

The MCJC shul is located at 15071 Caspar Road, Caspar, CA.
Send mail to P.O. Box 291, Little River, CA 95456. website: <http://www.mcjc.org>

Call the MCJC at (707) 964-6146
email: sarah.nathe@gmail.com

RABBI'S NOTES



While I like the word, I've never thought of myself as queer. I'm heterosexual and cisgendered (meaning that I identify as the gender I was born into, in my case female). But my sense of queerness has been vastly expanded by the recent forays I've made into the teachings of Rabbi Benay Lappe, who runs a "traditionally radical yeshiva" called SVARA in Chicago and holds an annual "Queer Talmud Camp." SVARA's name comes from the 2,000-year-old Jewish concept that one's moral intuition informed by serious Jewish learning—together called *svara*—is not only a legitimate source of Jewish law, but can even "supersede" Torah. I fell by accident into a day of Queer Talmud study when I went down to Oakland for the installation of my dear friend Rabbi Dev Noily as the senior rabbi at Kehilla Community Synagogue. The Shabbat celebration included an afternoon of all-skill-level Talmud study led by Rabbi Lappe. Why not, as long as I was going to be in the 'hood? I signed up, not really knowing what I was getting myself into.

I'll discuss the study itself, but first let me tell you a little about the sermon that Rabbi Lappe gave the night before, at the big celebration in Rabbi Noily's honor. She began with a story from Talmud, of course. Roughly, it goes like this:

Moses went up to heaven and found God tying crowns to the tops of the letters of the Torah (which Moses had himself transcribed). Moses said to God, "What's taking you so long!?" And God replied, "After many generations there is going to come along a guy named Akiva, and he will be so inspired that he will derive piles and piles of teachings from every little doodle and curlicue of the letters. So I'm putting these in here for him." Moses said to God, "I want to meet him." So God transported Moses to the academy of Rabbi Akiva and Moses sat back in the eighth row and listened. When he didn't understand a thing that Akiva was saying, he became dejected. At some point one of the students asked Akiva, "From where do you derive this law?" Akiva responded, "It is a teaching of Moses from Sinai," and Moses was consoled.
(Menachot 29b)

Benay's teaching from this story was that, from the very beginning, God intended the Torah to be transformed through the generations, especially in times of historical change and crisis, especially by "queer" people. Her definition of queerness goes far beyond gender and sexuality: "Queer equals a profound experience of marginality—outsiderness—that gives insight that most people don't have, that you bring to bear on the mainstream." She gave a shout out to the joyous array of folks in the shul that night—many genders, many skin colors, hair colors, many ages—who were gathered to honor their rabbi, who is herself of non-binary gender, among many attributes.



She talked about the many experiments and advances that the Kehilla congregation has made to transform Judaism into something radically more inclusive and engaged than the Judaism in which many of us grew up. And she said, "It was God's intention from the beginning that Torah be transformed through the generations by people like [she named her own teachers] and by you."

I was deeply touched by this teaching about the role of people in the margins, in Jewish life and in life as a whole. I haven't myself thought a lot about queerness over the years, but I have thought a lot about marginality. We all (with apologies to esteemed *Megillah* readers who don't live on the Mendocino coast) live literally on the edge of the continent, in a small place, far from the palaces of power. To make our lives here we have given up some degree of access to mainstream visibility, economic success, and what is often called "opportunity." We have chosen other satisfactions over these: community, simplicity, closeness to the non-human world, freedom to fly our freak flags. Some of us are gender-queer and some are gay or lesbian or bisexual; others aren't. Not many of us look, or live, like we work on Wall Street or even at Google. Some of us eat curious and exotic food. Some of us grow that food. And so on.

(I should add here that I in no way want to horn in on the particular struggle and bravery of people who are transgender or gay or lesbian by sharing this analysis. "Queer" means LGBTIQ specifically, and using this term to mean all kinds of marginal people is poetic license. Rabbi Lappe, by the way, is a lesbian and has a powerful personal story of choosing to stay in the closet for five years of rabbinical study in the Conservative movement in order to learn and teach Talmud).

In a talk I heard later, which Benay calls the "Crash Talk," she posited that every civilization has a "master story," and periodically that master story crashes. Sometimes the crash happens for one individual person: they come out as gay and no longer fit in the orthodox world of their childhood. Sometimes the crash happens for a whole civilization: the Romans destroy the Temple; the Enlightenment takes place; climate change challenges everyone on earth to change their ways of life.

