

# SHERITH ISRAEL NEWS

MAY-AUGUST 2020



**DRUMMING UP ENTHUSIASM:** Incoming Cantor Toby Glaser sings and drums at his audition service in February. Cantor Glaser officially joins us on July 1.

*Filling Sherith Israel with joyous sounds*

## CANTOR TOBIAS (TOBY) GLASER JOINS CSI IN JULY

On a cold Thursday evening in February, Rabbi Jessica Graf welcomed the Sherith Israel board, the cantorial search committee, our Koleynu choir, past presidents, and partners and spouses to hear Tobias (Toby) Glaser audition to become the newest cantor in Sherith Israel’s 169-year history. Guitar in hand, wordless niggun on his lips, he connected with the “congregation” almost immediately.

Cantor Glaser’s version of *Shiru L’Adonai* (“Sing Unto God a New Song”) included a surprise element—percussion. His eyes sparkled as he played a drum strapped over his shoulders and around his waist, engaging the crowd in the exuberant rhythm of the joyous psalm. Then he introduced a new setting of *L’cha Dodi* by Craig Taubman and Alberto Mizrahi, explaining that this version evolved from a project that paired old-school *chazzans* (cantors) with contemporary Jewish composers. “The result,” Cantor Glaser told the group, “is a mash-up of

Cantor Glaser continues, page 4

*Zooming through the coronavirus crisis*

## SUSTAINING COMMUNITY IN A TIME OF SEPARATION

While San Francisco’s shelter-in-place directive makes usual synagogue practices impossible, Sherith Israel has sustained community through technology, determination, ingenuity and spirit. Our response began to coalesce at an executive committee meeting on March 10, before any Bay Area shelter-in-place orders had been issued. “We were hosting a Purim party for young adults on March 11,” recalls executive director **Gordon Gladstone**, “and we thought we could do it safely because it was not expected to attract older congregants.”

Board treasurer **Katie Zier** argued convincingly that holding an event was wrong from a public health perspective. “The idea of canceling events made us all very sad,” she recalls. “We wanted to be there for the community.” But what needed to be done was obvious. CSI closed the synagogue—but opened

new opportunities for people to worship, study and interact.

The first major synagogue event to be affected was Shabbat services on March 13. Services were streamed from the sanctuary, but Gordon concedes that “we ran into some technical difficulties.”

When San Francisco issued its order to shelter in place effective March 17, the staff and clergy “had to get creative.” For Gordon and his team, “it was both challenging and liberating to do something without the usual tools, to try whatever might work.”

With live-streaming services from the sanctuary off the table, CSI turned to Zoom—the now-ubiquitous video conferencing app—as an event platform. A test resolved some audio issues, and the first Zoom Shabbat service was held on March 20.

Sustaining Community continues, page 6

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

**ANNUAL MEETING**  
Wednesday, May 27  
6:30 pm via Zoom

**CANTOR FROMMER  
FAREWELL TRIBUTE**  
Saturday, May 30  
7-8 pm via Zoom

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*Senior Rabbi*  
Abby Phelps  
*Rabbi Educator*  
David Frommer  
*Cantor*

#### EMERITUS CLERGY

Lawrence Raphael (z"l) *Rabbi Emeritus*  
Martin Weiner *Rabbi Emeritus*  
Martin Feldman *Cantor Emeritus*

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## A MOMENT WITH RABBI ABBY PHELPS

### SHELTERING IN TORAH

**As I write, I am sitting on a living room sofa rather than at my office desk, struggling to stay productive and hopeful while sheltering in place.** I am lucky. I have a job, a home, food and other resources, and remote access to those I love. My heart aches for people who have lost jobs, who must be stay-at-home parents and home-school providers while working full time, who cannot visit loved ones in the hospital nor stand graveside, who have no homes in which to shelter. I look forward to the time when we can help each other begin to heal from this pandemic's wounds.

But I have found a few bright spots. One is our continuing weekly Torah Study sessions via Zoom. It has been wonderful to see both our regulars and many new participants, some members and some not, some nearby and some hundreds—even thousands—of miles away. Preparing for Torah Study has forced me to ask again and again: What can the Torah teach us in this moment?

Our first Zoom Torah Study covered *Parashat Vayikra*, the first portion of the *Book of Leviticus*. *Leviticus* is challenging. It deals largely with the priesthood, animal sacrifice and ritual purity and impurity, which do not particularly resonate with us today. Those concerns, however, reflect an underlying anxiety about the world's chaotic nature and the conviction that our role as God's earthly partners is to impose order through

righteous action and spiritual practice. *Leviticus* teaches us to respond to fear, danger and the unknown by striving for holiness.

**Reflecting on this idea, I realized that sheltering in place is itself holy work.**

What is more righteous than protecting our health and that of those around us by staying home and maintaining social distance? What more spiritual practice could there be than daily rededicating ourselves to this work despite its hardships? We can also reach further toward holiness by offering support to those most vulnerable to the coronavirus: the elderly, people of color, the unhoused, the incarcerated and detained. Each week, preparing for Torah Study has brought me new insights, guiding me to see a next step along the path toward holiness.

