

MEGILLAH

The MCJC shul is located at 15071 Caspar Road, Caspar, CA.
Send mail to P.O. Box 291, Little River, CA 95456.

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

website: <http://www.mcjc.org>

RABBI'S NOTES



A couple weeks ago a group of us gathered at the shul to participate in a webinar called “Embracing Reality: Spiritually Preparing for Dementia.” The webinar was given by my dear friend and teacher Rabbi Dayle Friedman, so I knew it was going to be brilliant and challenging. Beyond that, I couldn’t begin to imagine how to prepare spiritually for dementia. What could she possibly say???

Dayle and I met in her last year (my second-to-last) of rabbinical school. The final year, at least way back in our day, was a little like an NBA draft; all the fifth-year students were competing for a handful of “e-ticket” pulpit jobs (an age-based reference: that was how rides at Disneyland used to be rated). Dayle surprised everyone by opting out of the race and choosing instead to take a job as a chaplain at a large elder care facility in Philadelphia. This was long before there was anything much by way of a professional chaplaincy, so by taking this job she became a trailblazer in the rabbinical world. And thus she began what has been a whole working life of reflecting on the spiritual and material lives of elders. Dayle has gone on to become a noted innovator, author, speaker, and counselor on matters of aging, especially--but not only--in the Jewish world. I have learned so much from her! Among much else, it was her inspiration that first led me to call together what has become our beloved Elders’ Conversation.

Dayle began by pointing out that, if we live long enough, chances are that a majority of us will develop dementia. This webinar wasn’t about how to face other people’s dementia; it was about facing our own. She went on, gently but firmly, to share many observations, from her years of chaplaincy and counseling, about what dementia is like. She wishes she could find more Jewish resources for facing something as relentless and challenging as dementia. There are wonderful teachings in the Buddhist world in particular, though not many Jewish texts and perspectives to guide us. But she has one.

I’m not going to go further into her teaching about dementia, but I was really moved by the text she shared, and by how she applied it to the issue at hand. I find myself reaching back to it with regard to issues unrelated to my own impending dementia. The teaching comes from the Ba’al Shem Tov, the early-eighteenth-century founder of Hasidism, as refracted by the contemporary rabbi (and MCJC friend of many years) Burt Jacobson. Burt quotes the Ba’al Shem Tov:

An individual should cultivate three ways of dealing with adversity: *Hachna’ah*/Yielding, *Havdalah*/Discernment, and *Hamtakah*/Sweetening.... If you are able to purify your thinking regarding what is good and pleasant about each of the occurrences that happen to you through Yielding, Discernment and Sweetening,...you will then be able to hold your footing and you won’t be toppled by the husks of evil. You will remain bound in Oneness to the Blessed One.

(from ***This Precious Moment: The Wisdom of the Ba’al Shem Tov***)

Dayle translates *hachna’ah* as “softening.” (Here I am indebted to Holly Tannen for her great notes from the webinar.) Softening says, “Okay, this is happening.” “It’s not what I was expecting.” “I don’t know what this will be like.” It lets go of fighting reality and allows it to be what it is.

We know the world *havdalah* from the end of Shabbat, when we bless the transition from Shabbat rest to the regular week. *Havdalah* literally means “distinction” or “differentiation.” It is about noting differences between one thing and another. Dayle (via Burt Jacobson via the Ba’al Shem Tov) suggested that, beyond softening into the reality, we might look closely at it, notice its various textures. She suggested that we “allow our eyes to adjust to the dark.” We can ask ourselves, “What parts of this experience are unremittingly difficult, and where

might there be some ease or comfort? Or even gain, or blessing?” No experience is completely flat and uniform. Even in a very difficult situation, there are pockets of relief, possibly of humor or release or connection.

And finally *ham'takah*, sweetening. What might make this experience sweeter, lighter, more savory? Are there ways to bring in some relief? Music? A bath? Fresh air? A kiss? Even a person with dementia can experience sweetening. As, I hope, can we all.



