

# YourHaus

A publication of Lehrhaus Judaica

lehrhaus.org

## Rededicating and Revisoning Your Haus

By Rabbi Jeremy S. Morrison, Executive Director

*Chanukah* is the perfect time to reflect on Lehrhaus Judaica's role as a leader in Jewish learning in the Bay Area.

The Hebrew root of the word *Chanukah* — *chet, nun, kaf* — means "dedication," and our winter festival of light celebrates the rededication of the Second Temple following the Hasmoneans' victory over the Seleucids, in the second century BCE. The root of the word *Chanukah* is also the same as the Hebrew word for "education," *chinuch*. A year ago, as I described in the first edition of *YourHaus*, we initiated a visioning effort to determine how we should evolve as an institution best positioned to meet the educational and community-building needs of our quickly changing Jewish community. The staff and Board of Directors of Lehrhaus Judaica are now in the midst of a rededication process of our own.

### The Basic Building Block of Judaism Is a Relationship

We are committed to continuing to provide the high-quality learning opportunities for which we've long been known. Simultaneously, we envision the development of a network of small, local groups of participants who we will support in the creation of Jewish experiences, according to the participants' desired structures and content. This effort will build upon the successful experiences of our Kevah Groups and Text Study Circles participants.

Flexibility, depth of learning, relational, dialogical: these are all hallmarks of Lehrhaus Judaica and its work, and are the most important elements that have made us compelling to our present participants. We are doubling down on these values in order to reach out to unaffiliated Jews, to develop a shared sense of ownership, and to collaborate with them in the creation of Jewish experiences. We will launch this initiative in the East Bay during 2019.

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Additionally, we are in the process of lowering the thresholds to participation by ensuring multiple entry points into Lehrhaus experiences. We will focus not only on intellectual offerings, but also upon the creation of opportunities that engage the whole person and the full complement of human concerns.

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Lehrhaus  
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As we begin to reach out to unaffiliated Jews with limited, Jewish social networks who are interested in developing a sense of ownership of their Judaism, we are also “reaching in” — striving to develop a deeper sense of community among the predominant constituency of Boomers and older adults that we already successfully serve. This strategy, of partnering directly with people, is aligned with the shifting realities of both Jewish institutions and populations in the Bay Area. As the 2018 Portrait of Bay Area Jewish Life and Communities asserts:

- A relatively small, highly engaged affiliated population is offset by a much larger unaffiliated population that is under the age of 45.
- Since the previous study in 2011, the Jewish population of the East Bay has grown by 33%. The population of San Francisco has diminished by a similar percentage.
- Bay Area Jews are more educated, increasingly interfaith (or “inter-group” according to the study’s label), and more diverse in their ethnicities (25% of Bay Area Jewish households are multi-ethnic or multi-racial), than any other American Jewish community.

### Generational Change

Lehrhaus Judaica is a unique and decentralized organization that has been serving the Bay Area with lifelong Jewish learning for 44 years. Our diverse activities include seminars; language study; Kevah Groups; learning circles engaging with Talmud, Zohar, and Jewish Thought; daylong public events; and educational tours throughout the world. We have thrived as an organization because of our willingness to experiment, to respond to changes in Jewish communal life, and to not become overly guided by a sense of tradition. In a period of destabilization of long-standing institutions such as Federations and synagogues, and being centered in a region with



Jeremy Morrison was selected to the 2018 ELI Talks Speaker Fellowship.

shifting patterns of affiliation and ever diversifying definitions of Jewish identity and practice, we continue to adapt our pedagogic models and evolve our mission in order to deepen our impact as a leader in Jewish learning in the Bay Area.

The present modes through which adults learn and seek Jewish meaning are very different from 15 years ago, and Lehrhaus is committed to leading the construction of a vibrant Bay Area Jewish community for future generations. We will focus less on providing content or programs and more on implementing relational approaches to organizing Jewish communities of meaning for an increasingly diversified population with a complexity of needs and interests.



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### Rededicating Our Haus With a New Name

When we affix *m’zuzot* to the doorframes of our houses, we perform a ritual called *chanukat habayit* (“The dedication of a house”). Often, this ritual signals new beginnings, or a new stage of an individual’s or a family’s life. We have entered a new stage of Lehrhaus Judaica’s “life.” Excited about our future, we are in the process of determining a new name for our organization that is both easier to understand and connotes who we are and what we do. I welcome your feedback and ideas ([jeremy@lehrhaus.org](mailto:jeremy@lehrhaus.org)) as we reimagine, and rededicate, our House of Learning: a house open to all, a place in which we create meaningful relationships through learning and practice.

# Kevah Groups Thrive at Lehrhaus: Create Your Own Learning Community

By Jaimie Baxter, Chief Operating Officer



Do you have friends or family who you've always wanted to make a point of seeing more regularly? Is there a particular topic you want to dive into? Have you been wishing you could create your own custom experience for you and your friends? If so, let us help you get started! Email us at [kevahgroups@lehrhaus.org](mailto:kevahgroups@lehrhaus.org), and we will walk you through the process of launching your own Kevah Group.

