

# Tri-Valley Cultural Jews:

Your East Bay Secular Humanistic Jewish Community

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<http://trivalleyculturaljews.wordpress.com/>



Affiliated with the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations

Our mission statement: "A Secular Humanistic community serving those who identify with the Jewish People through family, culture and history, rather than through religion."

## Upcoming Events for November 2011

**Wednesday, Nov. 2** – Planning meeting, 7:00 p.m. at 1817 Sinclair Drive, Pleasanton. All members welcome.

**Sunday, Nov. 6 and 20**: Jewish Culture School 10:30 a.m. in Castro Valley. We are actively looking for new students, particularly those 10 and older. We have a 2-year Bar/Bat Mitzvah program that is now accepting students. If you know anyone who has kids the right age and who might be interested, please let them know about Jewish Culture School!

**Saturday, November 12** – 4 pm - Family Havdalah and movie night at the King's home. Please come join us for challah, candle lighting, pizza and a movie. We are looking for a family friendly movie. This is a great event to come and meet some of the wonderful families with children in our community. Open to all; not just "families with children."

## Mark Your Calendars

**December 4** - Jewish Culture School in Castro Valley.

**December 18** – Chanukah party! We will again be collecting gifts for a family that is being resettled by Jewish Family Services. If you'd like to be part of this lovely project, please let us know so we can get you a list of what's needed. We also need someone who will drop the wrapped gifts off for us in Walnut Creek.

## Holiday Giving Program

Jewish Family and Children's Services/East Bay provides social services to hundreds of families and individuals from all walks of life in the community. This, in turn, strengthens their ability to help themselves. The Holiday Giving Program serves newcomer refugees and immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iran and Latin America who live in Contra Costa County, as well as families in need in Oakland. They provide a family "bio" with information on where the family is from, a bit of family background, and their specific gift requests. Members buy the items, and we wrap them together at our Chanukah party each year. We'll be told our family and given a list of needed items just before Thanksgiving.

## Message from the President

Graffiti. Last year I went to Ellis Island and this year I went to Angel Island. One of the things I noticed is that in both places they realized the historical significance of the writings people put on the walls. It's interesting that what was seen at the time as a mess that needed to be painted over, years later becomes a window into the lives, thoughts, and feelings of people struggling through the system on their way to America.

## Hello from CSJO

From all the reports and flyers I've received, this looks as though the New Year Festivals were celebrated in grand style by many of the CSJO communities! And I've shared much of this information with the rest of our communities. Keep up the good work!

School has started and I'm receiving reports about this, as well. If you would like to be on the CSJO Principals list, please send me your name and email address and you will be included.

FYI department: There are a number of Member Benefits that you may not be aware of. Sharing principal information is just one of a number. Here are more:

CSJO has a Video/CD library from which one can borrow either a video or a CD. The list can be found on our website at [www.csjo.org](http://www.csjo.org). Just click on Member benefits.

CSJO has digitized our archives. For the list of information, again visit our website and click on Member Benefits.

CSJO members can purchase CSJO's publications at a 20% discount. The publication list is on the CSJO website.

And lest you forget, CSJO communities that put ads in newspapers or magazines, and use the CSJO logo and the words "Affiliated with the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations", are eligible for up to \$100.00 refund, per annum. The ad needs to be sent to Joan Kurtz, CSJO treasurer, and the refund will be made.

As you can see, the CSJO website is a useful tool so please visit us at [www.csjo.org](http://www.csjo.org)  
I wish you continued success in your communal endeavors.

All the best,

Rifke Feinstein  
Executive Director, CSJO

## Thank you

Kevin Coren for spear-heading the Rosh Hashanah program, Levi Coren for his keynote presentation, and all who helped set-up and clean-up.

The workshop presenters for Yom Kippur: Ya'el Seid-Green, Deborah Grossman, Lora Shapiro and Sam Ruben.

The Frank/Wang family for opening their home for our sukkah raising.

Jamie Ireland for arranging the Angel Island trip.

