



The Newsletter of Kol HaEmek (Voice of the Valley)

P.O. Box 416, Redwood Valley, CA 95470 Phone # 707-468-4536

September 2006

Elul 5766 / Tishrei 5767

Please note all submissions preferred by the 20th of each month to carolrosenberg@sbcglobal.net

[Check our website www.kolhaemek.org](http://www.kolhaemek.org)

Schedule for September-(early) October, including High Holidays!

Friday, Sept. 8, 6:30pm - Shabbat Service with Rabbi Shoshanah; following will be a dairy potluck and a special showing of a video by David Wolf-Blank, Z'ael, partly featuring his early time in Mendocino County, in remembrance (his *yahrzeit* is 8 Elul)

Saturday, Sept. 16, 8:30pm - Slichot: a service of chanting and meditation to help us do soulwork in preparation for the High Holidays

Sunday, Sept. 17, 10am -12 noon Shul School Begins! *This is an open house for parents and children. Receive this year's schedule and meet the teachers.*



Friday Sept. 22, 7-9pm - Rosh HaShanah Eve

Saturday, Sept. 23, 9am - Rosh HaShanah - 10-10:45am - Children's Service

At about 11:30, after reading the Torah and the first round of shofar blowing, we will break for kiddush (wine, juice, challah, apples, honey). We will resume at about noon to continue the traditional Rosh HaShanah service and shofar blowings and finish about 1:45. This plan will enable those who want to, to experience a full Rosh HaShanah service.

2pm - potluck picnic with *tashlich* at Lake Mendocino, Pomo Day Use Area B. Use Highway 20 to reach the northwest part of the lake. Go past the Pomo roundhouse. Park near the bathrooms and walk toward the lake.

Sunday, Oct. 1, 1pm - Women's Mikveh led by Rabbi Shoshanah

Sunday, Oct. 1, 3pm - Men's Mikveh led by Alan Sunbeam

Sunday, Oct. 1, 7-9pm - Erev Yom Kippur (Kol Nidre)

Monday, Oct. 2, 10am -1:30pm - Yom Kippur morning service

from 4pm until 3 stars appear - afternoon, *Yizkor*, and concluding **Yom Kippur** service, followed by breakfast. (See menu instructions on page 4.)

Friday, Oct. 6, 6:30pm - Succot/Shabbat celebration and potluck

Saturday, Oct. 14, 6:30pm - Simchat Torah celebration with dessert potluck



Torah Portions

September 2 - Kiteitzei

September 9 - Ki Tavo

September 16 - Nitzavim-Vayeilech

September 22 - Erev Rosh Ha Shanah

September 23 - 24 Rosh HaShanah

September 30 - Shabbat Shuva

candle lighting times are on the website

a woman dying
holding her hand in silence
is more than enough

Peace, David Vilner



Marc Komer

LEGAL DOCUMENT ASSISTANT

\$275 Basic Living Trust

\$100 Basic Will

Divorce, Eviction, Incorporation, Name Change, Guardianship,
Power of Attorney & more.

459-2775 mkomer@pacific.net

I am not an attorney, and can only provide self help services at your
specific direction.



GARDEN REPORT

Well, it looks like almost all the plants survived the summer!!!! Check out the blossoms on the desert willow in the NW corner.

The Shul needs some spiffing before the High Holidays. I plan to be there every Sunday am, working on general garden tidiness. Please join me!! Bring clippers, gloves, etc.

B'vakasha

Louisa 485-1290

Donations to Kol HaEmek

Make a Difference

Kol HaEmek is grateful for all contributions to our various funds.

