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444 Skokie Blvd, Suite 300
Wilmette, Illinois 60091
tel: 847/ 251-2675
fax: 847/ 251-6002

www.sukkatshalom.org



CONGREGATION SUKKAT SHALOM

Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

The "Arab Spring" has arrived in Israel and, perhaps surprisingly, the battle has been defined by cottage cheese boycotts, tent cities, and marches featuring baby-strollers and physicians dressed in their "scrubs."

"Israeli Jews have taken to the streets out of frustration with limited opportunities for the young and educated middle class."

On Saturday evening, July 30th, tens of thousands of Israelis protested in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa and many other cities. I believe that this protest movement, concerned almost exclusively with domestic social welfare issues, is a momentous occurrence and could engender real change in Israel. Like the protesters in the Arab world, Israeli Jews have taken to the streets out of frustration with limited opportunities for the young and educated middle class. They are protesting the costs of housing, basic necessities and perceived limited possibilities for advancement.

Israel has become a prosperous nation. Its standard of living is equal to many of the most successful of European countries. It is a sophisticated nation with many of the benefits and luxuries available anywhere in the world. But too many of the young and educated middle-class have seen Israel move into the First World while they have been left behind. Housing is unaffordable. The price of basic goods has risen. Professionals, such

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People often ask me why I chose to become a Cantor. You might be surprised to learn that this is not an easy question for me to answer. It's not, however, because my choice to join the Cantorate was quick or easy. Rather, it's because I feel like being a Cantor is so inextricably linked to my very identity. I feel as if it's like being asked, "Why are you a Jew?" I am a Jew because, though I was born into this tradition, being a Jew is how I choose to stand before God.

Being a Cantor is also how I choose to stand before God. I don't believe I was called to the Cantorate in the traditional sense of a "calling." I am a Cantor because of the realization that this is how I can most fully serve the Jewish people and connect with the beauty of Jewish music and tradition.

The journey that led me to this realization has been long and eventful. I suppose it began in college, where I had the opportunity to explore my Jewish identity in ways that I had not as a child. I grew up in Monsey, New York -- perhaps one of the most religiously observant areas in the U.S. I was raised as a Reform Jew, attending weekly religious school and singing in the temple choir. But as a Reform Jewish child in a largely traditional environment, I often saw Judaism as something that was practiced by "the other." I felt equally fascinated and alienated by the traditional Judaism that surrounded me.

College, on the other hand, provided me with my first opportunity to be Jewish on my own terms. As the semesters passed, my involvement with the Jewish Student Union became all encompassing. It was my college professors (both Jewish and non-Jewish) who first suggested that the Cantorate was where I could combine my passion for music and Judaism.

Before I truly knew what a Cantor was, I was applying to Cantorial School. Luckily for me, the application was a yearlong process -- and through this process I came to realize that I could be my most authentic self as a Cantor. Studying Hebrew for my placement exam, I developed a love for the Hebrew language. While choosing Jewish repertoire to sing for my vocal audition, I was in awe of the depth and emotion that is found in Jewish music. In speaking to other Cantors who graduated from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I learned what a multi-faceted clergy partner the Cantor is in the modern synagogue.

"I am a Jew because, though I was born into this tradition, being a Jew is how I choose to stand before God."

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Building Our Own Spiritual Home

by Jesse Peterson Hall, President

Friday night, July 15th, was a special and important night in the life of Congregation Sukkat Shalom. We observed our first Shabbat worship service in our new home.

About 150 members of our community joined together for this inaugural event, along with three pastors from neighboring churches. Reverends Stephanie Perdue VanSlyke, Tripp Hudgins and Sarah Butter all participated in our service, and our new Cantor, Jason Kaufman, brought us together in song.

Our Oneg Shabbat featured a variety of ice cream bars -- fitting for the warm July weather. There was a feeling of energy and excitement as we started down the new path of having our own spiritual home.

We are now preparing to begin our next phase of work -- the renovation of the building. Following is an update of activities that should result in moving into the building by the Fall of 2012 -- just a little more than a year from now.

Working Committees: The Board has approved the formation of five committees to oversee the renovation and related activities. The committees and their chairs are: Renovation (Fred Wilson and Kerry Leonard); Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (Ken Kraus); Operations/Sustainability (Debra Shore); Development (Joel Fliegel); and Communications (Lynn Denton). Any questions on the specific work of each com-

mittee can be directed to the chairpersons or to me.

Development: We are deeply grateful that we have raised the funds to allow us to purchase the building and do extensive, important renovations. Some of these renovations include: an accessible entryway; an elevator to provide access to all levels of the building; a full, working kitchen; ADA-approved restrooms; classrooms for a variety of uses; and a library. A renovation we are particularly excited about is a redesign of the north wall of the sanctuary where the bimah and Ark are located. We will be adding windows to this wall, which will look out onto a landscaped garden area -- bringing a view of the outdoors into our worship space.

