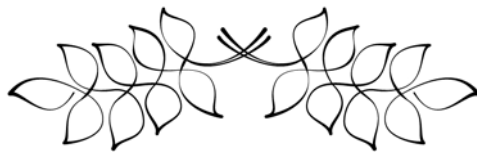


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CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

The prophet, Jeremiah, living at the time of the first destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., wrote to the Jewish exiles in Babylon and said: "Pray for the well being and peace of the nation to which I have sent you. Pray to the Eternal One on its behalf; for if it prospers, so too will you prosper." (Jeremiah 29:7)

For more than 2,500 years, Jeremiah's words have guided the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Our fate has been inextricably tied to the welfare of the nations in which we found ourselves. In no place has that prophetic value been more true than in the United States. From the very first Jewish settlers in the Carolinas, New England, Virginia and New Amsterdam, there has been a long tradition of engagement in the public life of this country. Our fate has always been tied to the social and political health of America.

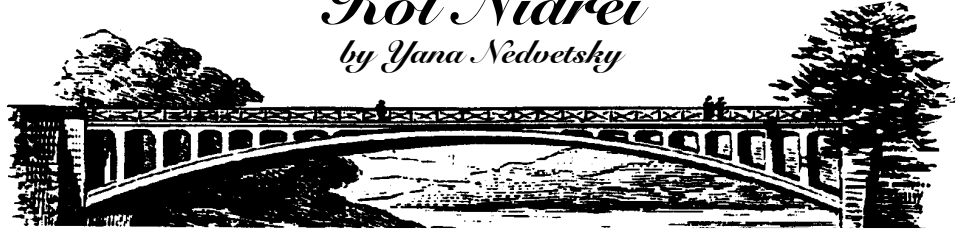
But many of us are now deeply worried about the American future. That concern is not partisan or based on any political party affiliation. There is a deep divide in America, and it is a source of profound concern. There is far too much demonization of the other and resentment and anger directed at those with whom we disagree. Too many people cannot talk to each other, or choose to speak only to those with whom they agree. Even the sources of our news and information are chosen for their agreement with our predisposed positions.

"There is a deep divide in America, and it is a source of profound concern."

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Our Family's Journey to Kol Nidrei

by Yana Nedvetsky



In the beginning there were no musicians and no Judaism in our family.

My husband Axel's ancestors ceased being Jews in the 14th Century. My grandparents abandoned their Jewish roots at the beginning of the 20th.

Growing up in the Soviet Union, I perceived Jewishness as a physical trait; an ethnicity listed in birth certificates and passports. The remnants of our lost culture were the Yiddish words flavoring my grandparent's conversations -- gefilte fish on a holiday table -- and names that we invariably associated with elderly relatives born before the 1917 Revolution: Yakov, Isaak and Rivka.

When our daughter, Natalie, started attending Sunday school, I was asked to volunteer in her classroom. I was immediately and profoundly affected by the experience of Jewish learning, even at a third-grade level. Encouraged by the school, I enrolled in the Melton Course for Jewish educators and became a third grade Sunday school teacher. It was a life-changing experience that has altered our family's Jewish consciousness. It led to Natalie's Bat Mitzvah and our son Jan's Bris, the first one in many generations of our family. Eventually, it led us to Sukkat Shalom, our Jewish home.

Then music entered our family life. Jan's sister, Natalie, started playing

piano at age seven, completely on her own initiative. She became very serious about music at the Bat Mitzvah age and performed in a prestigious chamber music festival in Belgium. She continued

on a fascinating and unique journey that led to the Juilliard School, where Natalie is now a third-year student majoring in classical piano performance.

Jan was taken to his sister's concerts and exposed to a variety of classical music from the earliest age. He attended his very first concert in an infant-carrier. While visiting Natalie at the chamber music festival in Belgium, four-year old Jan became entranced with the sound of the cello and the "cool" appearance of the long-haired teenage cellists. Jan decided that the cello was his kind of instrument. He began his cello instruction at the age of five with Gilda Barston. Gilda was a master teacher and an extraordinary mentor to the parents of her students.

