

HAGESHER TINI

The Bulletin of Congregation Ner Tamid
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UNWRAPPING THE GIFTS OF CHANUKAH

by Rabbi Shana Chandler Leon



ho can retell the things that befell us, who can count them? In every age a hero or sage came to our aid!

As soon as I hear the opening notes of "Mi Y'mallel," still and always my favorite Chanukah song, I melt as quickly as a candle in the menorah. The kid in me never gets enough of the sights, scents, and sounds of the Chanukah season - the

latkes frying, the jelly doughnuts overflowing, the *chanukkiah* lights dancing, the *dreidel* spinning, the joyous melodies, the cool, wet weather...and let's be honest – the anticipation of a present on each of the eight nights! For young (and young at heart) folks, blessed with bounty and comforts, Chanukah can't be bested.

But Chanukah is far more than a "minor holiday," though it isn't mandated in the Torah. It is so much more than an excuse for excessive acquiring and giving of gifts. And it is far more than a "Jewish answer to Christmas," as it is sometimes unfairly called (although there are more positive similarities between the two celebrations than first meets the eye). Chanukah is deeper and richer than I ever imagined, with enough tantalizing aspects to talk about for the eight nights and far beyond. It

has so much to teach Jews of all ages – it's the gift that keeps on giving.



Alex Levin

I first woke up to Chanukah's unusual nature when, about eighteen years ago, I realized that the words we use for blessing the Chanu-

kah lights, "asher kid'shanu bemitz-votav..." "G*d, who has sanctified us with mitzvot and commanded us to light the Chanukah lights," had no basis in the Torah. I was new to serious, adult Jewish learning, and by really listening to words I had been saying for decades, I discovered how the Rabbis of the Talmud took ownership of their tradition, elevating certain rituals to the level of "commandment" when those practices were determined to be that effective, powerful and necessary for

Jewish continuity. I hadn't appreciated until then how creative the rabbis had been in re-forming Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple and the end of the sacrificial system.

The Miracle and the Maccabees

We're all taught the legend of the Chanukah oil – that tiny cruse uncovered in the desecrated Temple that was barely enough to last one day, but which lasted for eight days until the re-dedication (the "chanukah") of the Temple. We're all taught about the Maccabees, who bravely, and miraculously, rebelled and prevailed against the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus in the second century BCE. We may know that maccabee means "hammer," or that it might be an acronym taken from "Mi Chamocha"

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Ba'eilim Adonai," – "Who is like you among the gods, o Adonai?"

It may surprise some of us (it sure did me!) that in the Book of Maccabees (part of the Apocrypha - writings that are considered crucial, but which didn't get fitted into the final Jewish Bible/the Tanakh), the Maccabees designated what would become known as Chanukah as "a second Sukkot." Because the Temple had been defiled and inaccessible in the year of the revolt, 164 BCE, a version of the eightday Sukkot festival was observed two months later when the Temple was re -claimed – that second Sukkot gave birth to the eight-day holiday we still enjoy.

I learned also that the legend of the oil was codified centuries after the Maccabean revolt, perhaps because of the Rabbis' discomfort with the violence in the military story; or perhaps because the Maccabees were a priestly family whose zealous way of life the early Rabbis mostly opposed. What I also didn't know, and was sad to learn, was that our beloved Maccabees waged a civil war against their Jewish brethren who had embraced the Hellenistic lifestyle, and that far more Jewish blood was spilled by Jewish hands than they ever taught me in day school.

To reckon with Chanukah as an adult means acknowledging that Jews have always (until the establishment of the State of Israel) balanced their religious identity against that of a dominant, and often hostile, ruling culture. This has particular resonance with the fact that our Festival of Light comes in mid to late-December – this year Christ-

mas is literally in the middle of Chanukah. With the lights and music of Christmas ubiquitous in much of America, Jews are asked every year to re-affirm our place and particularity as a tiny minority in an overwhelming majority. How American are we? How much can, or should we fit in? How openly should we wear our Jewishness? In a time of stunning, and rising, anti-Semitism and hostility to Israel, should we go underground or stand our ground?

