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CONGREGATION SUKKAT SHALOM

Bulletin

Cantor's Corner: A Tribute to Debbie Friedman

by Cantor Ross Wolman

Debbie Friedman's music has been in my life for as long as I can remember. I was first exposed to her music in Religious School at an early age. While I may not have known who Debbie Friedman was, I was nourished by Not By Might, And Thou Shalt Love, and many more. My love for music and Judaism began in these early years.

When I was 10, I saw Debbie in concert for the first time. The families from our synagogue's youth choir traveled to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and I watched in awe as Debbie led the group with her signature guitar strum and magical smile. With each new song, she took time to bring in the group with excitement and patience. It was a foundational moment in which many seeds were planted. I began playing guitar the following year and Debbie's Miriam's Song was one of the first I played in synagogue as a 7th grader.

When I was 14, my father suffered a serious heart attack and stroke. His recovery was slow and the experience was difficult for me to process as a teenager. My personal moments of prayer were found at the piano. It was there that I worked through my emotions and relieved the stress in my life. It was there that I explored Debbie Friedman's Mi Shebeirach (healing) prayer. I did not have the music but I knew it well from services. As I played the melody I thought of my father and, for the first time, confronted my fears of possibly losing him. It was a powerful moment I could not have experienced without Debbie.

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Egypt's Journey by Rabbi Sam Gordon

Current political events in Egypt create waves of concern for us. All of us who stand in the West, but whose hearts and eyes are turned to the East, follow the news reports with great interest and even fear. In modern times, Egypt was Israel's most powerful military enemy as well as its first peace partner. The pyramid of a Middle Eastern peace relied on the foundation of the agreement with Egypt.



Events occur far too quickly for any analysis offered in a newsletter to have much immediacy. I write this article very aware of the fact that what I put on paper may be long out of date, inaccurate or irrelevant by the time you read it. But I do know this: There is a balance between democracy and stability. Dictators are often not nearly as stable as they appear. Democracy is usually a far better long-term bet. Many foresaw Mubarak's fall. Much of the Middle East is a tinderbox where powerful dictators could be toppled by a sudden popular revolt.

This Facebook and Twitter revolution has been led by young people inspired by their peers in Tunisia seeking opportunity, democracy and freedom. By the time the Egyptian President began to respond with long-awaited democratic reforms, it was too late. Mubarak surprised the world with his continuing defiance but, in the end, the will of the people was too strong.

“By the time the Egyptian President began to respond with long-awaited democratic reforms, it was too late.”

There is much still to work out. It is not clear who will end up in control, but I think there are certain realities to keep in mind. The army remains a powerful and respected force. The unions are of great importance, as well. Egypt is a secular, Western nation. It is unlikely to go the way of Iran following the overthrow of the Shah, but there is legitimate fear that the Muslim Brotherhood could move Egypt in that direction. I hope that such a scenario will not happen. It is very likely that the Muslim Brotherhood will have a role in the “new” Egypt, but will probably not be in control. Egypt is not a fundamentalist nation. The young revolutionaries seek economic and educational mobility and a free society, not an Islamic republic.

At the same time, I would hope and expect that the peace treaty with Israel will stand. Egypt has much to gain from that peace treaty. There is far too much at stake that is

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Journey, cont'd

of benefit to Egypt. In Israel, one can see the expected reactions to the news from Cairo. Those who have opposed a peace agreement with the Palestinians see these events in Egypt as proof that a Palestinian peace is far too dangerous. Those in the peace camp see the events in Egypt as proof that a Palestinian-Israeli, two-state solution is needed now more than ever. It is a difficult choice.

Israel has often relied on agreements with dictators such as the Shah and Mubarak. But Israeli President Shimon Peres has also spoken of a new Middle East -- one that is more democratic, with the full educational and economic opportunities that would help to liberalize the nations surrounding the Jewish State. It is possible that the changes coming to Egypt, and perhaps to the entire region, will lead to a more open society that will recognize the benefits of peaceful relations with Israel and the democracies of the world.

