



The Jewish *Gaily Forward*

"Transcend the Ordinary"

Iyyar 5779 - Av 5779 / June 2019 - August 2019

Shavuot & Pride: Experience The Thunder

By RABBI MYCHAL COPELAND

Our other High Holy Day season is here - the month of Pride. This year, June also brings us the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, celebrating our receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. The confluence of San Francisco's month-long boost of ecstatic energy and our ancient holiday marking spiritual revelation is fortuitous.

Shavuot lifts up the idea that those who were present at Mt. Sinai (and even those who are still listening for it) could hear the voice of God. What does God's voice sound like?

God takes many forms throughout Torah, inviting us to experience godliness in different ways depending on what we need God to be from moment to moment. For the prophet Elijah, God is found in a still, small voice.

In other places in Torah, God's voice might be that of an angel, a parent or fire. What does God's voice sound like at Mt. Sinai? Joy Ladin reminds us in her new book, *The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective*, that at Sinai, "God's voice is neither still nor small..." Here, God speaks to us in thunder. Imagine being present for the drama of a Being we cannot see, booming out in thunder! Theatrical, awe-inspiring, tangible.

That is the kind of drama Pride month and Shavuot are all about. On June 8th, join Sha'ar Zahav as we relive the experience of receiving revelation and kick off Pride Month 2019. Joy Ladin will headline our Shavuot night of learning with insights from her book and check out the back page for more information about Pride.

May your season of revelation be spectacular.



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Transparency And Torah

By NANCY LEVIN / President



In today's world, people value transparency. We strive for that at Sha'ar Zahav. Our by-laws stress member participation and awareness. Board meetings are open to all members. We send weekly emails. Some things are easy to see and feel – our meaningful High Holy Day services, the energy at new member brunches, Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer creativity on our walls,

and rallying together against hate and tragedy. However, we haven't been consistent in talking about the financing of our community. The Pirkei Avot says *Im ein kemach, ein Torah; Im ein Torah, ein kemach* – “If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour.” As I understand this phrase, it means if there is no money (flour), then a community of Torah can't exist – but without Torah, then money doesn't matter. So, I'd like to begin to talk about “flour.”

Understanding Our Cost Structure

Of our almost \$1 million budget, 80% of our expenses are “fixed” -- that is, personnel and building operations. The other 20% cover programs – High Holy Days, Pride, education, social action, Beit Sefer, music, food and celebrations – that nurture and draw people into our community. We own our building with an \$82,000 mortgage. Our \$225,000 endowment

generates operating interest and exists for costs beyond the annual operating budget.

Our Revenue Structure

Our income comes primarily from rentals and fees (10%); endowment income and grants (5%) and most importantly, member support (85%). While we have worked hard to diversify our revenue base, like most synagogues we depend on members to underwrite the majority of our costs. Members contribute through annual dues, High Holy Day donations, and our Rainbow Campaign.

We have 325 member-households, which translates to a cost of \$3,000 per household (or about \$250 per month). Of course, not all members are able to provide this level of support. Currently, 45 households (20%) contribute at least \$3,000 (some much more), 40 households contribute \$1-2,000, and 240 households, contribute under \$1,000. Each member is vital to our community. Long term, we need to significantly increase the level of support from our members – and continue to attract new members to create an even more vibrant community and to spread our fixed costs over a larger base. As I shared in my last column, we are embarking on building a connected community so that each of us can feel the joy and inspiration that comes from engaging together in a community rooted in Torah and B'tselim Eloheim.

That engagement, we believe, will fuel our financial sustainability. Transparency and Torah. Torah and flour. Let's keep the conversation going.

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Asking Questions

By CANTOR SHARON BERNSTEIN



I recently found myself thinking about how often we say: "Can I ask a stupid question?" The typical response is that there is no stupid question, but somehow, we keep referring to our questions as stupid. I don't think it's just semantics – I think that we are genuinely concerned that people will think the question is stupid, that we will be ridiculed, scorned, or dis-

missed. And that's a problem. Because asking a question is an opportunity: for learning, for growth, for connection. One can find a wealth of advice online on how to ask good questions, which seems to boil down to principles of openness and curiosity, asking open-ended questions, letting one question lead into another and listening to the answers.

But that's a little easier said than done. In a world with so much information at our fingertips, trying to figure out what question to ask can be daunting. Think about an internet search engine. How the question is phrased can make a vast difference in the response we get.

But beyond our basic googling proficiency, there's the deeper matter of narrowing down our questions to what is really important to us. Perhaps that's the point. Our questions are a reflection of ourselves,

sometimes even more than our answers. They point to our interests, our desires, our concerns, and yes, our knowledge.

