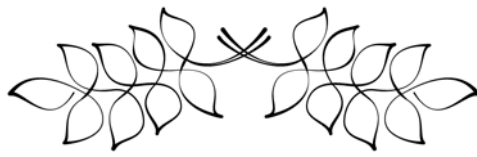


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CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

Some 30 years ago, when I was first ordained as a rabbi, I never expected that conversations and debates about Israel would be so divisive. My rabbinic colleagues and I often discuss how dangerous it has become to talk about Israel within the Jewish community. For many American Jews, Israel has slipped off the radar screen. But for others, Israel is an issue of competing political ideologies.

There is the AIPAC contingent and the J Street side. Far too often the two groups demonize each other even though they both represent a pro-Israel position. At the further extreme is the boycott-divestment-sanctions movement roiling university campuses and the scholarly community. In Israel, itself, there is a division between the settler community and anti-settler movement. As former Speaker of the Knesset Avrum Burg once said: "There are extremists on the left, extremists on the right, and extremists in the middle."

"... it is often difficult to have civil conversations about Israel's policies and future."

For those of us who care about Israel's future, it is often difficult to have civil conversations about Israel's policies and future. I think that is one of the reasons that Ari Shavit's new book, *My Promised Land*, has become so widely read.

It is an important book that cannot be pigeonholed into one political camp or another. It is a lyrical, poetic, personal history that offers profound insights into the Israel-Palestine conflict and

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My Journey by Henry Straus



Some years ago, when we still shared space with The First Congregational Church of Wilmette, I was invited to participate in our first Challahpalooza. Of course, I did not know what Challahpalooza meant. But if it had challah in it, it would have to be something good.

Nor do I recall how the program director at Sukkat Shalom knew of my interest in challah. But none of this mattered once I learned that Challahpalooza meant introducing and teaching little children about challah and its place in the Jewish week. I was thrilled. Challah was the most important tangible "thing" that tied me to my childhood Jewishness. It still does.

One of my most treasured childhood memories is the Friday night meal welcoming Shabbat. The family gathered together. The foods always the same: soup with noodles, brisket or chicken--- each in its special sauce--- and my mother's freshly baked challah. My dad telling stories about the olden days. I am sure that I share this memory with untold thousands of kids, from the distant past to the present. What better way to build family memories and tradition than with challah.

"Challah was the most important tangible "thing" that tied me to my childhood Jewishness.."

My grandmother, who lived in the tiny German village of Koenigheim, began Friday mornings baking challah -- in her striped blue-and-white apron, without fail. Grandma and the other Jewish women of the village carried their finished loaves to the village baker, where they were baked and ready in time for Shabbat.

Later, my mother, a modern city woman who lived with my father and me in the large industrial city of Essen, carried on the tradition. I can still



Henry Straus speaks to children during Challahpalooza.

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Journey, cont'd

smell the cake yeast dissolving in water.

The tradition continued until my parents and I left Germany about six months after Kristallnacht. My father was arrested following the pogrom and sent to Dachau concentration camp, along with 30,000 Jewish men from all over Germany. He was released in January 1939, and the wait for our American visa continued. Fortunately, it arrived in time for our April departure.

Even during those dark months following the pogrom, when my father was in Dachau, Friday night Kiddush continued in our home -- although in shortened form. There were other foods. There were no stories. But there always was challah. It was a constant -- a guiding star.

Upon our arrival in Chicago, we settled in the Hyde Park neighborhood and a sense of normalcy returned to our family life. My parents looked for ways to express their gratitude to our American cousins who had sponsored us and surely saved our lives.

Although both my parents worked six days a week, challah came back into our lives. Thursday night was challah-baking time. And Fridays, after school, I walked all over Hyde Park delivering challahs. This was the only time I had my doubts about challah. I really did not like walking from one end of Hyde Park to the other.

Times changed. I married. My wife Judy and I raised three children. Like nowadays, there was not enough time for everything. Activity after activity; car pool after car pool. I needed time to make a living. And Shabbat and challah faded into the background.