The Rabbis taught: "The sword comes into the world because of justice delayed and justice denied." Let us hope for an Egypt built on justice, freedom and opportunity. And let us pray for a world of peace.

Celebrating Tu Bishvat, the Birthday of the Trees

January 23rd marked Tu Bishvat, the birthday of the trees. To celebrate, Congregation Sukkat Shalom organized an array of activities. Following are comments from some of the congregants who participated in the learning and celebration.

Touring the Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Plant Conservation Science Center at the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe:

"A highlight was seeing behind the scenes and the hidden offices in the Botanic Garden's new science building. We learned that not just bees pollinate flowers, but also bats, flies, and hummingbirds! We also learned the Hebrew word for lunch, but I already forgot it"...Jeff Axelrod

Winter tree ID and nature activity at The Grove in Glenview:

"I learned a lot about what makes a tree when we played the game where all of us were a different tree-part. I was the outer bark and my mom was the cambium! The activity I liked the most was when we blindfolded our family members out in the forest and had them use their senses to find the tree that we had picked out for them"...Marin Freedman (age 8)

Learning about Tilapia Farm and other environmental pursuits of the Kitchen at A Just Harvest in Chicago:

"A Just Harvest was an excellent choice for young families to help the community. It was amazing for our family to contribute to helping those in need"...The Ozer Family

Faith in Place panel discussion about Religion and the Environment at the Community Church of Wilmette:

"We had a wonderful, interfaith discussion led by Rev. Clare Butterfield from Faith in Place about how Sukkat Shalom can incorporate an environmental agenda into our work -- especially related to social justice. We plan to hold more meetings in the next two months to decide where to start. We are considering piloting a water curriculum that Faith in Place is developing, possibly together with the Community Church of Wilmette as an interfaith initiative"...Jennifer Hirsch

Cantor's Corner, cont'd

The first time I met Debbie was at Hava Nashira, the annual conference for songleaders, cantors, and Jewish musicians, still held at Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute (OSRUI) in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. It was the day after I graduated from high school and I was there to learn new music for my upcoming summer job as songleader for our local JCC day camp. I rounded a corner and there was Debbie Friedman. She was in the middle of a conversation and looked over at me. All I could say was, "There you are!" She responded with, "There YOU are!" It was the beginning of what would be a long friendship.

Debbie was my inspiration, teacher and guide on my path to becoming who I am today. She shared her incredible spirit through music, humor and love. Even after fame caught up with her, Debbie was humble, giving and selfless.

After her passing, I heard from many in our community about how her music had touched them though they had never met. She changed our lives and touched our souls with her gifts. And now it is up to us to make music and continue the legacy Debbie Friedman began as a songleader at OSRUI over 40 years ago.



Tikkun Olam: Repair the World

My Mitzvah Project

Tap, tap, tap, tap.

"Don't stand up right now."

She sat back down. Then a few minutes later, I had to do it again:

Tap, tap, tap, tap -- gentle on her shoulder.

"Please sit down."

You might think I'm talking to a little kid, but I'm actually talking to a resident of Presbyterian Homes who has dementia, a memory disorder. She has a wheelchair to keep her from falling down, but doesn't remember that she needs to use it.

I picked my Mitzvah project because I thought it would be nice to help older people. I picked it in memory of my grandpa. I chose to volunteer at Presbyterian Homes in Evanston. I helped people who were in wheelchairs and couldn't move around the building to do things, like go to a room to watch funny YouTube videos that they picked out themselves.

When I first volunteered, I had hoped I would keep people company and make them happy. I hoped to visit people and read to them, but I learned something very important. Even though I might have wanted to keep them company, what they really needed me to do was push them around in wheelchairs. It taught me that it's sometimes more important to do what people need you to do than what you want to do.

