

“Transcend the Ordinary”

Kislev 5783 - Adar 5783
December 2022 - February 2023

THE SHAMASH

By RABBI MYCHAL COPELAND



The hanukkiah, our special menorah for the Hanukkah holiday, displays eight candles of equal height, one for each night of the celebration. But the ninth candle, the “shamash,” stands a bit higher and is used as a helper to light each of the eight. This candle doesn’t get its own night of the holiday - yet without it, we would have no light at all.

Hopefully at some point in your life, you have been lifted up by someone who acted as a shamash for you, and you have likely had the opportunity to be the shamash for someone else, whether you realize it or not.

This Hanukkah season, how can each of us be a shamash? The month of December brings joy to many, while it is the most difficult time of year for others: those who are lonely, exacerbated by the isolation of the pandemic; those who face mental health challenges; those who are in recovery from addiction; those who have suffered the loss of loved ones; those who have been displaced or evicted; those feeling despair about our world. Take a moment, right now, to think of someone in our community who could be having a rough season. You might ask yourself:

- What is a strength of mine that I can offer them, or something I can offer my community?
- What is one thing I can do to include them?
- What is an issue facing our community (like one of those above) where I could get involved?
- What is one thing I can do to make someone feel celebrated?

Call them. Text them. Email them. Visit them. *Listen.*

A Hasidic sage, the Sfat Emet, reinterpreted the Hanukkah candles as the light by which we search out our inner selves. Perhaps the internal work of this holiday is to see ourselves as a shamash, to recognize that our own spiritual development is deepened when we are in profound connection with another human being. When the Festival of Lights comes around at the end of this month, let the hanukkiah be an inspiration and reminder to be a shamash to someone in your life.

For more great resources about Judaism and mental health, check out www.TheBlueDoveFoundation.org.

**Meet The
B'mitzvah pg. 3**

Social Justice at Sha'ar Zahav

By DEBORAH LEVY



We'll soon celebrate Hanukkah, when we remember battles fought by ancient Jews for the right to determine our own practices and priorities. It's a good time to consider our priorities as a community. Our Va'ad (Board) is working to meet our budget while continuing needed upgrades

to our building – particularly our heating and ventilation system. We have restructured how we address health, safety, and security issues, we are continuing to explore our implicit biases so that people of every race and background feel welcome and valued in our community, and we're working on a new set of bylaws. Present in all these conversations is the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world.

At Sha'ar Zahav, we're proud to have several social justice committees leading our Tikkun Olam work: our Social Action Committee (SAC), Climate Action Committee (CAC), Racial Equity Committee (REC), and Disability and Accessibility Committee (D&A). SAC includes the John Lewis Voter Engagement group working on voter

turnout, and other groups working on housing and poverty issues, immigrant rights and support, gun laws, and more. At Yom Kippur we reminded ourselves of Isaiah's admonition: our fasting is not an end in itself, but a ritual to move us to action. Sha'ar Zahav can have an impact by raising our voices and taking steps together. Now, as 2022 rolls into 2023, I ask you to consider what Tikkun Olam means to you, and how you express your values through your Sha'ar Zahav membership.

For example, many of us are deeply concerned that in this time of increasing climate change, our most disadvantaged siblings, including communities of color, trans and LGBTQ youth and adults – and our very planet – are at risk. Whether you are at home or at a joyful Oneg gathering, do you bring your social justice values with you, taking steps to reduce waste (bring your own fork!), to recycle correctly, or in other ways?

When you read the weekly email, do you make an effort to attend and support the amazing events from our numerous social justice committees? If social justice is indeed a priority in our community, we each need to take part. As part of a congregation that clearly values social justice, in a tradition that calls us to action, what are you doing to bring about change?

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RAISE OUR LGBTQI VOICES

By RABBI MYCHAL COPELAND

A few months ago at Rosh Hashanah, I asked us to raise our unique Sha'ar Zahav voice as an unapologetically queer, Jewish community. We are a distinctive synagogue, and yet as a progressive spiritual community, we represent a large swath of our nation that usually goes unnoticed in the political arena. The loudest voices control what defines "religion," which is almost always pitted against LGBTQI people and our rights. Especially right now. LGBTQI discrimination is being written into law around our country, most dramatically affecting transgender, nonbinary, queer youth.

