



# CONGREGATION SHIR AMI

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Congregation Shir Ami in Castro Valley is an intimate, intergenerational Reform Jewish Community that welcomes interfaith families.  
Affiliated with the [Union for Reform Judaism](#)

## DECEMBER 2013 (Kislev~Tevet 5774)

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### Accessing the Bulletin

If you read the Bulletin on the Shir Ami website you probably have noticed that the pictures look "odd." This is due to the way the website functions, to help insure that it is not slow-to-load. If you download the Bulletin to your computer and read it, the pictures should be fine.

I am interested in how you read or do *not* read the Bulletin. Please think about what would be helpful for you. Let me know your thoughts by email .

I would also like to give a BIG thank you to all you who contribute articles and photos for the Bulletin, and to those who proofread for me. You are a treasure.

Rose Firestone  
[editor@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:editor@CongShirAmi.org).

**Men's Group at Lake Chabot with Rabbi Benj**  
(See more photos from Milt on the last page of this Bulletin)



## Event Calendar

- Sun. Dec. 1 5:00 pm [Chanukah celebration](#): potluck and candle lighting. Bring your family and friends!
- Wed. Dec. 4 7:00 pm [Rosh Chodesh/Sisterhood](#): Chanukah dinner and gift exchange at Bettina Skehan's home.
- Fri. Dec. 6 7:30 pm [Shabbat Service](#): led by Benj Fried.
- Sat. Dec. 7 2:00 pm [Book Discussion](#): *The Sabbath*. Led by Benj Fried.
- Sat. Dec. 7 4:00 pm [Torah Tape](#): practice followed by Havdallah at 5:30. All are welcome. Led by Benj Fried.
- Sun. Dec. 8 11:30 am **Tot Talk**: held monthly, is FREE and is open to all families with children under 5 years old.
- Tue. Dec. 17 7:00 pm **Board of Directors Meeting**: all are welcome.
- Fri. Dec. 20 6:30 pm [Potluck Dinner at 6:30](#): A-S: main dish; T-Z: salad, side or dessert and **help with clean-up**.
- Fri. Dec. 20 7:30 pm [Shabbat Service at 7:30](#): led by Megan Brudney.
- Sun. Jan. 5 11:30 am **Tot Talk**: held monthly, is FREE and is open to all families with children under 5 years old.
- Sat. Jan. 18 12:00 pm [Tu BiSh'vat Luncheon](#): Save the date for this event. Reservations required.
- Tue. Jan. 21 7:00 pm **Board of Directors Meeting**: All are welcome.
- Fri.-Sun Feb 21-23 [Women's Retreat](#): Save the weekend for our 18th Annual retreat.
- Fri.-Sun Mar. 21-23 **Cantor-in-Residence**: Save the dates for Cantor Ken Cohen, leading services and classes throughout the weekend.



## Shir Ami Board of Directors



The Shir Ami Board of Directors meets monthly, on Tuesday evenings at 7:00 PM. Meetings are listed in the calendar and are open to all. You are welcome to join us.

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## President's Message

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### President's Message, December 2013

Shalom Shir Ami,

I'm realizing that this month marks the half-way point of our fiscal year, and the three-quarter point of my Presidency. Given this, I thought I'd use this month's message to reflect on a few of the lessons I've so far learned as your President.

The first – and one that should come at no surprise – is that volunteerism is the backbone of our Congregation. As I've often noted, Shir Ami accomplishes a tremendous amount in any given year, and usually far more than even Congregations up to ten times its size. This would not be possible without the hard work and selfless effort put forth by practically all of its members. In the past year and a half, my job as President has been to “make the ask”. And by this, I mean the ask for service. Whether it's helping out on our cleanup days, decorating the Sukkah, creating a flyer for one of our events, or serving as a Board Member, I appreciate that your response to my ask has always been a resounding “yes!” and I am grateful for the support all of you give our community.

If volunteerism is our Congregation's backbone, then communication is most certainly its blood flow. Communication brings not only information to and from Congregation members, but also a vitality that affirms and reinforces our sense of community. I am proud of all the recent improvements in communication that have occurred over the past few years (e.g. our new website, the weekly e-mail blasts, our Facebook page's notification of

Congregational simchas), and I am very impressed by those whose hard work has made these improvements a reality. I've also noticed that in instances when our communications have broken down, we endure illness and pain, limiting how effective our Congregation can be. The Board and I will continue to improve our communications skills, and are always appreciative of ideas and help on this important aspect.

