



CONGREGATION SUKKAT SHALOM

Bulletin

Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

It is difficult to remember what life was like before the internet, yet the wide-spread use of internet technology is not even a few decades old. It has changed our lives. We are able to communicate with people throughout the world with immediacy and ease. We can access information and knowledge anytime and anywhere. It has allowed all of us to live in a global village.

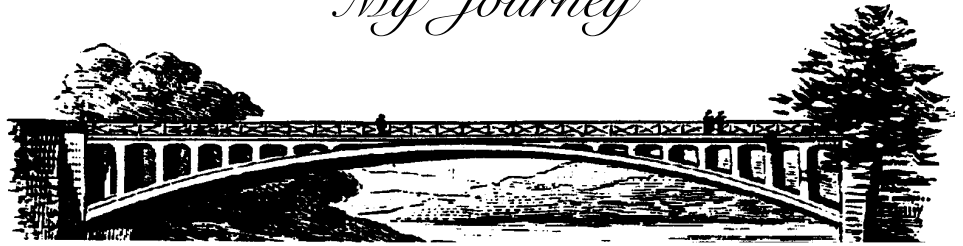
“The ‘blogosphere’ is full of the most outrageous statements, and far too many people accept these musings as authoritative.”

But there are also significant costs. Any writer now has the ability to immediately spread misinformation. Anyone with a keyboard seems able to promote himself or herself as an expert with absolutely no basis of knowledge. Urban legends, lies and smears find enormous audiences who fail to question the truth and who then send on these supposed pieces of wisdom to everyone else they know, creating the untruthful viral attack.

Expertise doesn't seem to matter. The 'blogosphere' is full of the most outrageous statements, and far too many people accept these musings as authoritative. I cannot possibly count the number of times I have received the absolutely shocking news that the teaching of the Holocaust has been banned in either the UK—as in United Kingdom, or at the University of Kentucky—the UK! Neither "fact" is true, of course, but the news of this supposed anti-Semitic threat has

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My Journey



As the political situation grew more tense in the Transylvania region of Hungary in 1937, especially for Jews, my grandparents fled their homeland for Montevideo, Uruguay. This saved their lives -- unlike their parents, friends and relatives who stayed behind. Uruguay would become their new home where they had one son, my father, who was raised speaking Hungarian and only learned Spanish once he began school.

My grandparents were not very religious Jews, yet their whole social life revolved around Jewish friends and community. At 18, my father saved enough money for a one-way ticket to United States. He studied English, graduated from college, got a Masters Degree and went to work in California, where he met my mother. She was from one of the few Jewish families in Hamden, Connecticut. Her family was Jewish on both sides, but did not practice. She never became a Bat Mitzvah nor had she planned on marrying someone Jewish.

“As a child, I was constantly changing schools, languages, cultures, friends and homes.”

Within days of their wedding, my parents learned they were being transferred overseas to Colombia. A few years later, in Bogota, I was born. We lived there for six months, then moved to New York and Los Angeles for one year each. Then it was on to Venezuela for five years, Brazil for four, and Washington, D.C., where we stayed through my college years.

As a child, I was constantly changing schools, languages, cultures, friends and homes. Being Jewish seemed to be the one constant in my life. No matter where the moving company took our belongings, we always observed the High Holy Days, gave up *hummitz* for Passover and lit the Hanukkah lights. We had a strong sense of family, respect for education and tried to be honest and compassionate people -- things our parents taught us were important values in a Jewish home. We always formed strong friendships in new countries with a few Jewish families who graciously opened their homes and hearts to us and became our extended family. We weren't Jewish in a religious way, but we lived a Jewish life.

We tried becoming part of a congregation while in Latin America, but it was not as easy as we anticipated. Listening to prayers in two foreign languages -- Portuguese and Hebrew -- at 9:30 at night (Latin culture does everything late) proved mentally exhausting rather than engaging and stimulating. Jewish communities in Rio and in Caracas were

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My Journey, cont'd

very small and close-knit; people were born into one temple and stayed there for the rest of their lives. We stood out like a sore thumb. I often felt intimidated by not having had a formal Jewish education like everyone else in the temple. If we did discover a prayer I knew, the intonations were different depending on whether the congregation spoke Spanish, Portuguese or English. It always seemed a bit off.

