



Upcoming Events

9/7 Sunday, 11:30 AM
Lunch at our
Chavurah House
to meet the Board of
the Jewish Federation
of Central California

9/14 Sunday,
5:30 Potluck Dinner
6:30 Discussion about
Selichot at our
Chavurah House

9/22 7:00 PM Erev
Rosh HaShanah
Services at the United
Methodist Church

9/23 10:00 AM Rosh
HaShanah Services at
the United Methodist
Church

The Maggid

C O N G R E G A T I O N E T Z C H A I M

P O BOX 3752 MERCED CA 95344

S E P T E M B E R 2 0 2 5



Notes from Rabbi Berlin

On September 23, my spouse and I will have the joy of meeting many of you at Erev Rosh Hashanah services. Yet the High Holy Days journey does not truly begin that evening. Jewish tradition teaches that it begins a full month earlier, on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* - the first day of the Hebrew month of Elul. By the time we arrive at Rosh Hashanah, we are meant to have already begun the work of *teshuvah* - of returning, reconnecting, and repairing relationships with ourselves, our loved ones, and our community.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur create sacred space for turning toward the Divine. But as our *machzor* (High Holiday prayer book) reminds us, we cannot seek forgiveness from Adonai until we have sought forgiveness from one another. While Judaism urges us to make amends as soon as we realize we have caused harm, Elul provides us with a concentrated season of soul-work - a kind of spiritual boot-camp. Just as an athlete might hear a coach's voice spurring them on, we hear the shofar each morning of Elul (except Shabbat), awakening us to the work before us.

That work unfolds in two phases:

1. Self-reflection

We ask ourselves:

- Where have I fallen short this past year?
 - Whom do I need to forgive, and from whom do I need to seek forgiveness?
 - What habits or patterns do I want to release before the new year begins?
- How might I return more fully to my best self, to my community, and to God?

2. Reaching out to others

- We seek reconciliation with those we know we have wronged.
 - We open the door for those who have wronged us to make amends.
- With those closest to us, we invite honest "relationship check-ups," asking what we could do better, what we might let go of, and what we should do more often.

Many resources can support us in this process - some even offer daily prompts to guide reflection and writing:

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/psalm-27/id1572512486>

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/writing-and-reflection-prompts-elul/>

<https://www.derekh.org/>

<https://www.jewishstudioproject.org/daily-creative-prompts-for-elul-2024>

<https://hebrewcollege.edu/elultogether/>

<https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/332139?lang=bi>

However we choose to enter Elul, may this month deepen our relationships, open our hearts, and lift our spirits as we prepare to welcome the new year together.

Meet the Rabbi

Andi Berlin

Rabbi Berlin is delighted to be with Congregation Etz Chaim to celebrate the 5786 High Holidays. She brings 25 years of experience leading services that are both inspirational and meaningful.

Rabbi Berlin began her career at Temple Sinai in Oakland, California, where she became known as a powerful preacher, dynamic teacher, and compassionate pastoral provider. After 13 years with Sinai, she shifted her focus to family and launched a corporate consulting firm specializing in transition management and conflict facilitation. Although she always intended to return to the pulpit (what she considers her true calling), she discovered a passion for this work as well—and found a way to bring both worlds together through serving as an Interim Rabbi.

She recently completed her first interim position with Congregation Shomrei Torah in Santa Rosa, California, a profoundly meaningful year in which she was embraced with open arms and lasting gratitude. Her next interim role begins part-time in October, and full-time in January. Even while running her firm, Rabbi Berlin continued to be invited to pulpits around the Bay Area, and for six consecutive years she was honored to serve as the High Holiday Guest Rabbi for Anshe Chesed, Fairmount Temple in Cleveland, where an initial one-year invitation blossomed into six years of preaching and service leading.

Rabbi Berlin believes services should be joyful, thoughtful, and inspiring. While she brings humor and warmth to the bimah, she also has deep respect for our ancient liturgy and modern prayers. She and her spouse, Jon, look forward to weaving themselves into the fabric of our community, even for the short time they are with us.

*Remembering is
a message from
the heart*



IN MEMORIAM



PLEASE INCLUDE THE NAME(S) OF MY
DEPARTED LOVED ONES DURING YIZKOR/MEMORIAL SERVICE

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
(please print phonetically)

A YIZKOR/MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTION TO CONGREGATION ETZ CHAIM IS ENCLOSED

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE

President's Notes

After a long, quiet summer with few events and no Friday night services, I am looking forward to seeing more of our Jewish and Jewish-adjacent friends and family again at Etz Chaim events this fall. Today was the first day of classes where I work, and the happy, excited energy of anticipation is almost palpable. I hope we are able to bring a little of that excitement and student energy to the congregation this year.

At our general meeting last May, feedback from members included requests that we do more outside of Merced – that we go to Jewish events and locations such as museums within a day-trip drive of our city. Along those lines, past Etz Chaim President Carol Madruga spent some time this past year at events in Fresno organized by the Jewish Federation of Central California. She has worked with them to bring their board to Merced on September 7th to tell us about activities and programs they can bring to Merced. If you can come to this lunch and very useful discussion, please RSVP to Carol at cookie52@sbcglobal.net ASAP (by Sept. 1, ideally!). The Etz Chaim board is working to offer more cultural and educational opportunities in the upcoming year, as requested!

