



CONGREGATION SUKKAT SHALOM

Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

I love Sukkat Shalom's Shabbat services at the lake. I think they are emblematic of who we are as a congregation. It is wonderful to be at the lakefront, gathered in informal groups, sharing music, prayer, and food. Sometimes it rains, and sometimes it is too hot, and sometimes it is sunny and perfectly comfortable. In all cases we learn to be flexible and creative, and what matters most is the feeling of an extended family and community.

We live in Chicago, so outdoor services can only take place for a limited time each year. But, at least for me, the memory of Shabbat at the Beach helps sustain me through the cold and snow of winter.

On my most recent trip to Israel, I did something totally unexpected. I spent

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Shabbat in Tel Aviv. I abandoned the “holy” city of Jerusalem and went to the secular “profane” city of Tel Aviv, instead. At the newly renovated Port of Tel Aviv, on the boardwalk amidst the most secular non-religious atmosphere imaginable, 500 people gathered to watch the sunset and celebrate the welcoming of Shabbat with a few traditional prayers and, mostly, popular contemporary music. These were Israelis without *kippot* or English accents. They were “normal” non-religious Israelis. It was refreshing and inspiring. At this outdoor Shabbat

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My Journey



If you had told me 30 years ago that I would become a Bat Mitzvah this month with my two daughters, Lauren and Meredith, I would have fallen to the floor laughing hysterically because I never would have even considered such a possibility. However, “to be positive is to be wrong at the top of your lungs,” my dad told me years ago. And to tell you that I was positive I would never participate in Jewish life, much less become a Bat Mitzvah, would be an understatement.

Let's travel back in time to the South Side of Chicago in the middle-1970s for a birds-eye view of my life. I went to Temple Sinai in Hyde Park because my parents made me go. While my parents never went to temple, I was forced to attend weekly services and sessions of religious school. I was an outspoken pre-teen and it seemed to me that the ideas and stories I was being taught were in fact very discriminatory and demonstrated a close-minded way of looking at life.

“What if I could provide myself and my kids with a much different religious experience through Sukkat Shalom?”

Picture this scene: I am called into the Rabbi's office for reasons I can't recall and am having a heated discussion with him. While I can't remember what we talked about, I do remember that he called me a “bigot” and I was kicked out of Sunday School -- not because of grades or attendance or misbehavior, but because I had such different views of the world than the congregation. I think it was the happiest day of my life.

From that point on, I never went to temple except maybe for High Holy Days when I sat for three hours -- completely lost and disconnected from anything going on in the service. I didn't fast for Yom Kippur, never observed Shabbat and never went to temple unless forced to by my non-observant family.

Now, fast-forward to the early 80s and my college days in beautiful Denver, Colorado. I was majoring in history and found a class on Jewish history in the course book. I took the class and learned a great deal about the people of Israel from an academic and intellectual perspective. I even heard Elie Wiesel speak about his recently published book, *Night*. During my studies of the Holocaust, I began to have a different view of Judaism. It stirred something inside me about family and survival that I had never really understood before. It was the non-religious aspects that resonated with me in school and,

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My Journey, cont'd

while I still never went to services, a new respect for Jewish history took root in my heart.

More than 20 years later I found myself at a crossroads. I was raising two daughters but I had no idea how to introduce religion to their lives. I didn't want to become the parent who forced the kids to go to Sunday school. I held steadfast to my view that Judaism was not for me but also knew that the girls would be surrounded by kids who were growing up with religion as part of their everyday life. It concerned me that they might feel out of place when the winter holidays rolled around and, inevitably, someone would ask them what they had got for Christmas.

“... while I still never went to services, a new respect for Jewish history took root in my heart.”

It was about that time that I was introduced to Sukkat Shalom. The congregation had a speaker come to Wilmette from New York to talk about interfaith marriages. When I went to hear the visiting author, it dawned on me that the possibility existed of a synagogue that would be open enough to include everyone and that maybe I could be a part of the group.

For many years I went to Sukkat Shalom services at the Congregational Church, but never became a member. I would go to High Holy Day services with friends -- and was able to follow along because Rabbi Gordon made it easy. Less Hebrew, more transliterations and family-friendly services showed me that a very different type of Jewish education was available right in my own backyard.

“I didn't want to become the parent who forced the kids to go to Sunday school.”

