



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](http://www.urj.org)

JANUARY 2014 (Tevet~ Shevet 5774)

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January Events of Interest

January is another busy month at Shir Ami. Stay informed by checking the Event Reminders sent weekly by email. You may also find it helpful to print the Event Calendar on page 2 of this bulletin.

Rabbi Benj will be at Shir Ami January 10-12

- On January 11, Benj will host a **Text Study** at 4 pm and at 7 pm, **Movie Night** (many of you have been asking!)

On January 18, we will celebrate Tu BiSh'vat at our [Tu BiSh'vat Seder Luncheon](#). Reservations are required.

Rabbi Megan will be at Shir Ami January 24-26

- On Friday, January 24, at 6 pm will be a **Children's Shabbat** Service, followed by a **Potluck** Dinner at 6:45 pm, and a regular Shabbat Service at 7:30 pm.
- On Saturday at 7 pm, Megan will lead an **Israeli Dance Class!** Put on your dancing shoes and join us at Shir Ami. Don't miss it!

Rose Firestone, editor@CongShirAmi.org.



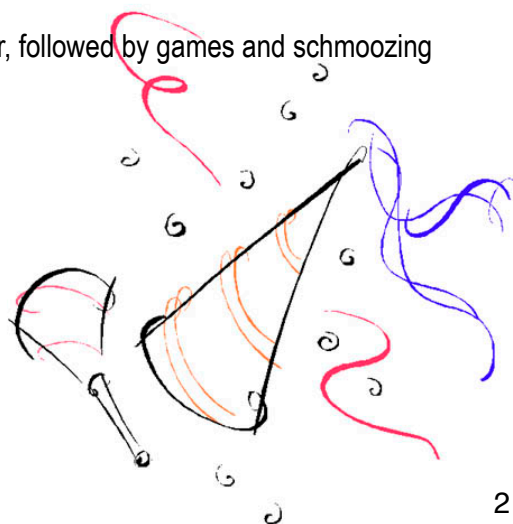
Shir Ami members at 2013 URJ Biennial in San Diego, December 2013, celebrating Shabbat.

Event Calendar

- Tue. Jan. 7 7:30 pm [Rosh Chodesh/Sisterhood](#): hosted by Melanie Einbund and Lina Teferi
- Fri. Jan. 10 7:30 pm [Shabbat Service](#): led by Benj Fried
- Sat. Jan. 11 4:00 pm [Text Study, The Song of the Sea](#): led by Benj Fried, followed by Havdallah at 5:30 pm
- Sat. Jan. 11 7:00 pm [Movie Night](#) (*Movie TBD*)
- Sun. Jan. 12 11:30 am **Tot Talk**: held monthly, is FREE and is open to all families with children under 5 years old. Theme for January is Tu BiSh'vat, recalling Israel's Festival of the Trees
- Sat. Jan. 18 12:00 pm [Tu BiSh'vat Seder Luncheon](#): Save the date for this event. Reservations required
- Mon. Jan. 20 10:00 am **Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration and March**: meet at Hayward City Hall Plaza, 777 B Street, Hayward. Children & adults are encouraged to attend
- Tue. Jan. 21 7:00 pm **Board of Directors Meeting**: all are welcome
- Fri. Jan. 24 6:00 pm **Kids' Shabbat**: with Megan Brudney
- Fri. Jan. 24 6:45 pm [Potluck Dinner](#)
- Fri. Jan. 24 7:30 pm [Shabbat Service](#): led by Megan Brudney
- Sat. Jan. 25 10:00 am **Religious Committee Meeting** at the Zankowsky home. **Please RSVP** for address/directions and to ensure the proper amount of breakfast is provided. religion@CongShirAmi.org
- Sat. Jan. 25 4:00 pm **Varying Views on Mitzvot**: led by Megan Brudney
- Sat. Jan. 25 7:00 pm [Havdallah and Israeli Dance Class](#): adults & children are invited to a fun evening at Shir Ami with Rabbi Megan
- Sun. Feb. 2 12:45 pm **Mitzvah Project**: filling toiletry bags with donated items for needy people, 12:45-2 pm.
- Tue. Feb. 4 7:30 pm [Rosh Chodesh/Sisterhood](#)
- Fri. Feb. 7 7:30 pm [Welcoming Shabbat Service](#): led by Benj Fried and Reverend Katie Kandarian-Morris
- Sun. Feb. 9 10:15 am [Sabbath Service](#) at Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church
- Tue. Feb. 11 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. Register now!
- Fri.-Sun Mar. 21-23 **Cantor-in-Residence**: save the weekend for Cantor Ken Cohen, who will be leading services and classes throughout the weekend
- Sat. Mar. 29 5:00- pm **Potluck Dinner and Family Night**: potluck dinner, followed by games and schmoozing



