

Shir Ami News

The Monthly Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami
4529 Malabar Avenue, Castro Valley, CA 94546
(call (510) 537-1787 for a recording of upcoming events)

Please visit our website at

www.congshirami.org

Affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism Congregations
January, 2009



Jan 4	School – K through Confirmation	Jan 26	Rosh Chodesh – 7:30 PM
Jan 9	Shabbat Services – 8 PM Led by Matt Dreffin	Feb 1	School – K through Confirmation
Jan 10	Havdalah & Israeli Movie – 7 PM	Feb 6	Children’s Shabbat – 6 PM Potluck Dinner – 6:45 PM Shabbat Services – 8 PM Led by Matt Dreffin
Jan 11	School – Preschool through Confirmation	Feb 7	Havdalah & Israeli Movie – 7 PM
Jan 14	Adult Ed – 7 PM Book Study Group	Feb 8	School – Preschool through Confirmation Tu B’ Shevat Seder – 5 PM
Jan 15	Board Meeting – 7 PM	Feb 11	Adult Ed – 7 PM Book Study Group
Jan 18	No School	Feb 12	Board Meeting – 7 PM
Jan 19	MLK Interfaith March – 10 AM Hayward City Hall	Feb 15	No School
Jan 23	Interfaith Shabbat Service – 8PM Led by Suzy Stone	Feb 20	NOTE CHANGE: No Shabbat Services
Jan 24	Religious Committee Mtg – 10 AM Adult Ed – 3:30 PM	Feb 20-22	Women’s Retreat
Jan 25	School – Preschool through Confirmation	Feb 22	NOTE CHANGE: No School

President's Message

Ruth Hartman

Dear Shir Ami members and friends,

As we enter 2009, we face hard times.

Our community includes people struggling with long-term unemployment, underemployment, and concern about possible job loss. Some of us have suffered severe financial losses in the stock market decline.

Some among us have recently lost a parent; several others have parents who are terminally ill. Several of us are facing serious illness or disability. Some are concerned about the mental health of those we love—an often hidden struggle that affects many families.

For all the hope that many of us feel about the new administration being inaugurated this month in Washington, the political, economic, environmental, and foreign policy challenges facing our country are unprecedented. Very difficult challenges also confront Israel, as violence in Gaza escalates and hopes for a political settlement of the Palestinian conflict have yet to be realized.

So now that we are all thoroughly depressed and panicked... what does Judaism, and our Jewish community, offer us in these times?

I won't insult your intelligence with easy reassurances. Religion is not always a force for good in the world. Absolute religious certainty and ethnic particularism have been the source of many conflicts throughout history.

But the Jewish people has survived for thousands of years by cultivating a body of wisdom about the nature of human relationships (with God and each other), the call to justice and righteousness, and the value of community. Our traditions of study, activism, and community service have enabled us to make contributions to the world far beyond our numbers. And these qualities, these contributions, are needed more now than ever before.

I heard someone say on TV the other day that in time of economic crisis, people tend to withdraw from group affiliation and become more isolated. I'd like to invite you, in these difficult times, to make a different choice. To join me in deciding in the coming year to engage even more, to discover how our 5000-year tradition, which has seen us through many crises in the past, can help us support each other through—and perhaps even find new opportunities in—what lies ahead.

Ruth Hartman

president@congshirami.org

Rabbis' Corner

Matt Dreffin

Suzy Stone

While I lived in Israel, my roommate and I subscribed to the basic cable service as our television provider. Our selection of new channels in English was limited at first to SkyNews (a British network) and CNN. After only a short period of time, the cable provider decided to replace CNN due to their negative portrayal of Israel. We were forced to watch Fox News Channel for our information from back home, a station that is skewed in another direction completely.

In all times, but especially in those as tough as now, it is important that we support our brethren across the world. One of the ways in which we can do that is to stay properly informed. It is important that we receive our information from several sources, understanding that there is not only one side to this story. The conflict in the region is extremely complicated. The history of the deep-seated mentality of conflict goes back beyond memory.

When the history of this incendiary conflict is studied (a subject every Jew should be familiar with) several incidents stand out. There are linchpin incidents that light periods of catastrophic violence. These events are usually not the actual cause of the violence, but an occurrence that tops longer periods of time where bad policies or unethical practices have been enforced. Much like the truce, there are periods of calm where the leaders attempt to find a solution. There is almost always one little hang-up in negotiations or a miscue entering a cabin (such as the incident with Yasser Arafat at Camp David). Every time an opportunity is missed, the conflict drags on longer, and it seems it will be even harder to make a compromise.

