

“Transcend the Ordinary”

Cheshvan-Kislev-Tevet-Shevat 5785  
December 2024 - February 2025

## DISAGREEING *L'SHEM SHAMAYIM*

By RABBI MYCHAL COPELAND



At this contentious time in our communities and the world, we are nearing what was once a very contentious holiday. Chanukah commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Greeks, a war that was also an internal conflict between Jewish factions. To underplay this divisiveness, the Sages later remade the holiday into a celebration of light in the dark of winter. They told a story about a small cruse of oil needed to rededicate the desecrated Temple - oil that miraculously lasted eight days, long enough to clean up the defiled sacred space. To remember this miracle, we light the chanukiah. But how to light it?

As usual, the ancient rabbis Hillel and Shammai disagreed. Shammai thought we should start with all the lights fully lit and decrease one each night of the holiday. Hillel thought we should start with one and increase the light each night. Much has been written about why

Hillel won the debate. More interesting, I think, is that these rabbis, and by extension their followers, did not despise each other. They are said to have argued *l'shem shamayim*, for the sake of heaven: with great humility, not to gain honor or to prevail over the other. Hillel always cited Shammai's opinions before his own, and the children of one house married the children of the other. The two scholars are said to be models of how to disagree. Their debate about how to light the chanukiah counters the internal fighting that is the origin story of this very holiday.

Many of us are feeling ruptures in our communities, families, and friendship circles, especially during this holiday season. If Hillel and Shammai were around, I imagine they would urge us to argue *l'shem shamayim*, or perhaps tell us not to disengage. But that might be hard for us right now. The 18th century Rabbi Eybeschuetz wrote of the Jewish mandate to love your neighbor: “not all neighbors are loveable. There are those who ... have done you harm.” He continues in the voice of Torah: “I do not, therefore, command you to live as if you were angels, without any of the emotions natural to human beings. I do, however, forbid you to hate.” We are allowed to be angry. But hate leads to destruction — very rarely of those we oppose, but definitely of ourselves.

Take care of yourself this holiday season. And when you find yourself with friends, family, or co-workers with whom you disagree, if you can't engage *l'shem shamayim*, let the light of the chanukiah remind you of two people who offered us a better model of conflict than the ones we see in our world right now.

CHEVRA  
KADISHA

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By MIKE SHRIVER



It's hard to imagine, but December marks the 12th month of having Rabbi Q (Lisa Levenberg), Rabbi Reuben Zellman, and Danny Shapiro as members of our amazingly talented staff.

In September, I had the great fortune of attending the opening of this year's Beit Seifer program. Sitting in the Oneg room surrounded by parents and so many kids was truly powerful. I love spending time with our future! Under Rabbi Q's leadership, our Beit Seifer is in good hands.

The incredibly talented Rabbi Reuben Zellman is leading our vanguard pilot program, The Welcome Home Project about which I am excited. (Please read Rabbi Zellman's article in this issue of the JGF).

It's been fantastic to witness Danny Shapiro successfully and effectively take the reins

as our Executive Director. To say that Danny is a gift is an understatement. His calming and professional manner is beyond appreciated. We are in such a better position administratively because of him, and for that I am so grateful.

Lastly, I wanted to return to a comment from my drash from High Holy Day services: "Hope moves in the plural." Whether sitting in the Sanctuary during Simchat Torah services, watching congregants and families and kids dancing with the Torah, being on Zoom for SZ's memorial service for the victims of the October 7th massacre, witnessing our community kick-off efforts to pass Prop 3 with a chuppah and a vow renewal ceremony on our bimah, or watching Rabbi Copeland leading yoga on the lawn of the Herbst Theater during Yom Kippur, I felt hope, and I experienced what hope looks like as a congregation and a community.

I look forward to a productive and meaningful 2025 with each and every one of you.

