

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



I woke up one morning not too long ago and felt alive. I hadn't really felt that way for the past nine months, not since Mickey died. This wasn't a big bursting sensation...more of a modest and familiar sense of looking forward to the day. Nothing special was planned, as I recall; it was just a day about to start: coffee, cat, newspaper, e-mails, zooms, phone calls, going somewhere, doing something, whatever it was going to be. But I noticed the feeling as I opened my eyes and looked up at the ceiling. Okay, let's go.

I've long had the notion that, when someone close to us dies, we die in some measure too. That's why Jewish tradition, and just about every other cultural and spiritual one, has practices for mourners: to woo them back to life, one cup of tea and slice of kugel at a time. But after Mickey died, I felt it: I was dead, or nearly dead, more in the grave than in the house with all the kind people who came to be with me. Sometime after that I read the astonishing essay, "Time Lived, Without its Flow" by the British poet Denise Riley, who wrote it after the death of her adult son. Riley writes about the weird feeling of being outside the forward flow of life, even while everything and everyone else seems to be on track:

The weak metaphor of 'time stopped' would sap the force from a description of this new state. Hard to put into words, yet absolutely lucid as you inhabit it daily, is this sensation of having been lifted clean out of habitual time. This condition of being 'outside time' is so quietly astonishing when you're first in it.

If there is no temporal flow, there is necessarily the lack of "futuraity." It is difficult to get purchase on even the simplest plan or intention. Over time, though, I regained my grip on the forward flow of life. I came back to work. I visited with people, went places (not very much, but sometimes), and I even laughed once in a while. Occasionally, I was even interested in something. One day a couple months in I was doing something or other, and I caught myself thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm having fun!" At another point I noticed that my feelings had moved from solid planes of aching grief interspersed with moments of whatever-else to mostly whatever-else interspersed with bursts of grief. When people would ask me, "How are you doing?" I moved from saying, "I can't answer that" to "Up and down" to "Not so bad, I guess" to mostly "Pretty good" and occasionally even "I'm fine thanks."

But I can't say that I've felt really alive since Mickey died. I've been in a kind of twilight for the most part, kind of attenuated. I've generally been glad to do whatever I'm doing, but I could walk away in a minute from any of it. Lack of purchase, no traction: "Time Lived, Without its Flow."

Then came that sense of readiness the other morning. Life. It surprised me. I've always felt—intellectually, but usually emotionally too—that it is the greatest gift to be alive. To have a body, to have the capacity to have relationships, to think, to imagine, to have senses, to create, to want, even to suffer. It feels so rich, so precious, and yes, so finite, to have the breath of God (*ruach*) imparted to us at birth, inhabiting us until death. I am trying to notice life inside myself; it's sort of like trying to feel my blood moving through my arteries and veins. I am trying to sense the flow of life energy—not to demand it, but to appreciate it.



I don't want to be too bold about this; I am still deep in mourning and the process of change that a huge life loss brings. I am committed to giving that evolution all the space it needs for as long as it goes on. At the same time, I am noticing the breath of life too, in me and all around.

It makes me think about the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, whose sap freezes underground and has to be called upward at Tu B'Shevat (February 6th this year). Just like there is life inside all of creation, there is life inside me. It is the same energy, the same breath, the same blood. To be in a living world, part of a living world, which also relates and senses and creates and wants and suffers, this is everything.



The Kabbalists have an idea that the world is filled with sparks of God, all encased in *klipot* (shells), and that the work of life is to release bound sparks. I think we do that with each other—release sparks, call each other to life. I think we do that in the larger world as well, calling pieces of land and houses and neighborhoods and gardens to life, and being called to life by them as well.

I can't help thinking of the beautiful last words of my favorite play (***Angels in America: Perestroika*** by Tony Kushner):

Bethesda fountain's not flowing now, they turn it off in the winter, ice in the pipes. But in the summer it's a sight to see. I want to be around to see it. I plan to be. I hope to be.

This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come.

Bye now.

You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.

*And I bless you: **More Life.***

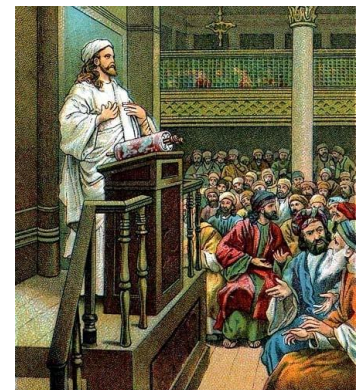
The Great Work Begins.