One other lesson I've learned is that our community is so much larger than ourselves. By this, I'm referring to all of the interactions myself and others at Shir Ami have had with the larger Bay Area, national and international Jewish community. This month, four of our members will be attending the URJ Biennial, a celebration of life, ideas and creativity that brings together Reform Jews across the U.S. This opportunity to teach others about Shir Ami, and to learn from others about their practices and triumphs, will no doubt bring new energy, enthusiasm and knowledge to our Congregation. I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had as Shir Ami President to interact with this larger community, and I would encourage you to seek out such opportunities for your own enrichment.

Toda Raba v'Shalom  
(Thank you very much and I wish you peace),

Jon Zimmerman,  
[president@congshirami.org](mailto:president@congshirami.org)



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## School Notes

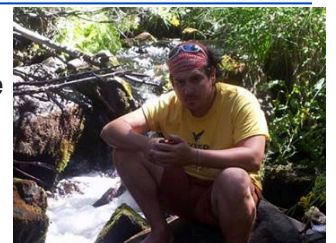
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I would like to personally say thank you to all of the teachers, TAs and volunteers who helped to **make** the Hanukkah faire a great time for our students. The kids enjoyed the singing, arts and crafts, and of course the food at Shir Ami. I especially enjoyed how creative everyone was with making edible menorahs.

Our school will resume on Sunday Dec. 8th.

I hope everyone enjoyed the unique opportunity to celebrate Hanukkah and Thanksgiving together.

Chag Sameach, Danny Farkas.



**December, 2013**

### **Chanukah Inspiration: Learning from the Maccabees**

We are all familiar with the basic Chanukah story—Seleucid Greek king Antiochus IV sacks Jerusalem (167 B.C.E.), the Temple is left in ruin, but in an act of bravery the Maccabees revolt and successfully reclaim the Temple (166 B.C.E.). They dedicate (the literal meaning of "Chanukah" in Hebrew) the Temple back to Adonai our God and even though they only find a tiny amount of oil to light their menorah, it miraculously lasts for 8 nights. The Maccabees are heroes and rule the sovereign Jewish state of Judea until the Romans conquer it in 63 B.C.E..

The history leading up to Antiochus IV's destructive campaign is absolutely fascinating. Under the Seleucid Greeks (who came to power around 200 B.C.E.) the Jews were living in a Hellenized society. The modern Jewish associations with that word are often quite negative—we imagine the Jews abandoning their Judaism and embracing Hellenism and its idolatry. However, in truth the key ideological concept of Hellenism was *fusion*: the tolerant and inclusive blending together of customs from a wide variety of different cultures. We know from Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus that at the start of his rule, Antiochus III (the father of Antiochus IV) was quite sympathetic to the Jewish cause. In *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus writes that Antiochus III offered the Jews tax breaks, allowed them to live under their own laws, and even published a decree insisting that all of his subjects respect the sanctity of our Temple. Antiochus III's acceptance of the Jewish legal code was particularly radical and not at all representative of status quo when incorporating a conquered territory. We plainly see that the Seleucids held the Jews in high esteem, and contemporaneously we see examples of Jews absorbing Hellenistic culture and repurposing it Judaically as well: First, approximately 2,000 Greek words appear in the Jewish texts recorded by the rabbis of the day. Second, we see the development of the synagogue—a new institution no doubt influenced by the Greek culture's emphasis on clubs and memberships. These examples show that the Jews actively incorporated Hellenistic ideas into their Jewish practice.

Unfortunately, this harmony was short-lived. In 167 B.C.E. Antiochus IV suddenly decreed an extreme edict barring the Jews from keeping Shabbat and, shockingly, dedicating our Temple to Zeus. This edict was not in any way an expression of Hellenistic values, but rather the brainchild of a dangerous and perhaps mentally unstable ruler. The Jews, led by the decidedly Hellenistic Maccabees, had no choice but to take up arms and defend their right to worship.

I believe that this give-and-take—as well as the red line that Antiochus IV trampled upon—is present in a microcosm in our own daily navigation of life as Jews in the United States. Every day we negotiate what it means to live a Jewish life in a culture where Jews are a minority. How much are others respecting our values and practices, and how are we utilizing greater cultural trends to promote or pursue stronger Jewish lives for ourselves and others? Each year at Chanukah we can look to the Maccabees for inspiration in recalibrating whether we are outwardly living our Judaism enough, whether we are taking advantage of opportunities to not just enjoy the majority American culture but also to apply it to strengthen our Jewish practices—and, of course, what for us crosses a line and spurs us to take action and fight injustice meted out upon ourselves or on others.

During this Chanukah time, I hope you too will be inspired by the bravery of the Maccabees in taking on a seemingly impossible fight—and winning.

