



CONGREGATION  
**SHIR AMI**

4529 Malabar Ave,  
Castro Valley, CA 94546  
Email: [Info@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:Info@CongShirAmi.org)  
Web: [www.CongShirAmi.org](http://www.CongShirAmi.org)

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

**FEBRUARY 2015 BULLETIN Sh'vat/Adar 5775**

*Event Calendar* You can find up-to-the-minute event details at Shir Ami's website, [www.congshirami.org](http://www.congshirami.org) !

Sun.	Feb.	1	10:30-12:30	am pm	<b>Religious School Tu BiSh'vat Seder and Potluck Lunch.</b> Parents are STRONGLY encouraged to attend with their child(ren). <b>NO Hebrew School. Includes Tot Talk.</b>
Thu.	Feb.	5	7:00	pm	<b>Board of Directors Meeting at Shir Ami,</b> all are welcome
Fri.	Feb.	6	6:45	pm	<a href="#">Drop-in Orientation</a> to synagogue prior to the interfaith Shabbat Service at 7:30 pm
Fri.	Feb.	6	7:30	pm	<a href="#">Welcoming Shabbat Interfaith Service</a> with Shir Ami's Rabbi Julie Bressler and Senior Pastor Chuck Horner from Calvary Baptist Church: <i>How We Put Our Faiths to Action</i>
Sat	Feb.	7	1:00	pm	<b>1:00-3:00, Office Hours</b> with Rabbinic Intern Julie Bressler, email <a href="mailto:rabbi.julie@congshirami.org">rabbi.julie@congshirami.org</a>
Sat	Feb.	7	3:30	pm	<b>3:30-5:30, Joint Adult Ed</b> with Shir Ami's Rabbi Julie Bressler and Senior Pastor Chuck Horner from Calvary Baptist Church: <i>How Our Faiths Approach the Study of Our Religious Texts</i>
Sun.	Feb.	8	9/10:30	am	<b>Sunday School: Hebrew, 9-10:30; Religious, 10:30-12:30</b>
Sun.	Feb.	8	11:00	am	<b>Sunday Service</b> at Calvary Baptist Church, 28924 Ruus Road, Hayward
Sat.	Feb.	14	9:00	am	<a href="#">Introduction to Judaism</a> , ongoing class, all are welcome, with Diana Zankowsky
Sun.	Feb.	15			<b>NO SCHOOL</b>
Fri.-Sun	Feb.	20-22			<b>Shir Ami's Women's Retreat, Reflect and Connect.</b> Contact Ruth Hartman for details. <a href="mailto:Events@congshirami.org">Events@congshirami.org</a> Rabbi Julie Bressler will participate.
Sun.	Feb.	22			<b>NO SCHOOL</b>
Wed.	Feb.	25	7:30	pm	<a href="#">Jewish Meditation Group</a> , contact Julie Greenfield, <a href="mailto:meditation@CongShirAmi.org">meditation@CongShirAmi.org</a>
Sat.	Feb.	28	7:00	pm	Havdallah, followed by Judy Ganz's Powerpoint on <a href="#">Medieval Spain</a> . Held at Shir Ami
Sun.	Mar.	1	9/10:30	am	<b>Sunday School: Hebrew, 9-10:30; Religious, 10:30-12:30</b>
Thu.	Mar.	5	7:00	pm	<b>Board of Directors Meeting at Shir Ami,</b> all are welcome
Fri.	Mar.	6	7:00	pm	<b>Purim Shabbat Service</b> with Rabbi Benj Fried
Sat.	Mar.	7			<b>Men's Event and Havdallah</b> with Rabbi Benj Fried
Sun.	Mar.	8			<b>Purim Carnival at Religious School</b>
Sun.	Mar.	8			<a href="#">Tot Talk</a> , families with children under 5 years old will join the school <b>Purim Carnival-- FREE</b>
Fri.- Sun	Mar.	13- 15			<b>Shabbaton, Los Gatos.</b> Go to <a href="#">Shabbaton</a> for details and registration.
Sun.	Mar.	15			<b>NO SCHOOL</b>
Wed.	Mar.	18	7:30	pm	<b>Rosh Chodesh/Sisterhood,</b> Details to follow
Sun.	Mar.	22	9/10:30	am	<b>Sunday School: Hebrew, 9-10:30; Religious, 10:30-12:30</b>
Sat.	Mar.	28	9:00	am	<a href="#">Introduction to Judaism</a> , ongoing class (all are welcome) with Diana Zankowsky
Sun.	Mar.	29			<b>NO SCHOOL</b>
Sat.	Apr.	4			<b>Passover Seder</b> with Rabbi Benj Fried

