

Shalom, Shabbat!

National Webinar Transcript

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Presented by:



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Shalom, Shabbat!

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much for joining us and welcome to Sharsheret Shalom Shabbat Program. My name is Melissa Rosen. I am the director of training and education at Sharsheret. I'm so happy to welcome all of you and so many of my Sharsheret colleagues who work to create this program to the webinar today. I'm also very excited to welcome and to thank our partners for today's program, The Women's League for Conservative Judaism and Women of Reform Judaism. We're always grateful for an opportunity to reconnect, to re-center. And I found, I'm sure you have too, that as we deal with this ongoing almost yearlong physical isolation, these opportunities are more important than ever. So before we get started, let me just go over a little Zoom etiquette super quickly. You were muted when you entered the today's program; please stay on mute so that we can clearly hear today's presenters.

Melissa Rosen:

As always, this program will be recorded, but no names or faces other than the presenters will be on that recording. But if you wish to turn your video off for additional privacy today, you can do so by three dots on the bottom of your square. And also you could choose to rename yourself if you'd like with those same three dots. You will be notified when the recording and the transcript of today's program is posted on the Sharsheret website. Please feel free to share that link with anyone who might enjoy today's program. However we celebrate and whatever our experience with Shabbat is or has been, we can all use an opportunity to re-center ourselves in the myths of treatment, survivorship, the pandemic, or honestly just the normal chaos of a life well lived. And that's what today's all about.

Melissa Rosen:

Together we'll explore different paths to healing, including song and how they can enhance both Shabbat and life as a whole. And we'll of course come away with a bit of inspiration for the week ahead. As I've mentioned in previous programs, there's always some level of chaos in life, work, family volunteer commitments. And of course, for those of us who have faced cancer, are dealing with survivorship or currently facing cancer, there's even more chaos. We need an opportunity to take a break, a deep breath. It's absolutely necessary, not just for our health, but for our happiness. Our tradition, the Jewish tradition gives us just that, a weekly pause, simply an opportunity to rest and regroup each week to focus on what's important and what gives our lives meaning. And that's different for each of us, for some our family, our health, perhaps something else. How we experience that pause is different for everyone.

Melissa Rosen:

Some celebrate traditionally and others have found innovative ways to make Shabbat meaningful. Some pair elaborate meals and others choose takeout pizza for a break in cooking. When it wasn't the pandemic, some of us attended services while others spend time in nature. Every person celebrates in a way that is meaningful to him or her, but I want to encourage each person here today to celebrate. Whether you've always marked Shabbat or just exploring it now, our lives deserve that pause. Take time each week to make the important things in our lives, including ourselves a priority. Okay. I am so, so very pleased to introduce today's guest Cantor Ronit Wolff Hanan. Cantor Ronit was born in Tel Aviv and raised in White Plains. She actually enjoyed a secular music career performing throughout the United States and Israel in musical theater, jazz, cabaret, and operettas before returning to her roots in Jewish music and beginning cantorial school at the age of 50.

Melissa Rosen:

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She is currently the music director at congregation Beth Shalom in Teaneck, New Jersey, where she conducts an award winning children's chorus, as well as the synagogues adults acapella group. She's a singer and soloist with the Zamir corral and has served on the faculty of the North American Jewish corral festival and the H.L. Miller Cantorial School at JTS, and is the co-founder and current conductor of the Bergen County chapter of HaZamir, the international Jewish teen choir. And we're going to get to hear some of their music later. She's also recorded several music CDs as well as an album of High Holiday music. Ronit was the seventh of nine women in her family to be diagnosed with breast cancer and her sister recently became the eighth. All of this, despite the fact that neither she, nor her family carries the BRCA gene mutation. She's looking forward to sharing her personal journey with all of you today.

Melissa Rosen:

As Cantor Ronit shares music insights and different paths to healing and her story, please take a moment to think about what has helped you personally to heal. Is it family music, poetry, exercise, meditation, prayer? Whatever it is, it can be anything, traditional or unexpected. When you land upon something that's been particularly meaningful, please take a moment to share that in the chat box below and a little later on in our program, we're going to share some of those as an inspiration for all of us. So again, thank you for coming and Cantor the floor is yours.