At the times when the master story crashes, people do different things. All responses are necessary and useful, and all are problematic as well. Some people move over to a new master story. Others go all-in with preserving the crumbling story and are more insistent about it than ever. Still others are able to draw useful pieces from what is crumbling and bring it to bear in new ways on the situation at hand. And "the queerer you



are, the closer you are to the edge of your master story when it crumbles." That's the "outsiderness that gives insight that most people don't have, that you bring to bear on the mainstream."

This analysis is not new. What was new, to me at least, was the sense that this reinvention was built into the system from the very beginning, that it is holy. That people in the margins, who weren't so well-served all along by the master story, have particular wisdom to bring to post-crumble life. "Queer folks," says Benay, "are prophets--because they get it first."

Subsequently, I found myself in the Kehilla synagogue hall, at one of five or six long tables, across from a *hevruta* (a study partner) with an untranslated page of the *Vilna Shas* (the most authoritative printing of the Babylonian Talmud), a talmudic dictionary, and a Rashi Decoder Ring (a little ruler with the special *alef-bet* on it). There were about a hundred people in the room, many beautifully visibly queer: men in dresses, people whose genders I wouldn't venture to guess, as well as every color of hair and tattoo and piercing.

There were five or six "Talmud fairies" wearing, yes, fairy wings, who could be hailed to come over and help decipher a word. We worked all afternoon to translate and then to memorize and declaim a single sentence of Talmud. It was loud and grueling, joyous, intensely beautiful and subversive. We were living for a day in a world that many of us wish for--a world where the treasures of Judaism are open and available to anyone who is willing to sit at the table, whatever flavor of queer (or not) you might be.

We didn't storm a yeshiva and demand entry. We built one with fairy wings and decoder rings and inhabited it. People who were both Jewishly and socially marginal and their friends, who may have been neither, created a beautiful, just, inspired little world for an afternoon.

I find it enormously enlivening to think that the changes which will heal and rebuild the world are as likely to emerge from a bunch of fashion-backward, tech-trailing, tree-hugging folks with our creative methods for making life more workable and beautiful here in the back woods (river mikvehs, the Elders' Conversation, the Mitzvah Freezer) as they are from the citadels of Jewish and secular power. I find it so hopeful to think that, not only can we build and inhabit new worlds that bring together the best of ancestral practices with our most deeply-held values, but also that this capacity, this creativity, might be built into the fabric of the spiritual world, that it might be what God always intended. When I think about master stories crashing, I understand more deeply that the margin is a powerful place to be.



Rabbi Lappe will be leading a Queer Talmud Camp at Walker Creek Ranch in Marin this summer on July 1-5. For more information, check out: <http://www.svara.org/queer-talmud-camp-2017/>. SVARA's Facebook page provided the great photos of the Kehilla Talmud study.

TU B'SHEVAT SEDER--BLESSING THE TREE OF LIFE



The beautiful holiday of Tu B'Shevat falls this year on Tuesday night, January 30th. We will celebrate with our customary mystical seder of fruits, wine, and blessings from 6:00-8:30 PM (or so.) All are very welcome!

On the full moon of the deep-winter month of Shevat, Tu B'Shevat is said to be the day that the sap rises in the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. Following the pathway taught by our Kabbalist forbears, we bless and eat three kinds of fruits and four hues of wine (or juice) and offer prayers for the ongoing life of all species in this beautiful world. It is a lovely, meditative, heart-full ritual which breathes peace and hope into the world.

You don't need to RSVP--just come. There will be lots of fruit, nuts, olives and the like, but not a full dinner. You are welcome, as always, to come and go as you need to, but for this seder we ask that, if you need to leave, you try to slip out "between worlds," in one of the pauses after fruit and wine have been blessed and enjoyed.

Much help is always appreciated for setting up the shul and making it beautiful and preparing the ritual fruits and drinks. And, of course, there's the holy mitzvah of cleaning up. If you would like to help in any of these ways, please contact Marnie Press at marniepress@gmail.com.

KABBALAT SHABBAT

We will meet Friday, January 26th at Mina Cohen and Jeff Berenson's sylvan retreat east of Mendocino. To RSVP and get directions, please call 937-1319. In February we will be at the home of Julie and Bob Melendi in South Caspar.

All gatherings begin at 6:00 PM and include a short service with a vegetarian potluck following. We need hosts starting in March; if you would like to host a Friday gathering, contact Mina Cohen at 937-1319 or mcohen@mcn.org.