Until, one day, friends invited us to Shabbat dinner. And the challah that graced that Shabbat table was the challah of my childhood. An epiphany! Challah awakened my slumbering Jewishness and came back into my life -- and the life of my family.

I could go on and on telling stories about how I rediscovered my

mother's challah recipe after her death; how I learned to bake it; how I introduced one of my granddaughters to baking—especially challah; of the friends I have acquired by way of a shared interest in baking challah. And one day I might do just that. But now is the time to write the thoughts that probably should have opened this tale.



Rabbi Gordon leads blessings over "wine" and challah.

Some of us look for the spiritual in Judaism -- for that inner something we never acquired in our youth. Some look for the spiritual connection we may have lost over the years. Some are attracted by the sense of community, the music, the prayer,

the ceremonial. I always had these connections -- at least to some extent.

And I need all of them. The humming voices of the congregation welcoming Shabbat. The Torah rescued from the Holocaust. The family around the Seder table. The joyful, final reader's Kaddish of the Neilah service.

And the glue that holds them all together:

Challah.

From the Rabbi, cont'd

the possible resolution of age-old enmity and mistrust. Shavit is deeply critical of the peace camp and the leaders of the Oslo Accords. He is

even more condemnatory of the right-wing settlers. At the same time, he is brutally honest about the treatment of Palestinians from the very origins of the Zionist state.

"...he is brutally honest about the treatment of Palestinians from the very origins of the Zionist state."

This is the one book to read to understand Israel today. I will be leading a discussion of the book on two consecutive Thursday evenings at Sukkat Shalom—February 6th and 13th. The book will be the discussion subject of our downtown Lunch and Learn on Wednesday, February 19th. Ari Shavit, himself, will be speaking at Northwestern University on February 11th. I urge you to read the book and join us as we meet to talk about its insights and wisdom.

Report From Rome: Catholic-Jewish Dialogue and a New Rock Star for the World

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

I have just returned from a rabbinic mission to Rome, which included 26 Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist rabbis from Chicago. I have been to Rome as a tourist a number of times, but this trip was different. While we

visited many of the usual sites, I am particularly grateful for the opportunities I had to learn

in far greater depth from key leaders in the Jewish, Catholic, and political worlds. I came away with new understandings and insights about Rome, Judaism, Catholicism, and Israel.

The Roman Jewish community is the oldest continuous Jewish community in the world. Jews arrived in Rome in the days of the Maccabees, to petition the Roman emperor for support in the fight against their mutual enemy, the Greek Antiochus Epiphanies. The Jews stayed. We saw the evidence, from the ancient Jewish catacombs dating back nearly 2,000 years to the oldest synagogue in Europe at Ostia Antica.

The most famous "Jewish" site, of course, is the Arch of Titus with its bas relief depiction of the sack of Jerusalem, the capture of the Temple Menorah, and the march of bound Jewish slaves. Here was my first new insight into Jewish Roman history: The slaves of the Judean revolt did not remain in captivity. They were quickly ransomed and redeemed by the free Roman Jewish community. It is little understood that the battle against the Jewish revolt in Palestine was political and did not extend to the Jews of Rome.

Today, the Jewish community in Rome numbers approximately 10,500 people. We visited the Great Synagogue and met with the Chief Rabbi. He was a lovely, unpretentious, thoughtful, scholarly man with a dry sense of humor. We met as well with middle school and high school students in the community's Jewish day

school. We ate the wonderful Roman delicacy of artichokes in the Jewish style.

But the true rock star of Rome, and the world, is Pope Francis. He has transformed the image of the Church and the Papacy. In preparation for the Papal audience, we met with John Allen, the chief Vatican

correspondent for CNN. He described the new pope as motivated by the values of service and mercy. He has set a new tone of leadership based on service rather than privilege. Pope Francis is committed to the social gospel of equality and human rights. Mercy is the key thread

that runs through his role as pastor, and his message is one of mercy more than judgment. He exudes an aura of humility in contrast to images of luxury and adornment.

