

Shalom, Shabbat!

National Webinar Transcript

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Presented by:



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Melissa Rosen:

Welcome to Sharsheret's Shalom Shabbat program. My name is Melissa Rosen and I'm the Director of Training and Education at Sharsheret. I'm happy to say that many of my colleagues are also on today and have helped create this wonderful program. We're always grateful for an opportunity to reconnect, to recenter. And I found, I'm sure you have too, that as we deal with the ups and the downs of this pandemic, these opportunities are more important than ever. You are muted on today as you enter today's program, please stay on mute so that we can clearly hear today's presenters.

Melissa Rosen:

As always this program is being recorded, but no faces or names will show on the recording other than those of the presenter. But if you wish to turn your video off for privacy now, that option is on the bottom left of your screen. And you can also choose to rename yourself if you prefer to remain anonymous. You can do that by clicking on the three dots on the top right of your photo square. And I just want to let you know that you will be notified when the recording and transcript of today's program is posted on Sharsheret's website next week. Please feel free to share that link with anyone you think might enjoy today's program.

Melissa Rosen:

However you celebrate, whatever your experience with Shabbat is, or has been, we can all use an opportunity to recenter ourselves in the midst of treatment, survivorship, the pandemic, or just the normal chaos of a life well-lived. As with all our Shalom Shabbat programs, that's what today is about. But we're also going to add to that agenda today. With the holiday of Purim just around the corner, today we're also going to speak about joy. Purim falls in the Hebrew month of Adar, which is all about embracing joy.

Melissa Rosen:

Hopefully, we'll each come away from today's program with a bit of inspiration and excitement for the week ahead. As we begin, I want to introduce you to one of today's special guests. Cantor Toby has joined us in the past and it's her beautiful voice that keeps enticing us to ask her back. She grew up in New Jersey and was a member of her show choir by 11, soloing by age 12. After moving to Los Angeles to attend the USC Thornton School of Music, Toby sang at the Synagogue of Creative Arts. She completed the vow to field a program at the University of Judaism and joined the Cantor's assembly, CICA program for learning the cantorate. Cantor Toby began teaching B'nai Mitzvah at Valley Beth Shalom in California over 10 years ago. She'll be singing two songs with us today. So the screen is yours, Cantor Toby. Thank you so much.

Cantor Toby:

Thank you, Melissa. It's such a pleasure to be back with all of you at a celebration for Shabbat. So one of my favorite pieces for Kabbalat Shabbat is comes at the end of the Amida after we've had a reflection of silent prayer to sing Shalom Rav. And if you can look at the text at the bottom grant, abundant peace unto Israel, your people forever. This sums up Shabbat. We're asking for peace for ourselves, for the nation of Israel. And in these days of war in Ukraine, certainly, for peace in Ukraine. So if you know the song, I bet a lot of you do, feel free to sing along. (singing)

Melissa Rosen:

Simply beautiful. That is actually one of my favorite songs and one that really lets me know it's time to celebrate Shabbat. Thank you so much. That was gorgeous. And we'll bring you back at

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the end of the program to close us out. Okay. I mentioned in my introduction that we're going to speak not only about the intentional break from everyday chaos that Shabbat can provide, but the importance of adding joy to that break. After all with Purim next week, it makes sense to add joy to the conversation. At each Shalom Shabbat program, we discuss how important the intentional break is. How it impacts healing, mental health. How we each experience that pause is different, but we each need some kind of pause.

Melissa Rosen:

I'm wondering if maybe we need to add something, if we need something more than just us that pause. Maybe we need to add joy to the equation. Depending on where we are in our own personal cancer experiences, that may not feel so easy or even so natural. But we have a model for incorporating joy in the holiday of Purim to celebrate the survival of the Jewish community in the face of Haman's evil, we celebrate and celebrate and celebrate some more. We sing and dance. We share delicious treats. We shout, we scream, we wear costumes and we wear masks.

Melissa Rosen:

Perhaps wearing masks allows us to be a bit more raucous, more joyful, less inhibited. I get that. My own cancer experience definitely included some mask wearing. I think we all wear masks during cancer to get through the day, to protect our families, maybe even to protect ourselves. Since cancer masks already hide some part of our current identities, current state of mind maybe, let's use that opportunity to cast off some of the sorrow, the anger, the chaos that fills us at times. It's okay to feel joy while we are dealing with cancer. In fact, it's great. Happiness, joy, celebration, fun can all impact both our physical and our mental health in wonderful ways.

Melissa Rosen:

Let's use the masks we wear during cancer, not only for protection, but for joy, just like Purim. Let's find ways to add fun, playfulness, joy to our lives. There are no rules that say that joy in cancer must never overlap. When we say fake it till you make it, there's actually some truth to that saying. I am sure there are plenty of people who enter Purim overwhelmed by cooking, delivering Hamantashen and making costumes, maybe even wrangling hyped up children.

