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BETH SHIR SHALOM

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CLERGY

Alex Kress
Rabbi

Neil Comess-Daniels
Rabbi Emeritus

Rebekah Mirsky
Cantor

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Executive Director

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Religious Education Director

Robin Masnicoff
ECC Director

Lori Daitch
Director of Engagement

Bailee Goodman
Youth Group Director

Brennan Schulweis
Office Admin

I spent the majestic summers of my childhood at Camp Harlam — a crown jewel of the URJ camping system — much like Camp Newman in our region. Camp instilled in me a love of Shabbat, the importance of community, and the joy of taking two or three showers a day. Only at camp did my week orbit around the gravitational pull of Judaism.

But in one significant moment, camp let me down. I have a vivid memory of a *shiur* (Hebrew for lesson) in which we were discussing our beliefs about God. The space felt safe and we freely expressed our feelings on God under the shade of a big tree. After everyone in the circle had spoken, the rabbi leading the session simply said, “I don’t believe in God.”

I was taken aback. “Wait - the rabbi doesn’t believe in God?!” It was an “a-ha” moment that allowed me to cease wrestling with God. It justified an immature disbelief and let my nascent theology off the hook with the short quip, “I don’t believe in God.”

After five years of theological dormancy, I encountered the ideas of Baruch Spinoza in college. I had never entertained or explored ideas of God outside of the biblical character. Without grasping the sophistication of Spinoza’s philosophy, I quickly latched on to his pantheism. I found the elementary notion that God and nature are one relatable. I enjoyed the idea that God is the force of the universe that everything unfolds from, an ever unfurling chain of events. I loved that Spinoza’s God was the antithesis of the Bible’s anthropomorphic God that I failed to relate to. Ultimately, the ideas of Baruch Spinoza reignited my wrestling match with God.

However, God did not have a place in my Judaism until I reached rabbinical school. In retrospect, that makes me incredibly sad. God is not just a character in the Torah. God is an attitude, a presence, the innate feeling in your kishkes of right and wrong. For well over a thousand years, our tradition has understood that we cannot confine God to a biblical box, to an archetype that is childishly easy to deny. Yet somehow, those sophisticated ideas of God never made it into my Jewish education.

This fall I am teaching a course on Sunday mornings at 10:00 am called “Is Judaism God-optional?” In a buffet of theological novelties, I promise the faithful, the questioning, and the atheist will all sink their teeth into thought-provoking, meaningful ideas of God that just might make you change your answer to the question: Do you believe in God?



A Message from our Board of Directors – Written by Mitch Rishe

It has been 15 months since California Governor Gavin Newsom issued the country's first lockdown order in March 2020. With the pandemic finally easing, we are re-entering a very changed world. That is also true at Beth Shir Shalom, which adapted quickly to a changed world. Although our Early Childhood Center operated throughout the pandemic, except for a brief closure during the lockdown, our religious school (JELLI) and youth groups (Club 78 and BESHTY) conducted their sessions entirely through Zoom. We had our first Zoom High Holy Days, and implemented a successful Zoom Shabbat that we intend to maintain as an option even after we return to in-person services. Our annual fundraiser also went remote.

Big changes also occurred with our clergy and staff. Our longtime spiritual leader Rabbi Neil Comess-Daniels assumed emeritus status, and we welcomed Cantor Rebekah Mirsky and transitional Rabbi Jim Simon. Thank you, Rabbi Jim for navigating our congregation through the selection of a new rabbi. We hired our new settled Rabbi Alex Kress during an interview process that was entirely remote. We also hired Lori Daitch, formerly of the Santa Monica Synagogue, as our Director of Engagement. There will be lots of new faces to welcome you back to Beth Shir Shalom once we return to in-person services and activities.

While our community has had its share of loss these past 15 months, it has also been a unique opportunity to spend time with family, explore new hobbies and interests, and re-evaluate beliefs and priorities. Personally, I feel blessed to have been able to spend time with my two teenage sons. With my entire family at home for online work and school, we ate lunch together, we baked challah, and we watched movies . . . lots of movies. My youngest son Eli had his Bar Mitzvah last June in the Beth Shir Shalom Gan with just his brother, parents and grandparents, and of course Rabbi Neil. While it was not the celebration he envisioned, and he missed out on a party, it was an intimate and moving experience and one that he is sure to always remember.