Lehrhaus is thrilled to welcome 20 Kevah Groups into our diverse program offerings. With the addition of the Kevah Groups, Lehrhaus is further poised to build vibrant Jewish communities that gather in people's homes to engage in meaningful conversations rooted in Jewish texts. In a nutshell, a Kevah Group is a group of friends and peers that come together regularly to engage in learning facilitated by an educator who is an expert in that topic. Many participants find that through engaging in this practice together, they come to know each other and the material in new ways.

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*“What I love about my Kevah Group is that we examine timely topics through the lens of ancient wisdom, finding lessons in Jewish texts to guide us in our modern day struggles. Being in a room full of people who are engaging together in seeking meaning is incredibly powerful.”*

— C.J., 27, San Francisco,  
Berenstein Cares Kevah Group with Raffi Magarik

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The customized element of Kevah Groups allows us to reach people in the places they already gather, and serve those who might be interested in exploring topics that are not offered through our regular course catalog. Groups consist of people who are already connected to some degree, which helps take the learning to a deeper and more intimate level. The breadth of our topic offerings is as wide and varied as the imaginations of our participants and educators. Our talented and experienced educators tailor each session to each group's particular curiosities, and guide them through a process of learning that illuminates new ways of seeing.

# Talmud Circles Feel Like Family

By Debbie Rosenfeld-Caparaz, Director of Communications

Ethan Kuniyoshi, a Palo Alto resident, has been immersed in Talmud study for eight years as an original member of the Lehrhaus Talmud Circles.

Ethan was introduced to Talmud study when he spent a summer in Jerusalem at the Conservative Yeshiva. Talmud Circles, which has eight groups throughout the Bay Area, enriches Ethan's life and helps him set a good example for his children to always make time for learning.

While it's hard for him to recreate the level of focus he experienced engaging with Talmud study in Israel, Ethan is happy to have found a welcoming community of dedicated learners through Lehrhaus.

"The Palo Alto Talmud Circle feels like a family – many of us have been together for years," Kuniyoshi said. "As new people join, the group does a great job of welcoming them in while at the same time connecting with the people who've been a part of the group."

Ethan and his wife, Monica, and their children, Avivah and Michal, are active members of Congregation Kol Emeth in Palo Alto. Monthly Talmud study at the Oshman Family JCC has expanded Ethan's community connections.

"One of the things I really like about Talmud Circles is that it brings people together from other communities who I wouldn't necessarily see," Kuniyoshi said.

When Lehrhaus launched its Talmud Circles program in 2011-12, Ethan and Monica both enrolled to continue their education together. Monica left their circle after a few years when the couple welcomed their first child.

Approximately 100 participants annually enroll in Talmud Circles to study a common curriculum produced by our high quality team of faculty which includes Prof. Deena Aranoff of the Graduate Theological Union, and Rabbis Dorothy Richman and Jennifer Clayman.

Ethan looks forward to returning yearly to reconnect with his circle, and to explore how the rabbis of the Talmud interpreted their inherited textual traditions and responded to the challenges of their times.

"Each session, when I sit in class, I'm filled with ideas, and I'm inspired to learn more," Kuniyoshi said.



Rabbi Peretz Wolf-Prusan, our Chief Program Officer and the Palo Alto Talmud Circle educator since the program's inception, has been a good match for Ethan.

"Peretz seems like a kindred spirit traveling along the path of life," Kuniyoshi explained. "He inspires me to be the best person I can be – never losing sight of what matters."

Ethan's fellow Talmud participants also motivate him during chevruta study (partner study). Each person brings a wealth of knowledge and adds to his understanding of the material.

A busy principal consultant for a technology firm, Ethan is committed to Talmud Circles because he knows if he doesn't make time for study, he won't do it.

"Studying Talmud helps put current Jewish issues in a historical context," Kuniyoshi added. "The fact that I have some fluency with how the rabbis disagreed with one another makes it easier to see how flexible our tradition is."

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# Lehrhaus Judaica's Journey to the Balkans: Crossroads of Four Cultures

*By Fred Rosenbaum, Founding Director Emeritus and  
Traveling Scholar*

For two weeks in August, our group of 29 enthusiastic travelers toured Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, a region unsurpassed in Europe for its lush forests and towering mountains, shimmering lakes and spectacular waterfalls.

However, we were captivated even more by the dramatic history and complex culture of this land — rarely the destination of a Jewish tour. For half a millennium, its highly diverse populace — Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish — has experienced the extremes of harmony and hatred, creativity and destruction. It has straddled the line between East and West, modernity and tradition, European influences and Asian folkways.

Perhaps we saw this confluence of civilizations best in the historic center of fabled Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital. At one point along the lively main pedestrian street, the words "Meeting of Cultures" were prominently inscribed across the pavement.

Looking west, we encountered a city of grand, turn-of-the-century architecture reminiscent of Vienna, where our journey had begun. Turning around and looking east, we beheld what appeared to be a town full of Turkish and Persian bazaars.



