

June, 2018 (5778)

Mendocino Coast Jewish Community

## MEGILLAH

The MCJC shul is located at 15071 Caspar Road, Caspar, CA.  
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### RABBI'S NOTES



Lately I find myself using the word “soul” a lot, but not in the technical Kabbalistic sense of five layers of soul and all that deep stuff (though I like those ideas). Just souls: souls at the bank, souls in the pool, souls at the meeting, souls around the table. Souls everywhere, doing what they do, meeting and parting and points in between.

I feel that sense of soul-ness a lot on Shabbat morning. I tend to start the Shabbat morning service right at 10:30, even if I’m the only one in the building just then. And as time and prayers go on, I’ll hear that funny squeak and shudder of the kitchen door opening, a couple of footfalls and then the door into the main room opens and a soul walks in. Often it’s someone I know well, but I still feel a sense of surprise: Nina or Eli or Carolyn... appears! Or someone I might not have expected to come to shul that day. Or maybe someone I don’t know at all. Once that other soul is in the room, the whole texture of the experience changes. Often my eyes are closed and I can’t even see them. Sometimes they are quiet, and I can’t hear them either. But their presence is palpable. It’s the most obvious, ordinary and simple thing in the world, the presence of another soul. And so surprising. From not being here to being here and only here--a small miracle, the presence of that particular soul.

On Shabbat people rouse themselves and make their way to the shul to sing and be quiet and murmur and listen, all, presumably to nourish their souls. So their soul-ness is pretty evident, as they find a seat and settle in and put on a tallit or don’t and open a siddur and begin to join into the flow of the service. Our souls are, as it were, on the surface, as we sing and contemplate. The reason I close my eyes so much when I pray is, I think, because of the incredible intensity of the presence of other souls, so tender and so vulnerable. It is sometimes almost unbearably beautiful.

On Shavuot, Laura led us in a wonderful meditation. She asked us to call to mind an experience of intense awe. I scrambled around in my mind: seeing the Grand Canyon (and a million tourists with I-phones snapping); taking hallucinogens (fun, but a bit of a cliché); beautiful music (I’m not complaining at all about any beautiful music I have ever heard, but that’s not where my mind took me...). “Don’t worry,” Laura said after a while, “something will come. It doesn’t have to be the biggest thing in the world.”

Heaven help me, what kept coming to my mind was walking into our bedroom and seeing our dog curled up on the bed. As many of you know, we share Pulga, so she’s not always at our house. And when she is, she has a life. She goes out strolling all over the place with Mickey, roams around the house and yard, moves her kibble around the living room rug, naps here and there. So I don’t assume at any given moment that I will see her on our bed. It’s not like it’s a big shock to see her there, just that tiny and sweet surprise of encountering someone I love in the regular flow of the day. She’s right here, in all her particulars--here and nowhere else.

This was, for me, the revelation of Shavuot this year: souls in all their particulars, there at this moment and nowhere else. Of course, stories and quirks and personalities and relationships--oh, and bodies too--were also there and nowhere else, swirling in right along with each soul around the table that night.

At funerals, when we’re gathered around the grave looking at a box suspended over a hole, I sometimes say that one good thing about this moment is that we get to feel the essence of the person who died, above and beyond all the transient moments that we knew them in life. We don’t have to be with them on a day when they were sick and cranky, or doing a tedious job with us, or being late to meet us, or just being their regular boring selves. We feel the soul that was there sorting the papers with us or at the other end of a telephone or



in a sickbed. But we feel more than those moments, those memories: there is some kind of through-line to a soul, something specific and continuous about that particular being above and beyond (or below and even closer than) their specific behaviors and experiences. Once that person has died, there is a piercing realization that we will never again encounter that exact soul, at least not on the plane of daily life. So often at a funeral someone will say, "I wish I had spent more time with them," or "I wish I had known them better." I wonder if those comments actually mean, "I wish I had paid more attention to the particular texture of that unique soul" and not been so wrapped up in the distractions of the moment.

Sometimes when I bop into the Good Life Cafe (which will always be The Bakery in my brain) and I'm not rushing or ravenous or otherwise preoccupied, I will come in the door, and my eyes will light upon someone. I wasn't thinking of them a second before, but encountering them, there and only there, in their wholeness, their specificity, their soul-ness--well, I find it kind of awesome.



Yes, yes, this is a kind of Sinai perspective. I can also see that person who is oh-so-there at the bakery and suddenly feel annoyed or shy or mortified that I forgot to respond to their e-mail or am too busy to talk or just plain uninterested. That would be most of the time for me. Okay, someday I will be at their funeral, and I will be saying, "Oh I wish I had spent more time with them." But at this moment I am probably thinking, "I wish I could just drink my coffee and read more stupid news on my phone."