Cantor Hanan:

Thank you so much, Melissa. And welcome everybody on this. I'm now in Teaneck, sunny, but it's still snow filled Friday afternoon. As Melissa said, I would like to talk a little bit about healing today. We'll talk a little. We'll sing a little together. We will listen to some music together. I wanted to just start to kind of set the tone with a musical setting of the Mi Shebeirach prayer. In traditional circles, of course, this is a prayer that's used. It's a quintessential healing prayer, may the one who blessed our ancestors blessed so-and-so with a full recovery. We know it well. There of course Mi Shebeirach is for other occasions also. We bless a new baby. We bless a couple that's about to get married. We bless somebody becoming bar mitzvah. We bless leaders of the community all the time. You name it. But whoever the recipient is, the wish is always the same and the wish is good health.

Cantor Hanan:

So we'll start by singing together. If you would like you can sing along with me. If you don't know it, you can hum. I'm going to share the lyrics with you. When I pause in the middle to hum a little bit, just send your thoughts of healing, it could be to yourself. It could be to someone else in your life that's in need of healing. God knows we know enough people now who are in need of healing. Everybody needs that little bit of push. I think it just gives us a moment to pause and reflect as well. So this is by Debbie Friedman, whom we just commemorated her 10th yard site, the 10th anniversary of her death, not from cancer, but at a very, very young age. This is her Mi Shebeirach and I'm just going to do an acapella so we can together sing. (singing).

Cantor Hanan:

So that was just to start us off and get us in the right zone, I think. Melissa shared a tiny bit of my story, but I thought I would just share with you a little bit more of how I came to know about Sharsheret, and what my personal journey was. I found my first lump when I was in the shower at age 23. It thankfully turned out to be benign but it sent me on a course at that time after having had an aunt who died very young of... maternal aunt of breast cancer sent me on a course of a lot of prophylactic testing. So from

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the age of 23, I went for mammograms and I went for ultrasounds and when the American Cancer Society suggested high-risk women go for MRIs, I did that as well. I think I had finer needle biopsies over a lifetime than I can remember. As Melissa also said, I was always waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Cantor Hanan:

After one aunt and then another aunt and my mother and two first cousins, and a year before me, my older of two sisters, I became the seventh of nine in my branch of the family to be diagnosed with breast cancer. And I credit that high-risk program and having gone for an MRI, it was a routine MRI that discovered it. My next in line, older sister just a few months ago became the eighth of nine. So it's pretty clear that something's going on in our family. And we were told a very long time ago, we're part of a study that is in Washington of the woman who discovered DCIS. She's looking at all of our family to see what else she might be able to discover, maybe a third BRCA gene, who knows? Because of the prevalence of breast cancer specifically in our family, but it has caused us to be very careful and very diligent. And we were all in the breast centers three and four times a year and we were grateful for that.

Cantor Hanan:

We were told to treat as if we were BRCA positive. So we all did that, including there had been those who had been suggesting a prophylactic [inaudible 00:13:19] bilateral mastectomy, even before my diagnosis. Certainly afterwards, all my doctors were saying that I should do that and I did. I experienced a pretty nasty complication the day after. They put me in the hospital for a few more days and three units of blood and yet, I considered myself very, very lucky for the entire journey. I just kind of picked myself up by the bootstraps and said, "This is what I need to do, I'm going to do it, and I'm going to get through it." So you see me now, and that was back in 2012. So I just thought it would be really nice today to talk about what helps each of us heal, because it's different for everybody and it's different at different stages of our recovery. What is it that you need?

Cantor Hanan:

Some of us have, but I mean, we all have certainly the physical needs. I need to be able to get up out of the chair. I need to be able to pull my undies down to go to the bathroom and I can't do those things post-surgery. I would like to be able to sleep in my bed again instead of sleeping in an armchair. I have drains that need emptying and all kinds of other physical challenges, if you've got little kids at home, I thankfully had older kids at home who were pretty independent, but who's going to take care of my kids when I can't really move much. There any myriad of things that we need physically and we all reach out to whoever can provide those for us. Whether it's a visiting nurse or whether it's family, or whether it's friends or whether it's signing up for a take me a meal or whether it's asking my sister to man [inaudible 00:15:29] the Caring Bridge site for me so that she can update everybody if I'm not up to it.

