THANKSGIVING AND THE JEWS, AKA YEHUDIM, THE GRATEFUL LIVING

Rabbi Alyson Solomon, Interim Rabbi

In Hebrew, Jews are called Yehudim. We are named after Judah, son of Leah. Judah was the fourth son of Leah and Jacob. He is the one who convinces his brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites rather than kill him. Judah, while far from perfect, is again the peacemaker who pleads on Benjamin’s behalf right before Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. Yehudim, could be translated as “the grateful ones” or as one of my mentors says, the “grateful living,” not to be confused with the Grateful Dead (a fan from way back).

Before we dive into the tofurkey, turducken, turkey, or dal-thanksgiving of your dreams, a note of gratitude to you. Thank you for your generosity over the High Holidays. Your open hearts, honesty, and warm listening and sharing meant so much to me. I loved meeting the wider BCC community, hearing about your paths to BCC and your own Jewish journeys. I love the questions you asked during the Days of Awe, the stories about BCC you shared with me and lifting up our collective voices in prayer. As I said over the holidays, my study door is wide open. I’d love to meet with you and hear what you are doing with your one wild, precious year and how I can support your journey. Even if you live in Palm Springs or elsewhere beyond LA, email me and we can hop on Skype or meet for a tea - RabbiAlysonSolomon@BCC-la.org.

Now, a bit about the history of Thanksgiving and how it relates to Jews, drawing on research by my colleague Rabbi Van Lanckton. As you might be aware, “the first ‘American’ Thanksgiving was held in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621, attended by 90 Native Americans and 50 English Pilgrim settlers.” This first Thanksgiving mirrored our Jewish Biblical holiday of Sukkot. It was a festival of thanks for the earth’s bounty and our harvest, sans the focus on turkey and the cornucopia in the middle of the table.

The Pilgrims’ Thanksgiving did not become an annual event until over 200 years later. When President George Washington wanted to mark the adoption of the Constitution and the establishment of a new government, on November 26, 1789, he declared a day of thanksgiving and prayer. But Washington did not renew his declaration annually.

It wasn’t until 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, that President Abraham Lincoln fixed the last Thursday of each November as a “day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent [Ancestors].” After the Union triumphed, Thanksgiving Day became an even more significant observance in the northern states. In an effort to urge the southern states to celebrate Thanksgiving, Governor John W. Geary of Pennsylvania, in 1868, issued a proclamation that read in part:

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Until we dedications for life and all its blessings. It therefore is
buries us at all times to be able to God the homage of grateful hearts... and I
recommend that the people of this Commonwealth on [November 26th] refrain
from their usual avocations and pursuits, and assemble at their chosen place of worship,
to praise the name of God and magnify God with thanksgiving.

These words didn’t raise too many eyebrows, but Governor Geary went on to say “Let us thank God with Christian humility for health and prosperity.” ... Let
Pennsylvanians pray that our paths through life may be directed by the example and
instructions of the Redeemer, who died that we might enjoy the blessings which
temporarily flow therefrom, and eternal life in the world to come.”

These were the words that raised a protest from Philadelphia’s rabbis who heard that
Geary was trying to “apparently... exclude Israelites” from the celebration.

By 1868, Philadelphia’s Jewish population was among the largest in any
American city. According to The Occident, the largest local paper, a week after Geary’s
proclamation the “Hebrew Ministers” of Philadelphia “deemed it their duty” to draft a
powerful petition in response. Their “solemn protest” was signed by all seven of the city’s
rabbis, including Rabbi Sabato Morais, who later played a central role in establishing the
Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, and Rabbi Morris Jastrow, a
Reform leader in Philadelphia. Regarding
Geary’s choice of words, the rabbis-- regardless of their affiliation-- agreed that:

An elected official, chosen by a large
constituency, as the guardian of inalienable
rights, ought not to have evinced a spirit of exclusiveness. He should have remembered
that the people he governs are not of one
mind touching religious dogmas, and that by
asking all to pray that their paths through life
may be directed by the example and
instruction of the Redeemer'... he casts
reflections upon thousands, who hold a
different creed from that which he avows.