## Sukkot

We had a lot of fun putting up the sukkah this year at the Frank/Wang home. And, of course, the food was delicious. After the sukkah was up, we held a sing-down with the theme "fruit" since sukkes is the holiday celebrating the fruit harvest. Here are some of the songs we came up with that include fruit in them: *One Bad Apple*, *Strawberry Fields Forever*, *Apples and Bananas*,

### **Mishpokha (family)**

**Happy November birthdays to:** David Austin, Molly Austin, Debra Witters, Judy Ganz, Zachary Lai, Matthew Looney, Bo Frank, Emma Greenberg, and Amy Greenberg.

If you have a yortseit you'd like us to remember, please let us know, 925-485-1049 or [CulturalJews@aol.com](mailto:CulturalJews@aol.com).

#### **Here's what's happening with our families:**

Matthew Looney helped the mayor cut the ribbon for the grand opening of the new Police Station/Permit Center for the city of San Ramon.

Levi Coren will be in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* with Brentwood Teen Theater opening October 28-Nov. 5. [www.brentwoodteentheater.com](http://www.brentwoodteentheater.com)

Michelle Coren made it to Level 4 State Championships in gymnastics. They will be held in Pleasanton on November 19-20.

Ella and Adam King will be in *The Nutcracker* together Dec. 16, 17, and 18. Here's the link to the dance company's website, where all dates are listed: [valleydancetheatre.com](http://valleydancetheatre.com). And here's the link to the Bankhead's ticket sales: <http://www.livermoreperformingarts.org/>

Wendy Berenson will be attending the CSJO board meeting in Detroit the weekend of Nov 12<sup>th</sup>

We know our talented, civic-minded, and caring families are out there doing more great stuff, so let us know so we can share!

### **Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur**

Rosh Hashanah was lovely and especially nice to have at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Livermore, the place we had our start, 6 years ago, with a Rosh Hashanah gathering. Our ad-hoc holiday band and chorus led the singing, and we enjoyed the honey cake baked by our Jewish Culture School students.

We continued our new Yom Kippur tradition of having workshops during the afternoon. This year, between our observance and the memorial, we had two workshop sessions with two different workshops in each. We also collected for several charities, including the Sulpher Creek Nature Center, Ve'ahavta, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, and the scholarship fund for the JWest conference of Secular, Humanistic and Cultural Jews that will be held here in the Bay Area in August.

Here are some reports from the workshops:

"What is Jewish Art: Jewish Artists or Jewish Content?" reported by Solomon Ireland

This lively workshop led by Lora Shapiro, a Jewish artist herself who also teaches art, engaged all the attendees, young and old. Ms. Shapiro presented an interactive slideshow that tried to span the history of Jewish paintings (both in content and in conception). She took us on a magical journey through the ages, going back to 17th c. Flemish painter Rembrandt (not a Jew), to 19th c. French Impressionist master Camille Pissarro (surprisingly a Caribbean Jew--who knew?), to 20th c. Masters who really left their "Mark"--famous artists such as Chagall and Rothko. The title question of the workshop, which came up again at the end of the presentation, was roundly answered by the attendees as being defined more by the artist than by the content, since it's the artist's perspective that creates the work and not the subject's. (Continued on next page.)

## Yom Kippur (continued)

Ethical Shopping reported by Tom Green

Sam Ruben, a Jeremiah Fellow and active member of Progressive Jewish Alliance, led a discussion about factors to consider in ethical shopping. The group discussed labor policies, including not only wages, but working conditions and access to health care, carbon footprints, sustainable production practices, and the political and social positions of companies when making decisions about shopping. Making shopping decisions in the best interest of social justice and the environment are not always easy or clear cut!

Why Community reported by Tom Green

Ya'el Seid-Green, organizer extraordinaire, led a discussion about the nature of secular Jewish communities. The group discussed the rationale for and definition of secular Jewish communities and other communities focused on culture and social activism. The group also discussed the commonalities and differences between virtual and physical community organizations, and the nature of community in the internet age.