The following is a list of some of them:

- 1) Building Fund
- 2) Religious School Fund (Kalifornia Memorial)
- 3) Scholarship Fund
- 4) General Fund
- 5) Memorial Board Fund
- 6) Tzedakah Fund
- 7) Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
- 8) The Marion and Sanford Frank Fund
for Feeding the Hungry in Ukiah & Willits
- 9) Feeding the Jewish and Arab hungry in Acre, Israel*
- 10) **MEMBERSHIP**
Questions? Call David Koppel 485-8910

Please mail your contributions to:

Kol HaEmek, P.O. Box 416, Redwood Valley, CA 95470

*Make your check payable to
PEF: Israel-Endowment Fund
and earmark it to the Association for Community
Development - Acre; HaAsif program. (There is
a \$25 minimum requirement for checks to Israel).

PASSINGS

Our congregation will say Kaddish on the anniversary of your loved one's death. Call Rabbi Shoshanah at 467-0456 with your concerns about the loss of a loved one and/or the name and either the Hebrew or English calendar date of death.

Rabbi Michael Robinson, Z'ael

Condolences to the family and friends of Rabbi Michael Robinson of Santa Rosa and to Congregation Shomrei Torah, which he served as rabbi emeritus. He died recently of a brain tumor discovered in March. A well-known activist throughout Sonoma County, he also served Kol HaEmek as an on-call rabbi for many years.

Letter from Rutie & Avraham in Israel

Editor's note: the following was recently received from Rutie Katz, who lived in Willits with her husband Avi for a long time until returning to Israel a few years ago. They were leaders of the Kol HaEmek choir of which Jan Stephens was a member. You can send email to avkat2@yahoo.com. Share your thoughts with Shema readers, too.

Dear Friends Shalom,

I haven't written anything all these years, but you were and are on my mind and in my heart.

These are hard days here, and I feel that I want to share my thoughts and feelings – to tell you things that you can't see on your T.V. or hear on KZYX.

During the 20 years that Israel occupied South Lebanon, there was a S. Lebanon Army that worked with our army. Their families worked in Israel (even I, while living in Gonen, working in the shoes factory, worked with some Lebanese workers, ate their food – tabuleh – tried to talk Arabic). They knew Hebrew and there was a nice cooperation between us and them. When Israel pulled out from S. Lebanon, many families from S. Leb. Army moved to Israel to live here, because they were considered traitors by Hezbollah. A few days ago, on T.V., one of these soldiers, who lives in the north of Israel, said: "All these 6 years since Israel left S. Lebanon, Israel developed the beautiful area, built hotels, restaurants etc. While the Hezbollah dug more underground shelters, and stored more bombs and rockets, preparing themselves to war." These words came from a Lebanese who has family in Lebanon. I couldn't say it better.

Hezbollah is the front-line organization of Iran. We know that they are trained in Iran, and get ammunition from Iran. Syria is in the background, too. Iran's solution for the Middle East is the destruction of Israel. Having a "clear of Jews" area. Nassralla, the leader of Hezbollah, is talking all the time about destroying Israel. During the last 6 years, since Israel pulled out from Lebanon into the international border, Hezbollah created many provocations: sent missiles toward Israel, and we didn't respond. They kidnapped and killed 3 soldiers in 2000, and we didn't respond. But they didn't stop.

They just got stronger and stronger, more weapons, more underground shelters, until the time will be right for another big attack. So how long should Israel be "nice"? quiet? what good will it bring us?

The same thing with Gaza strip. We pulled out a year ago, to the international border. Now is the time for the Palestinians to take over, to develop the area, to begin normal life. Instead they vote for the Hamas, another extreme fundamentalist Muslim organization, and they started sending rockets toward Sderot, a nearby town in Israel – every day! People got killed, homes were ruined, and Israel didn't respond strongly.

Jan (Stephens) asked me if Israel's response to the kidnapping of 2 soldiers wasn't too strong. Let me try and tell you: My first visit back home to Israel after a year in America, I realized a few big differences between Israel and America. It is very hard for people who live in big, large America to understand what it's like to live in such a small, tiny state. Everybody in Israel has a very similar background: everyone serves in the army. Everybody's son/ grandson/husband serves in the army. We all listen to the same news. We all have connection to the kibbutz. When something happens to a soldier – it could be our son/ grandson/husband/friend, or we know someone who knows, etc. Everybody in Israel feels this way. We all identify with what happens. Of course, we have our very left-wing people who will disagree. But I tried to give you a general idea.