Even then I am surrounded with souls. And even then I am a soul myself, though in the moment I am checked-out and irritable and indifferent. Just the occasional Sinai-like glimpse of a galaxy of souls going about their daily lives--not to mention learning Torah late into the night--is enough to remind me of the radiance that surrounds me all the time, whether I tune into it or not.

No punchline here--just a reminder to self that it is a bit of a miracle to walk into the grocery or anyplace else and see all those souls. And, who knows, maybe even to look in the mirror?

## TORAH READERS FOR HIGH HOLY DAYS



Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are not until September (10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>), but if you've ever had a yearning to be a Torah reader for the high holidays or are one of our regulars, it's not too soon to sign up. If you'd like to have your first experience with this, Mina Cohen can help you prepare; if you are one of our experienced readers and have a preference for a holiday and a passage, please contact Mina at [mcohen@mcn.org](mailto:mcohen@mcn.org) or call 937-1319.

## HESCHEL GROUP

The group of us reading Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel together will meet on Tuesdays, June 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 5:30-7:00 PM. These will be the final two meetings. For June 5<sup>th</sup> we will finish reading **A Passion for Truth**, and at our final meeting we will try to sum up and take Heschel's teachings into our own lives.

## KABBALAT SHABBAT

Our June 22<sup>nd</sup> celebration will take place in South Caspar at the home of Susan Tubbesing and Sarah Nathe. Please call them at 962-0565 to RSVP and get directions.

In July we will be at the home of Benna Kolinsky and Danny Mandelbaum in Boonville.



All gatherings begin at 6:00 PM on the fourth Friday of the month, and include a short service with a vegetarian potluck following. If you would like to host a gathering, contact Mina Cohen at [mcohen@mcn.org](mailto:mcohen@mcn.org) or 937-1319.

## ELDERS TRY SOMETHING NEW

You've certainly heard by now that discussions at the Elders' Conversation can go wide and deep. At our most recent Elders' Conversation the idea came up to share with other people what it is like for us to be old. To that

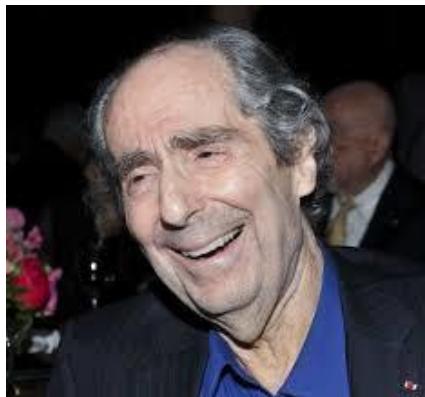
end, we are going to explore creating a program--exact medium TBD--which will draw on the experiences of people engaged in the ongoing conversation. For at least the next couple of gatherings we're going to try some writing, some interviewing, and some creating together. No promises of where or when there will be a public offering, just a commitment to explore what we would have to say and how we might want to say it. Elders meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month--June 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> this month, 3:00-5:00 PM at the shul. People of all ages are most welcome.

## PHILIP ROTH: “REMEMBER HIM FOR LIFE, HE WHO DELIGHTS IN LIFE”

Unlike larger news sources like the *New York Times*, we here at *The Megillah* haven't had an obituary of Philip Roth on file for years. And I (Margaret) must say that, as the world's biggest Philip Roth fan, it never crossed my mind that he could actually die. Someone so outsized in his genius, his humor, his passion--how could someone like this die?

He just had so much *chai* in him! From Ozzie the bar mitzvah student threatening to jump off the roof of the shul if his rabbi didn't confess that he believed in the virgin birth (in “The Conversion of the Jews,” 1959) to the aged Everyman standing by a friend's grave and ruminating: “I must, I must, he thought, my six stents tell me I must one day soon fearlessly say goodbye.... I can't do it!” (*Everyman*, 2006), Roth radiated that wild, irrepressible life energy.

He was of my parents' generation, but I feel like I grew up alongside him. When I was a preteen, our school offered a mail order book service. My parents always allowed me to order however many, and whichever books I wished. In 1969 I ordered a racy paperback called *Portnoy's Complaint* (along with another book, long-forgotten, which had splashed across the cover, “Pregnant, unmarried, scared...!”). One night soon after, my dad came in to say goodnight to me and saw these two books by my bed. “What are these!?” he roared and took them away. A few days later he gave them back. “They look fine to me,” he said, “enjoy them.”