So as we see the violence unfolding, we can do several things. We can become educated about the nature of the conflict. Only through education can we participate in positive and helpful dialogue. Secondly, and no less important, we can send our thoughts and prayers to the victims and their families. May they find comfort and peace, and may God seek to give these peoples the gift of understanding, so that they may finally live in harmony.

Matt

Feedback: The Good and the Difficult

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Los Angeles is the graduate school that our student rabbis attend. In the interests of helping our students learn and grow while at their student pulpits, the school has asked us to provide regular, written feedback to the students and their advisors. Diana Zankowsky (dzankowsky@aol.com) will collect and convey that feedback. Please communicate both positive and corrective feedback to Diana, no later than Tuesday after a rabbi's visit. Thank you in advance for contributing to our student rabbis' educations.



January 4th – Kindergarten to Confirmation
January 9th (Friday) – 5th – 7th graders Shabbat Service
January 11th – Preschool to Confirmation
January 18th – No School: Martin Luther King Holiday
January 25th – Preschool to Confirmation

First, Happy New Year! Here's to making great experiences in 2009 at Congregation Shir Ami. Some special events to watch for this year will be a second Children's Shabbat Service on Friday, Feb. 6th, K-4th grade participation in Shabbat services on Friday, March 6th, the annual Purim Carnival on Sunday, March 8th, and our school Passover Seder on Sunday, April 5th.

Second, thanks to all of you who helped make the Chanukah party successful. Thanks to Angie Ross and Matt Beckman for coming early to help set up, and for staying late to help clean up (and then they both ran a booth). Thanks to Barb Haber and Sharon Golembo for making the Sufganiyot. Thanks to Miron Goldgeil for providing a lovely Oneg. Thanks to Cheryl Solomon and Judy Brackin for staffing the mosaic magnet booth. Thanks to Irene and Carolyn Gilchriese for the great surprise of arriving just at the moment when I was thinking, "Gee, I could use a couple of extra people". Thanks to all of you who brought your children, and thanks as well to our Shir Ami teachers who are always there doing a fabulous job.

Third, I want to give an extra special Thank You to Diana Zankowsky for her continued support. I get an email from her most Saturdays before a school day asking if I need extra help (beyond her normal teaching duties). She fills in for staff at a moment's notice, covers morning prayers when the rabbis aren't there, has taken on my job occasionally to allow me extra time at home, and is a primary resource for questions regarding Jewish content.

Finally, a big thanks to our two rabbinic interns, Matt Dreffin and Suzy Stone. They have both done a great job supporting our school in 2008. I am looking forward to the ways they are sure to enrich our programs in 2009.

Important Schedule Change Note: Religious school will be cancelled on Sunday, February 22nd in order to allow Rabbi Suzy as well as several members of the teaching staff the opportunity to attend the Shir Ami women's retreat. I would like to encourage all of our wonderful Shir Ami women to use this occasion to experience the women's retreat. I have been lucky enough to attend for the last several years, and I find it to be a well orchestrated, inspirational, and relaxing good time. It is a great way to get to know each other and feel the support system that the women of Shir Ami embody.

With affection,
Jodi

Adult Education

Diana Zankowsky

In January, Congregation Shir Ami will continue to offer several different adult education classes and gatherings.

Shir Ami movie night brings to you "La'lechet al Ha'mayim," ("Walk on Water") a tale of a Mossad agent who is put into an unlikely situation. The film will give great insight about the Israeli mindset towards their enemies, as well as begin to touch on the issue of homosexuality in Modern-Israeli Culture. The film was directed by controversial and award winning Director, Eytan Fox. This wonderful film was nominated for 8 awards by the Israeli Film Academy and won 2 of them. See you there on Saturday, January 10th at 7pm! Snacks and a group debriefing will follow.

Our once-monthly book study group will continue our study of Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts, edited by Barry W. Holtz. Last month we took a break and went on a field trip to Congregation Beth Emek to participate in an interfaith discussion. This month, on January 14th, we will conclude our study of the first chapter, The Biblical Narrative, pages 31-81. This text, recommended by the URJ as one of the best books, will help us to learn how to read and study Bible, Midrash, Talmud and other writings. Please email Diana Zankowsky, dzankowsky@aol.com, to learn the location of the class.