Yet despite having had limited interaction with a congregation, not having gone to Sunday school and never having been a Bat Mitzvah,

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I always felt a strong sense of being Jewish. During college, I decided to try to reach deeper into what being Jewish meant. I embarked on a month-long trip to Israel with my sister to volunteer on a kibbutz. We were looking forward to gaining a deeper spiritual appreciation and to forge a physical bond with the Promised Land. Much to our surprise, we found little religious presence on the kibbutz. And rather than connecting with land through planting and harvesting, we were assigned to clean the industrial-sized dishwasher every day for a month.

After college I moved back to South America and spent four years in Argentina. In my last year, I met my husband -- a Sephardic Jew from the countryside. We moved to Chicago to go to business school together and, upon graduation, got married under a *chuppah* in Buenos Aires. As the rabbi was interviewing us before the wedding day, I realized that a large part of my husband's life had been centered on Jewish activities through his membership in a congregation and a Jewish club.

I knew then that I wanted to give another try to finding the

“I wanted to find a place that would embrace us for our diverse background rather than make us feel like outsiders.”

right congregation. But, much like my childhood, we began to move from city to city, country to country, and did not have

enough time in one place to participate in a congregation. In the nine years since our wedding we have lived in seven cities, including Lima, Peru, and Sao Paulo, Brazil.

This summer we moved to Wilmette. I made finding a congregation a priority, especially since our children began asking many questions about Judaism which we did not know how to answer. I wanted to find a congregation that could help us learn more about our religion. I wanted to find a place that would embrace us for our diverse background rather than make us feel like outsiders. I wanted to find a congregation that made learning engaging and accessible. That journey -- both spiritual and geographical -- has brought us here to Sukkat Shalom.

Cantor's Corner

by Cantor Ross Wolman

Thanksgiving is a time when we gather together with family and friends in appreciation for what we have. We celebrate the story of the Pilgrims' shared meal with Native Americans, which broke down racial and ethnic barriers in a time of great fear and mistrust. It is a symbol of fellowship and humanity we strive for in our everyday lives.

Since my arrival in Wilmette, I have been a part of the Wilmette Interfaith Religious Leaders (WIRL) group, which meets monthly to share news and coordinate events that aim to celebrate our community and help those who are in need. An annual highlight for me has been the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service in which Wilmette worshipers gather as a religious community to pray, make music, and show our gratitude for what we have.

Rev. David Musgrave of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church recalls the beginnings of the Thanksgiving Service. It was about 15 years ago when the WIRL decided to hold its first service -- the catalyst being a desire for a liturgical gathering of all the Wilmette congregations to foster community and fellowship.

At this year's celebration, we are in for a real treat. Members of the Sukkat Shalom Adult Choir will join singers from across Wilmette to form a community interfaith chorale to perform and spread the message of Thanksgiving in song. We have been working hard to put together a music worship experience that will help us get to know our neighbors and break down the boundaries that might ordinarily divide us.

This year's celebration will be on **Sunday, November 21st, at Beth Hillel Congregation Bnai Emunah (3220 Big Tree Lane) at 6:30 p.m.** I hope you will join as Wilmette's diverse faith community comes together in prayer and song.

Rabbi's Message, cont'd

been making its way around the internet for a number of years.

Some misuse of the internet may be relatively harmless but, in other cases, the internet has allowed bad behavior to morph into truly dangerous activity. Kids have always made fun of other kids. Bullies have picked on other children because they are too fat or too skinny, too short or too tall, blond or dark, too smart or too slow, gay or straight, Jewish or Muslim. The reason doesn't really matter; someone will always try to make the other person a pariah or outcast. The junior high years are often the worst time for such behavior, but it can carry over into adulthood as well. Most of us seem to survive, but in far too many recent cases the bullying has resulted in tragedy.

The latest case was that of Tyler Clementi, the Rutgers University freshman who was "outed" by his roommate in what might have seemed a simple prank or act of freshman hazing, but resulted in the suicide of a wonderful young man. Tyler's roommate and another friend video-streamed a private romantic encounter, and that action led to the horrible tragedy of a young person's suicide.

I have two primary reactions. One is to the suicide itself. Young people too often believe that life will always be 8th grade, that things won't get better, and that they will be stuck for the rest of their lives in the misery of the moment. We, who are adult survivors of 8th grade, know better, but it is often difficult to see a future of hope when one is living in current despair.

Sexual identity is often at the heart of these tragedies. For far too long, religious institutions added to the feelings of otherness by condemning homosexuality. The message sent to young people was that they were rejected or sinful. I would hope that the change of attitude in the progressive religious movements has allowed synagogues and churches to be among the most accepting and embracing of all our institutions. I believe that Reform Judaism demonstrated that commitment by its decisions on the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis, its support of same-gender marriage and support of our LGBT synagogues. The message must remain clear and unwavering: there is complete acceptance of gays and lesbians within our community and within the embrace of the Divine.

