

## **Sukkat Shalom 2013 Fall Newsletter Article - Cantor's Notes - Adam Davis**

I am thrilled to join the Congregation as its Cantorial Soloist this year. I have already had the great privilege to begin studying with some of the congregation's youth in preparation for their Bnei Mitzvot this coming year and to leading our community in prayer together with Rabbi Gordon on Shabbat. I look forward to doing so again on the High Holy Days with our choir under Michael Querio's direction.

My Jewish journey began as a young boy when I would sing along with our congregation's Rabbi and Cantor. This was not uncommon as our congregation was particularly participatory when it came to communal singing. Not until my Freshman year in college when I spent my first High Holidays away from home at my roommate's congregation, the very formal Plum Street Synagogue, did I realize it was not the norm.

I was a rarity in that I enjoyed going to Hebrew school and religious services at the Synagogue. Perhaps this was because I shared a Hebrew name with the Abraham of the Torah, whose open tent inspired the name of Sukkat Shalom. More likely it was because my family created an environment where exploring Jewish identity was not only encouraged, but enjoyable, a factor only enhanced by the experience itself. Our congregation and its clergy gave me the chance to sing and experience music in a way that connected me to something vastly larger and yet deeply personal.

In this way, I was made to feel like I belonged, that I had friends at the synagogue and that I had a role to play in worship and cultural life. I performed with the choir, did the Purim spiel and of course sang along with the Cantor and congregation on Shabbat mornings whenever I could. Following my Bar Mitzvah, I even signed up to tutor younger students preparing for their own celebration..

Though these experiences, I developed a powerful relationship with Judaism and synagogue life, but also with the clergy and members of the congregation. Everyone was so warm and happy to see one another having just davened (prayed) together. It was an infectious, relentlessly affirmative feeling.

I am so fortunate to have had these early, positive experiences that allowed me to feel comfortable with my Jewish identity. They gave me permission to continue to learn and explore it throughout my life and taught me my Jewish identity was entirely mine to create and that I could take it with me anywhere I went.

And so, Judaism and Jewish music have been as much my home as anywhere I have chosen to live and any community of faith I in which I've participated. In fact, they have been the leading factor in those decisions throughout the years. It has not been as important to me that I be the one singing so much as the community be one where singing together is important. Over the years I've also learned that through shared song and spirit, I could create that same inspiring

experience for others that I had so many years earlier. I can help people young and old enjoy our heritage, and perhaps even help them take a few more steps on their Jewish journey.

I came to love music and the arts through the lens of my early experiences in congregational life. I've found that through music and song, I can create a sense of community for those seeking a spiritual home. This is why my work here at Sukkat Shalom is so meaningful to me. I am grateful to serve our congregation in these cantorial and educational capacities not just because I love to sing, but because of the opportunity to inspire members of our community and help them learn, discover and grow through the songs we sing together.

Music can bring us together regardless of background, personal beliefs or familiarity with Hebrew. A melody is a way for us to share our intensely personal nature of our own voice to connect with the Eternal and with one another. When we sing together, we weave anew the fabric of the welcoming tent of peace, the Sukkat Shalom, that Abraham and Sarah pitched thousands of years ago. Each voice is a beautiful, welcomed strand in the woof and warp of the communal loom weaving the cloth covering our spiritual home.

When I sing, I am incredibly humbled when people remark on the vocal gift with which I am blessed. When we all sing prayers together, however, we can all remark on how blessed we are to have one another in the warm, spiritual community we can call home. I look forward to singing with you over the High Holy Days and throughout the year at Sukkat Shalom.