

Congregation Nahalat Shalom “Jewel of a Shul”

by Rabbi Deborah Brin / Nahalat Shalom Members and Staff

In 1982, a small group of young families, feminists, gays, and lesbians were in quest of a welcoming place to practice inclusive Judaism. In early 1980s America, this was indeed a grand quest. Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, one of the first women to be ordained and a pioneer in nonsexist, ecologically responsible Jewish peace culture, became the founding rabbi.

The congregation settled on its name: Nahalat Shalom, “Inheritance of Peace.” As a Jewish Renewal congregation, there is shared commitment to a holistic and creative transformation of Jewish liturgy and law, one that engages body, mind, and spirit while valuing diversity and honoring each individual’s spiritual journey.

In its early years, Nahalat Shalom was a congregation of wanderers; services were held in backyards, parks, community centers, and various churches. Eventually, it was decided a permanent space was sorely needed and, in 2000, an old Baptist church in the heart of Albuquerque’s historic North Valley was purchased. Many congregants rolled up their sleeves and worked hard to claim the space and make it Nahalat’s own.

A NEW ERA

In 2006, Nahalat Shalom welcomed Deborah Brin as its new spiritual leader. Rabbi Brin is one of the first 100 women rabbis to be ordained and is in the first generation of lesbian rabbis. She holds a bachelor’s degree in religious studies from

Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota; a master’s degree in pastoral counseling from La Salle University in Philadelphia; and a master of Hebrew letters and ordination from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Wyncote, Pennsylvania. On June 6, 2010, Rabbi Brin received an honorary doctorate from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College for 25 years of service to the Jewish community.

Her career within the rabbinate is rich and varied (geriatric chaplain, hospice chaplain, college chaplain and pulpit rabbi) and has taken her to Philadelphia; Toronto; Grinnell, Iowa; and Albuquerque. While in Toronto, she helped establish a community mikveh. She is a founding member of the Women of the Wall group, fighting for the right of women to pray openly

at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem; she led the first prayer service of Women at the Wall on December 1, 1988. Since moving to Albuquerque, she started a Hevra Kaddisha Society, is the founding president of the Rabbinical and Cantorial Association of Albuquerque (RACA), and the founding president of the interfaith group, Albuquerque Religious and Clergy United.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Transformation of the facilities, reflecting a Southwest aesthetic, is ongoing. A serene, adobe-walled courtyard with fruit trees, grapes, and Biblical trees such as fig, pomegranate, and almond has replaced asphalt. The sanctuary doors, replicas of Jewish temple doors in Spain, were handcrafted by local designer and

master artisan Hershel Weiss. The Klezmer band performs where the old baptismal pool once stood. Generous patrons provided a library that is well stocked by donors with an excellent collection of Hebrew and Jewish-themed volumes. A once-barren storage area is now a bright, welcoming art gallery that hosts regular exhibitions.



Rabbi Deborah Brin

Diverse programming and services at the synagogue center around the changing needs and interests of congregants and, when possible, community interests. As an example, the New Mexico Jewish Genealogical Society holds its community-wide monthly meeting at the synagogue, and these gatherings are appealing to a variety of individuals from the Albuquerque area and beyond.

MUSIC AND DANCE

The Nahalat Shalom Community Klezmer Band (NSCKB), formed in 1995, is one of the world’s oldest and largest (23 members and growing) intergenerational community klezmer mixed orchestras. The band is taught and directed by Nahalat Shalom’s cantorial soloist and music director Beth Cohen, a highly experienced music teacher to students of all ages, world music and classical music performer, and band and orchestra director. Over the years, the NSCKB has learned and performed a repertoire of exciting, lively, and beautiful klezmer, Jewish, Israeli, Sephardic and Eastern European dance music.

The NSCKB performs professionally throughout New Mexico, at Nahalat

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*Replicas of Jewish Temple Doors in Spain
Handcrafted by Hershel Weiss*

Jewel of a Shul *(continued from p. 6)*

Shalom's services and events, public and private concerts and *simchas* (joyous celebrations). The NSCKB also hosts an "open to all" klezmer jam at Nahalat Shalom's monthly "Der Freylekher Shabbes," which is usually held on the first Friday of each month.

Alavados Holy Days band is comprised of Beth Cohen and congregation members. Since 1999, Alavados has provided beautiful accompaniment for congregational prayers, songs, and dances during Rosh Hashanah, Kol Nidre, Yom Kippur, S'lichot, Der Freylekher Shabbes, Chanukkah Simchat Shabbat, Tu B'shevat, Purim, Shavuot services, and other Nahalat Shalom services and special events, including the Festival Djudeo-Espanyol.