At the age of nine, Jan returned as a performer to the Musica Mundi festival in Belgium -- the same one that started his sister's artistic career. There, Jan encountered a renowned Belorussian cello

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Journey, cont'd

teacher, Vladimir Perlin, who became Jan's mentor after Gilda's passing. Under Mr. Perlin's guidance, Jan's love of cello continued to blossom, although he kept his hair short.

Jan's cellos became bigger, and so did his repertoire. In June 2016, Jan heard Max Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* performed in his teacher Gilda's memory. Later that year he was able to play a small part of *Kol Nidrei* in the Sukkat Shalom Yom Kippur family service. It was unimaginable at the time that he would be able to play the entire piece, owing to the technical and artistic complexity of the score.

In May of this year, Jan was invited to perform the *Kol Nidrei* again. This time it was possible for Jan to consider playing the entire piece.

Jan prepared for this performance during the summer. He was helped by his cello teachers Horacio Contreras and Mr. Perlin; pianist Milana Pavchinskaya, who performed with Jan in the service; cantorial soloist Kenny Lyonswright, who explained to Jan the meaning of *Kol Nidrei* and showed how to connect musical phrases to the Hebrew chanting of the prayer; Misha Radunski, one of the original long-haired cellists in Belgium who inspired Jan, now a celebrated young artist; Michael Becker, a luthier who provided Jan with his current and former cellos and lent him a very fancy bow for the *Kol Nidrei* performance; and many other

friends from near and far who gave advice and supported the effort.

“It is impossible to identify a moment when the journey connecting our family's Jewish roots to the art of musical performance first started.”

This journey to *Kol Nidrei* can also be expressed in numbers -- an idea suggested by Jan, who loves math:

It took three months to prepare the piece, but also five years since our family joined the Sukkat Shalom congregation; seven years since Jan started learning cello; 12 years since Jan was born; 14 years since we embarked on

a Jewish way of life; 14 years since Natalie became our family's first musician; 26 years since Axel and I met; 30 years since my mother and I immigrated to the United States; and a millennia of Jewish life in our family before that.

It is impossible to identify a moment when the journey connecting our family's Jewish roots to the art of musical performance first started. But these are the milestones along the way that led to Jan's performance of *Kol Nidrei* for our congregational family.

Rabbi's Message, cont'd

We are divided today by class, race and background. Gender has become an especially hot issue in our debates. There are regional divisions between many of those struggling in the South or Midwest and the coastal

elites, including those of us on the coast of Lake Michigan. There are nativist forces opposing immigration and disaffected

“No matter the outcome of the mid-term elections on November 6th, the cultural divisions will not go away.”

Whites resentful of people of color. Too many feel left behind.

A little over a year ago, Charlottesville exposed the racism and anti-Semitism of a frightening underbelly of our society. The Kavanaugh hearings ripped open any remaining facade of a non-partisan commitment to a federal judicial system existing on a plane above the messiness of party politics. It was like the movie *Rashomon*; two sides saw the same event, but through completely different eyes and reached opposite conclusions.

How do we come to some sort of healing? The solution to our crisis cannot be focused on any one leader. We all need to do a better job of hearing the voices of those with whom we disagree. The Op-Ed pages of the New York Times and Washington Post should be read alongside editorials in the Wall Street Journal. Articles in *“Commentary”* or *“National Review”* can balance those in *“The New Yorker”* or *“The Nation.”* Media of all sort needs to inform us and not merely sow distrust and division.

No matter the outcome of the mid-term elections on November 6th, the cultural divisions will not go away. It will take very hard work and true political and moral leadership to bring this country together. That must be our ultimate goal.



Natalie and Jan Nedvetsky - and Jan's cello.

