



# Young People Teach With Readers' Theatre Divrei Torah

What is readers' theatre? And why have young people do it?

If you asked us, we would probably say first that it's called readers' theatre because there's no memorization—young people hold the scripts in their hands. This makes possible their monthly presentations—but even more importantly, the lack of memorization makes for less "performance anxiety," which is important because it's *not* a performance.

We would also say that we do it because we want young people to help *lead* the congregation, to be not only consumers, but also *builders* and *producers* of the community. We want young people to grow in confidence, self-esteem, and wisdom.

If you ask *young* people why *they* do it, they will

tell you that they do it because it's fun (we asked them recently).

And if you ask them *what* they are doing, they will probably say that they are *teaching* the congregation. The drama, drawn



from scripture, midrash, commentaries both ancient and modern, and rabbinic stories, is at a level that young people can learn, but it's not "kid stuff," because what these young people learn, they are responsible for teaching to the congregation. *They* give the d'var Torah on Friday nights.

And if you ask our young people: *How* do you do that? They will probably answer, "We teach as a team." That's because we encourage young people to explore what it means to teach and what it means to be a part of a team.

Most of them have experience as a member of an athletic team, and have no trouble making the analogy. They tell us that "team members support and encourage each other, team members cooperate, team members are responsible to each other."

Thus there are no auditions. Parts are circulated. Those who had the large parts last time, have the smaller parts this time.

Thus more experienced readers and older ones are responsible for helping younger ones.

*(Continued on page 2.)*

## Mark Your Calendar: March 9/Adar 15—Friday Evening Services & Torah-Drama

Kehillat Kharakim will offer Friday night Shabbat services at the Westside Jewish Community Center on March 9/Adar 15.

Services begin at 6:30 with a children's service that includes a regular costumed skit called "Here Comes Moses," followed by

Chayat Hashavua, the "Animal of the Week" devar Torah.

The Congregation's minhag of having young people present the devar Torah in the form of a readers' theatre will continue with their presentation of a special program

for Purim.

After services there will be a blessing of the children, a vegetarian-dairy potluck dinner, and zemirot.

Parking is available in the WJCC parking structure. Call (323) 934-925 for more information.

### Inside this issue:

Young People Teach (Con't.)	2
Reed Sea Midrash	2
What is a Tisch	3
Torah Shmooze	3
About Kehillat Kharakim	4
Pastoral Counseling Available	4

### Otzar—Treasure

*There are places where I go to pray, but then there isn't a person there with whom I can talk. There are places where I can go and find people with whom I can talk, but there isn't a person there with whom I can pray. All my life I've been looking for a group of people with whom I can both talk and pray.*

—Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

## Young People Teach (Con't.)

Readers' theatre is inclusive. Any child who can read can participate. Even those who cannot read can participate. This ensures that many young people can have an experience of being in front of the congregation, *before* their bar or bat mitzvah.

There is a concept in Judaism of "hiddur hamitzvah"—to make the mitzvah beautiful. It is a mitzvah to teach Torah. And these young people are in the business of making the mitzvah of teaching beautiful.

And if there is any doubt in our minds about "who" can be a teacher, we can find our confirmation in Moses' reaction to the prophesying of Eldad

and Medad (in parasha Behaalotcha).

Joshua bin Nun (it is said) comes running to Moses to report on their prophesying, as if they had no business doing that. But Moses responds: "I wish that

God would put God's spirit on all of the people."

Rabbi Samson

Raphael Hirsch has said: "The example of Eldad and Medad proclaims that no monopoly in intellectuality or spiritual-



ity is to be formed in the people Israel, that the spiritual gifts of God are in no way dependent on office or profession, and that the lowest in the nation should be considered as equally worthy of the spirit of God as the first official in the highest office. Moses' answer also remains for all teachers and leaders as the brilliant example they should keep before their eyes: The first maxim for all spiritual leaders of the people is 'establish many learners'."

