

Volume 24 – Issue #1
Fall, 2019
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CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

The Rabbis of the Talmud said that the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 was to be blamed on *Sinat Chinam*, baseless hatred. In many ways this is a remarkable statement. History would seem to ascribe the destruction to the Roman army that besieged the city in order to put down the Judean revolt against the Roman Empire. But the Talmud finds the ultimate cause in the bitter divisiveness that existed among the Jews, themselves. It is quite surprising that the authors of the Talmud chose to exonerate the Romans and blame, instead, their fellow Jews.

The lesson was clear: Internal divisions and conflicts are often far more dangerous than external enemies. I could apply that lesson to both America and Israel today. Both nations are deeply divided, and each side tends to demonize the other. I have relatives in Israel who are no longer able to celebrate Shabbat and the holidays together -- their dining room table having become a battleground rather than a place to share a common meal. The Israeli political system is now paralyzed, with neither major party capable of forming a coalition government.

“Internal divisions and conflicts are often far more dangerous than external enemies.”

America seems equally divided. There is little common ground or even civility in Washington. Each side views the other with distrust. There appears to be no shared vision of a common goal. We are moving to the extremes along a graph of political ideologies. Some of our families

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My Journey by Seth Zimmerman, Marketing Operations Manager



As a freshman in high school I was asked, “What makes somebody Jewish?” So many thoughts raced through my mind at that moment:

Be cool, a girl is talking to you.

Am I wearing my glasses? You nerd, take them off...but do it smoothly.

Wait, what did she ask? I have no idea how to answer that.

She’s staring at me. Just say something already!

The best I could come up with was, “I don’t know. I guess it’s a lot of things.”

Nailed it. ‘slow clap’

Her follow-up question was, “Where are your horns?” But let’s not dwell on that line of thinking because I was a little naïve and honestly had no idea what she was talking about. We’ll focus on the first question, which stumped me more than I was expecting.

What DOES make somebody Jewish? Ask a dozen people and you’ll get two dozen answers. Is it how often you attend services? Do you have to keep kosher? I spoke about as much Hebrew as I did Yiddish (which was just enough to properly deliver a joke’s punchline), so I didn’t have that going for me. What about having

a Bar Mitzvah? Jewish parents? Jewish friends? A Jewish-sounding name? Wearing a yarmulke outside of synagogue? Does our house have a *mezuzah* on the door? Do I go to Hebrew School enough?

Wait...am I Jewish by choice? Or am I Jewish because others define me that way?

The 13-year-old me was now spiraling down a rabbit-hole of identity and self-reflection.

Hebrew school did NOT help me with my Jewish identity. It was a chore. Three days a week reciting Hebrew and memorizing prayers, without really understanding the ‘why’. You did it because that was the way it was. It was how my teachers learned about Judaism, and their teachers before them. Memorize, recite, and don’t ask hard questions. Maybe I would have liked it if it were more like Sukkat Shalom’s Family School.

To make Hebrew School even worse, I was told by more than one classmate that I wasn’t Jewish like them. Why? Pick a reason from above. Great -- the only Jewish kids I know won’t accept me. Now what? I went through the motions and played the part of the good Jewish boy for both my Jewish and secular worlds. I kept kosher, attended Hebrew School through confirmation, and wore Hanukkah sweaters to Ugly Christmas-Sweater parties.

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Journey, cont'd

Fast forward to college. It was at Indiana University that I made my first group of Jewish friends, first Jewish girlfriends, and ate my first cheeseburgers.

I don't have to keep kosher just because I was told I have to in order to be a good Jew? Well, this is an interesting development.

It felt like a new lease on life. I was free to decide for myself what, if anything, made me Jewish. I explored Judaism. I attended services at Hillel as well as Chabad. I took Jewish history classes and (briefly) studied Hebrew for my language requirement. I developed close friendships with people of different backgrounds and faiths. It was liberating and allowed me to connect with my Judaism in a brand-new way.

“Wait...am I Jewish by choice? Or am I Jewish because others define me that way?”