Eventually I joined the congregation and, when Family School started offering family Hebrew, I

signed up for the class with my daughters. We began to learn the alphabet in our weekly lessons with Rabbi Ari. As the year progressed, I began to realize that my childhood experience with Judaism was just that: a child's perspective. What if I could provide myself and my kids with a much different religious experience through Sukkat Shalom?

We all agreed to continue the next year of Hebrew class with Cantor Wolman in anticipation of becoming B'not Mitzvah -- daughters of the commandments. As we approach our big day, it is from a perspective of love and joy with a deeper understanding of our heritage. Life can teach us what we need to learn if we are able to open our hearts and minds to love ourselves and each other without judgement.

Rabbi's Message, cont'd

service, there was a hint of the middle ground possible between the ultra-Orthodox exclusivist definition of Judaism and the secular rejection of all things religious that has been the nature of modern Israel.

Following the service, a group of us went to a wonderful seafood restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean and, once again, we reveled in the experience of an Israel that was sophisticated, charming, and "ordinary." It was as if the religious battles between Jews and Jews, the tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, the arguments about the Gaza Flotilla incident were all of another time and place. When dinner was over, we figuratively drove back 400 years to the "other" Israel of Jerusalem.

On my return to Jerusalem I was once again immersed in the great debates that are so often at the heart of the Israeli experience. There was the news of a conversion bill in the Knesset that threatened the unity of the Jewish people. Prime Minister Netanyahu had returned from a friendly meeting with President Obama, but there was little progress towards a lasting peace. Gilad Shalit's parents marched to Jerusalem to demand that the government reach an agreement with Hamas to release their son. The ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazim wouldn't allow their daughters to go to school with the ultra-Orthodox Sephardim. In Jerusalem, every issue was critical and there was the constant intensity of debate.

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But in Tel Aviv, people gathered on the beach and celebrated Shabbat

in shorts and sun dresses with world music and dancing. Life was joyful and somewhat carefree. It was lovely and refreshing to be able to experience a peaceful and holy Shabbat in Tel Aviv, of all places. We try to create that same feeling in Gillson Park on Shabbat in Wilmette. August 20th is our last remaining summer date. Please join us.

Cantor's Corner

by Cantor Ross Wolman

We read in the Book of Deuteronomy (Chapter 8, Verse 10): *Vachalta vsavata uveirachta et Adonai elohecha*. "You ate, you were satisfied, and you blessed the Eternal your God." While this passage is included in the traditional blessing after meals, we read it from the Torah around the end of July. It is a time when our days are filled with summer activities, but our minds are already preparing for the fall and the return to the routines of the school year.

During the year, we consume a vast amount of knowledge and experience through academic learning, celebrating holidays, and life-cycle events. We eat and we are satisfied. It is a blessing we often forget even with the best of intentions. Our lives become filled with meetings, rehearsals, sports practices, doctors' appointments, and all our other activities. It is difficult to take time out for blessing and fulfillment. The week goes by and we find ourselves once again waking up on Monday morning.

As a student, I found myself in the same situation. It was a mentor who reminded me of the age-old wisdom: If you don't make time for something, it won't happen. Luckily, the Jewish calendar has a built-in system for taking time out.

We create holy moments when we spend time together on Shabbat and differentiate the day of rest from the ordinary routines of our week. Our lives can be enriched by eating Shabbat dinner together, celebrating *Havdalah* (the end of Shabbat), walking around the neighborhood, reading special bedtime stories, creating art projects, playing cards or board games; the options are limitless. The essence of these special moments is spending time together and bringing meaning to our days by doing something on Shabbat we don't have time for during the week.

This year I challenge you to take time out and work on creating holy moments on Shabbat with your family. The first few times could take some work, but then a new family Shabbat routine could emerge. I encourage you to share these special moments with me throughout the year. Please send stories of your Shabbat experiences to ross.wolman@gmail.com. I look forward to sharing in your celebration and learning about the rituals you have created.

And so, this fall, when soccer practices and clarinet lessons, school projects and other commitments fill up the schedule, let us remember to bring blessing to the routines we have established to ensure that the time we spend together with our families on Shabbat will bring meaning to our lives and the rest of the week.

Tikkun Olam: Repair the World

Family Promise Program Off to Promising Start

To help "repair the world," volunteers from Sukkat Shalom are actively participating in the Family Promise program. The program assists homeless families by hosting them in North Shore synagogues and churches.