The rabbis came down hard on
Geary’s proclamation and Geary did not
revoke his words. Pennsylvania officially
celebrated a Christianized Thanksgiving that year. Today, while some still think of the Christian tones in Thanksgiving, in general it has become an American holiday, celebrated by all as a sign of freedom, good food and family.

So what does Thanksgiving mean to you, especially this year. What
are you grateful for that is uplifting you this season?

As I mentioned, we Jews are
called Yehudim, the Grateful Ones. Even
with this complex history, as Yehudim, we
might think of Thanksgiving as essentially a pop-up Sukkot, reminding us of our
bounty, our lands and our harvest. After all, according to the Talmud, we are invited to
offer 100 blessings of gratitude throughout each day!

Gratitude, our tradition tells us, is
a practice, an attitude, a stand against the
social drift towards cynicism and
resignation. Gratitude doesn’t mean
perfection, but it does mean aliveness.

This year, I’m particularly grateful
to be with you at BCC. I am also grateful
for my family and friends and the
opportunity to go visit my family in Oregon
over this holiday. As a family we will honor
my father’s yahrzeit and my oldest
brother’s birthday, and we will celebrate being together, alive, during this autumn season.

I look forward to celebrating
Hanukkah with you and bringing this attitude of gratitude into our Festival of Lights, honoring BCC’s Cantor Porat and celebrating the resiliency and promise of what it means to be an international community of Jews and all people, grateful to be alive for this season. May gratitude guide our days and keep us going with gusto.

In gratitude,
Rabbi Alyson Solomon
Cantor Juval Porat and Cantor David Reinwald recently got on the phone to chat about BCC’s upcoming Cantor’s Cabaret Concert “Songs in Borrowed Clothes.” Here’s a partial transcript of their revealing conversation:

Cantor Juval: Hi David!
Cantor David: Hi Juval! I can’t believe we’re doing this concert again [Cantar David and Cantor Juval performed a version of the concert at David’s home congregation earlier this year]. It’s going to be so much fun! There will be a new feeling to it, as we’re adding new musicians and changing up the songs. It’s going to be great.

CJ: I agree! I’m very much looking forward to it. I was wondering, as we prepare for the concert - could you tell me who your favorite female singer-songwriters are, or have been? Which ones inspired you growing up or nowadays?

CD: I have so many. When we were first putting this together I had to pare it down, because there are so many artists that have inspired me over the years. When I go back to the nineties, I think a lot about singers like Alanis Morissette and the Indigo Girls, singers that have strong dynamic personalities as well as musical vision and a voice that they bring to their artistry. I know that you’re also a great fan of Tori Amos.

CJ: Did you know that Alanis Morissette and Tori Amos went on tour together?

CD: Tell me more about that!

CJ: I don’t know the exact details - you could look it up online... but I do know that they’ve collaborated on a mini tour and I think each of the singers presented their own material, sang duets, and presented each other’s song.

CD: Oh, I thought you said you toured with Tori Amos!

CJ: That would be nice!! But no, I don’t think I’d be worthy…

CD: The Lilith Fair was a big festival that toured around the US in the late 90s. It was started by Sarah McLachlan and I went to it once and it was actually really amazing and powerful. Paula Cole, a singer who’s not in our set but is one of my favorite artists from the 90s, was a part of that as well, along with a lot of other artists. I’m sure that some of the members of BCC even attended and had good memories.

CJ: I remember Paula Cole as well! I bought her single back then! Do you think there’s something unique about a female singer-songwriter’s perspective or also having that singer-songwriters perform their own song instead of giving it to someone else to sing? Do you think there’s something that distinguishes them from their male counterparts in their artistry?

CD: Most definitely! I think I really identify with the feminist and female perspective and the voice that they bring to their songs. There’s something very special about a singer-songwriter who hangs on to their song and the voice of the song is their own voice. Many times today we see songwriters give their songs to a major artist. The artists give deference to the songwriter and the performer makes it come to life. So many of the songwriters that we are highlighting in our concert are ones who sing their own songs, so there’s something very honest and genuine about their music and it also makes you want to dig deeper to find out the story behind the songs.