These questions are not much different than those faced by Jews two thousand years ago, and spotlight the themes of Chanukah in a challenging and enlightening way. James Ponet, in "The Maccabees and the Hellenists" (slate.com) describes Chanukah as encapsulating "the historic Jewish passion to merge and disappear (confronting) the attested Jewish will to stand apart and persist," for here "we find the historical miracle that Hanukkah implicitly celebrates: the capacity to sustain intimate relations with another without totally ceding your own sense of self, the ability to love without permanently merging, to be enchanted by the exquisite beauty of another without losing sight of your own charms."

Judith and Holofernes

Lighting Chanukah candles is one of the few time-specific commandments given to women in Orthodox Judaism, because "women were also included in the miracle" of the oil. But there's more. The Book of Judith, also in the Apocrypha, describes a brave young widow who plied an enemy general, Holofernes, with salty cheese to lure him into a drunken stupor. Judith then cut off his head, thwarting the im-

pending siege of Jerusalem and warning potential adversaries not to mess with the Jewish People.



There are different versions of Judith – she either lived in the era of Nebuchadnezzar *or* the era of the Maccabees. The version in the Maccabean

chapter of history connects her directly to the Chanukah story, is the inspiration for why some Jews eat dairy foods on Chanukah (remember the salty cheese!) and elevates a rare woman to a place of astounding courage and moxie, willing to commit a shocking act of violence to help save her people. Judith's prayer, and subsequent celebration with timbrels and dancing, places her in the category of Great Jewish Warriors and Prophetic women like Miriam, Deborah and Yael.

A Global Message

Chanukah unfolds over eight glorious nights, each one brighter than the next during the darkest and shortest days of the calendar. Our traditions may differ and our legends and history may diverge, but the December holidays, with their lights, music, spirit of giving, family and community warmth and togetherness, should be a beacon to all who search for harmony and home. At Shabbat services December 21, we'll consider some of the surprising similarities between the major December holidays, and pray together for a world where all peaceful traditions are celebrated, where goodwill toward all will be the song we sing, and where light and love reign supreme. \$\pi\$

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ear Members and Friends,

We are in the month filled with Latkes, lights, dreidels and time to celebrate with family, friends and our community.

Chanukah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the larger Syrian army. It also celebrates a miracle that happened during this time, where just a day's supply of oil allowed the menorah in the rededicated Temple in Jerusalem to remain lit for eight days.

What a wonderful miracle that was, and don't we all wish for miracles to happen in our everyday lives. The best miracle would be good health for everyone; another would be a growth spurt for our wonderful Ner Tamid, world peace and happiness for all. We don't have control over some of these hopes, but if everyone invited a friend to come to Services, perhaps that could help increase our

membership. Let's work together to make this miracle a reality.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Heddy and David Pilpel and Ruth Jaffe who have joined Congregation Ner Tamid as Associate Members. It is my hope that others who maintain membership elsewhere but enjoy participating in events at our synagogue realize the importance of supporting both institutions. Associate Members status shows how much you care and we appreciate your support. We look forward to your affiliation and friendship.

Don't miss our Discover Shabbat Dinner on Friday evening, December 27th, Musical Shabbat Service at 6:00 PM with Dinner and Program following. Please make your reservations early and spend a wonderful evening with us. Lara Garner and her Amethyst Trio will provide a classical music program, Cantor Rudy will perform and Achi Ben Shalom will sing Chanukah songs. Dinner will be deli-

cious so make your reservation and join us for a lovely evening.

We are so blessed at our synagogue to have our amazing clergy team. Our Rabbi Shana, Cantor Rudy and Rabbi Reuben. They are so talented and such a pleasure to work with and they make services so meaningful and inspirational. Join us for a Shabbat morning and stay for a delicious lunch. Our doors are always open and everyone is welcome.

My wish for each of you is an enjoyable Chanukah, a healthy and happy New Year 2020 and a prosperous and fruitful year for Congregation Ner Tamid. May we go from strength to strength and become a shining beacon in the San Francisco Jewish Community.

Take care,

Charlotte Hyman

DAVID ENGELMANN INTERVIEW

with Nina Zentner

David Engelmann came to Ner Tamid in October 2018 where he and Alberta Mischke his dear partner have made a comfortable niche for themselves.

David was a member of Congregation B'nai Emunah, which he had joined in 1993 after converting under Rabbi Ted Alexander (z''l), when one Friday night they visited Ner Tamid. The way he describes it.... Rabbi Shana and Cantor Rudy, candles, beauty and sacred. So a year later, when Alberta began to study for conversion with Rabbi Shana, they joined Ner Tamid and have been Shabbat regulars ever since.