As our partnership with First Presbyterian Church of Wilmette continues, volunteers from both congregations - including young people - have found the hosting experience to be meaningful and rewarding. Volunteers serve dinner to the guests, and some stay overnight at the Presbyterian Church.

Our next hosting week begins August 29th and runs through September 4th. A brief training session is required before participating. The next training is scheduled for August 23rd from 7-8:30 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church, 600 9th Street (at Central) in Wilmette.

Anyone interested in volunteering should email the temple office.

Sukkat Shalom Runners Race Against Hate

The Sukkat Shalom runners club wants to congratulate the members of our congregation who participated in the 11th Annual Ricky Byrdsong Memorial Race Against Hate on Sunday, June 21st.

Participants included: Craig Caffarelli, Nancy and Joseph Schofer, Jonathan Baum, Keith Holzmueller, Bonnie Cortez and her sons Jonathan and Van, Jonathan Levy, Lisa Stein and her daughter Emma, Miles Paris, and Emma O'Connor-Brooks.



The Sukkat Shalom runners are looking for their next challenge. If you know of an upcoming charity race in the Chicago area, or want to join the club, please contact the temple office..

Facilities Exploration Process Moving Forward

by Jesse Peterson Hall, President

The summer is moving along, and so is the process for evaluating the viability of the available Wilmette church property as a future home for Sukkat Shalom. The next step is to enter into a non-binding Letter of Intent to purchase the property so that we can complete a full evaluation of the renovation and funding needs for the building. The Exploratory Committee reports on its progress elsewhere in this newsletter.

Sukkat Shalom was chosen as the name of our congregation, using the image of a sukkah, to remind us that our spiritual life is open, dynamic, and constantly evolving. Since our beginning in 1995, our selection of worship space has been driven by our founding principles and values. When I think about our congregational "home," I see: families learning together and adults engaging in intimate and dynamic discussions; open doors welcoming members, family and friends to High Holy Day Services; and interfaith communities collaborating and worshipping together.

For the first two years as a congregation, weekly Shabbat services were held at the Community Recreation Center (CRC), women's clubs and in private homes. High Holy Day services were first held at the Wilmette Junior High and then at the Community Church of Wilmette.

Then, in response to a series of hate crimes in the North Shore in 1999, First Congregational Church of Wilmette (FCCW) welcomed us into their home, creating a formal space-sharing arrangement that lasted for the next nine years. While Family School continued to meet at the CRC in Wilmette, weekly Shabbat services, bar and bat mitzvahs, adult education classes, and High Holy Day Services were held at FCCW. Joint programming with the two congregations included guest speakers,

adult seminars, Seder dinners, and summer religious education for our children.

In 2008, FCCW began renovations on their building, which required that Sukkat Shalom find alternative worship space. At that point, we were invited to move our worship and programming to the Community Church of Wilmette and we continue to share space and maintain a positive relationship with them today.

In Spring 2010, FCCW determined that they could no longer accommodate our worship needs in light of their own requirements. The option of returning to FCCW was taken off the table. The partnership between Sukkat Shalom and FCCW remains important to us and will continue - just without the component of shared space.

We are fortunate to worship in a community that offers a variety of facilities to accommodate our many and varied activities. In the past two years, we have held Shabbat worship and dinners, B'nai Mitzvah services and monthly Torah study at the Community Church of Wilmette. Our High Holy Day Services were held at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Our Family School, High School class, Jr. Youth Group events, and Hebrew classes continue to be held at the Wilmette Community Recreation Center.

Every summer, we have enjoyed Shabbat services in the covered shelter at Gillson

Park. Our office space at 444 Skokie Boulevard houses our clergy and staff offices, Hebrew classes and tutoring, monthly Board

Meetings, committee meetings, Lunch & Learn and adult education classes. The Kenilworth Club has been our home for holiday meal celebrations like the Hanukkah Party and the Congregational Seder, while the Meskill Senior Center has been the location for our Women's Retreat and other congregational programs.

With 320 member households, 300-plus children enrolled in Family School, 1,000 worshipers welcomed for High Holy Day Services and 30 B'nai Mitzvahs each year, we are challenged to meet our expanding space needs while remaining true to our founding principles and values. I will continue to keep you informed by letter and email, and I encourage any questions or comments you have to help us meet this challenge. Please feel free to contact me at jphhall@aol.com or 847-251-6048.