Now, nearly a year and a half after this life-changing event, things are starting to return to a new normal. With more than 76% of the adult population in Santa Monica vaccinated against COVID, we look forward to resuming Temple activities. Congregants will soon be receiving information about a return to in-person services this summer in the Gan, and limited in-person High Holiday services. And we look forward to welcoming Rabbi Alex Kress as he begins his tenure on July 1. Have a great summer, and I'll see you soon!

Welcome Lori Daitch – Director of Engagement

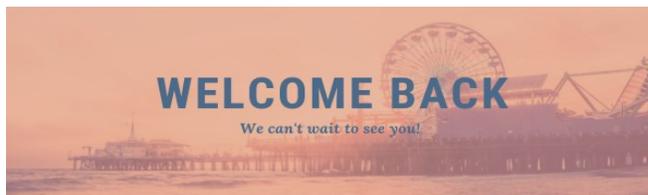
Beth Shir Shalom has a new position that we are very excited about, Director of Engagement. And what is even more exciting is the talented person we have to fulfill that role, Lori Daitch. Lori comes to us with over 30 years of experience in education, engagement and programming. She has already begun planning an event-filled year with us now that we are finally able to be together in person once again. Please join us in giving her a Beth Shir Shalom welcome.

She joins our dynamic staff which includes our settled Rabbi, Alex Kress, our Executive Director, Cynthia Barzilai, our Religious Education Director, Elana Mabashov, our Early Childhood Center Director, Robin Masnicoff, our Youth Group Directors, Bailee Goodman and Lara Gabrich, and our Office Administrator, Brennan Schulweis. With all of our teachers and custodians, we look forward to making 21-22 a year to be joyfully remembered!



Welcome Back!!!! Shabbats in-person are back in the Gan!

We are so excited to announce the reopening of services at Beth Shir Shalom, now that California has lifted nearly all its COVID-19 restrictions. For a year and a half, we have navigated uncharted territory with physical distancing and tech challenges in order to continue showing up to support each other. Our first in-person service will be held on Friday, July 9th with Rabbi Alex Kress.



We are grateful that we can finally open our doors and once again join in song, prayer and movement. Through it all, our community has grown stronger and gained a greater understanding of just how precious life is. Seating is limited to 100 people on a first-come, first-serve basis so sign up today! We will continue to stream for those who would like to join virtually.

We are reopening with the following provisions:

- Shabbat services are open to anyone 12+ years who has been fully vaccinated, and to children under 12. All are welcome ([members and non-members](#)), and registration is required.
- To join us in person, all people 12 years and older must complete a vaccine [attestation form](#) or bring their vaccination card (or picture of it) to services.
- If not vaccinated, a negative PCR test within 72 hours of the event must be provided.
- There will not be distancing requirements.
- Masks are no longer required for those who are vaccinated, but of course, please wear one if it makes you comfortable. If you are not vaccinated, a mask must be worn.
- We will begin holding services inside sometime after the High Holy Days.

We can't wait to sing with you in person and celebrate Shabbat as a community!

A Post Pandemic Understanding of TISHA B' AV

In this year of pandemonium—pandemic, racial unrest, and political insurrection—we must avoid descending into despair. On Tisha B'Av, we can break free of the bleak present by gaining historical perspective and thereby possibilities for the future. I recommend a *chidush* (innovation) whose groundwork was laid centuries ago in *Eichah Rabbah*.

Traditionally, with only candles for illumination, we sit on the ground to hear the woeful chanting of *Eichah*, lamenting the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. Lamentations painfully recounts the suffering of our biblical ancestors in gory detail, bringing us viscerally into their experience of God as vengeful punisher. Following the destruction of the Second Temple, however, and from a distance of four centuries, our Sages approached the tragedy with questions of theology and theodicy. They composed *Eichah Rabbah*, a midrashic exploration of the meaning of this pivotal event, bequeathing to us brilliant coping strategies for a demoralized community. God the Punisher was transformed into God the Mourner, who laments the destruction of Jerusalem and the divine abode. The guilt that permeates *Eichah* is subsumed by the comfort and compassion of *Eichah Rabbah*, which expresses the theology that “no disease is created without a cure” and exudes faith in the eternal strength of Israel. *Eichah Rabbah* reshaped the futility of *Eichah* into consolation and hope.