But the second point is about the technology and how all the advantages that might exist because of e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social networking have a dark side, as well. Cyber-bullying, malicious and destructive gossip, viral rumors and lies have made personal attacks all the more destructive. It used to take a decent amount of effort to take out a piece of stationery, put ink into a fountain pen, write a letter, put it in an envelope, seal it, address it, put a stamp on it and then mail it. In each one of those steps, some thought process occurred, and the letter might be withheld. Would that today we were forced to be as cautious about the words and messages we send.

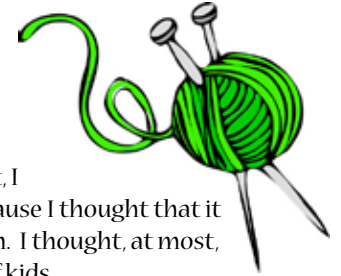
The Talmud teaches: "Why is gossip like a three-pronged tongue? Because it kills three people: the person who says it, the person who listens to it, and the person about whom it is said."

Always remember that the recipient of your message or the person about whom it is written was also made in the image of God.

Knitting Small Blankets Provides Big Rewards

At Congregation Sukkat Shalom, every boy and girl who becomes a Bar or Bat Mitzvah does a mitzvah project. Literally, mitzvah means commandment. To do a mitzvah is to fulfill the commandment of *tikkun olam* – repairing the world. For my mitzvah project, I chose to knit blankets for the Linus Project.

The Linus Project is an organization that distributes security blankets to sick kids in hospitals and shelters, or wherever there is a child in need. When I first heard about the Linus Project, I was hesitant to choose it because I thought that it was not a big enough mitzvah. I thought, at most, I would help only a handful of kids.

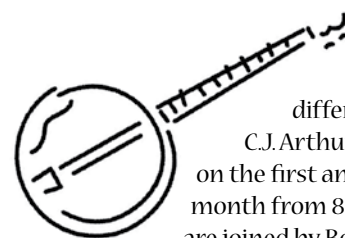


But then I learned that my neighbor's son was in the ICU, and that he had received a blanket from the Linus Project. My neighbor told me that seeing that soft blanket among all the hard metal machinery made her feel really happy and grateful that someone would put in the effort to help someone else in such a way. This showed me that one blanket not only helps a child, but an entire family.

I was worried at first that I was not a good enough knitter. But after I started, I realized the only way I could get better at knitting was to keep practicing. At some points I got very frustrated, like when I needed to unwind some of the blanket or when I dropped a stitch. I got through those tough moments by remembering to be patient and to focus on my goal.

When I was knitting, I felt proud to see the progress I was making. It was really rewarding that I was making something that would brighten someone's day. During the last six months, I have successfully knitted four baby blankets. This project has taught me that even what may seem like a small mitzvah still can have a big impact on someone's life.

Catch Musical Congregants at C.J. Arthur's in Wilmette



Sukkat Shalom congregant Bob Perlstein plays banjo with two different bluegrass groups at C.J. Arthur's Restaurant in Wilmette on the first and third Mondays of every month from 8 to 10 p.m. The groups often are joined by Bob's son, Liam, an 8th grader who is a former Indiana State Fair Fiddle Champion. Bob has taught at the Old Town School of Folk Music.

Tikkun Olam: Repair the World

The Hineinu Committee Tells Congregants: "We Are Here"

"Hineinu" means "we are here." The goal of the Hineinu Committee, formed in 2004, has been to provide support for each other during times of crisis or unexpected need.

The formation of the committee has resulted in a network of congregational volunteers committed to helping during challenging times, whether due to an illness, the birth of a baby or the loss of a loved one.

Over the years, the support provided by the committee and its volunteers has taken the form of a telephone call, a home-cooked meal, a visit, a ride to a doctor's appointment, respite care for exhausted new parents or assistance with the seemingly mundane tasks that can feel overwhelming during challenging times. We perform these acts of lovingkindness for each other as a congregational family and spiritual community. The members who have participated have been rewarded with deeper connections that form when we reach out to one another.

In the past year our volunteers have provided meals and assistance to several individuals and families in need of support after a surgery or a medical crisis or the birth of a baby. In addition, we have recognized the loss of loved ones and also joyous occasions with the monthly delivery of our Shabbat baskets. The Hineinu Committee has recently formed a New Members Committee to welcome new members to the congregation and provide opportunities for all of us to get to know one another.

