



# OPENINGS

## New Friday Services & Family Workshops Starting in May

Beginning in May (on May 4 and May 18), Kehillat Kharakim will offer two Friday evening services every month at the Westside JCC.

Services will be held on the *first and third Fridays* of the month, beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the Center's Singer Lounge.

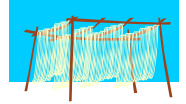
Friday evening services will continue to include a devar Torah ("sermon") to be presented by young people in the form of a readers' theatre Torah-drama.

Readers' theatre *rehearsal sessions are now being held from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. on the Sunday afternoons* preceding the next Friday evening service. The rehearsals are held at the home of Rabbi Moshe and Khulda and usually conclude with homemade bread and soup.

Kehillat Kharakim also will begin offering monthly Family Workshops, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. on the Sunday of the first reader's theatre rehearsal of the month.

The first family workshop, on challah-baking, was offered in early March.

The next family workshop—making homemade noodles for kugel—will be on *Sunday, April 29, from*



*2:00 to 3:00 p.m.* at the home of Rabbi Moshe & Khulda.

Workshop space is limited. Please reserve a place by calling (323) 934-2925.

## Readers' Theatre Rehearsals Move to Sunday Afternoons

Rehearsals for Kehillat Kharakim Friday-evening readers' theatre have been changed from Wednesday to Sunday afternoons.

The Sunday afternoon time was chosen to give more young people and their parents an opportunity to participate in the practice sessions and the Shabbat readers'

theatre divrei Torah.

Rehearsals are held at the home of Rabbi Moshe and Khulda.

Rehearsals include discussion by the young people of the vocabulary, concepts, and values incorporated in the script, which are based on Scripture, midrash, traditional and modern commen-

tary.

The rehearsal is usually followed by a light meal of homemade soup and fresh, home-baked bread.

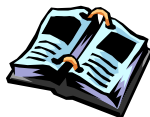
The next rehearsal is on Sunday, April 29 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. for a divrei Torah to be presented on Friday, May 4.

Call (323) 934-2925.

## Mark Your Calendar: May 4 & 18 (12 & 26 Iyar)—Friday Services & Torah-Drama

Kehillat Kharakim will offer Friday night Shabbat services at the Westside JCC on May 4 and May 18.

Services begin at 6:30 with a young people's service that includes a costumed skit by Khulda and Rabbi



Moshe called "Here Comes Moses," followed by the "Animal of the Week" devar Torah. Both the skit and the devar Torah encourage young people to participate by answering questions.

The Congregation's minhag (custom) is to have young people present the regular devar Torah in the

form of a readers' theatre Torah drama.

After services there is a blessing of the children, a vegetarian-dairy potluck dinner, and zemirot (table songs).

Parking is available in the WJCC parking structure. Call (323) 934-2925 for more information.

### Inside this Issue

Pesach Retrospective: Young People's Ideas	2
Shabbat Shalom	2
Becoming Students of Our Children	3
About Kehillat Kharakim	4
Pastoral Counseling Available	4

### Otzar—Treasure

*The purpose of life is not to be happy. The purpose of life is to matter, to be productive, to have it make some difference that you live at all. Happiness, in the ancient, noble verse, means self-fulfillment and is given to those who use to the fullest whatever talents God or luck or fate bestowed upon them.*

—Leo Rosten

# Pesach Retrospective: Young People's Ideas

## **Why do we celebrate Passover?**

Maybe we have to celebrate Passover because it's a Jewish holiday. To celebrate how Moses got the Jews free. We're Jews, so we should celebrate [our freedom] and have fun. We celebrate it because God passed over the Hebrews and they got across the sea. We celebrate freedom from slavery.

## **What is freedom?**

It's about freedom from Pharaoh's slavery. Freedom is when you can do what you want and no one can tell you not to—you can worship your God the way you want.

## **Why should we have a Seder?**

We should have a Seder to teach the children to be grateful [for their freedom].

## **What did I like best about the Seder?**

I liked the afikomen best, because it was fun. I liked it when the afikomen was hidden and we looked for it. I liked playing with my friends. I liked the game my daddy made up with questions for the Seder, like: What's in kharoset? I liked best when we we're all together eating and having a good time. I liked reading the four questions. I liked the four questions because they tell a story. They're very special questions to the Hebrew people who were once slaves. The questions are holy.

**What's the most important thing I would teach about Passover?**

I would teach people that all the slaves

passed over the sea. And that people would have a good time, and what that means. I would teach that we have to be kind and generous to other people. One thing I would do is tell the story. And you have to have matzah to show that they didn't have time to bake the bread. The matzah looks kind of like a brick. We're also not supposed to eat bread.

**What didn't I like about the Seder?**

They didn't have matzah-ball soup.

*[Ed: We note that the young people still have much to learn about the basics of Passover and the Seder. But we're gratified to see that they're enjoying the tradition and will probably want to attend another Seder next year—so their learning will continue.]*

# Shabbat Shalom

The root reason we have a day or two off from work (for those of us who do!) is that the religion of Israel introduced to the world the idea of a "creative pause" as ordained by God.

