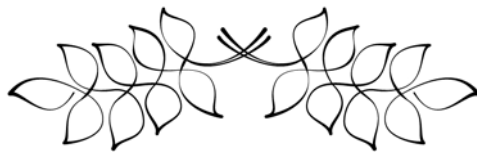


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CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

It would be disingenuous for me to claim that I am not political. I find politics both important and fascinating. In America, religious institutions and communities have always played a vital role in defining moral issues that have helped shape our history.

One cannot imagine the great movements of our society without the voice of religious leadership being heard. This is true of progressive as well as conservative issues. Abolition, women's suffrage, Prohibition, labor rights, civil rights, the anti-abortion movement as well as women's reproductive choice and LGBT equality all found inspiration from the voices of religious leaders.

Clergy and congregations have always been involved in American politics, but there is a fine line between being political and being partisan. Synagogues, churches, temples and mosques must not endorse an individual candidate or party. More importantly, I would find it presumptuous for me to try to influence any person's individual political choice. I can find truth and sincerity in the approach-

“People of good will can disagree over the best philosophies and methods to create a more equitable and just society.”

es of both Democrats and Republicans.

People of good will can disagree over the best philosophies and methods to create a more equitable and just society. Valid arguments can be made that social equality is better served by a free market

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My Journey by Harry Nathan Gottlieb



I hated Sunday school. It took place in a Catholic high school for boys. They took the picture of Jesus off the wall before class. After five years of attendance, that is the only thing I remember about it.

Hebrew school was torture. My parents got me a tutor. He was a wonderful man, but he couldn't have been stuck with a less interested student.

Nonetheless, on the day of my Bar Mitzvah, I absolutely killed it. Thanks to my years mastering mimicry as a class clown, I was able to perfectly imitate the cassette tape my Hebrew tutor had given me of his chanting my Torah portion.

But I had no idea what I was reading. No one had suggested that I review my Torah portion in English. And it hadn't occurred to me either...until I was 26.

Imagine my surprise when I learned that I had covered the section in Leviticus that prohibits clipping your sidelocks, wearing a poly-cotton blend and mating with livestock. There were no speeches given by the B'nai Mitzvah at my temple. Which is too bad, because if I'd known what my Torah portion said, my speech would have been filled with fabulous double-entendres.

And, most probably, my speech-that-never-was would have also been filled with youthful wonderings about why God cared about such things. I may have questioned whether these words were really written by God's hand. I may have asked whether these words were still holy even if only humans had written them.

The point is: I would have asked my own pointed questions about Judaism. And I would have learned that asking pointed questions about Judaism is perhaps the most Jewish thing a Jew can do.”

But the conservative congregation to which my family paid its membership dues did not open that curtain for me.

And yet.

As shallow and meaningless as the process of preparation had been, on the day of my Bar Mitzvah, I felt something that I had not felt before.

I sensed that I was the newest link in a 4,000 year-old chain. And, at 13, I knew enough to know that, as small as our numbers were, Judaism and Jews had made tremendous contributions to humanity. I felt that there was something here in Judaism for me that would matter.

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Journey, cont'd

I didn't get a glimmer into what it would be, however, until I started reading as a young adult. *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel helped me understand how we live in a world of things and largely ignore the far more precious commodity celebrated on Shabbat, a "Palace in Time." *I and Thou* by Martin Buber helped me recognize the holiness (or lack thereof) in our relationships. *Jewish Literacy* by Joseph Telushkin provided a badly needed overview from Torah to Jewish history, ethics and holidays. And there were many others.

Each book opened my eyes to the beauty of the Jewish perspective while leaving me with the distinct impression that I had had this perspective all along. Modern Jewish theology, in particular, made me feel at home with Judaism, because it led me to my own questions.

I also felt at home in a study group I attended in my late-30s with Rabbi Herman Schaalman of Congregation Emanuel. Schaalman refused to abandon his rationality or his faith, but he struggled mightily with the inherent contradictions. For example, he became a student of the archeology of biblical times because he wanted to know where, in the *Tenakh*, mythology ends and history begins.

For Schaalman, the name *God* was lacking in clarity. The name he chose was *The Mystery*. This appealed to me immediately, because it was *accurate*. If we and all we perceive are real, then how existence came to be – and why it came to be – is a mystery. It is *The Mystery*.

I was struck by watching Schaalman in his study take questions from the group and wonder about the very idea of God in a way that was so particular to him and simultaneously so Jewish.