Judy Ganz continues to teach the weekly "Learning Hebrew through Prayer" class, for those who already have basic literacy skills. Please contact Judy at jbganz@aol.com if you are interested in joining.

Rabbinic Intern Suzy Stone will discuss Parashah Va-era during her adult education session on the Saturday, January 24th from 3:30 to 5pm. During this week's Torah study, we will be learning some new, and old, techniques for studying Torah vis-à-vis this week's Torah portion.

Our on-going monthly class for adults interested in conversion to Judaism will continue to meet on Saturdays. Contact Diana Zankowsky, dzankowsky@aol.com, for more information or if you are interested in joining.

Sisterhood/Rosh Chodesh Group

Jan Dombrower



Sisterhood:

Wow, what a bash!! The all Shir Ami Hanukkah party sponsored by Sisterhood was a wonderful event! With about 50 in attendance, we ate, lit Candles, sang, visited, and danced.

First, when everyone arrived they set up their Menorahs. Latkas were served and there wasn't even one left when we were about to light the candles. Then, Tyler Dean led us in Havdallah, playing his guitar. The singing was a beautiful sound.

Rose and Hillie came for the candle lighting, but had to leave early to make their reservation for their 59th wedding anniversary celebration. We all sang "Happy Anniversary to You" to them.

Then, we lit the Hanukkah candles for the seventh night. There were at least a dozen and a half Menorahs. Again, led by Tyler Dean, we sang the Hanukkah prayers and the candles were lit. It was a beautiful sight. We turned off the lights and enjoyed the glow.

The desserts were then put out. We had cookies, cakes, candies, donuts, and a chocolate fountain! We drank hot apple cider and soft drinks. Everything was delicious.

In separate rooms, we had craft activities and the dreidel game. Young people were participating in making Hanukkah crafts and playing dreidel with gelt. The sanctuary was set up in a night club style. There were card tables and chairs where people sat to talk, eat, and listen. The front of the sanctuary was left open for dancing.

At 8:00 the live band struck it up. The Bluesbottle Band was lively, entertaining, and enjoyable. People of all ages were dancing. The first on the floor were little ones, spinning and jumping to the beat. Teens joined in as well as adults. The dance floor was full much of the time. Everyone had an enjoyable time. It was a great way to spend Hanukkah together.

I want to thank the committee led by myself, Jan Dombrower, consisting of Harriet Skelly and Lilly Erickson. The three of us met to plan the schedule and events of the party. We shopped, set up

the night club setting, put out the food, kept the schedule of events going, and cleaned up. Thank you so much!! You did a great job.

Thanks also go to Barbara Heimowitz for ordering the crafts and putting out the E-vite and to Sharon Golemba who provided all the drinks and the ice chest! Thanks to all of you who brought the delicious latkas and desserts. It contributed to a very tasty party.

Rosh Chodesh:

Please note that January's Rosh Chodesh has been changed to **Monday, January 26th**. It will be held at the home of Diana Zankowsky at 7:30. We will have a program on one aspect of the Kabbalah (Jewish mystical tradition). Look for an email closer to the date for a reminder. Hope to see you there.

Our annual retreat is coming up on Feb 20-22 in the Santa Cruz mountains. All women of Shir Ami and our surrounding communities are welcome to come. We are in the planning stages now for an exciting, meaningful, and fun weekend. Please see the flyer in this bulletin. Please register by January 20. Hope you can join us.

The Tzedakah Box A Social Action Column

*Sara Lamnin
Daryl Berman*



MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
Martin Luther King Rally and Peace Walk,
January 19, 2009 9:30am.
Hayward City Hall, 777 B Street.

SHIR AMI BULLETIN BOARD



PCW REGIONAL BIENNIAL/KALLAH REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!