The modern world has largely perverted the Sabbath day's purpose into little more than a time of recuperation to *do more work*.

What else might we do with this day every week?

- We might consider the purpose and direction of our life, free of the incessant demands that prevent such contemplation.
- We might allow all that is divine within us, our "second souls" as the tradition says, to emerge, so that all our energies are available lovingly to be parents, spouses, and children.

We live in an age when what's truly important inevitably takes a back seat to that which is most demanding. Fax, phone, and e-mail often get a higher priority than parents, spouses, and children. We have little or no time for what's important.

What are the consequences for our minds, hearts, and souls of these lifestyle choices we make ?

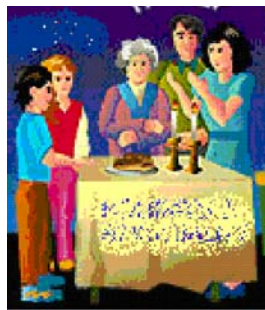
- Sociologists are finding that children are more ill-behaved and delinquent than ever, their needs not placated by toys and TV.
- Aging parents are more isolated and depressed than ever, their needs not placated by bingo and organized institutional recreation.
- Spouses are less capable of creating life-

long partnerships than ever, their needs not placated by professions, positions, possessions, and power.

We're not suggesting that there is a direct causal relationship between not making Shabbat for ourselves and all these modern maladies, but that undoubtedly these consequences can be addressed and lessened by focusing one day of our lives on what's truly important.

Is it easy to break out of old patterns and initiate new ones in our lives? Of course not. Creating a day of sacred time, separate and protected, is extraordinarily demanding, especially at the outset.

- Our work prevents it. We have made choices and commitments so that our job or career gets a higher priority than anything else.
- Our recreation prevents it. Our "golf day" or "skiing weekend" or the day we're with our children in their competitive recreation all get a higher priority.



And so it goes. . . . Ironically we're either too busy with our "life-work" or with "re-creation" to do what's really important.

On Shabbat we can be free of all urgency, of all that drains us. If we make the *completeness* of ourselves (lit., the root of shalom) as whole human beings a priority, if we replace the diversions of *doing* with

*becoming* all of what we can be in the image of God, we can transform one day of our harried lives into a weekly festival and feast. This is extravagant language but not an exaggeration.

What does it take to do it? Of course, the tradition has much to teach us about the possibilities and pathways to Shabbat. But there is no complete set of practices that one can take on whole or in any set order that will enable and ensure Shabbat shalom u-menulah, Sabbath peace and rest.

But there are two guidelines that have been borne out by much experience:

- Making a day of peace and rest, realizing our second souls, is done *one step at a time*. We make one small step—no more running the power mower on Saturday, or we replace TV with reading, or we study together as a family or as partners—then another step, and another.
- Making a day of peace and rest is much more difficult to do alone than with a family or, better yet, with a community. Dedicating ourselves to those we love rather than what we have replaced them with—our children rather than our work, our parents rather than our play (hobbies and sports), our spouses rather than our electronic diversions—becomes much more possible with a community of people who want the same completeness.

It is a verity in life that, for most of us, wisdom only comes with age, if at all. We discover only in our later years that this life is not a practice run, that we don't get to do it again, and that the better part of wisdom is to live each moment as if it were our next to last—for it may well be.

# Becoming Students of Our Children

In the Torah portion Behar this month, there is a phrase that reads: “Do not wrong one another. . . .” [וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת-עֵמִיתוֹ—ולא תונו איש את-עמיתו (Leviticus 25:17)] The word *tonu* (תונו), usually translated as “wronging,” means to suppress, oppress, or maltreat, and refers especially to *vexing* with words, that is, causing perplexity and puzzlement by what we say. The word *amito* (עמיתו), usually translated as “one another,” is from the root עמא, which suggests those with whom we are united or associated, especially our family members.

Do we wrong our children in this way when we repeatedly reinforce in them the belief that their future fulfillment in life depends almost entirely on their secular knowledge and accomplishments?

Most of us continue to be invested in that enervating fiction through our 20s and 30s, but we begin to have serious doubts by our 40s. By then we begin to acknowledge, at

*selves*, as Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz used to say: “According to the law, a person should not deceive another; לפנים משורת הדין going beyond the letter of the law [which we are required to do], a person should not deceive himself.” (R’ Mordekhai Hacoheh, Al Hatorah, Vayikra)