Touchpoints in Full Swing for Eager Empty-Nesters

By Beth Gomberg-Hirsch and Lesley Peters

Touchpoints is a program for Sukkat Shalom empty-nesters who want to stay engaged and involved after our children graduate from Family School. We kicked off this year's program with a trip to Chicago's Timeline Theater to see "Shayna Maidel." A number of us stayed afterwards for a post-play discussion about the effort it took to learn Yiddish, bond as a cast and deal with difficult themes of family dysfunction.

Sicha, our member-led Sunday morning discussion program, will resume on November 4th. During these 50-minute sessions, we discuss topics of relevance and build community among those no longer attending Family School. All Sicha meetings take place on Sundays at 10 a.m. at the Wilmette Community Recreation Center. Following is this year's schedule and discussion-leaders:

November 4th (Dolores Orlove)

January 27th (Missy Fleming)

February 24th (Pamela Kraus)

April 14th (Beth Gomberg-Hirsch)

Please RSVP to the Sukkat Shalom office if you plan to attend so that we can email readings to you in advance of these discussions.

On the afternoon of **Saturday, November 17th**, we will bake Hanukkah cookies under the guidance of our own, very talented Marlene Carl. Afterwards, we will conduct a Havdalah service. We hope you will consider participating -- and bring your sons, daughters and friends. Please RSVP so that we are able to plan appropriately.

On **Friday, January 18th**, we will host an Intergenerational Shabbat dinner and service beginning at 6 p.m.

On **Sunday, February 10th at 4 p.m.**, we will screen the movie "Footnote." Rabbi Gordon will facilitate a discussion of the film, followed by a light dinner.

On **Sunday, March 10th at 5 p.m.**, we will participate in an exciting and innovative program called "Death Over Drinks." There is a TED Talk that provides a sense of this approach to the subject of mortality. Rather than a morbid view of death, it seeks to put more meaning into living.

On **Sunday, April 28th at 4 p.m.**, we will wind up the year with our second film, "Rosenstrasse," which commemorates Yom HaShoah. Rabbi Gordon will lead a discussion about the film, followed by dinner.

We hope to see old friends at these Touchpoint programs, along with many new ones. We welcome all congregants who want to continue learning and building connections. You're never too old to learn -- or to make new friendships.

Meet the Teachers: Alyce Lang

What makes Sukkat Shalom's Family School great -- along with its precious students -- is the dedication and passion of its wonderful teachers.

For more than ten years, Alyce Lang has taught our congregation's pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students.



"My passion for Judaism and teaching, as well as my husband being home on Sundays, inspired me to look for a Sunday School job," says Alyce. "A friend was teaching at Sukkat Shalom and thought we would be a good match. I was very impressed with the ideals and philosophy of the Family School program and was excited to join the teaching staff."

Alyce says that her favorite part about Family School "is the fun I have with the children and the enjoyment I get in watching their enthusiasm as they learn about Judaism." She says her most memorable class projects are the "edibles."

"We have fun creating an edible snack that is tied to what we are learning on a given Sunday. The children love them! Hopefully, the parents do, too, since we send them home after class."

Alyce was a special education teacher for ten years before she stopped working full-time to raise her children. She continues working as a substitute teacher. She received her special education teaching degree at Northeastern Illinois University and a master's degree in guidance and counseling at Roosevelt University.

Alyce was born in Chicago and has lived in Skokie, Buffalo Grove and presently in Deerfield. She is married and has four adult sons, two Labrador retrievers and a "grand-dog." In her spare time, she enjoys cooking, reading, golf, exercise, hiking and mah-jong.

"I feel very fortunate to be teaching at Family School," says Alyce. "I work with an incredible staff and have met such wonderful families. The children keep me smiling!"

Sukkat Shalom to Adopt and Assist the Strangers in Our Midst

by Rabbi Carlie Daniels

Our world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. In early-2017, Sukkat Shalom partnered with First Congregational Church of Wilmette and First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette to create a program called "Stock the Shelves" to serve refugee families in our area. At the time, Sukkat Shalom hoped to co-sponsor a refugee family. But due to changes in the law that year, the project was put on hold.