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By DANNY SHAPIRO



Last December I faced a decision: whether to move across the country, to a city I had only visited a handful of times, where I knew virtually nobody, and to take on a new job that was clearly going to be a huge undertaking. It

had only been a few months since the earth-shattering events of October 7, and my personal life was also in a bit of chaos. With so much disorder, was there any amount of analysis that would have been sufficient to adequately evaluate this important decision?

It turned out to be a much easier decision than I had imagined. My visit to Sha'ar Zahav was over Chanukah Shabbat. I witnessed the beauty of our own somewhat disorderly Chanukah festivities, got to know so much about the community, experienced our tefillah, was hosted for lovely meals with lay leaders, and had a chance to explore a bit of San Francisco. It became clear to me that Sha'ar Zahav was the place for me.

As we are approaching Chanukah and I get ready to celebrate my anniversary at Sha'ar Zahav, I am fondly recalling my journey here. Serving Sha'ar Zahav and this community is my calling, and I feel like I've arrived home at 290 Dolores Street and in the larger San Francisco community. I'm so grateful to be here, and even more impressed by the generosity of the members that sustain our amazing home.

In a few weeks, as we celebrate the miracles of Chanukah and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, we can also take a moment to celebrate our own holy space and the endless miracles since Sha'ar Zahav's founding. What has been accomplished here through years of efforts from lay leaders, clergy, staff, and members is truly miraculous. We can also recall the events in our lives - both the good and the bad - that led each of us here to find Sha'ar Zahav. Let's give thanks and take pride in all that has been accomplished. Chag Chanukah Sameach!

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## CELEBRATING SUKKOT IN DECEMBER?

By RABBI Q

How can I write my article for the December Jewish Gaily Forward when it's only October? I can't think about Chanukah during Sukkot – my favorite holiday. Eight days of backyard camping! A full-moon harvest festival!

It turns out, the Maccabees were also totally into Sukkot. For ancient Jews, the Sukkot pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem was one of the community's most central rites; in fact, it was during Sukkot that Solomon dedicated the First Temple itself, hundreds of years earlier. Thus, when the wicked Antiochus tried to forcibly impose Greek religious practices and stamp out Jewish culture and identity, he banned Shabbat, kashrut, brit milah - and Sukkot.

According to the Second Book of Maccabees, during Tishrei, in what would be the final months of their campaign, the Jewish rebel forces were still hiding out in caves in the Jerusalem hills and were not able to make

the traditional Temple pilgrimage for Sukkot. Naturally, when the Maccabees reclaimed the Temple, they wanted to celebrate! “They celebrated it for eight days with gladness like Sukkot and recalled how a little while before, during Sukkot they had been wandering in the mountains and caverns like wild animals. So carrying lulavs...they offered hymns of praise to God who had brought to pass the purification of God's own place.”(II Maccabees 10:6-7)

The ritual they created was both a “make-up” for the missed holiday and a harkening back to King Solomon's original dedication of the first Temple. Today, people are more familiar with Chanukah than Sukkot – but now you know that there's a fall festival hidden inside our winter Festival of Lights!

For more, check out *A Different Light: The Big Book of Hanukkah*, by Noam Zion and Barbara Spectre.

## SHA'AR ZAHAV MEET THE B'MITZVAH

### Yeroham Franco



Yeroham Franco, son of Daliah Ortega and Yehuda Franco, will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on January 25.

Yeroham is a proud little Jewish boy, wearing his *kippa* every day.

He has always been attached to his *payes* (sidelocks), which have been part of his

identity as a Jewish boy. He loves to get compliments about how he probably has the longest *payes* in San Francisco. He is looking forward to his bar mitzvah.

At school, he enjoys studying English because he likes studying the meaning of words. Yeroham likes his name, how it sounds, how it is written and what it means. It means “the city of my people.” He also enjoys drawing.