Jan sent us an article written by her brother, about peace, not a military solution, etc. Every intelligent, human, "good" person agrees with these words. Of course I agree. But it can be written only by someone (Jewish) who lives in safe America, far away from military conflicts. A suicide car or human bomb that hits a bus or a hotel with many guests who came to celebrate Passover – is horrible. You cannot live normal life, sending your children to school, not knowing if, when or where a missile or a suicide bomb will hit.

So this is all very sad, confusing, political, and too long and too many innocent people dead. What's the solution?

President's Corner

Dear Friends,

It's September, the month of beginnings: the start of the school year, the Jewish High Holidays, the collecting of the harvest and the preparation for winter. It's a time to look at the past year and figure out our personal and communal goals for the coming year. You might call it developing our work plan.

As the President of our congregation, it's not for me to tell you what we need to accomplish; it's for me to ask, "What is this community's will?" "How can this Jewish community help people accomplish personal, family, and community goals for the coming year?"

As a child I did not receive a traditional Jewish upbringing. My father did not believe in organized religion or in community. He did believe in God and living a responsible and righteous life. God was responsible for the universe and the laws of nature and could be seen by observing the natural world. Our prayers were to be thankful for life itself and the opportunity for each day on this planet. We were responsible for caring for the members of our family and the work we did created the meaning in our lives. No work was demeaning if it was done well and with thought and care. He also taught that each of us must stand alone.

I still see much of life as I was taught. However, my father's life view was limited; he saw the lone wolf as the creature to be emulated. I, too, value time to be without the distraction of others, but my involvement in Judaism has made life richer for me. I now belong to a community and truly believe that collectively we live a richer, more interesting life than alone or only within our family. I now think that collectively we can affect more of the world than we can as individuals.

Community does come with its difficulties. The challenge that most concerns me at the beginning of the Jewish New Year is how can this diverse community come to consensus on what should be accomplished? What should be our priorities? What means shall we use to accomplish our goals? I would like to use our newsletter, the *Shema*, to help us do this. We cannot utilize our strength if we do not hear what our members are thinking and what they want. We need your input so we can develop programs and services to meet your needs and the needs of your family. It is only by the exchange of ideas that we can reach consensus and develop a congregation that is meaningful for all of us.

Sincerely,
Carol Rosenberg

Attention! all those who wish to blow a Shofar

Bruce Andich is our official coordinator for Shofarim. Please call Bruce Andich, 459-4855, or e-mail him at <brucea@saber.net>

We still need volunteers to help with High Holiday services and preparation. Enrich your experience. Please call Carol Rosenberg, 463-8526, or e-mail <carolrosenberg@sbcglobal.net>

לשנה טובה תכתבו

Realistic limitations

As you have probably noted, we are having both Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur services at our dear little Shul. Yes, our Shul is small and has limitations. We are trying to mitigate these limits with good planning and by asking for your cooperation. Seating will be tight! Please come on time so others are not disturbed by your looking for a seat. Bring a pillow if you need one.

We do not have another room to set up for the kiddush and the break-fast after Yom Kippur. Our kitchen is small and has limited refrigeration and oven space. Please understand that we must limit the items that need to be refrigerated or heated. We are suggesting the following limited menu for the break-fast potluck:

Fresh fruit or fruit juice
Hard-boiled eggs
Vegetable salad
Tuna fish salad or smoked fish
Bagels, butter/cream cheese
Sliced cheeses
Baked cookies or cake

Attention Parents

We have hired a competent child care worker for children on September 23, from 9am to 1:30pm, and on October 2 from 9am to 1:30pm and 4pm to 7pm. We are asking parents to sign up for an hour at a time to assist the child care worker. We will provide juice and crackers for the children in addition to challah, grape juice, apples and honey for kiddush. If your children require more food, please bring healthy dairy treats.