In this cold winter season I wish us all, wish myself, More Life.

SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES

A full Shabbat service is led by community members, with singing, chanting and silence, Torah teaching and reading, blessings for healing and peace, and time for mourners to say Kaddish. The teachers for January are listed below. We now have hybrid services, so come to the shul or Zoom in from 10:30 AM until about 12:30 PM.

01/07/23	<i>Vayechi</i>	Raven Deerwater
01/14/23	<i>Shemot</i>	Andrea Luna
01/21/23	<i>Vaera</i>	Janet Sternburg
01/28/23	<i>Bo</i>	Margaret Holub



Members of the community are invited to give a Torah teaching (*drash*) during a Shabbat service. If you have an interest in performing this mitzvah, or would like more information about what's involved, please contact Raven Deerwater at raven@taxpractitioner.com or (707) 937-1099.

ZOOM ADDRESS

We are using the Zoom address here for MCJC events. You may or may not be asked to type in a password, which is *shalom*. Disregard the numeric passcode at the bottom of the invitation unless you're dialing in on a landline. If you have questions or problems, contact Susan Tubbesing at susan.tubbesing@gmail.com.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7071836183?pwd=NzFaTkpiOXVYMDNnNnprOXInZjVhQT09>

Meeting ID: 707 183 6183

Passcode: *shalom*

Numeric Passcode: 776001

KABBALAT SHABBAT

We will attempt in-person Kabbalat Shabbat celebrations in January, but actual togetherness will depend on the COVID situation here on the coast. If all goes according to plan, we will meet at the home of Julie and Bob Melendi in South Caspar on January 20th. We will meet at 6:00 PM for a brief service followed by a veggie potluck dinner. Call the Melendis at (707) 961-6010 to get directions and let them know you are coming. Please test yourself before coming.



In February, our hosts will be Adina Merenlender and Kerry Heise in Elk. If you would be willing to host from April on, please contact Mina at (707) 937-1319 or mcohen@mcn.org.

PAIGE NOTES



Chodesh tov! Kabbalah teaches us that every Hebrew month embodies the energy of either Jacob or Esau, holding the essence of either good inclination or dark inclination, respectively. This new month of Tevet is one of only three months in the category of Esau. Not only are we in the dark cold days that no longer have the Hanukkah lights, but also Tevet is the month in which the walls of both the First and Second Temples were breached. We are invited to be with, and learn from the darknesses. Rather than resisting, we can take the extra time spent indoors to truly listen and feel. This can of course be done more healthily with the support of our loving community, so I look forward to more gatherings with you throughout this darker journey, so that we may feed one another's flames.

I am surely basking in the light of these past couple months of formally serving as the MCJC rabbinic intern. First, we officially relaunched our Youth Education Program: the Sunday before Hanukkah, I gathered with eight local Jewish kiddos and their parents to craft homemade menorahs out of small redwood logs. We shared stories, including the mystical Talmudic tale about Adam & Eve's first Winter Solstice, and began to deepen as a new constellation within this community. Additionally, I reached out to some of our local Jewish high schoolers and took them out to lunch in the middle of the school day. Many of them mentioned how much they had been wanting a structured space like this in which to explore their Jewish identities and to get to know each another in this way. We intend to continue monthly gatherings for both high schoolers and youth.

I have also started inviting myself to tea with **individual congregants**. Some of these people may be facing physical struggles, and others I feel drawn to, but my intention is to offer some pastoral care, support, and loving companionship. If you have any interest in meeting with me, please send me an email at lincenberg@gmail.com.

Each of these gatherings is deeply connective and nourishing for me, and the culmination was the beautiful Rosh Chodesh/Hanukkah/Havdallah bonfire I co-led with Rabbi Margaret on December 24th. We will be continuing a form of this Rosh Chodesh tradition every month, and I look forward to whatever riches arise from that connection.

With blessings on your month of healthy darkness exploration, paige

ELDERS' CONVERSATION

The Elders meet every second and fourth Tuesday of the month, 3:00-4:30 PM on Zoom. In January, they will meet on the 10th and 24th. The conversation is always provocative and enjoyable. People of all ages are most welcome. Use the MCJC Zoom address page 3, above. If you need more information, please contact Linda Jupiter (jupiter@mcn.org) or Joy Lancaster (ajoylancaster@gmail.com) and they will be happy to fill you in.