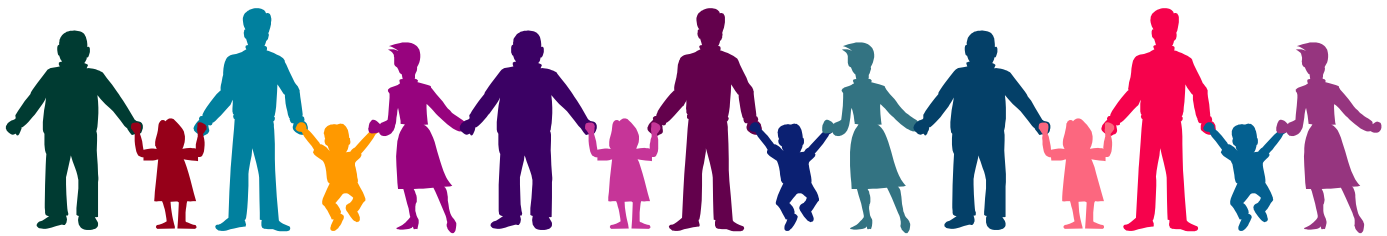
In effect, if we refuse, for whatever reasons, to acknowledge our own inadequacies and failures and, in that refusal, diminish our child’s opportunity to go beyond us *religiously* and *spiritually*, then we have grievously wronged not only our child but deceived ourselves and damaged our own souls as well.

Our experience has been that virtually every parent wants his or her child to achieve greater material success—and, of course, greater happiness—than he or she (the parent) has achieved. Parents are wonderfully self-sacrificing to make their children’s secular success more likely. They

On the subject of shame: “The sages teach that it is worse to hurt someone personally than financially, because money can be replaced but shame lingers on.” (N. Scherman)

What does that say about us as parents if we act so as to increase the likelihood that our children will experience shame later in life because we failed to invest sufficiently in their future religious and spiritual “success” and “accomplishments” and, as a consequence, they take moral and ethical wrong turns? And what is our culpability for the damage to our own souls if we fail to guide their lives so that out of 168 hours in the week, less than three hours are focused on their religious and spiritual future?

The Midrash teaches us that Zevulun, one of Joseph’s older brothers, when he was 114 years old, called all his own sons together and admonished them with these words: “When we came down into Egypt,



least to ourselves, that such *mastery* is not the route to fulfillment or happiness in life. We discover, instead, that the central challenge and source of fulfillment in life is to find *meaning*.

Certainly this is not an argument that we should send our children out into the world unprepared to do meaningful work and earn a livelihood adequate to sustain them and their families. But it is to suggest that their ability to make sound choices about what kind of work and family life will be meaningful to them depends in significant measure on their capacity to access and acquire values and a vision that serve a *higher* purpose than their own immediate interests.

This poses an extraordinary challenge to parents who are themselves struggling to find meaning beyond advancement of their careers that, while “successful,” have failed somehow to—if you will forgive the expression—“fill the hole in their soul.” Such a parent faces the possibility of wronging not only his or her own child, but him- or herself as well, because the first necessitates the second—when we wrong our child we inevitably wrong ourselves.

The *et* in our phrase *v’lo tonu ish et-amito* [ולא תונו איש את-עמיתו] is there to teach us that we should not deceive our-

will make great investments of their time and energy, expend extraordinary amounts of money and other material resources, to achieve this end.

So for parents whose own lives are far from spiritually and religiously fulfilled despite their secular success, it has the earmarks of doubling up on a losing bet.

On the other hand, we rarely encounter parents with similar sentiments about their children’s future religious and spiritual “success” and “achievements.” The most parsimonious explanation for this lack of commitment and investment on parents’ part is that they are operating in unfamiliar territory. We can’t lead where we ourselves have not successfully traveled. Moreover, to acknowledge as parents not only that we can’t lead our children but also that this is an area of failure in our own lives, places extraordinary demands upon us.

If we are to acknowledge our lack of success in building a religious and spiritual foundation of meaning and fulfillment in our own lives, yet we are committed to see that our children don’t experience the same outcome, then inevitably we will find ourselves the *students of children*—which, for many parents, is a source of embarrassment at best and shame at worst.

Joseph did not visit upon us the wrong he had suffered [when we sold him into slavery]. “Take him as your model, and remember not a wrong done to you, [or] else unity is rent asunder, and the bonds of kinship are torn, and the soul is disquieted.” (Legends of the Jews)

The challenge to us as parents is to set our children on a course that takes them beyond the learning that we received and beyond our own achievements. On the one hand, to the extent that we have achieved material success in the secular world, that we are knowledgeable and proud of our accomplishments, we are comfortable with the idea that our children can achieve much more than we have. On the other hand, to the extent that we have achieved much less religiously and spiritually in our own lives, we are much less competent and less committed to ensure that our children achieve more than we have.

*This* is where the challenge lies: overcoming our own pride and launching our children into better spiritual and religious lives than we have known—and letting them lead us, when they can, beyond where we have gone before.

## OPENINGS Published by Kehillat Kharakim

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Rabbi Team  
Rabbi Moshe ben Asher & Khulda bat Sarah

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## ABOUT KEHILLAT KHARAKIM—על 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 WJCC—specifically: all food served from the WJCC kitchen must be dairy or parve; generally: 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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