As we move into the future, we look forward to effectively responding to the needs of our community. We welcome any ideas, comments, or suggestions that you have. You can become involved in the committee as either a volunteer helping out on an as-needed basis or as a committee member. Committee members help to shape the goals and the direction of the committee, organize services and coordinate volunteers.

For more information about the Hineinu Committee, please go to the Congregation Sukkat Shalom website at www.Sukkat-Shalom.org. On the home page of the website, go to the "Getting Involved" link and scroll down to the "Hineinu Committee," which has a link to our volunteer form. You may also contact Judy Buckman at the Sukkat Shalom office. We invite you to join us in assuring those in need that "We are here."

Thanksgiving Provides a Chance to "Share the Harvest"

This fall will mark Sukkat Shalom's Sixth Annual Share the Harvest, and we invite you to join in sponsoring local families in need.

Thanksgiving is a time for family, food and friends, but the current economic climate makes it difficult for some of our neighbors to celebrate. That's why we're proud of the generosity our congregants have shown in previous years as they donated turkeys, cranberry sauce, gifts for kids, gift cards and a heaping side of kindness.

Whether you have participated in the past or are looking for a new way for your family to demonstrate *Tikkun Olam* in our own backyard, please join us as we work to bring a little joy to families in need this holiday season.

Collection will be held at **Family School on Sunday, November 21st, between 10 and 10:30 a.m.** If you have any questions or would like to get involved, please contact the temple office.



Participants in last year's
Share the Harvest



Participants in last year's Share the Harvest

Tutoring at A Just Harvest

The highlight of our week is going to A Just Harvest. There are many things about this place that inspire us. We are amazed at how many people they serve: as many as 200 people or more every night for dinner.

No one has to show identification or proof of need, and no one is turned away.

There is a real sense of community that has been created by the people who work there and the regular patrons. Everyone is respectful and friendly. There seems to be an amazing amount of generosity and coordination involved in making A Just Harvest work so smoothly. A Just Harvest reminds us of Sukkat Shalom: all are welcome and the emphasis is on community and a respect for all people.

As my son Danny was thinking about his mitzvah project, we wanted to incorporate some of his passions and strengths. He enjoys cooking, reading and babysitting. We volunteered at A Just Harvest a few times this summer, serving dinner to the people who came.

Danny and I noticed the number of children who were there. People started lining up early and were seated by 4:30, waiting for up to an hour for dinner. The children were great; they were well behaved, reading books that they had borrowed from the small library, or playing with toys they had brought. Danny tells the rest of the story:

"I saw kids doing nothing for an hour. They were well behaved, but just sat there. My brothers and I would go insane if we had to sit at a table with our parents for an hour before dinner was ready. I was comfortable talking to all the patrons of every different ethnic background and age. I felt like this could be a really enriching experience for me. I was helping serve many people who may not get a good dinner, but I wanted to do more.

"This seemed like a great place for me to do my mitzvah project. I could work with children who needed help with homework or just read them some of my favorite stories. Maybe I would even learn a thing or two about cooking from Jay, the kitchen coordinator!

"As the school year began, I worked with Bridgette, the volunteer coordinator, and made a flyer announcing that I would be there every Thursday for an hour before dinner and would help any kid with homework or could read them a story if they had no work. At first no kids were interested. Later in the month we had five or six kids each time. When we see a new face, we go up and ask them if they want to come work or read with us. Parents encourage this and the children and adults are excited to see us.

"A Just Harvest reminds us of Sukkat Shalom: all are welcome and the emphasis is on community and a respect for all people."

"Even though I have so little time with hockey, homework and Hebrew tutoring, I know that finding the time to do this act of kindness helps make a difference for these children. Parents have told me that it makes their life much easier, because they don't have to struggle with their kids to finish homework after dinner. It also makes a difference in my life because when I am there I feel good.

"This is a project that could sprout into something bigger. Sukkat Shalom could get more volunteers and we could have tutoring there every school night. It would be something great because many of these families are there every night. To have support

"I was helping serve many people who may not get a good dinner, but I wanted to do more."

daily, instead of weekly, could really make a difference in their lives. Even when I'm finished working at A Just Harvest, this program can take its own path and become something new. It would feel incredible to know I was a part of its beginning.

If you have any questions, are looking for a great mitzvah project please contact the temple office.