I didn't know much about teenage boys then, but I got the wildness of Alex Portnoy. And the Jewishness--that life force. A couple years ago Mickey and I listened to Portnoy, read aloud by Ron Silver. I definitely got the jokes better. We laughed until we were completely burned out from laughing, repeating lines out loud to each other and laughing again. Portnoy is my desert island book (“If you could take only one book to a desert island for the rest of your life,”). It has everything I love in life, which is mostly life itself, but, more specifically, it's just so funny and irreverent, in exactly the way that Saul Alinsky says, in a different context, is “...challenging, insulting, agitating, discrediting. As with all life, this is a paradox, for his irreverence is rooted in a deep reverence for the enigma of life and an incessant search for its meaning.”

I love that Roth dared to write some really bad books, *The Breast*, for instance (in which David Kepesh wakes up one morning, like Kafka's cockroach, and discovers that he has metamorphosed into a 155-pound breast). And some fun parlor tricks, like the cubist narrative of *The Counterlife* (an under-appreciated favorite of mine, actually). I love that he tried to express his wonder and wildness in so many ways.

Much later in his life (and mine) Roth turned his attention to huge matters of history, politics, and ethics when he wrote the great trilogy of *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*. Four years later (in 2004), he popped out a ridiculous little anti-history called *The Plot Against America*, in which Franklin D. Roosevelt is defeated in the presidential election of 1940 by Charles Lindbergh, and anti-Semitism becomes acceptable. “Kind of dumb,” I said when I first read it, and now we're all re-reading this one like it's a rune.

Finally, he turned his passionate attention towards decline and death, in novels like *Everyman* and *Exit Ghost* cataloguing with grim amazement how the wheels come off the bus. His last novel, 2010's *Nemesis*, explores the effect of a 1944 polio epidemic on a closely knit, family-oriented Newark Jewish Weequahic neighborhood

(the one in which Roth himself grew up). Children and young people are threatened with maiming, paralysis, lifelong disability, and death.

And then, the unimaginable happened and Philip Roth died at 85 on May 22<sup>nd</sup> of congestive heart failure, in a hospital bed in Manhattan. The stents....

Let me finish by quoting something Roth wrote about being Jewish:

*I have always been far more pleased by my good fortune in being born a Jew than my critics may begin to imagine. It's a complicated, interesting, morally-demanding and singular experience, and I like that. I find myself in the historic predicament of being Jewish, with all its implications. Who could ask for more? ("On Portnoy's Complaint" in *Reading Myself and Others*, 1969)*

I'm not a big fan of Jewish (or any other) exceptionalism, but I just gotta say of Philip Roth, "He's ours!"

## JEWISH WOMEN'S RETREAT

Our 28th annual Jewish Women's Retreat will be August 9-12<sup>th</sup> at River's Bend in Philo. Our theme this year is "Love your neighbor AS YOURSELF." We'll be exploring what it means to experience ourselves as loved, lovable, cherished, worthy of love, even as we try to love others. This year our retreat falls over Rosh Hodesh Elul, the beginning of the month of self-examination that leads up to Rosh Hashanah, so we will get to celebrate this most wonderful new moon together.

In addition to study and exploration, the retreat always includes a beautiful, spacious Shabbat, other moments of prayer and song, a mikveh in the river, great food, much relaxation and fun, and a glorious crowd of women with whom to learn and play and pray and swim and explore.

If you'd like to sign up or find out more, please contact Registrar Harriet Bye at [bysawyer@mcn.org](mailto:bysawyer@mcn.org) or 937-3622. The retreat usually fills up early (we limit it to 60 women), so sign up as soon as you can.

## MCJC JUSTICE GROUP



The Justice Group will meet on Thursday, June 14<sup>th</sup> from 5:30-7:30 PM at the shul. If any of the projects below interests you, please join us! All are welcome to attend.

### ***Primary Election & Measure C parcel tax to support the Mendocino Coast District Hospital***

The June 4<sup>th</sup> Primary election is almost here and the members of the Justice Group (JG) urge all registered voters to exercise their right (privilege, duty) to vote. Members of the group, along with other volunteers who have been working to pass Measure C, will be telephoning to get out the vote in the weeks preceding the election. On June 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> there will be a final *Get Out the Vote* drive, both telephoning and offering rides to the polls for those who need one.

### ***California Money Bail Reform Act—SB 10/AB 42***

Members of the JG are interested in money bail reform because the current system discriminates against the poor, against people of color, and against their families.

- A person without means, presumed innocent until proven guilty, can sit in jail for weeks, months and sometimes years and cost that person his or her job, housing and family.
- Basing freedom on wealth denies equal access; purchasing a bail bond can make a poor person or family even poorer.
- Mass incarceration is the new Jim Crow, a way to keep people of color in bondage or in debt.
- States that have moved away from a money bail system have proved that there are more effective ways to insure that people show up for their court appearances than a bail bond.

According to the ACLU, SB 10 will require "...that pretrial services conduct assessments and that no one is incarcerated solely on the inability to pay." Governor Jerry Brown has said he would sign the bill.

