



The Wire

West End Synagogue

Member, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

Our Mission:

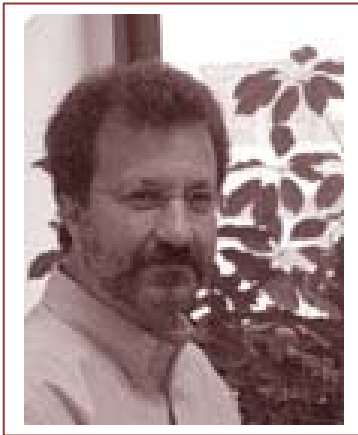
West End Synagogue seeks to develop, nurture, and transmit a Reconstructionist approach to Judaism by building an intellectually challenging, spiritually vibrant and mutually supportive community.

July 2010

Tammuz/Av./ 5770

West End Welcomes Rabbi Marc J. Margolius as its New Rabbi

It's official: Rabbi Marc J. Margolius is the new rabbi of West End Synagogue. Having (i) been the unanimous choice of the Rabbi Search Committee, (ii) received the unanimous approval of the Board of Trustees, and (iii) been approved and elected by the congregation at the Annual Meeting of West End Synagogue on May 16th, he has indeed won us over as we turn the page and start the next chapter in the ongoing West End story. Rabbi Margolius will co-lead, together with Hazzan Ayelet Pitagorsky, his first Shabbat Services on Friday, 2nd and Saturday, July 3rd.



Prior to joining West End, Rabbi Margolius served for five years as director of the Legacy Heritage Innovation Project, an initiative of the Legacy Heritage Fund which supports systemic educational transformation in congregations across North America, France, Germany and Israel. In addition, he also currently directs alumni programs for the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, a center for the cultivation of Jewish contemplative practices among rabbis, cantors, educators and lay leaders.

Previously, Rabbi Margolius served as Director of Jewish Life and Identity for the Jewish Community Centers of Philadelphia. As spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Am Israel (Penn Valley, Pennsylvania) from 1989-2003, he helped develop a national model of the synagogue as a Shabbat-centered community built around intergenerational learning. His work has been published twice in Sh'ma's annual anthology of outstanding High Holiday sermons.

Rabbi Margolius was ordained in 1989 at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. He is also a graduate of Yale Law School and he has been, for a long time, active in interfaith and interfaith matters, as well as social justice issues. As an attorney, he specialized in civil rights and poverty law. He has served as a staff attorney for the Commission on Law and Social Action of the American Jewish Congress, Pennsylvania Region, where he was active in church-state separation issues.

Rabbi Margolius lives in Manhattan with his wife, Rabbi Ayelet Cohen, and on June 2nd they welcomed the birth of twins, a boy and a girl, who join big sister (almost 2) and two older brothers.

Home for the July 4th Weekend?

Come to West End and meet our new Rabbi
Marc Margolius
on his first Shabbat!

Join us Friday, July 2nd at 6pm for a
Multigenerational Service
and Saturday, July 3rd for Shabbat
Morning Service at 10 am

THE PSALMS PROJECT, THEN AND NOW

By Don Menzi

Delivered at West End's "Farewell to Yael" Shabbat Service, June 19, 2010

When we moved into this building 15 years ago, we had to do something about the windows, which were plain glass. A committee was formed (of course) to design them, and if you look around today you can see what they arrived at. In addition to some symbolic graphics, they came up with several quotations that express our ideals – what we would like to be as a Reconstructionist congregation.

In the center section of the north wall, for instance, is a quote from Mordecai Kaplan – “Let us discover within ourselves unsuspected powers of the spirit.” A nice thought.

Next to it is one by Marcia Falk – “Tradition is not only what we receive. It is also what we create.” Very Reconstructionist.

Toward the back, overlooking the lobby, is the slogan, “Blessed is the community that comes together to create places of holiness.” That one is pure Susan Schorr.

All are very nice mottos, slogans etched in glass, expressing what we aspire to be. But etched in the glass of our windows they remained just that – slogans, mottos, ideals.

Then came that terrible day in August, 2003 – the day Yael told us of her diagnosis – breast cancer. We can only imagine the shock and terror she must have felt when she herself was first told. We only know the shock, the sorrow and the helplessness that we felt when she told us about it. We all knew that she was about to begin a dark and difficult journey of radiation and chemotherapy, full of danger and with an unknown outcome.

We are a community. Yael is our leader. She is an important person in all of our lives. We wanted to do something to help and support her during this terrible journey she was about to embark on. But we ourselves were lost and helpless, not knowing which way to turn, what to say – or not to say - or what to do.