READING HESCHEL TOGETHER

What could be more nourishing and reassuring than that? Margaret invites all interested to attend her class on the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. The class will meet on the first and third Tuesday of each month, 5:30-7:00 PM at the shul. We will begin on Tuesday, January 16th and continue through June 19th. We will read and explore three of his great books, food for the soul as well as the mind.

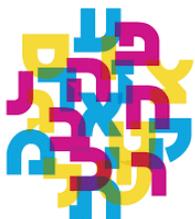
Rabbi Heschel is a universally revered teacher and scholar, and a beautiful, luminous writer and thinker. In many ways he bridges the world of the Hasidim of pre-holocaust Europe (he is a descendent of an illustrious dynasty of Hasidic masters) and the challenging modern world. He was born in Poland in 1907 and studied in Germany before being brought to the United States by leading rabbis here during the Shoah. He taught at both the Reform and Conservative seminaries in New York and became active in opposition to the Vietnam war and in support of civil rights [he's on the far right of the photo], all the while maintaining a deep personal piety. He famously said of marching to Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "My feet were praying."



We will read *Man is Not Alone*, *The Sabbath*, and *A Passion for Truth*. All are in print, and you will want to have access to the books to participate in the class. The MCJC library will have a copy of each available to borrow. Please let Margaret know if you will be participating in the class and would like to purchase the books, so she can order the correct number at Gallery Bookshop. Contact her at mholub@mcn.org or 937-5673.

We ask for a \$36 donation from each participant, but no one will be turned away for less than that.

LEARN HEBREW IN ONE DAY



Mina Cohen is considering offering "While Standing on One Foot" in early March. This one-day workshop will teach you how to read Hebrew (but you won't be fluent in understanding the language). She needs to know how much interest there is in such a workshop before moving forward with ordering the texts and scheduling the date. There will be a cost, and breakfast and lunch will be served. If you are interested or have questions, contact Mina at 937-1319 or mcohen@mcn.org.

ELDERS' CONVERSATION

The Elders' Conversation meets every second and fourth Tuesday of the month at the shul from 2:30-4:30 PM (our winter hours). January dates will be the 9th and 23rd. We always choose a topic for our next conversation at the conclusion of our gatherings. Our January 9th theme is "Can we decide to change?" Margaret will send out questions for reflection a few days before we gather. People of all ages are most welcome to participate.

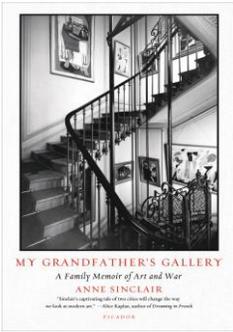
IN PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

Grateful thanks to December contributors Sandra & Gunter Riegler, Deena & Mark Zarin, Ying Lee & Howard Pines, and Pat Dunbar for their generous gifts to the scholarship project supporting immigrants in our community becoming citizens. The Justice Group has now provided ten scholarships, with funds available for 15 more local students in 2018.



The next meeting of the Justice Group is scheduled for **Thursday, January 11 from 5:30 to 7:30 pm**. The Shul will be used on that date by the Emergency Winter Shelter, so the location for the meeting will be announced in an email once the location is finalized. All who wish to work together to uphold and increase justice and equality in our community and world are welcome and encouraged to attend.

BOOK GROUP



On Monday, January 29th we will discuss *My Grandfather's Gallery*, a family memoir of art and war by Anne Sinclair, one of France's best known political journalists. Her mother's father, Paul Rosenberg, a famous European art dealer, managed to flee Vichy France and save his family, but had to leave behind his beloved Paris gallery, an artistic hub for some of the most significant French modern artists of his day. Even as he fled, dozens of works were seized by Nazi forces, and the art dealer's own legacy was eradicated. More than half a century later, during a move, Sinclair uncovered a box filled with letters. She plunged into the archives to find out who her grandfather really was. Drawing on Rosenberg's intimate correspondence with Picasso, Matisse, Braque and others, *My Grandfather's Gallery* shows us the life of a legendary member of the Parisian art scene.

Rosenberg's story is emblematic of millions of Jews, rich and poor, whose lives were altered by World War II.

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.

THE HIGH POINT OF THE WEEK



NEW YORK (JTA) — Marijuana entrepreneur Catherine Goldberg was working on an event with the Orthodox founders of Mitzva Herbal, a New York company that makes kosher-certified cannabis-infused edibles, when she shared her dream of uniting marijuana-loving Jews over Friday-night dinners. Since Orthodox Jews can't smoke on Shabbat, she figured that havdalah, instead, would be perfect.

