

# The Maggid May 2026

## Congregation Etz Chaim

P O Box 3752  
Merced CA 95344



Counting the Omer – What is an Omer anyway?

Well, an Omer is one tenth of a Ephah... If that isn't enough of an explanation, a quick and easy one is: one sheaf. One sheaf is a bundle of grain - let's call it barley or wheat. In theory, one sheaf can feed one person for one day, and that was the Manna (portion) each Israelite was allotted each day while wandering in the desert.

There are 7 weeks (49 days) between Passover and Shavuoth. Passover celebrates the exodus from Egypt, and Shavuoth celebrates the receiving of the Torah. We begin counting the Omer the second night of Passover, and Shavuoth begins the day after we've counted 49 days. The Omer period is one of preparation and anticipation for the giving of the Torah. Observant Jews treat these 7 weeks similar to a period of mourning, in that they abstain from haircuts, shaving, listening to live music, and attending weddings, parties and dinners with dancing.

Lag B'Omer is the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the counting of the Omer, and it is treated as a day of celebration, with a respite from the semi mourning restrictions of the Omer period. The day commemorates the anniversary of Rabbi Akiva's respite from the plague, and/ or Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's passing. Israelis celebrate with bonfires and picnics, and many people get haircuts, and even weddings are performed on Lag B'Omer. Many people visit the burial site of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron.

# President's Message from Belinda Braunstein

I am very happy to end my term of President with some very good news: we will have a student rabbi for the upcoming year! A toast! A Cheer! Our student rabbi, Joy will be coming to us from the Bay Area once per month as well as for High Holy Days, We'll want to meet her before the September 11<sup>th</sup> Rosh HaShannah service, so the Etz Chaim Board will plan a Friday night service or other event with her in August to get acquainted. Be on the lookout for this summer event along with a movie night and swim party.

So who is on the new board? Here is the slate, which requires your approval at the May 3<sup>rd</sup> General Meeting following our annual Bagel Brunch & Potluck:

**President (1<sup>st</sup> of 2-year term):** Rich Kleitman

**Vice President:** Carol Madruga

**Secretary:** Cathy Hofmann

**Treasurer:** Rachel Hadley

**Members at large in 1<sup>st</sup> year of 2-year term:**

Henry Fultz, Greg Friedman, Belinda Braunstein

**Members at large in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of 2-year term:**

Sheryl Wight, Ardene Shaeffer, John Kirihara

Any member of the congregation is welcome to join the board. The easiest way to start is as a member at large, providing your valuable perspective at monthly board meetings. We can't know you're interested unless you tell us, so let Rich or Carol know if you might consider joining as one of the three new members at large. In the meantime, your input is requested at this year's General Meeting as we discuss the upcoming year.

Every event we have, from monthly shabbat potlucks to seders and activities in the community, takes a team of volunteers: people to take RSVPs, to cook, to clean the patio, to set up and take down folding tables and chairs, to wash dishes, to take out the trash, to make reservations, to deliver challah... the list continues. I wholeheartedly thank the board of Etz Chaim for volunteering again and again... and again. And I thank the members of this wonderful little congregation for making this volunteer work such a joy.

B'shalom,

Belinda Braunstein

*Please join us on*  
Sunday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, for our  
**Annual Membership Meeting,  
Board Elections, and Brunch**

10:30 AM

on the Patio of our Chavurah House.  
Coffee, bagels, lox, and cream cheese  
will be provided.

Potluck all other brunch items.

*The Slate of Officers is listed in the Maggid  
and will be provided at the meeting.*

Please RSVP to Belinda Braunstein

[bbraunstein@ucmerced.edu](mailto:bbraunstein@ucmerced.edu) so we know

how many to set up for.



# Activities

## Please plan to join us:

Friday, June 19, 6:30 pm Potluck dinner followed by  
7:30 pm Lay Led Kabbalat Shabbat Services,  
at our Chavurah House

### Other Upcoming Community Events

May 3 - Annual Membership Meeting and 2026/ 2027 Board Elections

July 11- Movie and Ice Cream Night – at our Chavurah House

August 1 - Swim Party at the Kirihara residence

## **2025/ 2026 Annual Dues are DUE**

*Our Fiscal Year is July - June*

*\$500.00 per Year per Family Unit*

*Please mail your 2025/ 2026 Dues payment to:*

*Congregation Etz Chaim*

*P O Box 3752*

*Merced CA 95344*

For those who prefer, we do accept monthly Dues payments year round

### *June - August*

*(Schedule changes should be anticipated – however we'll strive for)*

3rd Fridays: 6:30 Potluck and 7:30 Lay Led Kabbalat Shabbat Services  
at our Chavurah House on Parsons Ave



*Please send your tributes to:  
Congregation Etz Chaim, P O Box 3752, Merced, CA 95344*

***Congregation Etz Chaim gratefully acknowledges the following tributes:***

John Hofmann in loving memory of his wife Mary Hofmann

Rachel Hadley in loving memory of her mother Raissa Moore

Rachel Hadley in loving memory of her good friend Mary Hofmann

*May their memories be a blessing זכרונם לברכה*

Sheryl Wight in honor of the marriage of Leah Wight and Eric Crawford

Ardene Shaeffer in honor of the marriage of Leah Wight and Eric Crawford

Rachel Hadley in honor of the marriage of Leah Wight and Eric Crawford

# Puzzle Page Sudoku

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

# More Beautiful than Before...



## May Yahrzeits

Diane Amussen  
Mortimer Cohen  
Francine Conae  
John Cornejo  
Mary Hofmann  
LeRoy Katz  
Jenny Kleeblatt  
Elliott Lewis  
Chaya Lieberman  
Maureen Miller  
Raissa Moore  
Max Osband  
Abraham Reiter  
Rose Robinson  
Willard Robinson

## May Birthdays

Noah Guidone	5/6
Howard Shainberg	5/10
Rena Taddol	5/10
Marlowe Shaeffer	5/12
Dempsey Hofmann	5/14
Josh Shaeffer	5/23
Mathew Madruga	5/25
Sarah Giventer-Kaber	5/28
Mathilde Hofmann Mook	5/31

## *In the year of their passing*

Mary Kaplan (01- 2026)  
Daniel Goodstein (09- 2025)

**זכרונם לברכה**

*May their memories be a blessing*

## Sudoku Solution

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