CJ: And yet we’re the ones who bring those songs to life by our own interpretation, which inevitably comes through when we sing other people’s songs. We love those songs for a reason and do our best to deliver our love for those songs in the way we sing them.

CD: Most definitely!

CJ: I recently read that Joni Mitchell was often categorized as a “confessional singer” -- this was a label often put on female singer-songwriters -- and how furious Joni Mitchell was for being labeled as such. For her, “confessing” something was associated with being captured or coerced to come out with a piece of information, when she was really singing from her unique perspective on her life. When I read that I was just made aware of the sexism that still exists, or this tension between genders when it comes to artistry and the music business and it also touched upon something that I think is the reason why I’ve been drawn a lot towards music made by female singer-songwriters. There’s a unique yet accurate, compassionate and gentle way to portray something out of someone’s life experience that as a listener you relate to, and for some reason it’s always been female identified singers who would do that for me. I haven’t quite gotten to the bottom of what created this appeal, but having read this article drew me a little closer to the reason.

CD: I’ve had this connection in the past. I’ve noticed recently that the country music that I like tends to also fall in the line of the

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female country singers. I don’t know why that is, but there’s a little bit more musicality in the female country singers. We are highlighting one song by KD Lang who falls along the borderline of country and folk. I don’t know if that’s still true today, but several decades ago female singers had to really have a more defined and unique voice to break through into the music field. I was just listening to an interview today on the radio with a very young singer who was talking about the challenges of breaking into the music industry and finding her voice, and hanging on to her own vision and not letting the industry try to define who she is.

CJ: I think what you’re touching upon is perhaps also about the perception of women in the music industry. There’s a perception of women being highly sexualized, stereotypical, maybe even without any skill? I think until those beliefs are altered, women will continue to face roadblocks as they navigate their careers. Do you remember how we came up with the idea for this concert?

CD: I remember we had a conversation where one of us mentioned the idea of singing songs written and performed by female-identified singers and singer-songwriters and I remember we were both surprised by the irony that we both had this idea and then we decided to do this together. I’m glad that we did and that we’re going to do it again!

CJ: Me too! I think the inspiration for me for this concert was Tori Amos’ album Strange Little Girls, in which she covers 12 songs written by men about women. She decided to make those songs her own and add a female perspective. I think when we do the opposite, there’s an opportunity to add our own perspective on those melodies and lyrics. I wonder if there’s even a redemptive component to us singing those songs. I’d like to think so! A lot of the songs I chose are songs where either the songs themselves or the artists had such an impact on my life and the way I listen to music, write music, and even sing music. Their contribution is definitely part of my musicality, whether the listener knows it or not. In a way, that’s a way of honoring them!

CD: I’ve seen Brandi Carlile do covers of songs by male artists and make them her own. It’s really incredible when she does that. I found that one interesting song in our concert is the song “Bo” by the artist Rita. What’s interesting about this song is that Rita originally sang it, and then it was covered by the male singer Ivri Lider and now we’re kind of covering both their versions and making it our own. The use of the song in the film Yossi & Jagger -- I presume a lot of BCC members have seen and recall the use of that song -- puts it in an entirely different context.

CJ: Right! It also touches upon how diva-esque singers, such as Rita, have a huge gay following. I find it so interesting - this draw of gay men towards larger than life female performers. I think knowing that is why “Bo” was chosen to be part of the movie. There’s a scene in the movie where the guys in the car sing along to “Bo” and make up different lyrics that are rather vulgar and I remember just laughing out loud when watching that scene and it’s been difficult to forget those lyrics every time I hear this song now.

CD: I’m glad I forgot them! I just remember that song and loving the melody. Have you found that singing music that was written by and for female artists - have you found there to be challenges along the way as a male singer trying to take on those songs?

CJ: Well, it was mainly the original key in which those pieces were written which was challenging, so I always needed to transpose those pieces. Though a part of me thought to maybe leave the original key as a way to honor those singers, but then I figured that my voice would be done after if I were to sing those songs in the original key during the concert. So, there’s been a lot of transposing and then, I guess, like with the Tori Amos song I picked - a lot of her lyrics could mean so many things and I also know that a lot of her songs have to do with female empowerment, objectification of the female bodies, rape. And there are a couple of lines in the song I chose that could be about the power play between the genders and I think when a woman sings it, it could be from the perspective of a former victim who now takes charge of her life and her healing. Having those lyrics sung by a male, or gay male who is not unfamiliar with discrimination, exclusion and being a victim of bullying, etc. There could be a notion of both solidarity and also even recognizing the original singer-songwriter’s pain and hopefully this can bring some healing.