THE BEST PART OF WAKING UP

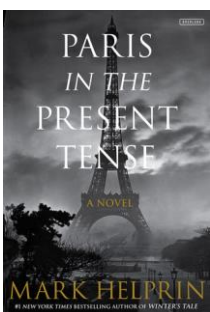


Tune in on Zoom for a virtual cup of your favorite beverage every Wednesday at 10:30 AM. Check in with community members and chat about anything and everything from the garden to the state of the nation, or from latke recipes to kids these days. We also talk about health and wealth, wisely. Leslie Krongold is the host and welcomes your questions and comments any time at elkron@gmail.com. Use the Zoom address mentioned above on page 3.

MCJC JUSTICE GROUP

The Justices will meet by Zoom on the fourth Thursday, January 26th, 5:30-7:30 PM. Everyone is welcome to attend the meetings. We have two ongoing projects: the Citizenship Scholarship project and the Indigenous Relationships project. We plan to start a third ongoing project related to abortion access. In addition, we do “pop-up justice” actions: in December, Justice members campaigned successfully to get the stalled Mendocino County Community Safety Advisory Board to schedule a meeting. If you would like to be on the Justice Group mailing list or attend meetings, please contact Donna Medley at dmthebeez9@gmail.com.

BOOK GROUP



Mark Helprin's rapturous new novel, *Paris in the Present Tense*, is set in present-day Paris caught between violent unrest and its well-known, inescapable glories. Seventy-four-year-old Jules Lacour—a *maître* at Paris-Sorbonne, cellist, widower, veteran of the war in Algeria, and child of the Holocaust—must find a balance between his strong obligations to the past and the attractions and beauties of life and love in the present. In the midst of what should be a full time of his life—days bright with music, family, rowing on the Seine—Jules is confronted headlong and all at once by a series of challenges to his principles, livelihood, and home, forcing him to grapple with his complex past and find a way forward. He risks fraud to save his terminally ill infant grandson, matches wits with a renegade insurance investigator, is drawn into an act of savage violence, and falls deeply, excitingly in love with a young cellist. Against the backdrop of a knowing vision of Paris and the way it can uniquely shape a life, Helprin forges a denouement full of humanity, elegance and truth. Books are available at Gallery Bookshop. For a Zoom invitation to the next meeting, contact Mina Cohen at mcohen@mcn.org.

ADVICE TO THE FOLKLORN

by Holly Tannen

When I heard Karen Rakofsky say, “The baby was born without any problems, *kinehora*,” I marveled that such an old expression still has currency. Yet, we all know that, whenever you are thinking about how well things are going, you must give yourself a *kinehora*. Failure to do so tempts fate to provide the opposite. *Kinehora* is a contraction of three Yiddish words: *kayn ayin hara*, which means “no evil eye.” *Kayn* comes from the German and Yiddish word for “no” and *ayin hara* from the Hebrew הרע עין בלי for “evil eye.”

The evil eye is one of the world's oldest and most widely held superstitions. Its place in Jewish lore dates to the Talmud and rabbinic Midrash. There's a rich history, from the Middle Ages onward, of bizarre and elaborate practices—invocations such as *kinehora* being a rather tame example—aimed at thwarting the malicious intent or effect of the evil eye. The oldest writing we have, Sumerian tablets dating back to 2500

BCE, are inscribed with symbols to protect from the evil eye. Belief in the evil eye and customs to ward it off are still found throughout India, the Near East, and in Europe nations and their colonies.

The Greeks theorized that the eye can shoot rays that strike with harmful or deadly force. In Greek legend, for example, the monster Medusa can turn a man into stone with a single glance. This capability is known as *jettatura*, a Latin term for a malevolent gaze with the power to harm, according to my teacher, Alan Dundes, the late folklorist from UC Berkeley in his essay “Wet and Dry: The Evil Eye.”

The evil eye may have been introduced into Jewish thought by Talmudic authorities exposed to Babylonian culture, according to Joshua Trachtenberg, the author of ***Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion***. The Babylonian Talmud claimed that there were rabbis who had the power to turn a person into a “heap of stones” with just a glance. ***Sefer Hasidim (The Book of the Pious)***, a 12th-13th century guide to Germanic Jewish religious practice, warns, “Angry glances of man’s eye call into being an evil angel who speedily takes vengeance on the cause of his wrath.”

A person who gazes upon someone or something with malice or envy may cause them to fall ill, wither up, or even die. In ***Bava Batra*** 2b:9, the rabbis say

It is prohibited to stand in another’s field and look at his crop while the grain is standing, because [the looker] casts an evil eye upon it and thereby causes...damage.