Something that I love about Judaism is that we are encouraged to ask questions. Why do we do X? What is the meaning behind Y? How is Z relevant today? It is this questioning that has drawn me to Sukkat Shalom. A congregation can operate in a way that adjusts to people's needs instead of how it's *supposed* to

be run. Just because Shabbat is *traditionally* done in a certain way doesn't mean it HAS to be done that way. This is a place where you don't need to have the exact same beliefs as everybody else in order to belong.

My Jewish journey is complex, as it is for everyone. It includes Holocaust-surviving grandparents, visiting family in Israel, and developing my creative identity thanks to Kitty Pryde. My parents encouraged me to attend a college where I knew nobody and develop my own identity, be it Jewish or not.

This journey has taught me it is possible to be a good Jew without being traditionally religious. The history of the Jewish people, our traditions and values are much more significant to me than prayer in shaping my Jewish identity. I have spent countless hours exploring my family's history. I love that I can tell my toddler the same stories that were told 150 years ago by our ancestors, and I love it even more that he needs to know 'why.'

I don't know what happened to that girl who asked me, "What makes somebody Jewish?" She went to

college in Virginia and I never saw her again. I hope she knows by now that Jews don't have horns. But what makes somebody Jewish? I guess it's a lot of things.

“Something that I love about Judaism is that we are encouraged to ask questions.”

Join in Celebrating the WOWs (Wise Older Women) of Sukkat Shalom

by Beth Gomberg-Hirsch

This past summer I had the pleasure of attending a 90th birthday party. One of the guests, a peer of the birthday woman, toasted the honoree by saying "Our age is merely the number of years the world has enjoyed us." How lovely. The women at the party in their late-80s and 90s were wise, wonderful and inspirational. It started me thinking that acquiring age or seniority is a gift, and a gift that should be shared.

We have Jewish rituals when our children come of age at 13, and we welcome them into our fold as adults.

We want to hear their thoughts on the Torah portions they studied, and we want to share

with joy their joining our community. I think the same should be done, with much appreciation, for those who have achieved the wisdom that comes from having lived a full life.

“...acquiring age or seniority is a gift, and a gift that should be shared..”

It turns out that such a ceremony does exist. It is a tradition that celebrates a rite of passage from adult to elder. It is meant to celebrate the presence in our community of human beings facing mortality and shaping their own legacies.

This *Simchat Chochma* ceremony was created in the early 1990's with elements of the Genesis narrative: a blessing, a change of name, a covenant, a reconciliation with death and, most importantly, an affirmation of life. It has become a women's celebration that is practiced in congregations across the country, and we in Touchpoints would love to participate in that movement.

We invite you to consider joining us on this journey to piece together a meaningful crafting of a way to celebrate the WOWs -- the Wise Older Women of Sukkat Shalom. We will be sending more information soon, with a goal of having a Simchat Chochma Shabbat service in May, 2020.

New York Times columnist Frank Bruni has written that "younger generations need older ones to turn idealism into more than pretty words. They need the moral authority reserved for people who've done so much loving, so much losing and so much figuring out how to press on. They need the life lessons, which have grown from a pamphlet to an encyclopedia."

Please let us share the blessing of our acquired knowledge. Let us know if you would be interested in working on this special ceremony by contacting Touchpoints co-chairs Beth Gomberg-Hirsch or Lesley Peters. We would love to have you.

Rabbi's Message, cont'd

experience that same division and bitterness. Too many people find it impossible to talk with civility with those who disagree with them.

Jewish history is replete with internal battles pitting one side against the other, each claiming an exclusive possession of the truth. Hanukkah, itself, is a lesson in the dangers of zealotry. The Book of Maccabees tells the story of the Hasmonean revolt against the Syrian/Greeks. The priestly family of Mattathias attacked their fellow Jews who were adopting Greek customs. Judah and his brothers waged war against the Hellenistic Jews. Their zealotry was the basis of a Jewish civil war.

The Maccabees won that war, but they, themselves, soon adopted Greek names and culture. They prevailed against the Seleucid Empire but then were conquered by the newly ascendant Roman Empire. Much of the Jewish world thrived under Roman rule, but a group of zealots refused to adapt to this new society. They fought against Rome, but they also fought against their fellow Jews. They experienced an overwhelming defeat that ended Jewish sovereignty for nearly 2,000 years. The Jewish nation was destroyed by internal strife.