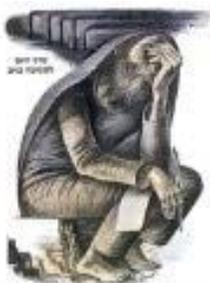
Dayle applied this teaching about adversity to a particular situation that many of us especially dread, but there are all kinds of adversity. I am moved to consider that, instead of looking at any experience that I or someone I love might experience as an unremitting tragedy (what Dayle calls “the tragedy narrative”), maybe I could soften into it a bit, look at what is happening with curiosity and not just horror, and look for ways to bring sweetness to, or find sweetness in, what is going on.

For my small part, these past few years I have been trying to steer away from speaking of experiences in people’s lives as being “bad” or “terrible” and instead to look at them as “difficult” or “challenging.” I don’t really think that illness, for example, is bad, even though it can be hard and sad and wearing and a source of difficulty, loss and grief. I try to say (and think) that someone has a “difficult” diagnosis and not a “bad” one. I don’t think that the changes which come with aging are bad, or tragic, even though they can be sad and frustrating.

In saying this I am taking an inside view. I mean that I can try not to judge my own experiences, or those of people I love, to be bad or tragic, even if they are very difficult. I do believe, with the Ba’al Shem Tov, that there is always a possibility of softening, discerning, and sweetening even in very challenging experiences. From the outside--looking, for example, at the treatment of people at the U.S. border--it seems entirely right to say that their treatment is bad, tragic, cruel, a sin, a crime, a nightmare. From the outside it is not for me to tell someone else that they should soften, discern and sweeten. It is for me to try as hard as I can to bring relief to their situation! But if I were in such a situation myself (as any of us could be someday, God forbid), I would hope then to reach for the Ba’al Shem Tov’s teaching.

Life can be hard, even without cruelty and depravity. Life in a body, life in a family and a community, life on this earth, they bring with them suffering and adversity. I’d like to think that I might be able to keep these three keys on a ring in my pocket for when they are needed. Of course, I hope I’ll never have to take that keyring out and use it. But the odds are I will.

VIRTUAL TISHA B’AV



This year Tisha B’av falls during the Jewish Women’s Retreat (Saturday night August 10th and Sunday, August 11th). Because of this, there will not be a service at the shul, but Margaret will send out some reflections that you might wish to contemplate as you observe the saddest day on the Jewish calendar.

Tisha B’av (which literally means the ninth day of the month of Av) is the date that, according to tradition, marks the destructions of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, first by the Babylonians in 423 BCE and again by the Romans in 69 CE. It is a day of fasting and lamentation. In our times some Jewish communities have expanded the context of Tisha B’av to include lamentation for all historical destruction and genocide, including those of our own time. In our community we take this day to reflect on human cruelty and destructiveness in a spirit of humility and teshuvah/repentance, and to pray for peace, restoration and healing of our world. It is a difficult but important marker in the cycle of the year. It is unfortunate that we can’t be together on Tisha B’av, but our souls and thoughts can be connected.

WANTED: TORAH READERS

It seems like the High Holy Days are a long way off, but time has a way of getting away from us. Rosh Hashanah this year is Monday, September 30th and Yom Kippur is Wednesday, October 9th. If you have chanted a portion from the Torah before and would like the honor and pleasure of doing so again, please contact Mina at mcohen@mcn.org or 937-1319 to reserve your spot. If you have always wanted to be one of our readers and have not ever done it before or haven't done it since your Bar or Bat Mitzvah, Mina is willing to coach you with help from a recording of Rabbi Holub chanting.

SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES

Shabbat morning services are held every Saturday morning of the year from 10:30 AM until about 12:30 PM. Members of the community often give the *davar Torah* ("word of Torah"), an interpretation (*drash*) of the weekly Torah portion (see schedule below). The services are led each week by Rabbi Holub, except when she is out of town.