I find we do live in a dualistic world where it’s hard to talk about nuances, though I think we get better at it. As long as there is this approach in the mainstream I think it’s an important step we can by mixing up the genders on who’s singing whose lyrics and thus conveying we’re all in this together, we all experience pain, we all experience healing - no one is better or more superior than another and we strive for that equality. That’s kind of why I thought it would be nice to come up with this concept for a concert.

To listen to the rest of the conversation, for more information and to buy tickets go to BCC’s website: bcc-la.org/cabaret2019
AN EXCITING START TO OUR NEW JEWISH YEAR

Jay Jacobs, President

Hello from the other side of 5780. Did you enjoy our High Holiday observances as much as I did? Rabbi Alyson and Cantor Juval led us through an inspiring liturgy and the choir—I was singing with you from the pews—sounded even better. We had so many volunteers from greeters to ushers to Yom Kippur workshop facilitators. Thank you all for participating during High Holidays and beyond. This is going to be a busy year and the gift of your volunteering will be like manna to sustain each other. Here are just a few things coming up.

Our application for a new settled rabbi has been submitted to the Rabbinical Placement Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. BCC’s Rabbinic Search Committee is now preparing for the interview process, during which the identities of rabbinic applicants must remain confidential. You can read more about this process and the anticipated timeline in the Search Committee’s article elsewhere in this issue.

Did you know our chazzan, Cantor Juval, has been with us for ten years now? During the High Holidays we circulated a card, now filled with signatures and well wishes (on both sides) for his anniversary. A big thank you to everyone who participated, but that’s not the only way to appreciate our amazing and talented cantor. He is planning a Cantors Cabaret in December, and we will be applauding and celebrating his tenth anniversary with BCC during the reception. Many thanks to Kenna Love for her production of this event. I hope to see you all there. Please bring a friend.

Our clergy and Director of Education Rae Antonoff Portnoy have also been collaborating with the Shabbat morning minyan to create intergenerational services on Shabbat mornings. We plan to ease into this, starting with every other month to see what works. I attended the first one and really enjoyed seeing the kinder (children) with theirs eyes twinkling at the Torah. We invite you to join us and experience it yourself. All ages are welcome.

If you didn’t get a chance to choose some of Mary Oliver’s poetry that Rabbi Alyson presented on Yom Kippur, we have them printed on colorful cards in the lobby. Please take any of them that move you. A prolific writer of both poetry and prose, Mary Oliver routinely published a new book every year or two. In the late 1950s she met photographer Molly Malone Cook, who would become her partner for over 40 years and also her literary agent. Ms. Oliver lived in Provincetown, Mass. and Hobe Sound, Florida until her death in early 2019 at age 83. You can read more about her at https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-oliver

For me, the new year 5780 is not about how we continue to survive in a chaotic secular world but rather how we can come to live together Jewishly, because we are, after all, the House of New Life.

L’hitraot!

—Jay

Photo credit: Kenna Love

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That’s my niece Kam!
AN UPDATE ON OUR SACRED SEARCH FOR BCC’S NEXT RABBI

Ginger Jacobs and Elizabeth Savage, Co-chairs

On behalf of the members of the Rabbinic Search Committee, we would like to update the congregation on the progress of our rabbinic search since our last report in September. We all take seriously the responsibility that the BCC Executive Committee has entrusted to us to conduct this search in a way that is thoughtful, transparent, responsive to our members, and in accord with the spiritual values and practices of Judaism and the Reform movement of which we are a part.

What has happened so far in our rabbinic search process?

We have filed BCC’s “Solo Rabbi Application” with the Rabbinical Placement Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the organization for Reform rabbis. Our application was posted on the CCAR website in late October and is accessible to all rabbis who are members of the CCAR. Any rabbi who is interested in applying to become BCC’s next rabbi may submit a resume to the CCAR, which will review the resume and forward it to us.