Jews have been through very difficult times, and we will get through this one too. Torah, as always, can help sustain us. Torah has connected us when we were physically separated, rooted us when the future seemed uncertain, kept us hopeful when we could easily have succumbed to despair. As long as we are sheltering in place, I invite you to also seek shelter in the depth, richness and wisdom of Torah. If you would like help getting started, please join me for Torah Study on any Saturday. No prior knowledge is needed, just an open mind. ■

### PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

*"Ben Bag Bag would say: Turn it and turn it, for all is in it [Torah]."*  
— *Pirke Avot 5:22*

Torah with a capital "T"—the Bible, Talmud and myriad commentaries—touches on everything human. While current technology may have been beyond our ancestors' wildest imaginations, human nature remains basically unchanged. It's important to note that, because God created the natural world (the Book of Gen-

esis), Jewish tradition has long accepted science. Rabbi Micah Kelber writes, "A survey of the Talmud turns up frequent discussions of botany, anatomy, biology, zoology, astronomy, medicine, magic, astrology (which would have been regarded as 'science'), and even rudimentary chemistry." ■

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## Questions for RABBI JESSICA GRAF

The coronavirus has upended life around the world. We wondered what challenges a senior rabbi faces during a pandemic and what solutions she finds.

**Q: How is the congregation doing? Has there been a lot of need?**

**A:** We're working on making connections with everyone in the congregation and assessing their needs. Many congregants have very different needs from the ones they usually have. Difficulty getting food safely—either because of health conditions which make grocery shopping inadvisable or an inability to access usual methods of help—has been a challenge. Also, a large percentage of our community feels isolated. Many congregants live alone. Normally, they have full lives and socialize regularly. But during this pandemic, isolation is a common—and painful—feeling. To help, we created a spreadsheet so we can reach out and make calls to the whole congregation, which we're doing little by little. We're also encouraging congregants to call each other to check in.

**Q: How does it feel to lead services remotely?**

**A:** I'm pleasantly surprised by how meaningful our remote celebration of Shabbat has been each week. That said, there are a number of challenges to leading services virtually. Our clergy team likes being together, so it's hard not to stand up together and share a siddur and a smile. Also, Zoom doesn't allow more than one voice to be heard clearly at a time, so we have to give up singing together. Initially it was difficult to give a drash into a computer screen without human feedback. But I've grown to love seeing people smiling at home in their comfy chairs and holding up homemade challahs. At the end of the service, all of the greetings and virtual hugs we share are wonderful. But... I can't wait to be back together in our sanctuary!

**Q: How have you dealt with funerals and b. mitzvah?**

**A:** Judaism has survived and thrived over the ages because of its ability to adapt. Our tradition's elasticity has allowed for Jewish practice to remain rooted in our sources but to be molded by the cultures and the realities of each time and place. This moment is pushing ancient

Jewish traditions toward new boundaries. Being together and gathering in a minyan is fundamental to being Jewish, so it's difficult not to do that regularly—especially for lifecycle events.

Judaism has many helpful traditions around death and the rituals of gathering as a community at that time. We are required to be present for the dead, giving honor to the body from the time of death through burial, then turning our attention to the mourners. Now, when many of our most cherished rituals are limited by health concerns, we've had to devise new ways to support mourners. We've had only one funeral since our shelter-in-place regulations began. Though it was difficult for the family, the funeral was, in some ways, one of the most beautiful I've seen. As a result of the intensity of the task at hand—a dignified burial—and our heightened awareness of life and death, there was a focus that was very moving.

Regarding b. mitzvah, unfortunately we've had to cancel those scheduled in the spring. To make things a bit easier on the b. mitzvah, as we've reassigned later dates for in-person celebrations, we're allowing students to keep their original Torah portions. Since they've each worked so hard to learn the chanting and to prepare their divrei Torah, we didn't want them to start from scratch. It's exciting to see how amazing and resilient these kids are.

**Q: What Jewish learning can we take away from this pause in our lives?**

**A:** Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught that Shabbat is about holiness in time—and a separation from space. This pandemic brings that teaching to life. We are re-evaluating our lives as we redesign how we spend our time. I hope that the lessons of family, extended walks and healing of nature that we're experiencing stay with us.

Also, since the counting of our shelter-in-place days coincides with the counting of the Omer—the days from Pesach to Shavuot—our Jewish calendar gives us the opportunity to reflect on the season's messages of freedom and the value of community. ■

two different styles of Jewish music, creating a contemporary sound steeped in the past.” Throughout his 45-minute presentation, he delighted people with novel twists on favorite songs and prayers.

“It’s so beautiful to hear your voices,” he told those gathered, as he looked around the sanctuary, taking in the space. “This is such a wonderful, welcoming place. And all your social justice action, being a sanctuary congregation, and these windows remind us how to live our lives with justice.” In just a few minutes of commentary, Cantor Glaser connected with the congregation on yet another level.

“The mock service was remarkable,” commented **Lindsay Braunig**, our congregational president. “There were probably 40 people, and Toby’s music completely filled the sanctuary. It was incredibly uplifting. Within five minutes, a smile appeared on everyone’s faces. He filled the space and owned it in a really positive way.”

**Cantor Glaser’s Jewish journey began in Melbourne in a secular humanist Jewish family.** For his bar mitzvah, he presented a project on the history of the Jews of Melbourne rather than reading Torah. In college, he majored in music and German, and later studied and worked as an *au pair* in Berlin. “It was a great way to see the world,” he reflected.

Back in Australia, Cantor Glaser sang in several opera companies and choirs, and worked as a choral conductor and as an extra in TV productions. He also taught high-school music before becoming a cantorial soloist at Melbourne’s largest Reform synagogue. When his father died in 2013, his synagogue community’s support and the realization that he could use his voice to be there for others in times of sadness and joy cemented his desire to become a cantor. He received his Masters of Jewish Sacred Music from HUC in 2019, with his ordination in May 2020.

While in New York, Cantor Glaser served as a cantorial intern or soloist at several synagogues, including Rodeph Sholom, where he taught religious school, adult education and Torah study; gave sermons; and prepped students for their b. mitzvah. He also worked closely with TRIBE, an innovative community engaging Jewish millennials with a fresh take on Jewish tradition and culture, including holding monthly Shabbat services in a bar.