David was born in San Antonio, Texas, the youngest of four children, where his dad was a colonel in the US Air Force. When David was four, his dad retired from the USAF and joined the Federal Aviation Agency and the family moved to Long Island, New York.

One more move when David was nine years old to Dallas/ Fort Worth. Following high school, David attended North Texas State University in Denton, Texas where he obtained a degree in journalism. For about six years he worked as a journalist at various publications in Collin County, just north of Dallas.

In 1980 a year after he graduated from college David took a trip to Los Angeles to meet his best friend, who had moved there the year before. From there they drove up the coast to San Francisco, and that's when he fell in love with the city and promised himself someday he'd be back. In April 1985 David with another friend finally did move to San Francisco...promise kept! They lived in a little apartment in the Tenderloin, which after residing in the 'burbs was total culture shock.

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In 1986 David started working at ACT...the American Conservatory Theater... in the front of house as an usher, and eventually progressed into the box office where he is now Head Treasurer.

David and Alberta first met when she joined the ACT box office in 1997 and they've been a couple since 1999, sharing their love for San Francisco, peculiar music, and Charles Dickens. Every year they visit the Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon, and from

time to time travel to northern and southern California. They especially like Carmel and Pacific Grove. Alberta grew up in the Sierra foothills near Auburn to which they make semi regular visits.

However, their big adventure was to celebrate Alberta's birthday in Paris a few years ago enjoying that fabulous city for one blissful week and living in a tiny flat in Montmartre.

A record collector since grade school, David in the early 2000's began diving into the world of shellac and vintage 78rpm recordings. Of particular interest are recordings made in San Francisco and the Bay Area, and just about anything with an accordion.

David and Alberta love Torah Study with Rabbi Shana, (as do many of us) and David has become active at Ner Tamid, joining the Security Committee. They find themselves blessed at having found Ner Tamid, and likewise Ner Tamid is blessed at having both David and Alberta as valuable and involved members.

Nina Zentner

Meeting with Hasidim by Danise Chandler

his month a number of Congregation Ner Tamid stalwarts volunteered to read the Jewish Library's One Bay, One Book choice, On Division, by Goldie Goldbloom. It is a story of a 57 year old Ultra Orthodox mother of ten (her youngest is 13) who finds herself pregnant with twins. A complex and suspenseful novel follows, and no surprise here – for virtually all of us this was a rather startling peek into the world of Lubavitcher Hasidim – most, maybe even all of whom we have never met.

I could probably have said the same but for two remarkable rabbis I have had the pleasure of meeting and even more important seen a t work, as it were, living lives that embody a certain warmth and accessibility that makes the Lubavitcher world more familiar than I would have expected, I met the first long after this story begins. It was 1967 - I was teaching at Washington High School here in the city; many of my more restless students would wander off after lunch and sadly I would wonder if I shouldn't just take roll on the corner of Haight and Ashbury. I especially re-

member Steve (not his name)...a dear Jewish boy for whom school simply didn't 'work.' I liked him so much and tried to talk to him with no results... the day he came after school with a package of hand rolled joints for me... each one lovingly inscribed...'For you, Mrs. C', 'Chill out, Mrs. C' - I knew he wasn't going to graduate. I just hoped he'd be safe whatever he did. Some 20 years later (yes! 20), I stopped by the Chabad House on 21st and Anza to talk with a young lady I remembered from Hebrew Academy. While chatting, a very grown, bearded man leaped from a van with packages of kosher meat he was delivering. He recognized me at once...it was Steve. Rabbi Joseph Langer had 'found' him a while back and did the magic that he had done with so many (remember Bill Graham?) Steve was well, looked wonderful, and soon after married a lovely Israeli woman. He now has nearly grown twins, lives in Jerusalem and is a fulfilled man in every way. Hasidism came to me more directly 5 or 6 years ago when on a Friday afternoon, the doorbell rang. I answered and a gentleman introduced himself as Rabbi Aaron Hecht from The Richmond District Chabad (literally around the corner). The mezuzah on the

doorpost led him to believe that this was a Jewish home.