## CHEVRA KADISHA

By LISA FINKELSTEIN

Certain things in life are inevitable, with death at the top of the list. It is often hard to talk about, read about, think about, hear about, but the end of life happens to us all. Just as joy informs my choices about being in community, so does death. Feel free to blame intergenerational trauma or my own life experiences, but somehow I got the skills to talk about Jewish rituals around death. So why the upbeat topic? Because in my mind, we as members of Sha'ar Zahav are incredibly lucky: unique among San Francisco synagogues, we have an ongoing, thoughtful, and kind *Chevra Kadisha* team to help us when a community member dies.

First some vocab – the word *chevra* is Aramaic in origin and is now used in Hebrew to mean a close-knit group of friends or society. The word *kadisha* (also from the Aramaic) roughly means sacred or holy. A “*Chevra Kadisha*” is, essentially, a Jewish sacred burial group.

Imagine the death of a random someone you once sat next to at services. Maybe you gave them a nod hello, sang *Hinei Ma Tov* with your arms wrapped around each other's shoulders - and that was it. Now imagine what happens when that person dies. Someone they know or our clergy calls the nonprofit Jewish funeral home to come pick that person up and start the process of arranging for that person's burial. But before they go into a casket, this person, once filled with life and joy, deserves one last moment of dignified kindness from folks who have chosen to be in community with them. SZ's dedicated *chevra kadisha* volunteers are trained in the *halachic* (Jewish legal)

principles guiding the burial process; with prayers and without judgment, they perform *tahara*, traditional rituals including cleaning and dressing, preparing this person for the next step and ensuring that every member of our community can depart this world embraced by love, compassion, and understanding - reaffirming that every life, no matter its journey, is sacred.

Many of us don't have biological families to take care of us during our most vulnerable moments - sadly, this is especially true for Queer folx both historically and now. I feel so lucky to have found this community, knowing that when my time comes to leave this beautiful earth, our holy burial society volunteers will know exactly what to do. To learn more about making your own plans that include *tahara* (or not), please be in touch with Rabbi Copeland, call one of the amazing Funeral Directors (Robert, Jaguar or Crae) at our local nonprofit Jewish funeral home and cemetery organization, Sinai Memorial Chapel, or watch for SZ workshops about advance planning.

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The JGF can be found online.  
Read current and previous issues at:

<https://www.shaarzahav.org/newsletter>

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**Rabbi Julius and Pearl Funk Music Fund**

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in celebration of Jon Funk and John's Anniversary. Mazel Tov!

**Jonathan Funk and John Arnold  
Ron Lewkowitz and Sharon Lewkowitz**

**Karen Schiller**  
in celebration of Jon and John's 40th wedding anniversary

**The Welcome Home Project**

*in memory of Paul Cohen z"l and Ray Bernstein z"l:*

**Jonathan Funk and John Arnold  
Eric Weiss and Dan Alpert**

Many thanks to the Oneg Chavurah for honey cakes at the High Holidays, and delicious treats for Friday night services!

SHA'AR ZAHAV PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS!

**AUGUST**

**Ryan Dudak (she/her)  
Travis Knight Svensson (he/him)  
Shawna Berry Davis (she/her)**

**SEPTEMBER**

**Mike Levi (he/him)  
D.W. (he/him)**

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**NOVEMBER**

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in memory of Jerry Greenspan

SHA'AR ZAHAV CONDOLENCES

**Sha'ar Zahav mourns the loss of our members, and extends our sympathy to their loved ones:**

**Judith Cohen  
Bob Gutterman  
Alan Ferrara**

**In Memoriam**  
The congregation notes with sorrow the deaths of:

**AUGUST**

**Stanley Kornfeld**  
cousin of Ron Edelman  
**Martha Ellen Friedberg**  
friend of Ron Edelman

**SEPTEMBER**

**Hugh Groman**  
friend of Danny Kodmur  
**Hazzan Jack Kessler**  
teacher of Marty Rawlings-Fein  
**Sheila Glass**  
cousin of Ami Zusman  
**Judy Marchick**  
aunt of Lisa Finkelstein  
**Kevin Fisher-Paulson**  
friend of Larry Best and our community

**OCTOBER****Thomas Pressman**

friend of Kay Magilavy

**Marsha Berger**

friend of Allan Gold

Got something to celebrate? Send your Mazel Tov Announcements to [office@shaarzahav.org](mailto:office@shaarzahav.org) to be included in future newsletters.

