



Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 10, Number 2, February 2012
Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Events of the Month

Shabbat services at Temple Ner Maarav

Saturday, February 4 10:00 am
Birthday Shabbat
Saturday, February 11 10:00 am
Friday, February 18 8:00 pm
Saturday, February 25 10:00 am
Anniversary Shabbat

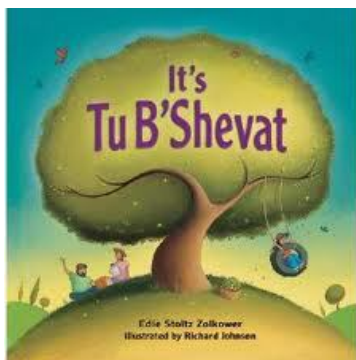
Around the Rabbi's Tisch Thursdays, February 2, 9, 16, and 23 at 7:30 pm at the Vorspan's

Our weekly discussions led by Rabbi Vorspan on Jewish wisdom and current events continues with its 5772 season. Call Rabbi at (818) 888-9917 for more information.

March Events

Brunch and Learn with Andy Hill - Sunday, March 4 11:00 am
See article on page 4 and flyer.

Free BINGO and Ice Cream - Sunday, March 25 3:00 pm
See article on page 2 and flyer.



Visit our website:
www.shirami.com

Rabbi's Column



It's time for another seminar on Jewish views on death and mourning. I find a lot of congregants have questions, such as: What do I do when a loved one dies in my home? Must there be an autopsy? What does a funeral shroud look like and must my loved one wear one? What's wrong with viewing the deceased during the funeral? Why do we put the shovel back in the dirt rather

than just hand it to the person next in line? Are flowers appropriate at a funeral?

How many days should I sit shiva if I also have to work? What's with the pitcher of water outside the mourner's home? I'm not sure what to say to the mourners. Are there expressions to avoid? I want to be cremated. Is this a problem? What's the difference between a yizkor and a yahrzeit? How many days do I mourn for a loved one?

I didn't much care for my relative. Do I still have to mourn? What do I do with the guilt I feel after my loved one died?

What's the Jewish view on life after death? Embalming? Euthenasia? Suicide? Can people with tattoos be buried in a Jewish cemetery? Non-Jewish spouses?

Do you have such questions? Looking for answers?

Our seminar will take place during an expanded "Around the Rabbi's Tisch" on Thursday, February 16, 7:30 - 9 PM.

Please don't miss this session. It will be information we are dying to use.

Rabbi David Vorspan

Tu B'Shevat: A New Year for Trees

Tu B'Shevat (the 15th of Shevat, Wednesday, February 8), traditionally known as the birthday of the trees, is a time to think about relating to the natural world. This holiday can be celebrated by planting trees, eating fruits, and having a Tu B'Shevat Seder, a ritual that began with the kabbalistic masters of the 15th century.

This month's featured articles:

Page 2 **A Special Sunday Sundae Treat**

Page 4 **Brunch and Learn with Andy Hill: *Finding Success in the Teachings of a Lifetime*** by Stan Schroeder

Page 5 **Jewish World Watch / Witness Award** by Stan Schroeder

Page 6 **Biography of the Month: Neil Simon** by Stan Schroeder

President's Report

Shalom,

I want to extend my congratulations to the members of our 2012 board and executive board on the occasion of their consecration at our first Shabbat service of the new year on January 7. I also want to thank the membership and the new board members who attended the service for almost doubling our regular attendance. And with all the grandchildren present, our service could easily have been mistaken for a Tot Shabbat!

A great round of applause and thanks also go out to **Helga Unkeless** for her two years of outstanding service as our president. I am personally grateful to Helga for agreeing to remain as our Executive Vice-President.

While the Board is still considering the various options for the future of Shir Ami, we are also actively planning events for our Shir Ami family. These will include a **Brunch and Learn** and **Member Appreciation Free Bingo and Ice Cream**, both to take place in March.

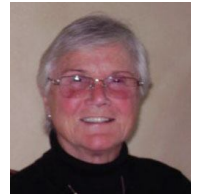
And, if you want to know what's *really* going on, you can attend our board meetings, but the best way to keep up with what's happening (and get the good gossip) is to join us for Shabbat services.

