



TCJRC Celebrates: Tribute & Transformation

Remarks by Sherry Stern & Kohenet Riv Shapiro
August 9, 2026



Kohenet Riv Shapiro, Terry Gips, Sherry Stern



ALEPH Executive Director Michelle W. Malkin speaks

Sherry Stern: Thank you, Michelle, for flying in to join us today. Thank you, Terry, for your kind words. I really want to honor you all as well as any one of you could be standing here with me. I thank all of you who came today from many faiths and backgrounds. You help us come together as One with God.

I have been a Jewish spiritual seeker for most of my life. I belonged to a Temple in various cities mainly participating in Reform and some Conservative synagogues.

When my husband, Steven Snyder, helped form the Ruach music band at Bet Shalom Congregation in Minnetonka, I loved the lively music. I resonated with the rhythm and vibrations and moved and danced in my spot. When I looked around to see other congregants, I saw I was usually the only one moving.

So, to my surprise when we visited Temple Adath Or for the first time in Southeast Florida for a Friday night service in April 2018, I was in shock. People were not only moving to the music but dancing around the entire sanctuary. The tunes were unknown to me but resonated deeply within. People that I just met were welcoming and hugging me and so happy. The service was upbeat and to them this was just a normal Shabbos.

The same thing happened when I returned and I came to understand that this is part of the meaning of Jewish Renewal. A feeling of Oneness with God, people, the earth, animals, everything! We who are in the image of God are part of God's oneness.

Since then, I have encompassed a joyful loving approach to living, interpreting Chasidism and Kabbalah with a modern perspective listening inside to the still small voice of God and realizing it through Tikkun Olam.

When I returned to Minneapolis in the spring of 2019, I looked to see what existed that was involved with Jewish Renewal and that is how I found Terry Gips and Julie Dean. I began to write a monthly newsletter to inform people what they could attend and where, that in some way related to the spirit of Jewish Renewal. We also had some of our own activities. With Laurie Savran's help we registered with the State of MN as Twin Cities Jewish Renewal Community and with Terry Gips's assistance we became a Network Community in November 2019 with ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. We grew from there.

Similar to Julie's idea that Mussar learning belongs everywhere, our goal became to incorporate Jewish mysticism in every Jewish Temple and organization in the Twin Cities. It has been so joyful to work with many of you here and I would like to recognize and thank you.

First, my honey, Steven (wave), who has kept me sane as I balanced multiple deadlines events, the monthly newsletter and marketing each month. You always had a listening ear and good advice and I love you.

I would like to thank our present and past board members, Terry Gips, Julie Dean, Laurie Savran, Kohenet Sharon Jaffee, Bob Rubinyi, Jamie Skog-Burke and Kohenet Riv Shapiro. I appreciated your leadership and guidance throughout my seven years with Twin Cities Jewish Renewal Community. Julie and Sharon thank you for your wonderful early contributions and leadership. Terry, you kept us in line with keeping things eco-kosher, highlighting our involvement with the earth and of course sustainability as you are the expert in that, and guided us toward funding opportunities to incorporate bigger events.

Laurie, as our treasurer you have been my go-to person for anything financial or legal and for maintaining our relationship with ALEPH. Thank you for taking the time for our many discussions to think things through and to keep us on budget.

Jamie, thank you for volunteering your expertise. It came in handy both with your wealth of Judaic knowledge to help plan services for Shabbat and a leading a Passover Seder, your social media creativity to design and post flyers and your wonderful cooking skills and presentation for delicious meals during events. TCJRC Board members please rise and be recognized.



*Sherry and community partner
Cantor Rachel Stock-Spilker, Mt. Zion Temple*



*Sherry and TCJRC Board Member
Laurie Savran*



Sherry Stern

Our programs would not have happened without you our partners and leaders. I want to thank you for the many hours you diligently and lovingly prepared to lead us incorporating Jewish mysticism at your Temple or organization. Partners, I offer sincere thanks for your generosity through grants such as with St. Paul Jewish Federation, ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, J-Pride, etc. or by your Temple or Organization offering us meeting space, security assistance, and often personnel for registration or marketing, and custodial help with setup logistics and food.