Then Yael told us about an old Jewish tradition that uses the book of Psalms as a way to deal with serious illness. The traditional practice involves reading the entire book of Psalms every day for as long as a person is ill. Yael suggested that if we undertook that practice on her behalf, it would be a great comfort her, knowing that her community was doing whatever it could to support her mentally and

emotionally, while her doctors went to work on her physical body with radiation and chemotherapy for at least the next six months.

Well, that sounds simple enough: Recite the Book of Psalms. But six months – 26 weeks – 180 days – and all 150 psalms? Do the math! That works out to a total of 27,300 separate psalm recitations. That's a lot to expect a little congregation like ours to be able to do. Could we do it? Nobody knew.

Jane and I, for our own personal reasons, stepped up immediately and volunteered to organize and coordinate the effort, not even sure ourselves that enough people would make a commitment to read a single psalm every day for as long as Yael was still in treatment.

It turned out that we needn't have worried. Right away there were more than 150 volunteers for what we came to call The Psalms Project. All we had to do was make the assignments and keep track of who was doing what in order to be sure that every single psalm was covered by one or more people.

So it was that West End set off on a journey of our own, parallel to Yael's and hopefully contributing to the success of hers in some unknown and perhaps mysterious way.

We began a process of discovering within ourselves – both as individuals and as a community – “unsuspected powers of the spirit” – just like the window says. And so we started to learn our first lesson in how to convert our ideals into reality.

Of course, some things haven't changed much since Biblical days, and it wasn't long before Jane and I began hearing some complaints – just like the Israelites complained on that journey in the wilderness. Don't get me wrong. No one was complaining about having to recite a psalm every day. They were glad to be able to do that for Yael. Their complaints were about what it was that they were reciting – about the content of their assigned psalm.

Now, in making those assignments we had discovered that the Book of Psalms encompasses almost every possible human emotion, positive and negative. There's joy, thanksgiving, praise, relief at being delivered from sickness or saved from one's enemies. But there is also anger, hatred, grief and the desire for bloodthirsty revenge on those who have harmed us. There is even what I immediately

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recognized as clinical depression – something that only someone who has experienced it personally can even begin to understand how terrible it is. Well, whoever wrote psalm 88 was clearly clinically depressed and he nailed it. We decided to keep that one for ourselves because there's no one we disliked enough to assign it to them.

Again, don't get me wrong. Most people loved their psalm, and were happy to wake up or go to bed with it. But some others hated theirs – and with good reason! So we made up a new rule. If you didn't like your psalm, you could go ahead and re-write it – reconstruct it if you will – to make it say what you wish the psalmist had said when he confronted whatever he was dealing with.

We even held a workshop on the psalms – their origin, their function, their unique poetic style, and how to approach the task of reconstructing them, while still being respectful of the impetus that drove the psalmist to write what he wrote in the first place. Thirty-six people – an auspicious number – came out one dark and stormy night to learn about the Book of Psalms and to share their experiences in attempting to creatively reconstruct the one they had been stuck with. The result was that about 30 psalms got reconstructed. And we began to learn how to make the second motto in our window – “Tradition is not only what we receive, it is also what we create” – into a reality.

So Yael, we want to thank you for the gift to us of The Psalms Project. A gift you gave us in the midst of that terrible time for you – a gift that showed us how to live out our ideals in a very concrete and practical way. Several people today have mentioned that The Psalms Project was one of West End Synagogue's “finest hours” because it showed us what we could do. It empowered us to be the best we could be, to live out the slogans that expressed our ideals, to become what we had always aspired to be. We learned that we could do whatever it takes, and that knowledge lives on in us. It has changed us as individuals. It has transformed us as a community that cares for its members in whatever way they need us to. And we have you, Yael, to thank for this.

*WES Members who would like a personal copy of “The Psalms Project” document may obtain one by contacting Don Menzi.

Now, six years later, you are about to embark on another journey – this time a happier one, to a place that has no weather, of all things! This time, however, we're staying here. But we have something to send with you that will help maintain the bond between us that was strengthened by the Psalms Project, even while we are thousands of miles apart.

I'd like to ask all those present who participated in the Psalms project to stand, please. (Note: About two-thirds of those present stood up.)

On behalf of the entire congregation of West End Synagogue, but especially on behalf of the more than 150 members who participated in the Psalms Project and who continue to be moved by it to this day, I'd like to present you with a copy of a printed document that I believe captures its essence. It includes all of the psalms that were reconstructed, with a Preface by Jane and me and an introduction by Mel Scult, plus Mark Nazimova's helpful notes on how to reconstruct liturgy, and other resources for the study of the psalms.