We are hoping to fund other enhancements, including offices for Rabbi Gordon and Judy Buckman just inside the entryway of the building. These offices, located

next to the sanctuary, will greet members and visitors. They also will free up space on the lower level for classrooms and programming.

The development committee will continue to reach out to all members of our community. We hope that all families will choose to contribute to this remarkable opportunity to establish a spiritual home that is both inspirational and inviting.

Communications: We will continue to provide you with updates on the project, development and other details on a regular basis. These updates will come through emails as well as articles in the Bulletin. I'm also happy to answer any questions about specific aspects of this effort.

Thank you for your support for the future home of our spiritual community.



Congregant Receives White House Appointment

Congratulations to congregant Patty Gerstenblith, who was recently appointed Chairman of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee by President Barack Obama. Mazel Tov!



How Our Interfaith Partnership Led to Bigger Dreams for Both Congregations

by Reverend Stephanie Perdeu VanSlyke

Our congregational journeys have overlapped and intersected for over a decade now. When I first met many of you, I was a fairly new associate pastor at First Congregational Church of Wilmette, and you were a fairly new synagogue. We began to share sacred space -- first for High Holy Days, then on a weekly basis. After a series of white supremacist activities on the North Shore in 1999, we publicly formed a faith partnership to give witness that we could learn from one another and mutually enrich one another's spiritual journeys and social consciences.

As our journey unfolded, our congregations asked whether part of our calling might be to invest together in First Congregational's building as the site of a permanent home for both of our congregations. We explored that idea—diligently and tenaciously. And in the end we learned that we simply could not fit all of our congregational functions into that space.

But we learned from one another along the way. Those at First Congregational, who had spent decades letting the building decay while prioritizing ministries of social outreach, began to appreciate the stability and grounding of a spiritual home and the unique features of our church building. You at Congregation Sukkat Shalom encouraged us to dream bigger dreams. Without you, we would not have completed our building renovation or even undertaken it. And we would not be experiencing the growth that we are today.

And, in turn, we rejoice that you, too, dreamed bigger dreams. We know that your congregation wrestled profoundly with the question of how acquiring a building might change your culture and your mission, and that your congregation—like ours a few years ago—seriously questioned whether investing money in a physical space was a faithful thing to do in a world full of needs.

We learned from you that a solid, secure spiritual home is the place we do our service from, and the place we return to -- to be inspired for service once more. We hope and trust that this structure will become such a spiritual home for you: where your children are blessed or married, where your dead are prayed goodbye, and we hope, too, where we all will continue to learn together.

As it turned out, the big bold thing that God had in store for us was not the creation of one spiritual home, but of two. Most of us did not think it would turn out that way five years ago, but for Biblical people, one of the surest signs of God's presence is that we will be led where we did not expect to go.

Where once we had envisioned one house of prayer and study where Jews and Christians, too long estranged, could represent a model of interfaith understanding, now I envision that there are two houses of prayer and study where we can continue to pursue that vision and that partnership.

I am conscious of remembering those who were part of both of

our congregations -- some among the living, some now among the dead -- who I hope are also celebrating: my colleagues Rabbi Ari Moffic and Cantor Ross Wolman, and a wonderful woman in your synagogue, Mimi Dunitz, of blessed memory, who taught me at the women's seder many years ago about the orange on the seder plate. I am remembering my friend Cantor Jill Abramson, and looking forward to working with Cantor Jason Kaufman. And I am remembering my late colleague, Reverend David Owens. When Reverend Owens and Rabbi Gordon got together, they made no small plans.

May the source of strength, who blessed the ones before us, help us to continue to find the courage to make our lives a blessing; and continue to make no small plans; and continue to be a witness of interfaith understanding right here in the heart of Wilmette.

This article is adapted from remarks delivered by Reverend Stephanie Perdeu VanSlyke at a Shabbat Service at Congregation Sukkat Shalom's new building on July 15, 2011.

New Family Educator Joins Sukkat Shalom

Alissa Zuchman has joined the professional staff of Congregation Sukkat Shalom to serve as the Family Educator beginning July 15, 2011.

Alissa comes to us from Temple Beth-El (Northbrook) where she has been the Director of Life Long Learning since 1996. She has developed, taught, and managed the curriculum for Kindergarten through High School as well as Adult Education. She has a commitment to diversity and interfaith learning that has always defined Sukkat Shalom



Alissa is a graduate of the Solomon Schechter High School in Skokie and the Jewish Theological Seminary (University of Judaism) in Los Angeles, where she earned her B.A. degree in Bible and Rabbinic Literature. She also earned a B.S. degree in Political Science at the University of Illinois, and received her Master of Science in Educational Psychology/ Educational Administration from The University of Chicago. She has her Master Teacher certification from the Community Foundation for Jewish Education, and is a graduate of the Florence Melton Adult School.