Nahalat Shalom's Yiddish dance troupe, Rikud, also leads traditional Jewish dances to the music of these great bands.

The annual KlezmerQuerque is a three-day festival of concerts, workshops, and dance parties featuring "klezmer," which is the traditional dance and instrumental music based in the ancient wedding ceremonies of the Eastern European Jewish people. The festival presents a variety of events for all ages and abilities. World-recognized klezmer guest artists are brought to Albuquerque to play, teach, and continue the evolution of klezmer.

**HERITAGE AND OUTREACH:
HOME FOR CRYPTO JEWS**

Nahalat Shalom is an inclusive congregation that affirms and supports the discovery and exploration of our diverse identities and heritages through worship, learning, dialogue, joyful celebrations, community involvement, arts, music, and dance. Services reflect Sephardic and Ashkenazic heritages, e.g., allowable foods for both groups at Passover.

The synagogue's commitment to creating a home for the "crypto" or "hidden" Jews of New Mexico, begun in the mid-1980s by founding Rabbi Emeritus Lynn Got-

lieb, continues today under the leadership of Rabbi Deborah Brin.

Rabbi Lynn recognized the breadth of this population that existed outside the established Jewish institutions, and incorporated Ladino prayer and melody into Nahalat Shalom's services. This developed into a regular Sephardic Shabbat service led by Lorenzo (Lawrence) Dominguez, may he rest in peace, and Maria Sanchez. Lorenzo, whose Hebrew name was Levi ben Macario, was well known for his ground-breaking radio program, "Mi Seferino," aired on KUNM-FM in 1999-2000. He chanted the entire Friday evening service, accompanying himself on guitar and later on oud. Throughout the 1990s, outreach to the crypto-Jewish community resulted in return ceremonies, poetry readings, music, and Sephardic festivals organized by Lorenzo.

Beth Cohen, Nahalat Shalom's cantorial soloist, worked closely with Lorenzo and Rabbi Lynn to form the synagogue's High Holy Days band, Alavados. Beth continues to enrich the Sephardic experience with her vast knowledge and love of its music and has played a central role in the development of Sephardic and crypto-Jewish programming.

Lorenzo Dominguez's tragic death in 2003 dealt the congregation a terrible blow. His presence was huge, and his visibility and leadership as a crypto-Jew blazed a wide path for others to follow in discovering and celebrating their Jewish identity and finding a welcoming community.

Upon her arrival in 2006, Rabbi Brin embraced this aspect of Nahalat Shalom. Monthly Sephardic/crypto-Jewish Shabbat dinners continue, as well as the annual Festival Djudeo-Espanyol, which seeks to gather and unite the members of the oldest members of the Jewish communities of New Mexico and, indeed, the United States. Many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Iberian Jews who had converted to Christianity in order to escape the

clutches of the Spanish Inquisition found their way to what is now New Mexico, then the northern reach of the Spanish Empire in the "new" world.

Descendants of these hidden Jews are today coming to grips with the effects of centuries of secrecy, hiding, isolation, and fear. The festival is committed to bringing together this community that has been historically divided and hidden, using the arts as a means of stimulating hidden cultural memory. Art is presented in the historical/cultural/spiritual context of the Sephardic Jews of the Southwest and serves an educational function, as well as aiding the establishment and re-enforcement of a Jewish identity that is uniquely New Mexican. Educating the more visible and established Jewish community about the rich culture of the Sephardic and crypto-Jews, who sometimes are not accepted as Jews, creates an awareness that helps them feel comfortable among Jews in Albuquerque.

The 2015 Festival Djudeo-Espanyol was held 29-31 May, with the theme "Sephardic Culture Across the Centuries: History, Poetry, and Song." The featured speaker was folklorist and editor Enrique R. Lamadrid, UNM distinguished professor emeritus of Spanish. Other events included: dramatic reading of poetry from medieval Spain, directed by Salomé Martínez Lutz; expressive writing workshop; personal story-telling; enchilada lunch; and "Café Sepharad," featuring tapas and vegetarian paella, with Sephardic music performed by Stephanie Sofie Shefia Cohen, Neil Manuel Frau-Cortes, Sheila Fox, and Don Shapiro. Yearly festival information can be found at nahalatshalom.org.

In summary, Nahalat Shalom describes itself as a warm, welcoming place for individuals and families of "all shapes and sizes." ✧

Nahalat Shalom is located in Albuquerque at 3606 Rio Grande Blvd. NW, NahalatShalom.org, 505-323-8227