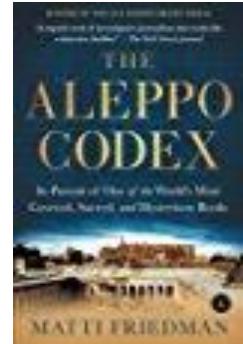
The goals of the JG members are to lobby the legislature in support of SB 10/AB 42, to track the bill's progress in the legislature, to educate the community about bail reform, and to build a local coalition of support

### **Support for the ACLU**

The JG set a goal of signing up 36 new members in the ACLU, a commitment that will support this organization's pursuit of equality and justice across the nation. The JG would also like to see the ACLU focus some attention on the organizing effort in Mendocino County and to support the JG's efforts on behalf of the ACLU's projects.

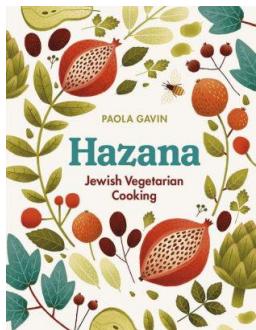
### **BOOK GROUP**

We will meet Monday June 18<sup>th</sup> to discuss ***The Aleppo Codex*** by Matti Friedman. A thousand years ago, the most perfect copy of the Hebrew Bible was written in the city of Tiberias, in what is currently northern Israel, and was endorsed for its accuracy by Maimonides. It was kept safe through one upheaval after another in the Middle East; by the 1940s it was housed in a dark grotto in Aleppo, Syria, and had become known around the world as the Aleppo Codex. Journalist Matti Friedman's true-life detective story follows the trail of this precious manuscript—smuggled from its hiding place in Syria into the newly founded state of Israel—to reveal how and why many of its most sacred and valuable pages went missing during the journey. It's a tale involving secret agents, pious clergymen, shrewd antiquities collectors, and highly placed national figures, who, as it turns out, would do anything to get their hands on an ancient, decaying book.



We meet at 2:00 PM; please call Fran Schwartz at 937-1352 for information on location. The books are available at Gallery Bookshop; you receive a 10% discount when you say you are in the MCJC book group.

### **COOKBOOK GROUP**



Devotees of Ottolenghi may feel they don't need another new cookbook ever, but they might want to take a look at ***Hazana: Jewish Vegetarian Cooking***, by Paola Gavin. Just in time for summer's veggies—whether from our gardens or the farmers market—this delightful book looks at the cultural heritage of Jewish people around the world through 150 recipes for traditional vegetarian dishes passed down from mother to daughter over many generations and across 20 countries.

Gavin is a well-known food writer, having written three other cookbooks that center on vegetarian cooking in different countries. Here she leads us from North Africa to Italy, Lithuania, Turkey and beyond, examining the subtle differences and origins of the Jewish vegetarian dishes in these regions. Published by Quadrille Publishing in late 2017, ***Hazana*** is available from Gallery Bookstore.

### **MCJC BOARD MEETING**

The MCJC board meets monthly at 5:30 PM at the shul. The June meeting will be on Thursday, the 21<sup>st</sup>. If you would like to attend, please leave a message on the phone at the shul, 964-6146.

### **THANKS TO NEWSLETTER MAILERS**

*Merci bien* to Monique and Jay Frankston for preparing the May newsletter for mailing. *Quelle mitsva!* If you volunteer for a future folding, stamping, and mailing project, you can do it at home, or another spot of your choosing, in about two hours. Contact Sarah at 962-0565 or [sarah.nathe@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.nathe@gmail.com).

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Annette & Jonathan Lehan in memory of Frances Lehan.

## CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE BUILDING

Pledges and contributions to the Capital Campaign have been received from the following: Nancy Harris; John & Rebecca Picard; Devora Rossman; Holly Tannen; Lillian Cartwright; Ira Beyer; Dawn Hofberg & Robert Schlosser; Eric Labowitz & Kathy Bailey.

We have secured \$71,379, less than \$4,000 short of our \$75,000 goal. We need your help! If you haven't yet donated, or are able to increase your support, please consider doing so now. We are so grateful to all who have given, but let's get to the top of the steeple!



## CONTRIBUTING MEMBERSHIP IN MCJC

Everyone who lives on the Mendocino Coast, and desires to be a member of MCJC, is one. The MCJC Board has set a goal of having every household become CONTRIBUTING members in 2018. We have memberships at Regular, Limited Income, and Family levels, as well as any level possible for you. Please mail your donations to MCJC, Box 291, Little River, CA 95456, or use PayPal on the MCJC website.

When you contribute in memory or honor of someone, an acknowledgment card will be sent to the individual or family. Please include their name and mailing address. Contact Donna Montag at [montag@mcn.org](mailto:montag@mcn.org)

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