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CONGREGATION
SUKKAT SHALOM
Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

For those of us who identify as progressive Zionists, the re-election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister was a deep disappointment. While the number of votes separating Netanyahu and his opponent, Benny Gantz, were close, the nature of a parliamentary form of democracy means that the right-wing coalition won a decisive victory over the center-left. There is some good news in that the extreme parties of the left and right both suffered even greater losses.

But Netanyahu's right-wing victory means a rejection of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Netanyahu has promised to move towards the annexation and absorption of the West Bank settlements into Israel. Should his election promise become reality, Israel will provide full civilian rights and control to the Jews living in the West Bank, while denying full civil rights of citizenship to the Palestinians living within the same territory.

This will mean that Israel cannot remain a Jewish democratic state as envisioned by the Zionist founders. One group will live under democracy, while the other will be denied those full rights. The alternative democratic option would grant full civil right to all the inhabitants, but that would result in the end of the Jewish majority and Israel would cease to be a Jewish country.

"I am deeply worried about the direction that Israel seems to be taking with the full support of the current American administration."

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Our Journey by Rabbi Garlie Daniels



Our congregation began the journey of seeking to welcome a refugee family to the Chicago area in January of 2017.

At the time, Sukkat Shalom hoped to co-sponsor a refugee family. But due to the changes in the law, and changes in local Chicago resettlement agencies, the project was put on hold. In the summer of 2018, Sukkat Shalom connected with RefugeeOne -- a local resettlement agency -- and signed as a co-sponsorship partner. During the High Holy Days that year, we shared news of the project with the congregation, and were blown away by the positive response.

As part of our role as a co-sponsor, Sukkat Shalom agreed to raise at least \$8,000

to help RefugeeOne support the family with rent and living expenses during their first months in the U.S.. On average, it

takes approximately \$12,125 to help a refugee family become independent. Originally, we planned to welcome one family. In late-November, we received word that there would be another family sponsored by RefugeeOne that would arrive on the same flight and live in the same building as "our" family. Without hesitation, our volunteers jumped at the opportunity to help an additional family.

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Members of Sukkat Shalom wait to greet two arriving refugee families at O'Hare Airport on December 12, 2018.

Journey, cont'd

The families are Rohingya – a Muslim community that has faced genocide in their home country of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). Both families spent years as refugees in Indonesia, where they were not recognized as citizens and their children were ineligible to attend public schools.

Leading up to the families' arrival in Chicago, our community raised more than \$16,000 to help RefugeeOne welcome and support them. In addition, a team of Sukkat Shalom volunteers coordinated an effort to collect new and used household items to fully stock and set up two apartments.

The families arrived at O'Hare Airport on December 12th, 2018, greeted by a welcoming committee of more than 20 members of Sukkat Shalom. That day marked the beginning of their journey in their new home, and our journey as mentors. As co-sponsors, our team of volunteers agreed to meet with each family weekly. In the first few days and weeks of their arrival, our volunteers helped the families settle into their new apartments, buy groceries at the local grocery store, navigate the Chicago bus system, provided winter clothes and brought toys and educational games for the kids.

Since then, our volunteers have gone above and beyond – helping the families attend doctor appointments, taking them on outings to parks and museums, and helping them address any of their concerns or questions with RefugeeOne caseworkers and translators. As one can imagine, the language barrier was and is a challenge. Yet, both families enjoy the time they spend with our mentors, and our volunteers and the families have benefited from the relationships that we have built with one another.

Now, just five months later, both fathers – Shanbi and Abdul – have jobs working at O'Hare Airport, where they first arrived. Shanbi and his wife Romaneh both take adult English classes, and have two children – Rosanah and Nur Kamal. Rosanah is in kindergarten at a local charter school and is excelling in her school work. Her brother, Nur Kamal, 4, will attend summer camp and begin preschool in the fall.

Abdul and wife Bibi Zainab have two children, Tharik, 4, and Bibi, 9 months. Tharik will also attend summer camp with Rosanah and Nur Kamal, and begin preschool in the fall. Our volunteers spend a lot of time playing with the kids, doing puzzles and reading books. They also help the adults practice their English, create household budgets and register the children for camp and school.

In this season of Passover, we were reminded that Jewish tradition teaches, "When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt..." (Lev. 19:33-34). Many of us have our own familial stories of being strangers in a strange land. We were immigrants and refugees, some are first-generation Americans and others know and tell of the journeys of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. We are taught to retell the story of Passover each year, so each generation remembers and empathizes with the feeling of being a stranger,

At the time Sukkat Shalom was created more than 20 years ago, some interfaith families felt and were treated like strangers in the Jewish community. Sukkat Shalom sought to create a community where interfaith families would feel accepted as full members of the congregation. Sukkat Shalom was built on values of openness and inclusion, and it is with that same spirit of openness, inclusion, and acceptance that we embrace our two refugee families. We want them to know that their journey has found a home.

