CSH Center for Early Education Going Full STEAM Ahead

The Shirat Hayam Center for Early Education, which has been voted #1 preschool/daycare in Swampscott and Nahant for the past three years, has doubled its student body size in the last four years, growing from 82 to 108 just since last year. Andrea (DiPesa) Bernard, who became CEE Director in January 2018, attributes the increase to several factors: a progressive early childhood environment and curriculum; exceptional staff who provide loving and nurturing childcare; flexible schedules to meet the needs of our families, and a warm and welcoming Shirat family.

“The preschool curriculum is what we call ‘Reggio fusion,’ which consists of a child centered, emerging curriculum and is strongly influenced by the Reggio Emilia Approach,” Bernard said. She also notes positive energy and excitement from both staff and kids.

Preschoolers learn many important skills through play at CEE.

CSH Torah Is Alive and Well in Havana

Michael Cohen’s first trip to Cuba was in 2012 on Shirat’s organized mission. “It was an incredible experience. We visited almost every synagogue in the country,” he said. Two years later, he went again, wanting to see if Havana had made any progress since his first visit. He really wanted his son and daughter to see the country he has come to love before it changed too much, and so last December he returned once again with his wife, his kids and their significant others to this “really cool” place, this time on a private tour he put together himself. Part of their itinerary was visiting Sinagoga Centro Hebreo Sefaradi de Cuba, where the Shirat Hayam Torah, brought by the first CSH 2009 mission, is housed. He found that the synagogue has fallen on hard times, which is concerning to him. He learned that in 2014, 50 tour buses stopped in. This year only 12 small groups visited. “They are really in dire straits for some financial assistance right now,” he said. Seeing and holding the Torah was an important part of the trip for Cohen and his family. “It was very emotional for me and really blew my kids away,” he said.
Life of the Congregation

RABBI’S CORNER

As Religious Identity Declines in America, Judaism Has Much to Offer

“How will the decline of religion among young people affect your faith?” asked a student at St. John’s Prep, where I participated in an interfaith panel on January 31. Upon reflection, this is an answer I would offer him. Americans, especially the younger generation, increasingly say they have no religion. Among 18-29 year olds, the American Family Survey reported an increase in this cohort from 37 percent to 44 percent - in just the past four years! Nevertheless, young people are “hungry for connection … [and] communities [that] offer the experience of being part of something bigger than themselves,” according to Casper ter Kuile (the Ministry Innovation Fellow at Harvard University).

And yet, at the same time that fewer people consider themselves religious, more and more self-identify as “spiritual.” This trend is a golden opportunity for Judaism to be especially welcoming because our tradition is well positioned to become a home for those in search of meaning, connection, and spirituality.

First, Judaism is more than just a religion. It is also the culture of a people, a way of life. Prior to modernity, all these elements of Judaism – religion, culture and nationality – were inseparable. Today, in a society that increasingly identifies as spiritual, we can add the perspective of Rabbi Heschel, who taught that these same mitzvot are not doors that block the path to Judaism, but rather are portals that invite us “into the presence of spiritual meaning.”

Second, the questioning of religious teachings is the most common reason that people do not identify with a religion. In Judaism, questions are more important than answers. Our sacred texts conserve a multiplicity of often contradictory voices, preserving unarticulated questions. Further, Judaism’s radically diverse conjectures about the Divine offer seekers many ways in. Turning traditionally dogmatic faith on its head, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel even said, “We are closer to God when we are asking questions than when we think we have the answers.”

Lastly, many equate the Jewish religion with the practice of its mitzvot / commandments (particularly the ritual ones), mistakenly thinking Judaism is only relevant to those who identify as religious. However, as far back as Talmudic times (200 -500 CE), the mitzvot were understood as a discipline that makes us better human beings. Today, in a society that increasingly identifies as spiritual, we can add the perspective of Rabbi Heschel, who taught that these same mitzvot are not doors that block the path to Judaism, but rather are portals that invite us “into the presence of spiritual meaning.”

So, circling back to the St. John’s Prep student’s question, how will the decline of religion among young people affect our faith? I believe that it will usher in the opportunity for a religious and spiritual transformation in America that ultimately more closely aligns with the authentic practice of Judaism and the value of being part of that spiritual community through synagogue membership.

CSH CEE

Continued from page 1

and families surrounding other changes such as online billing and registration systems, updated delivery of parent/teacher communication, and major classroom and curriculum upgrades which will continue into 2019-2020.