Cantor Hanan:

So there are the physical needs of course, and we all have them and we need to network to reach out and ask for what we need physically. I think the slightly more elusive needs are the emotional and the spiritual needs and what helps us heal in those ways. So I want to give a shout out to a friend of mine, rabbi Beth Naditch from the Boston area. She teaches workshops on resilience. I don't know whether it was her phrase or someone else, but she coined something called Sacred Sources. She said, "Each of us has something that we turn to for comfort, and that helps us to heal, whatever grounds us, whatever helps us to refocus to take a deep breath, to set our priorities straight, something that moves us,

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something that grounds us." It can be, as Lisa also said, it can be anything, it can be poetry, it can be a text, a liturgical text or something from the Torah, from the scripture.

Cantor Hanan:

It could be a beautiful piece of music. That's usually what'll hit me of course. It could be art. It could be book. It could be nature. It could be humor. Actually, rabbi Naditch talks about her sacred source is a particular episode of the West Wing. So whatever works for you is what will heal you emotionally. Do you need a diversion or do you need to dig deeper into how you're feeling? Do you need a distraction or do you need to say, okay, this is me time now, and I'm going to just delve into my favorite book or my favorite TV series. Of course we are often so overwhelmed with the physical part of it that we can overlook the emotional. So it's important to take the emotional and the spiritual. It's important to take a moment to just focus on something other than the physical and see what our Neshama, our soul needs in order to heal, and that too.

Cantor Hanan:

So some of these things can come from outside, from our friends and our neighbors and our family and our community, our religious institutions, our support groups, from Sharsheret, from any number of external sources that can help us. Sometimes those things are things that will come from inside us. We have that power to be resilient, and we have that power to actually look inside ourselves and heal. I personally am a little bit of an introvert. So when people wanted to visit, I had to put boundaries on that and say, "Nope, that's not really what's going to help me heal right now." People wanted to deliver lots of food and I had a refrigerator full, but it wasn't always what I needed. So I think it's also important for us to articulate to others what it is that we need in order to heal and that is different for every person.

Cantor Hanan:

I think that our friends and our family and our community are gracious, but they're also very forgiving of us setting boundaries in a way that perhaps they wouldn't be, were we not going through what we're going through. So all of those things kind of combine the physical, the emotional, the spiritual, what grounds you, what is something that you can focus on, that will help you to heal? So the next piece that I wanted to share is something that is from part of my work. So for me, again, I would go from personal experience. I'm a little bit of an introvert, but I'm also a little bit of a workaholic and my work brings me joy. It's something, as Melissa said, I went to cantorial school at age 50. So it was something that I came to late. I wasn't really tired yet of it. I was actually just starting out.

Cantor Hanan:

It was my last semester in cantorial school that I got my diagnosis and had to miss the last six weeks of classes. But my work was ongoing and when I could, it really brought me joy. It was one of those things that grounded me. And that enabled me to, of course when I got over the initial, real physical challenges where I couldn't do much at all, I found that A, music was healing and B, the sense of community and just kind of paying it forward that my work gave me was extremely, extremely helpful. So one of the things that I do as part of my work is to conduct a lot of choirs. As Melissa mentioned, I have two choirs within my synagogue, little kids choir, Tzipporei Shalom that just... how can that not bring you joy, [inaudible 00:21:30] first to sixth grade little kids. And an adult acapella choir was also just a phenomenal and phenomenal people in it.

Cantor Hanan:

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I conduct another choir that's outside of my synagogue that's part of the HaZamir network of choirs, which is an international network of high school, teen choirs in the United States and in Israel. And if I tell you the sharing that goes on there too is just incredible. And the power of all these little chapters that come together for a big festival of 400 kids to perform in Lincoln Center is also pretty incredible. So of course now with the pandemic, all of our choirs have had to take a little bit of a break. And we have pivoted a lot to the virtual platforms for these various choirs. So two of the HaZamir chapters, this is Baltimore and Ashkelon, which is their partner city in Israel put together, one of my favorite texts and you may know it as a song. (singing).