"That day marked the beginning of their journey in their new home, and our journey as mentors."

Rabbi's Message, cont'd

It appears that Netanyahu and his nationalist supporters are willing to trade off the democratic definition for the sake of an expanded Jewish nation-state. Some autonomy would be offered to the Palestinians. There would be renewed promises of economic growth and prosperity, but there would not be full rights of Israeli citizenship like those given to Arab citizens living in pre-1967 Israel.

"Progressive Israelis are feeling defeated, and that is all the more reason they need our support."

I am deeply worried about the direction that Israel seems to be taking with the full support of the current American administration. A non-democratic state is not one that I could support. Having said that, I am thus confronted with the question of how to be supportive of an Israel whose political policies I so strongly object to. Is it possible to love Israel but reject its government and political leadership?

I don't believe the answer is to disengage, though I fear many will choose that option. I believe there is another choice. Israel remains a vibrant democracy with active opposition parties, a free press and an independent, though endangered, judiciary. There are numerous individuals and organizations working to preserve the most idealistic visions of Israelis and Palestinians working together for equality and peace.

I continue to support the New Israel Fund, the Israel Religious Action Center, Hand-to-Hand Schools, Kids 4 Peace, and other organizations that battle for Israeli democracy and human rights. I continue to travel there and study with Israeli scholars. Progressive Israelis are feeling defeated, and that is all the more reason they need our support. There is still, among many, the pioneer spirit that built a remarkable country in fewer than 75 years. I am often energized when I go there and encounter the dynamism, creativity and dedication of its citizens. Idealism has certainly not died. We need to remain engaged to help achieve the Israel we hope and pray for.

My Mitzvah Project: Helping Our Refugee Families

by Taylor Glicken

Taylor Glicken is a 7th grader at Wilmette Junior High. She recently celebrated her Bat Mitzvah and chose volunteering with the Rohingya families as her Mitzvah project and the focus of her D'var Torah.

The families we are sponsoring are very sweet and learn very quickly. I love to go through vocabulary words and work on pronunciation with the moms and sometimes the dads. They all have come here willing to learn with bright, open minds. The little girl is such a fast learner and she is a great helper to her mom.

These families inspire me so much with their courage in moving to a new place that they had never been to before to start new lives. This must have been scary, but they sure came with a lot of curiosity.



Taylor Glicken

Since the first day I met them, getting off their long flight, I knew they were passionate and caring people. Every time I leave their apartment, I always wonder about the things that they tell me, our experiences together and when I will see them next. I have loved to do this and can't wait for more adventures with these extraordinary people.

I have realized from this experience that these families are like many of those who came here before them, including my ancestors, being new to their country but coming with so much courage. Everyone has felt new to something like a new school, workplace or even a different type of food. But could you imagine moving somewhere half-way across the world knowing no one?

I'm so glad that I had this experience to meet new people because I have learned a lot about myself and others. This connects to Judaism because it is an act of Gemilut Chassadim (lovingkindness). Reaching out to those who are separated and isolated can really change their lives for the better, while enriching our own lives through performing a mitzvah.

Death Over Drinks: Reframing Views on Living and Dying

by Lesley Peters

What would you want said at your own eulogy? What happens to our loved-one's souls after death?

To try to answer these and other questions, more than 20 Sukkat Shalom congregants gathered in March to broaden our understanding and ideas about living and dying. Our hope was to provide a safe, comfortable place to talk about end-of-life issues. We wanted to give congregants an opportunity to re-think their views about death and to share their stories with others.

The conversations were based on ideas from Death Over Dinner, an organization founded by Michael Heeb, and a program developed by Reboot, a Chicago community action group. Reboot holds Death Over Dinner - Jewish Edition events to consider, debate and discuss ideas about Jewish living and dying. The framework for the Jewish Edition was formed with the help of rabbis and other experts on Judaism.

We held our discussions at two tables -- one led by Rabbi Carlie Daniels, and the other by Beth Gomberg-Hirsch and Lesley Peters. We began by lighting a yahrzeit candle and asking each person to share memories of a loved one who changed their life. We ate, drank wine and told our stories about losses, old and new. As Jews, we say kaddish and share stories to keep the memories of our loved ones alive -- as well as the history of our people. This night was no exception.

We used specific questions from Reboot to guide our discussions. To start, each person was asked to share an intimate story about a special person -- one we loved, who loved us or made a significant difference in our lives. You could feel the emotions rise as each one told their tale.

Another question we considered was what each person wanted to be said about them in their eulogy. Did we want people to talk about what defined who we were or who we wanted to be? We realized we wanted some input in our eulogies. We decided that we needed to explain to the important people in our lives what we wanted others to say about us when we are gone.

We followed that with a question about each person's belief in the persistence of the soul after death. Everyone offered their own beliefs and experiences. Some members said they felt connected to the souls of their departed loved ones and had on-going relationships with them. You could sense that those connections were powerful, positive and memorable.

We ended the evening by asking everyone to tell the person to their left something we admired about them. You could see that person light up and bask in the glow of friendship, kindness and gratitude.

The evening established a celebratory and meaningful dialogue on new ways to consider living and dying. Rabbi Daniels' group wants to have more discussions on spiritual topics in the future. Beth and Lesley's group established a new understanding of what discussing death can mean -- an intimate, shared experience rather than a depressing, painful one.

We plan to continue tapping into our congregants' collective wisdom around grieving, rituals and practical matters for living and dying. If you're interested, we hope to see you there!

Meet the Teachers: Kelli Max and Dana Harf

[Following are brief profiles of two more of our fantastic and dedicated Family School teachers.]

Kelli Max has been working at Sukkat Shalom's Family School for more than 10 years, teaching 6th graders about the Jewish life cycle. She is also the Youth Group Coordinator, which she has done for several years.

"My favorite thing to teach is how kids can incorporate their Jewish traditions and milestones into their everyday lives," Kelli says. "I love getting to know the students and sharing our thoughts and experiences with each other. Youth group is especially rewarding because I get to make memories with the kids outside of the synagogue."

Kelli was born in Highland Park and went to the University of Iowa, where she met her husband, Trent. They currently reside in Chicago's Roscoe Village neighborhood. This year, they became parents to a son, Lincoln.

In "real life," Kelli is a 2nd grade teacher at a charter school in the city called Rowe Elementary School. She loves teaching and couldn't imagine doing anything else. In her spare time, she likes to do Pilates, read and shop. However, she says she hasn't had much spare time lately.

"Sukkat Shalom is special for many reasons, but one important reason to me is the acknowledgement of all types of Jewish families," Kelli says. "My husband is not Jewish and I am happy I found a synagogue that promotes love, openness and tolerance."

Dana Harf is completing her ninth year of teaching at Sukkat Shalom. After teaching first grade her first year, she's taught 6th grade every year since with her co-teacher, Kelli Max.

"Teaching about the Jewish life cycle is very engaging," Dana says. "My favorite lesson is when the parents come into our classroom. This year, the Torah portion was about building the tabernacle, the portable sanctuary that traveled with the Israelites in the desert."



Kelli Max

"We know that the ancient artisans brought their skills to that project, so we had the students and parents write the ways that they honor their own parents on strips of paper," Dana says. "Once that task was completed, we wove the strips together -- kind of how the artisans wove tapestries for the tabernacle."

Dana is from Buffalo Grove and currently lives in Highland Park. She graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. She later completed a Master's in English Language Learners at National Louis University.

Dana and her husband Isaiah have two boys named Brody, 4, and Levi, 2. Before having kids, Dana was a teacher for nine years in Lincolnwood. Since leaving the classroom, she has made a career out of being a lifestyle/mom blogger. Her blog is called I Adore What I Love (<http://www.iadorewhatilove.com>) and she is also on Instagram.



Dana Harf

"I love that we call our program "Family School" instead of Sunday School and that it's not just a drop-off program," Dana says. "It's a wonderful lesson for kids to know that while they're learning, so are their parents."

"I hope to instill that Judaism is a part of us throughout our entire lives. It doesn't end with a bar or bat mitzvah; it's a lifelong journey."

Sukkat Shalom's Senior Men Embrace Jewish Learning and Friendship

by Joel Wineberg

In the Fall of 2017 I received a call from an old and dear friend, Monte Levinson. Monte had recently joined Sukkat Shalom and asked Rabbi Gordon how to become an active member in his new synagogue. Rabbi Gordon suggested he start a group of senior men to meet monthly at the synagogue and discuss current events, religious subjects and other topics of interest.

Monte said that he would feel more comfortable if he had a co-chair to work with on this new endeavor. Rabbi Gordon knew that Monte and I go back a long time as former members of Beth Emet in Evanston, and he recommended that Monte get in touch with me. Once that happened, I knew I was hooked.

From those conversations and a few breakfasts with Rabbi Gordon and Andy Schultz came the start of Sukkat Shalom's Senior Men's Group. We first met in January of 2018 and have met the fourth Wednesday of each month since then. We have explored a number of different topics with various speakers:

- Geoffrey Baer, a fellow Sukkat Shalom member and WTTW-TV personality, spoke about Chicago's Jewish history;
- Ron Grossman, a Chicago Tribune columnist, discussed immigration and Chicago Jewry;
- Rabbi Michael Balinsky and Rabbi Gordon explored the relationship between the Orthodox and Reform communities in Chicago;



Sukkat Shalom's Senior Men's Lunch Group (left to right) Back row: Clive Hohberger, Joe Ross, Jeffrey Shaman, Monte Levinson, Joel Wineberg, Jim Meyers. **Front row:** Shelly Kantoff, Ken Glick, Eric Schiller.

- We made "field trips" to the Illinois Holocaust Museum and the Spertus Museum;
- Rabbi Gordon spoke about relations between American and Israeli Jews;
- We discussed books written by the famous Jewish authors Philip Roth and Joseph Epstein;
- John Kupper led us in a lively discussion on the Chicago Mayoral election and correctly predicted that Lori Lightfoot would win the run-off election;
- Kenny Lyonswright spoke of his duties and joys as our Cantorial Soloist.

While we have explored these and other stimulating topics, the best outcome of our group is the friendships we have made. When I come to Shabbat services

or attend a Sukkat Shalom event, I am warmly greeted by the buddies with whom I meet for lunch and discussion each month.

Included in our \$20 fee for each meeting is a catered lunch ordered by Andy Schultz, who has been our excellent Traveling Secretary, Catering Manager and Promotions Director. We thank him for his outstanding efforts in helping this idea to succeed.

We invite other members of Sukkat Shalom to join our senior men's discussion group, where you can learn about a Jewish topic, engage in conversation, have a great lunch and make new and lasting friends. Please let Andy know that you want to be placed on our mailing list. We promise your time will be well spent.

The Senior Men's Group, and the entire Sukkat Shalom family, recently lost a dear member with the death of Mike Levy. Mike always had a twinkle in his eye and everyone he met became a friend. We send our condolences to his wife, Ronit, and children, Sharone and Gil. His memory will be an abiding blessing to all who had the privilege to cross his path.

Musical Notes

by Kenny Lyonswright, Cantorial Soloist

You might not know it, but the Chicago area is responsible for some of the great contributions to Jewish music in the 20th century.

Max Janowski composed the musical setting for "Avinu Malkeinu" which, aside from perhaps "Kol Nidre," many of us consider the quintessence of High Holy Days music. Janowski served as the music director at Congregation KAM Isaiah in Hyde Park from 1938-1991.

Just down the road from Sukkat Shalom at Beth Emet in Evanston, Cantor Jeff Klepper collaborated with Debbie Friedman and Rabbi Danny Frelander to write new, folk music-inspired settings of texts and prayers that Reform communities nationwide use in our prayer services, organizational conventions and summer camps.

Richard Cohn, who was the cantor at North Shore Congregation Israel for 20 years, now serves as the dean of the cantorial program at Hebrew Union College, stewarding cantorial students as they prepare to serve communities all over the world.



Song Circle: Cantors, cantorial soloists and musicians from local synagogues, including Kenny Lyonswright of Sukkat Shalom, participated in *Chicago Sings*.

This great Chicago-area tradition is alive and well in the form of a concert series entitled "Chicago Sings." This series has brought together cantors, soloists and instrumentalists from all over the Chicago area for a truly amazing collaborative experience. The concerts are comprised of 100 percent original Jewish music -- all written by the performers. The concerts have taken place at various synagogues and venues throughout the Chicago area. Highwood, Hyde Park and Vernon Hills have been host venues this year.

What is especially wonderful about these concerts is how each and every artist is willing to share the spotlight. Cantors and cantorial soloists are notoriously averse to sharing the stage—but not so during Chicago Sings. Collaboration is heavily emphasized, as is re-arranging whatever music we've written to feature as many other voices as possible.

I've been fortunate to be included in this concert series throughout the past year, and it has been an unbelievably rewarding experience. To participate in creating Jewish music, with so many professionals from throughout the area, has been truly meaningful.

I'm confident that Chicago Sings will resume in the Fall. I will be sure to inform our congregants when that schedule is set.

"To participate in creating Jewish music, with so many professionals from throughout the area, has been truly meaningful."



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