

SHERITH ISRAEL NEWS

JANUARY–APRIL 2021

Science to guide reopening plans

MEDICAL ADVISORY COUNCIL SUPPORTS CSI CLERGY, STAFF AND BOARD

As our sanctuary sits empty waiting for us to return, Sherith Israel will take advantage of the congregation's abundance of medical talent to determine when and how to come together. Congregational president **Lindsay Braunig** started thinking about reopening months ago, when San Francisco was in the least restrictive yellow tier. "I didn't want a new decision-making group," she recalls, "but it seemed silly not to take advantage of all the medical expertise we have in the congregation." She points out that it is beyond the expertise of most lay leaders to decide what is safe. "We can read the guidelines, but we wanted input from experts within our community about what was the appropriate level of caution for Sherith Israel gatherings."

Sherith Israel's medical advisory council consists of doctors **Valerie Flaherman**, **Erin Gordon**, **Jonathan Graf**, **Valerie Jahan**, **Meghan Marmor**, **William Shore** and **Lucas Zier**. They met in person for the first time on November 2, when San Francisco was still in the yellow tier. The advisory council reviewed the city's Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines with Lindsay, **Rabbi Jessica Graf** and executive director **Gordon Gladstone**. According to Lindsay, the consensus was that the DPH guidelines were sound. "That made me feel grateful for the city's expertise."

One goal of the initial meeting was to assess whether some organized in-person activities could be conducted under the guidelines at the time. Although the yellow tier guidelines

Medical Advisory continues, page 6

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

SHABBAT PURIM

Friday, February 26, 6 pm

CONFIRMATION

Friday, May 14, 6 pm

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Photo by Becca Henry Photography

KETUBAH CONUNDRUM: Bride **Juliana Brodsky** and Rabbi **Jessica Graf** look on as groom **Seth Rosenblatt** confirms witness signatures on the couple's ketubah before their wedding. The issue? Relatives can't be witnesses. But during Covid, non-relatives can't attend. In a novel solution, the witnesses signed ahead of time and confirmed their signatures by phone before the ceremony. Most friends and family joined the festivities via YouTube.

LIFE GOES ON: Juliana and Seth's adaptation is just one of many that people have made as they celebrated lifecycle events during Covid. **For more stories, see page 5.**





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A MOMENT WITH CANTOR TOBY GLASER

AN ENDLESS PILGRIMAGE OF THE HEART

Traditionally, the role of cantor is *shaliach tzibur*—emissary of the congregation. Due to current legal restrictions, I am the only person in our sanctuary during services, meaning that I am a very literal representative of the congregation for services. Yet I find the idea that I am the “emissary of the congregation” to be inaccurate.

Although I am the only person present in the sanctuary during these times, I am by no means alone. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “Faith is not the clinging to a shrine, but an endless pilgrimage of the heart.” I find this particularly fitting for our current circumstances.

Because our “shrine” sits empty, it would be easy for congregants to slip into complacency, to simply sit in on our Zoom sessions as mute spectators. Instead, week after week, people are energized to sing along exuberantly, bake exquisite and extravagant challot, and take part in other home rituals, such as candle lighting and making kiddush. This new prayerful practice enables us all to celebrate private rituals in the same public digital space, something congregants and clergy would be unable to do together in our synagogue.

Added to this is our ability to connect others to our community. Jewish artist and composer Elana Arian led services for us on two Shabbatot. She brought her

spirituality, wisdom and prayerfulness to us in a way that felt authentic and intimate—and she never left her apartment in Brooklyn.

Similarly, being forced to confront change and uncertainty on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis has spurred the community to be receptive towards change and innovation in our services. In this year of upheaval, it might have been appealing simply to go online to a service during which your cantor sings all your favorite prayers and melodies. Instead the Sherith Israel community confronted this new Australian guy, who bangs drums and sings weird songs! And yet congregants have welcomed me with great warmth and generosity of spirit while coming to love many of the new melodies I’ve introduced.

By not “clinging to the shrine,” we open our hearts to the possibility of new connection and new means of spirituality. When we are unable to hear each other sing, we dance and entertain and write supportive chat notes and show that we are connected and connecting. In short, we continue the “endless pilgrimage of the heart” of which Heschel speaks. We find ways to continue our Jewish legacy through difficult times and keep our traditions sacred even as we practice them in ways which may have been unimaginable to our ancestors. ■

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

“I will sing, will sing to the LORD, / Will hymn the LORD, the God of Israel.”
— Judges 5:3

After the Canaanite king Jabin is slain by Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite, the prophetess Deborah and the warrior judge Barak sing a song of praise to God. In 30 verses (Judges 5:2–31), they salute God’s “gracious deliverance of Israel,” involving courage displayed by Yael and

Israel’s tribes in battle. “So may all Your enemies perish, O LORD!” In difficult times, as well as in good, the songs/poems in the Tanakh, along with Psalms, offer soul-stirring ways to ask for our own deliverance and *shalom* for the world. ■

4

Questions for RABBI JESSICA GRAF

The Friday morning after San Francisco Mayor London Breed announced the City's shelter-in-place orders, our in-boxes were graced with the first of what has become a new CSI pre-Shabbat tradition—a "Hello Out There" email from Rabbi Jessica Graf. This surprising delight has kept us connected through ten very long months. We asked Rabbi Graf about her inspiration for the emails and how they have been received.

Q: What about the pandemic inspired you to start your Friday missives?

A: I wrote the first on Friday, March 20, 2020, at the end of that first week of sheltering in place. It felt really important for us to be connected. It was already clear that we'd survive this unprecedented time by reaching out to each other—and holding on tight. I wanted to acknowledge the discomfort we were all feeling and to make people feel less alone. I also wanted to remind people to stay positive during what I thought would be a short time.

I was quite sure, on March 20, that we'd all shelter in place for just a few weeks and that life would soon return to normal. Well, I was wrong. But staying connected and keeping our spirits up was definitely the best way to approach this ordeal as individuals and as a community.

Q: What were you trying to achieve with the emails?

A: As the weeks turned into months, the missives became an opportunity to connect people to interesting articles or ideas, sometimes loosely related to the unusual circumstances we were all experiencing. I wanted everyone to remember that we're in this together and that we were all navigating uncharted territory—separately but together.

Q: The emails are quite eclectic. Where do you get your inspiration?

A: We have been living through a tumultuous time with the pandemic, the racial justice movement and the election. Each of these events has brought about upheavals in our society. It's really important to consider the ways our culture has changed—and that includes humor. I love to laugh at the silliness of human behavior. Laughing is one of the few activities we can still do together. And it's one of the most important!

Each week I look for new angles on the pandemic. How are we behaving differently? What silly things are we doing to cope? And, despite all our differences, what experiences are we sharing? Everyone is dealing with isolation, boredom, frustration, anxiety. I like creative ideas that

help us turn those feelings into more positive and hopeful ones. If I can include an article on chocolate, shoes or PieCaken, I'm delighted. As the tenth senior rabbi of Sherith Israel—and the first woman—I often wonder what my predecessors would think.

Q: What kinds of conversations have the emails generated with congregants? Will you keep them going after we get the vaccine and can see each other in person again?

A: I've been delighted to receive so many responses. Many people have reached out to tell me how they're feeling, what they liked, or didn't like, or why they do, or don't, agree with me. The Friday missives definitely have been conversation starters. I love that they've connected me to so many congregants each week.

I probably got the most responses to the piece I wrote on See's Candies. That one really hit home. I laughed reading stories people sent about their own See's Candies memories. I especially loved the confessions about how eccentric family members clandestinely determined what's in the center of the candies.

Almost all responses have been delightful and engaging. But you can't please all the people all the time. I've gotten a few responses telling me that I should take the pandemic more seriously or discuss my feelings about the pandemic with a therapist!