Looking forward to seeing you December 20-22<sup>nd</sup>!

Student Rabbi Megan Brudney



Benj Fried  
[rabbi.benj@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:rabbi.benj@CongShirAmi.org)

### **Rabbinic Interns**



Megan Brudney  
[rabbi.megan@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:rabbi.megan@CongShirAmi.org)

## Adult Education with the Rabbis

### Saturday, December 7, Rabbi Benj

#### 2 pm: Book Discussion, *The Sabbath*

Rabbinic Intern Benj Fried will be discussing the book, *The Sabbath*, by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

#### 4 pm Torah Trope

Join Rabbi Benj from 4:00 to 5:30 pm. We will go over our Torah trope and practice. We will build off of Megan's class, but feel free to come if you didn't go to hers!

The class will conclude with Havdallah at 5:30.

### Saturday, December 21, Rabbi Megan

#### 2pm: Are You There, God?

This week's story of the burning bush will serve as a jumping off point for us to discuss ideas on God and react to some depictions of God in pop culture.

#### 4pm: Shalom! Mah Koreh? [Hello! How are you doing?]

Hebrew unites Jews around the world--so let's get in on the fun with some modern Hebrew conversation! Come to this super-introductory class to learn some basics. All vocabulary will be right in front of you in English characters to minimize intimidation and maximize speaking Hebrew. This is our second modern Hebrew class but beginners are still welcome.

## Shir Ami, November 2013

### Donations

Shir Ami thanks the following for their generous contributions in November.

- Noah and Helen Markus: in Memory of Deborah Mitchell, mother of Helen Markus; in Memory of Jeanette and Martin Brody and Sarah Leona Markus, grandparents of Noah Markus.
- Peter and Lorraine Lewis: in Memory of Lazar Lewis, father of Peter Lewis; in Memory of Joseph Foreman, father of Lorraine Lewis; in Memory of Florence Lewis, mother of Peter Lewis.

### Typhoon in the Philippines

On November 8, Super Typhoon Haiyan made landfall over Guiuan, Eastern Samar province in the Philippines, destroying coastal communities with ferocious winds and a storm surge of up to 20 feet. As time passes the destruction of the region and to the people of the Philippines becomes more critical. Shortages of food, shelter and basic needs exist.

Our Congregation has donated \$100 to the URJ Disaster Relief Fund to help relief efforts. If you would like to donate please send your checks to the Disaster Relief Fund, Union of Reform Judaism, 633 Third Ave., NY, NY 10017.



### Congressman Swalwell Visits Shir Ami

Congressman Eric Swalwell visited Shir Ami on November 23. He shared his thoughts about his recent trip to Israel and listened to member concerns. We appreciate his visit.

Parsha Vayigash : Approached (Judah approached God)

Upon witnessing his brothers' loyalty to one another, Joseph, who had earlier been sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers, reveals his identity to them. The brothers are overcome by shame and remorse, but Joseph comforts them, saying that it was God's plan who also destined him to reach high office in Egypt by predicting years of famine and of plenty thus saving the region from famine.



Shabbat Service Friday, December 6th at 7:30 PM  
will be led by

Benjamin Fried

Introduce a Friend to Shir Ami

Remember Shir Ami's food basket

**Parsha Shemot - Names  
(Names of the children of Israel in Egypt)**

The Children of Israel multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their growing numbers, Pharaoh enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, to kill all male babies at birth. When they do not comply, he commands his people to cast the Hebrew babies into the Nile.



Pot Luck dinner 6:30 PM and Shabbat Service 7:30 PM  
Friday, December 20th at Shir Ami

Service will be led by

**Megan Brudney**

Please participate in Shir Ami's rotating food assignments

A to S    Main Dish  
T to Z    Side dish , dessert,  
            help with cleanup

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ



**Tu BiSh'vat Celebration  
Recalling Israel's Festival of the Trees**

Seder will be led by  
Diana Zankowsky  
on Saturday, January 18, Noon  
***Delicious Luncheon***

\$15 Members, \$18 Non-Members  
No charge for children under 12

Please RSVP by January 10 by Evite, or by sending an email to  
[events@congshirami.org](mailto:events@congshirami.org)

Send your check payable to Congregation Shir Ami to:  
Tu BiSh'vat Seder, Congregation Shir Ami  
4529 Malabar Ave., Castro Valley, CA 94546



Join us for our 18th Annual (our Chai year!)

