

JOIN SHA'AR ZAHAV

OUR VALUES



Authenticity

Empathy

Engaging with Difference

Commitment

FROM SIDDUR SHA'AR ZAHAV

"Let us Remember that we depend on one another; quicken our hearts and hands to lift each other up, and teach us to make our words of prayer fruitful by deeds of loving kindness"

SHOWING UP FOR EACH OTHER

BY DANIEL CHESIR

Sha'ar Zahav surrounds you with a Jewish Community that honors and believes in you.

I couldn't believe when thirty people showed up to our first service in 1977. My friend Bernard Petcher had placed an ad in the classified section for a gay synagogue and people were eager for the experience. After our whole lives of being scorned by other synagogues and often by our own families we wanted a Jewish community where we could celebrate our lives and relationships.

Sha'ar Zahav started meeting in the basement of the GLIDE Memorial Church and quickly became a traveling synagogue. We met in a gay community center, at the Jewish Community Center, the Women's Building, even in a Buddhist monastery and eventually grew large enough to secure our own space in the Castro. People kept coming to support each other and create a spiritual practice that affirms the sacred in each and every one of us. When Harvey Milk was killed, hundreds of people packed our synagogue to remember him and remind each other of the strength of our community.

During the AIDS crisis, we really showed up for each other. I remember our Megillah Madness Purim celebrations, which we started to add some joy and silliness into our congregations while so many people around us were sick and dying. We danced and sang and acted, and reminded each other of the power of close friends, a few laughs, and a loving community.

In 1977, when we moved into our new building in Mission-Dolores, we had over 350 families in our congregation, and they lined the streets to dance and celebrate as we carried our Torah through the heart of San Francisco. I never thought I'd see such a vibrant community celebrate the diversity of Jewish people.

Today, Sha'ar Zahav remains rooted in our history as San Francisco's gay and lesbian synagogue and now offers the warmth and comfort of chosen family to people of all backgrounds and identities. When I mentor the children in our school - and I never thought in 1977 we'd be a congregation with children! - I often ask them why they want to be a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Some of them believe in G-d, some don't, but all of them believe in the power of being a part of this community.

I invite you to come and experience for yourself the power of a community that shows up for each other for all of life's celebrations and challenges.