He couldn't have come at a more opportune time. A Brooklyn fellow with as kind and friendly and engaging manner as any I could imagine, he charmed my Bronx-born husband as only a landsman could. What a perfect match. Though Sanford hadn't davened in the Orthodox way since he was a boy in Cheder, he had forgotten none of it. Rabbi Hecht brought tefillim, we had an abundance of kippot, Friday's became their time together and I know to this day how much Rabbi Hecht meant to my husband. As he became ill a couple of years later, the rabbi was of comfort and solace; I will never forget his coming to see Rabbi Shana's daddy at St Mary's Hospital to say the prayers for him. I still drop by Chabad - Rabbi Hecht's wife teaches all kinds of Sunday night classes, and I am always welcomed with affection. As a busy and committed member of Ner Tamid, I know how lucky and blessed I am. Knowing a little of the Hasidic world just reminds me of how many treas-

C3 - "C" Our "Personhood"



Community & Culture Club ..., instead of a Sisterhood, C3 is the "Personhood" of Ner Tamid, celebrating community simchas and working to provide enriching and kehillah-building events.

Would love seeing you . . .

The first "C" of C3 stands for "Community". It's always great to see you at our fun and musical "Joy of Shabbat" evenings, our Jewish Film Nights, and other events, and there is quite a bit to choose from.

We hope you'll be here on Thursday, December 19th, for the showing of *"Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story"*. Continued thanks to **David Volansky** for all the energy he puts into our movie nights.

A new eight-part series of our **Mussar classes** has started again, every other Shabbat following Services and the Kiddush Luncheon. Mussar is a path to soul development, mindfulness and self-awareness that has the power to transform lives. Come explore it with us! The next class will be December 21st, at 1:15pm, discussing *Savlanut*/Patience.

This Thursday, December 12th, C3 and NT Programming will visit *SFSU for their Opera Program's presentation of "Seeking Sanctuary"*, to hear our **Rabbi Reuben Zellman** in scenes and arias from Jonathan Dove's "Flight" and other operas about immigrant and refugee experiences.

Last Sunday, C3 co-sponsored a second **One Bay One Book** with NT Programming. Those who participated enjoyed sharing the experience of reading and discussing **On Division** by Goldie Goldbloom. Please let me know if you'd like to suggest a book and/or simply join in the discussion of the next selection.

C3 will be sponsoring a family in need again this Chanukah, through the **Shalom Bayit** organization and their **Adopt-a-Family** program. Please keep an eye out for a list of items that can be purchased to help brighten the holidays for a worthy family.

Ner Tamid will co-sponsor "Harmony & Hope", a benefit concert for the Jerusalem Youth Chorus and Project Level. The concert is on Thursday, January 9, 2020, from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. at San Francisco City Hall. More information will be forthcoming, but please Save the Date and plan to attend to support these young singers from East and West Jerusalem.

Todah Rabbah to **Shirley Edelson** for sending out the **Golden Book** acknowledgments. Let Adele know if there's an event or celebration you would like to recognize with a Golden Book card.

Thanks to our *Chesed Committee* members —**Alberta Mischke** and **David Engelmann** for delivering Shabbat treats to those members unable to attend Joy of Shabbat. We're so glad to see our *Chesed Committee* member, **Madelaine Eaton**, is doing much better. *Refu'ah Shelema*, *Madeline!* If you know of someone who would appreciate a quick visit or might like to have some items to help welcome Shabbat or a holiday, please let us know so arrangements can be made.

Would love to know . . .

. . . if you would like to participate in the *Chesed Committee* . . . if you have suggestions of ways to build our community.

. . . if you would like to contribute to, or sponsor a "Joy of Shabbat" celebration, a Mussar class, an outing, or just make a general donation to our Community & Culture Club (C3).

C3 is YOU. You are the Community (the "Personhood"). You decide. Please think about your vision for Ner Tamid and C3, share with others, with me, and let's create events you want to attend!

When thinking of your resolutions for New Year 2020, consider committing a half-hour or an hour a week to help plan and execute a C3 program. We appreciate your donations of goods and monetary contributions to C3 and would love your ideas, time, and support as well.

The Community & Culture Club wishes you and your families a happy Chanukah and wonderful New Year 2020!

B'Shalom.