A HAPPY
NEW YEAR



President's Message

President's Message for January 2013 Bulletin

Shalom Shir Ami,

Last month, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) held its 72nd Biennial convention in San Diego. This event brought together lay leaders, professional clergy, youth, and congregants from across North America to learn, pray, share ideas, dance, sing, hear from inspiring guest speakers, create new connections, and make decisions about the policies of the Reform Movement. Altogether, about 5,000 people attended, representing nearly 500 congregations and 14 countries. I'm proud to say that Congregation Shir Ami was among the groups present, and our attending members represented our community's perspective in many activities and lively discussions. Our congregation was honored at the Biennial for this year's Belin Award, given for innovative activities honoring and engaging current members. Shir Ami's Sisterhood was also recognized in becoming among the newest members of Women of Reform Judaism, an affiliate of the URJ that celebrated its centennial anniversary this year.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs – the current President of the URJ – gave the Keynote Address for this event. The full text of his speech can be found at this URL: http://urj.org/about/union/leadership/rabbijacobs/?syspage=article&item_id=109240. I encourage you to read it (or watch the video at <http://urjbiennial.zerista.com>) to get a complete vision of where the Reform Jewish community is headed. Here, I'll only highlight a few of the programs and initiatives that he announced:

- Over the past few years the URJ has ramped-up its Campaign for Youth Engagement (<http://urj.org//cye/index.cfm>), focused on increasing the engagement with Jewish life that post-B'nai Mitvah youth (ages 13 to 18) have through URJ congregations and programs. The URJ is integrating and deepening all of its youth programs to include opportunities for every teen, whether their family is a member of a URJ congregation or not. This augmentation
- includes expanding NFTY (<http://www.nfty.org>) to include 6th, 7th and 8th graders and opening a new (its 14th) overnight camp, Six Points Science and Technology Camp (<http://scitech.urjcamp.org>), which will be located north of Boston. As Rabbi Rick explained, "Our gateways into Jewish life include service learning, leadership, deep learning, social justice, arts, sports, technology, and more, all of which take place over the course of hours, days, weekends, summers, or even longer..."
- To increase the visibility of the Reform Judaism, and the URJ, to the larger world, the URJ has created an outward-facing website called www.ReformJudaism.org. This website is now regularly at the top of the first page of Jewish Google searches, and more than half a million individuals who came looking for Jewish substance found it through this website.
- To stem the tide of declining memberships in URJ congregations and engage young Jewish adults with synagogue life, the URJ has begun to focus on connecting families with young children to early childhood programs in congregations, and to develop such programs in congregations without them. The URJ has also begun to build new bridges to families with young children by partnering with PJ Library (<http://www.pjlibrary.org>). As you know, Shir Ami is among those groups URJ has partnered with on this, resulting in our new Tot Talk program and mini PJ library collection. URJ is also working with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation (<http://www.hgf.org>) to improve its ability to find those unconnected young families living in our neighborhoods.
- Finally, the URJ is more active than ever in its pursuit of social justice. Issues such as immigration reform, LGBTQ equality in marriage and employment, accessibility for people with disabilities, and providing care for the poor and those in-need are at the forefront of URJ's attention and efforts. This has resulted in new programs, such as Reform California

(<http://www.rac.org/reformca>) – an offshoot of the Religious Action Center – to galvanize congregational leaders from across the state to raise their collective voices for the rights of immigrants, as well as new partnerships with existing organizations, such as the Ruderman Family Foundation (<http://rudermanfoundation.org>) to help member congregations remove barriers to participation, so that all individuals can participate in congregational life.

These are only a few of the efforts mentioned by Rabbi Rick in his Keynote address, which in-turn are only a few of the ways in which the URJ is working to expand and strengthen the

international Reform Jewish community. I encourage you to explore the URJ's online resources to find out what else is going on and where and how you'd like (and would like Shir Ami) to contribute/participate.

Toda Raba and Happy New Year!

Jon Zimmerman,
president@congshirami.org



Shir Ami Receives Belin Award at URJ Biennial

ShirAmi Belin Outreach and Membership Awards

At the recent 2013 URJ Biennial Conference held in San Diego, the URJ recognized the winners and honorable mentions of the [2013 Belin Outreach and Membership Awards](#). Shir Ami was listed first among the winners, receiving an award certificate and \$1,000.

The Belin Outreach and Membership Awards have been designed to encourage and honor Reform synagogues with outstanding Outreach and Membership programs, which actively welcome and integrate those new to Judaism, create relationship based membership models, or develop new, innovative ways to engage and retain members.