But in ***Berakhot*** 55b, the rabbis offer a protective gesture and invocation:

*He who enters a city and fears the evil eye should hold the thumb of his right hand in his left hand and the thumb of his left hand in his right hand and recite the following:
‘I...come from the descendants of Joseph, over whom the evil eye has no dominion.’*

As our grandmothers knew and demonstrated, the effects of the evil eye may be prevented by concealing, denying, or disguising good fortune, or by spitting three times (poo poo poo). The *hamsa*, called by Jews the Hand of Miriam, is an eye embedded in an open hand. It can be worn on a necklace or a bracelet, or hung in the house, often near the front door. Do you have one?



We Jews think of ourselves as rational people, so why does such a seemingly irrational belief still have a hold on us? Sigmund Freud suggested that, “Whoever possesses something valuable and fragile is afraid of the envy of others, [and] projects onto them the envy he would have felt in their place.” One who fears the loss of his or her life force (and Jews are certainly in that group) may worry that another is trying to steal it.

Today, belief in the evil eye is very low—according to the Pew Research Center, only about 16% of Americans take the idea to heart. Still, the use of protective amulets and talismans, the utterance of protective expressions, and sales of *hamsas*, perhaps accompanied by a red “kabbalah” string (*khutt hashani*), do not seem to be decreasing. According to the ***Sefer Hasidim***, “One should not believe in superstitions, but it is best to be heedful of them.” Or as your grandmother used to say, “It can’t hurt.”

MCJC BOARD MEETING

The MCJC board meets monthly on Zoom. The January meeting will take place on Tuesday, the 17th, at 5:30 PM. If you wish to attend part of the meeting, please contact board member Susan Tubbesing at (707) 962-0565, or susan.tubbesing@gmail.com, and she will give you the address.

NEWSLETTER THANK YOU

We are very grateful to Roslyn and Bruce Moore for preparing the December ***Megillah*** for mailing. It was the perfect task as they watched World Cup soccer action. You too could combine it with another pastime, thereby doubling your pleasure. It takes only a couple of hours, but your sense of accomplishment lingers for days. Please contact Sarah Nathe at 962-0565 or sarah.nathe@gmail.com

MEGILLAH SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Mendocino *Megillah* is published monthly as an emailed PDF and an online version. The online *Megillah* is posted on the newsletter page of the MCJC website: www.mcjc.org/newsletter. Any information on changes in email address or 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*.

A GENEROUS START TO THE YEAR

If one of your resolutions is to give more to MCJC this year, and wouldn't that be lovely, you can mail your donations to MCJC, Box 291, Little River, CA 95456, or use PayPal on the MCJC website. When you make a donation in memory or honor of someone, an acknowledgment card will be sent to the individual or family if you include their name and mailing address with your donation.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH TO THE FOLLOWING DONORS



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Ronite Gluck in honor of Donna Montag, Joan Katzeff, Harriet Bye, and Mina Cohen and their work for MCJC. Thank you!

Dawn Hofberg Schlosser and Robert Schlosser in honor of Miles Cooper Schlosser, born 9 28 22 to Ayla Schlosser and Brett Cooper.

Adina Merenlender & Kerry Heise in appreciation of the long- term board service of Donna Montag and Harriet Bye.

Rosalie & Art Holub to the Ella Russell Bikkur Cholim Fund in honor of Donna Montag's years of hard work on the board as Treasurer, and in memory of Ella.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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Rituals (Chevra Kadisha/cemetery)	Joan Katzeff	964-9161	jkatzeff@mcn.org
Outreach (new to the community), Finance Committee, Chai on Coast	Susan Tubbesing*	962-0565	susan.tubbesing@gmail.com
High Holidays/liaison to young adults	Lisa Fredrickson*	972-0884	yes@mcn.org
Women's Retreat/ Chai on Coast)	Harriet Bye	937-3622	bysawyer@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
Landscaping	Lew Mermelstein*	650-387-3581	lewmer@gmail.com
Finance Committee	Alix Sabin*	415-238-1342	alixsabin@gmail.com
Library	Nina Ravitz*	357-6462	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
MCJC Website	Sarah Nathe	962-0565	sarah.nathe@gmail.com
Online Megillah	Bob Evans	357-2817	bobevans@boborama.net
Rabbi	Margaret Holub	937-5673	mholub@mcn.org
Rabbinic Intern	Paige Lincenberg		lincenberg@gmail.com