Thank you, **Jordan Pistol**, President



Our Consecration of Officers

Our annual Consecration of Officers was held at our Shabbat service January 7 with about 50 people in attendance. Outgoing President **Helga Unkeless** spoke about her two years in office:



Well my friends,

Sometimes two years flit away in a hurry, sometimes two years just drag on. These last two years did not drag – believe me.

Even though we have been caught up in a few whirlwinds of changes, the most important part did not change – us. Everything was doable in the end because we respected each other and worked together for our common good.

When I accepted the title of President I said that I was not a business person that could lead a synagogue. But I was a people person that truly enjoyed interacting with everyone. Thank goodness we have many experts in the fields of finance, legalities, negotiations, etc. They took over those entities and left me free to keep molding our congregation in the only other direction that I know.

Let me read a part of my original acceptance speech which is as true today as two years ago – “My motto is ‘Shevet Achim gam Yachad’, which to me means many things, let’s sit down together and talk things out, no one will not be heard, let’s be a warm and caring congregation, let us support each other, let us be together during Shabbat services and during the events planned for us. Join us in helping out and becoming involved with the other members and so becoming a closer family. That is what we are all about. We don’t have a school to nurture children, we have each other to nurture and be close to, and enjoy each others’ company within and without the walls of our congregation.”

That is who we are and that is why I love Congregation Shir Ami. I have all of you to thank - for your guidance, your patience and your ability to make me look good while you did all the work. You are a great group and I am so proud to be a member of Congregation Shir Ami.

*Now I can blend into the background again where I am most comfortable and productive and leave you in the capable hands of our next president - **Jordan Pistol**.*

Thank you all and Shabbat Shalom.

A Special Sunday Sundae Treat

Is it an Ice Cream Social with Bingo or a Bingo afternoon with Ice Cream? Either way, you're going to get both of them together at a very special Shir Ami event. **And it's free!**



That's right! On **March 25**, as a special treat and thank you to our Shir Ami membership, you are invited to a combined Bingo/Ice Cream Social with free Bingo cards, cash prizes, and ice cream with all the toppings.

It's going to be a fun afternoon. Look for details in the Bingo flyer.

Be sure to RSVP to **Jerry Zatz**: (818) 883-9924 or email to **elz1@pacbell.net**.



DONATIONS

Congregation Shir Ami wishes to acknowledge the following donations:

Yahrzeits

- Fran Friedman for Yetta Slotsky
- Shirley Esko for Marv Esko
- Ann and Isidore Goldfarb for Morrie Berman and Minnie Berman
- Fran Friedman for R. Milter
- Lorraine and Edwin Orens for Irving Zelenitz and David Orens
- Esther Perez for Samantha Elaine Perez
- Marcie and Steve Spetner for Sara Lurie
- Andrea and Leon Nachenberg for Simon Nachenberg
- Rose Chaplan for Ben March
- Gerry and Sam Hochberg for Leble Salle
- Jacque and Marshall Gordon for Joseph Gordon and Resella Katz
- Peg and Jerry Kovar for Sylvia Kovar
- Laura and Al Simon for Joseph Simon
- Clara and Stan Rosenbluth for Sadie Rosenbluth
- Nancy and Lawrence Scharf for Sally Bricker
- Linda and Harvey Tapper

Birthdays

- Jacqueline Gordon
- Jerry Gort
- Esther Perez
- Fiona Taylor

Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays

- Nancy Scharf 2/1
- Carol Koransky..... 2/2
- Howard Teichman 2/3
- Madeline Cooperman..... 2/4
- Michael Easley..... 2/5
- Esther Perez..... 2/7
- Bette Delman..... 2/9
- Lorraine Simansky..... 2/10
- Sherry Dollins..... 2/12
- Sima Schuster..... 2/13
- Talia Gnessin..... 2/14 15th
- Fran Black..... 2/21
- Philip Cramer..... 2/23
- Elanor Rubin..... 2/28

Anniversaries

None

Our Condolences



We regret to inform the congregational family of the passing of **Charlotte Mintz**, longtime member of Congregations Beth Ami and Shir Ami.

May God comfort the Mintz family and members **Fran Friedman** and **Becky and Gary Finlay**, who lived with Charlotte and have been like family for many years, during this time of their bereavement.

Congregational News



Get well wishes *rafuah schleimah* to:

- Phyllis Robinson**, recovering from quadruple bypass surgery
- Sheilah Hart**, recovering from gall bladder surgery
- Myrna Gold**, diagnosed with liver cancer

May they be blessed with a complete recovery in body and spirit.