The newly renovated preschool classrooms are modeled on the innovative STEAM program (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) with open-ended art centers and a large set of hollow blocks to encourage imaginative play, gross motor strength, and peer collaboration. “Children are encouraged to plan, design and execute their ideas, which takes their learning to new heights,” Bernard said.

The reinvented classroom also has a mobile magnet wall, which creates the opportunity to think, question and reason. Children experiment with PVC pipes, ramps, balls and learn through trial and error, learning to estimate, predict, and problem solve. “Teachers facilitate exploratory play and support new skills by asking questions such as, ‘what do you think will happen if? Can you tell me about…?’” Bernard explained.

Each Thursday yoga instructor Jenny Frontero leads the school in a 25-minute relaxing journey through yoga poses, such as tree pose, airplane, cat and cow and happy baby. There is a weekly
Cantor’s News

Prophet of Love

How did a slow talking, squarely dressed man become an American cultural icon during the last part of the 20th century? Because Mr. Fred Rogers was a kind, courageous radical who invited us to make the world into a counter-cultural neighborhood of love and, in turn, many of us fell in love with him. A prophet is one who proclaims and interprets divine revelation. It is descriptive of one who speaks forth God’s word. Mr. Rogers was a prophet of love.

For 30 years, Mr. Rogers produced and starred in the children’s TV show, “Mr. Rogers’s Neighborhood.” He had the chutzpah to tell kids they mattered, that they were worthy of love, and that emotions were to be embraced, not buried. He spoke to children like grown-ups, and helped them tackle topics such as anger, trust, honesty, courage and sadness. This was and is important in a world where the lives of so many children are riddled with neglect, violence or abuse.

In a still, soft voice, he declared “You are special, just by being you.” “Your feelings are real and valid.” “It’s okay to wonder.” “I want to be your friend; I like you.” The Prophet is to be the voice of God in the midst of the harsh world. Prophet Jeremiah would walk up and down the streets criticizing the King and people’s greed, hypocrisy and idol worship. But he was also there to reassure them and bring them hope.

Neighbors and love were at the core of Rogers’ beliefs and message. As an ordained Presbyterian Minister, Fred Rogers undoubtedly took inspiration from the New Testament. When Jesus said “Love your neighbor like yourself” he was quoting the Torah in Leviticus 19:18. Fred Rogers’ definition of ‘neighbor’ was whomever you happen to be with at the moment, especially if they are in need.

In his life and work, he always sought to remind children that their unique thoughts and feelings helped make their neighborhoods places of flourishing. The magnificent new documentary, “Won’t You Be My Neighbor,” includes a scene where, on the one-year anniversary of the Sept 11 attacks, Mr. Rogers shoots a video message for parents and those who care for young children. “No matter what our particular job, especially in our world today, we all are called to be Tikkun Olam - repairers of creation,” he said. On Feb 27, 2003, Mr. Fred Rogers passed away. Thank you Mr. Rogers for your love, kindness, courage and teaching me Torah. Your memory is a blessing in my life.

B’Shalom, Cantor Alty

Calendar (continued from page 1)

FRIDAY, MARCH 29
5:30 pm Young Families Shabbat (at Temple Sinai)
6:00 pm Kabbalat Shabbat

SATURDAY, MARCH 30
Shabbat Synaplex™
Bat Mitzvah of Madison Walker

FRIDAY, APRIL 5
6:00 pm Kabbalat Shabbat

SATURDAY, APRIL 6
Shabbat Synaplex™

Shabbat celebration with Rabbi Michael, Cantor Alty, and Marcy Yellin and many special programs and sports activities.

CEE’s next steps are to break ground on an outdoor classroom and focus on the natural aspects of its outdoor space. “We are raising funds for our outdoor classroom. If there are any outdoor/garden enthusiasts who would like to make a contribution to our outdoor classroom fund, it would be greatly appreciated!” Bernard said.

STEAM hollow blocks encourage imaginative play, gross motor strength, and peer collaboration.
Life of the Congregation

Tu Bishvat at Shirat Hayam

4th graders are adventurous while tasting foods grown in the Land of Israel. Shown, L - R: Levi Crockett, Maddy Gelb and Maxine Mintzer.