As for his approach to the Jewish community, it is based on his own personal biography. A week before our visit, the Pope met with his good friend, Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Argentina. The two had co-authored a book, *On Heaven and Earth*. The relationship is genuine and longstanding. John Allen also pointed out that the Latin American Catholic Church does not carry the history of Catholic-Jewish conflict that so defined the relationship in Europe. The Pope's first association

with Jewish-Catholic relations is not the Holocaust but the present.

In addition to attending the Wednesday Papal audience, we also met privately with Cardinal Kurt Koch, the Vatican leader in charge of Catholic-Jewish relations. We had a serious theological dialogue based on deep mutual respect and understanding. There is some irony in realizing that the religious group that historically has had the most troubling relationship with Judaism is today the very church that is closest to and most respectful of Judaism.

The Catholic Church continues to be guided by the teachings of *Nostra Aetate*, passed by the Second Vatican Council of

1965. Jewish-Catholic dialogue takes place at the highest levels of leadership in both faith communities. There is profound understanding of our respective theological beliefs. One very special moment for our rabbinic delegation was a private showing in the Vatican

Library of five priceless Jewish manuscripts from the Vatican collection.

This was, for me, a fascinating rabbinic mission that came at a time of historic transition within the Church. Pope Francis is a global figure who may transform not only the Catholic world, but society at large.

"The Roman Jewish community is the oldest continuous Jewish community in the world."



Pope Francis (photo by Rabbi Sam Gordon)

Life After Family School: The Fabulous Baker Sisters

Rachel Baker, 26, graduated from Syracuse University in 2010 with a BFA in Drama/Musical Theater, then moved to New York City to pursue an acting career. Some highlights included: singing for Carnival Cruise Lines; performing in *A Christmas Carol* at the historic McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey; and traveling with the national tour of *Fancy Nancy And Other Storybooks*, a theater for young audiences. Rachel also worked for Lululemon Athletica, sharing her love for fitness with co-workers and guests.

Rachel moved back to Chicago last August to pursue new career aspirations as a counseling psychologist. She is currently taking prerequisite courses and applying to graduate schools. When she doesn't have her nose in a book, Rachel loves practicing yoga, running and cross-training.



Rachel and Melissa Baker with their mother, Cathy.

Melissa Baker, 24, graduated from Washington University (St. Louis) in May of 2012 with a major in Environmental Studies and a minor in Psychology.

While in school, she led a co-ed *a cappella* group, the Washington University Amateurs. The group performed at a benefit sponsored by the actress Glenn Close, sang the national anthem at an Oklahoma City Thunder NBA basketball game, and auditioned for "America's Got Talent" before judges Howard Stern, Howie Mandel and Sharon Osbourne.

After graduation, Melissa started working at LaSalle Network, a leading staffing and recruiting firm in Chicago, where she filled administrative positions for clients in the western suburbs. Melissa will soon be starting a new position as a Human Resources Assistant at Underwriters Laboratories' corporate headquarters in Northbrook.

My Mitzvah Project: Special Gifts Theatre

A mitzvah is an activity that benefits others. Because of the significance of becoming a Bar Mitzvah, I wanted to choose a project that would go well beyond anything charitable I had ever done and that would allow me to share not only my time, but my passion. I love musical theatre, so I chose to participate in a program called Special Gifts Theatre (SGT).



At Special Gifts Theatre, we help kids with special needs put on a play. This year we are putting on *Aladdin*. I've been paired with a buddy, who I meet with for more than an hour every week. During this time, we learn songs, practice acting and just catch up on our week. I've been involved with SGT since the beginning of this school year. Every week we learn a new song and a couple of lines.

I don't say those lines in the show, but I help my buddy remember the lines and his blocking and help him to feel more comfortable with the acting experience. The sense of pride and accomplishment these buddies have is remarkable and heart-warming. It is really an amazing and fun experience.

I have truly learned about the meaning of being a volunteer and the importance of giving your time and talents to others -- to provide them the same experiences that I have enjoyed. Through this program, I have also learned that you shouldn't judge what people can do based on superficial impressions.

My Torah portion for my Bar Mitzvah is known as Yitro. This portion tells the story of the Ten Commandments. The most interesting commandment to me is the fourth, which is to keep Shabbat. Shabbat is not only a day of holiness; it is when we might do something not in our normal routine.