We also ask all parents to review with their children what is thoughtful, appropriate behavior in a place of worship so that they may not distract people at prayer.

Proposed Schedule for 5767

The following is a draft calendar for the coming year. Please review it and mark your calendar in pencil!

We want your ideas. So don't hesitate to call Carol at 463-8526 or e-mail <carolrosenberg@sbcglobal.net> or Rabbi Shoshanah's new e-mail <sdevorah@gmail.com>

Wednesday, Oct 4 - Succah building at shul

Friday, Oct 6 - Succot/Shabbat Family Service

Saturday, Oct 14 - Simchat Torah Family Service (which do you prefer - a Saturday evening or Sunday morning **Oct 15?**)

Saturday, Nov 11 - Family Shabbat Service

Friday, Dec 15 - Chanukah/Shabbat Family Service

Sunday, Dec 17 - Chanukah Faire

Saturday, Dec 23 - Eliana Gitlin's Bat Mitzvah

Saturday, Jan 27 - Family Shabbat Service

Tuesday, Feb 2 - Tu B'Shevat seder **or** Saturday Feb 3 noon Tu B'Shvat seder, still under discussion

Saturday, Feb 24 - Family Shabbat Service

Saturday, Mar 3 - Family Purim Celebration

Saturday, Mar 24 - Herron's Bat Mitzvah

Tuesday, April 3 - Communal Seder (unless we have it Apr 2, first nite)

Saturday, May 12 - Family Shabbat Service

Dear Beloved Kol HaEmek Chaverim,

The month of Elul is upon us, the High Holidays are just a few weeks away, and now is the time for soul review. Some of you may be using the Elul outline I suggested in last month's Shema to take stock of your own sense of well-being, where you feel you've fallen short or missed the mark, and what your intentions (kavvanot) are for the coming year of 5767.

We call this work "tshuvah" (return), often understood to mean return to our purest state, our true identity. Especially in our modern day American society, this sounds like a call for highly individuated and introspective focusing. Tshuvah can, and perhaps must, be very personal, but no matter how deeply we go in our own soul inquiry and assessment, tshuvah is not a solitary process.

In wanting to wipe the slate clean and have a fresh start, we're aiming for forgiveness - and not just between ourselves and our Creator. The tshuvah process needs to include our fellow human beings when it comes to making amends and asking forgiveness of those we've hurt or offended. The move toward reconciliation needs to happen between humans, before it can happen between us and God.

The High Holiday liturgy emphasizes our connectedness at an even more basic level. The long lists of sins that we itemize and attest to repeatedly during the Yom Kippur service ("For the sin that we have sinned against You by....") are all expressed in the first person plural - "we". Now, this does not seem to indicate the royal "we", not at this time when we consciously minimize our egos and acknowledge our weakness before our Creator.

We might say that we are following the traditional mitzvah of not shaming anyone in public by reciting in unison the litany of sins that have been committed - this way everyone can confess their sins aloud without any one person standing out as a marked sinner in the crowd. We might also be identifying with our fellow humans a la the words of a song we would sing back in elementary school: "No man is an island, no man stands alone, each man's joy is joy to me, each man's grief is my own". In this sense, we are sinners together: each person's sense of inadequacy, of imperfection, of disappointment, of having done wrong, is my own.

This sinners' "we" might also have to do with how our own soul fits to the larger scheme of being. Are you integrally American, or is that rather an accidental label? Perhaps you find it easier to identify as a resident of Mendocino County, or Northern California? Is being Jewish part of your intrinsic identity? Not just you as a historical accident of being Jewish, but you as a part of a people with a unique history and perhaps destiny.

I remember one Yom Kippur in another location here in the U.S., when the prayer leader interrupted the recitation of the printed list of sins to call upon Israelis to ask forgiveness for "their" wrongful behavior. She clearly had no sense of "we" in this case. Seems to me that if we object to either the American government's operations at home and abroad, or the Israel' government's conduct, we need to ask forgiveness in the first person plural. What do you think?