"Our tradition commands us to, 'Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.'"

Stock the Shelves has been a wonderful way to work in partnership with other local faith communities to engage with and offer support to refugees. Because our experience with Stock the Shelves has been so rewarding, and the continuing need to help local refugees, Sukkat Shalom officially signed up in September to co-sponsor a refugee family through RefugeeOne, a local refugee resettlement agency.

"The money our congregation raises will help the family meet their basic needs for their first few months here in the U.S."

During the High Holy Days, we rolled out our fundraising effort for this project. So far, we have raised over \$5,000 to fund our co-sponsorship project. We are just \$3,000 away from

the \$8,000 minimum that RefugeeOne requires. On average, it takes \$12,125 to help a refugee family of five to become independent. The money our congregation raises will help the family meet their basic needs for their first few months here in the U.S. If you haven't yet donated, please consider making a donation to this worthy cause. Every dollar makes a difference.

The two most common questions I receive about this project are, "Where is the family from?" and "When will they arrive?" We



Rabbi Daniels loading donated supplies for local refugee families through Stock the Shelves.

will not know the answer to either question until RefugeeOne receives word from the government that "our" family officially has obtained plane tickets to Chicago. Typically, we will know two weeks in advance of the family's arrival.

Once we know we have a family coming, we will set up their apartment (furnished and stocked with generous donations from you), greet them at the airport, and begin weekly family mentorship and tutoring sessions. Here are a few ways that you can support Sukkat Shalom's Refugee Initiative:

- Make a monetary donation at refugeeone.org/sukkatshalom.html, or send a check to Sukkat Shalom with Refugee Co-Sponsorship in the memo line.
- Donate and/or purchase items to help stock the apartment. See the list and sign up for items at www.sukkatshalom.org/refugee-cosponsorship.
- Volunteer to be a family mentor or tutor, to help the family acclimate to life here in the Chicago area. Sign up to volunteer at www.sukkatshalom.org/refugee-cosponsorship.

I hope that you will join with me and the Sukkat Shalom community to support this effort to welcome a refugee family. Our tradition commands us to, "Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19), and through this work we can live out this commandment in the present day.

Together: How Laughing Through Hebrew Lessons Led to Insight and Understanding

by Charlie Fies and Drew Klearman

Both of us knew exactly what the summer of fourth and fifth grade meant: Hebrew lessons. We had watched family, friends and relatives take on the responsibility of completing their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, but we found ourselves reluctant to begin the task of actually reading and understanding the Torah.

“We have been friends for a long time, and the work of becoming a Bar Mitzvah wasn’t going to get in the way of our plans”

This feeling of being uncomfortable carried over to our lessons with Ronit – poor Ronit – our Master Hebrew Teacher. We found every Hebrew word hilarious. Every consonant and vowel that we hadn’t heard before sounded alien to us and you could bet we would laugh hysterically. Between our outbursts, Ronit would calmly ask us to stay focused and remind us that someday we would value the lessons and understand their importance.

Two years and thousands of laughs went by, and soon we began preparing for the big day. This meant meeting with the cantorial soloist and doing more than just the usual “practice” at home as our Bar Mitzvah dates were approaching. We both agree that we didn’t treat the preparations as seriously as we should have. We wrote Hebrew letters, pronounced words, worked on our Torah portions, and still found plenty of time to hang out on the weekends.

“We found every Hebrew word hilarious.”

We have been friends for a long time, and the work of becoming a Bar Mitzvah wasn’t going to get in the way of our plans. Whenever we got bored, we thought of unique ways to remember Hebrew words and studied together whenever possible. We went to Family School together every other Sunday, but often found ourselves off-task.

However, we were both extremely excited for our Bar Mitzvahs and talked about them a lot. Ours were scheduled close to each other (only two weeks apart!), and we still remember stressing about all the

things that could go wrong: *What if my voice cracks? What if I forget Hebrew? What if I say the wrong prayer at the wrong time?*

With our dates fast approaching, we were both extremely nervous.

