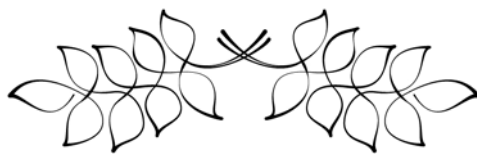


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CONGREGATION  
SUKKAT SHALOM  
**Bulletin**

## Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

One of the worst scandals to hit the American rabbinate took place this last month in Washington, D.C. Rabbi Barry Freundel, a highly respected Modern Orthodox rabbi, was arrested and charged with setting up cameras in the showers and changing areas of the *mikvah* (ritual bath for purification) attached to his synagogue.

This was an incredible violation of privacy, trust and authority. Rabbi Freundel was a leading figure in conversion within the Orthodox community, and it appears that he particularly targeted women studying for conversion as well as the many Orthodox women who use the *mikvah* on a monthly basis.

***“This was an incredible violation of privacy, trust and authority.”***

The human impact was enormous. The female victims of his voyeurism were often in their most vulnerable and powerless state. Indeed, the very nature of Orthodox Judaism creates a power imbalance between male rabbis and the female students and congregants. Women studying for traditional conversion are particularly dependent on Orthodox male rabbis who exercise complete control of the process.

On Rosh Hashanah morning, I spoke about the striking absence of Sarah in the story of the Akedah—the Binding of Isaac. Sarah had been a key figure in the previous story concerning God's promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah. When she heard the news that she would, in fact, become pregnant, she laughed. Sarah was skeptical and doubted. She

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*And you may find yourself in another part of the world  
And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile  
And you may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife  
And you may ask yourself  
Well...How did I get here?*

-- Talking Heads, "Once in a Lifetime"

If you would have asked me 40 years ago: "Can you see yourself as a member of a congregation," my immediate response would have been: "A congregation of what?" In my current stage, however, I have begun to explore who I am, the nature of my community and my role/purpose in it. My community by intent and practice is small and yet, for as long as I can remember, I have longed for a sense of belonging to something.

My father died when I was 37 and he was 64. Before then, I relied on him as my connection to my Jewish heritage. My mother – though technically Jewish – was a self-defined, New Age woman. She would pick, choose and change her spiritual allegiance on a regular basis. My father, however, was Jewish to the core – even in his denial of it. He would seldom speak of being Jewish, but would regularly tell stories with a Yiddish accent, worked principally with and for Jews in his advertising agency, and then established himself as a "Jewish Cowboy" when he lived with his second wife in Miles City, Montana.

***“My father, however, was Jewish to the core — even in his denial of it.”***

As a child, I was never sure I was Jewish. I never went to Hebrew School and was not a Bar Mitzvah, like all my Jewish male friends. I was sent to school on the Jewish holidays until, in third grade, I lamented to my father on Rosh Hashanah: "Boy, those Jews have it great. They get Christmas and their own holidays off from school." My father proceeded to keep me home and we went to temple the following week on Yom Kippur. From that point forward I knew I was Jewish but didn't know what that meant.

When I married my wife, Janet, she couldn't understand how I could be Jewish. She was born and raised a Catholic. She went to Catechism, was confirmed and went to church every Sunday until she went to college. I was never formally trained, did not know Hebrew and never went to temple. The truth is that I was unsure what would enable me to qualify as a Jew. We live in a culture where "belief" or "observance" identifies you with a religion, and I didn't believe, didn't know the prayers and didn't have the diploma or pen-and-pencil set. Yet, at my core, I am Jewish. Religiously, no; socio-culturally, yes. Truth be told, I am an Atheist. (I tried being an Agnostic, but came to believe that was the coward's way out.)

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## From the Rabbi, cont'd

questioned the word of God. But in the Akedah, Sarah's voice is not heard. I offered the thought that the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son might have been very different had Sarah's voice been heard. Abraham obeyed God's command without questioning or doubt. I regretted the absence of Sarah's doubting skepticism.

In this sermon, I went on to speak of how women's voices, presence and leadership have transformed modern American Jewish life. I have witnessed this in my own profession as women have become rabbis and leaders since 1972 when Sally Priesand was ordained a Reform rabbi at Hebrew Union College. Within Orthodox Judaism, however, women still cannot be rabbis, judicial witnesses or members of the court determining conversion status. The voice of the woman is largely silent within Orthodoxy.

The Freundel case demonstrates the danger of an all-male system of religious authority. Male rabbis maintain exclusive control over the laws of Orthodox conversions, and that power can too often be used capriciously and irrationally. While Orthodox rabbinic authority seldom results in sexual abuse, the power imbalance is very real.

It would be possible to argue that Rabbi Freundel was a deeply flawed individual whose alleged sexually exploitative acts have no wider implications. But I would disagree. The absence within Orthodoxy of women rabbis of equal stature and authority to the male rabbis creates a culture where abuse of authority is more likely. The role of women rabbis in liberal Judaism serves as a counterbalance to a patriarchal tradition. It helps to ensure that the "voice of Sarah" is present in our discussions and actions.

*"The role of women rabbis in liberal Judaism serves as a counterbalance to a patriarchal tradition."*

## Journey, cont'd

When my father died, I realized I had to own my Jewish identity and to find out what that meant. I started reading and took a few classes. That helped a little, but I still felt like a fraud. Shouldn't I believe in God? Shouldn't I know the songs and prayers? Shouldn't I read Hebrew? Shouldn't I expect to go up on the Bima? And if I did, what would I do? One of the courses I was taking, Introduction to Judaism, was taught by Rabbi Gordon. His focus on history and sociology, as well as Sukkat Shalom's faith partnership with the First Congregational Church of Wilmette, intrigued me. I had previously viewed religion as exclusionary and rule-bound. Both Janet and I were impressed with the openness of the two congregations to explore together their similarities and differences.