“In thinking about the next cantor for Sherith Israel, we wanted to build on the really wonderful aspects of our current clergy team,” observed Rabbi Graf. “That meant finding someone who could bring music that’s joyful and creative and who could be a full participant in all aspects of community life—someone personable and fun to be with who takes a creative approach to Jewish engagement for all ages.”

**Cantor Glaser brings a unique perspective on diaspora Judaism—and a charming accent—with him to Sherith Israel.** “I didn’t grow up with typical American Reform experiences or a summer camp mentality. Jewish migration came to Australia later than it did to the U.S., so the Australian-Jewish community tends to be more traditional,” he explained. Cantor Glaser’s connection to his home community gave him a passion for Yiddish, which brings us back to his accent—delightfully Australian with a *bissel* Yiddish.

Cantor Glaser was attracted to Sherith Israel when he saw our iconic ad on our website. Traditional chicken soup plus sriracha resonated with him. “I take Judaism seriously, but I don’t take myself seriously,” he said. On his February visit, Cantor Glaser spent time with Rabbi Graf and **Rabbi Abby Phelps**, went to dinner with members of the CSI board, walked to the Golden Gate Bridge with Lindsay Braunig and met with members of the choir and music director **Jonathan Dimmock**. “It’s very exciting

to have a community that respects the full range of Jewish music and to be coming to a city like San Francisco that is urban, cultured and dynamic.” He looks forward to attending the SF Symphony and SF Jazz when music venues reopen.

**CSI began its search for a new cantor when Cantor David Frommer announced that he and his wife, Rabbi Carla Fenves, wanted to move back to the East Coast to be closer to their families.** Lindsay appointed **Craig Etlin** to chair the cantorial search committee, which conducted ten interviews on Zoom before inviting Cantor Glaser and one other candidate to San Francisco. “The committee was outstanding,” enthused Rabbi Graf. “Craig brought together a diverse group of congregants to run a careful and transparent process.”

Toward the end of the mock service, Jonathan went up to the organ loft to accompany Cantor Glaser on a soulful *May the Words*. To conclude, Cantor Glaser demonstrated his approach to the High Holidays with a *Sh’ma Koleynu* that filled the dome with a poignant Yom Kippur plea to the heavens.

**“I’m thrilled Cantor Glaser is coming to Sherith Israel. Those who had a chance to hear him came away excited by his energy,” said Rabbi Graf.** “In addition to the great spirit Cantor Glaser demonstrates, he also let his playful personality engage with us. At his interview, I asked if he could channel his inner Aussie by repeating the line ‘We’ll put another shrimp on the barbie!’ I wasn’t sure what he’d do—he was interviewing, after all. Without missing a beat, our new cantor smiled and gave us his best Crocodile Dundee imitation. It’s going to be a fun and interesting change for us with new opportunities for growth.” ■





## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH GORDON GLADSTONE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### SHELTERING IN PLACE AT 2266

**Who knew it was this difficult?** That was the question that played in my head over and over during the first few weeks of sheltering in place. The transition from running a physical space to a virtual space was punctuated with improvisations, last-minute changes and a steep learning curve.

The first step was shutting down the building. We informed congregants that events were cancelled, confirmed with renters that they knew the building was closed, and made sure we cancelled all our deliveries. In those first days we shut off furnaces, checked what was left in the refrigerators, and came up with a new way to get the mail. We worked out a rotation of having one person in the building each day, and then worked through how to do many of the things that we normally did in person, including paying the bills (many of them are still mailed to us). Finally, we had to get as many of our core programs online as quickly as possible, with all of us learning as we went. Everyone’s tolerance for those early, bumpy efforts was most welcome.

**By week two we were able to start thinking about moving more of our programs online.** After we got Friday evening

services and Torah Study up and running, we helped many of our smaller programs like Wise Aging find a new home on Zoom. Studio, our religious school, moved online with **Rabbi Abby Phelps** and the staff coming up with new materials each day. Adult Hebrew classes went online, complete with virtual white boards. Finally, our biggest production—Passover—went online as well. The matzo ball soup was strictly BYOB(owl). Each of these large events usually meant a few rehearsals and a quick pre-event prep session in a Zoom breakout room.

One thing that we can’t move online is our space rentals. These rentals bring various communities and potential members into our building each week. They are also a source of earned income that helps the space become a little more financially self-sufficient. On the other hand, virtual rooms are cheaper to heat.

**At some point a version of normal will return.** We will turn on the lights and furnaces. We will gather to hear music in the sanctuary. We will open bottles of wine and toast the New Year. What will remain are bonds of community that met this challenge on Zoom and came away stronger. ■

*The new normal: kids in PJs, teachers with pets*

### STUDIO @ SHERITH ISRAEL KEEPS LEARNING OPEN WHILE SYNAGOGUE IS CLOSED

California’s shelter-in-place orders have inspired Sherith Israel to find creative ways to maintain religious education and community for our children. The challenges are formidable, but the responses have been positive.

“Zoom enables us to continue meeting as a school,” says Studio @ Sherith Israel head **Rabbi Abby Phelps**. “Early on, we realized we needed to focus on two main goals: providing students and families with meaningful Jewish content and enabling them to remain in community.”

Since the shelter-in-place order went into effect, Studio has continued to meet for its scheduled Sunday-morning sessions, albeit in modified form. “It’s much harder to maintain students’ attention over Zoom than in person,” says Rabbi Phelps. “Also, it’s not healthy to sit in front of a screen for too long, so we’ve made our sessions shorter and kept them as engaging and interactive as possible.”