Melissa Rosen:

Yet it's hard to leave a Megillah reading not joyful. It's just simply too much fun. So of course, as I encourage you all to embrace joy, it's important to remember that not all of us who wear masks of happiness actually feel that way. That may be why sometimes we feel we need a mask. So please be sensitive to that. Check in with someone you think might be masking. After all, all emotions are valid and help us to process our situations. Yet, as we approach Purim, I want to encourage you to use your mask differently. Yes, as a source of strength and protection, but also as an excuse. An excuse to be silly, to be joyful, to be happy. Perhaps this Shabbat is the perfect time to welcome it back into our lives.

Melissa Rosen:

I want to try something. Take a moment right now, everyone on the screen, to think of something that brings you joy. We don't need a whole detailed description. One or two or three words. Something easy, something you can access or create without too much trouble. Something you can commit to this coming week, hold on to that thought. Type it into the chat box, but don't press enter yet. I'm going to count to three in a couple of seconds. And on three,

together we'll all press enter and then we'll see a waterfall of ideas on our screens. Ideas we can all try as ways to bring joy into our lives. So again, open your chat box, take a second to write just one thing.

Melissa Rosen:

Okay. And I'm going to count to three and then let's all hit enter. One, two, three go. Oh, I love it. It's all coming in. That's amazing. Lot of families. Yeah, some sort of tree. Oh, planting trees. Grandchildren, nature, music, art, more nature, Yiddish. I love it. Sunshine. Oh, thank goodness we're coming into that season. And some of us are already there depending on where you're located. That was great.

Melissa Rosen:

Take a look at some of the things that people said. See one of those things that maybe you haven't got involved with before and try something new. Or at least commit to one thing you know brings you joy this weekend. Okay. Now I want to introduce you to our second special guest. A Sharsheret caller and my wonderful neighbor, Joelle, who has graciously agreed to share her experience with cancer, masking, and joy. You know this is going to be an important experience to share when she agrees to speak, and I quote, "Only if she can be honest." So Joelle, the screen is yours and we're going to put onto the screen a particular image you shared with me.

Joelle:

Thank you. When Melissa asked me to speak today about joy and she told me it was because she thought of me because I'm someone who exudes joy and happiness. And I thought, "Hmm, I should tell you something. I actually battle with depression and anxiety." And I wear a pretty good mask because a lot of people over the years have commented to me how happy I seem and how joyful I seem. And I said, "Well, I will agree to do it, but only if I can be honest." And when she said that it's not just about joy, but also about the masks we wear I thought, "Wow, this is actually kind of perfect because joy is sometimes the mask that we wear."

Joelle:

So I don't intentionally hide my depression and anxiety, but we do whatever we do need to do to get through our days in our lives. And very similar to what Melissa said, she used a different expression, but the concept in Judaism: from doing something not for its own sake, you come to do it for its sake. So the same thing is with joy. Sometimes we have to search for the joy and really work to find it to bring it into our lives. But by making those efforts, we actually then do find true joy. When I was diagnosed in February 2019, I remember my husband saying to me right away... And when I mean right away, I mean within the first 30 minutes of diagnosis, that it will be as bad as I think it will be.

Joelle:

And now he's a doctor so he understood more about cancer and my diagnosis than I could possibly. And he understood how far we've come and the strides that have been made in breast cancer research. I was thinking, "How am I going to parent through this?" At the time I had three, four year olds, a five year old and an eight year old. And I said to him, "I love you hun but that's a pretty asinine thing to say." And we ended up laughing and that night we spoke and I actually apologized for getting breast cancer and we laughed again. And somehow we kept laughing.

Joelle:

For his birthday last year, we have a family custom where we hang up signs all over the house for everybody's birthday. And for his birthday, one of the signs I printed out was, "Born in 1975. All original parts." We're both born in the same year. And I said, "You're not going to be able to use that sign for my birthday." And we laughed and people take their cue from me.

Joelle:

So one of the things I did before I started chemo was I cut my hair really short and I dyed it like pinks and purples. And it was really fun. People loved it. A day or so after I did it, I was so sad and I realized I did not like it at all. It made it too real for me that suddenly this is real. This is really happening. But I did it as a mask perhaps so that I could help my kids cope with it. They were young and I wanted them to see that this was going to be fun. And we had talked about that I was going to lose my hair. And we were very open with the kids in a way that was age appropriate. And everybody else loved it.

Joelle:

And so I had to wear a mask for a little while to get through that. And it did bring joy and happiness for my kids in that case, which for me to help them cope with what I would be going through and what we would, as a family, be going through was really important. And at one point, talking about the cues that people take from you, my then six year old, he had a birthday. We were out for a meal and at that point I didn't have any hair. And his friend had come to the house and I never wore anything on my head when people were in my house. So his friend, his six year old friend saw that I didn't have any hair. And then we were out for a meal with that family and a few others. And my parents were actually visiting and they were there too.

Joelle:

And I was wearing a wig and she was looking at me really, really strange. And I said to her, "Are you wondering how I have hair?" She says, "Yeah, kind of got back so fast." And my six year old son, without missing a beat, pulled my wig right off my head in front of everybody and said, "It's not her hair, it's a wig." And I burst out laughing. I knew it wasn't malicious. I knew he was six years old. And so, because I laughed, it could have been the most awkward moment ever, everybody laughed.