It also includes the truly wonderful *D'var Torah* that you gave at the end of the project when you thanked us and you told us the time had come for us to stop. Try reading that without a box of Kleenex!

Any time you're feeling down, Yael – and it's possible even in sunny San Diego that there will be down days – just open this document and read a few of the comments that were addressed to you back then, and recall the caring and the love for you that your people put into The Psalms Project. That should help bring you back up. (Just don't read the un-reconstructed version of Psalm 88 – or Psalm 101, for that matter.)

You already have a hand-made copy that is more beautiful than this one but not very practical to use. This new, expanded and improved version is easy to take apart and copy or use any way you see fit.*

So Yael, for the many ways that the Psalms Project transformed us then, and continues even now to transform us into our better selves, we thank you.

Project Ezra Expanding to Meet Year-Round Needs

Stan Samuels, Chair, Yad-Mordecai Social Action Com.

By now we are all familiar with Project Ezra, the social agency that serves the aged Jewish population on the Lower Eastside (www.projectezra.org) because of our donation of boxes of food for Passover. Project Ezra has pointed out to us that their clients' needs are not limited to eight days of the year. They are people in their upper eighties and nineties who struggle from one Social Security check to the next.

Project Ezra has established a *matan beseter* (silent gift) account at a local kosher food market that enables elders in need of help to obtain foods that they need. Project Ezra then pays the monthly bill, protecting the dignity and privacy of the elders.

Project Ezra is seeking to supplement that program with contributions of non-perishable kosher food that it can distribute to its client community. To

that end, the **Yad-Mordecai Social Action Committee recommends that the Synagogue's monthly food collections now be strictly kosher** with a visible symbol of kashruth on the label and that the collected foods go to Project Ezra.

Rather than the rotating food list that we have been following, it is asked that, when shopping, we **purchase an extra item or two** such as: hot or cold cereals, canned fruits and vegetables, jars of gefilte fish, jams and jellies, apple sauce, crackers, Parmalat, puddings and juice boxes. **The food items placed in the collection box in the Synagogue lobby will the go to Project Ezra.**

Our generosity will help those less fortunate in these difficult times and be most appreciated.

An Invitation from The Yachad Committee

Event: August Meeting of the WES Book Club
Date/Time: Sunday, August 8, 4pm
Where: Home of Mayris Webber, (Please RSVP)
Book: "The Ministry of Special Cases," by Nathan Englander

Here is an excerpt from The New York Times book review:

" . . . In "The Ministry of Special Cases," Nathan Englander might as well have airlifted Gimpel the Fool out of the shtetl and landed him in the broad avenues of Buenos Aires, where this novel is set. It is 1976, the outset of Argentina's Dirty War, in which nearly 30,000 students, union members and political opponents were disappeared by the military government.

Englander's Argentina is a mythological realm, ruled more by the gods of literature than by the generals of the junta. Englander names his protagonist Kaddish, after the Jewish prayer of mourning....Kaddish is an outsider's outsider, not just a Jew but a Jew in Argentina, and not just a Jew in Argentina, but a Jew in Argentina condescended to by his fellow Jews. . . . The more Kaddish fails, the more we love him. In the tradition of Jewish bumblers in literature, he seems protected by God. Or at least by the author.



Kabbalat Shabbat services are generally held every Friday at 6:30 PM.
 9:00 AM Torah Study and 10:00AM Shabbat services are held every Saturday.
 Please see online calendar at westendsynagogue.org for additional information.



July 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
<p>Have a Great Summer Everyone!</p>				1	2  6p Multigenerational Service	3 9a Torah Study  10a Shabbat Service	
4	5 4 th of July Holiday Office Closed	6	7 6:30p Social Action mtg. 8p Ritual Com. mtg	8	9  6:30p Kabbalat Shabbat Service	10 9a T.Study  10a Shabbat Service	
7	11	12	13 7:30p Bible Study	14 6:30p Exec. mtg. 7:30p Board mtg.	15	16  6:30p <i>Shirat haLev</i> Kabbalat Shabbat	17 9a T.Study  10a Shabbat Service
18	19 9p TISHA B'AV service	20	21	22 6	23  6:30p Kabbalat Shabbat Service Rabbi Audition	24 9a Torah Study  10a Shabbat Service	
25	26	27 7:30p Bible Study	28 6:30 YMAE mtg. 7:30p Israel Connections mtg.	29	30  6:30p Kabbalat Shabbat Service	31 9a Torah Study	

Culminating Tribute Event at Camp JRF Saturday, July 17th, 6-9pm

Camp JRF will celebrate Linda C. Jum for her ongoing dedication and inspiration. A light supper, havdalah service and special program will all honor Linda.