# Shir Ami Women's Retreat

Friday, February 21 – Sunday, February 23, 2014

At the beautiful (and new to us!) San Damiano  
Retreat Center in Danville

Connect with your Jewish sisters and yourself! Join us for a weekend of women's friendship, worship, creativity, music, and play. Rabbinic Intern Megan Brudney joins us to share her musical and spiritual leadership. As always, newcomers are *very* welcome.

The cost for the weekend is \$250.

Please register online at <http://tinyurl.com/kfqepgg>, and mail your check, payable to Ruth Hartman, the same day. (Mailing address is at the online registration site.)

*Register ASAP, no later than **February 1.***

*Questions?*

*Contact Ruth Hartman: 510-582-3379 or [events@congshirami.org](mailto:events@congshirami.org)*

## Rosh Chodesh/Sisterhood

### UPCOMING ROSH CHODESH

Our annual Sisterhood Chanukah party is coming on Wed, Dec 4 at the home of Bettina Skehan. The party will start at 7:00 with dinner of latkas, salad and dessert. Please bring a dinner item to share. Please bring your Menorahs and candles which we will light for the 8th night. Finally, we have our lively gift exchange. Please bring a "desired" wrapped gift with a \$20.00 maximum for our exchange. We will play "steal the gift."  
Hope to see you then. Look to your email for more information and reminder

#### Upcoming Sisterhood Events

Wed., Dec 4. Tevet: Chanukah Party

Tues., Jan 7, Sh'vat

Tues., Feb 4, Adar

Fri.- Sun., Feb 21-23: Women's Retreat

Tues., Mar. 4, Adar 2

Tues., Apr. 1. Nissan

Wed., April 30, Iyar

Wed., May 28, Sivan

Wed., Jun. 25, Tammuz

### ROSH CHODESH RECAP

Last month we brought in the month of Kislev, a month that represents darkness, miracles, and oils. We shared a meal of salads with our favorite oil dressings. Sharon Golembo, our hostess, led us in a discussion about interesting rituals that take place in this month around the world. During our discussion about oils, we learned of several different baths:

The Yom Kippur Bath, with herbs of rosemary and lemon balm, helps us wash away our sins. A flower bath of roses, zinnias, or marigolds taken from the Incas can create a soothing healing bath. Finally, soaking in a Sumerian-style new moon bath of plantain, hyssop, marigold, or basil can be a time to renew.

We then shared personal stories of miracles in our lives and had fun mixing bath crystals, fragrance, and oils to take home and use in our own ritual bath.

Delicious refreshments ended a wonderful evening.

Thank you, Sharon, for the interesting and creative evening and thank you, Bettina, for contributing the bath crystals and fragrances.



For more information on Sisterhood/Rosh Chodesh, contact Jan Dombrower, [Sisterhood@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:Sisterhood@CongShirAmi.org)



# December Yahrzeit List

## December 2013 Yahrzeit List (as of 11/20/13)

### December 6, 2013

Frederick Apple,  
Larry Dean,  
Inez Gautreaux, (pron. GO-TRO)  
Frieda Greenbaum,  
Jan (pron.YAHN) Okoniewski,

father of Angie Ross  
father of Tyler Dean  
aunt of Toni Schulberg  
grandmother of Diana Zankowsky  
husband of Marion Kramer

### December 20, 2013

Sheila Arthur,  
Joseph Bressler,  
Ann and Michael Bruser,  
Joseph and Meshka Druker,  
Tom Manley,  
Isaac Rosenberg,

long time former member of Shir Ami  
father of Florrie Finkle  
active early members of Shir Ami  
grandparents of Alex Druker  
former member of Shir Ami  
grandfather of Alex Druker

### Kaddish List (those who have died during the past 11 months) (read at both services)

Leona Rosenthal,

mother of Ruth Rosenthal and grandmother of  
Evelyn, Lisa, and Jacob Carmack

Deborah Mitchell,  
Stephen Slavin,  
Kevin Keil

mother of Helen Markus  
long-time close friend of Nate Einbund  
husband of Danielle Keil, father of Sarah, Gabriella and James,  
and son-in-law of Vicky Sapper

Susan Weinberg Andersson,

daughter of Rolf & Ingrid Weinberg, and former member of Shir Ami

### Do you have a name you would like to have read for Kaddish at Friday services?

Is there someone for whom you'd like a Yahrzeit reminder letter? The process is simple. **Please email Toni Schulberg** ([yahrzeit@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:yahrzeit@CongShirAmi.org)) and include your name, the name of the person who died, their relationship to you, the date they died (month, day, year in the English calendar), and whether you want to use the English or the Hebrew calendar for your reminder. Toni will send the reminders as requested.

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Photos from Chanukah  
Faire and Boutique at  
Shir Ami.