The youngest students now meet for 30 minutes of show-and-tell, Jewish storytelling, art-making, music and movement, followed by 30 minutes of all-school T’filah. “T’filah hasn’t had to change much,” Rabbi Abby notes. “We still lead kids in stretching while we sing *Modeh Ani* (I give thanks) and still ask them to suggest daily miracles they’re grateful for. Now, they suggest them through the chat. It’s moving to see how many express gratitude for their parents and families, shelter, medical professionals and their Studio community.” Other objects of gratitude that have shown up in the chat include pets, video games, sports and, after Passover, cinnamon buns.

Studio continues, page 7

## SUSTAINING COMMUNITY, from page 1

The first Zoom service wasn't perfect. There was confusion about coordinating the clergy and music director **Jonathan Dimmock**. There were timing issues, and Jonathan's piano didn't come through cleanly. Nevertheless, Gordon considers it a success. "The moment of validation occurred at the end of the service when we turned off the mute and everyone was talking together. 'Oh, my God,' I thought, 'this is why we did this.'" Nearly 100 people logged into that first service, and 100 or more have logged in each week since. Gordon upgraded our Zoom subscription to accommodate the unexpected throngs. "This was an incredible stress test for an intentional community, to show we could be there for our congregants in this moment of crisis."

**Moving services to the cloud presented unexpected challenges and surprising benefits.** The challenges arose from Zoom's technical capabilities. For example, there's a slight delay between when someone speaks and when the audience hears what they say. It's not a problem when one person speaks at a time, but it frustrates coordinating singing and praying together.

The solution is both technological and liturgical. The congregation is muted so only the speaker can be heard. Liturgically, **Rabbi Jessica Graf** and the other clergy eliminated prayers like the *V'ahavta* and *Aleinu* that derive their power from praying in unison.

**Cantor David Frommer** and Jonathan Dimmock had to work out the timing between Jonathan's instrumentals and Cantor Frommer's singing, since delays meant that only one could be live at a time. Jonathan had to learn to start playing a split-second before Cantor Frommer finished to eliminate the gap between the end of the cantor's singing and the congregation's joining in at the end of songs. Jonathan also worked with program manager **Peter Bonos** to improve his piano's sound. They switched from Jonathan's iPad to a laptop, which has a better microphone and more advanced sound settings, and moved the laptop closer to the piano.

For Jonathan, the remote experience was odd and unsettling. "The whole endeavor of music is about collaboration," he notes. When playing in the sanctuary, he has "feelers out for what the music is doing. I'm sensing context, and that informs how and what I play." That's harder when no one is in the same room, although with Zoom, "I can see everyone's faces, so I know I'm reaching people on some level."

**Nonetheless, going online created unexpected opportunities.** Many congregants have experienced a different kind of intimacy, seeing friends in their homes. For some congregants, being online has made services more accessible. According to Chesed committee co-chair **Helen Luey**, one congregant found the online service easier to follow because the siddur text is on the screen. Congregants who have a difficult time getting to the synagogue can now attend without having to drive and find parking.

*Sustaining Community continues, page 13*



**SHABBAT, SEPARATE BUT TOGETHER:** Our virtual Kabbalat Shabbat service has attracted 100 or more congregants and friends each week. **Jacob Barrett**, whose b. mitzvah was postponed from April to this fall, lights Shabbat candles with his family. Separation hasn't stopped us from sharing candle-lighting, Kiddush and Motzi with each other.



## Yom Hashoah Seder

**STUDIO TEACHES VIRTUES VIRTUALLY:** Our youth education programs are zooming into our students' homes. The youngest students meet for a half-hour each Sunday. All students share T'filah, beginning with a prayer of thanks. Our SITY youth group presented an online Yom Hashoah seder for the entire congregation.

### STUDIO, from page 5

Older grades meet after T'filah to continue working on the year's curricula. The 2nd- and 3rd-grade group continues to learn about multicultural Judaism by watching and discussing videos of Jewish ritual and prayer around the world, as well as through artwork and projects. The 4th- and 5th-grade group is concluding its study of Jewish lifecycle rituals by interviewing a half-American, half-Israeli couple about their upcoming wedding, as well as by staging a mock wedding for youth programs manager **Natalie Weizman's** dogs. The 6th-graders still prepare for b. mitzvah with their teacher **Noa Levy**, who is also organizing mid-week check-ins for 6th-graders feeling socially isolated.

Zoom has proved to be a rich venue for supporting and teaching teens. Teens @ Studio weekly Zoom sessions allow teens to connect socially and compare notes on living well while sheltering in place. With more time on their hands, teens have been more active in directing their own learning, including delving into Mussar, a Jewish spiritual practice for working on one's ethical qualities. They have also researched questions about Israeli history and politics, and our SITY teen group presented a Yom HaShoah seder for the entire congregation via Zoom.

So far, according to Rabbi Phelps, Zoom studio attendance has been strong, especially among the youngest and oldest students. "Kids and teens say that keeping connected with each other is the highlight of their week."

**To supplement Sunday programming, Rabbi Phelps offers family learning opportunities every weekday via email.**

**Mitzvah Mondays** focus on doing mitzvot, community service and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. Activities have included making postcards for isolated congregants, trying out new matzah recipes during Pesach and acting as *shomrei ada-*

*mah*, protectors of the earth, by having plant-based meals or picking up litter while out on walks.

**Torah Tuesdays** present the mysteries and wisdom of Jewish texts, often focusing on the week's portion. Families have received resources regarding the weekly *parsha*, including videos and coloring sheets, as well as instructions for how to count the Omer, marking the seven weeks from Pesach to Shavuot.

**Wellness Wednesdays** emphasize caring for minds, bodies and souls. Students often are invited to spend some time outside, moving and enjoying nature, and to say blessings for the wonders of the natural world.

**Thankful Thursdays** guide students in appreciating and discussing the blessings in our lives. Suggestions have included naming things they're thankful for, thanking loved ones directly and making "thankful windows" full of messages of gratitude and hope.