At the same time, I have made older people who probably feel lonely feel happy.

On Veterans Day, I helped people in wheelchairs get down to the ceremony. The residents told stories about what they had gone through during wars. They also read some stories from books about wars the country had to overcome. It made me feel good to help older and less fortunate people experience Veterans Day. But it made me sad to think about the people who died in the wars.

In the future, I hope that I will continue to make time to help other people who are not as fortunate as I am.

The Surprise at My Door

I opened the door thinking I could make it to Whole Foods before it closed early for the holiday. It was Friday night and New Year's Eve. I planned to make a special dinner for myself, even if I was spending the night alone. My long-time boyfriend had just returned to the East Coast a week before (where he is completing a year's internship), and was unable to take more time off to spend the holiday with me.

I was also newly recovered from surgery that I had the previous month. Although it wasn't considered life-threatening, the surgery required a six-week recuperation, including three weeks off work on modified bed rest.

As I stepped out into the sunlight, I saw a brown paper bag at my front door! Hmm, I thought...I wasn't expecting anything. What could it be? I took the bag inside and opened it. It contained a bottle of red wine, a large challah, candles for Shabbat, homemade cookies, crackers and cheese, and a note reading: We hope you have a happy, healthy New Year and are recovering well from your surgery. It was signed, "The Hineinu Committee." I felt such a wave of gratitude and warmth at this lovely gesture. I was also surprised, as it had been a few weeks that I was back to work and caught up in the usual pace of my hectic life.

"The experience left me with a sense of appreciation and gratitude that I believe was partially responsible for my healing."

During the weeks of my convalescence, six volunteers from the Hineinu Committee had come to my door with delicious, healthy meals for my son and me. It was so helpful to receive these wonderful meals -- from homemade soups, breads, salads, roasted chicken and veggies to a warm tray of fresh-baked brownies. Members of the congregation that I didn't even know showed up and asked whether there was anything else they could do to help, such as driving me to a doctor's appointment or my son to some extra-curricular activity.

I have to confess that, as a psychologist and therapist, I'm used to giving help to others; it was a bit of a challenge for me to receive assistance instead -- particularly from people who were not family or friends. However, we all sometimes find ourselves in difficult periods when we have to allow others to help us.

I truly believe that receiving the support of this volunteer committee taught me something about unconditional generosity, kindness and giving support to others in need. The experience left me with a sense of appreciation and gratitude that I believe was partially responsible for my healing. I have since become a member of this wonderful committee.

If you are interested in joining the Hineinu Committee, or if you are in need of assistance, please call Congregation Sukkat Shalom at (847) 251-2675 and leave a message for Judy Buckman..

Thinking Outside the Bat (Mitzvah): How to Keep Teens Engaged

by Rabbi Ari Moffic, Director of Family Education

Everybody needs the chance to think creatively about the future. That need applies to Jewish education and keeping young people engaged in Jewish life.

To pursue new ideas, I recently attended a conference sponsored by the iCenter -- a local think-tank whose mission is to "Ignite a passion for and commitment to Israel in the hearts and minds of young Jews." Israel in this sense means all of Jewish life.

Educators from 24 synagogues spanning the denominations attended the conference. There were also professionals from every major Jewish organization, including the Jewish Community Centers, Jewish United Fund, Jewish day schools and camps.

Our two teachers had backgrounds in branding and collaborative Jewish leadership. They introduced us to a method of generating ideas called SIT (Systematic Inventive Thinking). It begins with small groups thinking about a problem.

My group was made up of five other Reform religious school directors. Our "problem" was losing our children and families post-Bar and Bat Mitzvah. Our first task was to list in a few minutes every resource we could think of that we could draw from to address this problem.

We wrote down dozens of items, including classrooms, teachers, parents, kids, books, money, phones, movies, computers, smartboards, buses, cars, chalk, ritual items and so on. Then we had to eliminate one major resource. One group took out the teachers. My group took out the Bar and Bat Mitzvah service and celebration. We then had to think of the programs we would offer in their place.