Thank you, our Program leaders. You often volunteered your wealth of knowledge to prepare materials and lead highly interactive experiences with exuberance that made an impact on attendees. You were able to juggle those new to Judaism with those having long time experience, to those who were not Jewish but interested to participate as part of the oneness with God and everyone. If you have been one of our Partners or Program leaders, would you please stand to be recognized.

Now everyone please stand if you are able. Please give yourself a pat on the back.

I want to thank you, our attendees and those of you who have supported me over the years. You are the heart of what we do and why we do it. You came to our events, you spread the word, you became members, you supported us financially, you volunteered to help us with setup, take down, sign in, find locations, monitor doors, etc. Your enthusiasm to participate in our Spiritual book group or our many creative or musical events kept me motivated to continue to do more. Thank you for your commitment to us. I appreciate and love you! Please be seated.

Kohenet Riv Shapiro starts our next TCJRC chapter and is the ideal person to do this. We could not be more excited!

Riv, you have been an inspirational hands-on leader for TCJRC events, a community collaborator, and an advisor for us over the years. Your innovative creative ideas, patience, reliability, and feeling of Oneness with all people will bode well in our ever-changing environment.

Riv's conglomerate of education and skills is a perfect match to lead us. They have studied at the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies in Israel with Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian students focusing on peacebuilding through environmental leadership. As an ordained Kohenet, Hebrew Priestess, who embodies earth-based and ritual-focused leadership, Riv can lead Shabbat/festivals, officiate life-cycle events, and provide spiritual counseling.

They have used their skills as an artist and educator with several innovative Jewish organizations including Wilderness Torah and served as the Producer and later Director of Jewish Arts & Culture at the Minnesota JCC.

Riv was a Rising Song Fellow and has been composing liturgical music since 2014. This May 2026, Riv completed their Master of Fine Arts in Visual Studies at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Riv is passionate about making Jewish wisdom accessible, inclusive and liberatory. We offer a small gift to launch their new role as Managing Director of Twin Cities Jewish Renewal Community. Please help me welcome Riv to share their vision with you!

Kohenet Riv Shapiro:

Thank you, Sherry.
It's incredible to think that someone I've known since I was five would go on to discover Renewal as an adult and make this position possible for me. Thank you for your generous work.



Kohenet Riv Shapiro speaks and leads community in song

When I was 14, I found myself at a crossroads that went on to define my spiritual and professional life. I wanted to go deeper into the joy and ruach (spirit) and depth of tradition I was finding in Judaism, but I discovered that as a patrilineal Jew, I was not accepted in more observant spaces. This painful rejection led me to seek spaces that could offer me access to that depth and also accept me as a queer nonbinary woman of patrilineal descent.

Seven years later, I had all but forgotten about this quest. I had found spiritual nourishment through yoga and east asian philosophies of nondualism, and I thought that's how it would be. My Jewish life would be meaningful, but separate from the source of my deep mystical spiritual nourishment. Or, if I wanted to pray outside or weave embodiment into my practice, I would have to do so alone. That's when I found myself at a shabbos table in Tzfat hosted by strangers who just happened to be a Renewal rabbi and rebbetzin from Berkeley.

In an instant as they blessed the challah together (an egalitarian gesture I had not seen in any observant homes in Israel), these worlds I thought to be separate collided and merged. As we sat down to an eco-kosher meal together, I heard my companions talk about GMOs and Jewish yoga and care for the earth. Every now and then someone would say "baruch Hashem" and my brain struggled to comprehend how this could be - in my mind, only REALLY religious Jews praised the divine this way. Could one really be a devoted Jew and hold these egalitarian values and perspectives?

That shabbos meal changed everything for me. When I returned to the states after my study abroad semester, I googled "Twin Cities Jewish Renewal". Thanks to many of the folks in the room, especially Terry Gips, I found something! I started attending the small but nourishing monthly Shabbat services and soon met Kohenet Sharon Jaffe who showed me there was even another layer of myself that could be expressed in Renewal Judaism. When I graduated from Macalester that spring, community members like Sharon and Julie Dean encouraged me to migrate to the Bay Area in California to immerse myself in the Jewish Renewal movement and meet my peers.