Through their work, our young people are helping to accomplish this task of establishing many learners, and we could add, many teachers.

## Red Sea Midrash: The People Were Ready to Promise Anything in Gratitude for Their Salvation

They arrived at the sea tired but exultant, momentarily renewed by what seemed a successful escape. But as they rested and consciousness returned, the futility of the situation began to depress them. Their practical problems were compounded by a power-bind: the overwhelming circumstances they faced undermined not only the words of their leaders but lifetimes of belief and hope as well, confounding even the smallest decisions. As unity and common purpose gave way to fragmentation born of fear, they could no longer chase away the despair that had dogged them for hours.

It was then that a lookout on a high bluff signaled the camp. Chariots were sighted off in the distance, hardly three hours ride away. A palpable fear began to ripple, wending its way snake-like. Speech and body movements quickened perceptibly among the people. Leaders rushed to counsel with one another, then clutched. The ignorant nervously prattled that leaving their country was a bad idea, so it was well they would be going back.

As rising waves of hubbub and confusion spread, even the most serene

and reflective felt the oncoming menace. At the periphery, near the water's edge, those with an instinct for survival looked to the sea. It was a nondescript moment in the tumult when one family, then another and a third, stepped into the still water.

They moved with great care, first by inches, then feet and yards. Slowly, cautiously, they advanced as they discovered that by feeling the shape of the bottom with their bare feet, they could make a zig-zag course on what seemed an endless rocky path. Later they described the sea as divided by a great underwater ridge, coming almost to the surface.

At the water's edge others saw that the small band of hardly a dozen had covered hundreds of yards—and still they were in water only waist-high. Then came shouted exchanges: "come back"—"join us." Before long a trickle of bodies linked the water-borne with the milling mass on shore. Soon hundreds and then thousands were following the careful steps of the first few. As they struggled to



traverse the narrow underwater pathway, some fell or were accidentally pushed into the deep, only to be pulled back by others. Many lost or jettisoned their possessions in the confusion of the movements.

The last soul to exit had been in the water no more than an hour, gone hardly a mile from shore, when the leading divisions of the oppressor's army arrived. With horses panting and snorting, and blood lust exuding from the ranks, they charged the fleeing people—only to stop and sink to their axles in the soft sand of the shoreline.

It wasn't long before pursuers and pursued knew that the exit wouldn't be blocked. While troops unhitched and re-hitched horses in vain efforts to salvage their chariots, officers watched in silent frustration as the people disappeared in the distance, a melting mirage on a sun-shimmered sea.

That night, by the light of a full moon, the escaping people made their way to shore. As the thousands emerged from the water and the light of dawn came, the talk and tears and singing extravagantly exalted God's miracle. The people were ready to promise anything in gratitude for their salvation.

# What is a Tisch?

Over the past few years we've asked many people about their favorite Shabbat experience.

Many mentioned the warmth of family, the white tablecloth, the special foods, the warmth of the candles and of family. But one of the people we spoke with also said this: "When I grew up, my mother and our family were always prepared for guests whether we had them or not."

So did our Abraham and Sarah. Early in the Torah there occurs a striking scene. Sitting in the heat of the day, Abraham, gazes out from the door of his tent. What is he looking for? The unseen guest.

Suddenly three men appear. He hurries to welcome them, to bring them to his home, to provide for their needs. He brings them water for washing. He sets the table with only the best.

Who are they? The scripture uses the word: "anashim" (men). But Rashi, the 11th century Torah commentator, says that these men actually represent the presence of God: They are angels. Does Abraham know this? Apparently not. And yet he is eager to provide for them.

And so the Torah asks us to do also. To

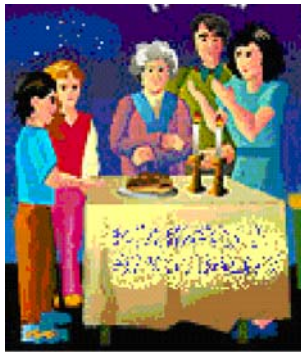
provide hospitality to guests, *hachnasat orchim*, has been a major theme in Jewish life.