The rabbis told their own story of Hanukkah, one that emphasized a divine miracle of the oil lasting eight days. They largely ignored the military story. The rabbis chose not to glorify the zealotry of the past. They understood the destructive forces of extremism and absolutism.

Many of us are deeply concerned about America's future. The most sophisticated defensive weapons are no protection against internal divisions and hatreds. We can only hope that *sinat chinam*—baseless hatred—will not destroy our world.

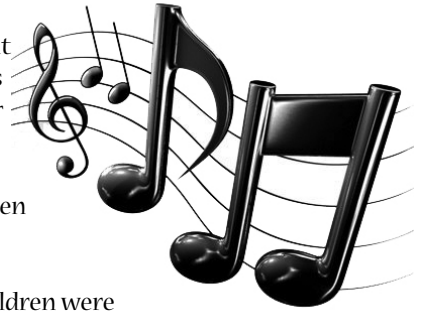
"The most sophisticated defensive weapons are no protection against internal divisions and hatreds."

Musical Notes: Exploring the Overlap Between Jewish and Afro-Cuban Tunes

by Kenny Lyonswright, Cantorial Soloist

We recently welcomed Shabbat at Sukkat Shalom by featuring an Afro-Cuban jazz band during Shabbat services.

As many attendees remarked afterwards, the seamless fusion between our well-known Shabbat melodies and "Latin" rhythms and harmonies was quite striking. As much as I'd like to take credit for the brilliant idea of combining the two musical traditions, there is actually a rich and vibrant history of collaboration and cross-pollination between Jewish Americans and Afro-Cuban music.



Many Jewish-American immigrants and their children were captivated by the Cuban music and dancing that reminded them of the spirit of their Eastern European roots. As the Prohibition Era encouraged travel to nearby Cuba, vacationers from the United States brought back a penchant for the mambo, the rumba, and all things Afro-Cuban. This led to enormous popularity for

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the genre at B'nai Mitzvahs, weddings, and other gatherings. The melting-pot of New York City furthered the cross-pollination, and soon Afro-Cuban bands were a regular fixture throughout Manhattan nightclubs, not to mention the summer resorts of the Catskills.

Before the Cuban Revolution of 1959, there were many thousands of Jews living in Cuba. After that revolution, however, more

than 90 percent of them fled to the United States. It was around this time that the first real effort commenced to make the marriage between the traditions "official," beginning with Irving Fields' 1959 recording of "Bagels and Bongos." Fields, a pianist and bandleader, arranged well-known Yiddish folk songs such as "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" and the cheekily renamed "Havana Nagilah" for an Afro-Cuban jazz band.

Two years later, in 1961, superstar percussionist Ray Barretto would arrange old Yiddish Theater songs for a Latin jazz band and title the album, "Mazel Tov, Mis Amigos." In many ways that album, while full of shtick, was a love letter to the symbiotic relationship between Jews and Latin jazz bands that had been fostered over the past decade or so.

As popular taste in America changed (the Beatles would arrive to perform on the Ed Sullivan show only three years after "Mazel Tov, Mis Amigos"), the intense interest in Latin and Afro-Cuban music waned. Even as musical tastes have shifted, and Jewish-Americans have left their mark on folk and hip-hop, there are few genres that feel quite so like home to us as Afro-Cuban jazz -- whether or not that appreciation is born of nostalgia or some deeper, epigenetic force.

I am eagerly awaiting the return of Rabbi Gordon and the members of our congregational trip to Cuba in December. I'll be interested to learn if they're still singing "Havana Nagilah" down south.

"Afro-Cuban bands were a regular fixture throughout Manhattan nightclubs, not to mention the summer resorts of the Catskills"

Welcoming the Stranger as Others Once Welcomed Us

by Judy Goodie

My dad came to the U.S. as a teenager in 1914. He traveled with the Jewish underground and left his large family in Belarus. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) met his boat in Seattle and helped him find his American cousins by advertising in the Yiddish press. He spoke several languages, but English was not one of them. So I was thrilled when Sukkat Shalom gave me a chance to befriend and help young families become Americans, as others had helped my dad.