At the Passover seder, there are the famous (or infamous) four questions. Four questions by four children with different personalities with four different answers. One can easily find in this – particularly in traditional readings of the text – a sense of judgment about the questioner and the question they ask. But I see something different in it. I see in it the validation of the different people we are, and the different questions we ask. All questions are to be encouraged, received and answered...from everyone.

Jewish texts and practices are based on questions and questioning. God asks Adam: "Where are you?" Abraham asks God whether Sodom and Gomorrah can be spared. Moses asks why the burning bush doesn't burn up. The Talmud starts with this question: Starting at what time in the evening can we say the "Sh'ma"? Traditional text study is all about questions and answers. Jewish law is determined by people asking questions and getting responses. Nowhere in there is the concept of a "good" or "bad" question. There are just questions.

As Einstein said, "The important thing is to not stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity."

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Reinvesting In Our Teens

By SUE BOJDAK / Director of Education



Expectations for success, no time for boredom, social pressures, anxiety and depression, lack of sleep, social media, safety fears, body issues, identity confusion, drugs, sexuality.

This is a list of teen stressors generated at a community training for Jewish youth

professionals this spring. I know what you are thinking: sounds like the same list of adult stressors with which we all are wrestling.

The difference is that our teens have all of this coming at them when they are in a developmental stage that is as unstable as when they were toddlers. It's a lot to take on; imagine the grown-up world, intensify it with adolescent hormones, remove strong decision-making skills and add a highly volatile sense of self. As the mother and stepmother of four teens, including two who have just completed running the college admissions gauntlet, I can tell you for certain that it's harder today than when you were a teen. It just is.

The San Francisco Jewish community is in the middle of a Community Teen Initiative. This work is designed to get our community thinking about how to engage and support our teens. One element of the work is training for Jewish youth professionals presented by Jewish LearningWorks.

In addition to taking a hard look at our teens' many stressors, we also explored their strengths: a deep commitment to inclusion, enthusiasm for a challenge and the desire to connect with adults who take them seriously. And we shared ideas for how to expand their possibilities, challenge them for growth, share power with them, provide support and express care. Our teens are living serious lives. It's important for the adults in their

lives to take them seriously. We can do that by being present for them, listening, giving them opportunities to try new things, supporting their successes, allowing them to make mistakes, and continuing to invest in them.

“Our teens are living serious lives. It's important for the adults in their lives to take them seriously. We can do that by being present for them.”

- Sue Bojdak

This year we were able to re-invest in our teen program, thanks to a grant from SF Humanities, Inc. and leadership from graduating senior Langston Bealum.

In addition to reshaping our madrichim (teen leadership) program, we also launched a handful of Sha'ar Zahav Teen Hang Outs. Hangouts are an opportunity for Sha'ar Zahav teens to get together and, you've got it, hang out.

It's our first step toward bringing our teens together in community to connect in real time and build supportive relationships. I'm excited to expand the opportunities for our Sha'ar Zahav teens and would love to have you as a partner.

If you have a great idea, an opportunity to share, room for a teen in a project you are working on, please contact me. Let's show up for our teens, support them and be challenged by them as they grow.

David Ogus Lanoue Langdon

David Ogus Lanoue Langdon will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on June 15.

David is a 7th grader at Gateway Middle School in San Francisco. He lives in Bernal Heights with his mother, Rachel Langdon, and also spends regular time with his grandmas, Irene Ogus and Susan Langdon.

David enjoys swimming, travel, baking, musical and improv theater. His interests include video games, movies, TV, reading and tech stuff. A list of favorites includes: TV show: Daredevil (Netflix); video game: Batman Arkham Knight; movie: The Dark Knight; book: Little Brother by Corey Doctorow; restaurant: Super Duper Burger; and artists: Queen and Abba. He also loves Legos (who doesn't?) and really enjoyed Camp Tawonga last year.

His mitzvah projects include using his tzedakah fund for selecting and delivering Christmas gifts to homeless children living in Ashbury House; preparation of break-fast oneg at Yom Kippur; weeding at the AIDS Memorial Grove; volunteering at S.F. Food Bank; and numerous Ocean Beach cleanup projects. David endears himself to others with his quick wit and humor.



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Celebrate PRIDE!

On Sunday **June 30th**,
We will march alongside
other members of the Union
of Reform Judaism with flags,
music, banners, free swag
and so much more!

**This is a great time to
show your Pride!**

Celebrate Pride with your Sha'ar Zahav Community!