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I'd like share just a few moments I carry with me from my seven years in the Bay:

Intergenerational Purim dance parties on the Jewish urban farm, the same farm where I volunteered harvesting food for free distribution and celebrated Shabbat and made lifelong friends.

Ecstatic Jewish prayer, whether in a synagogue or in the desert as we welcomed Shabbat during Passover

Torah study in an art studio, where whatever happens on the page opens meaning from the text I studied in chevrotah.

Gathering around a fire at twilight as one by one, the youth I've mentored for two years rise and state their intention for their all night solo fire, placing a prayer in the central fire and heading into the forest to re-emerge transformed.

These experiences and the relationships I formed with youth, parents, teachers, elders and peers have fundamentally transformed my perception of what is possible for Jewish life in diaspora.

I always knew I was going to California not just for myself, but to bring it back to the land my Jewish ancestors have called home for over 120 years. So when the board approached me this spring, I knew it was time.

This is what I envision for Jewish life in the Twin Cities:

- community with a shared commitment to cultivating **curiosity and compassion**, knowing we may disagree on things but all want a world built on love and that requires our spiritual practice
- A **village of intergenerational relationships**, elders and youngers that supports each other through the various cycles of life
- **nature-based Judaism**, mysticism, song, mindfulness, embodied practice, and creativity as spiritual inquiry
- **ritual spaces to process grief**, rage, and fear about climate crisis, war, fascism where we cultivate our knowing of interconnection and love for the world
- **Jewish resources for spiritual development for all seekers**, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, ability, politics

In this next chapter we will continue the excellent work that Sherry devoted herself to. We'll continue to partner with diverse Jewish institutions to bring the spirit of Renewal to everyone who can benefit from it. We'll offer earth-based holiday programming, our monthly virtual spiritual book group, and connection to virtual events through ALEPH.

And we'll begin three new programs: a young adult affinity space for Jewish mindfulness practice, a monthly Rosh Chodesh gathering, and an intergenerational council fire where we'll gather to speak from the heart and listen from the heart, witnessing each other in the wild journey of being human.

As we grow, I dream of expanding our offerings of nature-based life cycle support, developing programs like the middle school rite of passage mentorship I did in California and spaces for seniors to process what it means to become an initiated elder. I hope these programs and teachings can serve those who are affiliated and those who aren't, strengthening our entire community.

As I look around, my heart is so full from your generosity to be here with us today. It feels hard to ask for more - I know what it's like to feel financially scarce, and I know how many deeply important and worthy projects and people are asking for your support. I'm going to ask for your generosity anyway and here's why:

I believe in the world we can build together

I believe healing is possible for our people and all peoples

I believe the way we gather matters

I believe that we are equipped to make a lasting impact, if we are supported

I know because I've seen it and I've lived it.

I'm living it right now. Relationships I developed with elders are leading me into my soul work, my true service here.

We have the resources to move through this harrowing time on Earth, in Judaism and in our openness to embracing wisdom from other sources. We can cultivate this community that connects us to the earth, our ancestors, and those to come, calling forth the gifts each of us have to offer this moment.

We deserve to live in that world and our children deserve it. And who can imagine what they will do with that kind of fertile soil.

I'm asking for whatever you have to give - money, time, connections, abundance of your garden, land we can gather on, list goes on and I can't wait to discover what I haven't even imagined yet. I experienced this winter how much we truly have when we all give ourselves to the web, when we ask for what we need and give what we have.

The board and I can't do this alone. Sherry's incredible investment of her time and generosity with her resources have made this next chapter possible, but in order to have a future we do need your financial support.

What can you give today? Can you double that? Or can you make it annual or better yet monthly? What other forms of abundance are pouring out of you? On the back of pledge forms you'll find a space to signup as a volunteer.

Take a moment to find the spark of anything you've heard today inspired you, breathe life into that ember by making a donation or a pledge now. **What future do you want to nurture?**



To contribute to our future,
use the QR code or visit
tinyurl.com/tcjrc.

Thank you for your support!

Left: Kohenet Riv and Julie Dean lead a song while attendees give from their hearts to TCJRC's future.