Analogously, beyond our raw mourning this year, we have learned the power and necessity of interdependence for public health and the acute moral imperative of racial equity. On Tisha B'Av, let's include *Eichah Rabbah* along with *Eichah*, as we strive to shape this year's story. (Written by Rabbi Gila Ruskin for CCAR)

Robin Masnicoff – ECC Director

Summer days long and hot. Days spent at the beach or traveling to a new destination. Summers past that we took for granted, the ease of a day at the beach or a road trip to the mountains. This summer is especially rewarding after the last 16 months. For some of our children, the last 16 months is more than half of their lives and they do not know any different. We adults feel a united sigh of relief with every little step towards our collective freedom to gather unmasked. What a blessing and how much gratitude to science.

This June when we opened our doors for our ECC summer program, Camp Olam, we were able to invite our parents back into the building. That small change brought such a great feeling of relief and happiness. Our building is always filled with laughter and play, and having our parents back inside to see first-hand the joy in our children has been beyond rewarding.

Wishing you all a summer of memories to be made with family and friends.

Elana Mabashov – Religious Education Director

What a privilege and honor it was to finish out the school year in person. After over a year of remote learning, JELLI was finally able to come back together as a community. While the option to continue learning remotely remained, the majority of our students chose to return in person. Nothing can describe the joy our students and staff felt to see the smiles and hear the laughter of young people while they learned, played, sang and danced. JELLI is very excited about what's ahead!

We will have two new teachers coming to us for the 2021-22 school year. Jennifer Bennet and Azita Nemanim are experienced, enthusiastic educators, sure to spice up our student engagement. We are also so fortunate to have Rabbi Alex Kress join us this year. Rabbi Alex brings a wealth of knowledge and fun to every occasion! Assuming Covid continues to move in the right direction, JELLI is looking forward to resuming fully in-person classes this fall. Classes are scheduled to start Sunday, September 12th at 9:00 a.m. Until then, have a wonderful summer break!

Bailee Goodman and Lara Gabrich – Youth Group Directors

Hello Beth Shir Shalom community! What a great way to end a school year. With the world a little safer, and things opening up a little more, our BESHTYites are enjoying their summer breaks! Pearl and Mae are going to sleep away camps while Oona and Sasha are spending the summer enjoying Santa Monica! Gabe, Caroline and Jessica are gearing up for their first semesters in college, IN PERSON! Those are just a few of our summer plans! We are so excited for all our members continued growth and success and can't wait to see what Fall 2021 looks like.

As for Lara and me, we are spending the summer collaborating and redesigning our youth group structure to better fit our members' lives. We also want to really start to explore more opportunities with other local YGs as well!

BESHTY is so pumped to welcome Rabbi Alex and Lori Daitch to Beth Shir Shalom and can't wait to work side by side with them as well!

A Message from our Social Action Committee

WE ARE COLLECTING HYGIENE KITS!



Once again, we are partnering with Food on Foot: a nonprofit dedicated to assisting our unhoused and low-income neighbors. For the months of June and July, we will be collecting hygiene kits for the homeless.

- Your homemade kits will contain TRAVEL SIZE toothbrush, toothpaste, mouthwash, shampoo, soap and hand sanitizer in a SMALL ZIPLOCK BAG.
- Or these kits can be ordered from Amazon.
- Please bring your kits to Shabbat services in the Gan on Friday evening July 9, 16, 23or 30, or they can be dropped off at the Temple in a box provided in the lobby.