As Jews throughout the world join today in celebration of Hanukkah—A Festival of Rededication and Light, the Pacific Central West Council of the Union for Reform Judaism wishes you a joyous holiday. The URJ-PCW Council is offering you a gift: a new kind of Biennial designed to meet our congregation's most important needs. Over the last year, the URJ listened to our leadership and has learned that we have three areas of critical need: help with synagogue management, finance, and membership. In addition to the usual workshops and opportunities for community, there will be intensive seminars in these three areas. There are a variety of registration packages to reduce the cost. Registration for the Biennial begins today. [Click here for Kallah FAQ and Program-Registration materials.](#) The Biennial-Kallah includes:

- Inspiring worship which incorporating aspects of the Shabbat Initiative launched at the URJ Biennial in San Diego
- A community art project led by Artist-In-Residence, Nancy Katz.
- A Friday Evening Song Session
- An opportunity to discuss the results of the interviews with the URJ Consultant, Amy Asin and a preview of next steps for our region

Registration to the Biennial/Kallah Weekend is open to all who wish to attend. On-line registration will be available in early January and we will be notified when that service is available. Meanwhile, registration and program materials can be [DOWNLOADED](#) now. Registration for guest rooms at the [Santa Clara Marriott](#) Hotel is also available. [This link](#) is pre-programmed with the URJ's special promotional code for the deeply-discounted guest room rate.

If you have questions, please contact Linda Feldman at the URJ office in San Francisco via email at <mailto:Lfeldman@urj.org> or by phone at (415) 392-7080 x 20.

The Community Page

January, 2009

Yahrzheits:

January 9, 2009

Joseph Bressler, father of Florrie Finkle
Peter Rosenberg, uncle of Alex Druker
Helen Rosner, long time active member of Shir Ami

January 23, 2009

Tyler Brooke, father of Toni Schulberg
Cecilia Kramer, grandmother of Marion Kramer

Kaddish List: (to be read at both services in January)

Sheila Arthur, former member of Shir Ami
Lazarus Lewis, father of Peter Lewis
Betya Druker, mother of Alex Druker
Sy Moubert, longtime former member of Shir Ami
Chris Partridge, son of Ricki Weintraub (Baird), former members of Shir Ami

May their memory be a blessing...

Ever wonder how the names read out loud for Yahrzeit and Kaddish at Friday night services get on that list? If you are a member of Shir Ami, and want a personal reminder for the Yahrzeit of a loved one, just send Toni Schulberg the following information: the name of the deceased; the relationship of that person to the member of Shir Ami; the full date (month, day, year) that person died; and whether you want to use the Hebrew or English calendar for their Yahrzeit (Toni will look up the Hebrew date for you). Questions? Call Toni at 278-1695 or e-mail her at yahrzeit@congshirami.org



TODAH RABAH TO OUR ONEG HOSTS

For December 5th: donation from Sofia & Simon Blank
For December 12th: Helen & Noah Markus

TODAH RABAH FOR THESE GENEROUS DONATIONS:

- From Marlene Balmforth: in Honor of her parents, Ann and Sam Blank at Chanukah.
- From Alex and Irina Druker: In Memory of the Yahrzheits for: Joseph Druker, Isaac Rosenberg, Dora Alperovich, and Meshka Druker.
- From Joel Permison: in Memory of Rose Permison's Yahrzeit.
- From Florrie Finkle: in Memory of Joseph Bressler.

A contribution to Shir Ami is a great way to honor, remember, or show appreciation for someone special. It's easy. Send a check and note to:
Florrie Finkle, 18730 West Cavendish, Castro Valley, CA 94552
Florrie will send a card to the person you are honoring and your dedication will appear on this page.



TODAH RABAH

- To the following people for their work on the Chanukah party: Harriet Skelly, Lilly Erickson and Jan Dombrower for putting together the party; Barbara Heimowitz for ordering the crafts and sending out the E-vite; Tyler Dean for leading us on guitar in Havdallah and the Chanukah blessings.
- To Noah Markus for coordinating the installation of new side gates protecting the back parking lot and backyard areas at Shir Ami. These new gates will improve our security and improve our appearance as well. Thanks also to Art Liskewicz for his help with pruning work to make room for the gates!



WHAT'S NU?