Joelle:

And I remember a friend of mine actually saying to me that night, that it's amazing how I'm dealing with this. And it was funny. I have to admit, my parents had to leave the room because it was harder for them but that's understandable. Seeing your child go through this is not something any of us want but it was a pretty amazing experience. Now, I don't know how I managed to go to each chemo treatment with a positive outlook. Considering I do deal with depression and anxiety, I do tend to look at life or I try to look at life in a positive, optimistic way, glass half full. It is my nature.

Joelle:

And at some point, once COVID started, somebody I had met actually through Sharsheret, she and I were speaking. And she said, "So how are you?" And I said, "Oh, you mean in terms of cancer?" And she said, yeah. I said, "Oh, cancer is so 2019." Now she burst out laughing and she's like, "I love that. Can I quote you?" I was like, sure. I didn't realize what a big deal was to say that. But for me, maybe I was lucky that COVID hit as my treatment was ending. And you

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have to kind of put things in perspective. I knew, in my situation, that I had to get through that year that I knew it was going to be a rough year and I had to get through it.

Joelle:

But then who would've expected that COVID would come next. And it couldn't just be about me, me, me anymore. I had five kids learning from home and other things to focus on. So it was kind of like a blessing in disguise, perhaps, that I had to kind of... Breast cancer was just so 2019 suddenly. And that was good and it did help bring me joy, I would say. Now, I do still struggle with depression. That's not going to go away suddenly. And because of my Tamoxifen that I have to take, we had to change up my meds because of drug interactions. I'm sure many of us have had to deal with similar types of situations and challenges.

Joelle:

But I do manage to find joy. I am taking an art class right now, which is bringing me so much happiness and joy. It's a highlight of my week. And I think it's so important for all of us to try and find the things that bring us joy. And Melissa's now sharing this great image that my friend actually just shared with me by chance on Sunday. We all wear our masks. Some days it's easier to have the joy and some days we put on that mask and it's just beneath the surface that we're feeling sadness. And it's important to have people that we can remove our masks with.

Joelle:

Because by finding the people with whom we can remove our masks, it gives us the support we need. And through that, it actually allows us to find happiness and joy by having to hold in the feelings of, whether it's depression or sadness or angst or whatever we might be going through. And going through it alone, I think, makes it so much harder. But through finding support systems and our people, it actually helps to bring joy and happiness into my life.

Joelle:

I mean, no one in any situation always feels joy and happiness. I think there's a term these days called toxic happiness. But it is really important to find those safe spaces and things that bring us joy. And by removing my mask and talking about it openly, it has actually allowed me to be a more authentic and joyful person. And I wish that for everybody, that Shabbat brings me great joy. And I hope that you'll find joy through this program and through, whether it's Purim and find joy, what was it, in the weather, the sunshine and grandchildren, our children. I have five children and the hugs and snuggles I get bring me joy. Yes, there are challenges in raising lots of young children, but in general, I do find even with my depression and what I go through, that I do have, thank God, a lot of joy in my life.

Melissa Rosen:

Well, thank you so much, it was such an important perspective, such an honest perspective. And I can tell you that you... I know being a neighbor, you bring joy to a lot of people so thank you. Okay. Speaking of Purim, because we've been speaking, I am excited that Cantor Toby will be leading us in one additional song, Chag Purim, traditionally a children's song. You can't help but smile. So even though we're all staying on mute, please feel free to join along. And if you happen to have brought that box of pasta with you today, you can use that as a grogger or a noise maker, because we're going to drown out what we need to drown out. So Cantor, please.

Cantor Toby:

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Thank you, Melissa. So if you've got your box of pasta, grab it so we could shake it together. And yes, Melissa's right, it is a children's song but it's such a fun song. And we all sang it with our children, I'm sure, when they were little. And frankly, it was the first song that I thought of to ingratiate the joy of Purim. So if you know it, sing along. Oh, there's the lyric. Perfect. So if anybody needs the lyric, there they are. (Singing) Hag Sameach, everyone.

Melissa Rosen:

Sorry. I needed to unmute myself. Thank you so, so, so much. What a fun way to close today's session. As we conclude, I want to remind you, of course, that Sharsheret is here for you. We continue to offer online content. You can always go online and view any webinar you may have missed. On a special note, if you enjoy this type of programming, please plan to join us for our third annual Sharsheret UNSeder on Friday April 8th. We will be talking about the way matzah changes when you add things to it and the way we change when we add things to us.

Melissa Rosen:

Let's post that registration link in the chat box. Although there certainly will be more marketing as we get closer. Of course, remember we do have our wonderful team of dedicated social workers, a genetic counselor that are always here to help you address your concerns. Please don't hesitate to reach out. And we can paste that contact information in our chat box as well. Once again, I want to share my deep thanks to Joelle for sharing her story, to Cantor Toby for sharing her beautiful voice. And of course, I'd like to thank each and every one of you for joining us today. Wishing you a Shabbat filled with quiet and comfort and joy. Shabbat Shalom. Bye.

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

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- 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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