5th graders played a Tu Bishvat Bingo game designed to familiarize them with the fruits and trees that grow in the Land of Israel and to help them see familiar fruits in a new way. Pictured L - R: Alexis Rebello and Mimi Weisman.

The children of the CEE learned about Tu Bishvat by putting together a tree appreciation mural.

Rabbi Ragozin led a Tu Bishvat seder at the Bilt Bar in Salem as part of the JCC’s Torah Hub. A multi-generational group drank hard cider and ate fruits, while deepening their environmental consciousness through discussion of traditional Jewish texts. Pictured from left: Alan Sidman, Barbara Sidman, Dylann Cooper Morgan Cooper, Sara Ewing, Daniel Goldberg, Cedric Francis, Judy Dunn, Aileen Cordette and Lois Sargent.

Margaret O’Connor and Christian Richards

Young Family Seder Workshop
Saturday, April 6th 10 – 11:30 am

RSVP required to CJE@shirathayam.org, no walk-ins, please. No charge but all adults must be accompanied by at least one child aged 3 – 6.

The Passover seder is the ultimate opportunity to make lasting and joyful Jewish memories. Our workshop will offer a selection of stations designed for parents and children to learn more about the holiday together and to pick up some new ways to deepen your understanding and increase the fun at whatever Passover experience your family may have.
Adult Ed at CSH!

Over forty people are learning about the Book of Samuel with Rabbi Michael — a 10 percent increase over last year’s Limmud (Torah study) — with even more participating via video. The class focuses on discovering the plain meaning of the biblical story and discussing contemporary issues that the text raises.

In a nutshell, the text covers: Divine Providence, the triumph of the righteous, whether parents are judged for their children’s actions, whether leaders are held to a higher standard than ordinary citizens, and whether it’s just for citizens to be punished for the sins of their leaders.

If this sounds like it’s up your alley, contact Barri to join in person or by video—there are still three classes left!

The Future of Shirat Hayam: An Interfaith Conversation

Many in our community are touched by intermarriage. Nearly half of all couples in Jewish Greater Boston are interfaith. Moreover, on the North Shore, there are more intermarried families raising Jewish children than inmarried families.

For a thriving future, we at Shirat Hayam need to become the congregation of choice for intermarried families. The questions are: How will we get there? What conversations can we have to convey clearly and unambiguously that we embrace intermarried couples and non-Jewish spouses?

The Interfaith Task Force is partnering with CJP to facilitate this important conversation at two different times, Sunday, March 3 at 9:15 am and Tuesday, March 5 at 6:00 pm (with babysitting and pizza for kids). Please join us and bring a friend - our future depends on it!


Save the Date: Women’s Seder

Thursday, March 28th at 6:30 pm

The purpose of the Women’s Seder at Shirat Hayam, led by CJE Director Janis Knight, is to offer a space where the women of our community can come together and prepare for Pesach emotionally and spiritually even before we prepare physically for the holiday. Bringing out the hidden in our lives and reconnecting with it is part of the spiritual preparation for Pesach.

Our seder is a dairy/vegetarian potluck meal with food assigned by the letter of your last name. An upcoming flyer will provide more information on reservations and assignments. Volunteers to help shape the evening are most welcome. Space is limited. Please contact Janis@ShiratHayam.org or 781-599-8005, ext. 25.
CONDOLENCES

Our deepest condolences to those who have passed away.

MEMBERS:

Bernice Insuik 12/31/2018
Mother of Gary Insuik and Husband of Dr. N. Milton Insuik, z”l

RELATIVES:

Estelle Halpern 12/16/2018
Mother of Diane Rubchinsky

Helen Bergman 12/28/2018
Mother of Arnold Bergman

Terry Andrew Sokoli 12/31/2018
Father of Kathleen Lewis

Shirley Kessler 1/7/2019
Sister of Robert Myerson

Saul Kraft 1/22/2019
Brother of Frances Pearlman

Margery Schwartz 1/25/2019
Mother of Sheila Rich

CANTOR’S DISCRETIONARY FUND

In appreciation of Cantor Alty’s beautiful voice at the funeral of our father, Arnold Spector
by Michael & Ami Stix

BRODY MINYAN FUND

In memory of Helen Bergman, mother of Arnold Bergman
by Carla Greenberg; Eli & Muriel Talkov