But for me, the missives have been a fun way to connect with people and get away from my own anxiety about Covid for a few minutes. My husband is a front-line worker—a doctor working with Covid patients every day. Like all other essential workers who have kept our society going, he's a hero (to me anyway!), and I never forget how much suffering people have experienced during this time.

I never imagined I'd write more than three missives. We're well past 40 weeks now—and that means 40-plus missives. I've heard that some people print them out each week and keep them in a binder—like a scrapbook of the pandemic. Someone even suggested that I publish them! I'm grateful for the conversations the missives have opened and for the opportunity to hear from so many people. I hope these check-ins continue long after this pandemic is over! ■

Coping with Covid

B. MITZVAH TRAINING GOES VIRTUAL

Imagine starting a new job where a major portion of your responsibilities is tutoring young teens one-on-one, but you can't have in-person meetings with anyone? Cantor Toby Glaser has lived it. Shelter-in-place in San Francisco began right around the time he was hired. It was deeply entrenched by the time he began working as CSI's cantor last summer.

"Because I had just arrived, I wanted to get to know the families and to discover how much the kids had learned up to that point," explains Cantor Glaser, currently working with a dozen b. mitzvah students ranging in age from 12 to 15. "I thought it was best to let the parents know I'm here and to start working with the students right away."

But Covid and sheltering in place complicate almost everything, especially expectations and schedules. Some families with b. mitzvahs planned for last spring gave up their dates amid the shock of the lockdown. Some students experienced a break in training between **Cantor David Frommer's** departure and Cantor Glaser's arrival. And some families were disappointed that they couldn't invite their families to a traditional b. mitzvah in the sanctuary with festivities following. This was new territory for everyone—students, parents and clergy.

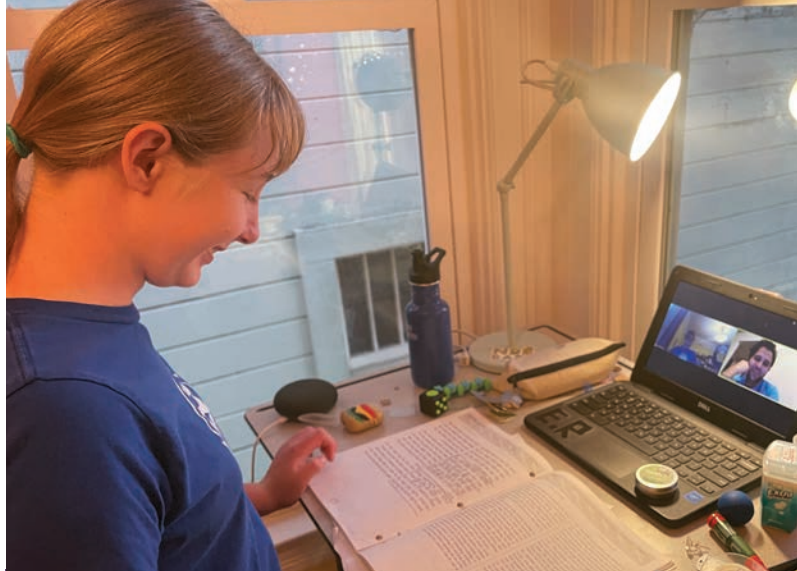
Cantor Glaser is working with several students who have basically prepared but have pushed back their dates because of Covid. "Those kids still need weekly lessons to be kept fresh. Otherwise they'll forget the material," he says. "It's frustrating for everyone that we're in this holding pattern."

Other students are coming up through Studio in their normal timeframe but are learning at home. Typically, they have already learned a smattering of spoken-prayer Hebrew, and heard and sung Hebrew songs. Decoding—educator speak for recognizing letters and reading—doesn't usually begin until fifth grade. The sixth-grade fall retreat for students, families and clergy normally kicks off serious b. mitzvah studies. Everyone comes together as a class and starts to think about the meaning of b. mitzvah in their lives. This year there was no retreat. There are no in-person meetings.

"That's the challenge of the moment," says Cantor Glaser. "I can't even see their books. They can hold them up to the screen, but how can they tell what I'm pointing at?" Engagement is difficult since kids have been sitting in front of screens all day. Cantor Glaser tries to make lessons fun and light-hearted. "I also emphasize that it's the students' responsibility to take ownership."

Two who have taken ownership of their studies are **Zachary Kamil**, son of **David Kamil** and **Jun Yamashiro**, and **Evie Richard**, daughter of **Marcy Zelmar** and **Andrew Richard**.

Zach, an eighth-grader at A.P. Giannini Middle School, began his b. mitzvah training with Cantor Frommer after the family joined Sherith Israel about three years ago. He had a leg up on



TELE-TORAH: Evie Richard digs into her Torah portion, parashah *Vayikra*, on a Zoom study session with **Cantor Toby Glaser**. He is currently working with a dozen b. mitzvah students, some of whom rescheduled or postponed their simchas because of the pandemic.

his Hebrew because earlier he had enrolled in the traditional Hebrew school of Orthodox congregation Chevra Thilim, since the family's prior Conservative congregation didn't have a Hebrew school.

Given shelter-in-place, the family decided to postpone Zach's June 2020 b. mitzvah until May 2021, when his parashah appears in its natural place in the calendar. "When we had first planned to do it, I wasn't completely prepared to do the Haftarah. Now I can actually do all the Haftarah, so postponing just gave me time to learn more," says Zach.

Comparing the experience of studying in person or on Zoom, Zach says, "I got recordings in each case, but in person I was able to hear exactly how the cantor said it, and he was able to show me how each vowel represents each sound. On Zoom, I have the recordings and just try to match it. Now we're working on the pitch, the sound and the melody for each word." Adds Cantor Glaser, "Zach is learning a huge amount of Haftarah and has really taken his chanting to heart."

Evie, a seventh-grader at Live Oak School and a new b. mitzvah student, started her studies with Cantor Glaser. Her parashah, *Vayikra*, which opens *Leviticus*, is a challenging portion about sacrifices. "I'm learning my Torah portion by looking for patterns and noticing that I already know some of it," she notes. Her mom, Marcy Zelmar, says, "Cantor Toby has done a really good job. I feel like Evie is learning it really well."

Evie, who is "really into World War II," is planning an interesting project in conjunction with her b. mitzvah. "I'm 95% sure I'm going to be able to talk to someone who was on the Kindertransport," she says, excited about the possibility of talking to someone who was whisked from Germany to England as a child and lived a history Evie has only read about.

B. Mitzvah Training continues, page 13

Going online enables long-distance presence

LIFECYCLE EVENTS ADAPT TO PANDEMIC REALITY

During the COVID pandemic, Sherith Israel has adhered to *pekuach nefesh*—preserving life—while finding ways to carry on lifecycle events from birth to death. Government guidelines, science and common sense dictate that people stay apart as much as possible, so CSI follows guidelines to keep congregants, family and friends safe but also present for important events.

“One of my most important responsibilities,” says **Rabbi Jessica Graf**, “is celebrating with people in joy and supporting them in sadness. While I now officiate at events with only small numbers, Zoom enables our synagogue to bring many people together at special times.”

Jews have marked important events in their lives for millennia. Rabbi Graf points out that we have followed our customs even during dangerous times, from Greek and Roman rule of Judea to the Inquisition and the Holocaust. “Sherith Israel has experienced its own challenges, but we’ve always understood our obligations and adapted.”

BRIT MILAH

In September, Rabbi Graf participated in the bris of **Ari Newburgh**, son of **Michelle** and **Alex Newburgh**. They, a few members of their immediate family and mohel **Rabbi Moshe Trager** were inside the house. Rabbi Graf stood at the door, but outside. The rest of the immediate family and guests, all masked, were on the garden patio.

Says Michelle, “It was a great way to keep a tradition alive in a time that was so foreboding with dark, smoke-filled skies. We were putting a little light in the world.” To add joy to the celebration, CSI’s HaMotzi brought food and Sherith Littles dropped off packages with a little stuffed Torah for Simchat Torah, a Chanukah gift bag and a Shabbat bag. “It was such a welcoming experience,” adds Michelle.