Cantor Hanan:

So that's one particular melody of that text. It's by Rav Nachman of Bratslav and it is loosely translated, the whole world is a very narrow bridge and the important thing is not to be afraid. I'd like to pose it that the important thing is, and again, I borrowed this from rabbi Naditch, is not to be paralyzed by fear. You can't tell somebody not to be afraid. If you're afraid, you're afraid. But the part of the healing process for me is to say, "Okay, I'm feeling whatever I'm feeling, but I'm not going to let it paralyze me." So this is that same text but a very different setting of it. And this is the two HaZamir chapters that are singing this piece. I hope you can hear it. I'm going to share my screen with you and go right to Gesher. (singing).

Melissa Rosen:

Okay. Hang on. While you are un-sharing on your screen, I just want to apologize. It seems that many people could hear it and many people could not, and I'm not sure what that is about. I'm going to ask everybody to ensure that their volume is up because there's one more recording. But I will tell you, even before we send out the whole recording, today we'll make sure we get out links to this and the next one that's coming out. So you [crosstalk 00:27:22].

Cantor Hanan:

When Melissa does the conclusion at the end, when she says goodbye to everybody, I will cut and paste and put into the chat, those two videos for you as well.

Melissa Rosen:

Perfect. Thank you.

Cantor Hanan:

So that was Gesher. Kol ha'olam kulo, Gesher tzar me'od. I think it's a time now for all of the Sharsheret folks to read all the chats which I have not been looking at and to see what it is that people have shared or will share about what helps you to heal.

Melissa Rosen:

Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing such a personal story with us and I saw lots of nodding and some tears, and I know that it struck a chord. And now, there's still time if there's something that helped you heal to put it into the chat, but I'm going to introduce my wonderful colleague, Rachel Tasha, who is our support program coordinator. And she's been monitoring the box and we'll share some of your own thoughts and ideas with everyone.

Rachel Tasha:

Shalom, Shabbat!

Yes. Hi everyone. So nice to see you all here again, I'm Rachel and I am one of the support program coordinators or social workers at Sharsheret. So I'm so glad to be here with you all today. And of course, if anybody feels like they need any support or want to reach out separately after the webinar, you can reach us at clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org, you can give us a call. We are here for you every step of the way. So some of you shared some really wonderful comments. One person shared that they find mindfulness in both cancer survivorship and COVID and knitting by creating order out of chaos with yarn and Mahjong by creating order out of chaos with tiles and the friendships that go along with both the knitting and the Mahjong. It's a silver lining of COVID being able to be online and have support communities.

Rachel Tasha:

Another person shared that they find help in prayer and that helping others and giving other support, and that helps them to feel supported as well. Another person shared that they teach yoga and they have a Zoom meeting with their friends and practice healing and calming. They also find that music and comedy brings inner joy. Another one was that someone [inaudible 00:29:33] find observing Shabbat and mindfulness and meditation and yoga and stair climbing and altitude hiking as an athlete are wonderful activities and feel very healing. Another person shared that mentoring is actually healing for them through ABCD, which is another organization. They find a source of joy and healing and participating in Sharsheret events as well, which is great. And just on that note, so you guys know we also have a peer support network. So if anybody is interested in joining and being a part of that, feel free to reach out to us, excuse me, about that as well.

Rachel Tasha:

I know Melissa will talk a little bit more about that later on. Another person shared something called [Selah 00:30:10] it's the slowing down and processing life or mindfulness. The word can be found in Psalms. They learned the word selah from the book untamed by Glennon Doyle, and recommend selah for everyone. Another person shared that close friends keep them laughing which is also healing. You have another one that said Face Timing with nieces, nephews, and family keeps them feeling grounded, distracted and grateful and hopeful as well, also taking long walks keeps them feeling mindful. Another person said they really enjoy preparing Shabbat dinner for their family and helping others to help themselves and observing Shabbat with their family and turning off all electronics is unbelievably peaceful. I second that. Another person said they actually participate in the Zoom Shabbat service and Torah study that her congregation offers, which is wonderful.