This commandment relates to my mitzvah project. On most days, I am doing things for me. Things like my schoolwork, improving my technology skills, or practicing my theatre. When I spend part of a day each week meeting with my buddy, I am not focused on improving something about me. Rather, I'm focused on helping someone else. And I'm not only working with my buddy on acting; I work with him on social skills and sometimes just help him out if he's having a bad day.

This project is something more meaningful than I've ever done before. In the past, I haven't focused on volunteering my time. Sometimes I think of my free time as sacred time. But I now realize how important it is that we all find a way to carve out time in our week for others. I've learned that it is important to go out of your comfort zone and try something new and significant.

By the Numbers

Member Families of Sukkat Shalom by Location:

Evanston:	94
Wilmette:	93
Chicago:	19
Glenview:	16
Highland Park:	16
Northbrook:	12
Glencoe:	10
Winnetka:	10
Skokie:	8
All Others:	5 or fewer

A Recipe for Repairing the World

As we all know, our genes are determined by our parents. My mother, raised in Shreveport, Louisiana, was a very loving, petite, vivacious woman who had a special gene that she shared with me.

"Little Ida Ketch," as she was known, was the cookie maven for our family, friends, neighbors and congregation. If there was a special family occasion, Ida graciously baked for the sweet table such treats as cookies, brownies, cakes, and strudel. I always enjoyed working with mom in the kitchen. I firmly believe that this cooking/baking gene was passed on to me and to my daughter and granddaughter.

My parents often went to Friday night services, but there was another tradition in our home on those evenings: "Shabbos cookies." Chocolate chip, poppy seed (mohn), or refrigerator cookies; lemon or toffee squares; brownies or holiday-specific treats like Hamantaschen or kamishbroit came out of the tiny kitchen in St. Louis. It was my mother's way of reminding my sister, brother, and me that -- in addition to the blessings over the candles, bread, and wine -- the Sabbath was sweet and special.

When I became a mother, I continued Ida's tradition and baked "Shabbos Cookies." This resulted in an interesting development when Renée and Scott got to high school. Their friends discovered Shabbos Cookies! Teenagers of all faiths would gather at our home to enjoy the treats. Even when Renée and Scott were off at college, their friends continued to stop by for cookies.

Several years ago, members of the Hineinu Committee approached me about helping with their baking needs. It has given me a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure to know that, in a small way, I am helping this wonderful group. I am also passing along my mother's tradition of sharing homemade sweets -- not only within my family, but with friends and members of Sukkat Shalom.

Hamantaschen with Poppy Seed Filling

My Hamantaschen dough is very similar to a sugar cookie. My family fights over the homemade poppy seed filling, although some prefer raspberry-filled. If you prefer fruit filling, I find Solo Brand pastry-filling works well. This recipe easily doubles; a single recipe just doesn't seem to be enough!

For the dough:

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsalted butter at room temperature
1 cup sugar
1 large egg*
2 tablespoons milk
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

*Note: if you are baking with children and worried about their eating cookie dough with raw egg, you can substitute $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Egg Beaters. Add an additional 2 tablespoons of flour if you use Egg Beaters.

For the filling (makes enough for $\frac{2}{3}$ to 1 batch of dough):

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup poppy seeds
2 tablespoons honey
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup finely chopped pecans
1 tablespoon well-beaten egg or 1 tablespoon Egg Beaters

Make the dough:

Mix the flour and baking powder in a bowl.

In a separate large bowl, cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy.

Add the egg to the butter/sugar mixture; blend well.

Add the vanilla to the butter/sugar mixture; blend well.

Add half of the dry ingredients slowly to the butter/sugar mixture. Add half the milk, combine, followed by the rest of the dry ingredients and rest of the milk.

Divide the dough in half and place each half on a large sheet of wax paper the size of a cookie sheet. Cover with another sheet of wax paper.

If you need to take a break, the dough can be tightly covered and refrigerated. Bring to room temperature before rolling out.

Make the filling:

Combine all filling ingredients. It should form a paste. If filling appears too thin, add additional poppy seeds.