**Family Fridays** offer a time to prepare to welcome Shabbat and continue family learning. Studio has suggested a round of "Roses and Thorns." Each person tells about one good thing and one difficult thing they experienced in the last week. In honor of Passover, the Studio staff nicknamed the game "Maror and Charoset." Students also had the opportunity to prepare for Seder by practicing the Four Questions together.

Given the challenges inherent in developing online programming and socializing, Rabbi Phelps says, "It takes a certain humility to admit we can't do as much as we like. But we're offering outstanding resources and connections." She notes that planning for next year is going on now. "We're weighing a variety of options, not knowing what the status of the pandemic will be. But we'll be prepared. And we're always happy to hear feedback." ■

# WHAT'S HAPPENING

## Shabbat Services

### FRIDAY EVENINGS

#### 6 pm: Kabbalat Shabbat

Welcome Shabbat and leave your week behind with Rabbi Jessica Graf, Rabbi Abby Phelps, Cantor David Frommer (through June), Cantor Toby Glaser (starting July 3) and music director Jonathan Dimmock. Share a wonderful experience with old friends and new.

### SATURDAY MORNINGS

#### 9:15 am: Torah Study

Engage with one of our clergy and an eager assembly of congregants and guests—some have joined us from as far off as Lima, Peru and Mexico City, as well as Nevada and Boston. Review key passages from the week's portion and commentary ancient and modern, and share responses to a range of biblical history and law.

### OCCASIONAL SATURDAY EVENINGS

#### 8 pm: Havdalah

Celebrate the end of Shabbat with CSI clergy, members, staff and community. See *Under the Dome* for schedule.

#### = Registration Required

- [sherithisrael.org/programs](http://sherithisrael.org/programs)
- [programs@sherithisrael.org](mailto:programs@sherithisrael.org)
- or 415.346.1720

#### Online events livestreamed on Zoom

- [sherithisrael.org/joinusonzoom](http://sherithisrael.org/joinusonzoom)

## Virtual Events

### ANNUAL MEETING

#### Wednesday, May 27, 6:30 pm

The Board of Trustees invites you to the historic 2020 Annual Meeting of Congregation Sherith Israel, the first ever to be held online. You'll get an update on Sherith Israel's administration, budget and plans for the future in addition to nominees for our Board of Trustees. You must be a member in good standing to vote.

Registration: [sherithisrael.org](http://sherithisrael.org) for Zoom meeting link and details.

### CANTOR DAVID FROMMER FAREWELL TRIBUTE

#### Saturday, May 30, 7-8 pm

Honor Cantor David Frommer and wish him and his family well as they prepare to head to West Point. Share memories, send messages and enjoy music at our festive Zoom-a-bration as we all say *l'hitraot*—see you later.

Include your greetings in our tribute book for Cantor Frommer. Visit [sherithisrael.org/tribute](http://sherithisrael.org/tribute) or email [Nia Taylor, ntaylor@sherithisrael.org](mailto:Nia.Taylor@sherithisrael.org).

### TIKKUN LEYL SHAVUOT

#### Sunday, May 31, 3-10 pm

Shavuot (literally, "weeks"), which falls seven weeks after the beginning of Passover, is a harvest festival and celebration of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. This year, we partner with the JCC East Bay for a virtual Tikkun, a traditional late-night study program. Rabbi Abby Phelps will teach one hour-long session. Watch *Under the Dome* for details.

## Ongoing

### COFFEE KLATCH

#### Thursdays, 10 am

Brew some coffee and join executive director Gordon Gladstone to discuss a weekly topic of relevance and importance. Gordon brings to the meeting a passion for motorcycles and baking bread in addition to a deep knowledge of Israeli history, culture, food and politics. The microphone is open, and what you bring to the discussion means so much.

### JEWISH BOOK CLUB

#### Mondays, monthly, 4 pm

**May 18:** *Catch-67: The Left, the Right, and the Legacy of the Six-Day War* by Micah Goodman and Eylon Levy. Discussion facilitated by Tanya Berezin.

**June 22:** Book selection. Books must be read by the nominee and available in paperback.

Contact: [Julie House, juliehousesf@gmail.com](mailto:Julie.House@sherithisrael.org)

### WISE AGING

#### New cohort forming, dates and times to be announced

Aging presents challenges and opportunities that refuse to be ignored. The Wise Aging program offers a sacred and supportive place for those 60 and older to share their observations and experiences to help enrich their own lives and those of other community members. Developed by the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, this program features contemplative listening, journaling, mindful meditation, Jewish text study and poetry to deepen participants' inner and outer journeys.

Registration:

[Debbie Freed, freedassoc@aol.com](mailto:Debbie.Freed@sherithisrael.org)

## Volunteer Opportunities

### HAMOTZI & CHICKEN SOUPERS

#### HaMotzi:

Sundays, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

#### Chicken Soupers:

Sundays, monthly, noon–4 pm,  
June 7, July 12, August 2, September 6  
Newman Hall

Make a difference to those in need by becoming part of our crew of HaMotzi volunteers. You'll prepare meals for two shelters in San Francisco. Chicken Soupers volunteers cook and deliver meals for clients of Jewish Family and

Children's Services once a month. Stuck at home? You can still participate by baking cookies, brownies or other treats. Contact: [Nancy Sheftel-Gomes, hamotzi@sherithisrael.org](mailto:Nancy.Sheftel-Gomes@sherithisrael.org), to shop, pick up donations, cook or deliver.

### SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

To volunteer to support our work with immigrants and refugees, and senior and homeless housing, contact [Karen Alschuler, kalschuler@gmail.com](mailto:Karen.Alschuler@gmail.com), or [Stacy Passman, spassman@gmail.com](mailto:Stacy.Passman@gmail.com).