# *President's Message*

**Editor's Note: This month's President's Message was written by Shir Ami Board Member, Jeremy Templeton. Comments may be sent to [Editor@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:Editor@CongShirAmi.org)**

This February marks the 25th anniversary of my Bar Mitzvah. As I've grown, I have come to appreciate more and more this uniquely Jewish coming-of-age experience which captures so many of our values. First, the Bat/Bar Mitzvah is the culmination of years of study. I was fortunate to have an amazing Hebrew teacher living under the same roof: my Mom. We started Hebrew lessons in second grade, doing 15 minutes each morning, and I can still remember reading stories in Hebrew together. These lessons for 5 1/2 years culminated in translating my Torah portion: the Ten Commandments. And after all the intervening years, I'm trying to pass that knowledge on to our Shir Ami Hebrew learners who will spend 4 to 6 years learning a language passed down for millenia until they too become Bnai Mitzvah.

Another way in which the Bat/Bar Mitzvah express our Jewish heritage is that even though it is an occasion focusing on an individual, it is a community event. It is not enough to say the blessings over the Torah by oneself or just with the Rabbi. The words may be the same during practice, but in front of one's family, friends, and the entire congregation, they become a public vow affirming the place of Judaism in one's life and a commitment to keep the commandments. I can't remember anymore how many times I practiced all the prayers, blessings, and readings (but it was a lot!). But I can clearly remember saying all of them during my Bar Mitzvah. I was incredibly nervous demonstrating all that I had learned in front of the community because it is at that point I accepted the responsibility and privilege of being Jewish.

Given the public affirmation of Judaism at a Bat/Bar Mitzvah, why have the ceremony at thirteen years of age? Perhaps when one is older with more experience, the true impact will be greater? While a deeper understanding of the rituals and responsibility will come with age, for me my Bar Mitzvah was an incarnation of passing our religion, history, and rituals on to the next generation: the Jewish concept of l'dor va dor. At thirteen, parents are still parents. While we certainly had our struggles when I was that age, the lessons they taught me during my preparations and the blessing they gave me in front of the Ark communicated to me that they were seeing me differently... so much so they let me pierce my ear afterward! If I were older, this transition would have already happened, but informally and without acknowledgement. However, at thirteen, in between childhood and adulthood, the Bat/Bar Mitzvah still has the impact of passing on Judaism to the next generation.

Finally, my Torah portion was the Ten Commandments, which is one of the cornerstones of Jewish faith and one of our religion's greatest gifts to humanity. Where would we be today without a weekend, which started with resting on Shabbat? In the Ten Commandments, we see the two pillars of Judaism: our relationship with a single G-d in the beginning of the passage, and our relationship with each at its end. Uniquely Jewish is the fact that these are the beginnings of the laws which Jews still follow to this day. Indeed, the first commandments stress the uniqueness and primacy of G-d, which underlies the common humanity we share with all the peoples of the Earth. It is this, Judaism's greatest gift to humanity, which I found during my Bar Mitzvah.

Jeremy Templeton, Board Member

## *Editor's Note about the Bulletin*

Changes have been made in the Bulletin. The most significant changes include:

- The Event Calendar is now on page 1, eliminating the table of contents and the small page 1 articles. Copies of this new calendar page 1 will be available for members to pick up at Shir Ami each month.
- The page footer has been eliminated, allowing more room on each page for content.

Almost everything else remains the same. There may be more changes coming, and we can add back things that were eliminated. Let me know if you care about any of these changes. Please email your comments.

Warm regards, Bulletin Editor Rose Firestone [Editor@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:Editor@CongShirAmi.org)

# Rabbinic Interns' Page

Julie Bressler  
February Bulletin Article  
Congregation Shir Ami

Have you heard of Huldah? I would be quite surprised if you had since, according to Rabbi Dr. Tamara Eskenazi, renowned Torah scholar and professor of my Prophets class, this question has received an affirmative response only a handful of times throughout her decades of speaking and teaching engagements. When I learned about Huldah's role in biblical history, my mouth dropped – how could I, a Women and Gender Studies major, proud feminist and rabbinical student, not know about this woman's story or even that she existed at all?