For nearly 20 years, the Seder we attended was imbued with that same spirit. It was led by our family's dear friend, Arlene Bunis. The star of Arlene's Seder was Moses's sister, Miriam. The questions were asked by the Four Daughters. And there was always an orange on the Seder plate. Her feminist Passover was vigorous and fun.

Arlene interpreted the ancient rituals using her enormous creativity to engage us in their ideas. I learned that the freedom of the Hebrew slaves is manifest in the freedom we employ in how we remember the story of our Exodus. The example Arlene set made me feel, once again, that I was at home, because my religion welcomed me to use my imagination.

The torch for leading Passover has now been passed to Arlene's stepson and me. It isn't a feminist Seder anymore. Yet Schaalman's and feminism's critique about the name of God are complementary. This year, after we begin the Seder by lighting the candles and reciting the traditional Hebrew prayer, I will interpret the words in my own way:

Blessed art Thou, Mystery of the Universe, Source of All Being, who sanctifies us to kindle the light of Sabbath and this Good Day.

We use these same words, Mystery of the Universe, Source of All Being, for our blessings nearly every Friday night. My two boys occasionally scold me: "That's not what the Hebrew says, Dad!"

But I am trying to teach them as children what I only learned as an adult: By asking pointed questions, they can make Judaism their own...and as the

newest links in the 4,000 year-old chain, it is their privilege and responsibility to do so.

"By asking pointed questions, they can make Judaism their own"

Naming Ceremony Brings Family Story Full-Circle

by Beth Gomberg-Hirsch



Rabbi Gordon presiding over the naming of Ella Zoe Hirsch Muram.

About eight years ago, my husband Austin and I joined Sukkat Shalom. As empty nesters, we had talked about perhaps ending our affiliation with a synagogue. But after 28 years of temple membership, that decision did not feel right.

We did a modest amount of research and found a congregation whose stars aligned with ours on the issue of inclusion and interfaith families. We joined Sukkat Shalom and have never looked back.

We committed to joining a congregation because we wanted to be part of a community. Lifecycle events grow richer when celebrated within a community. For example, Rabbi Gordon officiated at the marriage of our younger daughter. This past February, he officiated again at the baby-naming ceremony of her daughter, Ella Zoe Hirsch Muram.

The ceremony was very meaningful and filled with much pride and joy. We were able to celebrate the people Ella was named after and share their life stories. We presented Ella with her own *wimpel*, a symbolic sash that she will have for her own lifecycle celebrations. It was extremely important to us to be able to share with family, friends and com-

munity our family history and the story behind Ella's name.

There is a postscript to this event.

This March, we were contacted by students from a school in the German town where one of the people Ella was named for -- Ella Hirsch -- once lived. They told us that her home was to be honored with a *Stolper-steine*, which literally means a

"stumbling stone." This commemoration involves the installation of a brass plaque in the pavement in front of homes of people who were forced to leave in the Holocaust.

Such plaques are now in place in 610 locations in Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Norway and Ukraine. Gunther Demnig, the artist who conceived the project, cited the Talmud for his inspiration. It teaches that "a person is only forgotten when his or her name is forgotten."

And so the Hirsch family plans to travel to Germany this May to see Ella Zoe Hirsch Muram stand in front of the home that once belonged to Ella Mayerfeld Hirsch.

The circle will be complete.

Rabbi's Message, cont'd

economy or by a social welfare state. Similarly, one can believe that open trade is good for the economy and jobs or that forms of economic protectionism are better.

Open immigration can be helpful to society or harmful. Foreign policy can be based on either isolation or intervention, but no one side can claim absolute truth with complete certainty. We live in a world of ambiguity and I believe most of us, as well as our political leaders, act

"Human rights and equality must be a given. Peace and justice continue to be the goal."

with the best intentions and the sincerest hope for a world of peace.

But I also believe in certain absolutes. Human rights and equality must be a given. Peace and justice continue to be the goal

We are now in the midst of an ugly battle for political leadership in America. We have every right to disagree on the issues confronting our nation. There is much to be troubled by, and neither political party has all the answers.

Yet, all of us need to reject appeals to racism, Islamophobia, misogyny, mockery of the disabled, xenophobia and violence. Many of us have been dismayed by the coarseness of this year's campaign. I don't believe this is a Democratic or Republican issue. Both parties must reject those who might use hateful rhetoric to divide us.

Let us hope that this year's presidential campaign will, in fact, be waged on issues and values. We do not need to agree on candidates or parties, but we must reject demagoguery and prejudice. And each of us should decide for ourselves how to most effectively engage in this process. That is the hope and promise of our democracy.