**SEPTEMBER****Emily Ornelas-Dorian and Carolina Ornelas-Dorian****Jan Half and Sharyn Saslafsky****Arthur Slepian and Gerry Llamado****Lisa Finkelstein and Sarah Grams****Daniel Loftus and Christopher Nguyen****Marty Rawlings-Fein and Shelli Rawlings-Fein**

on renewing their vows at our Proposition 3 Campaign Kickoff

**Nancy Levin**

On her first drash

**Ellie Rose Maas and Jim Chowdry**

On their wedding

**OCTOBER****Tamar Gershon**

on her retirement

**NOVEMBER****Michael O'Rourke and Geoff Cooper**

on the blessing for their baby Maxine

**DECEMBER****Clark Beebe****Allan Craig****David Glassberg****Midred Goldstein****William David Holt II****Norman David Kramer****Elijah Michael Silverrod MacLachlan****George Mintzer****Milton Murland****Marilyn O'Keeffe****Walter Palmer****Nicholas Papadopoulos****Sol Segal****Frieda Shaber****Jerry Sharlin****Kathy (Pixie) Swanz****JANUARY****George Ash****Bill Ashley-Dobbin****Robert Baldock****Ben Blachman****Jerome Davis****Keith Fenton****William Goldstein****Jose Hernandez****Arthur Judelsohn****Phyllis Mintzer****Aaron Nacamulli****Eugene I. Pearl****Martha R. Pearl****Gerald (Jerry) Rosenstein****Soraya Vorster****FEBRUARY****John Atteridg****Tauby Auerback****Paul Cohen****Ziggy Gimnicher****Allen Harris****Zadie Heart****Mordechai Kashtan****Hyman Margolis****Israel Miranski****Cheryl Orvis****Steven Richter****Ada Rosenbaum****Barbara Rosenblum****Ephraim Troy****Leland Vogel****Stephen Walters****Nathan Eli Weinstein****Ronald Wilmot**



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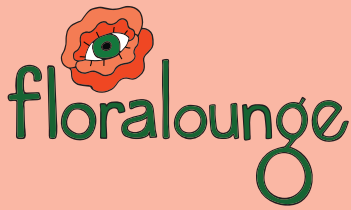
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Your contributions help us realize our commitment to building and maintaining a vibrant, living community for Sha'ar Zahav. With your financial support, we continue to prosper, grow, and celebrate our future.

Congregation

# Sha'ar Zahav

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Voice 415 861 6932

Web [www.shaarzahav.org](http://www.shaarzahav.org)

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## Celebrate a Month of Chanukah Joy with Sha'ar Zahav!



*Gary Glaser, Shirley Lieberman and Phil Charney  
sample the latkes, Sha'ar Zahav Chanukah party, 1990.  
Photo by Michael Bettinger.*

**Dec. 6, Klezmer Shabbat**

**Dec. 16, Menorah Lighting in the Castro**

**Dec. 21, BSPM Chanukah Celebration**

**Dec. 25 - Jan. 1, Nightly Zoom Candlelightings**

**Dec. 27, Special Chanukah Zoom Shabbat**

*Do you have digital photographs or video of Sha'ar Zahav activities or events?  
The Archives Project, documenting our history, would like to have copies. Contact Lawrence Helman  
([heytheresells@gmail.com](mailto:heytheresells@gmail.com)) or Robert Tat ([rob@roberttat.com](mailto:rob@roberttat.com))*