07/06/19	Korach	Margaret Holub
07/13/19	Chukat	Margaret Holub
07/20/19	Balak	Andrea Luna
07/27/19	Pinchas	Raven Deerwater
08/03/19	Matot-Masei	Margaret Holub
08/10/19	Devarim	Mina Cohen
08/17/19	Vaetchanan	Margaret Holub
08/24/19	Eikev	Raven Deerwater
08/31/19	Re'eh	Margaret Holub

KABBALAT SHABBAT



We will gather at the home of Jeff Berenson and Mina Cohen in Mendocino on Friday July 26th. Please call 937-1319 to RSVP and for directions.

Kabbalat Shabbat in August will be at the home of Benna Kolinsky and Danny Mandelbaum in Boonville on August 23rd. Please call 895-3883 to RSVP and get directions.

The joyful get-togethers take place on the fourth Friday of the month, begin at 6:00 PM, and include a short service with a vegetarian potluck following. If you would like to volunteer to host a gathering, contact Mina at 937-1319 or mcohen@mcn.org.

CELEBRATION OF LIFE FOR RICK BANKER

Please join in the celebration of life for our dear friend Rick Banker on Sunday, July 21st, from 3:00 PM onward at the Caspar Community Center. There will be food and drink and stories and much music to honor and celebrate his memory. All are most welcome.

2019 WOMEN'S RETREAT AUGUST 8TH - 11TH

If you haven't yet signed up for the Women's Retreat in Philo, there are still a few vacancies. During the four-day retreat, participants will look at their own lives as holy narratives with meaning and consequence. For more information or to register, contact Harriet Bye at bysawyer@mcn.org or 937-3622.

ELDERS' CONVERSATION

The Elders' Conversation meets every second and fourth Tuesdays of the month 3:00-5:00 PM at the shul. At each conversation we take up a topic about life and we explore, discuss and reflect together. Sometimes the topics are specific to aging; other times they are not. People of all ages are most welcome. Topics are decided at the previous meeting. If you're not on the announcements list, or not sure, please check with Margaret at mholub@mcn.org.

JUSTICE GROUP

At the June 6th meeting we welcomed Gladys Jimenez, an Immigration and Citizenship Agent with California Human Development. Raised in Ukiah, fluent in English and Spanish, and a graduate of UC Davis, Gladys spoke enthusiastically about her efforts with DACA recipients (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) in Mendocino County. In the past 18 months she has worked with approximately 100 recipients, all of whom have been in this country since at least 2007. Gladys has an office at Mendocino College in Ukiah, where she helps DACA recipients with work permits, eligibility requirements, their understanding of immigrant rights, and renewal forms. The biennial renewal filing fee is \$495, and the process can take up to six months to complete.



The July meeting of the Justice Group will be on the 11th at 5:30 pm. Thank you to the following generous supporters for their donations to the Citizen Scholarship Project: Mina Cohen & Jeff Berenson. We appreciate donations of any amount. If you would like to contribute to the Citizen Scholarship Project, please make checks out to MCJC, with a notation of Justice Group on the Memo line, and mail them to MCJC Justice Group, PO Box 291, Little River CA 95456.

On Thursday, July 18th, from 5:30-7:30 PM at the shul the Justice Group and the Coast Climate Crew are sponsoring two speakers on Coastal Health in a time of Climate Change and Crisis. Sheila Seaman, Executive Director of the Noyo Center, will speak on “Climate Change and the Kelp Forest Ecosystem on the Mendocino Coast.” Thais Mazur, an international consultant to communities and organizations working for environment and social justice, and the co-founder and co-director of The Karuna Center for Mindful Engagement, will present “Do No Harm: Mindful Engagement for a World in Crisis.” The public is invited to attend; there is no cost. There will be a time for question and answer after each speaker. If you have questions, please contact Carol Wilder at (415-786-6559) or carolgwilder@gmail.com

The August meeting of the Justice Group has not yet been scheduled, but the date for that meeting will be announced in plenty of time to get it on your calendar.