Fully aware of the importance of this rabbinic search, the Search Committee took great care in preparing our application over a period of several weeks. The application form includes a range of questions about BCC and about the candidates we seek. It asks for details about our current clergy and staff, lay leadership, religious school, building facilities, finances, and membership demographics. It requests narrative statements about BCC’s primary goals and hopes for the next few years, about the most important issues and challenges facing our congregation, and about our core strengths and values. It asks for the qualities that are most important in our new rabbi, the most important priorities of our new rabbi, and the most important things a rabbinic candidate should know about BCC.

In order to answer these questions as completely and accurately as possible, we sought input from as many BCC members as we could. We held five “community reflection meetings” during the month of August, two at BCC and three in members’ homes around the LA area. Each meeting was led by a trained facilitator and sought input directly related to the questions on the CCAR application. The comments of BCC members at each meeting were recorded anonymously by a “scribe” during the meeting and then collated with the comments from the other meetings. Some 60 BCC members attended these meetings.

We also made available a short online survey to allow those who were unable to attend one of the meetings in person to provide input as well.

On September 8, we presented the results of the survey and the community reflection meetings at a “town hall” at BCC, at which members could consider the opinions of the congregation as a whole and provide additional input if desired.

The Search Committee took all of this information into consideration in completing the application to the CCAR. Our current clergy and staff also had an opportunity to provide input at this stage.

What are the next steps in the rabbinic search process, and what is the expected timetable for it?

To prepare to interview and evaluate rabbinic candidates, the Search Committee has been working diligently over the past few weeks to prepare interview questions for the candidates and to decide how we will evaluate their responses. We have made use of the resources of the CCAR, which provides sample questions and guidelines for evaluation, and we have sought similar information from other Jewish movements as well.

Although we may modify the questions as we proceed, we expect that our first round questions will focus primarily on the areas that BCC members have indicated are most important to them. These include the candidate’s experience working with the LGBTQ+ community, experience working with multicultural Jews and families (including interfaith families), working collaboratively with lay leadership and other clergy and staff, openness to a variety of religious practices including queer liturgy and gender-neutral liturgy, and commitment to social justice. We will also explore the candidate’s rabbinic experience and achievements and will conduct our own online research of each candidate.

The Search Committee will review applications as they are received on a rolling basis and will conduct interviews by telephone, Zoom, or Skype during the remainder of 2019. We will likely invite two, three, or four candidates for a 2 to 3 day visit to BCC during January and February of 2020, to allow BCC members an opportunity to meet them. The Search Committee will then deliberate and recommend a candidate to the Board of Directors. Upon approval of the Board, the congregation will be asked to approve the new rabbi at a special congregational meeting in the spring of 2020. This will allow sufficient time to negotiate a contract and for the new rabbi to make arrangements to begin serving BCC on July 1, 2020.

What are the qualifications for rabbis to apply to become BCC’s next rabbi?

Any rabbi who is a member of the CCAR may apply to serve BCC, whether or not they were ordained at Hebrew Union College. Continued on page 7
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College (the seminary of the Reform movement). Since we are a small congregation, rabbis with any level of experience are eligible to apply. Beyond that, we can set our own criteria for evaluating rabbinic candidates, so long as they comply with the law and CCAR guidelines.

Will BCC members be kept informed as the search proceeds?

We will keep the congregation informed of our progress in a general sense through our webpage and periodic articles in the newsletter. However, as rabbis begin to submit their resumes, the Search Committee is required to maintain strict confidentiality about who has applied to become our next rabbi and how many applications we have received. This confidentiality extends to BCC’s current clergy and staff and to family and friends of the Search Committee members. This is necessary because some of the rabbis may not have informed their current congregations or employers that they are seeking a new position. It would also harm BCC’s reputation if we become known for “leaks” in the search process. If Search Committee members decline to answer questions about the search, they are not being rude or secretive but rather are maintaining the necessary confidentiality of the process.

Once we invite a few candidates to visit BCC, their identities will become public to our members and to their current congregations or employers.

Who are the members of the Search Committee and how were they selected?