A Jewish Poem reported by Noah King

Deborah Grossman, the former poet laureate of Pleasanton, met with us and asked what we thought a Jewish poem was. Is it a poem with a Jewish theme? Is it a poem written by a Jew? We discussed our thoughts, and then she read us a poem called *The Turning* by Phillip Levine, the poet laureate of the United States:

### ***The Turning***

Unknown faces in the street  
And winter coming on. I  
Stand in the last moments of  
The city, no more a child,  
Only a man, -- one who has  
Looked upon his own nakedness  
Without shame, and in defeat  
Has seen nothing to bless.  
Touched once, like a plum, I turned  
Rotten in the meat, or like  
The plum blossom I never  
Saw, hard at the edges, burned  
At the first entrance of life,  
And so endured, unreckoned,  
Untaken, with nothing to give.  
The first Jew was God; the second  
Denied him; I am alive.

She asked if we thought that was a Jewish poem, and we shared our thoughts. Then she read one of her own poems; something she had written after being in Chile during last year's earthquake, and then she read a few other poems written by Jewish poets. We talked for a while about each, and then she shared some ideas about how to write poetry. Write about what you experience with your senses, include metaphors and wordplay, make connections, and try to end with some sort of surprise. Then we had about ten minutes to write our own poems. When we were finished, people who wanted to share their poems had a chance to, and they were all unique, touching, and beautiful.

Noah King's thoughts: "I remembered a time when I was 12, and my parents enrolled me in an extremely religious summer camp. One Friday night we had a sleepover field trip. They took a bunch of us reform Jews to Fairfax, and we observed Shabbat in the home and synagogue of an orthodox family. It was my first experience with orthodox Jews. For whatever reason, it popped into my head as I started to write my poem." (Continued)



## Yom Kippur (continued)

I remember men and women,  
stoic as a garden of statues,  
seated and separated by a short accordion screen.  
Weak, but strong, it divided the room.  
And I, reform among orthodox, wondering at its purpose.

An hour before, a stranger in an unknown house,  
the smell of roasting chicken rushing over me like a wave,  
I listened to the list of things we would not do.  
“It is Shabbat,” said the man wearing black.  
Serious, Stoic, Unyielding, and Confident.  
Saying things that, even as a boy, I knew sounded wrong,  
but with the conviction of one who has the world behind him.  
We will not turn on the lights.  
We will not use the phone.  
Or this.  
Or that.

And now, here in this strange little shul,  
witnessing the crooked little screen and wondering.... why?  
What does this mean?  
What does this mean?  
What does this prove?  
And even then knowing my answer.... nothing.

If you have any feedback or thoughts, I'd love to hear them. Noah King: [maluba2@yahoo.com](mailto:maluba2@yahoo.com)

## This Month in Jewish History

The 5<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan, this year on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, is the birthday (in 1880) of a problematic figure in Israeli history and in Secular Jewish history. Ze'ev Jabotinsky, founder of the right-wing Betar youth movement and the Irgun terrorist organization (or alternatively Irgun freedom fighter organization), was the leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement, a far-right exclusivist movement before and during the founding of the political Israeli state. It began as a self-defense group, the Haganah, during the Arab riots of 1920 in Jerusalem. Jabotinsky was asked to form the group since he had been a founder of the Jewish battalions serving with the British army during WWI to oust the Ottomans from the area. After the failure of the Haganah during the 1929 Arab riots, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Irgun. During the Arab riots of 1936-39, the two organizations worked together, but the Irgun was not happy about the policy of restraint, and in 1937, when Ben Gurion accepted the idea of partition, the Revisionist party rejected it outright. After the murder of a number of Jews by Arabs, the Irgun carried out a violent reprisal and adopted the position that “one who does not wish to be defeated must attack.” While Jabotinsky’s fascist politics and hatred of Arabs are dismaying and repugnant to most of us, his secularism was strong and he resisted every attempt by the religious to gain power. A difficult person to extol as a secular leader, isn’t he? If you’re interested in the history of the Irgun, there’s a long and fascinating article at <http://www.etzel.org.il/english/index.html>.