For details, reservations and to contribute contact mschneider@jrf.org

D'var Torah, *Acharei Mot* & *Kiddoshim*

Adam Ettelbrick, April 24, 2010

Shabbat Shalom and good morning. I am here to talk about my Torah portions; *Acharei Mot* and *Kiddoshim*. These portions talk about the rules of holiness, all of which were intended to create a society that reflects the idea of holiness through rituals, relationships and responsibility. Many of the rules were just and meaningful, such as “do not put a stumbling block before the blind and do not curse the deaf.” I also noticed a particularly just line: “you shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kin fairly.” To me this related to how difficult it can be for some people to ask for help when they need it, and how some offer pity instead of real assistance. It is incredible that something written so long ago could relate to things happening today.

As I read through the portions, what really caught my eye was the law of holiness stating, “you shall not lie with a man as you lie with a woman, it is an abomination.” As I read this line, I realized that it completely contradicted the morals that I had been raised to believe were part of my religion. I believed that the message most prominent in Judaism was to “love your neighbor as yourself,” which is another part of the holiness code of Parshat *Kiddoshim*. But after reading the passage about homosexuality, I was confused. If Judaism condemns homosexuality then how can a Jew who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender be themselves? What right does religion have to question a person's identity?

Over the past few years I have struggled with the question of God and faith. I'm not sure I know who or what God is, but I know that asking questions is one of the most important things in my religion.

Parshat *Kiddoshim* asks us to consider that all of us are holy because god's presence in the world is holy. Although barriers all over the world are broken, releasing tides of freedom and equality, there is still work to be done. There are still wars, greed and corrupt governments, hate crimes and terrible killings and outbreaks of violence. There is violence towards people who are considered different, and the attacker does not realize, that to their victim, they are different. There is not yet national marriage equality for gays and lesbians.

So, in times like this we have to look beyond the people who do not recognize the holiness in every human being. If one blindly follows their faith without questioning, without wondering, without discussing, is there really a point in being religious? If you put down those who are different than you claiming that the Bible says it is so, you might one day find somebody putting you down, saying that the Bible looks fondly upon their beliefs.

Religion is not meant to be a source of ideas condemning different people, but a community to rely on, somewhere to go when in need. Parshat *Kiddoshim* tells us to treat others the way we want to be treated.

There are those that look upon the parts of religion that will bring others down instead of looking upon religion and seeing the good things, and the things that say you

should help one another, and even help a stranger in need. What we have to realize is that if we condemn a fellow human being in the name of faith, then we are in fact estranging ourselves from that person and not helping them, or ourselves in the end. A religious ideal should be that each person can celebrate their own individuality while being part of a Jewish community.

As I become a Bar Mitzvah I am more interested in how my life relates to the traditions and similarities to those who came before me. As challenging as the verse in the Torah about homosexuality felt to me, I knew that I would wrestle with its meaning, challenge the text, and arrive at my own conclusion.

Before my Bar Mitzvah, I was not so connected to Judaism, but after reading *Acharei Mot* and *Kiddoshim* I realized that some of the morals and ethics I hold closely in my life are related to some of the laws of holiness in the texts. There are so many good things that are written in these portions, and we must be willing to dissect, and figure out the things that we might find offensive or prejudiced and see how they were meant.

I have come to the conclusion that the line that condemns homosexuality is just in place of something that might have been considered unholy because people were uneducated about it. Thousands of years ago people had very little knowledge about homosexuality, and so it was considered unholy, but it was also unheard of. If we find something, or glean some knowledge that we never had even comprehended before today, I guarantee that there would be those who would condemn it because it was new and different. Take this past presidential election. The whole Obama, Biden campaign was based on the idea of change. Several people disagreed with this idea of change because it was new and different, and it was even shunned by some communities for those reasons.

When I read something that was part of the holiness code in the Bible that I didn't believe, I dove into the text to figure out why it could say something so un-accepting in a text that holds the rules of holiness. I think that the line in Parshat *Kiddoshim* was written to teach the lesson to not take it as it comes but to challenge the status quo. Because if anybody in this room right now takes time to read portions *Acharei Mot* and *Kiddoshim*, they would find their own meaning in it. This is because these words about the rules of holiness allow for discussion, and for questioning. That is what truly makes it holy, that each individual can follow these rules of holiness, while also injecting a flare of their own holiness, the holiness that every human being holds.