Lacking the confidence to go it alone, I buddied up with Beth Gomberg-Hirsch. Beth and I shared monthly visits with Romenah and Shanbi and their children from January to June. We embraced the challenge of mentoring a family of four who spoke no English. Rosanah, a kindergartener, proudly sang the A-B-C song at our first visit and enjoyed playing word games. Her brother Nur Kamal, then 4, who did not attend school, enjoyed puzzles, stickers, matching games and, of course, trucks. But he did not communicate in English.

“We were delighted that the children looked forward to our visits and greeted us with hugs.”

that the children looked forward to our visits and greeted us with hugs.

Beth and I took both families together to the zoo, the aquarium, and the Baha'i Temple followed by a picnic in Gillson Park. They admired our beautiful city, and the kids were excited about everything. By summer, with the children enrolled in a nearby day camp, our six-month co-sponsorship with Refugee One came to an end. Fortunately, the camp experience, followed by pre-school for the little boy, is already working to get him speaking English and making new friends.

Bibi and Abdul are diligently working on their English. They speak it sometimes at home to teach the children. Both attended school in Burma and are eager to go to college. They welcomed my offer to tutor them when Sukkat Shalom's co-sponsorship ended. I often visit on Abdul's day off. Since they want to learn to drive, we loaded the Illinois driving rules and practice tests on their iPad. They hope to be ready to take the instruction permit test next year.

Bibi asked me to bring easy-to-read books for her to read to Thariq. They are both enjoying *Curious George*. I brought a beautifully illustrated memoir about four generations of a Japanese American family who found 'home' in both countries—*Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say. This book held great meaning for my friend Bibi and I expect she will read it often to her family.

On the morning that the two families were to visit our Family School, we discovered that Thariq had a high fever and could not attend. Instead, he agreed quite willingly to go home with me and play with my grandson's toys. It truly warmed my heart to see this child enter a strange new house and make himself at home. Later, his mom told me he has asked to come to my house again. That is all the thanks I could ever want.


Tikkun Olam
Repair the World



(From left): Bibi Zainab, Nasuha Tazollah (wearing skin protection) and Janet Pierce-Ritter.

How “Welcoming the Stranger” Became Personal for Me

by Janet Pierce-Ritter

On a beautiful fall morning this October, two remarkable Rohingya women shared the story of their journey from Burma to Rogers Park with Sukkat Shalom's Family School. I was honored to be part of the synagogue community that joined together to support these two families:

Romenah and Shanbi and their children, Rosanah (7 years old) and Nur Kamal (5); and Bibi and Abdul and their children, Thariq (5) and Nasuha (1).

For me, it all began with setting up their apartments to create a warm and welcoming place for them to call home. Once settled, we developed a plan to mentor the families for their first six months as part of our agreement with the Refugee One organization. I signed up to tutor the children, but this morphed into monthly visits to help the families navigate all that they confronted. With a Google spreadsheet to keep us connected, and John Shapiro to guide us, the weekly Sunday morning visits began.

In the beginning, my monthly visits were split between the two families -- answering questions, filling out forms, connecting with social services, etc. Communication was difficult and we all struggled to understand each other. A lot of patience was required on both sides. Bibi spoke some English and helped us to communicate with Romenah.

On nice days we went to the park and visited the local library. We helped the families register for summer camp and preschool.

On one visit, I ended up taking Bibi to Urgent Care at St. Francis Hospital. We both were impressed with the care she received.

Bibi was glad that she now had a resource for emergency medical situations.

“I feel that my relationship with her has grown from volunteer to friend.”

As less time was needed to manage weekly issues, I began tutoring Bibi in English. She is extremely motivated. Her English lessons had concluded at Refugee One but we were unable to find additional resources. I set her up with a language program on the internet that she continues today.

When our formal agreement with Refugee One ended in June, I started seeing Bibi weekly. I feel that my relationship with her has grown from volunteer to friend. Through these visits I understand so much more about Bibi -- her family, her previous home, her life prior to Chicago. We share stories about each other's lives. Communication flows both ways. One of Bibi's goals is for us to write her story so she can share it with Sukkat Shalom. A bonus is that one-year-old Nasuha seems to have attached herself to me. The smile I get from her when I visit lights up my day!