Throughout our study tour, we explored the deep Jewish roots in the Balkans, including the oldest Sephardi synagogue in the world, located in the Pearl of the Adriatic, Dubrovnik.

Of course, the Holocaust devastated Jewish life in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and we pondered the immense loss at Jasenovac, one of the most brutal concentration camps in all of Nazi-occupied Europe.

Yet the greatly diminished Jewish communities of this area continue to survive, and in three cities, we met with their leaders to learn first hand the challenges they have faced since the breakup of Yugoslavia. The role played by Sarajevo Jewry during the agonizing, four-year-long siege of that city in the early 1990s was especially heartening.

They turned their only synagogue into a haven, providing Muslim, Croat, Serb, and Jew alike food, shelter, and medical care. La Benvolencija, as the endeavor was called, even helped evacuate over a thousand people of all ages and backgrounds. One Muslim woman they brought out of the war zone had been designated a righteous gentile by Yad Vashem. During the Holocaust, she saved Jews by hiding them in her home. Now the Jewish community saved her.

In the synagogue that had been the island of refuge, we met with Jews who had led and chronicled the humanitarian effort, another achievement of Sarajevo Jewry, five-centuries old. And we learned that the Jewish community remains a valued thread in the multiethnic fabric of the city today.

## Meet Your Lehrhaus Leaders:

# Lisa Douglass Pearlmutter

## Board Member

**Tell us a little about yourself, where you grew up, and what you're doing now?**

I grew up just outside of Philadelphia in Montgomery County, popularly referred to as the Main Line. My husband, Steve, and I live in San Francisco with our two sons, Ari (age 10) and Ethan (age 9).

After undergraduate studies in French and advertising from Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Communications, earning an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh, and living in Dallas, Texas, and Greensboro, North Carolina, I landed in San Francisco.

Ready to try something new and de-stress from a job, I went on a trip to Israel with the Jewish community and ever since then have been actively engaged with the Jewish community. My involvement includes the Young Adult Division (YAD) of the San Francisco Federation, Kevah, The Hub (a Jewish art group created by Amy Tobin), the American Committee of Weitzman Institute of Science (ACWIS), and Brandeis Hillel Day School. I continue to bring my Jewish sensibilities to volunteer work at our sons' elementary school.

Additionally, I've pursued my passion for consumer insights for the past 18 years, helping companies understand what their customers think of their products and services.

**What attracted you to Lehrhaus Judaica?**

I loved that Lehrhaus was at the precipice of doing something new and that there was the opportunity to build engagement with new and younger target audiences. Plus, to be part of this change side-by-side with Howard Simon and Marc Dollinger, with whom I had the privilege of working with on the Brandeis Hillel Board, and Fred Rosenbaum was irresistible. I am thrilled to be working with Rabbi Jeremy Morrison moving forward to help bring in new faces and new perspectives.

**Why is Lehrhaus' mission important to you?**

What I appreciate about Lehrhaus is its dedication to opening its doors to anyone willing to learn, discuss and practice. Lehrhaus creates that space I was missing when I first headed out on my own, providing a connection to Judaism and to a community.





*"I love the Kevah Groups program! My group has been studying together for 7 years. Kevah Groups provide knowledge, meaning, and community to participants. Speaking as a former Kevah Board member and ongoing financial supporter, I am delighted that Lehrhaus Judaica incorporated Kevah into the diversity of its programs. I am excited by Rabbi Morrison's vision of a Bay Area network of small groups building meaningful connections between participants through deep and relevant study. It's wonderful that Kevah has found a new home."*

— Eileen Ruby, Lehrhaus and Kevah Groups Supporter

**Thank you for building community with us!**



Please keep Lehrhaus in mind for your end-of-year giving plans.

Visit [lehrhaus.org](http://lehrhaus.org) to make a donation. We appreciate your support!



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## **China: A Jewish Journey to an Ancient Civilization and Contemporary Powerhouse**

Beijing | Tianjin | Harbin | Xian | Nanjing | Shanghai

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Encounter some of the most breathtaking attractions on earth: the Great Wall, the imperial palaces in the Forbidden City, the shrines in the Temple of Heaven, and the ancient 8,000 Terracotta Warriors in Xian. Contemporary China is no less astounding: the world's fastest high-speed train, busiest ports, longest bridges, and highest dams. Witness how the Chinese are remaking their lives amidst this head-spinning change.

In Harbin, Manchuria, enter the largest synagogue in East Asia, built by Russian Jews seeking a new life in the early 20th century, even as this frontier region was fought over by the Great Powers. In Nanjing, visit the memorial to the 1937 massacre carried out by the Japanese and ponder the similarities between the genocidal occupation of China and Nazi Germany's subjugation of Eastern Europe. In Shanghai, walk through the former ghetto, a refuge during the Holocaust for almost 25,000 Jews.

Tour scholars: Rabbi Jeremy S. Morrison, Ph.D. and Fred Rosenbaum

Tour leader: Ariel Goldstein

*In partnership with Tiyul Jewish Journeys*

**Contact Ariel for more details at  
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