Rabbi Abby Phelps officiated at the December bris of **Aaron Joseph**, son of **Michael** and **Elizabeth Joseph**, at the office of congregant **Dr. Eric Tabas**, CSI’s longtime mohel. Friends and family joined in over Zoom.

B. MITZVAH

While some b. mitzvahs have been postponed (see story on page 4), others have gone forward with adaptations to meet the circumstances. **Gabe Linder** became b. mitzvah in June with guests attending via Zoom. “It was lovely and meaningful,” says Rabbi Graf. “B. mitzvahs have taken place all over the world under difficult conditions. We have a duty to celebrate these milestones. Never cancel a simcha.” Side note: Rabbi Graf discovered that the Linders are related to some of her cousins.

WEDDINGS

Sherith Israel had many weddings scheduled for spring and summer, almost all postponed. However, a few couples chose to move ahead. Some weddings were held out of town. Rabbi



HANDLE WITH CARE: New father **Alex Newburgh** gently hands son **Ari** to his brother-in-law, **Adam Reingold**, as mohel **Rabbi Moshe Trager** prepares for Ari’s bris. Ari’s mom, **Michelle Newburgh**, was joined by a few relatives. **Rabbi Jessica Graf** officiated from the doorway, a Covid adaptation.

Graf officiated at the wedding of **Seth Rosenblatt** and **Juliana Brodsky** in San Francisco, where a “secret garden” hosted a dozen or so immediate relatives at pod-specific, socially distanced tables with everyone masked.

Nearly 300 digital guests watched a video stream over YouTube. Many would not have been able to attend in person, including Juliana’s grandmother, over 90, and friends with children.

The ketubah signing posed a special challenge during Covid since the two witnesses can’t be family members and they couldn’t attend in person. “We had our witnesses sign before the wedding,” says Seth. “At the start of the ceremony, we phoned and had them affirm that their signatures were authentic.” Juliana loved the simplicity of the affair. “No arguing about colors and seating charts.” Seth also points out that he’s known Rabbi Graf since she was four and he was two. “Having her officiate was very important.”

CHOOSING JUDAISM

Through December, Sherith Israel welcomed five Jews by choice despite the pandemic. The *batei din* (legal court of three adult Jews) met on Zoom. Three adults immersed in the bay by the Saint Francis Yacht Club between Crissy Field and the Marina Green. Witnesses met with the candidates at the beach where they could maintain safe distances.

Lifecycle Events continues, page 13

allowed for indoor services as long as there was no singing or chanting, the prospect of services without singing or chanting wasn't appealing, especially, as Lindsay notes, when our services over Zoom were working well. Therefore, the group focused on the potential for small gatherings, such as Havdalah services or b. mitzvah services, that could be held outdoors. Lindsay had spoken with synagogue presidents in other cities who were starting to do small events in courtyards or parking lots. "We're in a different position because we don't have our own outdoor space. This makes the logistics harder."

As executive director, Gordon questioned whether we could "color out to the lines" or needed to observe more caution than the city required. The physicians' consensus that we could follow the city's guidelines made Gordon feel "delighted to be in San Francisco," comparing our situation with synagogues in other states, where lax public health guidelines have forced his colleagues to come up with their own answers to difficult questions.

The discussion of whether we could hold small events outdoors became moot later in November when San Francisco joined the rest of California in the most restrictive purple tier, but Lindsay expects "to get back to that conversation when conditions improve."

Bill Shore is working with the State of California and San Francisco DPH to train and provide backup to contact tracers and case investigators. He believes "it's important that Sherith Israel has a group of people with more expertise that can guide the decisions our leadership makes about reopening." CSI has to be very cautious about bringing people back together, he emphasizes, pointing out that he is "very impressed with how the congregation has handled its response to the pandemic."



WITH DUE CAUTION: UCSF pulmonologist **Erin Gordon** warns against trying to get back to normal too soon. Many of her older ICU patients were infected by their adult children at family gatherings.

Erin Gordon, a critical care pulmonologist at UCSF who treats coronavirus patients in the hospital's ICU, agrees. "As transmission of the virus has increased, Rabbi Graf and the staff have made appropriate decisions about whether to gather." She adds, "We have an obligation to protect those who are most vulnerable even if that means deferring life-cycle events."

Erin advises that the best medical advice has changed over the course of the pandemic, as we learn more about the virus. "What the pandemic has taught us is how much we don't know." She points to the mid-December discovery of a new mutation of the virus in the United Kingdom that appears to be more contagious. "We are learning as we go along and making rules based on the best evidence we have." As to vaccines, we don't know yet whether they confer long-term immunity.

Erin is deeply concerned about pressure to get back to normal too soon. While the younger patients she is seeing are generally recovering, she notes that "many of the patients I'm seeing in the ICU are older people who are much sicker." Sadly, she says that "many of them were infected by their adult children." Families are pressuring their older relatives to visit. "When their parents get infected and are seriously ill, there's a lot of guilt and shame." Erin also says she had friends who were going on vacation over the holidays, and she "felt an obligation to tell them it was a bad idea."

CSI leadership remains acutely aware of the need to resist pressure to reopen prematurely. Safeguarding the health of our congregants is our paramount concern. For Rabbi Graf, the situation will continue to be complicated after medical issues are resolved. Even when most congregants have been vaccinated—and assuming that the vaccines confer long-term immunity—she anticipates that our programming will still be a hybrid of in-person and online.

She notes that congregants and guests attend online services from as far as Mexico and Australia. Some join services in pajamas. Others who don't drive can now participate. And some people who like to have Shabbat dinner with their families can do that while attending online. "There's something wonderful about being together," Rabbi Graf says. "Now that we've experienced the benefits of assembling remotely, the challenge will be to create an intimate community experience in hybrid form."

She acknowledges that "we don't have the answers yet." But Rabbi Graf is confident that the same resiliency with which the congregation embraced online services, Torah Study and religious school will enable us to find those answers as a community. ■



BEHIND THE SCENES WITH GORDON GLADSTONE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MAKING READY TO WELCOME YOU HOME

My undergraduate degree is in history, and in my first years of study I was fascinated by military history and the **readiness conundrum**. It posits that no fighting force can stay at peak readiness for long. Each day that an army waits to fight is a day that it isn't training. When you don't train, you lose your edge and your readiness. You cannot train and be ready to fight at a moment's notice. This explains the dynamic in a siege; neither force is fighting, and the hazards of disease, low morale and supplies loom larger than incoming cannonballs.

Right now Sherith Israel is also in a siege situation with the virus encircling the city and our efforts to contain it the walls of our defense. At the synagogue, making sure we're ready also extends to our physical spaces. While we are unable to host anyone inside the building, we are "training" for the resumption of activity. This long hiatus in activity has prompted us to examine each and every room with an eye towards what once was simply taken for granted but now could be cleaned, repaired or otherwise improved. In a building that makes extensive use of brass, glass and wood, that means that there are plenty of things to restore to their former glory.

Each subsequent month pushes us to dig a little deeper into the repair list. Lights that have been broken for years, storage spaces in need of reorganization, brass door handles that haven't been polished in decades are just samples of what happens each week.

Luis and Estuardo Arevalo, our two full-time custodians, have been working through a long list of deferred cleaning. They're slowly removing tarnish, dust, grime and more each week. When you next visit, look up at the chandeliers in the lobby. Likely you never knew that they were any color other than black.

Charlie Stern heads up our repair team with the able volunteer assistance of **Alan Mirviss** and **Zack Migdail**. They are systematically repairing broken light switches, leaky faucets and doors that never shut properly. **Corey Christopher**, our office manager, has returned his attention to the Hall of History, with the goal of getting more of the old photos back on display in a manner that accords with our love of order and style, while also helping **Cantor Toby Glaser** get settled into his office.