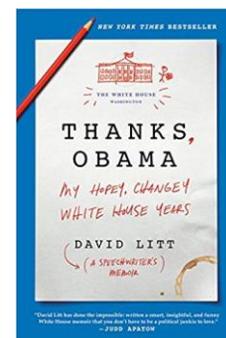
UPDATE ON THE BORDER



Judy Stavelly returned recently from volunteering on both sides of the US/Mexico border. She will give a talk about what she has observed on Tuesday, August 13th, at 7:00 PM at the shul. In addition to this recent trip, Judy has walked the Migrant Trail twice and has taken several other journeys to try to understand in real terms the experiences of people seeking to enter the United States.

BOOK GROUP

On Monday July 29th at 2:00 PM the book group will discuss former presidential speechwriter David Litt's memoir, ***Thanks, Obama--My Hopey, Changey White House Years***. With a storyteller's attention to detail and a humorist's eye for the absurd, Litt uses his experience to address the legacy of Obama's presidency during the ascendancy of Trump. ***The New York Times Book Review*** observed that “Litt is a funny and skillful storyteller. While the first half of the book is enjoyable, the second half is masterly, rising to a crescendo that is as rousing as, well, a particularly inspiring campaign speech.”



In August, the book group will meet on Wednesday, August 28th (note the change from their customary Monday meeting day) at 2:00 PM to will discuss ***The Assistant***, Bernard Malamud's second novel, published in 1957. Along with Saul Bellow, Joseph Heller, and Philip Roth, Malamud was one of the best known American Jewish authors of the 20th century. ***The Assistant*** is the story of Morris Bober, a grocer in postwar Brooklyn, who “wants better” for himself and his family. Like Malamud's other stories, this novel evokes an immigrant world of cramped circumstances and great expectations.

Please call Fran Schwartz at 937-1352 for information on location. Gallery Bookstore offers 10% off your purchases if you belong to the book club.

PROGRAM ON THE COAST HOSPITAL



Jessica Grinberg of the Mendocino Coast District Hospital Board of Directors and John Allison of the Hospital Planning Committee will speak at the shul on Wednesday, August 7th at 7:00 PM. They will present their perspectives on the current situation of the Coast Hospital and alternatives that are being considered to keep the hospital up and running. Jessica and John are both former MCJC board members, and we are happy to have them share their points of view. MCJC doesn't endorse a position on the future of the Coast Hospital (other than hoping it can stay alive and healthy).

MCJC BOARD MEETING

The MCJC board meets monthly at 5:30 PM at the shul. The July meeting will be on the 10th. The August meeting has not yet been scheduled. If you would like to attend the meeting, please leave a message on the phone at the shul: 964-6146.

NEWSLETTER THANKS

Linda Jupiter prepared the June *Megillah* for mailing and earned our everlasting gratitude. 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. It's a mitzvah! Please contact Sarah at 962-0565 or sarah.nathe@gmail.com.

ONLINE MEGILLAH

The *Megillah* is available in a format suitable for online viewing. The format will adapt itself to any screen size, including smartphones. It is posted on the MCJC website on the newsletter page: <https://www.mcjc.org/newsletter>

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GREAT THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING DONORS



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Danny Mandelbaum & Benna Kolinsky in honor of grandson Jonah William Mandelbaum's fifth month.

Annette & Jonathan Lehan in memory of Bill Garrett.

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Everyone who lives on the Mendocino Coast, and desires to be a member of MCJC, is one. The MCJC Board has a goal of having every household become CONTRIBUTING members in 2019. 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

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

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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 Website: www.taxpractitioner.com

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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
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Outreach (new to the community) & Finance Committee	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
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/Liaison & Finance Committee	Nancy Harris*	964-4824	nancyh@mcn.org
Librarian	Nina Ravitz*	357-6462	ninabo@mcn.org
Book Group/Bikkur Cholim	Fran Schwartz	937-1352	franbschwartz@gmail.com
<i>Megillah</i> Editor	Sarah Nathe	962-0565	sarah.nathe@gmail.com
Name & Address, Subscription Changes	Sarah Nathe	962-0565	sarah.nathe@gmail.com
MCJC Website	Sarah Nathe	962-0565	sarah.nathe@gmail.com
Online <i>Megillah</i>	Bob Evans	357-2817	Boborama.net
Rabbi	Margaret Holub	937-5673	mholub@mcn.org