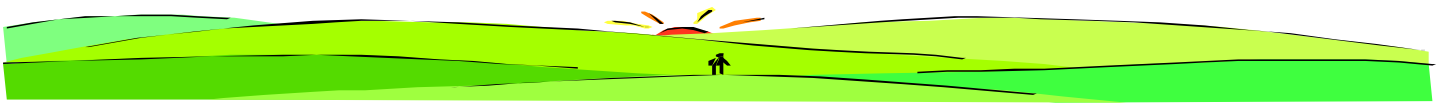
Last fall I co-officiated at a Jewish/Buddhist wedding. Without advance notice, the Buddhist monk in the middle of the ceremony asked those present to take a vow to treat all people equally, without preference based on familial, religious, national or any other association. More recently, I was conversing with a small group of Jews who are dedicated Buddhist practitioners. The fighting between Israel and Hizbollah was already underway. These Jew-Bu's acknowledged that despite the universalistic Buddhist teaching, they were surprised to discover that each felt concern for the Israelis' welfare that was stronger than their concern for the Lebanese. This had nothing to do with rights and wrongs, but rather a more primal sense of connection, of tribal kinship with their fellow Jews. They might admire and strive for the Buddhist universalist teaching, but their experienced truth was otherwise.

Another case from the recent fighting: friends of mine with dual American/Israeli citizenship had lived on a kibbutz on the Lebanese border for years. Their closest friend had been murdered on the road just outside the kibbutz by infiltrators from Lebanon. Their last night at the kibbutz, before they returned to the U.S., was spent not at their preplanned goodbye party, but taking shelter because infiltrators from Lebanon were spotted in the area. These friends, who live in Michigan today, cancelled their summer vacation this August so that they could afford to make a sizable donation in response to the Israeli/Lebanese fighting. Their first contribution went to the Lebanese Red Crescent Society (equivalent of the Red Cross); they also contributed to the local Jewish Federation campaign to help Israelis suffering war damage.

Our essential soul connections might extend beyond the realm of the human. The leading 15th Century kabbalist, The Ari, explains that “every human soul is connected by an invisible circuitry of golden threads to certain animals, plants, and minerals in the world (which s/he may never actually meet face to face). Together they comprise a soul cluster (with the human at its center) and their destinies are entwined. The bounty that will be available to these creatures this coming year (sunshine, fertilizer, health, provisions, etc.) is dependent upon what their human soulmate pulls down this Rosh HaShana as a result of their own inner work (email communication from Jerusalem teacher Sarah Schneider)”. Perhaps we need to ask forgiveness of and make amends to not only our fellow humans, but to the animals, plants, and minerals with which we share our planet - and to the planet itself. May our individual tshuvah journeys help clarify for us the true alignment of each of our souls, and bring deep healing to us and our world.

B'shalom oovrachah, In peace and blessing,

Shoshanah



Rav Kook's Four-Fold Song (Orot HaKodesh II:444)

In their columns this month, both Shoshanah and Carol speak of how people perceive themselves and their soul connections. Rav Kook, the chief rabbi of Palestine in the 1920's and 1930's, speaks of the song our souls sing. Here is an excerpt from his Four-Fold Song:

"There are many levels of song.

Some sing the Song of the Soul. Within their own soul, they discover everything, their complete spiritual fulfillment.

Others sing the Song of the Nation. They leave the restricted circle of the individual soul... with sublime love, they cleave to Knesset Yisrael. They sing her songs, feel her pains, delight in her hopes, and contemplate her past and her future.

Others allow their souls to expand beyond the people of Israel. They sing the Song of Humanity, reveling in the grandeur of the humankind, the illustriousness of his divine image. They aspire toward humanity's ultimate goal, and yearn for its sublime fulfillment. From his source of life they draw inspiration for their universal thoughts and analyses, aspirations and visions.