Our hope is both that, when we can welcome everyone back home, it looks better than you remember it and that our fighting force will be at its best and ready for what I know will be a joyous and well-attended reunion. In the meantime, I can tell you that we already have gone through a full gallon of brass polish with many, many more fixtures to go. ■



CHANUKAH HONORS: During our nightly Zoom candle-lighting calls, our clergy honored congregants celebrating a variety of simchas. On the left, a smiling **Ximena Hansbach** lights Shabbat candles in honor of her recent conversion. Mentor **Leslie Rabine** looks on from the right. Above, mom **Karen Aidem** lights Chanukah candles with son **Harrison Maring**. Harrison is one of a dozen students preparing for b. mitzvah with **Cantor Toby Glaser**.

WHAT'S HAPPENING



Online events livestreamed on Zoom
For meeting details, visit
sherithisrael.org/joinusonzoom.

Don't have internet access? Call Gordon Gladstone, 415.346.1720, x25, or Peter Bonos, 415.346.1720, x24, ahead of time to learn how to connect to events by phone.

= **Registration Required:** sherithisrael.org/programs, programs@sherithisrael.org or 415.346.1720

Shabbat

FRIDAY EVENINGS

6 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat

Welcome Shabbat and leave your week behind with Rabbi Jessica Graf, Rabbi Abby Phelps, Cantor Toby Glaser and musical director Jonathan Dimmock. Share a wonderful online experience with friends old and new.

SATURDAY MORNINGS

9:15 am: Torah Study

Join our clergy and an eager group of congregants and guests. People have attended from as far off as Melbourne, Australia; Lima, Peru; and Mexico City, Mexico. Learn about and discuss key passages from the weekly portion with commentary both ancient and modern.

Special Shabbats

KABBALAT SHABBAT WITH SPECIAL GUEST MICHELLE CITRIN Fridays, February 12 and March 12, 6 pm

Brooklyn-based singer, songwriter and producer Michelle Citrin (a YouTube sensation with hits like *20 More Things to Do With Matzah*—check her website!) brings us fun and funky music for two special musical Shabbatot in collaboration with our clergy team.

Adult

TU B'SHBOX

The Tu B'Shvat Shabbat

Thursdays, January 21 and 28, 6:30 pm

Do some meditative journaling and craft cheerful plant-filled terraria during this two-session Shabbat event honoring Tu B'Shvat, the Jewish new year for trees. Information: Natalie Weizman, nweizman@sherithisrael.org.

SHERITH@HOME TU B'SHVAT

Thursday, January 28

Discover Sherith@Home, a way to enrich our understanding of Jewish festivals and traditions, with a DIY celebration of Tu B'Shvat, the new year of the trees. Be on the lookout for a Sherith@Home email with new ways to honor nature, including recipes, Tu B'Shvat Seder ideas, tree planting and a kids section. For ages 1–120! Sponsored by the CSI membership committee. Information: Christina Jefferson, christina.a.jefferson@gmail.com.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH ANTIRACISM DISCUSSION

Wednesday, February 3, 5:30 pm

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."—James Baldwin

The CSI antiracism discussion group has engaged in robust monthly discussions about how we can be better stewards of belonging and inclusion. Continuing that journey, congregants are invited to join the conversation at a special Black History Month meeting. CSI membership committee chair Christina Jefferson will lead a discussion in which current group members explain why they got involved, what belonging means to them and why this conversation is important. Information: Stacy Passman, spassman@gmail.com.

ONGOING ANTIRACISM DISCUSSION GROUP

Join us for discussions about antiracism, belonging and inclusion informed by selected readings. For meeting dates, book assignments and online meeting information: Stacy Passman, spassman@gmail.com.

SOUNDS OF THE SANCTUARY: YOM HASHOAH MUSIC PROGRAM

Wednesday, April 7, 5 pm

Cantor Toby Glaser, musical director Jonathan Dimmock and program manager and trumpeter Peter Bonos perform musical selections dedicated to communities lost during the Holocaust. Survivors and relatives from our community will present testimonies of their personal stories from World War II. Information: Peter Bonos, pbonos@sherithisrael.org.

YOM HASHOAH SEDER

Friday, April 9, 7:15 PM

Join Sherith Israel Temple Youth (SITY) in a moving observance of Yom HaShoah, the Jewish day of remembrance for the Holocaust. We'll gather not just to remember the pain of the Holocaust but also to celebrate our survival as a resilient people. This Seder is completely teen-led and raises funds for SITY. Please donate generously. Information: Natalie Weizman, nweizman@sherithisrael.org.

YOM HA'ATZMAUT DISCUSSION WITH ISRAELI DEPUTY CONSUL MATAN ZAMIR

Wednesday, April 14, 5 pm

On the eve of Israel's 73rd Independence Day, join Rabbi Jessica Graf and executive director Gordon Gladstone for a lively conversation with Matan Zamir, deputy consul general of Israel to the Pacific Northwest. Find out what's going on in Israel regarding everything from politics to culture to responding to the pandemic response.

ANNUAL MEETING

Tuesday, May 25, 6 pm

The CSI Board of Trustees invites you to the 2021 Annual Meeting. To vote, you must be a member in good standing. See your Under the Dome email for details.

BYOM (BRING-YOUR-OWN-MATERIALS) B'LAILAH CRAFT NIGHTS

Tuesdays, January 19, February 2 and 16, March 2 and 16, April 6 and 20

Bring your own materials for a lailah (Hebrew for "evening") of crafting in community. Information: Natalie Weizman, nweizman@sherithisrael.org.

JEWISH BOOK CLUB

Meets 4th Monday of the month 4 pm, Zoom

Participants present books (paperbacks and ebooks only). Information: Julie Lekach House, juliehousessf@gmail.com.

Jan. 25: *Four Mothers* by Shifra Horn. Facilitator: Jan Maisel.

Feb. 22: *The Book of V* by Anna Solomon (One Bay, One Book). Facilitator: Valerie Jahan.

March 22: *We Stand Divided: The Rift between American Jews and Israel* by Daniel Gordis. Facilitator: Tanya Berezin.

April 26: *The Liar* by Ayelet Gundar-Goshen. Facilitator: Nancy Sheftel-Gomes.

May 24: *Enemies: A Love Story* by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Facilitator: Cathy Taylor.

June 28: Annual book selection meeting.

PIRKEI AVOT STUDY GROUP

Rabbi Abby Phelps

Thursdays, 5 pm

What began as the weekly Talmud group has begun exploring *Pirkei Avot* (literally, Chapters of the Fathers), an ancient text offering timeless ethical and spiritual guidance. No Hebrew or prior experience required, just curiosity and a willingness to engage in spirited discussion.

Information: Rabbi Abby Phelps, aphelps@sherithisrael.org.

MEMOIR WRITING WORKSHOP

Mondays, biweekly, 3 pm

Share memories from another time, wishes for the present and desires for the future. Members only. Information: Gale Gottlieb, galegott@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTORY HEBREW

Wednesdays, 6:30–8 pm

February 17–April 21

Cantor Toby Glaser

Participants learn to read and pronounce the letters of the Hebrew alef-bet, as well as gain familiarity with the prayerbook, basic blessings and core parts of the liturgy. No prior knowledge required.

Information: Cantor Toby Glaser, tglaser@sherithisrael.org.

ADULT INTERMEDIATE HEBREW

Sundays, 1–2 pm, until May 16

Noa Levy

Hebrew for the advanced beginner, focusing on reading and deeply understanding prayers from the Siddur.

Information: Noa Levy, noalevy8@gmail.com.

Volunteer Opportunities

HAMOTZI & CHICKEN SOUPERS

HaMotzi: Sundays, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Chicken Soupers: Sundays, noon–4 pm, February 7, March 7, April 11, May 2

HaMotzi volunteers prepare meals for two shelters in San Francisco each week. Chicken Soupers volunteers cook and deliver meals each month for clients of JFCS. Home-baked cookies, muffins, biscuits and bread are welcome every week. Information: Nancy Sheftel-Gomes, hamotzi@sherithisrael.org.

SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Second Thursdays, monthly, 6–7:30 pm

Sherith Israel's social action volunteers support immigrants and engage in legislative advocacy on important social justice issues. Contact: Karen Alschuler, kalschuler@gmail.com or Stacy Passman, spassman@gmail.com.

CHESED COMMITTEE

We support one another during times of need, celebration or transition. The Chesed committee invites you to sustain the warmth and inclusiveness we value at Sherith Israel. If you or someone you know in the congregation can benefit from support, contact Nia Taylor, ntaylor@sherithisrael.org. If you can offer food, supplies or phone support, contact Janet Parker, jparkersf@gmail.com.



PURIM AND PASSOVER

SHABBAT PURIM

Friday, February 26, 6 pm

Travel to far-and-yet-so-near Zoom-shan for a lively Kabbalat Shabbat and specially masked Purim celebration. Put down your N-95s and put on your Mordechais and Esthers. Join Cantor Toby Glaser, the Koleynu choir and community players for a dramatic online multimedia adaptation of the Purim story with silly skits and provocative parodies of beloved California pop songs.

YOUTH

PURIM PARTY

Sunday, February 28, 10 am

Plan to visit mysterious Zoom-shan on Sunday. A virtual carnival? An online escape room? Whatever we do, we guarantee that you'll have a fabulous time while cheering for Esther and Mordechai and heckling Haman. Be sure to wear your costumes. BYO hamentaschen. And remember, this is the one holiday on which we're instructed to get down and get silly.

SUPER-SILLY LITTLES PURIM SCAVENGER HUNT

Saturday, February 27, 11 am

Wear your silliest costumes and complete this neighborhood scavenger hunt. We'll start with a dance party and use the Scavv app to collect and share our scavenger hunt experiences. Information: Natalie Weizman, nweizman@sherithisrael.org.

23rd ANNUAL JCRC MULTICULTURAL SEDER

Tuesday, March 16

Rabbi Jessica Graf and Emanu-El's Rabbi Jonathan Singer will lead San Franciscans of all faiths at the 23rd Annual Multicultural and Multifaith Passover Seder. This online community seder is jointly sponsored by Sherith Israel, the Jewish Community Relations Council, the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco, Congregation Emanu-El and the San Francisco Interfaith Council. Information: jcrc.org/news-events/events.

Youth Education & Programs

CONFIRMATION

Friday, May 14, 6 pm

(during Kabbalat Shabbat services)

Join our confirmation class to celebrate the completion of their religious school studies. Confirmands will help lead the service and speak about what Judaism means to them.

SITY—SHERITH ISRAEL TEMPLE YOUTH

Teens are invited to join SITY for fun events like celebrating Rosh Chodesh (the holiday that marks the start of each Hebrew month), Shabbos crafting, hygge (Danish for coziness) at home and scary-movie nights. Information: www.sherithisrael.org/youthgroups or Natalie Weizman, nweizman@sherithisrael.org.

Sherith Littles

Programs for young families with children 5 and under. Information: www.sherithisrael.org/early-childhood.html or Natalie Weizman, nweizman@sherithisrael.org.

MUSICAL SHABBAT FOR KIDS

Fridays, 5–5:30 pm

January 22, February 19, March 19

Join us as we welcome Shabbat with Rabbi Jessica Graf, Cantor Toby Glaser and friends new and old. For children 9 and under plus their families. We look forward to singing and celebrating with you!

✓ SECOND-NIGHT PASSOVER SEDER

Sunday, March 28, 6 pm

Join Rabbi Jessica Graf and Cantor Toby Glaser to celebrate our liberation from bondage and historic fight for freedom at our second online—yes, second—family-oriented second-night Seder. In keeping with CSI tradition, the Seder raises funds for our fabulous Chicken Soupers and HaMotzi programs. Your donations help us feed homebound seniors, those in need of healing and residents of local shelters. Please donate generously. Information: programs@sherithisrael.org.



Three generations treasure Judaism ... and Sherith Israel

PROFILE: THE HANDLER FAMILY

For many years the Handler family celebrated Thanksgiving with a Jewish twist. With guests gathered around the table, **Louis Handler** would lead a rousing *Shehecheyanu*. Its simple, grateful message meant a great deal to Louis, who emigrated to the United States from Germany as a child on the eve of World War II. Some 35 years later, with a young family of their own, Louis and his wife Sandra joined Congregation Sherith Israel and became instrumental in its growth.

CSI in the mid-1970s was, as now, a vital, vibrant community. **Rabbi Martin Weiner**, early in his 32-year tenure, was a contemporary of many of the congregation's families. **Cantor Martin Feldman** brought a spark to Shabbat and holiday services and his guidance of b. mitzvah students. For Louis and Sandra, Sherith Israel was a perfect fit to build a Jewish identity for themselves and their children **Daniel** and **Rebecca**.

"Having the children raised in a Jewish home was very important to Lou," recalls Sandra, who converted to Judaism ("My gift to Lou"). Both enjoyed learning more about Judaism through Sandra's conversion classes. "The synagogue helped me and Lou create a Jewish home, and I'm grateful for that."

Louis, who passed away in 2013, served on the Sherith Israel board and volunteered with Chicken Soupers. Sandra also was a board member and part of the Social Action committee. "It's important for everybody to take a little responsibility for the success of the synagogue," she says.

Three generations of Handlers are currently involved with the temple. Dan-

iel and his wife **Lisa Brown** have a son, **Otto**, in Confirmation class. Rebecca and husband **David Andrade** (who is not Jewish) have two daughters, **Willa** and **Simone**, preparing for their upcoming b. mitzvah. They are following the path of Rebecca, Daniel and Otto. Rebecca and Daniel recall fondly the traditional "doughnut walk" to Fillmore Street that Rabbi Weiner took with students shortly before their b. mitzvah to communicate the significance of the event—and enjoy a doughnut.

Daniel and Rebecca went to college on the East Coast and built careers far and wide. Rebecca and her family spent four years in Australia. Both, with spouses and children, found their way back to their hometown and home congregation.

Rebecca and **Rabbi Jessica Zimmerman Graf** were in the same religious school class at CSI and went to kindergarten together at what was then Brandeis Hillel Day School. "If you were to choose someone in our Sunday school class to be a rabbi, it would be her," Rebecca says of Jessica. "She is a major reason why I rejoined the synagogue."

"I feel happily engaged with Sherith Israel," Daniel adds. "The beauty of the space, the music, and the social action and engagement all feel solid and exciting. That's what I treasure in Judaism—the spiritual aspect and the aspect of engaging in the world."

Daniel, of course, is often better known as "Lemony Snicket," the mysterious author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. These darkly humorous tales involve three young orphaned siblings on the run from a hostile and relentless foe.

As a boy, Daniel heard stories from his father and extended family about the prejudice and persecution they endured in Germany. Their resilience in the face of unpredictable, monstrous peril is a core element of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Says Daniel: "A story in which people are making their way through an unfriendly world that seems to be resentful of them and is pursuing them to the ends of the Earth is a very Jewish story."

Rebecca is also a writer. Her debut novel *Edie Richter is Not Alone*, about a Jewish woman who moves to Australia with her husband following her father's death, will be published in March. Says Rebecca: "There's a strong family element in the book. It's loosely inspired by my experience with my father."

Sherith Israel has been a source of strength and inspiration for the Handlers. Like her mother Sandra, Rebecca finds Sherith Israel helpful in creating a Jewish home and instilling Jewish values. Says Rebecca: "I have a partner in Sherith Israel."