Habitat for Humanity Project Update

Thanks to all the members of Sukkat Shalom who contributed to the Habitat for Humanity fund drive earlier this year. The combined efforts of the 11 congregations that constitute the Glencoe Interfaith Builders (GIB) raised in excess of \$20,000.

With these additional funds, we now can consider new projects. GIB has more than \$70,000 on hand, which it plans to use in conjunction with a matching grant of \$50,000 for each new project. The project at Carter Woods in Waukegan is now complete, so we are looking at new home sites and the rehabilitation of existing homes.

Habitat currently owns scattered home sites in Zion as well as existing homes that it acquired through foreclosures. In consultation with the Lake County Habitat for Humanity office in Waukegan, GIB will choose one or two of these locations to begin construction or rehabilitation.

The difficult economy has resulted in a much slower pace for these projects than we anticipated. In fact, we have many volunteers to help with construction for which we do not have funding. The new opportunities we're pursuing should allow us to start getting our hands dirty again, soon! Many of you have volunteered for this project, and we will be sure to contact you when it's time to begin the next home.

Getting Religious School Right

by Rabbi Ari Moffic, Director of Family Education

Since its inception, Sukkat Shalom's Family School has sought to provide two things found in almost every successful religious school: parental involvement, and teachers who instill positive feelings among their students. We want our students to feel that they belong and are in a safe environment. They should be excited about what they are doing and learning. They should have fun in class and feel that their teacher and classmates care about them.

Successful religious schools produce children who know that Judaism is challenging, relevant, multi-layered and complex. The students should build memories that stay with them -- memories of holiday celebrations, life cycle events, social justice work and youth group excursions. Perhaps most important, the students

should leave these programs with established relationships -- with new friends, a special teacher, and with their clergy.

“Successful religious schools produce children who know that Judaism is challenging, relevant, multi-layered and complex.”

How wonderful it would be if your child felt all these things and shared these memories when he or she graduates from Family School. That

would be an extraordinary success. But we also need to ask ourselves about the body of knowledge our children will possess. Will they be able to converse thoughtfully and knowledgeably about their religious background and traditions?

Each grade has its own learning goals, which we plan to make available on the Family School section of the Sukkat Shalom website. Our littlest ones are working to gain the basic building blocks of their Jewish tradition. These include understanding the holidays, and knowing *Hamotzi* (the prayer over bread) and the *Shema*. They learn basic Jewish vocabulary and can identify ritual items such as the Torah or a *mezuzah*.

Our younger students study and perform ethical *mitzvot*. They are exposed to the timeless stories of Genesis and Exodus. They begin to talk about God and their own sense of how the world works. They learn about the beauty and importance of Shabbat.

By third grade, the students start forming a connection to Israel -- from its biblical roots to the modern state. A love for Israel is part of what it means to be a Reform Jew, and this begins at an early age. We expose our children before Bar and Bat Mitzvah to the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) by focusing on how the Israelites formed a holy community and through reading the ethical messages of the Prophets.

Sixth grade students tackle the daunting subject of what it means to mark their days with meaning over the cycle of their lives. Seventh and eighth graders

use classic rabbinic texts to grapple with ethical and moral subjects, ranging from poverty and hunger to relationships and honesty.

In high school class we address the major questions of life. We have open discussions during which our students can work through issues they may never before have tried to put into words.

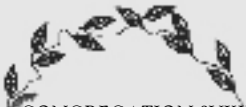
We want our Family School students to feel positively about their religious identity. They should gain important historical and religious content over the years. But a successful religious school experience, in our eyes, goes far beyond whether they can quote chapter and verse or historical dates. We hope you agree. Please feel free to let us know.

Congregational Running Group Plans to Expand for Next Year

Members of the Sukkat Shalom Runners' Club concluded their first season by participating in the Community Church of Wilmette's Trot for Turkeys 5K Run/Walk in late-October. Congregants who participated in the charity run included: Nancy Schofer, Keith Holtzmueller, Craig Caffarelli, Jesse Peterson Hall and Miles Paris.

As this year's racing season comes to a close, we're hoping to expand our running group next year to run in charity races that help "heal the world." In the meantime, some of our runners have decided to meet on a weekly basis for "fun runs" and to build momentum for next year.

For the time being, we will meet at the Community Church of Wilmette (corner of Wilmette and Forest). We've invited members of that congregation, with whom we share a spiritual home, to join us for our fun runs. Our goal is to build an interfaith running group to participate in charity races next year. Those interested in joining or who want more information can contact the temple office.



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