Congregation Shir Ami Tribute Cards

Thanks to **Phyllis Schroeder** for sending your cards celebrating *simchas* and conveying your get-well and condolence messages.



She is creative with individualized, artistic cards that include a message and color graphics. Call her at (818) 718-7466. Minimum donation of \$5 per card is appreciated.

Corrections to Shir Ami Roster



Email address for **Sheilah Hart**:
sheilahhart@gmail.com

Email address for **Robert and Sondra Licht**:
Lichtson4u@yahoo.com

Zip code for **Lawrence and Nancy Scharf**:
91306

Fax number: (818) 348-2796

Email for Lawrence: LonnyS9970@aol.com

Social Action Committee

February has always been special for me because I try even harder to reach out to those who don't feel loved, appreciated, respected, and important - showing they are important to me and that I do care!

I think most of us take for granted how lucky we are to feel loved, needed, respected and have self worth. We need to never ignore those who are going through such difficult times in their lives, and let them know that they are not alone and yes, there are people who truly do care!

Congregation Shir Ami has shown so many people in so many ways that we all truly do care about those who are going through very difficult times. We have our **SOVA** bins at all services and events where we collect non-perishable food, new toiletries, and new and gently used children's books. We collect **Target \$10 gift cards** for the women and children in the domestic violence shelters that we help sponsor; we have a **Linen Shabbat** to collect new linens for the women and children in the shelters, because otherwise they will not have any; we collect new and gently used children's books for Northridge Hospital so they can be used by all the children visiting the hospital; we have had major mitzvah day projects where we have donated over 1000 knapsacks to the **School on Wheels** project; we have had annual **Walks Around Lake Balboa** to raise money for many charities; we do an annual Walk for Jewish World Watch to raise funds to combat genocide; and we have volunteers from our congregation who are tutors for the School on Wheels project and for **Koreh LA** (volunteer children's literacy program).

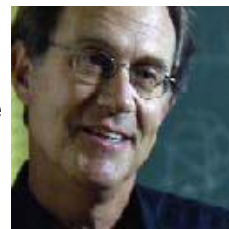
We also have volunteers who knit baby caps and blankets for the preemies at Tarzana neonatal unit, and many members of our congregation who have written over 1000 cards and letters for **Project MOT** and **Operation Gratitude** and volunteer at the armory to assemble the care packages for our military. We have donated over 1000 books for these care packages too. We visit the **West Valley Health Care Center** for the High Holy Days and Mother's/Father's day celebrations, and some of our members go there regularly to visit the residents as well. We try to reach out to everyone in our community who needs our help on a regular basis. We also try our best to practice *Bikur Cholim* (visiting the sick) whenever possible. (continued on page 5)



Brunch and Learn with Andy Hill: *Finding Success in the Teachings of a Lifetime*

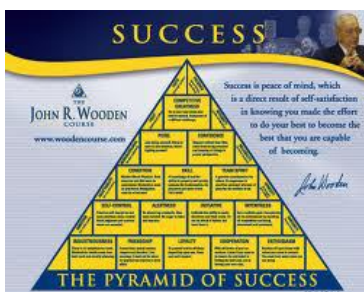
by Stan Schroeder

The **Brunch and Learn** is scheduled for **Sunday, March 4 at 11 am** at the Northridge Mobile Home Park Recreation Room. Tickets are \$10 per person. See the flyer with this *Shir Notes* for more information and ticket form. If you have questions, you may call me at (818) 718-7466.



Those who attended our 5772 High Holy Day services may remember I presented a Dvar Torah on Yom Kippur in which I spoke about **Andy Hill**, an ex-UCLA basketball player who played for **Coach John Wooden** on national championship teams in 1970 - 1972. Andy had a disappointing varsity career, in that he sat on the bench as a seldom used substitute. He didn't talk to Coach for 25 years. While playing golf he realized that although he played very little those years, he learned a great deal that helped him in business and life. He called Coach Wooden, reconnected, and became a close friend and associate in motivational seminars during Wooden's later years..

Now we have the unique opportunity to hear Andy talk about how Coach Wooden's philosophy of life helped him, and can help each of us. I was privileged to have met Coach on several occasions. We started at UCLA at the same time, I as a pre-med student, and Wooden as basketball coach taking over a mediocre program. I also played in the basketball band. During the Wooden years I belonged to the UCLA basketball booster club. And Coach Wooden has been a role model for me ever since.