Facilities Exploratory Committee Report

The Sukkat Shalom Exploratory Committee continues to evaluate the available Wilmette church property as a possible home for our congregation. Based on information gathered thus far, as well as positive meetings with the Seller, we now intend to submit a letter of intent (LOI) to the church leaders for their approval. Once the LOI is signed, we will disclose the name and location of the building to the congregation.

It is important to note that the LOI does not obligate Sukkat Shalom to purchase the property; rather, it grants the congregation an exclusive right to purchase the property while we complete our evaluation. When this evaluation is finalized, a decision whether to purchase the building will be made by congregational vote.

In addition, we would like to update you on the progress of the various subcommittees:

PROPERTY EVALUATION: Since our June update, LM (our engineering and environmental consultant) has completed its Physical Condition Assessment reports. There remains some follow-up analysis to properly quantify the cost of certain building deficiencies, such as asbestos removal and lead abatement. However, LM's review of the building did not reveal any major surprises and its final reports were acceptable to the committee.

RENOVATION EVALUATION: The Architect Evaluation group has sent a request for qualifications (RFQ) to various firms and

continued

Jewish Family Education Presents Challenges, Opportunities

by Rabbi Ari Moffic, Director of Family Education

We face many challenges when it comes to providing a religious education for our children. Children go to school all week, have activities after school and then do homework at night. It is difficult for many to come to a "school-like" atmosphere on Sunday mornings for yet more learning and doing.

Building community is difficult when children come from many different schools and towns and may only see each other once or twice a month. Teaching subjects that feel relevant, familiar, and link to what is already being done and taught in the home presents obvious challenges. It takes creativity to teach biblical literacy and holiday know-how in exciting ways so our children have a religious foundation to build on.

With these obstacles come a million more, including engaging a classroom so that talking and disruptive behavior is kept to a minimum. Yet, with all of these daunting challenges before us, I am very excited about this upcoming year of Family School.

Here are my top ten reasons (in no particular order):

1. Our teachers will be working with a local education professor who specializes in creating classroom routines that foster community, enhance learning and make all feel welcome and valued.
2. We are all going to learn and be enriched by the meaning of the *Vahavta*

this year. Learning the *Vahavta* (And you shall Love God...) will be the core of our morning worship together.

3. We have 26 high school *madrichim* (classroom aids or literally "guides"), which means that at least two high school superstars will be in each of our classrooms -- bonding with our children and inspiring them. Two of our parents, Jill Schoeneman-Parker and Anne Ryan, are creating an ongoing program to help our *madrichim* get better integrated and involved in their classrooms.

4. Sixth graders are in for a treat this year as they will pilot a new curriculum that I have been writing with three parents (Caryn Caffarelli, Paula Shapiro and Jill Schoeneman-Parker) and the two lead educators at the Board of Jewish Education. The focus of their learning will be understanding and experiencing how Judaism marks time and sacred occasions. Their class will be fast-moving, highly participatory and focused on small-group activities.
5. We have 12 amazing teachers returning for another year. Many of them have been with Sukkat Shalom for more than 10 years. We also have eight new teachers who will be bringing

their own talents and experience to our program.

6. We are going to streamline our classroom snacks this year. More information to come.
7. We are going to have a school-wide day in conjunction with *Tu B'shevat* to learn about Judaism and the Environment. Two congregants, Jennifer Hirsch and Debra Shore, are helping to plan this program.
8. We will be celebrating the Global Day of Jewish Learning (Ipeople1day.org) on November 7th in conjunction with our annual Festival of Books.
9. We are getting more and more parents involved with helping to create programs that will have meaning and purpose for our children and families.
10. Be honest... haven't you missed hearing Cantor Wolman's guitar, Rabbi Gordon's stories, my passionate pleas to take part in weekly home activities, Judy's *Boker Tov!* (and amazing adult speakers), and seeing your friends' smiling faces?

We can't wait to see you on Sunday, September 12th at 10 a.m. in the Auditorium at the Community Recreation Center. Let the learning begin!