Adule Adele Shafer

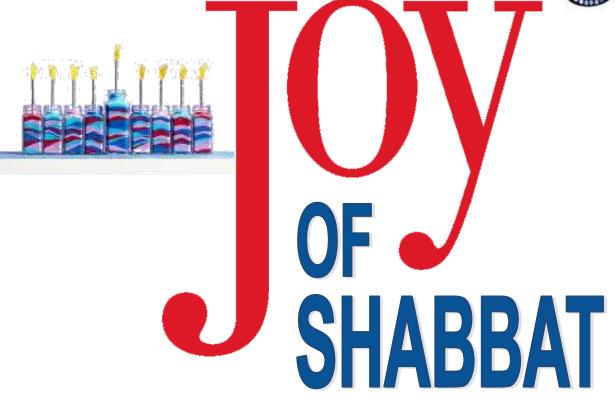
C3 Acting President

Community and Culture Club at Ner Tamid (C3@NT)

Warm up for Chanukkah at ...







Friday, December 13, 2019

Happy Shabbat Service 6pm "Oneg" ~ Nosh & Schmooze 7-7:30pm

SPECIAL SHABBAT TAKE-HOME FAVORS FOR ALL!

Sponsored with joy by

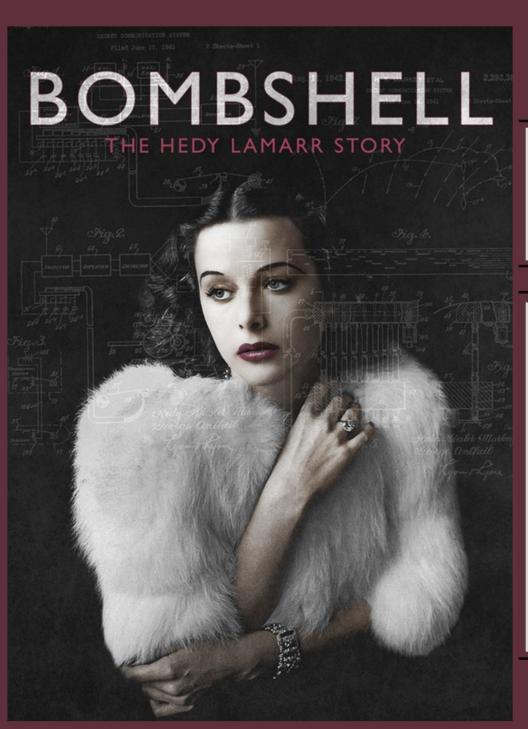
Community & Culture Club at Ner Tamid (C3)

Congregation Ner Tamid ◆ 1250 Quintara Street ◆ San Francisco, CA ◆ 94116

Congregation Ner Tamid's Jewish Film Night

Thursday, December 19, 2019, at 6:30pm

6:30 pm: dessert snack; 7:15 pm: movie



The life and career of the hailed Hollywood movie star and underappreciated genius inventor,

Hedy Lamarr.

Please let us know
you're coming so we
have plenty of dessert!

Refreshments
\$6/person with RSVPs
by noon
on Tuesday,
December 17
to: (415) 661-3383 or
office@NerTamidSF.org
or \$9/person at the door
— or more, remember,
this is a fundraiser!

THE SHEVATIM OF NER TAMID By Alberta Mischke



f the crown of Ner Tamid is the Aron Kodesh (the Holy Ark), then the jewels in that crown are the 12 stained glass windows representing the Shevatim -- the Twelve Tribes of

Israel. I have loved looking at these extraordinary windows and pondering their meaning. To write this article I wanted to find out where these particular symbols originated. I didn't have far to look, for most of them were found in Jacob's blessings to his sons or in other parts of the Torah.

THE PURPLE FLOWER

Reuben

Genesis 30:14: "Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah." The simplicity of this window is very poignant when contrasted to the blessing from Jacob, which is harsh and punishing: Genesis 49:3: Reuben, you are my first born, my might and my first fruit of my vigor,

Exceeding in rank and exceeding in honor.

Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer; for when you mounted your father's bed, you brought disgrace--my couch he mounted!"

A CITY FORTRESS

Simeon

Representing the city of Shechem, in which Simeon and his The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's brother Levi violently killed all the inhabitants in retribution for the defilement of their sister, Dinah, by the Canaanite Shechem. They paid a heavy price for this as is revealed in Jacob's blessing:

Genesis 49:5: "Simeon and Levi are a pair; their weapons are tools of lawlessness.

Let not my person be included in their counsel, Let not my being be counted in their assembly.

For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen.

Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so relent-

I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel."