### CHESED COMMITTEE

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

# PURIM BCE\*



**\*Before Corona Epidemic:** Our Purim Shabbat and Purim Carnival in early March were the last major congregational events where we could all be together.



## Action Report

### CHAPLAIN (MAJOR) DAVID FROMMER'S NATIONAL GUARD DEPLOYMENT

*Cantor David Frommer, a chaplain with the rank of major in the California Army National Guard, was deployed in March to assist with operations in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Here's an overview of his situation as of late April:*

**Unit.** 115th Regional Support Group, a brigade-level unit in the California Army National Guard headquartered in Roseville, northeast of Sacramento, about 100 miles from San Francisco.

**Mission.** The 115th RSG partners with the 195th Air National Guard Wing to provide command and control for Joint Task Force 115, the state's COVID-19 response mission. The task force numbers over 900 soldiers and airmen from units across the California Military Department. It assists with providing vital services and resources through work at food banks, homeless shelters, medical warehouses and quarantine facilities.

**Number of other chaplains deployed.** Four: three Protestants and a Greek Orthodox priest. All are supported by three enlisted chaplain assistants and one chaplain candidate (trainee).

**Duties.** Every military chaplain has two primary responsibilities: supporting personnel and advising the commander. Supporting personnel entails visits at various sites to offer counseling and to make sure any religious needs are provided for—a worship service, sacred text or food to comply with dietary restrictions. Advising the commander involves

providing input on issues related to faith, ethics and morale, as well as serving as a trusted conduit of information between the commander and the field. As a brigade-level chaplain, Chaplain Frommer also supervises chaplains in subordinate units, assuring they have needed resources and are geographically arrayed to cover as many service members as possible.

**Service of non-Jewish personnel.** The majority of personnel are not Jewish. Chaplain Frommer cannot lead worship services for them but can offer non-denominational prayers and provide generalized counseling and support. He also provides non-Jewish personnel with resources to practice their faith, like facilitating attendance at worship services led by Christian chaplains, delivering a prayer rug to a Muslim service member or providing a Bible in Spanish.

**Passover.** Chaplain Frommer led a Seder for fifteen military and civilian personnel at a makeshift skilled nursing facility for COVID-19-positive patients. Only one attendee was Jewish. For many, the Seder was their first, and they were immensely appreciative. Normally the Army would have provided

all the food, but this was last-minute, so Chaplain Frommer purchased it himself, including take-out matzah ball soup.

**Getting home.** For the first three weeks, Chaplain Frommer went home every seven days. After his responsibilities shifted, he slept at home more, staying in Roseville two to three times a week.

**Biggest challenge.** Safety. Service members have had to expose themselves to a public health risk the nation is just beginning to understand. By extension, that exposes their families. Military personnel are used to assuming personal risk, but risk usually doesn't extend to their loved ones. That poses a difficult issue as they decide whether to stay separated or return home to help their families during the mission. There's no easy answer, but Chaplain Frommer serves as a key resource for those conversations.

**Observation.** "I never imagined we'd be sheltering in place for my last few months at Sherith Israel, but I'm grateful for the opportunity to have served both our members and the soldiers of California in new ways during these challenging times." ■



**LET ALL WHO ARE HUNGRY:** Chaplain (Major) David Frommer led a seder for members of his National Guard team. The fact that just one of the attendees was Jewish only emphasized the universal message of Passover.



**MAJOR SCHLEP:** Even the brigade chaplain pitched in when there were sacks of potatoes to move.



In this time when we need real science and good information, Sherith Israel physicians and health workers have stepped up. Maximum *k'vod* to all our medical professionals on the front lines, making telemedicine calls or doing basic science to move us closer to a cure or a vaccine. And thanks to UCSF rheumatologist **Dr. Jonathan Graf** for introducing us to congregants **Dr. Erin Gordon**, a UCSF pulmonologist, and **Dr. Meghan Marmor**, a Stanford pulmonologist, on their terrific April 29 Zoom panel, COVID-19: A Conversation from the Front Line...

Also helping people understand the public health implications of COVID-19 is **Dr. Jeremy Faust**, son of **Susan** and **Leland Faust** and a CSI confirmand. Jeremy, an ER physician at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston and an instructor at Harvard Medical School, has been interviewed on CNN, MSNBC, CNBC and BBC America and has written for the *Washington Post*, *Slate*, *Scientific American* and *The Atlantic*. With his calm presentation, Dr. Faust may become the next generation's Dr. Fauci...

Retiring, but not shy: MDs **Thierry** and **Valerie Jahan** are hanging up their shingles this June. Thierry has specialized in thoracic oncology at the UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center. Pediatrician Valerie has been in private practice in Foster City. Daughter **Lillian** will carry on the Jahan family medical tradition when she starts nursing school at Penn in June...

Sherith Israel in the news: Executive director **Gordon Gladstone** has been interviewed about how congregations have adapted to the coronavirus shelter-in-place orders by *j. Weekly*, NBC Bay Area, *SF Examiner* and CBS News. Let's hope September stories describe plans for High Holidays in our beautiful sanctuary...

The week before Passover **Nancy Sheftel-Gomes** offered bakers a deal: use up your hametz and do the mitzvah of baking cookies for HaMotzi. Thanks to everyone who answered her call with sweet treats: **Ardis Breslauer**, **Heather Cowan**, **Carole DeNola**, **Diane Fellman**, **Jeri Hart**, **Miriam Kasdan** and **Roxie**, **Zack Migdail**, **Mary Montella**, **Ellen Newman**, **Laura Olson**, **Jeanette Quick**, **Terrie Raphael**, the **Recht-Appel** family, **Mindy Rosenberg**, **Ellen Schumm**, **Michaela Shaw**, **Andrea Steiner** and **Julia Weston**. Thanks also for fruit and vegetable donations from **Stephanie Galinson**, **Wendi Stern** and **Star Route Farms**, and to shoppers **Valerie Jahan** and **Bradley** and **Teresa Graham**...