Could we utilize our particular voice to correct the false narrative that religion in our country is monolithic, that someone else's freedom of religion should be allowed to eclipse ours? That is exactly what we are doing. A group of SZniks are working with local and national partners to fight LGBTQI discrimination, especially focusing on trans youth. Last year, SZ joined Thrive, a coalition through the national organization Keshet, devoted to defending transgender and LGBTQI youth alongside other Jewish community leaders. We brainstorm and partner with leaders in states most affected by the current sweep of anti-LGBTQI legislation. We invite you to join us as we look for more ways to raise our unique voice. To get involved, contact me at queeractivism@shaarzahav.org.



Gabriella Powell, child of Gina Roccanova and Michael Powell, will be called to the Torah as a b'mitzvah on February 18. Gabriella attends the Ruth Asawa School of the Arts as a member of the vocal program.

As a madrichol (teen teaching assistant), Gabriella helps teach and guide the youngest participants in Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer at Sha'ar Zahav. Gabby loves watching the little ones grow and learn, and they look up to Gabby as something of a big sibling. Gabriella also enjoys spending time with a large circle of talented, smart and interesting friends.

Gabby is grateful for the warm and welcoming atmosphere at Sha'ar Zahav and thanks their mentor, Martin Tannenbaum; Ila Cherney for teaching Gabriella Hebrew; and Sue Bojdak for welcoming them into the Beit Sefer team.

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Specifications supplied upon request.

Who or What Is God?

By SUE BOJDAK



A third grader once told me what he didn't like about religious school: the learning was too abstract. "In math class," he explained, "we learn a new concept on Monday and by Friday we can do it."

In religious school, I never know what we are even talking about."

Math may actually be the ultimate abstraction, but if you remember third grade math, it's very concrete. Two plus two always equals four.

This year at Beit Sefer we are teaching about God, the other ultimate abstraction: Who or What Is God? Our teaching team began by determining our learning objectives: We want to invite the kids to become God-wrestlers with us, to know that Judaism has a wide range of ideas about who or what God might be - and that none of them is the definitive answer. And we want to both invite them into a relationship with God and give them robust permission to never believe, while feeling 100% Jewish. At the end of the day we are asking them to notice both two and two and also four, and to make of them what they will. So how do we help young children, especially those who are concrete thinkers, develop

or explore expansive notions of God? If that question has a definitive answer, we don't know it yet, and at the end of the day, I suspect we will still be wondering. Here's how we are exploring:

We have taught a couple of foundational texts, Jacob wrestling with the angel/God and becoming Israel, the God-wrestler, and Moses encountering the burning bush and being introduced to God as Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh, I will be who I will be. Our youngest students have read about God as a creative force, God being in the space between people, and people using a variety of names and images for God.

They have played with the idea of God through abstract art and image- and word-collage, and brought their ideas together as songs/poems à la the Psalms. Our older students have examined the variety of ways God shows up in Torah and have tried on different aspects of God through short skits. They have asked questions about God, read rabbinic stories that address those questions, looked at storytellers' God imaginings, and crafted their own stories. They have also made contraptions that capture evidence of that which we cannot see. Who or what is God? We Jews have a lot of ideas but we don't really know. How do you teach God? With creativity, openness, and a willingness to experiment and see what happens. What will the children make of it? Time will tell.

SHA'AR ZAHAV PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS!

SEPTEMBER

Hannah Klion they/she

OCTOBER

Ezra Bison-Rapp they/them

Zach Harrison he/him

Lou Lief they/them/she

Lynn Piade she/her

Eanna Sarah she/her

NOVEMBER

Sid Bradford he/him/they/them

Rebecca Foster she/her and Jamie Meltzer he/him

Sasha Harris Cronin she/they

Watson Ladd he/him

Alex Lemberg they/them

L'Havin: Understanding Israel and its Neighbors

By RACHEL NILSON RALSTON

In May 2021 a resurgence of violence between Israel and Hamas rippled across the world. Thousands of miles away, many of us here at Sha'ar Zahav were heartbroken by the escalation's impact on civilians, and we worried about what it meant for the entire region and how it might shape future diplomacy and geopolitics.