Thus at Friday night services, we follow the *minhag*, the custom of asking the young people to open the door to welcome the Shabbos queen, to welcome the presence of God.

But in the Jewish tradition, every stranger, every guest is a potential angel.

How can we welcome the "angels" among us, the human guests? The rabbi's answer: *shulchan oruch*, the set table.

The beautifully set table: the white tablecloth, the candles, the flowers, the special foods, the singing, the sharing—all help to welcome the guest, and to encourage that person to be a part of our congregational family. All of us need and seek the warmth



of family.

What does it take to secure that warmth? The answer, of course, is that each of us must also help to *provide* the warmth.

Every month after Friday evening services we host a "tisch." When we say "we," we mean we the rabbi-team and others who are willing to help prepare for the unseen guest.

The word "tisch" means table, or what we do at the table. A tisch is eating, sharing conversation, singing table songs, sharing stories and a little Torah.

Our family-style sit-down Shabbat dinner happens after the *motzi* (blessing over the bread). Those who are new to Friday night services we encourage to join us at the table. Those who know ahead we encourage to bring a dish (the kitchen is veggie-dairy, which is the WJCC policy) to share, enough for six people.

As the scripture says: "Let your house be open wide." This is our house. And we are both the guests *and* the welcomers. So come! Be a guest at the table! And be also a welcomer! Invite friends and family to be with you.

## Torah Shmooze: That I May Dwell Among Them

And they will make a sanctuary for Me that I may dwell among them. (Exodus 25:8) And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give to you. (Exodus 25:16)

"... Building a Temple for the Eternal Lord, there to offer up our prayers ... would be entirely to prepare our hearts for His worship ... —not because He needs to dwell in a house of human beings and come under the shelter of their roof. ... In truth, blessing and holiness would increase according to the good actions that people would do. ... " (Sefer haHinnuch)

"The message is that the concept of sanctity in its various levels of intensity is independent of measurements" [i.e., sanctity is unrelated to the dimensions or proportions of a sanctuary]. "It is significant that the Torah does not describe God's presence as dwelling בְּתוֹכָהּ, 'within it,' but as dwelling 'amongst them' [בְּתוֹכָם]." (Or Hachayim)

"... The בְּתוֹכָם וּשְׂכַנְתִּי ["that I may dwell among them"] of our verse extends far beyond the mere presence of God in the Temple, but ... means the proximity of God in

our midst, showing itself in accordance with the covenant, in the whole happiness and prosperity of our private and national life. ... But also that this blessing and protecting Shechina—proximity of God—is not brought about by the mere erection and upkeep of the Sanctuary, but can only be won by consecrating and giving up our whole private and public lives to carrying out the Divine Torah." (S.R. Hirsch)

The ark [aron] was at the *center* of the Mishkan. "The word aron comes from the Hebrew word for light, 'ohr.' The aron was the light of the Mishkan for it contained the Holy Torah, which is the light of the world. Without the aron, the Mishkan would have been merely a shell, merely a dry faucet—without the living waters of the Holy Torah." (U. Milevsky)

"The Torah was given not merely for private inspiration but for the public weal" [i.e., the prosperity, happiness, and general good of the community]. (Nehama Leibowitz)

The meaning of the Tabernacle is to be found in "... the covenant-relationship between God and Israel, brought about by the giving and acceptance of Torah." (S.R. Hirsch) That is, we fulfill the vision of To-

rah and, in turn, we receive the spirit-protecting, blessing presence of God, which is played out in the fulfillment of our personal and communal life.