Mazel tov to development professional **Jeremy Benjamin**, newly appointed as executive director of the Pacific Northwest Region for Hebrew University...

**Ingrid Apter** has been honored for her work as an environmental science educator by NatureBridge, which introduces students to the natural world. Ingrid, who has loved nature since her youth in Germany, has worked with NatureBridge for more than 20 years. Check out Ingrid's story at [naturebridge.org](http://naturebridge.org)...

Congratulations to illustrator, author and cartoonist **Lisa Brown**, who has two new books out. *The Phantom Twin* is a sweetly spooky graphic novel. And in *Long Story Short*, Lisa offers 100 pithy three-panel literary summaries of books like *Don Quixote*, *Jane Eyre*, *Beloved* and *Twilight*—perfect browsing material for the twilight days of sheltering in place...

Congratulations also go to our graduating teens starting college this fall: **Abraham Baldonado**, Temple University; **Rosie Bell**, UC Berkeley; **Asher Etlin**, Tulane University; **Abe Feldman**, University of Kansas; **Ollie Feldman**, Lewis and Clark; and **Jake Himelstein**, UC Berkeley. We hope that starting college actually means going away...

**Rabbi Jessica Graf** reports that her favorite part of home-schooling **Ari** (5) and **Zach** (3) is outdoor ed. "We have had so much fun taking our very energetic kids on bike rides and hikes almost every day. They have built forts, climbed trees, biked and scooted up and down the hills of San Francisco..."

For quieter moments, **Susan Faust**, former librarian at the Katherine Delmar Burke School and the *SF Chronicle's* children's book columnist, suggested some books with a Jewish connection that might help young kids (and their grown-ups) get through shelter-in-place. These riveting reads nurture what we all need now—imagination, perseverance, compassion and hope:

**How I Learned Geography** by Uri Shulevitz (ages 4–8): A young Jewish refugee survives war in Kazakhstan with little food but a map to feed his imagination.

**No Truth Without Ruth: The Life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg** by Kathleen Krull and illustrated by Nancy Zhang (ages 4–6): Personal and societal challenges do not derail Ginsburg's trajectory to the U.S. Supreme Court.

**It Could Always Be Worse: A Yiddish Folk Tale** by Margot Zemach (ages 3–6): The frustrations of living in an overcrowded one-room hut send a man to the village rabbi for advice.

**Noah's Ark** by Jerry Pinkney (ages 5–8): It rains for forty days and nights. Noah saves the world's animals in this early shelter-in-place tale that ends with a rainbow.

**White Bird** by R. J. Palacio (ages 8–12): A crippled French boy hides a Jewish girl during World War II in this graphic novel based on a family history. ■

By the News Nosh, aka Ellen Newman.

Please send bits and bites of gossip to [ellennewman@earthlink.net](mailto:ellennewman@earthlink.net). Be sure to put "News Nosh" in the subject line.



The coronavirus hasn't shut down the vital work that the Sherith Israel community does to meet the needs of our members and the broader community. HaMotzi and Chicken Soupers continue to feed the hungry; our social action committee is working to protect immigrants and refugees; and our Chesed and membership committees have joined with the clergy to reach out to congregants to make sure that everyone feels connected.

## HAMOTZI AND CHICKEN SOUPERS

**"As long as the shelters need and want the food, and we have the people to do it, we'll do it,"** says Nancy Sheftel-Gomes. "And they do want the food." HaMotzi has adapted to the crisis. "We don't have more than four people in the kitchen; the rest work in the pavilion," she says. "Everyone wears gloves and masks, changes disposable aprons and washes hands regularly. Deliverers wear gloves to prevent transmission." Meals are less elaborate. "There's no egg salad," Nancy laughs, "because it's impossible to peel eggs with gloves on."

The crisis has forced changes in how we get food. Safeway donation pickups were paused because there was no telling how many hands had touched packages. On the other hand, some new food sources opened up. Star Route Farms, an organic grower supplying many local restaurants, started distributing food boxes to organizations and individuals when its restaurant business dried up. "I was able to get four boxes of little gem lettuces," Nancy reports.

Even people sheltering at home have stepped up. When Nancy put out a call for cookies, nearly two dozen people delivered several hundred cookies to the synagogue for HaMotzi distribution. Nancy had been concerned about canceling the congregational seder because HaMotzi depends on the funds for half of its operating budget. But, according to executive director **Gordon Gladstone**, the congregation stepped up generously. We took in as much as we normally would without the expenses of an in-person seder.

## SOCIAL ACTION

**"We're not going out,"** says social action committee co-chair **Karen Alschuler**, **"but we're still getting it done."** The committee's work on immigration, healthcare and housing has continued unabated during the coronavirus crisis. One new initiative arises from our partnership with the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity (IM4HI) to create a Nueva Esperanza Accompaniment Team. We are moving beyond courtroom accompaniment to multifaceted support for immigrant families. IM4HI trains faith groups to support newly arrived immigrants and their families. Seven CSI volunteers took that training and now support a young family whose father is just out of detention.

In April our volunteers met by Zoom with the parents and their 9-month old daughter and listened to their primary needs. Whether it was workmen's comp support, addressing healthcare needs or finding household items, our team went right into action. We are partnered with Saint Mary the Virgin Episcopal Church, a terrific team we've known for years through our courtroom accompaniment.

With the need to move many more vulnerable people out of overcrowded detention centers, Karen reports that this work may model a whole new population group for Nueva Esperanza.