THE BIRKAT KOHANIM AND BREASTPLATE

This window shows the raising of the hands during the Birkat Kohanim (Priestly Blessing), and the Breastplate of Judgement which depicts the Urim and Thummim, translated in the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia as "revelation and truth" and "lights and perfections." Here is the detailed description of the breastplate:

Exodus 28:15-21: "You shall make a breastpiece of decision, make it of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. It shall be square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width. Set in it mounted stones, in four rows of stones. The first row shall be a row of carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald; the second row: a turquoise, a sapphire, and an amethyst; the third row: a jacinth, an agate, and a crystal; and the fourth row: a beryl, a lapis lazuli, and a jasper. They shall be framed with gold in their mountings. The stones shall correspond [in number] to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names."

THE LION





Jacob conferred the leadership of Israel upon Judah. Genesis 49:9: "Judah is a lion's whelp; on prey, my son, have you grown.

He crouches, lies down like a lion, like the king of beasts-who dare rouse him?

staff from between his feet;

So that tribute will come to him and the homage of peoples be his."

THE DONKEY WITH A HEAVY LOAD

Genesis 49:14: "Issachar is a strong-boned ass, crouching among the sheepfolds.

When he saw how good was security, and how pleasant was the country,

He bent his shoulder to the burden, and became a toiling serf. "

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THE SAILBOAT

Zebulun

The tribe of Zebulun is said to have harvested the chilazon, a sea snail, from which came the beautiful blue dye used to color ritual fringes.

Genesis 49:13: "Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore; he shall be a haven for ships, and his flank shall rest on Sidon."

THE SERPENT AND THE BALANCE SCALE

Dan

Dan's name means judge, which explains the balance scale

Genesis 49:16: "Dan shall govern his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.

Dan shall be a serpent by the road, a viper by the path."

THE DEER

Naphtali

Genesis 29:21: "Naphtali is a hind let loose, which yields lovely fawns."

THREE TENTS

Gad

Three tents represent a military camp, revealing the reputation of Gad's tribe as warriors.

Genesis 49:19: "Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels."

A CHALICE FILLED WITH FRUIT

Asher

Genesis 49:20: "Asher's bread shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties." Most sources interpret royal dainties as food fit for kings.

A TREE WITH TWO SHIELDS

Joseph

These images are not found in Jacob's blessing and are a bit of a puzzle. This is what I came up with: The tree is a symbol of Joseph, and the two mysterious square shapes on either side of the trunk represent the shields of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Genesis 49:22: "Joseph is a wild ass, a wild ass by a spring-Wild colts on a hillside."

A WOLF

Benjamin

Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, whom she named Ben-oni, which means son of my suffering. But Jacob changed his name to Benjamin: son of the right hand or son of the south.



Genesis 49:27: "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he consumes the foe, and in the evening he divides the spoil."

These windows have thrilled me from the very first Shabbat that I attended: the light illuminating the brilliant colors, the images that intrigued me and the grand scale of them. Also, as I was learning the aleph bet, the Hebrew names on each window gave me experience in deciphering words without the vowel symbols.

As I continue on my Jewish path, rich with study and questions, seeking and finding, I am in awe of the vastness of Jewish tradition, and filled with joy as I make my way.



Todah Rabbah

For your donations...from a Grateful Congregation

[The following donations were received between September 10, 2019 and December 2, 2019]

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Ruth Abers

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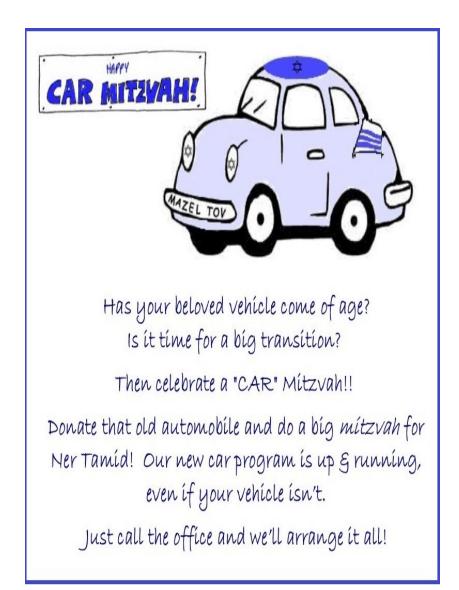
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