There were many inspiring programs that were submitted this year by Reform congregations from all across North America. Eight winners and nine honorable mentions were chosen out of the myriad entries received.

2013 Belin Award Winners

- Congregation Shir Ami, Castro Valley, CA
- Temple Sinai, Atlanta, GA
- Temple Sinai, Sarasota, FL
- Congregation Or Chadash, Chicago, IL
- Congregation Beth Yam, Hilton Head Island, SC
- Temple De Hirsh Sinai, Seattle, WA
- Temple Rodef Shalom, Falls Church, VA
- The Temple, Congregation B'nai Jehudah, Overland Park, KS



Shir Ami members (left-to-right) Bruce Skelly, Harriet Skelly, Jan Dombrower and Diana Zankowsky receiving the Belin Award from URJ Chairman Stephen Sacks (top-middle) and URJ President Rabbi Rick Jacobs (top-right) at the 2013 URJ Biennial

Rabbinic Interns' Page

January 2014 Message

Happy 2014! New Year's time is always a very joyous one. We get to spend time with family and friends, going to parties and maybe even getting a kiss from that special someone as the clock strikes midnight. After the Champagne and party hats go away, we are left with those resolutions that we make for the coming year. Many people decide to quit smoking. Others pledge to spend more time with family and less time at work. Whatever the case is, often times these resolutions go unfulfilled as the optimism of the New Year quickly sinks into the reality of everyday life within a week. It is very hard to keep resolutions; it is exceptionally difficult to change the self.

Of course, Judaism teaches us that our behavior and our decisions are our defining characteristics as human beings. While our beliefs are a very important part of our Jewish identity, the performance of the mitzvot is the primary way that we create holiness for ourselves and connect with God. For example, it does not matter what one believes when he says a blessing or hears the shofar sound, the act itself is what causes him to perform the mitzvah. As such, our behavior, our habits, and the values we live out through our actions are of the utmost importance to us Jews. So how might we go about living out our New Year's resolutions in a meaningful way, given how hard it is to live up to the tough standards that we often set for ourselves?

The way that Jews have worked on improving their behavior for the past two centuries has been through a movement called Musar. The movement was started in the early 19th century by Orthodox Jews in Lithuania who were deeply committed to their mysticism. These people developed chants, guided meditations, contemplations, and exercises meant to direct the subconscious towards moral and upright behavior. These mystics believed that their work in manifesting the best within ourselves was the holy act of releasing the divine sparks within our souls, which in turn could serve to enact *tiqqun*—the sacred act of repairing the universe. We see from this belief that our New Year's resolutions are not trivial things that should be cast aside when they become inconvenient. Embodying the best within ourselves has implications that reach far beyond our own souls; indeed our behavior has an effect on the entire world, if we can frame it with the right perspective.

While Musar practice has mostly been relegated to the realms of the Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox, it has become an important movement for a growing number of Reform and Conservative Jews. The Musar Initiative and the Musar Leadership Project were both founded by non-Orthodox rabbis and books such as Everyday Holiness and A Responsible Life have popped up on bookshelves. So we see that working on ourselves and our behavior has become an increasingly important part of our Reform Jewish observance. So how can we go about doing this?

First we have to be realistic with ourselves. We have to be self-aware and identify one or two character flaws that we know we want to work on. These flaws have to be ones that we can realistically expect to improve. Maybe we want to work on patience. Maybe we want to be more thankful. Or perhaps we want to let go of some of that anger we have stored up. In any event, once we identify that negative character trait, we can work on it by taking a few moments every day or every other day to reflect. How am I doing? Did I embody that negative characteristic? How can I improve on that? By mentally checking in and perhaps doing a little meditation, we can raise the level of self-awareness in our minds and begin to travel that hard and winding path towards self-improvement.

I truly wish that 2014 will be a year of success, a year of happiness, a year of joy, and a year of peace for all of us, Shir Ami. I hope that we will find our lives full of blessings and have the wisdom to be able to see them.

Student Rabbi Benj Freid



Benj Fried
rabbi.benj@CongShirAmi.org

Rabbinic Interns



Megan Brudney
rabbi.megan@CongShirAmi.org

Adult Education with the Rabbis

Saturday, January 11, Rabbi Benj

4 pm: Text Study of the Song of the Sea

Come explore the Song of the Sea in depth with student Rabbi Benj. We will do a thematic exploration of this most ancient of Jewish texts, and compare it with other creation mythologies of the Ancient Near East. Then we will look at what the rabbis made of this song through the lens of Midrash. Class will conclude with Havdallah.