Welcoming the stranger is a core value of Judaism. The Torah instructs us 36 times to care for the stranger. The relationships I have formed with these former-strangers to our shores has given true meaning to the text for me.

New Table Symbolizes Sukkat Shalom's Commitment to Social Justice

Social justice has always been a cornerstone of Sukkat Shalom's mission and our wonderful new library/conference room table is a great example of this commitment. It was created by an amazing organization called Revolution Workshop.

Co-founded in 2018 by Dan Miller, a longtime friend of Sukkat Shalom, Revolution Workshop is changing lives by providing free skills-training for unemployed and underemployed adults seeking a career in construction.

Operating out of a workshop in East Garfield Park, Revolution Workshop has built a best-in-class construction training program fused with a non-profit custom furniture enterprise. With each piece of furniture they build, lives are rebuilt as well.

Over the past few weeks, Revolution Workshops' current group of train-

ees designed, crafted, and built a custom, handcrafted conference room table for Sukkat Shalom.

Our beautiful 12-foot table was delivered in time for the November Board of Directors meeting and we look forward to many more years of using and enjoying this work of art.



My Montana Mission: Wiping a Slur on Jews Off the Map

by Alex Froeter

[Alex is a former-member of Sukkat Shalom and attended our Family School.]

I was looking for possible backcountry ski terrain when I found a slur on Jews.

As a graduate of the University of Montana's Geography Program, exploring and creating maps has always been a passion of mine. In search of ski slopes, I was scanning a map of the southern Bitterroot Mountains, about 100 miles south of my Missoula, Montana apartment. Near Painted Rocks Lake and Lookout Mountain, I noticed a "Jew Mountain." This peak's slopes feed multiple creeks, two of which are named Gentile Creek and Kyke Creek. The latter was the clear issue, as this is an immensely offensive slur directed at Jews.

I was born and raised in Evanston, Illinois, which has a large Jewish population. Montana is different. As one of the few Jews in the area, I felt a duty to remove this slur from maps. After some online research and a few emails, I was in contact with the U.S. Board of Geographic Names, U.S. Forest Service, and Laurie Franklin, the rabbi at Congregation Har Shalom in Missoula. Kyke

Creek is on public land and administered by the Forest Service and the research of Supervisory Cartographer Ray Backstrom proved to be invaluable.

The Forest Service has records of Jew Mountain being named for Jewish prospector Milton Steinberg and his wife, Raychel, who had several mining claims in the area. Mr. Backstrom suggested that we name the creek Steinberg Creek, which I happily agreed to. After about a year, I received a decision from the Board of Geographic Names that it had approved my proposal for a name change.

Kyke Creek will henceforth be known as Steinberg Creek in the official name repository, which is used by nearly all mapping applications. I'm very pleased that we were able to remove this hateful word from future maps and properly honor the Steinbergs.



Alex Froeter

Meet Our Family School Coordinator, Samantha Worth

Hello Congregation Sukkat Shalom! My name is Samantha Worth and I am thrilled to be a part of the Sukkat Shalom community. My new role as Family School Coordinator has been a fantastic experience so far and I look forward to meeting many more congregants in the near future.

I grew up in Highland Park and attended Indiana University. After studying Elementary Education, I moved back to Chicago and began working in the field. I have taught at Arie Crown Hebrew Day School, Gesher HaTorah and now Chicago Jewish Day School (CJDS). I have been teaching fifth grade at CJDS for six years and love the community.

A big draw to Sukkat Shalom is that it feels similar in many ways to my CJDS community. I was connected to Sukkat Shalom through my mother, Holly Ginsburg, who has taught first grade at Family School for a number of years. I love the diversity and openness of the Sukkat Shalom community. The embrace of *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) is something that I find admirable about the congregation.

I am married to my husband Jason and we live in Chicago with our daughter, Penelope, who is 15 months old. In my free time I love to spend time with my family and friends as well as exploring Chicago farmers' markets and restaurants. I look forward to a year of learning together in Family School.



Samantha Worth with husband Josh and daughter Penelope.



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