There are ten members of the Search Committee, including the two co-chairs. The other eight are Robin Berkovitz, Davi Cheng, Mark Homyk, Naomi Katz, Jack Kelly, Deborah Lowe, Bruce Maxwell, and Larry Nathenson. They were nominated by the co-chairs and submitted to the BCC Executive Committee, which consented to these nominations. The members serving on this committee reflect the diversity of our congregation in terms of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, race, age, length of membership, prior service to BCC, and family status (including parenting). Also, members of this committee have diverse work experience as teachers, managers, lawyers, HR administrator, insurance broker, community activists, LGBTQ archives, social services, the arts and more.

The work of the Search Committee is time-intensive, involving numerous evening and weekend meetings. We are aware that the choices we make will affect all the members of BCC, both now and into the future. Rabbi Alyson Solomon, in her role as Interim Rabbi, will assist us in this process. We will benefit from her years as a congregational rabbi and her special training in the interim rabbi process, as well as her skills as a change management consultant for Jewish non-profit organizations.

With your help, support and input, we will accomplish our sacred task and find the right new rabbi for our community. We are looking forward to the journey together. We hope we have answered most of your questions here and on our page on the BCC website. But if you have additional questions, please feel free to contact us at gingerj18@gmail.com and ehsavage@charter.net.

Transgender Day of Remembrance Ceremony in West Hollywood
Wednesday, November 20, 6 to 8 pm

The City of West Hollywood and its Transgender Advisory Board will host a Transgender Day of Remembrance Ceremony. The event will take place at the Center for Early Education (563 N. Alfred Street) and will include a march, speakers, and a reading of names to memorialize those who have been killed as a result of transphobia.

The event is free and open to the public. Limited parking will be available on site at the Center for Early Education; validated overflow parking will be available at the West Hollywood Park five-story public parking structure, lat 625 N. San Vicente Boulevard.

On Transgender Day of Remembrance, the flags at West Hollywood City Hall will be flown at half-staff.

BCC Observes Transgender Day of Remembrance with Shabbat Service and Movie, Friday, November 22, 6 to 10 pm

Join Bobbi Meilen and BCC’s Na’avor “Let Us Cross Over” Havurah for Shabbat on November 22 in honor of Transgender Remembrance Day. During the service, led by Rabbi Alyson Solomon and Davi Cheng, Bobbi and others from our Na’avor Havurah will share words of Torah from their experience. To honor our trans siblings who have passed:

• We will mark off chairs in front of the sanctuary.
• Stones will be available for people who would like to place a stone on our bimah in remembrance of someone who has passed, similar to our Yom Kippur ritual of remembrance.
• You are also invited to bring or send in photos and bios to honor those who have passed prior to the service.

At 6:00 pm, there will be a screening of “The Death and Life of Marsha P Johnson” in the library. Arrive any time prior to our 8pm service for the opportunity to view the movie, create a photos display of remembrance and be together in community.
HANUKKAH PALOOZA WITH DRAG QUEEN STORY HOUR AND MORE ON DECEMBER 14

Rae Antonoff Portnoy, Director of Education

Join all of BCC’s Youth and Family Programs – Baby Kibbutz, Ohr Chayim Shabbat School, and Teen Track – for an exciting day of Hanukkah-themed fun on Saturday, December 14!

Families with children age 0-18 are invited to join us for a Palooza of Hanukkah activity options from 10am to 12:30pm, including…

• Cooking with Tara and Ashira
• Games with Tal and Rae
• Crafts with Ms. Purple
• Songs with Cantor Juval
• Text study with Rabbi Alyson

…and a special guest for Drag Queen Story Hour starting at 11:15 am, in partnership with PJ Library!

Drag Queen Story Hour is just what it sounds like – drag queens reading stories to children. It captures the imagination and play of the gender fluidity of childhood and gives kids glamorous, positive, and unabashedly queer role models. In spaces like this, kids are able to see people who defy rigid gender restrictions and imagine a world where people can present as they wish, where dress up is for real.

Our Drag Queen Story Hours are planned to take place during our four holiday “paloozas” throughout the year, and are coordinated with PJ Library. If you would like to sponsor a Drag Queen Story Hour for $300, please indicate your donation to go to that program.