You don't have to be a basketball fan to enjoy, and learn from, Andy at this unique Shir Ami event. Coach Wooden was much more than the greatest basketball coach of all time. He is

the only person elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame as a player and a coach. He won more national titles (10), by far, than any other coach. But his most noteworthy achievements were not as a coach or player. They were as a **teacher and a builder of character**. One of the tools he used was his **Pyramid of Success**. Andy will explain how each of us can enrich our lives and become a better person by following these principles.

Jewish World Watch / Witness Award

by Stan Schroeder



Jewish World Watch (JWW) presented their annual */ Witness Award* at the **Skirball Cultural Center** Wednesday evening, January 11. The event was held in conjunction with the **Women Hold Half the Sky** exhibit that addresses the oppression of women world-wide as the human rights cause of our time — and boldly asserts that change is possible, and it can happen quickly. I attended, along with **Charlene Kazel, Ethel Granik, Audrey Halem, and Shirley Esko** and an overflow crowd in the main auditorium.



The recipient of the award was **Melanne Vermeer**, United States Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues. She talked about the challenges and opportunities for the U.S. in creating policies to deal with the African countries where women have traditionally been subjugated.

The award was presented by JWW co-founders **Rabbi Harold Schulweis** of Valley Beth Shalom and one of his congregants, attorney **Janice Kamenir-Resnik**. Rabbi Schulweis started his talk with a reference from Isaiah:



“What gives us the theme that embraces our collective vision this evening? **Witness**. The mandate to “Witness” stems from the ancient prophetic imperative found in the prophesy of Isaiah: “*Atem aydai, neum adonai, v'ani elohim.*”

You are my witness, says the Lord. I am God.

What relationship have these two together? What has the human witness to do with the presence of God? The sages explain that God said, “When you bear witness, I am as God. But when you do not bear witness, I am as if there were no God.” Without the testimony of humankind, the divine is driven from the earth. If in the presence of evil we bite our lips to keep silence, if in the presence of evil we shrug our shoulders in despair, we lock God in Heaven behind an iron wall. We act deaf, dumb, and blind, God is segregated — the divine is exiled, Godliness is rendered impotent, and we are cut off.

But the Psalmist sang, “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth has he given to humankind.”

This is our earth. This is our moment. This is our family, our children, our wives, our sisters, our mothers, our grandmothers.”

He then explained, “To be witness is not simply to know how to count, but how to respond, how to react, how to intervene.”

JWW consists of member congregations who agree to their principles. They work to mobilize synagogues, their schools, their members, and the community to combat genocide and other egregious violations of human rights around the world. It is the mission of Jewish World Watch to:

Educate target constituencies by developing appropriate materials and programs;

Advocate for policies to stop or prevent genocide and other atrocities through community organization and mobilization; and

Develop resources and allocate funds towards relief and development projects aimed at empowering and alleviating the suffering of survivors.

Congregation Shir Ami has been a member since shortly after its founding in 2004. Our coordinator is **Rae Wazana** who keeps us informed of JWW activities and organizes our projects.

The next local event is their annual fundraising Walk to End Genocide April 29. Look for further information on how to participate or contribute in our next issue.

Social Action Committee (continued)

You must be asking now how such a small congregation can accomplish so much. The answer is so very simple: it is because each and every one of you is dedicated to doing community mitzvot with us and sponsoring us when you can't join our mitzvah projects.

I am asking each of you to please continue participating in our community projects during these difficult times. Together, we have earned a reputation in our community as ***The Little Temple That Does.***

Please save the following dates to participate in our community mitzvah projects: **Sunday, April 29** for **Jewish World Watch Walk to End Genocide**, **Friday, May 11** for our **annual visit to West Valley Health Care for Mother's/Father's Day Shabbat**, and **Sunday, June 3**, for our **annual Walk Around Lake Balboa**. And continue to ask your family and friends to please join us as well.

Fran Kobulnick, Social Action Vice President

Biography of the Month: Neil Simon

by Stan Schroeder

Neil Simon was born Marvin Neil Simon July 4, 1927 in The Bronx, New York City to Irving, a salesman, and Mamie Simon. He grew up in the Bronx, attending DeWitt Clinton High School. Neil was only 15 when Danny, his 23-year old brother, was hired to write the sketches and songs for a department store's employee party. The brothers worked together for two months to finish the job. "I slept through my classes at DeWitt Clinton High School, failing an English Lit class while I was honing my Comedy Lit future," Simon recalls.