L'Taken: A Timely Lesson in Democracy

by Annelise Goldman

Can one person really make a difference? Does our democracy still work?

Over the course of one long weekend in February, I became much more politically conscious and aware of social justice issues in the world around me. I attended *L'Taken*, a Jewish social justice program in Washington, D.C., run by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. During the program, about 420 Jewish teens from all over the United States came together to celebrate our Judaism, learn about social justice issues, what the Reform Jewish movement says about these issues, and what we can do to help.

We attended programs of our choice about social justice. I went to programs about raising the minimum wage and LGBT rights. We learned about the lobbying process, including running an issue campaign, writing letters and making phone calls to representatives in Congress, and how to actually visit and talk to their Legislative Assistants.

“Now, I feel much more involved and engaged in the world.”

The weekend culminated in our writing speeches and presenting them to our representatives on Capitol Hill. My group, which included Anna Caffarelli from Sukkat Shalom and a girl from Lakeside Congregation in Highland Park, spoke about gun violence prevention legislation with staff members of Senators Durbin and Kirk and Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky.

At first, I was rather skeptical about going on the trip. Upon actually participating in the program, however, I absolutely loved it. We went to Shabbat services on Friday night and Saturday morning, as well as a *Havdalah* service at the Jefferson Memorial, which was absolutely beautiful. Those experiences, alone, made the trip incredibly meaningful to me.

The programs on social justice and politics, however, were honestly life-changing. Previously, I had very little interest in politics. But, after *L'Taken*, I realize that politics are incredibly important

Congregants (from left to right) Annelise Goldman, Maya Wernikoff, Emma Stein and Anna Caffarelli in Washington, D.C. for the L'Taken program.



Tikkun Olam Repair the World

and that I can actually do something to influence the world. The program enabled me to sincerely believe that I can, as one person, make a difference. Now, I feel much more involved and engaged in the world.

I have tried to bring the lessons I learned at *L'Taken* to my school. Some of my friends and I have started a civic engagement program. We hope to create designated times at school when we as students can write letters and emails and make phone calls to our representatives about issues important to us.

The *L'Taken* experience was incredibly meaningful. I hope that I can participate again next year. I would like to thank Alissa Zuchman, Rabbi Carlie Daniels and Rabbi Gordon for making this opportunity possible for me.

Sukkat Shalom – By the Numbers

“Share the Harvest” for Thanksgiving 2015:

Gift Card Volunteers:	24
Shopping Volunteers:	13
Families Served:	47
Adults Served:	89
Children Served:	145



No Ordinary Soup: Forging Connections While Helping Others Through Tikkun Olam

by Julia Brown

On a recent Saturday morning, Sukkat Shalom's chefs and *sous* chefs crowded the kitchen, aprons tied, knives and peelers sharpened. We looked not unlike an updated version of Mrs. Patmore's *Down-ton Abbey* staff.

Lynn Denton and Lesley Peters, under the umbrella of the Hineinu (We Are Here) Committee, had conceived of this soup-making project. An industrious group had gathered to restock the supply of soup available for delivery to congregation members who might, in the moment, feel buoyed by a caring gift.

Dear Members of Sukkat Shalom:

I wanted all of you to be aware of the great excitement and heartfelt thanks coming from our Connections Day School families for the wonderful Share the Harvest Thanksgiving gifts. Our staff members have received many phone calls and in-person comments expressing tremendous gratitude for these gifts. Many of our students reported that your gifts allowed their families to have a REAL Thanksgiving this year.

The kindness and generosity that you have shown to our families is truly incredible. This year, you helped 28 of our neediest families with your kind Thanksgiving gifts. Please know that your congregation's charitable spirit and clear commitment to performing acts of *tzedakah* year after year has garnered great respect and appreciation from our Connections Day School families, as well as our staff.

I have been proud to play a small part in this fantastic program for the past 11 years and look forward to continuing our relationship in the years to come. We hope that everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving, a very happy Hanukkah and a beautiful New Year!

Thank you again,

Dr. Kristen Mittl Pollina, Psy.D.

This was no ordinary soup. The crew worked from delicious recipes: Winter Minestrone from *The Barefoot Contessa* and Carrot-Dill from *The Silver Palate Basics Cookbook*. In the temple kitchen, pillow-sized bags of spinach sat on counters next to large cans of cannellini beans. Carrots were everywhere.



Blessed are the soup-makers.