In honor of Bobby Kaplan’s special birthday
by Carl & Sandra Shalit

In memory of Bernice Insuik, mother of Gary Insuik
by Samuel & Carol Denbo; Alice & Charles Leidner; Michael & Rachelle Rosenbaum; Eli & Muriel Talkov; Robert & Ellen Zirin

In memory of
Father, Lawrence Abrams
by Howie Abrams
Mother, Minnie Axelrod
by Judith Arnold
Mother, Pauline Orloff
by Jayne Carey
Father, Samuel Gilberg
by Fay Castleman
Father, Leo Cohen
by Barry Cohen
Mother, Sarah Denbo
by Sam Denbo
Father, Irving Feldman
by Judy Feldman
Son, Matthew Forman
by Dorothy Forman
Grandfather, Jacob Pearl
by Maury Greenbaum
Father, Joseph Fishman
by Evelyn Handis
Father, Jacob Handis
by Bernard Handis
Grandfather, Louis Kline
Great aunt, Esther Kline
Grandparents, Ida and Joseph Razin
Parents, Roberta and Bernard Kline
by Susan Kline

CENTER FOR JEWISH EDUCATION FUND

In honor of the 70th birthdays of Howie and Izzi Abrams
by Eddie & Diane Knopf; Sarah Ragozin

GENERAL FUND

In memory of Bernice Insuik, mother of Gary Insuik
by Arnold & Brenda Beberman; Barbara Fermon; Joel & Barbara Levine; Toby Sloane

In memory of Helen Bergman, mother of Arnold Bergman
by Alan & Phyllis Bolotin

In memory of Margery Schwartz, mother of Sheila Rich
by Michael & Wendy Dubinsky

In memory of Saul Kraft, brother of Frances Pearlman
by Dawn Ehrlich

In honor of Shari and Robert Cashman’s daughter, Alyssa’s, recent engagement
by David & Karen Rosenberg

In memory of Mim Ostrovitz
by Toby Sloane

In honor of our son, Daniel Goldberg, chanting Haftarah
by Richard & Ilene Goldberg

In recognition of my chanting Haftarah
by Daniel Goldberg

In memory of
Husband, Henry Bershad
by Helaine Bershad

Brother, Mark N. D. Breslin
Father, Donald Joseph Breslin
Mother, Evalynne Wood Breslin
Friend, Ira Kweller
by Lisa Breslin

Father, William Cohen
Sister, Miriam Lehman
by Bunny Gorffinkle

Father, Myer Lillian
Father-in-law, Samuel Beletz
Brother, Herbert Lillian
Mother, Anna Lillian
Mother-in-law, Dora Beletz
by Melvin Lillian

RABBI’S DISCRETIONARY FUND

In loving memory of Bernice Insuik, mother of Gary Insuik
In honor of the birth of Rabbi and Sarah Ragozin’s daughter, Aleza Rose
by Bob & Leslie Ogan

With thanks for our granddaughter’s naming ceremony
by Moshe & Bethany Roditi

Wishing the rabbi and his family blessings, happiness and good health and in honor of Aleza Rose
by Michael & Ami Stix

In memory of
Father, Harry Rodman
by Gerald Rodman
Husband, Joseph Rooks
by Norma Rooks

BURT & BECKY SCHOLARSHIP FUND

In memory of Margery Schwartz, mother of Sheila Rich
by Gloria Sax

CENTER FOR EARLY EDUCATION

In honor of Eleanor Ginsberg’s 3rd birthday
by Debbie Leibowitz

In memory of Barbara Gannino, mother of Leslie Harsap
by Nick and Jennifer Jasilli

Donations / Condolences
Received January 1 – January 31

Donations

6 NEW WAVE | Congregation Shirat Hayam | 781.599.8005 | www.shirathayam.org
**KIDDUSH FUND**

In memory of Bernice Insuik, mother of Gary Insuik  
by Jerry & Gail Gerson; Larry & Susan Goldberg; Christopher & Jennifer Hockert; Leonard & Bunny Lieberson; Mark & Karen Meyer and family; Phyllis Sagan; Arthur & Cheryl Schwartz

In memory of Shirley Kessler, sister of Bob Myerson and aunt of David Myerson  
by Jerry & Karen Madorsky

In honor of the birth of Carla Greenberg’s grandson, Griffin Dean Greenberg  
by Marsha Gerber

In honor of Harold Epstein’s special birthday  
by Jason & Renee Sidman

**LEV INITIATIVE**

In memory of Shirley Kessler, sister of Bob Myerson and aunt of David Myerson  
by Jerry & Karen Madorsky

In honor of Jerry Kreitzer’s special birthday  
by Moshe and Bethany Roditi

**TORAH FUND**

In memory of  
Brother, Sumner Germain  
Grandmother, Malia Osattin  
by Marion Garfinkel and family

**SHEPARD SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

In memory of Bernice Insuik, mother of Gary Insuik  
by Herbert Goldberg; Eddie & Diane Knopf

**SHIR CHESED FUND**

In memory of Bernice Insuik, mother of Gary Insuik  
by Herbert Goldberg; Eddie & Diane Knopf

In memory of Helen Bergman, mother of Arnold Bergman  
by Marsha Gerber

In honor of the marriage of Rachel Roditi, daughter of Bethany and Moshe Roditi, to Elan Witkowski  
by Jack & Phyllis Karas; Jerry and Karen Madorsky; Ron and Cindy Matloff

In memory of Helene & Harvey Cotton’s new great-granddaughter, Felix Kaplan  
by Alice & Charles Leidner

**TREE PLANTED IN ISRAEL**

In memory of Bernice Insuik, mother of Gary Insuik  
by Jack, Ann & Michael Bailen; Florence Wigetman

**YOGA FUND**

In honor of Jane Zeller’s special birthday  
by Diane Knopf

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**Make a Donation**

To make a donation, please visit [shirathayam.org/Donate](http://shirathayam.org/Donate) or mail your donation with a check made out to CSH or Congregation Shirat Hayam. Please specify the fund to which your donation should be allocated.

Donations listed were received through January 31, 2018.
Congregational Spotlight
Meet Renewal and Ruach Rally Musician Michael Smerka

In every issue, The New Wave spotlights a congregant as a way to help us get to know each other better by putting a face with a name. This month, prosthetist and percussionist Michael Smerka shares his thoughts on meditation, music, Tikkun Olam and Shirat Hayam.

What brought you to CSH? What keeps you there?
We moved to the North Shore in October 2011 after leaving NYC for an employment related opportunity to work for an MIT start up. The company specialized in manufacturing Bionic technology for lower extremity amputees. I was hired as a Certified Prosthetist to support the clinical operations related to R&D and testing of these devices. My wife, Heather, grew up in Marblehead so we relocated there for obvious reasons. After searching for a congregation to join, the welcome we received from CSH was evident from the moment we came to visit. We love the friends and community we have discovered. We feel CSH has an amazing program that supports our children to discover their own Jewish identities.

What drew you to music initially and “renewal” music in particular? What inspires your Jewish musical expression?
Renewal is a meditative time where we can forget about everything going on in life to deeply connect with song and prayer for an hour. I love participating and bring my percussive ideas and expression into this space. I am influenced by various types of music (Rock, Funk, Soul, Jazz and World to name a few). Growing up, I was exposed to both of my Ashkenazi and Sephardic roots. My father’s parents left Germany in the years before the war when Jews were still able to get out. I grew up in Washington Heights where there was a large German Jewish constituency. My mother was born to Yemenite parents in Israel. She arrived to the U.S. as a teenager where she met and married my Father. Growing up, she would take us (my sister and I) to Israel during summer vacation for weeks at a time. This is where I was initially exposed to the sounds and the rhythms of Yemenite and Israeli culture. In middle school, I was selected to sing with the Boys Choir of Harlem. I sang with them for a couple of years preceding my Bar Mitzvah. There were weekly rehearsals, music theory, a choral summer camp and Gospel performances on Sundays. We got to perform with Ray Charles and sang under the direction of Leonard Bernstein. I played the clarinet for a few years after the choir but by thirteen, I moved to playing the drum set and the rest is history.

In a nutshell, can you describe the Tikkun Olam you do with ROMP?
So many lack the good fortune to be able to access quality medical care in the developing world. People with amputation experience a life-altering event that affects the entire family. It exacerbates emotional and financial stresses. ROMP is a 401c non-profit organization dedicated to empowering people through mobility. To restore a person’s ability to move, work, take care of themselves and their family again is such a powerful thing. Seeing someone walk again for the first time after amputation never gets old. I have traveled six times to Guatemala to participate in the yearly mission to treat people at the Zacapa clinic. I encourage everyone to visit rompglobal.org to find out more about this amazing organization.