## Who We Are

President Kevin Coren 925-240-5612  
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Phyllis Looney 925-803-0574  
Jamie Ireland 510-888-1404  
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Phyllis Looney 925-803-0574  
Ed Looney 925-803-0574  
Webmasters Noah King 925-371-8585  
Solomon Ireland 510-888-1404  
JCS Teachers Judith Seid, Jamie Ireland  
Phone Chair Phyllis Looney  
Family Shabbat/Havdalah Coordinator –  
Jamie Ireland  
Publicity Kristie Wang. 925-596-0416  
Movie Coordinator Wendy Berenson 925-829-0554

## Interesting Website

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-court-grants-author-s-request-to-register-without-religion-1.387571>

And don't forget to check [culturaljudaism.org](http://culturaljudaism.org) regularly!

## Angel Island Field Trip

JCS families and friends had a beautiful field trip to Angel Island on October 23. If you have never been, take the time to go visit this fascinating piece of California history right in our own backyard. Our day started by meeting at the ferry dock in Oakland. For the kids and adults alike, riding the ferry was an adventure in itself. Once on the island, we hiked up the hill, 144 dirt and wooden steps, and then followed the road to the immigration station. We met our guide, Richard Kalken, and we were given an excellent history of the island, back to 1775 when it was first discovered and named by Juan Manuel de Ayala. The Miwoks had of course used the island 2500 years before he came along! From the steps overlooking the ocean, we walked up to the dormitory building and were shown all the rooms the self-guided tour doesn't allow you to visit. We learned that over 300,000 Chinese came through the immigration station from 1910 to 1940, in addition to tens of thousands of other immigrants from all over the world. Unfortunately, they were not welcomed and the discrimination against the Chinese that began in the 1850's continued. After our tour, we had lunch and compared Chinese sayings and Jewish sayings, many of which are similar, and learned about the Jews in China. All in all, it was a fun and educational day.



### Poem inscribed on the wall.

#### *Random Thoughts Deep at Night*

*In the quiet of night, I heard, faintly, the whistling of wind,  
The forms and shadows saddened me; upon seeing the landscape,  
I composed a poem.  
The floating clouds, the fog, darken the sky.  
The moon shines faintly as the insects chirp.  
Grief and bitterness entwined are heaven sent.  
The sad person sits alone, leaning by a window.*

*Written by Yee of Taishan*

## In The Community

This November, the Jewish Federation of the East Bay's Partnership for Israel invites you to three upcoming lectures that will focus on contemporary and historic relations between the Jewish world, the Arab nations, and Islam.

On **Thursday, November 3**, at 7:30 p.m., Barry Rubin will explore the Arab Spring's bearing on Israel and how those changes will affect peace-making in the region. This "Conversation with Israeli Journalist Barry Rubin" will take place at a private home in Berkeley. Rubin, a senior fellow at the Interdisciplinary Center's International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, is also editor of the journal *Turkish Studies* and the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA) and the former deputy director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. He has been a guest on *This Week with David Brinkley*, *Nightline*, *Face the Nation*, *The MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour*, *The Larry King Show*, as well as on CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC. His articles have appeared frequently in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The New Republic*.

On **Monday, November 7** at 7:30 p.m., foreign policy analyst Jonathan Spyer will talk on his newest book *The Transforming Fire*, which is a trenchant analysis of the rise of revolutionary, extremist Islamism and which has been described as one of the best books on the subject in the past decade. His talk will be held at Congregation Beth Emek, 3400 Nevada Court in Pleasanton, the co-sponsor of the event. Spyer received his Ph.D. at the London School of Economics, and served on the Government Press Office in Jerusalem. He is a frequent guest on the BBC, National Public Radio, Israel Channel 1 and Al Jazeera. Currently, he is a Senior Research Fellow at the Global Research International Affairs Center in Herzliya, Israel.