All members of the community with family members aged 0-18 are welcome, regardless of synagogue membership or enrollment in any of BCC’s Youth and Family Programs. For more information or to be added to any of the Youth and Family Programs mailing lists, contact Rae Antonoff Portnoy, Director of Education, at rae@bcc-la.org.

FOURTH SUNDAYS ARE NOW PLAYGROUND SUNDAYS AT BCC

Donna Quigley Groman

Let’s get to know each other better. That’s why I came up with the idea of “Playground Sundays.” We can get to know each other while doing something fun.

I remember April 10, 2011, the day we marched our Torahs from our old building at 6000 W Pico to our new home at 6090 W Pico. Upon entering our spacious parking lot (we never had one before), I thought of how delightful it would be to use it as a playground. You see, I am from New York City, Brooklyn to be specific, and asphalt brings back memories of playing “Foursquare,” “Skelly,” jumping rope, playing jacks, even a game we called “Three Feet Out of Germany.”

The point is, no matter how athletic or non-athletic you may be, there is some activity that we can enjoy together on Playground Sunday. We now have a basketball hoop, and a net for volleyball, badminton and pickleball, and plenty of room for “sidewalk games.” I am not contemplating any serious competition, although I must confess that I fantasize about relay and potato sack races and my wife is eager for dodgeball.

So will you join me? Fourth Sundays in the BCC parking lot from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. November 24, December 22, and January 26, to start. Be there or be (four)square! And bring your game.

For more info, feel free to email me at dlgroman@hotmail.com.
BCC’S NEW VEGAN HAVURAH CELEBRATES THANKSGIVING AND HANUKKAH

BCC’s new Vegan Havurah brings together those who are vegan or vegan-curious for social and educational events. Among the planned activities are outings to vegan restaurants and vegan fairs, cooking demonstrations, talks with dietitians about proper nutrition for vegans, and in-home gatherings to share meals. We will also invite outside speakers to talk about the connections between Judaism and veganism.

BCC Executive Director Rabbi Jonathan Klein serves as the Chair of the Rabbinic Advisory Board of Jewish Veg Los Angeles, a Jewish vegan and animal welfare organization. He and BCC member Brett Trueman seek to make BCC a welcoming and embracing congregation for Jewish vegans and vegetarians seeking a spiritual home. For more information, contact Brett Trueman at brett.trueman@gmail.com.

Vegan Potluck Thanksgiving Dinner, Sunday, November 24, 5pm

Please join BCC’s new Vegan Havurah for a celebration of Thanksgiving. We’ll be having a potluck dinner at the home of Rabbi Jonathan Klein, BCC’s Executive Director, beginning at 5:00 p.m. Please RSVP to Brett Trueman (brett.trueman@gmail.com) by November 21, so that we can get an accurate head-count. Your dish should serve 6 to 8 people. Please make sure that there are no animal products (i.e. no meat, dairy, eggs, or honey) in the dish that you bring.

If you haven’t been to a vegan Thanksgiving dinner, you’ll be amazed at how delicious it can be!

Vegan Hanukkah Celebration

BCC’s Vegan Havurah, along with the Los Angeles Chapter of Jewish Veg and Recruiting for Good, invite you to join us for “Lights & Latkes,” a vegan Hanukkah celebration and dinner. The event will be held on Monday, December 23, from 6 pm – 9 pm, at a private home in Pacific Palisades. It will include a special presentation by Rabbi Jonathan Klein, BCC’s Executive Director and the Jewish Veg Los Angeles Rabbinic Chair. The cost is $18/person. All are welcome (including children) whether or not you are a member of the Vegan Havurah. Please rsvp for the dinner at https://www.jewishveg.org/lights-and-latkes by December 18.

BIKKUR CHOLIM: BCC’S CARING COMMUNITY

Bikkur Cholim refers to the mitzvah, the Jewish religious commandment and opportunity to visit or extend aid to those who are ill and those who assist them. Caring for those in need is an aspect of gemilut chasidim, an act of selfless and loving kindness.