And some reach even higher in the expanse, until they unite with all of existence, with all creatures and all worlds. With all of them, they sing the Song of the Universe."

Kol HaEmek Information & Resources

Kol HaEmek	468-4536
Board Members:	
Carol Rosenberg, President	463-8526
Dan Hibshman, Vice President	462-7471
David Koppel, Treasurer (Financial committee)	485-8910
Bill Ray, Secretary	459-5850
Nancy Merling (Rabbi's Council)	456-0639
Nancy Moilanen	459-4039
Divora Stern	459-9052
Alan Acorn Sunbeam	463-8364
Steven Levin	462-3131

Address changes (e-mail, etc): contact David Koppel davekoppel@yahoo.com or call (485-8910)

Brit Milah: Doctors willing to do circumcisions in their office or in your home: Robert Gitlin, D.O. (485-7406); Sam Goldberg, M.D. (463-8000); Jeremy Mann, M.D. (463-8000); Sid Mauer, M.D. (463-8000), Chanan Feld, Certified Mohel (510-524-0722). **Assistance with the ceremony, contact the Rabbi** (see below)

Chevra Kadisha (Jewish Burial): Eva Strauss-Rosen (459-4005); Helen Sizemore (462-1595)

Community Support: *If you need help (illness, family crisis) or you can be called on when others need help;* in Willits, call Divora Stern (459-9052); In Ukiah, Tal Sizemore (462-1595); Lake County (*Volunteer needed, call a board member*)

Editor of the Shema: Carol Rosenberg, Dan Hibshman & Tal Sizemore (carolrosenberg@sbcglobal.net)

Interfaith Council: Cassie Gibson (468-5351) (Food preparation for homeless in Ukiah)

Jewish Community Information and Referral: Bay Area activities and services (415) 777-4545 or toll free at (877)777- 5247.

Library: At the Kol HaEmek shul, 8591 West Road, Redwood Valley; open at shul events and by appointment

New Members: Nancy Moilanen (459-4039)

Publicity: (*Volunteer needed, contact a board member*)

Rabbi's Council: assists with community and calendar planning; **liaison** - contact Nancy Merling, grandnan@saber.net (456-0639)

Rabbinical Services/Special Ceremonies: Rabbi Shoshanah Devorah, 467-0456, sdevorah@gmail.com

Use of Torah/Siddurs: Schedule ahead of time with a board member.

Tzedakah Fund (Financial Assistance): David Koppel (485-8910)

Summer deck rebuild at the shul continues...



Robbie (Huh?) finishes up the deck framing;
it's ready for the Trex decking crew!

Decking crew,

a great sight! Helen and I (Carol), returning from our 3rd & hopefully last, precarious trip to bring TREX decking from Friedman's to the Shul - were delighted to see so many cars parked in front of the Shul. They belonged to the best of all possible work crews: Rob Gitlin, Dale Harrison, Dan Hibshman, Bill Ray, Tal Sizemore, David Seidell, Robert Klayman, Will Boults, Anthony Melville and Steve Levin; *go-fers Helen Sizemore & Carol Rosenberg.*



Will and Bill

the crew on all cylinders



maybe we could put a planter in that corner some day...

Tal, David and Anthony



photos courtesy of David Koppel

Bar mitzvah, Philip Ari Coren, 8/26/06 - 2 Elul, 5766



This picture of Philip, taken during the festivities following services, has cousin Sandy from southern California in the way back, cousin Adrienne from Brooklyn in front of her on the left, and Phillip's grandmother, Bernice Kam in the back right.

THANK YOU

From Andy, Phillip and Yvonne Coren

Andy, Phillip and I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the people who helped with Phillip's Bar Mitzvah:

Bella Feldman, Bar Mitzvah tutor and cantor – we couldn't have done it without her! For over a year, Bella was at our house tutoring Phillip each week. Not only did she teach him how to chant his Torah portion, she also taught him about his Torah portion and how to read trope. Her sense of humor and "stage management" were wonderful. Finally, having Bella serve as cantor for the service was a treat for all of our ears. Her beautiful voice truly moved everyone.