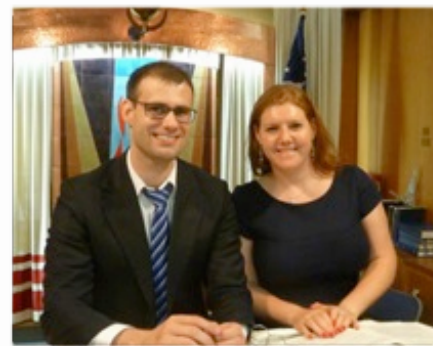
Huldah's story appears in the second book of Kings, one of the earliest books within *Nevi'im* or Prophets, the second major division of the Hebrew Bible. These largely narrative histories include many important biblical historical events, including the many times our ancestors strayed from the path Moses and God preached and begged our ancestors to follow throughout the Torah. In one of these periods, a just ruler named Josiah ascends the throne after a long line of corrupt kings. He hopes to bring his people back to lives of righteousness and good standing with God. The text tells us that during his efforts to rehabilitate and repair the Temple, one of his men found the "Book of the Law", which turned out to be the text of Deuteronomy! When they read the text of this book, they learn that terrible curses will come upon anyone who strays from the Law (check out Deuteronomy 28 for a long list of these curses!), which of course terrifies Josiah and his council. Josiah responds by tearing his robes and crying out in anguish. He needs to verify the material's accuracy, so he turns to Huldah, a known prophetess and clearly respected authority, for the answer. Josiah likely was hoping that Huldah would see the text as a false document, but instead she confirms its accuracy. She doesn't sugarcoat her response but plainly and truthfully presents God's verdict. Huldah continues by prophesying that divine judgment will indeed fall on the nation of Judah, but God will be merciful to the king. Because Josiah had shown humility and responsiveness to God, he will not see this horror in his lifetime. Judgment will not fall until after Josiah is dead and buried, and the story follows Huldah's prediction accurately.

If you follow this text, you see that Huldah is the reason that the Book of Deuteronomy is included in the canon of the Torah! Therefore, it shocks me that her name is essentially lost in Jewish biblical history. My professor shared that some of our ancestors tried to take away her involvement altogether. Some wonder whether it was actually her husband who confirmed

the document's accuracy and prophesied about the nation's fate while others hypothesize that Huldah is actually a man's name, even though feminine pronouns and verb forms are used in the text to describe her. Fortunately, other sages expound upon her role in a manner that celebrates her female qualities. One explanation in the Talmud states that the king sought her opinion because "women are more compassionate than men", and a terrified king needed comfort and support after hearing these curses. While both men and women certainly share the capacity for compassion, these characteristics were largely seen as more feminine during ancient times. Unfortunately, our ancestors' effort to blot out her name from history is all too common amongst women during this period, a practice that continues even today. We should instead be celebrating Huldah's strong yet careful choice of words that accurately represented God's message through a tone of mercy and encouragement, ultimately guiding our ancestors through this challenging time with compassion and courage.

This month, the women of Shir Ami will come together to pray, schmooze, learn and grow together at the Annual Women's Retreat. I look forward to sharing a weekend with many of you as we celebrate our own voices and those women in Jewish history who are often forgotten. Each of us has a unique and powerful message to share and I hope you will join us at the retreat so that each of us can grow and benefit from these gifts!

Rabbinic Intern Julie Bressler



**Rabbinic Interns, 2014-2015**

Benj Fried [rabbi.benj@congshirami.org](mailto:rabbi.benj@congshirami.org)  
Julie Bressler [rabbi.julie@congshirami.org](mailto:rabbi.julie@congshirami.org)

# Adult Ed/Lifelong Learning

## Adult Learning w/ the Rabbi

### **Saturday, February 7,**

**1:00-3:00 p.m. Office Hours** Office hours provide a great opportunity to meet one-on-one for a private conversation with Julie and to get to know her better. Please email Julie at [rabbi.julie@congshirami.org](mailto:rabbi.julie@congshirami.org) to set up a time. She looks forward to hearing from you

### **3:30-5:30 p.m. How Our Faiths Approach the Study of Our Religious Texts:**

Discussion led by Rabbinic Intern Julie Bressler and Senior Pastor Chuck Horner from Calvary Baptist Church. **Havdallah** (a short, lovely service concluding Shabbat) will follow this discussion.

### **February 20-22, Shir Ami's Annual Women's Retreat: Reflect and Connect**

Rabbinic Intern Julie Bressler will be joining Shir Ami Women's Retreat weekend.

### **Spring 2015 Book Club Selection: *My Promised Land* by Ari Shavit**

*"Spellbinding . . . In this divided, fought-over shard of land splintered from the Middle East barely seventy years ago, Mr. Shavit's prophetic voice carries lessons that all sides need to hear."*—**The Economist**

*"One of the most nuanced and challenging books*

## Introduction to Judaism

The Introduction to Judaism class met in mid-January. We discussed two types of Jewish literature: Tanakh (Torah, Prophets and Writings) and Jewish cookbooks. We also talked a bit about Tu BiSh'vat.