Rachel Tasha:

Let's see. Sorry, just trying to get to more. Another person, the last one we have right now is that they shared that having emunah, which means faith and focusing on gratitude for health for care workers keeps them positive, especially when they make sure to chat with them on a daily basis, which is really wonderful. So thank you again all so much for sharing all of your beautiful comments. And if we can do anything to help you outside of this program, please do either feel free to put a message in the chat box or email us at clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org. And sorry, just one other great one came in I wanted to share. Friendship helped to heal. After having her surgery and treatment, and moving around, it seems like, she had her boys in Yeshiva that was being built. And when she came home from the hospital, she had lots of pain, wasn't able to cook and all of her friends got together and brought meals for her and so just the power of friendship is wonderful as well.

Melissa Rosen:

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Amazing. Thank you for sharing this Rachel. What strikes me is that healing is such an individual and unique experience for all of us and that there isn't just one path to healing but many and that's fantastic. Okay. Back to you.

Cantor Hanan:

So, yeah, it was very interesting to me that sometimes the healing comes from inside and from this attitude of gratitude that we have, and that I think has been shown that if we can muster that positivity and focus on what we are grateful for, it definitely helps us to heal. But it was interesting to me in all of those comments also that so many of you said that what helped you to heal was actually helping other people and feeling like you were paying it forward. One of the reasons that it's so important, I think to tell our story, and one of the reasons that I jumped and said yes right away to doing this for Sharsheret, is that when you hear somebody else's story, you can connect and being connected to the stories of is, actually there's a been a study at Emory that it's a serious predictor of resilience.

Cantor Hanan:

So if I hear somebody else's story, I can imagine myself getting to that place as well. If I'm not in that place right now, but I hear that someone else started out a little bit more despondent and then got to this other place. Well, maybe I can put myself in their place and actually get there too. I think, I mean my just the nitty gritty part of my journey and my diligence in terms of screening, I like to share that all the time, because so many people that I know were early detectors of breast cancer. And the more we can share how our diligence in the screening process saved our life, the more we can help others to do the same. I know Sharsheret does a lot of that work as well. I'm here now. I survived this. This is where I've gotten to, but I wasn't always here. So sharing our stories and hearing other people's stories, I think is a big, also a big component of the healing process.

Cantor Hanan:

All the power, Kol ha Kavod to all of you who help others as part of your healing process. I think that's really important and paying it forward is great. I don't know if there are questions before the last song that I'd like to share. But Melissa, you tell me whether I should just go ahead with our last piece.

Melissa Rosen:

So let's do this. I have a couple of concluding words. That's wonderful, 13 years. I have a couple of concluding words. Let me do that and then we'll go out on that beautiful song, but that way, if somebody can't hear it, they can wait for our email, with the links to those [inaudible 00:35:23].

Cantor Hanan:

Okay. If you take a minute to do it, I can probably cut and paste the both links into the [crosstalk 00:35:29].

Melissa Rosen:

[crosstalk 00:35:29] we'll send them by email to anyone who's registered as well, but this would be a good thing. So I was going to start our conclusion by reminding you that we're here for you, but Rachel already did that so beautifully. And the link was in there, but I do want to let you know about some programs coming up. So first of all, Cantor Ronit spoke so beautifully about the importance of helping others and sharing stories. And we have once a year, something called our Peer Support Training Webinar, which really allows people to learn how to tell their story and why to tell it. And it's going to be

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February 23rd, it's this unique opportunity to learn how to offer that support. This program is just for people who've been directly impacted by breast or ovarian cancer, but the link was just in the box and you can learn more about it.