"The synagogue added tremendously to my life," Sandra adds. She advises people newly connecting with Sherith Israel or considering it to be open to the possibilities. "Join a synagogue because it's fun and the kids will learn about Judaism, and you will meet other couples who are in the same place in big-city life. Families can grow together. And the sanctuary is so gorgeous. It's a treasure in San Francisco, and I'm happy to be a part of it." ■

THE HANDLER-ANDRADE-BROWN CLAN: Just before Covid descended, the Handlers and Andrades enjoyed a cousin's bar mitzvah in San Diego. Left to right: **Simone Andrade, Sandra Handler, Rebecca Handler, Otto Handler, David Andrade, Willa Andrade, Lisa Brown** and **Daniel Handler**.



As much as we celebrate the turn to 2021, we are going to miss two major San Francisco institutions. After 28 years behind the KQED microphone, CSI congregant **Michael Krasny** will host his last Forum program on February 15. Over the years, he has interviewed innumerable public figures, including Barack Obama, Bernie Sanders, Maya Angelou and Rosa Parks. His show has been one of the most popular regional programs on public radio, reaching nearly a quarter-million listeners a week. Stay tuned for a special CSI retirement celebration for Michael later this spring...

David and **Mary Sperber** turned off the pilot lights and closed the door of their/our beloved Town's End Restaurant and Bakery last November after 30 years as a go-to brunch and breakfast spot. But the good news is that they have found a buyer who will be keeping the name and menus and rehiring most of their long-time employees. That means we can still get a fix of Mary's amazing mini-muffins and scones (yum!). Still unclear is whether the new owners will be making takeout latkes for Chanukah and flourless cakes for Pesach. Much thanks to David and Mary for catering innumerable CSI Shabbat dinners and congregational Seders...

That Handler family really is amazing (see page 10). **Rebecca Handler's** debut novel, *Edie Richter is Not Alone*, will be published on March 9. The book follows Edie, who moves from San Francisco to Australia only to confront memories of her recently deceased father. Join Green Apple Books at 6 pm on March 9 for a virtual chat with Rebecca. Check out the Green Apple website for login details...

Another multi-talented family in our midst: **Carolyn Power Perlstein** sang two delightful Johnny Mercer tunes—"I Thought About You" and "I'm Old-Fashioned"—in a January 9 Society

Cabaret Zoom performance. Meanwhile husband **David Perlstein's** short story, "Mirror, Mirror," will appear in the spring edition of *Avalon Literary Review*, out April 15. The fable presents a man who works for a polling firm but can't make decisions and David's column decrying the renaming of 44 San Francisco schools was published in the *J.* online November 6...

That school board issue was definitely on the minds of congregants. In the *SF Chronicle* letter's column, **Dorothy Auerbach** wrote that maybe, just maybe, the school board had more important things to do than renaming schools, like getting children back into the classroom. Dorothy also weighed in on proposed admission changes to Lowell High School. When Dorothy speaks, hopefully people listen...

Congratulations to oncologist **Thierry Jahan**. He was presented with the GO₂ Foundation for Lung Cancer's outstanding lifetime achievement award at the foundation's virtual gala this past November. Thierry, recently retired from clinical work at the UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center, is currently clinical professor of medicine and oncology at UCSF.

Property porn: What a surprise to see the façade of our beloved California Street home on the cover of the *SF Chronicle's* Real Estate section on November 22. We're apparently a calling card for the Pacific Heights neighborhood that was featured inside...

Sherith Israel also was lauded for our "innovative programming," including our virtual High Holiday services, in the October *J.'s* Reader's Choice edition...

Challenging times: Two CSI congregants more than tested their stamina with organized virtual runs last year. Kudos to **Adrienne Kristine**, who participated in the first Kaiser Per-

manente 150-Mile Around the Bay Challenge, logging 559 miles in six weeks and winning one of five prize packs for her efforts. Also running actually, but in a virtual contest, **Alicia Kletter** logged 32 miles in the Backyard Ultra with 12 running friends from around the world. They met running the World Marathon Challenge, an adventure that included seven marathons on seven continents in seven days in early 2020, just as Covid was racing around the world. Covid eventually caught up with Alicia, who is now donating plasma to treat other patients and planning her next running adventure...

Speaking of going the distance, former religious school head and super-volunteer **Nancy Sheftel-Gomes** received her master's degree in human rights education from USF. Not stopping to rest, Nancy is working on a doctorate focusing on racial justice and education...

Also reaching higher education milestones: **Cyrus Robins**, who graduated summa cum laude from USF with a degree in computer science, and **William Geist**, who graduated with honors from the University of Colorado...

David Newman, who chairs JCRC's public policy committee, and CSI membership chair **Christina Jefferson** both sit on the JCRC's board of trustees. They're also members of its strategic planning team. And **Judie Wexler**, CSI's recently appointed representative to the JCRC Assembly, has joined David and Christina on its public policy committee. Yasher koach for helping fulfill JCRC's work to pursue a just society and a secure Jewish future, something we can all get behind. ■

By the News Nosh, aka Ellen Newman.

Please send bits and bites of gossip to ellennewman@earthlink.net. Be sure to put "News Nosh" in the subject line.



ON EDUCATION

RABBI EDUCATOR ABBY PHELPS

PLAGUE YEAR PERFECT FOR HEALTHY ADULT JEWISH LEARNING

The Talmudic sage Ben Bag Bag would say: “Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it; and see in it, and grow old and frail in it, and do not move from it, for you have no better reward than it.”—*Pirkei Avot* (Chapters of the Fathers) 5:22

What is this all-encompassing thing of surpassing value to which Ben Bag Bag refers? It is the Torah, of course, a text so rich that we study it year after year without ever exhausting its insights.

I have always loved this quotation from *Pirkei Avot*, a compilation of ethical teachings by rabbis from about 200 BCE–200 CE, but it never rang truer for me than it did in 2020. Each week, as I studied the parashah, I was struck by how relevant it seemed in light of current events. I saw deep connections between the Flood and the dangers of global climate change, between Jacob’s visions and the widespread phenomenon of vivid Covid dreams, between Joseph’s unjust imprisonment and the need for sentencing and prison reform in our society.

It sometimes feels like we are living in “biblical” times with near-cataclysmic events unfolding daily, but I also think that the increased isolation we’ve all experienced in recent months has led my intellectual curiosity to run a little wild.

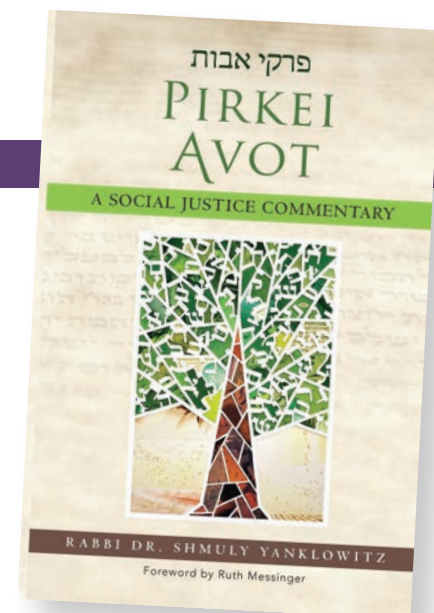
I am not alone in this. Despite all the challenges we faced in 2020, I enjoyed seeing how a combination of spiritual yearning, time to fill and easy online access to classes inspired so many in our community to dive more deeply than ever into Jewish learning. In our Intro to Judaism class, we have seen a higher proportion of participants from within our congregation, people who missed

out on Hebrew school as kids and are taking advantage of this opportunity to catch up on their Jewish education.

We have also seen higher-than-ever attendance at Torah Study. And we have added a weekly Talmud study session that has been a particular source of joy for me. What began as an investigation of what the Talmud might teach us about racial prejudice and inclusion has morphed into an equally lively *Pirkei Avot* study group. Participants from a wide variety of backgrounds, ranging in age from 19 to 90, come together each week to explore the timeless wisdom of this centuries-old text.