Charlie: On the day of my Bar

Mitzvah, I looked out at the crowd of people listening to me as I read from the Torah and many things hit me at once. I observed the looks on the faces of my friends, who had no idea what I was saying, and the looks from my relatives and family, who were probably in the same boat. But they all had something in common. They were smiling. They all looked as if they were proud, and that sense of collective pride is something I will never forget.

Drew: One thing that I will always remember is when I finished reading my Torah portion and looked into the crowd and saw all of my friends along with both sides of my family. It was the first time that I had seen both sides of my family together, and I was honored to have so many people come to celebrate my Bar Mitzvah. It made me realize the importance of having such supportive family members.

These are some of the many things Sukkat Shalom has given to us: A sense of community; people proudly working to help you make others proud; people not only passionate about Judaism,

but also passionate to help and guide others.

We both feel that if there were one thing we could go back and change, it would be to truly value the opportunities we were given. Both our cantorial soloist and Hebrew teacher Ronit worked tirelessly to help us present our years of study in the best way possible. They taught us lifelong lessons that we may not have understood then, but appreciate now.

From laughing during lessons to being grateful for what we learned from them. From struggling to understand a new language to learning valuable life lessons. From waiting impatiently for the end of Family School to becoming *Madrichim* (assistant teachers) for the past two years.

We have been taught responsibility in the best way possible. We have grown in many respects. And the best part? We did it together.



Charlie Fies (left) and Drew Klearman with Master Hebrew Teacher Ronit Levy.

Young People's Commitment to Social Change Provides Hope for the Future

by Kenny Lyonswright, Cantorial Soloist

Outside of providing music at services, the majority of my time at Sukkat Shalom is spent in the company of seventh graders -- tutoring them in groups or individually for their B'nai Mitzvah. These meetings, whether in my office or in a classroom, focus mostly on Hebrew language lessons: decoding the letters, learning how to chant prayers, and getting used to reading from the Torah (no vowels!).

Sometimes, our lessons or conversations will turn to their D'vrei Torah or "Words about Torah." This is the speech delivered at their service, offering a translation and interpretation of the Torah portion they have learned to chant.

In my many meetings with students during their time with me, however, the thing I look forward to the most is talking about their Mitzvah projects. For many of them, this is the first opportunity they have had to take stock of their community and identify places in which they can make a difference.

In some cases, their families have volunteered together before—at Curt's Café, Bernie's Book Bank, the Night Ministry, Family Promise, or other organizations in the area. The Mitzvah project, however, is often the first chance the student has to decide completely on their own how they'd like to inspire change in their community.



Kenny Lyonswright and Bat Mitzvah student Zoe Parker.

Many students opt to serve a community they already are a part of: collecting new or gently used equipment for sports leagues; volunteering their time at animal shelters; or various projects involving their schools. Other students collect money for charitable causes through bake sales or by selling artwork. No two Mitzvah projects are quite the same, but the end result is identical: a community has been made better by the hard work and effort of a Sukkat Shalom student.

To watch the news in recent months is to witness young people making a difference across the country. There is the remarkable poise and character shown by the teen survivors of the Parkland High School shooting; youth advocacy groups making impassioned pleas to address the separation of families at the U.S.-Mexico border; daughters who join hands with their mothers at Women's Marches; and the young people who've taken to the streets to protest inequality due to race, gender, orientation or religion.

It is my distinct privilege to work with students who, to a person, exemplify what it means to work towards bettering their community. I am so proud of all the Sukkat Shalom students and the important work they are doing. It should give us all hope for the present – and the future.



Participants in last month's joint Sukkat Shalom-First Congregational Church of Wilmette trip to Israel, Palestine and Jordan gather on the beach in Old Jaffa with the Tel Aviv skyline in the background. (Photo by Rabbi Sam Gordon)



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