BCC’s Caring Community (Bikkur Cholim) hopes to coordinate outreach to other BCCers in times of need. We seek to broaden such activities in the coming year. Anyone who would like to participate as we rebuild our outreach is welcome to contact Evelyn Poplawski, Glenn Chester or Estaire Press. You can also join our Facebook group BCC Caring Community.

In case of a pastoral emergency call (323) 931-7023 x 200 to reach our Interim Rabbi Alyson Solomon. You’re also welcome to send her an email. Indicate “Urgent” in the subject line.

HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE FUTURE OF BCC!

The BCC Development / Fundraising Committee is looking for people who want to help strengthen and grow BCC.

Fundraising is not just asking people for money. It’s building relationships and deepening our connections to each other and to our congregation. BCC is a special and unique community.

Executive Director Rabbi Jonathan Klein has created an excellent fundraising plan, which is our roadmap for the next year. If you have any interest in helping out on this committee, please contact the Development Committee Chair – Jeffrey Janis at jeffreyjanis@yahoo.com.
FREE FILM SCREENINGS:
“A SINNER IN MECCA”
AND “BOY ERASED”

BCC’s Film Club is back with two free film screenings in the coming weeks. The film screened at BCC will either have an LGBT and/or Jewish content theme. Each film will be preceded by an introduction on the cultural importance and impact of the featured film when it was initially released. Screenings will be followed by a discussion on the film’s timelessness or relevance in today’s world. This program is free and open to members and non-members. Popcorn will be provided, please bring another snack to share.

“A Sinner in Mecca”
Saturday, November 23, 6:00 pm

This 2015 documentary from director Parvez Sharma (“A Jihad for Love”) chronicles Sharma’s Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia as an openly gay Muslim. This film won the Grand Jury Award for Best Documentary at Outfest in Los Angeles.

“Boy Erased”
Sunday, December 15, 6:00 pm

This is the courageous true story of Jared Eamons, whose parents struggle with reconciling their love for their son with their religious beliefs. Fearing the loss of family, friends and community, Jared is pressured into attending a conversion therapy program. While there, Jared begins his journey toward finding his own voice and accepting his true self.

NEED A MORALE BOOST? TRY BCC’S LIFE TRANSITIONS SUPPORT GROUP

If you could use some help dealing with the stress of relationships, careers, economics, social life, family life, health or bereavement, you might want to give the BCC Life Transitions Group a try. The goal of the BCC Life Transitions Group is to enhance participants’ spiritual and emotional growth. Participants have the opportunity to share their experiences, give and receive mutual support, and exchange coping skills with one another in a confidential atmosphere. Everyone is welcome - members and non-members alike. The group meets twice a month on the first and third Wednesdays from 7:00 - 9:00 pm.

This support group is facilitated by Shirley Hirschberg, Social Worker. Shirley is also available for individual sessions. For more information, please call the BCC office at (323) 931-7023, ext. 205.

BCC BOOKS AND BAGELS

Larry Nathenson

BCC’s Book Group (Books and Bagels) has been meeting continuously since January 1995. The group meets monthly in members’ homes for a bagel brunch and discussion of a book selected by the group. We read a variety of books: fiction and non-fiction, American and Israeli, historical and contemporary. The only requirement is some Jewish content (LGBT content is a plus, but not required). Our next two meetings are as follows.

Sunday, November 24, 10:00 am
Jewish Comedy: A Serious History, by Jeremy Dauber

A Columbia University professor traces seven strands of Jewish humor through the centuries as it both mirrors and shapes Jewish life and culture.

Sunday, December 29, 10:00 am
The Weight of Ink, by Rachel Kadish

This historical novel of 17th and 21st century Jewish women and the men who influence their lives deals with issues of Jewish identity, interfaith relationships, and the continuity of Jewish culture over the centuries.

The group is open to BCC members and non-members, and you are welcome to join us for a particular book that may interest you. RSVP is required for location and to ensure enough food. For more information, contact Larry Nathenson at Larrynath@aol.com.

HANUKKAH BEGINS DECEMBER 22

Our winter festival of lights, Hanukkah, begins on Sunday evening, December 22 this year. Our gift shop will be open on Friday evenings starting in early December. Watch the weekly announcements for details of our community observance of Hanukkah.