Since July, "Chai Havdalah" has become a somewhat regular event that marks the end of Shabbat with the traditional havdalah blessing alongside the less traditional acts of smoking marijuana and eating cannabis-infused edibles like challah, rugelach, and squash latkes sautéed in weed oil. So far there have been five Chai Havdalah events, mostly in the herb-friendly states of California and Colorado.

Goldberg, who lives in Los Angeles, is on a mission to spread the gospel of marijuana; the "Cannabis Concierge" frequently writes about her passion for weed for *High Times* magazine. In a recent column, she explained how cannabis can help fulfill the Jewish ideal of "tikkun olam" (<https://hightimes.com/culture/holy-smokes-cannabis-catalyst-spiritual-growth/>).

"I love being Jewish and I love weed, so it made sense to bring my two passions together," says Goldberg. Wearing a shirt with the words **Let's Get Chai**, she noted, "I wanted to show people that Judaism can be really fun and it doesn't mean you have to go to temple." Plus, she added, "Jewish people have high rates of anxiety, and weed really helps with that." -- *The Forward*, October 20, 2017



MCJC BOARD MEETING

The MCJC board meets monthly at 5:30 PM at the shul. The January meeting will be on Wednesday, the 17th. If you would like to attend, please leave a message on the phone at the shul, 964-6146.

MERCI TO THE NEWSLETTER MAILERS

Monique and Jay Frankston prepared the December newsletter for mailing. Such a mitzvah! 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.

MEGILLAH SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Mendocino *Megillah* is published in two formats: hardcopy and emailed PDF. You can subscribe to the hardcopy version and have it mailed to you, you can subscribe to the email version, or you can receive both. Any information on changes in mailing address, changes in email address, and changes in email notifications should be sent to Sarah Nathe at sarah.nathe@gmail.com. If you choose not to be a contributing member of MCJC, we request a \$25 annual fee for the *Megillah* hardcopy or email. You will also find the *Megillah* posted on the MCJC website at <http://www.mcjc.org>.

GREAT THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING DONORS



Nancy Harris; Jane Marcus & Lew Mermelstein; Carol & Jerry Greenberg; Helen Jacobs; Rebecca Yaffe; Ronnie James; Joan Selchau; Marinella Miclea; Steve Antler & Carla Jupiter; Liz & Kelvin Jacobs; Phoebe Graubard; Laurie Lepaule; Rosalie & Art Holub; Julie & Tim Anderson; Bea Karish; Jessica Morris; Bob Evans; Rick & Nancy Banker; Dorothy & Bob Ashbury; Henrietta Steiniger; Betty Barber; Sam & Theresa Waldman; Roslyn & Bruce Moore.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE BUILDING

Pledges and contributions to the Capital Campaign have been received from the following: Shelley Martin & Lilian & Jerry Davis in memory of Bill Martin; Claire Lobell; Joseph Zicherman & Ginny Roemer; Jay & Monique Frankston; Karen Rakofsky; Frances Novak; Theresa Glasner Morales; Carolyn Steinbuck; Rebecca Yaffe; Lilian Cartwright; William & Diane Millen; Marty Freedman & Joy Lancaster; Susan Miller; Ben & Susan Finkelstein; Ruth Rosenblum & SA Ephraim; Sam Markson; Cayenne Harris; Phoebe Graubard; Elaine & David Tavelli; Rosalie & Art Holub; Evely Shlensky; Jennifer Kreger & Wade Grey; Dorothy & Bob Ashbury; Jane Corey; Les Reichek & Rima Lieben; Janet Sternberg; Jonathan & Annette Lehan; Mettika Hoffman; Mark & Deena Zarin; Andrea Luna.



We have secured almost \$44,000 so we are over halfway toward our \$75,000 goal. Thank you all!

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

EDITORIAL POLICY

The *Mendocino Megillah* is published monthly. The deadline for article submission is the 15th of the month before publication. The editor will include all appropriate material, space permitting, with the exception of copyrighted material lacking the permission of the author. Divergent opinions are welcome. Material printed in the *Megillah* does not necessarily represent the policy or opinions of the MCJC Board of Directors.

Please Support the Underwriters Below



Albion Doors and Windows: 1000s of recycled windows, French doors, thermal windows, entry doors, new & used. Leaded glass, arches & unique styles. Liquidation prices at 937-0078 in Albion. www.knobsession.com

Karen Bowers Studio: Painting workshops and studio gallery. Website: karenbowersstudio.com
Email: highpt@mcn.org Tel: 707 937-3163.