**Our next meeting will be on February 14.** We will be meeting at Congregation Shir Ami at 9 am. We will study the holiday of Purim. Please read Chapter 9 in the text for class.

Throughout the school year, we will be meeting only once per month, intentionally on a Saturday when the rabbinic interns are not in town. The remaining schedule follows:

March 28

April 11

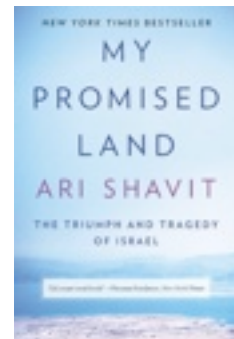
Dates may have to change; check the congregational calendar at [www.congshirami.org](http://www.congshirami.org) for the latest information.

**There is no cost for the class** except for the purchase of the required text: "Every Person's Guide to Judaism" by Stephen J. Einstein and Lydia Kukoff. If you haven't yet attended but want to join, please email Diana ([religion@congshirami.org](mailto:religion@congshirami.org)) with any questions and to confirm your attendance.

*written on Israel in years . . . [The] book's real power: On an issue so prone to polemic, Mr. Shavit offers candor.*"—**The Wall Street Journal**

*"A tour de force."*—**Jewish Journal**

*"Reads like a love story and a thriller at once."*—**Dwight Garner, The New York Times**



As it examines the complexities and contradictions of the Israeli condition, *My Promised Land* asks difficult but important questions: Why did Israel come to be? How did it come to be? Can Israel survive? Culminating with an analysis of the issues and threats that Israel is currently facing, *My Promised Land* uses the defining events of the past to shed new light on the present. The result is a landmark portrait of a small, vibrant country living on the edge, whose identity and presence play a crucial role in today's global political landscape. Ari Shavit draws on interviews, historical documents, private diaries, and letters, as well as his own family's story, illuminating the pivotal moments of the Zionist century to tell a riveting narrative that is larger than the sum of its parts: both personal and national, both deeply human and of profound historical dimension.

**Discussion to be held during Rabbi Julie's  
April 24-26 visit**

**Details to Follow**



# Community Information

## Jewish Meditation Group

Next meeting: **Weds., Feb. 25, 7:30 pm**

A group for the practice of Jewish meditation and spirituality. Relax, center yourself, and connect with the divine spark within! Held at Congregation Shir Ami the fourth Wednesday of each month. Includes guided and silent meditation, chanting, and sometimes movement. One hour long. No meditation or religious experience necessary. \$5 donation requested of non-members; free to members. Led by Julie Greenfield. Contact [Meditation@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:Meditation@CongShirAmi.org)

## Medieval Spain

**Saturday, February 28,  
7:00 pm**

Have you ever wondered why the "Golden Age" of Jewish literature took place in medieval Spain? Or if you can get a kosher meal in Barcelona? Or even how far it is from Gibraltar to Morocco?



Well, you can find the answers to all these questions at Shir Ami on Saturday evening, February 28. That's when Judy Ganz will be showing a Power Point Presentation of her recent trip to Spain.

We'll start with Havdallah at 7:00 pm, followed by the program. Everyone is welcome. Please RSVP to Judy at [SpecialEvents@CongShirAmi.org](mailto:SpecialEvents@CongShirAmi.org) —so we'll have enough popcorn to go around!

## Shashana Markus

Congratulations to Shashana Markus! She will be teaching high school chemistry as a member of the 2015 Teach For America corps in Baltimore, Maryland. She will also be pursuing her Master's Degree in Education at Johns Hopkins University.

## Mazel Tov Jan and David!

Congratulations to Jan Dombrower and David Chimpky on their engagement!

## Alamo Women's Club: Author's Faire Breakfast

**Wednesday March 4 at Round Hill Country Club** to raise money for local charities. Please join us for this delightful morning featuring a panel of seven local authors who will discuss their writing journey and do readings from their books. Danville author, Penny Warner will moderate. To make a reservation please contact Phyllis Clark at [ClarkPhyllis@Comcast.net](mailto:ClarkPhyllis@Comcast.net) or call 925 939-4814.

## Toastmasters at Shir Ami

Let's face it, whether it's verbal or non-verbal – communication *isn't* optional. Developing and honing this important skill, along with the other skills you gain with Toastmasters, will give you the confidence to:

- Excel at job interviews
- Give powerful business presentations
- Effectively teach classes or training sessions
- Lead successful seminars
- Present persuasive opening arguments, summations or cross examinations
- Give humorous, informative or special occasion speeches

Come to a meeting and start taking advantage of all that Toastmasters has to offer. We meet at Shir Ami on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of the month from 7:15 to 8:45 pm. Open Houses on Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>, Mar. 26<sup>th</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>. Join us for some fun!