We thank Rabbi Shoshanah. Comments from our relatives and friends who met Shoshanah for the first time at the Bar Mitzvah included, "If we had services like that at my synagogue, I'd go to them," and "Your rabbi is so spiritual that her whole being just glows," and so on and so forth. One relative said that this was a wonderful Bar Mitzvah because it "skipped the glitz and glitter and focused on what was important." A non-Jewish friend said that he felt very comfortable because the rabbi explained everything. Shoshanah, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for reviewing the service and keeping us on track, and proofreading the transliteration (any remaining errors were Yvonne's); for all the time you spent helping Phillip understand his Torah portion and write his drosh; for your leadership; and last but not least, for the delicious tomatoes from your garden (just had to throw that in!!).

Sharon Govern took time off from work to help with shopping and hauling challah, wine, wine glasses, grape juice, etc. She was there months before the Bar Mitzvah helping to stuff envelopes and send out invitations; weeks before placing orders for challah, wine, wine glasses and juice; the day before picking up stuff and setting up at the Conference Center; and the day of helping to set up, put away all the leftover food, and clean up. Sharon was always there when we needed help with anything that had to be done. How can you thank someone adequately when you can't even remember everything they did?

We thank Bernice Kam. Mom, we thank you for everything! Mom helped with the table decorations, and is another person who was always willing to do anything that needed to be done. She also still runs "Mom's Taxi Service" and gave lots of rides, not just to her grandchildren, but to in-laws and friends. We appreciate you, Mom, and thank you for everything!

We thank Amy Wachspres for helping with setting up at the Conference Center and putting away leftovers and doing clean up. We really appreciate your help. We thank Robin Sunbeam for her help with the leftovers and cleaning up at the Conference Center. And, we thank our relatives who helped with set-up and clean-up: our nephew, Scott Arenberg, and our cousins Robert Traktman, Henry Traktman and Adrienne Traktman. They did a lot of work, especially considering that they had traveled 3,000 miles just to get here. And, we thank our cousin Adrian Salee, who did a wonderful job taping (DVDing?) the entire service.

We also thank the professionals who went above and beyond: Tom Ganoung provided beautiful piano music and John Beatty ran the sound system flawlessly; Dan Waterman provided our major decorations (his trees) and Drew Sublet created lovely centerpieces; Cristin Myers of the Potter Valley Cafe did the catering which received many compliments and no complaints, and Michael Feldman baked delicious cake, rugalach, kichel and mandel bread which were described as “the best ever” by people from New York! Finally, we thank Kerry Randall, Terry Nelson and Theresa Brassfield of the Ukiah Conference Center, who were a pleasure to work with and made everything run smoothly.

In addition, we thank the parents of the B’nai Mitzvahs who went before us: Lily Isa Aaron-Apfel, Isaac Frankle, Benjamin Walker Feldman, Molly Simone, Aubrey Mann and Moses Sunbeam – we read and excerpted various parts of the prayer books they had created for their Shabbat services. And, we thank Karen and Norm Rosen for the Pisek (Czechoslovakia) Torah story.

The following is Philip’s teaching presented after his Torah reading and based on Shoftim, the Torah portion of the week of 2 Elul:

DROSH FOR SHOFTIM FROM DEUTERONOMY

Phillip Coren, August 26, 2006 - 2 Elul, 5766

My Parsha, or Torah Portion, is from Shoftim, a part in the Book of Deuteronomy. An alliyah is when someone comes up to bless and read at least three sentences from the Torah. I chanted three alliyot from Shoftim.

There is no punctuation in any Torah scroll, so you may ask how I knew what to chant. Centuries after the Torah was written down, ancient scholars made the Torah easier to read by giving it vowels and chapters. They also wrote down a melody that made the text less boring and easier to learn. This melody was written in trope or tamim in Hebrew. Tropes are little marks (like Hebrew vowels) that go around the letters of the Torah like musical notes. It makes the Torah a song. The fancier the trope, the more important what was going on in the Torah story. In my Parsha I have a lot of complicated trope.

There is a big difference in trope. It is very easy to spot rare and more important trope from common ones. One of the rarest tropes comes into my Parsha twice. It’s called tli-shla gdo-la. You sing it “la la la la la la la la.” It comes around a two syllable word. Whereas one of the most common tropes is mu-nach sung “la la la.”

My first fancy trope goes around the words, "Your king shall not multiply horses." I believe that this also goes for armies – since horses and chariots were the best way to fight. Also, it may have a connection with the fact that kings shouldn’t be rich under the law of the Torah. This is because having many horses was a common way of showing off being wealthy. This was one of the most important rules for a Jewish king – who in fact had a lot of rules.

I find this interesting because the way the Torah starts the section about kings is, "When you are settled in the land of Canaan, you shall want a king for your nation like all around you." And, in nearly all the nations around Israel there were kings, but their kings didn't have rules. In fact most of the kings themselves made the rules, and some kings were worshipped as gods. Jewish kings on the other hand are definitely not God, seeing as they served God. Another way of saying this is that Jewish kings were under the law instead of making it.

There are two more places that I have fancy trope in my Parsha. The first place says, "Night and day your king shall guard the words of the Torah." Earlier in my Parsha the Torah says that the king shall write his own copy of the Torah and keep it with him wherever he goes. I believe that this is because if you write something down you remember it better. He also has to read it every morning and every night. But now the most important part (with fancy trope) is that he must guard the words of the Torah. In other words, the Israelite king has to follow the teachings of the Torah and not let anything come between the Torah and living his life, and ruling his subjects. This is one of the most important parts of my Torah portion; this trope sign is only used in the entire Torah about ten times.

However, in my third alliyah I have the same trope again. This probably means that it is of nearly the same importance. This time it comes in the sentence that says that people of the tribe of Levi will get no territorial portion of Canaan. Instead of farming, they will get to eat certain parts of the animal and other sacrifices made to God. This is because the Levites taught people about God, and performed religious rituals, and none of them had farmland or a job that they got paid to do. Instead of inheriting land like all of the other tribes, the tribe of Levi inherited God. Cohaneem (like me) were the Levitical priests. Every Cohain was a priest and a Levi, but not every Levi was a Cohain and a priest.

If I had lived about 2,000 years ago, I would have been a priest. This is because my dad's family are Cohains and my mom's family are Levites. So, when I turned 13, I wouldn't just help lead one service for my Bar Mitzvah (they didn't even have Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies back then); I would in fact become a priest. Pretty much my whole life would be devoted to learning the Torah. I don't know how I would feel about that, but I am somewhat completing my job now by not making my Bar Mitzvah my first and last reading from the Torah. From now on, every month or two, I will be reading from the Torah (starting at Rosh Hashanah).

The first part of my Parsha relates to the last. The first part is about kings, who were political leaders. The end is about priests, who were religious leaders.

Priests shouldn't religiously put themselves above the rest of the people – they shouldn't feel that they are closer to God. Instead, they should teach the people what they know, but also make every effort to learn more themselves. Even if I do read a little out of the Torah every month or two, I shouldn't feel that I belong reading the Torah more than anyone else.

Here is another question; would the world function better if every leader followed the Torah's rules for kings? I believe yes. If every king, queen, president, governor, ruler, or chief of every country, state, province, or nation wasn't greedy, then I believe the world would be a better place. For one thing the war in Israel would not exist, because no nations would be too greedy for compromise. And there would be much, much less famine since every leader would give money and food to his subjects.

I think that many of the rules from the Torah for Jewish kings should be not just for Jewish kings, but for all leaders, political and religious.