- Mazel Tov to Rose and Hillie Levine on their 59th wedding anniversary.
- Michael Heimowitz had a wonderful experience exploring Israel on the Birthright program. He highly recommends it to 18-26 year-olds!
- Debbie Heimowitz just finished working as a line producer on a feature film called, "Raspberry Magic." Danielle Keil and her daughter Sarah were extras in the movie, as were Stan and Barbara Heimowitz!
- Diana Zankowsky has published a story on the Interfaith Family website, titled "The Gift We Couldn't Refuse", about receiving a Christmas tree from her mother-in-law via UPS. You can read the story at http://www.interfaithfamily.com/holidays/hanukkah_and_christmas/The_Gift_We_Couldnt_Refuse.shtml

It is with great sadness that we share the news of Sheila Arthur's passing on Dec. 26th from cancer. Funeral services will take place at 11 am on Friday, January 2nd in the Chapel of HOME OF PEACE CEMETERY, 1299 El Camino Real, Colma, CA. 94014

Jan Dombrower wanted to share with you her letter to Sheila's son Alan Lawson:

Dear Alan,

I was sad to hear of your mom's passing and I know it is hard to lose a parent. I am sorry for this profound loss. I wanted to share some experiences I had with your mom. I met her at Congregation Shir Ami in Castro Valley. Sheila and I shared the same birthday, April 7th. While she lived in the Bay Area, we celebrated together with a meal and always a card or a call. I also went to a few birthday gatherings for her. When she moved, we usually sent birthday e-cards to each other.

I went to your mom's wedding to Gus. She was like a blushing bride. I can see the picture of her with her flower girls. She looked beautiful and was so happy.

Our sisterhood gave your mom a bridal shower. We each gave her a Jewish ritual item as a gift. She was so pleased with these beautiful pieces of Judaica.

Your mom and Gus loved Shir Ami. She expressed to me on many occasions that the small community was so warm and embracing. It enriched her Judaism and contributed to her Jewish growth.

She came to our women's retreat one year. She and I were roommates. She often referred to that experience as some kind of accomplishment...

Whenever I saw your mom and Gus the many times they visited Shir Ami after they had moved, they always had these big smiles... I found it really easy to talk to your mom because she was so open and non-judgmental. I remember when she told me about meeting Gus and their courtship. We had many nice discussions. I enjoyed her good sense of humor, as well.

After Sheila became sick, during services, I would often say her name aloud before the Misheberach prayer – the prayer for healing. I will continue to say your mom's name aloud now in the Kaddish prayer – the mourner's prayer.

*My thoughts are with you, her family and Gus. All the best Alan, you had a great mom.
Warm Regards, Jan Dombrower*

- To contact Alan: ajlawson@pacbell.net or 925-513-1251

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Donations:

General Funds, Special Funds,
Wall Plaques
Florrie Finkle
mailto:donations@congshirami.org

Vayechi (and it came to pass)

On his death bed, Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to some their role as a tribe leader: Judah will produce legislators and kings. Although Levi and Shimon were rebuked, priests will come from Levi. Scholars will be produced by Issachar, seafarers by Zebulun, and schoolteachers by Shimon. Soldiers will come from the tribe of Gad, and judges from Dan. Olive growers will be the legacy of Asher, and Naphtali shall deliver words of beauty. Joseph is granted the blessings of fertility. Benjamin is likened to a wolf and spoiler.



Services at Shir Ami will be held on
Friday, January 9th at 8:00 PM
and will be led by

Matt Dreffin

Bring a friend to the Temple

Paresha Vaera (Appeared)
The Lord appeared...

"I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians
and I will deliver you from their bondage...."



Michelangelo's Moses

Services at Shir Ami
Friday January 23th, 2009

Led by
Suzy Stone

Religious Committee Meeting Saturday, January 24 at 10<00 AM

**Join Us for the *Thirteenth* Annual
Shir Ami Women's Retreat**

**Finding My Voice
Exploring My Values
Creating My Vision**

Friday, February 20 – Sunday, February 22, 2009

At the beautiful Sequoia Retreat Center
Ben Lomond, California

You are warmly invited to experience this weekend of
friendship, worship, creativity, inspiration, and play.
A great way to expand your Jewish women's connection.
Newcomers are *very* welcome.

Questions? Ruth Hartman: 510-582-3379 or ruth@wordcraft.com.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Congregation: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I enclose a check for \$275, OR

I enclose a deposit of \$_____. I will pay the balance on _____.

I need a ride.

I have the following special needs (mobility, vegetarian, etc.):

Make check payable to **Ruth Hartman** and mail by **1/15/2009** to:
18850 Cull Canyon Road, Castro Valley, CA 94552