## Sisterhood/Rosh Chodesh

### ROSH CHODESH RECAP

Look for the complete Rosh Chodesh recap in next month's Bulletin.

### UPCOMING ROSH CHODESH

The next month's new moon will take place during the retreat so we will not have an additional Rosh Chodesh meeting. If you haven't signed up for the retreat, please contact Jan Dombrower to see if there are still openings. The next Rosh Chodesh will be on Wed, March 18 as we bring in the month of Nisan.

# Yahrzeits

## **February 6, 2014**

Susan Weinberg Andersson,	daughter of Rolf & Ingrid Weinberg, and former member of Shir Ami
Paul Bergel,	father of Marci Loss
Tessie Bressler,	mother of Florrie Finkle
Shellie Cohen,	active member of Shir Ami
Gene Gash,	Shir Ami organist for many years
Sherrie Kidwell,	Shir Ami member
Civia Rudman,	former member of Shir Ami
Jacob Small,	grandfather of Toni Schulberg
Fannie Heimowitz,	mother of Stan Heimowitz
Syd Kramer,	uncle of Jan Dombrower
Leon Meier,	long-time member and one of the founders of Shir Ami
Sy Mober,	long-time former member of Shir Ami
Chris Partridge,	son of Ricki Weintraub, former member of Shir Ami
Rivka Rosenberg,	grandmother of Alex Druker
Clara Schneider,	mother of Marilyn Schneider, and grandmother of Irene, Sarah & Carolyn Gilchriese
Rolf Weinberg,	husband of Ingrid Weinberg; a charter member, & mainstay of Shir Ami for many, many years

## **Kaddish List (those who have died during the past 11 months)**

Lorraine Golembo,	step-mother of Sharon Golembo
Harry Yoseph Mitchell,	brother of Helen Markus
Bobbie Clark,	sister of Marci Loss

## School Notes

God is energy, being, a spirit that lives deep in the sky and watches over us. God is everywhere and his wife is mother nature. Angels are messengers. These are the wonderful ideas from our first graders. The topic was *Concepts of God*. It is a difficult topic to discuss but our young students were enthusiastic to share their impressions of God.

That same Sunday, school felt wonderfully active. Every space was being used. The small room was occupied by the four and five year olds, the other room had the first graders, the older students were using the sanctuary and back room, and the kitchen was used by Tot Talk. It was cool to see such an active group of adults and children learning about Judaism.

## Tot Talk

Tot Talk is a free program, meeting monthly, for families with children under age 5. Tot Talk is an opportunity for families to enjoy a Jewish connection in a fun atmosphere.

**On February 1,** Tot Talk will join the religious school for the Tu BiSh'vat Seder and Potluck Lunch.

**On March 6,** Tot Talk will again join the religious school activities, this time as participants at the Purim Carnival.



Hanukkah Drawing by Rowen

*Welcoming Shabbat Interfaith Service, Feb. 6*

## **Welcoming Shabbat/Sabbath Services**



*Join Student Rabbi Julie Bressler from Congregation Shir Ami and Senior Pastor Chuck Horner from Calvary Baptist Church to discuss how we put our Faiths in Action.*



### **All are Welcome to attend the following:**

Friday, February 6, 2015 – at Congregation Shir Ami

4529 Malabar Ave, Castro Valley

6:45 to 7:15 pm – Drop-in Orientation of synagogue & service

7:30 pm – Shabbat service, followed by oneg (snacks)

Saturday, February 7, 2015 – at Congregation Shir Ami

3:30 to 5:30 pm – Joint Adult Education session regarding how our faiths approach study of the holy texts, followed by Havdallah - a beautiful, short service to conclude Shabbat

Sunday, February 8, 2015 – at Calvary Baptist Church

28924 Ruus Rd, Hayward

11:00 am – Sunday service

**For more information, call (510) 432-7703**

**or e-mail: [ledorvdor@yahoo.com](mailto:ledorvdor@yahoo.com)**

*Sisterhood Retreat, Feb. 20-22*

Join us for our 19th Annual

**Shir Ami Women's  
Retreat:  
Reflect and  
Connect!**

**Be who you are. And may you  
be blessed in all that you are.**

Friday, February 20 – Sunday, February 22, 2015

At the beautiful 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 Julie Bressler joins us to share her spiritual leadership. As always, newcomers are *very* welcome.

The cost for the weekend is \$240.

Please register online at <http://tinyurl.com/o9sctyj> 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 [events@congshirami.org](mailto:events@congshirami.org)

Are you interested in attending the retreat but  
haven't signed up yet?