Assemble the cookies:

Preheat the oven to 375F

Roll the dough out between the sheets of wax paper to about $\frac{1}{4}$ " thickness. Remove top sheet of paper.

Use a 2" or 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " biscuit cutter (or a juice glass the same size) to cut out circles of dough. Place the circles about $1\frac{1}{4}$ " inches apart on a cookie sheet.

Place approximately a rounded teaspoon of poppy seed filling in the center of each circle. For fruit filling, use a bit less. Carefully draw up three sides to make a triangle with some of the filling still showing in the center of each cookie. Pinch each corner very well.

Bake about 12 to 14 minutes, or until the edges are golden brown. (Or, as my mother used to say, "Until they are done.")

Remove cookies to a cooling rack.

Enjoy!

On Thursday, March 13, at 7 p.m., Marlene will teach us how to make her mother's Hamantaschen recipe. Come to Sukkat Shalom to join the lesson -- and the nosh!



Musical Notes: Take a Trip to Morocco for Shabbat on February 28th

by Adam Davis, Cantorial Soloist

Whether you grew up with Judaism or were introduced to it later in life, it is easy to overlook its remarkable diversity. Judaism's multi-faceted beliefs, practices and observance vary by denomination, congregation and personal practice. This variety gets even more interesting when we add culture to the mix.

Jewish culture is not monolithic, but a global network of dozens of distinct cultures. Central Asian Bukharians, Breslover Hasidim and the now Brooklyn-based Syrians share the same Torah. Yet each has its own linguistics, customs, costumes and cuisines. Anyone who has visited the Jerusalem Shuk (marketplace) has seen this diversity first-hand. The rest of us can experience it through on-line articles, videos on YouTube or when it finds its way to Sukkat Shalom.

I am, of course, most interested in the

musical components of this diversity. I love my Eastern European background, but have always been drawn to the colorful musical contributions of the Sephardim. These are the Jewish communities that originated on the Iberian Peninsula (*Sepharad* is the Hebrew word for Spain). Although Sephardim sometimes is used as a catch-all term for non-European Jewish ethnicities, Jews from Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran each have their own, separate identity.

Some years ago, I befriended a few Sephardim from Egypt, Yemen and, most notably, Morocco. I attended services at their Sephardic congregation, sang with them around their Shabbat tables and learned about their unique modes of prayer. Their Shabbat melodies were as exotic as the foods that accompanied them.

While their liturgy is similar to ours, Sephardic melodies are rooted in the middle-eastern musical system known as Makam. Used throughout the Arab, Turkish and Persian spheres of influence, it is shared by the Jewish, Moslem and Christian faiths alike. The many different Makam modes each reflect different times of the day, much like the Indian Raga system (with which they are connected).

Like European Jews, Sephardim chant the Torah using tropes or Taamei Mikra to flavor the reading of our sacred text. Their Shabbat prayers, however, are sung following a single Makam for that week based on a tradition dictated by the mood or tone of its Torah reading. This makes for a varied and fascinating musical service experience.

In the last decade, there has been renewed interest and research into the many melodies for the Sephardic liturgical poems, known as Beqashot and Piyutim. Several initiatives are underway to preserve, document and hand down these songs to new generations living in communities far removed from their countries of origin.

We're fortunate to live in a time when such access is available, and I've been able to tap into this treasure trove of melodies. Many of them reflect the rich Moroccan heritage that cross-pollinated with Spanish, North African and Berber influences.

I am excited to share this music with our congregation, backed by Chicago's most accomplished world music ensemble, Lamajamal. As I sing the melodies, these musicians will accompany me using traditional instruments like Oud (lute), Qanun (zither), Riq (tombrel), Darbouka (drum) and Ney (flute).

Together, we will journey to Fez, Casablanca, Tangier, Essouiera, Rabat and the Atlas Mountains -- all within the comfort of our own sanctuary at Sukkat Shalom. I hope you'll join us for this amazing musical Shabbat -- as well as for the tasty, Moroccan-themed oneg that follows -- on Friday, February 28th at 7:30 pm.



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