Facilities Report, cont'd

will choose an architect by late-August. The architect will work with staff and key members of our programs (including those involved with Family School) to help us determine which of our programs could be housed in the building. Ultimately, conceptual drawings, cost estimates, and project renderings will be submitted for congregational review

FUNDING EVALUATION: Meetings with lead donors continue to be very positive and significant initial commitments have

been secured. The committee received bids from a number of third-party fundraising consultants and will be making a choice within the next few weeks. The consultant will assist us in determining how to raise the remaining funds for both purchase and renovation.

COMMUNICATIONS: Our mission is to maintain monthly email communications with you to keep you apprised of the progress being made throughout the due diligence process. *Open houses,*

tours, and informational meetings will be held at the church once the LOI has been approved. We hope that all congregants will visit the building and take part in these meetings to become familiar with the property prior to a congregational vote regarding purchase. (As a reminder, two-thirds of the congregants present at the vote need to approve purchase of the property). We will send information on dates and times for these events in early-Fall.

Oil, Water and Obligations

by Debra Shore

When considering the recent tragedy of the vast oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, I'm reminded of the words of the journalist Eric Severeid who once said, "The chief cause of problems is solutions."

The solution to the problem of our unquenchable thirst for oil was to drill wells far offshore stretching more than a mile under the sea. And now we don't even know the extent of the problems caused by the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon rig and the release of millions of gallons of raw crude oil in the Gulf of Mexico. We do know, however, that we

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are witnessing an environmental and economic disaster of unparalleled magnitude. It's a chance to reflect on how we as a nation allowed this to happen.



CONGREGATION SUKKAT SHALOM
444 SKOKIE BLVD, SUITE 300
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS 60091
847/ 251-2675
www.sukkatshalom.org

Rabbi Samuel Gordon
Cantor Ross Wolman
Director of
Family Education Rabbi Ari Poster Mofic
Executive Director Judy Buckman
Program Director Amy Israel
President Jesse Peterson Hall
Vice President Robert Goldman
Treasurer Craig Caffarelli
Secretary Amy Heller

Stephen Comar
Ken Kraus
Janet Levee
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Jill Schoeneman-Parker
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Bulletin Editor John Kupper
Layout and Design Deborah Harris

A leadership course I took at the Kennedy School of Government made a clear distinction between technical solutions and adaptive change. Too often we reach for the technical solution – drilling further out to sea, taking a pill to lower our blood pressure – when what is truly required is adaptive change, or what I call changing the culture. Instead of making offshore rigs safer, we need to take our foot off the gas and change the way we live -- reducing our dependence on fossil fuels altogether. Instead of taking more medications to lower our blood pressure or help us lose weight, we must eat healthier diets and exercise more.

Changing our habits, our values and our beliefs is hard, and there's little reward in the near term. Yet the challenges we face demand nothing less.

Judaism challenges each of us to "repair the world." I take that to mean we have an obligation to restore our physical as well as our social fabric – the ties that bind us to each other and to our blue planet. We cannot have a healthy economy or a healthy society without a healthy

"We must change the way we live, individually and collectively."

ecology. We depend utterly on the clean air, clean water, food and shelter (now known as "ecosystem services") that the natural capital of our planet provides for us.

An essential Jewish teaching is that the entire world belongs to God. Thus, if we love God, we are duty-bound to protect and preserve God's creation, the

Earth. Our challenge, then, is to be loving caretakers of the Earth. And stewardship places us in "right relationship" to the land. If we act as caring kin to the plants and animals

with which we share precious habitat, we become not merely users or abusers of natural resources. We can make amends.

A resolution of the Central Conference of American Rabbis states: "We have a solemn obligation to do whatever we can within reason both to prevent harm to current and future generations, and to preserve the integrity of the creation with which we have been entrusted. Not to do so when we have the technological capacity, as we do in the case of non-fossil fuel energy and transportation technologies, is an unforgivable abdication of our responsibility."



What's to be done? You've doubtless heard it before, but it bears repeating: We must change the way we live, individually and collectively. Drive less; take public transportation more. Reduce our consumption of water and energy. Eat locally grown food. Volunteer to restore local nature areas. And vote, please vote, because that, too, matters. (One good source of information, among many, is the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, which has numerous suggestions for things we can do to live more sustainably.)

As Marshall McLuhan once said, "There are no passengers on spaceship Earth. We are all crew." For goodness sakes, let's get to work!

Debra Shore is a member of Sukkat Shalom and a commissioner of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.