Thank you for participating in this Mitzvah

JULY

YAHARZEITS

<u>July 2nd</u>	<u>July 9th</u>	<u>July 16th</u>	<u>July 23rd</u>	<u>July 30th</u>
Carol Batson	Lillian Ansell	Leda Alkov	David Altschuler	Peter Courey
Stanley Cavell	Stan Hoffman	Irvin Avidon	Edyth Baum	Janis Jacobs
Albert Fassler	John Eric Johnson	Ethel Beil	Johny Elbaz-Deckel	Michael Jondreau
Terese Franklin	Thelma Pogensky	Myrtle Fischer	Joseph Ellis	Saul Kadish
Sadie Moot	Rabbi Joseph Topel	William Foran	Dr Jacob R. Heller	George King
Milton Potak		Evelyn Jacobs	Mildred Lieberman Hoffman	Dina Rosenshtroum
Irwin Reznick		Max Laskin	Dan Lombard	Sidney Solomon
Rachel Singer		David S. Michaels	Nancy Marks	
Esther Welling		Arthur J. Schwartz	Elena Seifert	
			Norman Silverstein	
			Moses "Moe" Susser	

BIRTHDAYS

Ezra Benjamin	Linda Hoffman	Shane Quentin
Cassidy Benson	Caroline Jusko	Esteban Ramirez
Frankie Buckholtz	Shayna Kadish	Lilly Resnick
Benjamin Cavell	Sheldon Kadish	David Reznick
Sibyl Courey	Andrea King	Denise Richards
Lillian Findler-Buchalter	Maya Kleiman	Josh Rosenfeld
Emma Godfrey	Asher Kreitzman	Ellie Schneir
Nancy Golden	Beckett Lowther	Jackie Silverman
Richard Golden	Robin Masnicoff	Alan Sinder
Ava Goldstein	Mike Miller	Ethan Wain
Frank Gruber	Tony Oliva	Asher Zaczepinski
Lauren Hoffman		

ANNIVERSARIES

7th	David Lepas & Amy Wruble
9th	Wendy Amster & David Hinkes
18th	Clifford & Gracie Neuman
19th	Nelly Rico Blustajn & Steve Blustajn
39th	Dr. William & Patricia Oppenheim
50th	Marsha & Gene Newstat
56th	Diane & Larry Nathan
58th	Herbert & Lillian Laskin

TRIBUTES

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 Simon, Rabbi Jim

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Judy Stearn Fund

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Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

Gartner, Barbara, in Memory of Sylvia Gartner

Tributes/Yahrzeits

Katz, David, in Memory of David Slater
 King, Andrea, in Memory of Morris Gross
 Lewis, Arla, in Honor of Rabbi Jim Simon
 Silverman, Jackie & Manny, in Memory of Sam Neidorf

AUGUST

Yahrzeits

<u>August 6th</u>	<u>August 13th</u>	<u>August 20th</u>	<u>August 27th</u>
Giancarlo Battigalli	Joan Cooper	Michael Blustajn	Norman George Courey
Saul Hymowitz	Linda Cooper	Richard Laskin	Jack Moraff Daniels
Mort Kofman	Sylvia Horowitz	Charlotte Levin	Sidney Grodberg
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	Eugene Topel		

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Athena Barefoot	Aurea Dosie	Adam Modlinger
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Chloe Bird	Anya Feldman	Luca Piva-Iriondo
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Shauna Brumfield	Lillian Laskin	Lyndon Stambler
Mia Castro	Margo Wain Lee	Ariella Wacht
Josephine Cavell	Tucker Levitan	Shayna Wacht
Ellen Cox	Erynn Miller	

ANNIVERSARIES

12th	Sarah & Matt Benson
13th	Jenni & William Pfaff
13th	Virginia & Nelson Weiss
16th	Michael Kadish & Deborah Novak
25th	Jack Susser & Marlene Preston
33rd	Gary & Kara Hirsch
52nd	Layne & Jeff Lepes
52nd	Ted & Lillian Roth

TRIBUTES

Tributes/Yahrzeits

Heller, Gloria, in Memory of Dr. Jacob & Kitty Heller
 Lepes, Layne & Jeff, in Memory of Charlotte Grodberg
 Oblath, Patti & Miller, Michael, in Memory of
 Bea & Harold Miller

Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

Cohen, Aaron, Thank you for the Memorial service
 Gartner, Barbara, in Memory of Jack Gartner

Matthew Mezza Fund

King, Andrea, in Memory of Ben Cardozo

Annual Fundraiser Sponsors

Wiener, Marilyn & Steve, Mazel Tov to New Grandparents
 Rabbi Neil & Toby

Wiener, Marilyn & Steve, Welcome to Rabbi Alex Kress

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