Melissa Rosen:

We have two other programs. On February 10th we're having a holiday [inaudible 00:36:34] to celebrate Pink Day and influencer Mandylicious is leading that. And she's created a flavor just for Sharsheret, which is really cool. Then on the 16th of this month, we're having another COVID and cancer update which will include all the latest information, including some information about vaccinations. So you can always go onto our website under events, and we have a special section for Corona, pandemic events that happen online, that are open nationally and it's very easy to find. Again, please, don't hesitate to reach out. I want to thank really with true gratitude, Cantor Hanan for sharing everything. It was incredibly moving program and to our program partners, Women's League for Conservative Judaism and Women of Reform Judaism. And thank each and every one of you for being here today. Wish you a Shabbat filled with quiet, with joy and with comfort, a Shabbat filled with Shalom, and this song is the perfect way to ease out.

Cantor Hanan:

Amen. Thank you, Melissa, and thanks to the whole Sharsheret team, really. You're doing wonderful work. So this last song that I'd like to share with you, I hope that you can hear it, but I have pasted, just go up in the chat a little bit. I have pasted the link in the chat to Heal Us Now, it's similar to the Mi Shebeirach that we sang at the beginning. This is a prayer for healing of body and soul. This one takes its texts from a variety of sources. Part of it is from the Psalms. Part of it is from the liturgy and part of it is from the book of numbers Chapter 12, verse 13, when Moses uses just five short words to ask God to please heal his sister, El Na Refa Na La, oh God, please heal her.

Cantor Hanan:

So as we look to our own healing and our own restorative Shabbat, I leave you with this song sung by HaZamir HaSharon, which is one of the HaZamir chapters that we usually host here in Teaneck when they come in person for our big festival. This year we're missing them dearly, but we get to see them on video. And this is a lovely rendition of Heal Us Now by Cantor Leon Sher. (singing).

Melissa Rosen:

Absolutely beautiful.

Cantor Hanan:

Oops, sorry.

Melissa Rosen:

We'll send those links in the next few minutes just in case, although based on the numbers that are in here, I'm hoping most people were able to hear it either through the link or through our live stream, but either way you'll get them shortly. Thank you again Cantor and Shabbat Shalom everybody. Bye-bye.

Cantor Hanan:

Shabbat Shalom Lekulam. Shabbat Shalom everyone.

Shalom, Shabbat!

About Sharsheret

Sharsheret, Hebrew for “chain”, is a national non-profit organization, improves the lives of Jewish women and families living with or at increased genetic risk for breast or ovarian cancer through personalized support and saves lives through educational outreach.

With four offices (California, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey), Sharsheret serves 150,000 women, families, health care professionals, community leaders, and students, in all 50 states. Sharsheret creates a safe community for women facing breast cancer and ovarian cancer and their families at every stage of life and at every stage of cancer - from before diagnosis, during treatment and into the survivorship years. While our expertise is focused on young women and Jewish families, more than 15% of those we serve are not Jewish. All Sharsheret programs serve all women and men.

As a premier organization for psychosocial support, Sharsheret’s Executive Director chairs the Federal Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women, Sharsheret works closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and participates in psychosocial research studies and evaluations with major cancer centers, including Georgetown University Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center. Sharsheret is accredited by the Better Business Bureau and has earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for four consecutive years.

Sharsheret offers the following national programs:

The Link Program

- Peer Support Network, connecting women newly diagnosed or at high risk of developing breast cancer one-on-one with others who share similar diagnoses and experiences
- Embrace™, supporting women living with advanced breast cancer • Genetics for Life®, addressing hereditary breast and ovarian cancer
- Thriving Again®, providing individualized support, education, and survivorship plans for young breast cancer survivors • Busy Box®, for young parents facing breast cancer
- Best Face Forward®, addressing the cosmetic side effects of treatment
- Family Focus®, providing resources and support for caregivers and family members
- Ovarian Cancer Program, tailored resources and support for young Jewish women and families facing ovarian cancer • Sharsheret Supports™, developing local support groups and programs

Education and Outreach Programs

- Health Care Symposia, on issues unique to younger women facing breast cancer
- Sharsheret on Campus, outreach and education to students on campus
- Sharsheret Educational Resource Booklet Series, culturally-relevant publications for Jewish women and their families and healthcare Professionals

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