The class will conclude with Havdallah at 5:30 pm

7 pm: Movie Night, (*Movie TBD*)

Saturday, January 25, Rabbi Megan

4 pm: Varying Views on Mitzvot

Come learn about different ways of relating to our 613 commandments.

7 pm: Israeli Dance Class

We will begin with **Havdallah** and then we will **get moving and get some old-fashioned Israeli culture** with these fun and easy folk dances! No dance skill required; please wear comfortable shoes. Adults and children welcome.

Shir Ami Donations, December 2013

Donations

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

- Susan and Tom Spitzer, in Memory of Kathryn Schuelke, Susan's mother
- Milt and Pat Palmer, in Honor of Harriet Skelly's Birthday
- Judy Ganz, in Honor of Harriet Skelly's Birthday
- Diana and Fred Zankowsky, in Memory of Frieda Greenbaum, grandmother of Diana, and in Memory of Ed Zankowsky, Fred's cousin
- Pat and Milt Palmer, in Honor of Sharon Golembo's birthday
- Florrie Finkle, in Memory of Joseph Bressler, Florrie's father
- Angela Apple Ross, in Memory of Fredrick Apple, Angie's father
- Sharon Golembo, in Memory of her sister, Darlene Golembo
- Sandra and Sidney Jacobson (Parents of Diana Zankowsky), for the General Fund,



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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

Send your check payable to Congregation Shir Ami to:

Tu BiSh'vat Seder, Congregation Shir Ami

4529 Malabar Ave., Castro Valley, CA 94546

Welcoming Shabbat/Sabbath Services



Join Student Rabbi Benj Fried from Congregation Shir Ami and Reverend Katie Kandarian-Morris from Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church to reflect on intentionality and social justice, and how both faiths have worked through embracing old and creating new traditions.

**All are Welcome to attend
both collaborative services!**



Friday, February 7, 2014 at 7:30 PM
Congregation Shir Ami
4529 Malabar Avenue, Castro Valley



Sunday, February 9, 2014 at 10:15 AM
Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church
22577 Bayview Avenue, Hayward

**For more information, call (510) 432-7703
or e-mail: president@congshirami.org**

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

The theme of our 18th annual retreat

Our Chai Tapestry

will be woven throughout the weekend's activities

The book discussion, led by Diana Zankowsky, will be on Dara Horn's fourth novel, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, published in 2013- "a spellbinding novel of how technology changes memory, and how memory shapes the soul."

Rosh Chodesh/Sisterhood

UPCOMING ROSH CHODESH

Our next Rosh Chodesh will be on Tuesday, January 7th at 7:30. We will be bringing in the month of Sh'vat and will focus on Tu BiSh'vat-- trees, fruit, fragrances. Our hostesses will be Melanie Einbund and Lina Teferi. Please stay tuned to email for location and theme of the night.

ROSH CHODESH RECAP

For last month's Sisterhood we had our wonderful annual Hanukkah party. Bettina Skehan hosted a festive dinner of latkas, salads, and desserts in her home. We lit our beautiful menorahs with all candles ablaze for the eighth night. We exchanged Hanukkah gifts through a lively "steal the gift" game. Everyone had a wonderful time. See pictures below.



For more information on Sisterhood/Rosh Chodesh, contact Jan Dombrower, Sisterhood@CongShirAmi.org



Yahrzeit List

January 2014 Yahrzeit List (as of 12/26/13)

January 10, 2014

Zac Cohen, long time member of Shir Ami
Darlene Golembo, sister of Sharon Golembo
Bridget Laky, past president and long time former member of Shir Ami
Peter Rosenberg, uncle of Alex Druker
Helen Rosner, long time active member of Shir Ami
Rolf Weinberg, husband of Ingrid Weinberg; a charter member; & Shir Ami mainstay for many, many years

January 24, 2014

Paul Bergel, father of Marci Loss
Tessie Bressler, mother of Florrie Finkle
Tyler Brooke, father of Toni Schulberg
Shellie Cohen, active member of Shir Ami
Gene Gash, Shir Ami organist for many years
Cecilia Kramer, grandmother of Marion Kramer
Syd Kramer, uncle of Jan Dombrower
George Lange, brother of Mickey Lange
Clara Schneider, mother of Marilyn Schneider, and grandmother of Irene, Sarah and Carolyn Gilchriese

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, mother of Helen Markus
Stephen Slavin, long-time close friend of Nate Einbund
Kevin Keil, husband of Danielle Keil, father of Sarah, Gabriella & James, and son-in-law of Vicky Sapper
Susan Weinberg Andersson, daughter of Rolf & Ingrid Weinberg, and former member of Shir Ami



Shir Ami Board of Directors.
The Board meets monthly on Tuesdays at 7 pm. All are welcome.