Alissa lives in Evanston and has a daughter Mimi who is a Junior at Arizona State University.

Welcome to the Sukkat Shalom family, Alissa. We look forward to learning with you.

Sukkat Shalom Runners to Participate in 9/11 Race

Congregation Sukkat Shalom's running club will participate in the inaugural Fort2Base Race on Sunday, September 11 – the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks.



The race begins at Fort Sheridan in Highland Park and proceeds north along the beautiful Green Bay Trail to the Great Lakes Naval Station. There are two courses for the event: the full 11.5 miles between the two facilities or the final 3.45 miles located completely within Great Lakes.

Members of the running club participated in the Ricky Byrdsong Memorial Race Against Hate in Evanston on Fathers Day, June 19th.

For more information or to participate in the Fort2Base Race, please contact the temple office..



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444 SKOKIE BLVD, SUITE 300
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS 60091
847/ 251-2675
www.sukkatshalom.org

Rabbi Samuel Gordon
Cantor Jason Kaufman
Director of
Family Education Alissa Zuchman
Executive Director Judy Buckman
Program Director Amy Israel
President Jesse Peterson Hall
Vice President Fred Wilson
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Secretary Ken Kraus

Steve Comar
Joel Fliegel
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Jane Rothschild, Ex-Officio President
Andrew Werth, Ex-Officio, President
Matt Baker, Ex-Officio, President
Bulletin Editor John Kupper
Layout and Design Deborah Harris

Rabbi's Message, cont'd

as physicians, are significantly underpaid. Teachers are protesting the lack of financial support for education.

To understand some of what is happening, one must understand what Israel was and what it has become. The old socialist, labor, kibbutz culture of a social welfare state has been replaced with free enterprise. Most analysts recognize that Israel has prospered to an incredible extent because of these changes. High-tech industry, innovation and entrepreneurship have allowed Israelis to live a solid middle class life. The downside has been that many of the basic goods are no longer subsidized. Housing costs have risen dramatically. Funding for education is inadequate. The younger generation sees limited prospects for advancement.

“The old socialist, labor, kibbutz culture of a social welfare state has been replaced with free enterprise.”

As Israel has prospered, and great wealth has been accumulated by certain sectors, social and economic disparity has become more pronounced. Vast concentrations of wealth are in the hands of a few favored families who control significant sectors of the Israeli economy. The gap between incomes is greater in Israel than in any of the 27 European Union countries. Israel also has the lowest percentage of its population participating in the workforce, largely due to the state's financial support of the ultra-Orthodox men who are full-time yeshiva students throughout their adult lives.

These demonstrations have been grassroots and Facebook and Twitter inspired, and largely unrelated to the traditional problems of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The protesters are no longer satisfied with the traditional Israeli answer that social equality will come only after the external threats of terrorism, Iran and the Palestinian issue are solved. That excuse is no longer as compelling as it once was.

So far, these protests have focused almost exclusively on domestic concerns. But many believe that, at some point, Israelis will come to recognize that a significant part of the domestic economic

problem is a result of large government subsidies to the Settlements in the West Bank and support of an enormous welfare state for the ultra-Orthodox who choose not to work or contribute economically to the State. In addition, the political system that rewards small parties of narrow interests has also allowed much of this disparity and inequity to occur.

Great change may be happening. Personally, I support the efforts of the New Israel Fund in its work to support this new grassroots movement. For those who

are interested in these developments, I suggest that you log onto www.haaretz.com for up-to-date information on Israel's unfolding “Arab Spring.”

Journey, cont'd

Cantorial School was an amazing time in my life. The curriculum was exciting and challenging. What carried me through Cantorial School was my love of being on the bima, my love of teaching and my love for the Jewish people.

I have been blessed to serve numerous communities as a Cantor and Student Cantor. I believe that I have grown through each of these experiences. I have served congregations in New York, New Jersey, San Francisco, Australia, New Orleans and now Chicago. I have learned that, even though these communities may seem drastically different from each other, we are all essentially looking for the same things -- connection and meaning in our lives.

At the beginning of my journey, it was predominantly the music that attracted me to the Cantorate. Over the years I have come to see the Cantorate as much more multidimensional. Being a part of people's lives and helping to create meaning for them -- utilizing music as a sacred tool-- is what inspires me at the beginning of each new day.

I am excited to continue my journey with the members of Sukkat Shalom.