Much had been prepared, literally. Amy Heller, Lynn Denton and Julie Sonneborn planned and shopped and *schlepped*. Amy and Dick Heller had chopped bags and bags of onions. Lynn had precooked the minestrone pasta. Everything necessary to complete this project was in place for the cooks.

But challenges remained. The recipes needed to be tripled. What is three times $\frac{2}{3}$ of a cup? Three times $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons? Amounts were in ounces, but contents were in grams. Fractions. Algebra. Conversions. Really? Laughter. Phones brought out for their calculator apps. More laughter. Rabbi Gordon dropped in, doffed his cap, grinned and wished us well.

As we spread out around the two deep sinks, laid out cutting boards on the gleaming counters, searched the drawers and shelves for measuring cups and spoons, I recalled the fun of an earlier event: the kitchen shower when we first moved into the building. Those gifts were used to make this new gift of soup. And so it goes.

Four restaurant-sized pots covered four burners on the industrial-sized stove, two for each type of soup. If you were tall, you stirred. If you were short, you added the vegetables to the pots. The choreography wrote itself. Along the way we gained new skills; practical tricks like how to best use an

immersion blender. More important, we were making new connections with each other.

The goal was to cook and freeze the soups. We made 30 quarts! Glass Ball jars (who ordered those?) gleamed as they were filled with steaming liquid. Red, orange, dark-green and white vegetables shimmered in the light. As the jars were transferred from hand to hand toward the open refrigerator, cleanup was already in progress. "Does anyone compost?"

How wonderful, just days later, to have a recipient of the soup acknowledge the work: "I was so grateful to know that I am cared for and that there are people in our community who are here if we need them. In my mind, this is the true heart and soul of Sukkat Shalom."

May all who receive this soup also know what joy there was in the making of it.



Mmm-mmm-good!

Not “Goodbye” But “See You Soon”

by Alissa Zuchman, Director of Family Education

Lhitraot is a Hebrew word that translates as “see you soon.” As I write this article, I don’t even want to contemplate saying goodbye. Instead, I’m just embarking on the next part of my journey.

Five years ago, I sat across the table from Rabbi Gordon, Judy Buckman and Jill Schoeneman-Parker to interview for the position of Director of Family Education. For the previous 15 years, I had held a similar-sounding position at another congregation. Although the titles might be the same, I soon found that this place was very different.

Like Dorothy returning from Oz, I knew I had found my home: A place that values relationships, friendships and community. A place that isn’t afraid to try new things or allow ideas to flourish.

In the five years that I have called Congregation Sukkat Shalom home, I have developed friendships that have become more like family. Rabbi Gordon uses this guidepost to see if we are fulfilling our mission: “If a person were stuck and couldn’t get home, is one of their best friends in the congregation and can they call upon them to help?” I can say without any hesitation that my best friends are in our congregation.

When I was sick, you came to bring me food, laughter and comfort. You provided rides and invited me into your homes for Shabbat, Passover and Break-The-Fast. I have been given opportunities to expand my teaching and lead you on new journeys.

“The truth at the heart of this congregation is that nothing is impossible and “yes” is the answer to almost any question.”

As I begin the next part of my life in Paradise Valley, Arizona, some favorite experiences will stay with me:

- **Family Retreat**, where we shared our different experiences with God without fear that our concepts weren’t acceptable.
- **Going on L’Taken to Washington, D.C.**, with the most extraordinary

group of young people. As much as they talk about it being a life-changing experience for them, it changed my life as well.


- **Tutoring students in Hebrew over FaceTime** to get them ready for their B’nai Mitzvah after they moved to Florida but came home to Congregation Sukkat Shalom for the service.

The truth at the heart of this congregation is that nothing is impossible and “yes” is the answer to almost any question.

Rabbi Gordon and Judy have built a congregation filled with love and compassion. They designed a place that is the envy of congregations across this country because the value of relationships is its most important aspect.

This is what you have taught me and I will take it with me on my journey. Please know that my home is always open to all of you when you come to Arizona. I can’t wait to take you hiking in the beautiful mountains outside my door or bring you to see your favorite team during spring training.

I will cherish every one of you and miss you more than words can express. I have been blessed to be a part of the ongoing story of Sukkat Shalom. So this is not a goodbye. Instead, I will leave saying *L’Hitraot* – see you soon.



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Shabbat on the Town

On Friday, March 18th, 75 young professionals gathered for a Shabbat celebration at The Rec Room at Henry’s in River North. Sukkat Shalom, along with Chicago Sinai and North Shore Congregation Israel, sponsored the event. Another young professionals Shabbat is being planned for this summer.