The third lecture will feature nationally recognized scholar Rabbi Reuven Firestone, Ph.D., professor of medieval Judaism and Islam at Hebrew Union College, and founder and co-director of the Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement in Los Angeles. He will speak on *The Abrahamic Family Feud: Its Aftershocks for Judaism and Islam* on **Sunday, November 13** at 4:00 p.m. at Congregation B'nai Shalom, 74 Eckley Lane, in Walnut Creek. The author of numerous books and over 80 articles on Islam, Judaism and their relationship to other religions, Firestone received his Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic studies from New York University. His talk is the first of four events on Islam and its relationship to Judaism which are being sponsored by Beth Chaim Congregation, Congregation B'nai Shalom, Congregation B'nai Tikvah and Temple Isaiah in partnership with the Jewish Federation and the Contra Costa JCC.

To register for an event, call the Jewish Federation of the East Bay at 510.318.6453 or email [riva@jfed.org](mailto:riva@jfed.org).

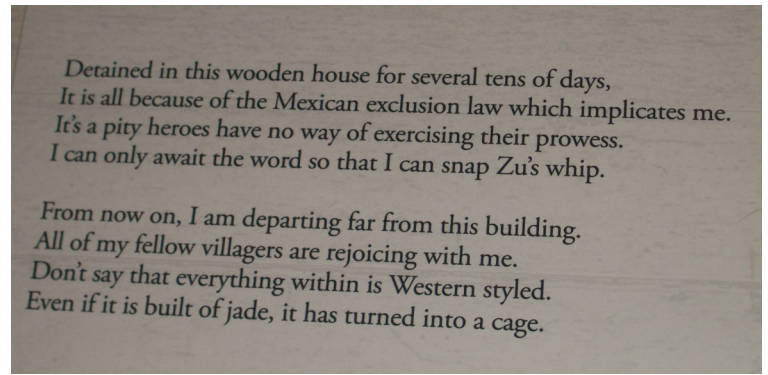
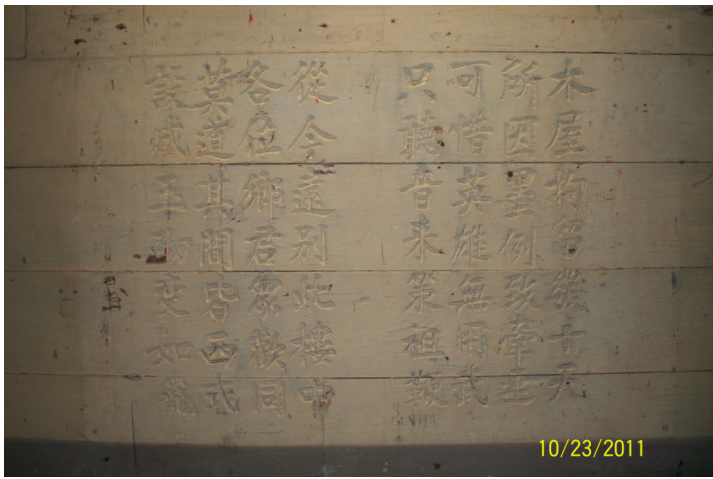
Internationally renowned klezmer (and classical) clarinetist **David Krakauer** will offer a workshop on **Monday, November 14**, 7:00pm, presented by KlezCalifornia and the 27th Jewish Music Festival. Tickets: \$50 for participants, \$20 for auditors (without instruments): 415.789.7679, [info@klezcalifornia.org](mailto:info@klezcalifornia.org).

A four-session mini-course on Sephardic/Ladino songs is starting in Berkeley **Sun., Nov 6** from 7-9 PM at a location near Ashby BART to be announced, and will run four **Sundays, Nov. 6, 13, 20, 27**.

Romancero! The folk ballads and songs of the Sephardic Jews of Turkey, Greece, Morocco, Syria, and the Balkans are some of the most beautiful melodies in the Jewish tradition. We will trace their origins, and learn as many as time permits. Sheet music and recordings will be provided. Cost is \$100.

Please send to: Mark Levy, PO Box 559, Felton, CA 95018. Please register before Oct. 15th, 2011 if possible!  
[Mark Levy Mitzvahmus@aol.com](mailto:Mark Levy Mitzvahmus@aol.com) (831) 338-7283





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