*It sometimes
feels like we are
living in “biblical”
times with near-
cataclysmic events
unfolding daily.*

Some passages are so rich that we spend an entire session talking about just one. For example, we spent over an hour on the instruction in *Pirkei Avot* 1:7 to distance ourselves from wicked people. Responses ranged from dismay at the apparent injunction against engaging with people whose views we do not share to consideration of the effect of the historical experience of exile and oppression on the text’s authors. We also wondered whether we might understand the words “*ra*” and “*rasha*,” usually



translated as “bad” or “wicked,” to refer instead to credible threats of violence.

Online learning presents some challenges but also offers advantages. It erases geographical barriers, allowing people in other states, even other countries, to learn with us here in San Francisco. It also means that limitations to a person’s physical mobility or ability to speak are not barriers to participation. While I do miss being physically present with students (and sharing snacks!), I cherish the addition of new, diverse voices to our learning community.

Some participants in our online sessions have spent years studying Torah and Jewish texts, and some are just beginning their Jewish learning journeys, but all bring unique and invaluable perspectives.

If you haven’t yet had the chance to check out these classes, you are not too late. We are always happy to hear new voices in Torah study, in our *Pirkei Avot* study group, and in any other classes we offer. With the need to schlep and park eliminated for the time being, and our minds and hearts growing more restless every day, there has never been a better time to try out adult education at Sherith Israel. I hope to see you there! ■

B. MITZVAH TRAINING, from page 4

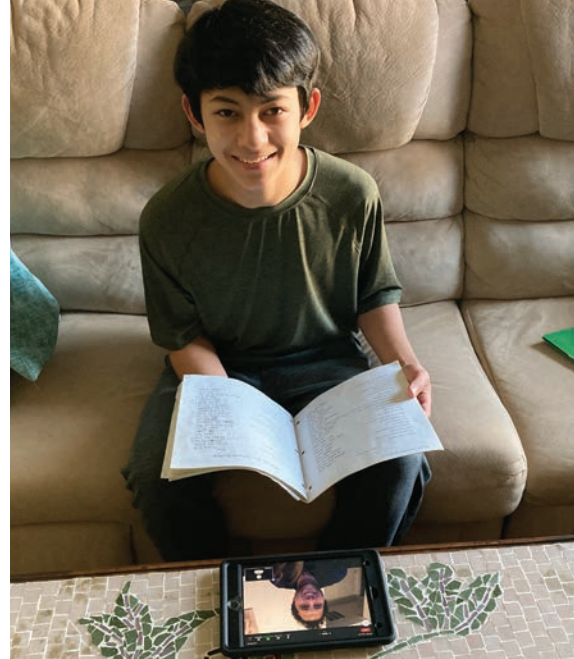
Meanwhile, Marcy and Evie feel conflicted about their scheduled date, March 20, 2021. Evie would like to do it on her assigned date but also wants to be able to have family there in person, including her aunt **Karen Zelmar** and her grandmother, a docent at Chicago's Holocaust Museum. "The date is our biggest topic," says Marcy. "We may not be opened up yet by March."

Rabbi Abby Phelps takes a holistic approach to b. mitzvah preparation, especially during Covid. "We are fired up about creating a process that feels like a substantive acknowledgment that the students are arriving at a point of greater responsibility and greater Jewish participation." To that end she, Cantor Glaser

and the Studio teachers spend a lot of time engaging students in discussions of what a b. mitzvah means in their lives.

"There are kids who don't see the significance of what they are doing now, but it's important that they put in the work," points out Cantor Glaser. "In five or ten years, they are going to see the significance of what they did, and it's really going to mean something to them."

Cantor Glaser is impressed with his students. "You can tell that they are just as exhausted and sick of 2020 as the rest of us, and they are still in class every day, making time for their b. mitzvah tutoring and taking on this responsibility. It's really wonderful to work with them." ■



NOT MOSES'S TABLET: An upside-down **Cantor Toby Glaser** coaches b. mitzvah student **Zach Kamil**. Covid pushed Zach's b. mitzvah back from last June to May 2021.

B. MITZVAH STUDENTS

Trevor Foss, child of Michelle Baden Foss and Christopher Foss, January 30

Evelyn Richard, child of Marcy Zelmar and Andrew Richard, March 20

Kai Denmark, child of Yuka Hachiuma and Andy Denmark, May 15

Zachary Kamil, child of Jun Yamashiro and David Kamil, May 22

Olivia Almqvist, child of Heather Barrett and Johan Almqvist, June 5

Simone and Willa Andrade, children of Rebecca Handler and David Andrade, July 31

Emma Raukman, child of Katherine and Gary Raukman, August 7

Isaac Braunig, child of Lindsay and Warren Braunig, August 14

Harrison Maring, child of Karen Aidem and Harry Maring, August 28



DIVING INTO JUDAISM: **Konstantin Antonovich** and conversion mentor **Lisa Erdberg** at Crissy Field, where Konstantin completed his conversion by immersing in San Francisco Bay. He was one of several CSI Jews by choice who bravely used the bay as their mikvah.

LIFECYCLE EVENTS, from page 5

Konstantin Antonovich experienced his "bay mikvah" on August 24 with smoke floating above the city and a dark red sun hovering. He had been intimidated by walking into such cold water, "but after I walked in, it became warm—as if HaShem embraced me and covered me with an invisible tallit. After the mikvah, my Jewish journey only started. There's so much more to discover. It's truly a lifelong journey!"

Two immersions took place at the traditional mikvah on Sacramento Street, including one on September 17 for **Gefen Aberman-Mashiach**, son of **Kfir Aberman** and **Adam Mashiach**.

FUNERALS

Burying our dead with dignity is one of the most important mitzvot Jews can perform. During the pandemic, two Sherith Israel congregants and a number of related individuals left us. Two funerals

were held at Hills of Eternity, CSI's cemetery in Colma. Attendance was limited, but the ceremonies were streamed so people who would not normally be able to attend could do so.

"Usually, people go back to the house, bring food and sit shiva, but we couldn't do any of that," says Rabbi Graf. "Nonetheless, our graveside funerals were beautiful." Several shiva minyanim have been held on Zoom, including one on the East Coast following the burial of **Lenore Levin**, mother of **Monica Levin**. Rabbi Graf attended. She and Rabbi Phelps later led Zoom shiva minyanim for congregant **Karen Spivack** and for **Renee Ketchum**, aunt of **Dan Weiss**.

Rabbi Graf adds, "It's hard not to be able to hug people at a milestone from birth to death, or go to the hospital, but we're doing everything we can. During and after the pandemic, we'll go on joyfully." ■



Praying with our fingers

CSI VOLUNTEERS GET OUT THE VOTE

**NINETY VOLUNTEERS
THOUSANDS OF PHONE CALLS
MORE THAN 25,000 POSTCARDS**

Beginning in late summer, Sherith Israel volunteers blanketed the South and Southwest with cards and calls encouraging citizens to register and vote early or by mail. They provided information about how to register, how to apply for an absentee ballot and where early voting locations were. “It made a difference,” says **Steve Garber**, who coordinated the postcard effort.

The CSI voter outreach effort grew out of a conversation last summer between social action committee co-chair **Karen Alschuler** and **David Newman**, who chairs the Jewish Community Relations Council’s public policy committee. David thought that voter outreach was a critical extension of Sherith Israel’s social action work.

“It was the summer of George Floyd and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter,” explains David. “Helping people vote is an essential part of pursuing social justice. Voting gives disenfranchised communities their voice and lets them advocate for themselves, rather than depending on the goodwill of others.”

Sherith Israel partnered with Reclaim our Vote (ROV), a non-partisan voter outreach project that focuses on states with significant minority populations and a history of voter suppression. ROV provided our volunteers with postcards, mailing lists and stick-on labels with critical information for voters. It also hosted a phone banking website with voter lists and scripts.

Steve worked directly with the local ROV coordinator. He distributed postcards, labels and mailing lists to volunteers throughout San Francisco. “I enjoyed delivering the postcards,” he says. “I got to see where people lived, and it got me out of the house.”

David focused on phone banking, which became more important after the postcard effort ceased two weeks before the November election. He ran a couple of training sessions to help volunteers learn best practices and get more comfortable making phone calls. “Some people are shy or don’t like to talk to strangers,” he notes. “Others get frustrated because they only reach a small percentage of the voters they call.” Volunteers received proven tips to make phone banking less intimidating—smile, read the script and practice pronouncing voters’ names. “I also helped people reset their expectations about how many voters they were likely to talk to.”

Many volunteers found getting involved a way to overcome feeling powerless in the face of threats to democracy, a frustration compounded by the pandemic. Several volunteers reported keeping a pile of postcards nearby while they watched the news and writing a few every time something made them angry.

For others, motivation was more personal. **Dmytro (Dima) Voytenko** emigrated to the United States from Ukraine in 1999. He

became interested in American politics but wasn’t able to participate until he became a citizen in 2014. “Now I can’t imagine missing an election,” he claims. “I’d have to be in a coma not to vote.” He got involved in Sherith Israel’s voter outreach because over the past ten years, it has become more difficult to vote in some parts of the country. “I wanted to push back,” he says.

Dima’s children, **Mattea** (12) and **Daniel** (10), helped write postcards. “It was a good opportunity to talk to them about voter suppression,” he notes. Living in San Francisco, with polling places rarely more than a few blocks away, it’s hard to imagine how difficult other states make it for people to get to the polls. He was able to explain why it was so important to send postcards with all the information people needed to register and vote.

Terrie Raphael was already sending postcards when the CSI effort got started, but she signed on to the synagogue team “because being connected added a different dimension.” She loved Steve’s postcard deliveries because “he really made me feel taken care of.” She adds, “I could visualize a stream of postcards going out across the country.”

Terrie was one of the volunteers who switched to phone banking after the postcard effort ended. She found phone banking more challenging than postcards, but thought that connecting with people was a treat. “People were really sweet,” she says. “It felt like a handshake across the miles.”

Gale Gottlieb, a member of CSI’s board of trustees, did some volunteer work to support the election of President-elect Biden but found Sherith Israel’s nonpartisan postcard effort particularly rewarding. “I was excited to do something I believed in. It was an absolute joy to get the brown bags of cards from Steve. It was a tie to the real world and gave me a feeling that I was involved and doing something.”

Did our work make a difference? David and Steve are certain it did. The voter turnout in Georgia (and the Georgia runoff) and in Arizona, two states on the ROV list, was unprecedented. “We were part of an effort that included tens of thousands of volunteers,” David says, “all dedicated to making sure that everyone who wanted to vote had a chance to be counted.”

Rabbi Graf offers a hearty “Yasher koach!” to everyone who worked on our GOTV effort. “I am so inspired by the amazing work of our Sherith Israel volunteers, who helped thousands of people vote. They made our Jewish values come alive!”

OTHER SOCIAL ACTION NEWS

Social action committee co-chair **Karen Alschuler** notes that Sherith Israel’s Nueva Esperanza (New Hope) Accompaniment Team (NEAT) partnership with Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin will be a year old in March. “We are proudly expanding our work to bring additional immigrants the support they need to become self-sufficient in the United States,” says Karen.

A hearty mazel tov to each of our families celebrating the following simchas:

NEW BABIES

Zoe Millie Davis, grandchild of Claire and Jim Davis and child of Chelsea Denlow and Jonathan Davis

Ella Reid Hilberman, child of Jessica Hilberman and Kat Reid

Aaron Reuven Joseph, child of Elizabeth and Mike Joseph

Ethan Lieber, child of Jamie Lieber

Ari Jacob Newburgh, child of Michelle and Alex Newburgh

BABY NAMINGS

Gefen Aberman-Mashiach, child of Kfir Aberman and Adam Mashiach

Aaron Reuven Joseph, child of Elizabeth and Mike Joseph

Ethan Lieber, child of Jamie Lieber

Ari Jacob Newburgh, child of Michelle and Alex Newburgh

NEW MEMBERS

Kfir Aberman and Adam Mashiach and child, Gefen Aberman-Mashiach

Jeff Eisenberg and child, Max

Bob and Jackie (z"l) Fonarow

Ximena Hasbach

Gil Knishinsky and Sangva Dy and child, Eyal

Adrienne Kristine

Jamie Lieber and child, Ethan

Emily Rapaport

Judith and Harvey Salgado

Marissa Schaeffer and Jeff Nobel
Chelsea Tirone and Mathew Kamkar
Leslie and Ken Wachtel
Kaitlin Wahl

CHOOSING JUDAISM

Catherine Bergstrom
Ximena Hasbach

*May the memory of the
righteous be for a blessing.*

Laura Amster, mother of Joseph Amster
and Lorann Thomas, mother-in-law of Rick
Shelton, and grandmother of David Thomas III

Jackie Fonarow, wife of Bob Fonarow

Marian Goldeen, aunt of Eileen Nervo,
Susan Weiner and Steven Stiller

Renee Ketchum, aunt of Dan and Lisa Weiss

Lenore Levin, mother of Monica Levin and
Mark Levin, and mother-in-law of
Nancy Igdaloff

Kay Payne, sister of Al Breslauer and
sister-in-law of Ardis Breslauer

Join our *Circle of Lights* legacy
society. Include Sherith Israel in
your estate plans.

Questions?

Contact Gordon Gladstone, executive
director, 415.346.1720 x25 or
ggladstone@sherithisrael.org

Robert Jay Pincus, brother of Nancy Pincus
Davis and Susan Williams, brother-in-law of
Arnie Davis, and uncle of Perri Davis and
Amy Williams

Jack Schaeffer, father of Marissa Schaeffer
and father-in-law of Jeff Nobel

Karen Spivack, wife of Dr. Samuel Spivack
and mother of Alix Spivack

Cheryl Gerson Tuttle, stepmother of Cantor
David Frommer, stepmother-in-law of Rabbi
Carla Fennes, and stepgrandmother of Aaron,
Talia and Eliana

Ernestine Waters Weiss, mother of
David Stephen Zalob, grandmother of Sasha
Desmarais Zalob and Simon Desmarais Zalob,
and great-grandmother of Maya Zalob and
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TIKKUN OLAM CORNER, from page 14

In addition to the Avila family, whom congregants met at the Social Action Shabbat in June, CSI social action volunteers are working with a young woman from Mexico who is now living in San Francisco. We are also assisting a mother from Argentina and her 15-year-old daughter, who is here for a medical trial at UCSF. Karen is grateful to the HaMotzi/Chicken Soupers team for supporting our NEAT families with some extra good food!

Karen also reports that we are looking forward to continuing our advocacy work with RAC California in the upcoming legislative session. New participants are always welcome.

Finally, she is excited that we have expanded our list of social action supporters to more than 90 congregants and hope to engage more volunteers in 2021. To get involved, contact Karen Alschuler, kalschuler@gmail.com, or Stacy Passman, spassman@gmail.com.

HAMOTZI AND CHICKEN SOUPERS

Another casualty of Covid was our tradition of helping cook and serve at the San Francisco Interfaith Men's Shelter over the Christmas holidays. According to HaMotzi coordinator **Nancy Sheftel-Gomes**, the pandemic forced the shelter to restrict the number of organizations involved. But, she notes, our volunteers showed their seasonal spirit in other ways. "People donated fancier baked goods for our regular clients, and we made things festive." Nancy adds that, while older volunteers can't volunteer in the kitchen, younger people have stepped up. "They are coming frequently, giving input and taking responsibility," she says, which is promising for the long-term future of HaMotzi and Chicken Soupers. Contact: hamotzi@sherithisrael.org. ■



SHERITH ISRAEL

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FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE, FREEDOM FROM WANT

Sunday, March 28, 6 pm — Online

Celebrate our family-oriented second-night Seder and raise funds for Chicken Soupers and HaMotzi. More information: page 8.

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