

Family Simchah

Notable female rabbis join forces for special Shabbat services at Beth Shalom.



Rabbi Cantor Marcia Tilchin with her daughter, Yaira, who will be celebrating a second bat mitzvah at Beth Shalom

Barbara Lewis | Contributing Writer

An international family with Metro Detroit roots will have an extra-special Shabbat Jan. 13-14 at Congregation Beth Shalom in Oak Park.



Rabbi Cantor
Marcia Tilchin

At late evening services that Friday, native Detroit Rabbi Cantor Marcia Tilchin, who holds degrees and ordination from both the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles and now lives in Tustin, Calif., will lead services

with her husband and children. Special guest speaker will be her cousin Rabbi Miri Gold, who grew up in Oak Park and gained fame as one of the first non-Orthodox rabbis to be recognized by the government of Israel.

A special oneg Shabbat will follow the service, sponsored by the rabbis' families, in honor of their late mothers, Jeannette Tilchin and Lillian Gold. The Tilchins were members of Congregation Beth Shalom in its early days, and Jeanette was a past president.

Lillian Gold and her husband, Ruben, were longtime members of Congregation Shaarey Zedek. In her later years, Lillian joined Beth Shalom to be closer to her sister Jeannette. She celebrated her adult bat mitzvah there at age 80 and was a stalwart of the daily minyan for the last 20 years of her life.

At Shabbat morning services, Tilchin's youngest child, Yaira Spitzer-Tilchin, will celebrate her bat mitzvah at Beth Shalom. She will lead the prayers, read Torah and haf-tarah and present a *d'var Torah* (teaching).

Tilchin and her husband, Scott Spitzer, decided to observe Yaira's coming of age both in Michigan and in California to accommodate family members unable to travel.

"Our son, Avi, had three bat mitzvah celebrations in 2010-2011, one in Detroit, one in Syracuse and one in California, so the precedent is set," Tilchin said. She and Spitzer also have another daughter, Sheindl Spitzer-Tilchin, who is named after her bubbie, Jeannette.

Yaira said she didn't mind celebrating her bat mitzvah so far from her California home. "I am grateful to Beth Shalom for opening its doors to me so that I can celebrate this special day in a place that was and is meaningful to my family," she said.

PIONEERING RABBI

Miri Gold achieved worldwide recognition in 2005, when she and the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), the legal arm of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, petitioned for her to be recognized as the rabbi of the regional council that includes Kibbutz Gezer.

Gold has lived on the kibbutz in central Israel since making aliyah in 1977. She and her husband, David Leichman, have three adult children, Eliora, Arishai and Alon.

A graduate of Berkley High School and the University of Michigan, Gold decided to become a rabbi in 1993 after she officiated at her daughter's bat mitzvah. She was ordained by the Reform Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem in 1999, when she was 44. She also holds a master's

degree from HUC-JIR.

Since her ordination, Gold has served as the religious leader of Birkat Shalom, a small regional congregation that serves Kibbutz Gezer and the surrounding community.

In Israel, the designated rabbis of regional councils are paid government employees. But, until three years ago, the government recognized only Orthodox rabbis. Even though the region's residents turned to Gold for clerical services and recognized her as their rabbi, their tax dollars were used to pay the salary of a local Orthodox rabbi. Residents had to raise additional funds to support Gold.

Israel Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein decided the case at the end of May 2012, recognizing Gold and 14 other Masorti (Conservative) and Progressive (Reform) rabbis. It took until 2014 for Gold to draw her first salary.

Weinstein's decision also enabled the regional council to use funds from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to build a 1,500-square-foot building for the congregation, located at the center of Kibbutz Gezer.

Gold and the other non-Orthodox regional council rabbis do not have the ability to officiate at Jewish ceremonies and have no authority over Jewish law.

Gold's visit to Detroit is part of a tour to raise awareness and funds for completion of the Birkat Shalom building. At Beth Shalom and elsewhere, she'll talk about the accomplishments and challenges facing liberal Jews in Israel, including her own case and the ongoing efforts of Women of the Wall.



Rabbi Miri Gold

INNOVATIVE RABBI

Marcia Tilchin's story is also impressive. She enrolled in the cantorial school at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in the early 1990s and added the rabbinic program a few years later. After being ordained as a cantor, she moved to California to take a position at Conservative Congregation B'nai Israel in Tustin, which she served for 13 years. She transferred her rabbinic studies to the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University and was ordained as a rabbi in 2015.

About a year ago, Tilchin left the congregation and started the Jewish Collaborative of Orange County (JCoOC), a creative approach to Jewish engagement that includes partnership with area synagogues and agencies as well as a range of mobile independent programs designed to reach the underserved in her community. "Some have called it a 'Jew Truck' without the truck," Tilchin said.

Tilchin knew Beth Shalom's Rabbi Robert Gamer from her Jewish Theological Seminary days. He was happy to turn his pulpit over to her and her cousin for Erev Shabbat services and to invite the Detroit Jewish community to hear Gold speak. The challenges of Jewish pluralism in Israel is something that every non-Orthodox Jewish American should understand, he said.

"Our moms would be very happy that we are doing this," Tilchin said. ✳

The service will start at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 13. Beth Shalom is at 14601 Lincoln in Oak Park.