*"I had previously viewed religion as exclusionary and rule-bound."*

My wife and I now have been members of Sukkat Shalom for more than 10 years, during which I have continued to learn about my history and to connect with other members of our faith community. I am slowly feeling less of a fraud. Sukkat Shalom has given me a connection to my heritage of a people who were not Russian, Polish or Ukrainian, but the Jews who lived in those places. It is a people who have migrated throughout history while keeping their own history alive through Talmudic interpretation and Yiddish jokes and stories.

My story has been a journey from a child in Skokie who was Jew-ish, to a professional of no affiliation, and finally to a Jew who still struggles to not apologize for his lack of traditional training and belief. I am seeking a sense of belonging to both a historic and current community, and Sukkat Shalom is providing the foundation for my search.

## Meet the Teachers

Here are two more of the teachers who help to make Family School such a unique experience for our students and parents:

**Kelli Max** is in her seventh year of teaching 6th graders at Family School and is excited to be part of the Sukkat Shalom community. She graduated from the University of Iowa in 2008 with a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education. She has been teaching public school for six years and is currently teaching 2nd graders at Rowe Elementary School in Chicago. Last year, Kelli took on the added role of Youth Counselor for Sukkat Shalom's "Sushy" Youth Group. She is thrilled to share her enthusiasm with our children as they learn about and discuss Jewish culture.

**Dana Harf** is in her fourth year of teaching at Family School and claims that each new year gets better and better. She has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education from Indiana University and has completed a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She is a first grade teacher in nearby Lincolnwood. Dana and her husband, Isaiah, live in Chicago. They share a passion for their Jewish heritage and hope to travel to Israel together after having been there separately prior to meeting each other. They are expecting their first child in December.

Mazel tov to Dana and Isaiah and thanks to all of our wonderful Family School teachers!

# Celebrating Our "Wise Ones" by Creating New Friendships

Our culture often seems very oriented toward youth. Even at Sukkat Shalom, we start our kindergarten students with a consecration service. We celebrate them further through all kinds of Family School events. Their Jewish education leads to their becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and continues through Confirmation and High School.

While it is important to honor and inspire our young people, we also should pay tribute to those from whom we have a lot to learn. Our congregation is graced with many older members whose wisdom and life experience are priceless. They deserve our respect, gratitude and celebration.



On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, we brought together some of our older members with some of our congregation's young people. In both one-on-one and group discussions, the elders shared their thoughts, teachings and wisdom. We were truly blessed to observe these budding cross-generational friendships and to forge bonds that proved meaningful for everyone involved.

We will continue to honor our older congregants throughout the year, culminating in a special Shabbat service on May 8, 2015. At that service, we will distribute booklets focused on the dialogue that emerged from this month's meeting between young and elderly members.

We want to thank everyone who participated in this initial activity, and invite others to take part in the ongoing project to honor our chochmah (wise ones). If you're interested, please contact Beth Gomberg-Hirsch or Marily Schonthal at [sukkatshalom@sukkatshalom.org](mailto:sukkatshalom@sukkatshalom.org)



## Sukkat Shalom – By the Numbers

Attendance at this year's High Holy Day Services:

Erev Rosh Hashanah:	395
Rosh Hashanah (Family):	377
Rosh Hashanah (Adult):	592
Kol Nidre:	602
Yom Kippur (Family):	365
Yom Kippur (Adult):	541



Tikkun Olam  
Repair the World



## “Share the Harvest” Brings Warmth of Season to Needy Families

Last year’s “Harvest” reaped great rewards!

The food and gift cards donated by Sukkat Shalom congregants and families through our Share the Harvest program enabled us to serve 57 families in need. By providing Thanksgiving dinner to a record 306 people (177 children and 129 adults), we performed a holiday version of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

With the holidays approaching once again, we invite you to join our Tenth Annual Share the Harvest community service project. We are working with three local social service agencies to serve local families in greatest need. Food collection will take place on Sunday, November 23rd, prior to the start of Family School in the north parking lot of the Wilmette Community Recreation Center.



Don’t have time to shop, but still want to participate? Gift cards from Jewel, Target or Wal-Mart can be mailed to us in advance or dropped off on collection day.

We hope that you will join us this year in our congregation’s tradition of sharing the warmth of the holiday season! For more information, or to sign up, please contact Eileen Levy or Stephanie Barsotti at [sukkatshalom@sukkatshalom.org](mailto:sukkatshalom@sukkatshalom.org)



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### The Hineinu Committee Wants You!

The Hineinu (We Are Here) Committee officially started in 2004. During our ten-year history, the committee’s volunteers have transported dozens of homemade meals to congregants, driven members to and from medical appointments, and delivered countless numbers of Shabbat Bags to congregants welcoming a new child or grieving the loss of a family member. Additionally, many young families, sharing a mitzvah, have delivered Rosh Hashanah Honey Bags to congregants.

Since the committee’s inception, the congregation’s membership has increased greatly, 1001 Central Avenue has been our home for almost two years, and the need for interested congregants to join the Hineinu Committee continues to grow. To discuss volunteer opportunities, please contact Co-Chair Missy Schonthal at [sukkatshalom@sukkatshalom.org](mailto:sukkatshalom@sukkatshalom.org). Or, if you prefer, you can visit the congregational website ([www.sukkatshalom.org](http://www.sukkatshalom.org)) and complete the volunteer questionnaire.