In the August Maggid, I mentioned that I was going to tell you more about our new visiting rabbi, Rabbi Andi Berlin, in this issue. However, better than what I can offer, we have a Meet the Rabbi page instead to provide you more details. The board committee that interviewed potential rabbis really liked her approach and energy. We think you will also like her and appreciate the religious services she leads for our community! Please give her a very warm welcome this Rosh Hashanah.

This year we will be returning to the comfortable and well-lit Fireside Room at United Methodist Church of Merced (899 Yosemite Parkway) for all of our High Holy Day Services, beginning with Erev Rosh Hashanah on the 22nd. You can prepare for the holidays with the resources provided by Rabbi Berlin on the first page, and we'll also have some printed resources for the interested at our September 14 potluck at the Chavurah House. I plan to be there and hope to see you.

B'shalom,
Belinda Braunstein

Tributes

Anytime you are celebrating a special event, let us share in your joy. We welcome tributes in honor or in memory of loved ones, births, weddings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and honoring special events. Send your Tributes to PO Box 3752 Merced CA 95344

Rachel Hadley - In loving memory of her grandfather Fred Moore
Rachel Hadley - In loving memory of Marcia Rosenbaum, who always sent Tributes in memory of her family members

May their memories be a blessing

זכרונם לברכה

High Holy Days Services 2025/5786

Congregation Etz Chaim
Fireside Room, United Methodist Church
899 Yosemite Parkway, Merced **
LED BY RABBI ANDI BERLIN

ROSH HASHANAH

MONDAY
SEPTEMBER 22

7:00 p.m. Evening Service

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 23

10:00 a.m. Morning Torah Service
followed by a Tashlich Service
on the Bridge at Rahilly Park,
and no host Luncheon with the Rabbi

YOM KIPPUR

WEDNESDAY
OCTOBER 1

7:00 p.m. Kol Nidre Service

THURSDAY
OCTOBER 2

10:00 a.m. Morning Torah Service
1:00 p.m. Healing Service
2:00 p.m. Open Discussion
4:00 p.m. Lesson
5:30 p.m. Yizkor (Memorial Service)
6:30 p.m. Neila (Closing Service)
7:30 p.m. Havdalah, Kiddush and
Break-the-Fast Potluck

- It is traditional at this time of year to make donations in memory of loved ones. Please fill out a **Yizkor Card**. You may mail your card and donation to P.O. Box 3752, Merced 95344-3752 or give to Rachel Hadley or Belinda Braunstein no later than Kol Nidre. Other donations will also be gratefully accepted throughout the High Holy Days.
** Please contact Greg Friedman for ZOOM link information
*** For our **Break-the-Fast**, please bring a main dish, and either a side dish or dessert - enough to feed your group heartily (these people will be hungry!)
- Tzedakah (food or clothing) for the less privileged in our community is welcome at any service



The Jewish Federation of Central California

<https://www.jewishfederationcentralcalifornia.org/>

Be part of something special!

Together WE do Extra-Ordinary Things!



THE STRENGTH OF A PEOPLE
THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

As Congregation Etz Chaim is very small we generally have to travel to Modesto, Stockton or Fresno (or even the Bay Area or Southern California) to participate with a large community of Jews. The Jewish Federation of Central California would like to inform us of all the various Jewish activities and programs they are willing to help us bring to Merced.

Please join us
at our Chavurah House on
Sunday, September 7th at 11:30
to eat lunch together, meet the Board
of the Jewish Federation of Central California,
and discuss what they can do for our Community.

*Please RSVP by September 1st to Carol Madruga
(cookie52@sbcglobal.net)*

To ensure we have enough food, and tables set up.

Welcome to our Puzzle Page
Sudoku

		4				6		
	5		2		9		7	
	9		7		5		4	
		9				1		
				1				
			6		4			
		5		7		8		
	4		8		1		3	
3		8		9		4		2

2025/ 2026 Annual Dues are DUE

\$500.00 per Year per Family Unit

Please mail your Dues payment to:

Congregation Etz Chaim

P O Box 3752

Merced CA 95344

Other Planned Community Events

September 9 - Lunch with the Board of the Jewish Federation of Central California

September 22 - Erev Rosh Hashanah Services at the UMC in their Fireside Room

September 23 - Rosh Hashanah Services at the UMC in their Fireside Room

October 1 - Erev Yom Kippur/ Kol Nidre Services at the UMC in their Fireside Room

October 2 - Yom Kippur Services at the UMC in their Fireside Room

May - Fall

Lay Led Kabbalat Shabbat Services when announced

September Yahrtzeits

Norman Ambrosini
Henry Bernstein
Harry Friedberg
Leon Ginsberg
Barbara Goldman
Lee Kamson
Gerald Kaplan
Judith Goodstein Kleitman
Mel Kramer
Alexander Labbok
Fred Moore
Phillip Pansky
Morton N. Rosenbaum
Ann Rotbart
Samuel Salzberg
Marty Victor
Steve Wight

Birthdays

Judith Salzberg Kiriara	9/1
Alicia Ambrosini	9/5
Peggy Shainberg	9/6
Belinda Braunstein	9/16
Carol Madruga	9/17



Campership

Amazon.com donates to our Campership Fund when we make purchases by accessing them through the Amazon link on our webpage
(www.jewishmerced.org)

Please try to use it!



*Those we remember in the
year of their passing:*

*Honora Helene Falk 12/2024
Stefanie Lotker 01/2025
Raissa Moore 05/2025*

זכרונם לברכה

May their memories be a blessing



John Hofmann and Greg Friedman have donated gallons of blood in the Congregation's name.
Any Congregant can access blood via the credit accumulated under the Congregation's name.