I think that becoming a Bar Mitzvah has brought me closer to my religion, and to all the good ideas and teachings it offers. Thank you and Shabbat Shalom.

Contributions for 5/24/10 – 6/29/10

In Memory of . . .	From . . .
Aliza Lieberman	Minie Sunfist
Gladys Nussenbaum	Flo Segal
Anna Mersel	Muriel Berman
Isidur Siegel	Joseph Siegel
Diana Skulnik	Andrea Brecker & Alfred Redd
Alice Frank	Andrea Brecker & Alfred Redd
Shirley Lewin	Andrea Brecker & Alfred Redd
Susan May	Andrea Brecker & Alfred Redd
Susan May	Irene Hack
Susan May	Harriet Bograd & Ken Klein
Tatjana Gurvets	Harriet Bograd & Ken Klein
Shirley Lewin	Muriel Weisel
Tatjana Gurvets	Valerie Troyansky
Susan May	Valerie Troyansky

Contributions to West End Synagogue

Susan Prager Leah Kaplan
Arleen Slive & Rick Mastbrook
Ed Baum & Holly Wallace
Albert Slawsky Nancy & Jeffrey Heller
Ken Klein & Harriet Bograd
Carol Rosenthal & Frank Schneier

In Honor of . . .	From . . .
Rebecca Schorr Gurvets	Sharon Cinnamon & Eli Shapiro
Rebecca Schorr Gurvets	Valerie Troyansky
Rebecca Schorr Gurvets	Harriet Bograd & Ken Klein
David McDaniel	Harriet Bograd & Ken Klein
Adam Ettlbrick	Harriet Bograd & Ken Klein

Kiddush/Oneg Sponsors & Contributors

- Yvette Branson for the graduates
- Yvette Branson in honor of her daughter, Rena's graduation and Dva Torah
- Adam Pollack for the graduates
- Matthew Goodman & Deborah Ziffer Goodman
- Ruth Bowman in honor of her birthday
- Melanie Levin & Jerald Saltzman
- Dianne Burhenne & Judy Ribnick
- Andrea Brecker in honor of Alfred Redd for Father's Day

SHALOM, Sarah, and Good Luck!

Jerry Saltzman, Chair, Jewish Family Life & Learning Committee

In the academic world, spring is the season of change. This year, it will be so for Sarah Chandler, the Director of Jewish Family Life and Learning (JFLL). Sarah is leaving WES as of the end of June to become the Associate Director of Adamah at Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Connecticut. Adamah is a three-month leadership training program for Jewish young adults in their 20s, which integrates organic farming, sustainable living, Jewish learning, community building and contemplative spiritual practice. We congratulate Sarah and wish her all the best in her new endeavor.

Meanwhile, action is already underway to provide a smooth transition in time for the new school year and the High Holy Days. I am chairing a search committee, commissioned by our president Ed Baum, that is already

hard at work. The committee currently includes Margot Levin, Marion Mackles, Janet Rosenberg, Kate Sherman and Hazzan Ayelet Piatigorsky. Ed will also help guide the committee in an ex-officio capacity. As the new Rabbi comes on board, he will become involved in the search process as quickly as possible, particularly given his expertise in the area of innovative Jewish education. The committee would welcome your comments and questions.

We will, of course, keep the community posted as the search and selection process progresses. We are confident that the community will go from strength to strength, and we look forward to the next chapter in the educational life of the congregation.

Community News

*The West End Community extends its condolences to Noah Lewin, Michele Becker, Jonah and Ester Lewin on the death of Noah's mother, Shirley Lewin.
May her memory be for a blessing.*

*The West End Community extends its condolences to Joe Gurvets, Margie Schorr, Simon, Alex and Rebecca on the death of Joe's mother, Tatjana Gurvets.
May her memory be for a blessing.*

*The West End Community extends its condolences to Viviane Topp and her family on the death of her mother, Susan May.
May her memory be for a blessing.*

The Wire

Will Be
on Vacation
for the month of August
We'll be Back on Sept. 1st

West End Synagogue

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Marc J. Margolius

Ext 229 Hazzan
Ayelet Piatigorsky

Ext 220 Executive Director
Lila Pahl

Ext 222 Director of Jewish
Family Life and Learning

Ext 224 Katherine Cleary
Main Office

Ext 228 Bookkeeper
Nurit Schwarzbaum

If you are unsure of the appropriate extension, please dial 0 to reach the main office.

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WEST END SYNAGOGUE

A Reconstructionist Congregation

190 Amsterdam Avenue (at 69th Street)

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www.westendsynagogue.org

West End Welcomes

Its New Rabbi

Marc J. Margolius

Member, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation