

April, 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



A group of us has been reading the works of the wise and poetic Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel these past few months. Mostly we're giving him a warm reception. We all love his sense of awe and wonder at the Ineffable, as he likes to call it--the great, compelling Whatever in the universe. But over and over our crew (not everyone, but many, let's just say) keeps bucking at one recurring idea of his: that the Ineffable, the Whatever, That which he is prone to calling God, loves us, desires us, and wants to be in relationship with us. Hence, writes Rabbi Heschel, God gives the Torah. Hence, the commandments. Hence the Sabbath, the "bride" to which we are the "groom." God wants to be intimate with us.

Heteronormativity is only the beginning of the problems that our group raises with this notion! The whole idea that there is Something--SomeOne--out there with feelings, with yearnings, seems to be a bridge too far for many of us. This is not just because we don't buy the "Old Man with the Long White Beard" personification of God made famous by Michelangelo and Garry Larson. But, whatever the gender, the age, even the species, it is hard to imagine desire without something person-like doing the desiring. With all his talk of love and desire, it sounds like Rabbi Heschel is personifying God.

But Rabbi Heschel is in no way simplistic: "To most of us a person, a human being, seems to be a maximum of being, the ceiling of reality; we think that to personify is to glorify. Yet do not some of us realize at times that a person is no superlative, that to personify the spiritually real is to belittle it? A personification may be both a distortion and a depreciation." (*The Sabbath* p. 60)

Here we are, being asked to wrap our heads around the idea that there is Something glorious and maximal--Something Ineffable, at that--with a capacity to love and a will to reach out in our direction. It's a very different picture from the "benign indifference of the universe," as Camus would have it, the awe-inspiring neutrality of the ocean's waves or the night sky.

When I come across these beautiful but hard-to-affirm notions, like that of a loving and relational God, I sometimes like to resort to my old standby, the Believing Game. This was developed by English professor Peter Elbow as a way to find meaning in what seems like an improbable claim. He invented the Believing Game for times when someone in a classroom offers up a wacko interpretation of a line of poetry or fiction. He says that we actually learn more by going along with the idiosyncratic idea for a while than we do by immediately knocking it down. It's a method for deepening our own understanding--he calls it "methodological belief."



Elbow suggests that, when we hear someone propose an idea that seems off-the-rails, we choose to believe that idea for a period of time, say five minutes. During those five minutes we try to bring everything we can to substantiate it. Sometimes by doing this, he says, we'll realize, "Hey, maybe there's a grain of something important in there that I would have missed otherwise."

I find this practice incredibly helpful for learning from religious ideas that seem preposterous or childish or just plain alien to my way of experiencing the world. And in Jewish life and learning, dare I say, there are plenty of ideas like that.

Okay then, let's take five minutes and believe: "The pious man avers that he* has a perpetual gift from God, for in all that comes to him he feels the love of God. In all the thousand and one experiences that make up a day, he is conscious of that love intervening in his life" (***Man is Not Alone***, p. 291). (* Rabbi Heschel published this book in 1951; I believe his use of the masculine gender reflects his times.)

What is coming to me right now, of the thousand and one experiences of my day? I hear loud ticking over my head from my plastic "No Mikvah No Tikvah" clock that looks kind of like a Jewish Dr. Bronner's bottle on a clock face. I got it a couple of decades ago at a conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education someplace in



the Midwest, given to me out of the back of a car by a sweet black-coated man who came every year to encourage the mostly non-orthodox women there to observe the mitzvah of mikveh. I remember the earnestness of his mission and how out-of-place he seemed, the way he gifted me with mikveh swag because I was one of the few who showed a bit of interest in what he was teaching. A couple days later I showed my new clock to a dear friend, also a rabbi, and he thought it was the funniest thing he'd ever seen. Just the other day, I explained my own, and our community's, very non-traditional path to mikveh to a lovely woman, a recent widow who wanted to immerse in the mikveh as she prepares

to move into the next phase of her life. I recall talking with her about our own beloved mikveh lady, Ella, and sharing with her so much that I learned from my dear friend and teacher.

Now I look at my copy of ***Man is Not Alone*** on the table in front of me, fringed with dozens of little blue and green post-its, and I realize that I am smiling as I do so. I'm flashing back to a women's retreat some years ago when Luna lovingly roasted me about my love of post-its and index cards, tossing little slips of paper to all the women in the room while we all laughed our heads off. Now I'm looking around my little office here, and it is full of little stuff, all thick with love and affection, all very much directed to me. I'm not going to bore you with more details, but suffice it to say that I've used up my five minutes and more feeling love--directional, personal love, pointed to me--in the little scraps and sounds of my immediate world in the past few moments. "In all the thousand and one experiences that make up [her] day, [she] is conscious of that love intervening in [her] life."

As I play the Believing Game, it is hardly any leap at all for me to experience this as the love of God. Neither is it difficult for me—as I move in my imagination out the door of my tiny office, whose stacks and gewgaws are admittedly curated for my own pleasure, to the cold night outdoors, the early spring grass, the overcast night sky, the big stack of bamboo that awaits next year's sukkah construction, the bicycles, the lawn mower, the cars, the neighbors—to feel that it is all full of love. How could I possibly experience it any other way?



My five minutes is more than up. I hadn't planned to contemplate any of this stuff when I started my Believing Game! I can experience love intervening in my life from many directions--clocks and post-its and the wet night sky. Ineffable, yes, but right here.

When we sit down at our Passover seder we will say: "By strength of hand God brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Imagine for a moment, or for five minutes, believing that this is true! *Chag sameach*, my dear community!

MCJC SEDER

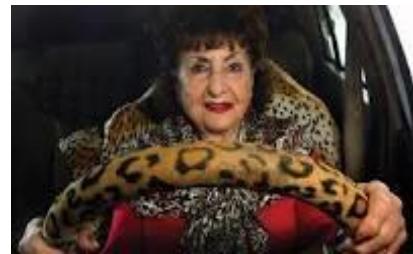


The shul seder will be Sunday, April 1st, 5:30- 8:30 PM. This will be a full seder meal and celebration, with songs, prayers, stories and teachings. People of all ages, from the youngest to the oldest, are welcome, and there is no charge.

But PLEASE RSVP to Mina Cohen at mcohen@mcn.org or 937-1319. When you do so, you will be asked to bring a part of the seder meal. Nothing complicated!

AN UPLIFTING YOM HASHOAH

We will observe Yom HaShoah, the annual day of remembrance of the Holocaust, with a gathering at the shul on Wednesday evening, April 11th at 7:00 PM. This year we will be showing the acclaimed documentary film "Big Sonia." Sonia Warshawski—great-grandmother, businesswoman, and Holocaust survivor—runs the tailor shop she's owned for more than 30 years in Kansas City, but when she's served an eviction notice, the specter of retirement prompts Sonia to revisit her harrowing past as a refugee and witness to genocide. "A poignant story of generational trauma and healing, 'Big Sonia' also offers a laugh-out-loud-funny portrait of the power of love to triumph over bigotry, and the power of truth-telling to heal us all."



This inspired film was shown at last year's Mendocino Film Festival, and people have begged us since to show it at the shul. Following the film, we will read our community's list of family members and others who perished at the hands of the Nazis and will recite memorial prayers.

SHABBAT MORNINGS



Since the beginning of the year, we have asked various people from the community to offer Torah teachings during the Shabbat morning service. They have all been moving, learned and surprising. We will continue to have such drashot at many of the Shabbat morning services, increasing our Shabbat pleasure, our love of Torah and our knowing of each other. For the Torah portion on the 28th, Kedoshim, Raven Deerwater will reflect on the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called a cardinal principle of Torah, and of which Hillel said, "This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary— **that which is hateful to you do not do unto your neighbor.**" The service starts at 10:30 AM with blessings and much singing. The Torah service starts at about 11:30 and winds up at about 12:30, followed by a simple kiddush and some time to schmooze. You are welcome to come for any or all of each service.

HESCHEL CLASS

The Heschel class meets on the first and third Tuesdays of each month from 5:30-7:00 PM at the shul. This month's meetings will be April 3rd and 17th. We will finish our exploration of *The Sabbath* and begin reading *A Passion for Truth*.

KABBALAT SHABBAT

We will meet Friday, April 27th at the home of Susann Flowers and Mike Kim in Fort Bragg. Call them at 409-5034 to RSVP and get directions. In May we will meet in Irish Beach at the home of Susan and Gary Levenson-Palmer.



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

IT'S NOT TOO LATE!



To attend the **ANNUAL MCJC DINNER & Silent Auction**, Monday, April 9, 2018 Ledford House, Albion. **Join the fun & help support our Jewish community.**

\$60 per person. See the menu and preliminary list of auction items at
<https://www.mcjc.org/events-and-holidays>



MAKE RESERVATIONS BY CONTACTING DONNA MONTAG (Montag@mcn.org)

PLEASE SEND YOUR CHECK TO MCJC, BOX 291, LITTLE RIVER, CA 95456

SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars today for Wednesday night, May 9th for a great night out and dinner at the first annual MCJC Dineout at the MacCallum House. A chance to eat well and do good! The profits from that evening will go to MCJC, so we want to make sure there is a very full house. Get your friends together and make your reservations today: 937-0289.

ELDERS' CONVERSATION

The Elders' Conversation meets every second and fourth Tuesday, 3:00-5:00 PM at the shul (note that we're meeting at our Daylight Savings Time hour). This month we will meet on April 10th and 24th. Topics to be announced. People of all ages are most welcome.

MCJC JUSTICE GROUP



The Justice Group will meet on Thursday, April 12th, 5:30-7:30 PM at the shul. We have much going on this month, including a report back from the four Justices who will be attending the ACLU Conference in Sacramento earlier in the month, organizing our participation in the effort to pass a tax to fund our hospital, exploring whether we want to join Bend the Arc's and the Ella Baker Center's campaign to end money bail in California, sharing some happy updates on our Citizenship Scholarship project, and more.

MCJC MEMBERS SPEAK ON CURRENT ISSUES

"WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?" Sunday, April 22nd (Earth Day), 7:00 PM at the shul.

Dennak Murphy (who has recently moved to the coast with his wife, Laura Goldman) will speak with us about promising approaches to rein in climate change, from the local to the global. Dennak is a co-founder of the 50/50 Climate Project, which calls on investors to challenge large corporations to adopt policies which are more environmentally sustainable (check out the website, 5050climate.org). He will talk with us about the 50/50 Project and also about legislative, advocacy, and local sustainability paths to addressing the crisis of climate change. Following his talk, he will lead a conversation about what we might do, individually and as a community, to address climate change.



"THE GUN IS A SILENCER" Thursday, May 3rd, 3:00 PM at the shul.



Local psychologist and artist, Lillian Kaufman Cartwright, is giving a paper at the international conference WORDS THAT KILL in Paris in May. Before she goes, she is offering us a preview of her presentation. Using illustrations from African American artists--including Kara Walker, David Hammons, Betye Saar, Kehinde Wiley, and Amy Serrald--Lillian will explore the concept of "negation" as a form of murder. We are social animals and want recognition and connection, but at the same time we divide people into US and THEM at stunning speeds. By placing other human beings into stereotypic categories that obliterate their individual talents and traits, we "kill" them. We invite you to come and participate in discussion following her talk.

The aim of the WORDS THAT KILL conference, organized by the George and Irina Schaeffer Center for the Study of Genocide, Human Rights and Conflict Prevention, is to reexamine the questions of hate speech and freedom, the production and circulation of lies, and violence-inducing identity rhetoric.

BOOK GROUP

There will be no book group meeting in April. We will meet May 7th to discuss *High Noon: The Hollywood Blacklist and the Making of an American Classic* by Glenn Frankel.

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 FOOLISH FRINGE OF FOLK MUSIC

HOLLY TANNEN IN CONCERT

SATURDAY APRIL 28th 8:00 PM at the shul
doors open 7:30 PM

Tickets are \$15 -25 (sliding scale) for adults and \$5 for children.

*** All proceeds benefit the MCJC Capital Campaign for the Building.**

Holly Tannen will sing silly American folk songs and her own ditties about Mendocino life: such favorites as "Bonobo Wannabee," "Listen to the Dinosaurs," and "Email from Norman." She will debut her newest, "A Dybbuk Named Fred." She will sing a few serious numbers as well. There will be plenty of choral song; she'll teach you the words.



Snacks and drinks will be available.

This concert is part of the Mendocino County Arts Council's Almost Fringe Festival.

MCJC BOARD MEETING

The MCJC board meets monthly at 5:30 PM at the shul. The April meeting will be on Thursday, the 19th. If you would like to attend, please leave a message on the phone at the shul, 964-6146.

THANKS TO NEWSLETTER MAILERS

Ronnie Karish and Ellen Saxe prepared the March 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



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Elizabeth Sabin in honor of her sister, Alix Sabin.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE BUILDING

Pledges and contributions to the Capital Campaign have been received from the following:
Joan & Paul Katzeff; Nancy Drooker & Alix Sabin; Cecile Cutler; Rosalie & Art Holub;
Irv & Rosalie Winesuff; Yarrow Rubin & Miles Clark; and Dorothy Salant.

We have secured \$54,845 so we keep creeping closer to our \$75,000 goal. Thank you all!
If you haven't yet donated, or are able to increase your support, please consider doing so.



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.

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MCJC Board & Useful Numbers

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Culture (films/ speakers/ Women's Retreat)	Harriet Bye*	937-3622	bysawyer@mcn.org
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* = board member