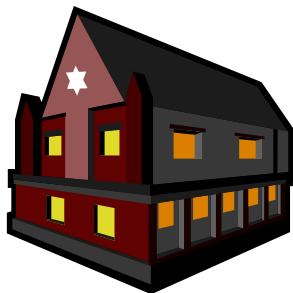
In effect, the testimony that was to be put into the ark was God's law, which was to reside at the physical and spiritual center of the community—it was to be the focal point of all life. It's place, within the ark and the Mishkan, was created from the heartfelt offerings of each woman and man. The testimony itself, the Torah, occupying the place of honor in the life of the people, was to be a witness for all time—because it would be denied in every age—that God has "commanded you in the commandments that are written in it." (Rashi) And that these commandments are the means to raise up the commonweal.

*Do you have an experience of sanctity in synagogue and, if so, how do you account for it?*

*If you do not have an experience of sanctity in synagogue, why do you think that's the case?*

*What might it mean to say, God has "commanded you in the commandments"?*

*In what sense can we say that God protects our spirits when we live out the vision of Torah?*



**OPENINGS**  
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Kehillat Kharakim

Mailing Address  
630 Hauser Blvd., #205  
Los Angeles, CA 90036  
(323) 93402925/934-2913 (fax)

Location of Services  
Westside Jewish Community Center  
5870 W. Olympic Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Rabbi Team  
Rabbi Moshe ben Asher & Khulda bat Sarah

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**About KEHILLAT KHARAKIM—קהלת חרפים**

- Kehillat Kharakim—a congregational community of *openings*—is a family-centered congregation that meets for Shabbat services at the Westside Jewish Community Center.
  - Kehillat Kharakim Friday-evening services regularly include a devar Torah (“sermon”) in the form of a Torah-drama presented by young people of the congregation.
  - Kehillat Kharakim offers a free six-month trial membership that includes bar and bat mitzvah preparation.
  - Kehillat Kharakim’s formation is being sponsored by Gather the People (GTP), a nonprofit organization founded by a Sponsor Committee of rabbis from virtually all the major branches and movements of Judaism.
  - Kehillat Kharakim’s rabbinic leadership is provided by Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Khulda bat Sarah, formerly the “Rabbi Team” for Congregation Beth Israel of Chico, California.
- The Kehillat Kharakim vision is to create a community of *openings*, or “kharakim,” through which family members of all ages can draw upon Judaism and congregational life to increase meaning and fulfillment in their own lives.
  - The goal is a congregation that, regardless of where one begins or ends in Jewish knowledge or commitment, encourages greater exploration, acquisition, and expression of Judaism—and regardless of where one fits religiously, treats each person with kindness and respect.
  - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is that, apart from our capacity as individuals, we also have a role as a *kehilla*, a congregational *community*. Following the example of Nehemiah, who gathered the people to rebuild the wall and gates of Jerusalem, we assume that we too can reduce the pressures and realize the hopes that will uplift our families. By doing mitzvot *collectively*, we can bring about change for the good in our day to day lives.
  - Kehillat Kharakim is an independent congregation, not affiliated with any of the movements or branches of Judaism.
  - Kehillat Kharakim will adhere to the Kashrut Policy of the Westside Jewish Community Center—specifically: all food served must be dairy or parve, packaged goods must be certified as kosher, fresh baked goods must be purchased from kosher bakeries, and home-baked goods must contain only vegetable shortening. Non-kosher food shall not be served.

Kehillat Kharakim is a project of  
**Gather the People**  
*An Education & Training Resource  
for Congregational Community Development*  
<http://www.gatherthepeople.org>

**PASTORAL COUNSELING AVAILABLE**

Rabbi Moshe offers pastoral counseling without charge to any Kehillat Kharakim individual, couple, or family member. Pastoral counseling addresses religious and spiritual as well as psychological and emotional needs. Moshe has a Ph.D. in Social Work, was a staff member of the Adirondack Samaritan Counseling Center of Glens Falls, NY, and was trained at the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Los Angeles. Call (323) 934-2925 for more information or an appointment.

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