We were also alarmed by the conversations (or lack thereof) around the flareup, as well as anti-semitic acts both in the Bay Area and elsewhere, purportedly in retaliation for the Israeli military's actions.

In response, Sha'ar Zahav activated a working group to re-create a space within our community where we might engage in learning opportunities related to Israel and Palestine. L'Havin: Understanding Israel and Its Neighbors was created to provide our members and community friends with support, knowledge, and dialogue skills that deepen our relationship with the land and peoples of Israel and Palestine, and to advance

understanding and healing within our Jewish community. We hold a range of narratives and relate differently to the ideas and realities of Israel, Palestine, and the Israeli-Arab conflict, yet are united in our desire to advance peace and justice.

To start, L'Havin is holding Zoom calls on the fourth Monday of each month, and we invite anyone who is interested to join us! You do not need to come with any previous knowledge of the topics we may discuss or with any set viewpoints. In fact, we encourage all to come with open ears and a learner's mindset. Please contact lhavin@shaarzahav.org if you're interested.

As we plan a congregational trip to Israel in 2023, it's important that we learn how to share our diverse and multi-faceted connections to this vibrant, storied place. We are hopeful that L'Havin serves as a valuable resource to our Sha'ar Zahav community.

Travel with Sha'ar Zahav to Israel during the second and third weeks of October 2023!

About 40 SZ members and guests will enjoy three nights in Jerusalem, two nights in Tzfat, and three nights in Tel Aviv. We'll attend Shabbat services at Kol HanesHEMA and Hebrew Union College; visit Hebron to meet religious residents in the small Jewish community and tour the largely Palestinian city with an Arab guide; meet individuals, politicians, and agencies involved in peace advocacy, LGBTQ rights, environmental concerns, and social service agencies. No knowledge of Hebrew is necessary; however, open minds are required!

We hope to keep the cost below \$5000 per person, based on double occupancy in moderate, kosher hotels (single supplements available), and we're exploring partial scholarships. Hotels, all breakfasts, a few dinners, ground transportation, entrance to museums, national parks, additional sites, and gratuities are included; airfare is additional.

You can still fill out the Israel Trip Interest Survey! For more information, please contact Patty Caplan at pcaplan@comcast.net or Marc Lipschutz at sfmoshe@gmail.com.

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in memory of their father,
Roger Leon Braunschweig

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in memory of his mother-in-law, Rita Roginski

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in honor of Marty Rawlings-Fein
and his fabulous drash

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in memory of his sister Terry
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milestone birthday

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AUGUST

Marius Greenspan,

on his new book, *Tales of a Gay Postal Inspector: You Can't Make This Stuff Up!*

Eli Ramer,

on his new book, *Texting with Angels, Modern Jewish Tales of Magic and Mystery*

Judy Katz,

on her b'mitzvah

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for their Aufruf

Rachel Nancollas and Elliott Sprehn,

on the birth of their son,
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SEPTEMBER

Jim Frazin,

on his bar mitzvah

OCTOBER

Soli Steinfield,

on his bar mitzvah

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In Memoriam

The congregation notes with sorrow the deaths of:

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Joseph Levine,

stepfather of Ruth Schoenbach
and Lynn Eden's stepfather-in-law

Harriet Fersh,

aunt of Shelli Rawlings-Fein
and sister-in-law of Donna Fein

SEPTEMBER

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father of Hershey Hirschkop
and grandfather of Eliana Frank

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brother-in-law of Yuridia Yisraeli

Judith Hedgpeth,

friend of Sharyn Saslafsky

OCTOBER

Jerome Leff,

father of Susan Leff

Lynne Denise Reynolds,

sister of Eli Andrew Ramer

Janice Marie Faria,

mother of Mary Faria
and mother-in-law of Deb Farkas

Larry Polsky,

brother of Steve Polsky,
brother-in-law of Mark Oliver,
and uncle of Gabe Oliver-Polsky

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