As a teenager Simon's ambition was to be a baseball player for the New York Yankees. This led to his dropping the Marvin from his name as he thought Marvin wouldn't have the right sound at Yankee Stadium on the public address system. Neil graduated high school at the age of 16 and decided to enroll in the United States Army Air Force Reserve training program through New York University. In 1945 he was sent to Colorado on active duty and attended the University of Denver until 1946 when he was discharged as a corporal.

As a civilian, he decided to go to work at the New York offices of Warner Brothers where his older brother Danny was also employed. While there, the brothers heard that Goodman Ace of CBS was looking for fresh comedy material and they both entered pieces and were both hired. From 1946 to 1961 Simon wrote for CBS and NBC. He was a writer for the *Jackie Gleason Show* and Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*, for which he won an Emmy. During this time, he married a dancer named Joan Baim in 1953 with whom he had two daughters named Ellen and Nancy. Joan died of breast cancer in 1973. He has had three subsequent wives, but Joan remained the love of his life and several characters in his plays were based on Joan.

In 1961 his first Broadway play, *Come Blow Your Horn*, opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, where it ran for 678 performances. It is the story of two brothers who have decided to leave home and experience the good life. The play took three years to write, with a total of 25 rewrites. Twenty producers turned it down before William Hammerstein agreed to produce it. His third play was *Barefoot in the Park*, opening in 1963. Inspired by the early days of Simon's marriage at the time, it is the story of a newlywed couple who are

setting up house in a minuscule fifth-floor walkup apartment in a mid-Manhattan brownstone. It was a big success and set the stage for his next play in 1965, *The Odd Couple*.



Simon was inspired to write the play when he saw his brother Danny and theatrical agent Roy Gerber living together after recent divorces. Danny took the first crack at the play, but later handed over the idea to Neil. It is the story of a neurotic, neat-freak news-writer, who is thrown out by his wife, and moves in with a slovenly sportswriter. This play was an even greater success with Art Carney and Walter Matthau playing the leading roles. All three plays led to successful movie versions and *The Odd Couple* also became a TV sitcom from 1970 to 1975.

From the mid 60s through the mid 80s, Simon wrote hit (mostly comedic) Broadway plays, nearly one a year. Most were also made into movies. Starting in 1983 he wrote a trilogy of plays that were largely autobiographical, starting with *Brighton Beach Memoirs* about a Russian-Jewish teenager in 1937 who experiences puberty, sexual awakening, and a search for identity as he tries to deal with his family, including his older brother whom he idolizes. *Biloxi Blues* in 1985 continues as a 20-year-old Brooklyn youth enlists in the United States Army during World War II and is sent to Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training. During his army life he learns to cope with fellow soldiers from all walks of life, falls in love, loses his virginity in less than ideal circumstances, and much more.

The series concludes with *Broadway Bound* in 1986. The brothers have to deal with their parents' relationship falling apart as they are working together to become aspiring comedy writers for the radio, and eventually, films. They discover that their father has been cheating on their mother and the story blends family and career situations. Neil Simon's success continued through 2001 with his latest play *45 Seconds from Broadway* appearing in 2001.

In March 2004 Neil Simon was the recipient of a kidney transplant from Bill Evans, his longtime friend who was the publicist on many of Simon's plays. Neil lives in Los Angeles with his wife Elaine.

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TREE OF LIFE

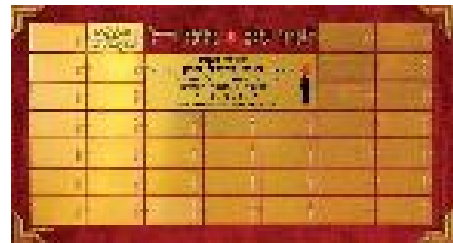


This beautiful Tree of Life, with leaves priced at \$100 and rocks at \$250 (one remaining), makes a perfect way to celebrate family occasions and support Congregation Shir Ami.

The Tree is on a rosewood background and consists of gold-colored leaves and rocks. It is displayed at all Congregation Shir Ami services and events.

For more information or to place an order, call Sherry Dollins at (818) 886-7590.

Congregation Shir Ami Memorial Board



If you would like to honor the memory of your loved ones by dedicating plaques on our new Memorial Board, please call Clara Rosenbluth at (818) 348-1498 so she may mail you an order form. The cost of each plaque is \$36.