Since children automatically become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah just by turning 13, no special ceremony or party is needed. They can be counted in a prayer minyan (a community of at least 10 people). They can participate in the Torah service, wear a tallit (prayer shawl) and take on the mitzvot (commandments).

Instead of a ceremony, we imagined giving all 13 year-olds a Torah License on their birthday. We imagined all Reform synagogues calling on Torah License holders to participate in Shabbat morning worship and relying on them for social justice work. We even imagined that 13 year-olds would have to go get their Torah License with their picture on it (and wait in line for their number to be called). We thought that by not focusing on a one-service, one-party model, teenagers might look forward to the years after 13 as a time of

sacred responsibility.

Of course, we are not going to stop holding Bar and Bat Mitzvah services. In Reform Judaism of years past many congregations did not have such services, but focused instead on confirmation in high school. Yet, the SIT exercise forced us to think radically and creatively about the issue many congregations now face of losing connection with young congregants (and sometimes their families) as they enter their teenage years.

Near the end of the seminar, we discussed Generation Me and Generation Wii! We brainstormed on how to best reach our kids today. These are young people who feel they can change the world (the same young people who helped elect our President). They want to be involved. They are socially engaged and politically aware. They see no geographic boundaries thanks to SKYPE and the Internet.

They are interested in tikkun olam. They need their information and activities at a faster pace. They want to create their own play-list, their own world. They do not affiliate with groups like the generations before them. They want to do whatever they want, whenever they want.

It is a challenge and a blessing to think about how to reach and teach this generation! We will be working as a staff and with parents on drawing from this information and applying these concepts to our vision and goals in the year ahead. As always, we're interested in hearing from you - and your kids.





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Hineinu Committee By the Numbers (since September, 2010)

Current Hineinu Volunteers: 52

Rosh Hashanah Honey and Apple Bags delivered to welcome new members: 15

Honey and Apple Bags delivered to families who suffered the loss of a family member: 28

Shabbat Baskets assembled by Linnea Lipson for her Mitzvah Project: 10

Dear Congregant:

I want to update you on our progress related to the 10th & Central building plan. As you know, our various committees have been intensively engaged in the due diligence activities to determine if the building is the right choice for our congregation in regards to furthering our mission and remaining consistent with our core values. We have been meeting with the architects, engineers, donors, and others to understand all the implications of this potential purchase. We have also held a number of town hall meetings and open houses to answer your questions and hear your concerns.

This is now what we know. The basic choice before us is whether to purchase the building at 10th & Central or to continue operating in our current fashion. Currently, we worship at Community Church of Wilmette, maintain our offices at 444 Skokie Blvd, and hold Sunday Family School at the Community Recreation Center. We use other facilities for various programs, but these are three basic locations for our operations. If we were not to purchase the building, we would continue meeting and worshipping as we do now.

We believe there is a significant advantage to purchasing this building from the point of view of worship, celebration, gathering, administration, and education. The sanctuary seats 380 people and is a beautiful and spiritual worship space. The multi-purpose room in the south end of the building can accommodate approximately 250 people and, with the addition of a kitchen, it is an ideal space for Shabbat dinners, Saturday morning Kiddush luncheons, Bar and Bat Mitzvah and wedding receptions, Passover Seders and Hanukkah gatherings as well as other social and cultural activities. Our offices can also be housed in this building. 10th & Central has the potential to create a true home for the congregation that would help sustain the congregation and our programs into the future.

We had asked the architects to draw up plans for the possibility of Sunday Family School fitting into the space. The architects came up with a workable plan for six permanent classrooms and four flexible classrooms in the multi-purpose room using floor to ceiling moveable walls. Under this plan two of our administrative offices would be located in the northern part of the building near the sanctuary space.