College-Bound Advising: College search, coaching, and application assistance. Mina Cohen, certified college counselor. Individual consultation and group workshops. Tel: 937-1319. cbadvising.com

Frankie's Pizza and Ice Cream Parlor: Homemade pizzas, Cowlick's ice cream, and other yummy things to nosh on. Beer and wine available. Live music weekly; all ages welcome. Open daily from 11:00 am - 9:00 pm at 44951 Ukiah Street, Mendocino, 937-2436. www.frankiesmendocino.com

Out of this World: Telescopes, binoculars, & science toys. 45100 Main Street, Box 1010, Mendocino. 937-3335. www.OutofThisWorldShop.com. Serving all your interplanetary needs since 1988.

Phoebe Graubard: Attorney at Law. Wills, trusts, probate, conservatorships. 594 S. Franklin, Fort Bragg, 95437. 964-3525. www.phoebelaw.com Member National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys. Wheelchair accessible.

Rainsong & Rainsong Shoes: From head to toe in Mendocino! Contemporary clothing. Shoes & accessories for men & women. Two locations: Mendocino and Healdsburg. 937-4165 (clothing), 937-1710 (shoes), 433-8058 (Healdsburg). <http://www.rainsongshoes.com/>

Raven Deerwater, EA, PhD: Tax practitioner. Specializing in families, home-based & small businesses, & non-profit organizations. 45121 Ukiah Street, Box 1786, Mendocino. Tel: 937-1099. Email: raven@taxpractitioner.com <http://www.taxpractitioner.com>

Rhoda Teplow Designs: Original jewelry created with beads from around the world, specializing in brass from Ghana, silver from Israel, and lapis, turquoise and coral from Tibet/Nepal. POB 453, Mendocino CA 95460. Tel: 964-2787. Email: rteplow@mcn.org

Silver & Stone: 45050 Main Street, Mendocino. Contemporary sterling silver & gemstone jewelry for women & men. Affordable to indulgent. 11:00-6:00 pm daily. 937-0257. Email: silverandstone@comcast.net Web: <http://silverandstone.net>

Thanksgiving Coffee Co: Local roasters on the Mendocino Coast for over three decades. Certified organic, shade grown coffee & Fair Trade Coffees. Box 1918, Fort Bragg, 95437. (800) 462-1999. www.thanksgivingcoffee.com

Tonk's Tree Service: Hazardous removals, spurless pruning, arborist reports, stump grinding, 60' aerial lift, view and sun improvement. Owner-operated, licensed & insured. Tatanka Russell, certified arborist WE-9236A, lic. no. 798911. 964-6209, <http://www.tonkstreeservice.com>, Email: info@tonkstreeservice.com

(MCJC underwriters increase their businesses' visibility to over 300 subscribers and improve their presence on the web. \$100/year. Contact Donna Montag at 877-3243 or montag@mcn.org

MCJC Board & Useful Numbers

Rituals and Holidays (including Hevra Kadisha/cemetery)	Joan Katzeff*	964-9161	jkatzeff@mcn.org
Outreach (new to the community)	Susan Tubbesing*	962-0565	susan.tubbesing@gmail.com
Culture (films/ speakers/ Women's Retreat)	Harriet Bye*	937-3622	bysawyer@mcn.org
Treasurer (finance and donations)	Donna Montag*	877-3243	montag@mcn.org
MCJC Website	Mina Cohen	937-1319	mcohen@mcn.org
Kabbalat Shabbat coordinator	Mina Cohen	937-1319	mcohen@mcn.org
Volunteer Coordinator	Susan Levenson-Palmer*	882-1750	slevensonpalmer@gmail.com
Building Maintenance	Marnie Press*	937-1905	marniepress@gmail.com
Secretary	Raven Deerwater*	964-8333	raven@taxpractitioner.com
Justice Group Treasurer	Nancy Harris*	964-4824	nancyh@mcn.org
Librarian	Nina Ravitz*		ninabo@mcn.org
Book Group/Bikkur Cholim	Fran Schwartz	937-1352	franbschwartz@gmail.com
Megillah Editor	Sarah Nathe	962-0565	sarah.nathe@gmail.com
Name & Address, Subscription Changes	Sarah Nathe	962-0565	sarah.nathe@gmail.com
Rabbi	Margaret Holub	937-5673	mholub@mcn.org

* = board member