Each plaque may contain up to three lines of engraving: English name, Hebrew name, and the years of birth and death. Both of our Memorial Boards are displayed at all our services.

Shop at Ralphs - Earn Money for Shir Ami

by Maralyn Soifer



Here is an easy way to earn money for our Temple. We are now officially a **Ralphs' community agency**. All you have to do is follow these simple instructions to help earn money for Congregation Shir Ami.

1. If you don't have a Ralph's rewards card already, go to the store and fill out the application. You can get it from the customer service station or any checker.
2. Once you have your card, go to the website: **www.ralphs.com**
3. Go to the top where the red bar is located and click on services.
4. On the left, click on **Community Contributions**.
5. In the upper left hand corner click on **Create an Account** if you haven't already registered a card with a community organization.

6. If you already have a Ralph's reward card and have registered it, go to sign in. You can change to our Temple by going to your profile page and clicking on **Community Rewards**. Then click on **Edit Community Rewards**. You can do a search for Congregation Shir Ami by putting in the number **92785**. Our congregation will pop up and click on the button next to the name. Click on the button that saves the changes.
7. You can also check the bottom of your receipt when you shop. It should say "**Thank you for supporting Congregation Shir Ami**".
8. If all else fails, call me in the evening at (818) 704-0306. I'll be happy to walk you through it.
9. Start Shopping!

Make sure that the clerk swipes your card each time you shop. Verify that your receipt shows a contribution to Congregation Shir Ami at the bottom.

Important note: A new term for the Ralphs Community Contribution Program started September 1, 2011. All participants are required to re-register on or after that date. Please visit Ralphs.com and do so!

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Congregation Shir Ami
Invites you to a

"FREE" MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION EVENT

Sunday, March 25, 2012 - 3:00 PM

Temple Ner Maarav
17355 Magnolia Blvd. (at White Oak) Encino

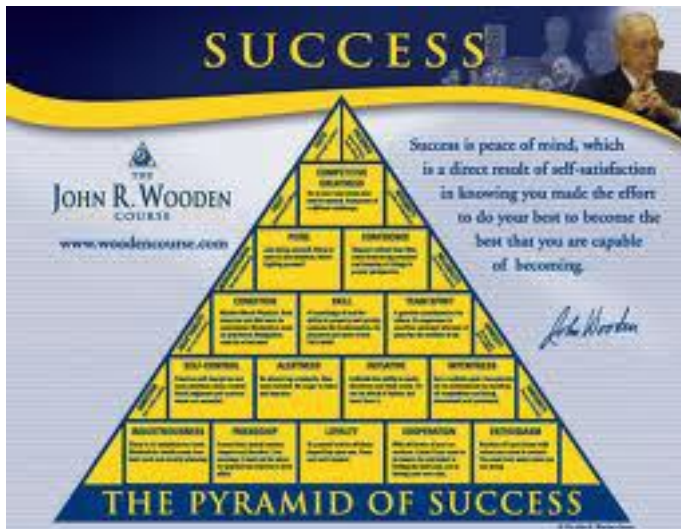


Please join us, at this members' only program,
for a *FREE* afternoon of Bingo and Ice Cream.
We want all of our members to come and have
a good time for *FREE*. (Yes, it's *FREE*.)

To attend you must R.S.V.P. by March 16th to:
Jerry Zatz at (818) 883-9924 or email elz1@pacbell.net

Congregation Shir Ami presents Brunch and Learn with Andy Hill

Finding Success in the Teachings of a Lifetime



Andy Hill is a motivational speaker and author whose unique success as president of two media companies, CBS Productions and Channel One Network, was based on lessons he learned from Coach John Wooden as a member of three N.C.A.A. basketball teams at UCLA. He generously offered to speak to us *pro bono* when I spoke with him prior to featuring his story in my Yom Kippur Dvar Torah. You won't want to miss this unique opportunity.

Sunday morning, March 4 at 11 o'clock
Northridge Mobile Home Park Recreation Room
19120 Nordhoff St., Northridge - \$10 per person
Call Stan Schroeder at (818) 718-7466

Brunch & Learn reservation: Please mail by February 27

Name: Mail check payable to Congregation Shir Ami
No. of tickets: Congregation Shir Ami
Phone: P.O. Box 6353
Woodland Hills, CA 91365