A key aspect of the due diligence process was estimating costs for these projects. Three options have emerged in our discussion. The first approach would be around \$3.6 million and contains the costs for purchas-

ing the building, renovating it so that it would have full handicap accessibility including an elevator and ramps, adding a kitchen, ADA bathrooms, creating necessary office space, and general upgrades and creating an appropriate capital reserve for potential future capital costs. That is what is being thought of as "Level One". Level One could accommodate all educational activities with the exception of Sunday Family School. All other educational programming including weekday afternoon classes and tutoring, adult learning and informal education programs would also be able to fit easily within the space at 10th & Central.

"Level Two" would include all of Level One costs as well as removing the organ and moving the sanctuary wall to the north end, allowing for windows opening to an enclosed garden. It would include a redesign of the bima for full accessibility, and flexible seating around the bima for more intimate worship settings. We estimate the cost of that project to be around \$4.2 million.

Finally, "Level Three" includes the two previous Levels plus the significant improvements to accommodate Sunday Family School including renovating the lower floor to create 6 permanent classrooms, the multi-purpose room to create 4 flexible classrooms as well as other necessary improvements. We estimate the cost of this to be \$6 million.

The Board and professional staff have had much discussion about the location of Sunday morning Family School through our due diligence effort as we recognize the importance of Family School to the congregation. We have determined that the cost to relocate Family School to 10th & Central will be \$1.8 Million above Level Two's cost. In light of this, the Board believes that the relocation of Family School is not financially feasible and that it should remain at CRC. It is possible that Sunday morning Family School programming at CRC could be augmented in some ways by the space available at 10th & Central under Level Two.

On the fund raising front, we are pleased to announce that our current philanthropy effort has succeeded in raising \$2.7 million from approximately 35 households. We are encouraged and grateful for this substantial commitment of financial support. Shortly, we will expand the fundraising program to include all households in the congregation who are willing to make a voluntary gift to our capital campaign. These gifts are usually spread over three to five years. Cash, appreciated securities or other investments are welcomed as

are estate planning charitable gifts and bequests. The Board's goal is to raise enough contributions to at least fund the Level Two project - \$4.2 million. We expect to conclude this capital campaign by the end of the summer and we do not intend to come back to you seeking additional contributions once the campaign concludes.

As we have said from the outset of this project, the Board's intent is to maintain the donor-driven culture of Sukkat Shalom and fund this purchase and renovation through voluntary donations, not through a traditional imposed assessment form of building fund. Sukkat Shalom is a financially stable congregation and the Board will only recommend purchase if we believe that it is not only the right choice to further our mission and enhance our worship and programming but also that it will not create undue risk to our finances.

It is important to note that the Board has not yet completed its due diligence. Over the coming weeks, we will continue to study and evaluate this opportunity including assessing the projected annual costs for operating the building. We plan on having additional town hall meetings to discuss our latest findings and to hear your input and concerns. You will also receive additional information from us to better inform your own decision making as we head towards the congregational vote which will ultimately decide whether this is the right choice for the congregation.

The Board will meet in March or April to vote on the purchase. The congregation will meet in April or May for its vote. You will receive a letter and ballot 45 days in advance of the congregational meeting that can be used to vote at the meeting or by mailed-in proxy. Due to the timing of the vote and the notice of meeting requirements in our bylaws, it is possible you may receive the ballot before your Board of Directors has actually voted on its recommendation to purchase. In that event, we will communicate the result of the Board vote by separate email prior to the congregational meeting.

Congregation Sukkat Shalom has been a unique congregation for the past 16 years. During that time, we have always been able to create sacred space in the various venues we have used. As a Board, we know that no matter what the decision, Congregation Sukkat Shalom will continue to be the wonderful, inspiring, spiritual home it has always been for our congregational family.

Please contact me, Rabbi Gordon, Judy Buckman or any other members of your Board of Directors with questions or comments.

Jesse Peterson Hall

*President
Congregation Sukkat Shalom*