**FEEDING THE HUNGRY:** HaMotzi volunteers observe the mitzvah of social distancing while packaging meals for our shelter clients.

anza. CSI social action volunteers also continue to engage with Faith in Action to advocate for housing for the homeless and seniors, a critical need during the coronavirus pandemic.

Finally, we will join RAC-CA, part of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, in some virtual lobbying at the State Legislature this May. Former CSI rabbi **Julie Saxe-Taller** leads Reform CA's efforts. Karen encourages anyone interested in joining the lobbying effort—or any of the committee's other projects—to contact her or co-chair **Stacy Passman** at [kalschuler@gmail.com](mailto:kalschuler@gmail.com) or [spassman@gmail.com](mailto:spassman@gmail.com). ■

## CHESED AND MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEES CONNECTING CONGREGANTS

**As Sherith Israel's doors shut, a campaign opened to make sure congregants stayed connected to the synagogue.** Coordinated by membership and development manager **Nia Taylor**, the clergy and members of the Chesed and membership committees took lists of congregants and are working to check in with every member of the congregation.

The Chesed committee's list included mostly older members. Co-chairs **Helen Luey** and **Janet Parker** note that most people appreciated the calls. According to Helen, very few people expressed real needs, although some were connected to food deliveries from HaMotzi. Compared to earlier rounds of outreach, Helen and Janet find that more people are picking up their phones. **Christina Jefferson**, chair of the membership committee, agrees. "People are lonely and are glad we're reaching out."

Janet praises Nia's leadership. "She has been fierce about not letting outreach slip." Nia explains that her goal is that everyone in the congregation be contacted. She adds that people have been calling her to ask how they can help. The committee chairs see long-term benefits. "We're building personal relationships," says Christina. Janet adds, "Outreach strengthens our congregants' sense that they are part of a real community that cares about them." ■

## SUSTAINING COMMUNITY, from page 6

Being online has also provided fresh opportunities for content. On April 17, instead of a rabbi's drash, Cantor Frommer presented a slide show illustrating what he's been doing as a chaplain for the Army National Guard during the crisis. (*For more on Cantor Frommer's deployment, see page 10.*)

**Torah Study moved smoothly into the virtual world.** Led by **Rabbi Abby Phelps** (screen name "Hillel") and **Cantor David Frommer**, the Saturday morning sessions have attracted close to 50 participants, double the typical in-person crowd. Every session has included several people from beyond the Bay Area, including Rabbi Phelps' parents in Seattle, and congregants and former congregants from as far as Mexico City and Lima, Peru.

In some ways, Torah Study regular **Tracy Boxer Zill** is enjoying it more. He praises Rabbi Phelps for preparing and guiding the study sessions. Tracy also notes the increased participation. "And the coffee is better," he adds.

**Expanded programming includes panel discussions taking advantage of our congregation's medical and other expertise.** The first online program was an April 29 panel discussion—*COVID-19: A Conversation from the Front Line*. The panel was

chaired by **Dr. Jonathan Graf**, professor of medicine at UCSF and an internist and rheumatologist at Zuckerberg San Francisco General and UCSF Medical Centers. Joining him were **Dr. Meghan Marmor**, a pulmonologist and critical-care physician and clinical assistant professor of medicine at Stanford University with a focus in chronic lung infections; and **Dr. Erin Gordon**, a physician-scientist who studies airway epithelial dysfunction in asthma. They brought the perspectives of their specialties to key clinical and public health issues and answered questions about many of our most critical concerns. More than 120 congregants logged on. A second program on May 6 included CSI confirmand **Dr. Jeremy Faust**, an emergency physician at Boston's Brigham & Women's Hospital.

**Peter Bonos believes this is a "great time to catch up and build our online presence."** We've created a new Congregation Sherith Israel Community Facebook group open to all congregants and other community members by invitation.

Gordon sums up the evolving challenge of managing online programming: "Does it feed our core mission? Is a program going to connect people?" Judging from the results so far, Sherith Israel is meeting the challenge. ■

## PASSAGES

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

### NEW BABIES

**Laura Helen Gould**, child of Pauline & Doug Gould

### NEW MEMBERS

**Fran Schecter**

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](mailto:ggladstone@sherithisrael.org).

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

**Leonard Berniker**, father of Shelley Berniker, father-in-law of Erik Shepherd, and grandfather of Olive

**Carole Cohen**, sister of Marilyn Allen

**Larry Dohan**, uncle of Dan Dohan and Phaedra Bell

**Ellie Gindoff**, cousin of Ellen and David Newman

**Lev Kheyfets** and **Riva Pheigin**, cousins of Laura and Steve Olson

**Shirley Rochman**, mother of Richard Rochman and mother-in-law of Ashley Rochman

**Art Rosenberg**, husband of Gayle Rosenberg, father of Jill Rosenberg and Steve Rosenberg, father-in-law of Melissa Fully, and grandfather of Violet and Dylan

**Abby Arlene Verbin**, sister of Lynn Baron and sister-in-law of Kenneth Baron



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## *Cantor Frommer Farewell Tribute*

**Saturday, May 30, 7–8 pm  
via Zoom**

Honor Cantor David Frommer and wish him and his family well as they prepare to head to West Point. Share memories, send messages and enjoy music at our festive Zoom-a-bration as we all say *l'hitraot*—see you later.

*Include your greetings in our tribute book for Cantor Frommer. Visit [sherithisrael.org/tribute](http://sherithisrael.org/tribute) or email Nia Taylor, [ntaylor@sherithisrael.org](mailto:ntaylor@sherithisrael.org).*



**We salute Cantor David Frommer on his appointment to the position of Jewish chaplain at the United States Military Academy at West Point.**