

Spirituality and Family

By **Cindy Acker, Ed.D.**

Spirituality has been the substratum of the ebbs and flows of family life, with its challenges. We've dealt with many issues over time, including serious health issues, family changes, economic challenges, and the judgments that come with adolescence and young adulthood. We go back to prayer, to groundedness, to reminders of where we have come from and the intentionality with which we have been raised (and I do believe that adults raise children, but the best parents are also raised in the sense that they are changed by their children).

When our son was in an auto accident and comatose for many days, it was our ability to remain spiritually grounded that got us through. The day that was most life-changing for us was when he had been in a coma for the tenth day. We were encouraged to leave the hospital and take a short break—the first and only time that we left the hospital. We had been asked whether we would remove him from life support, as his legs were beginning to turn in—his brain failing to send the information to his limbs. I recall praying

and crying, and saying that I needed a way to know what to do—a signal that was so clear that the decision was without question.

In the midst of my tears, the phone rang and we were asked to return to the hospital: he was awake. When he emerged from life support and began to learn to speak and walk again, we called upon everyone we knew (and even those whom we did not know) to hold him in their most positive thoughts. My partner was called as a pastor while we were in hospital #3, where we had remained steadfastly by my son's side, by then—for many months.

One nurse told us that through the months when my son was in the hospital, she was deeply touched by the never-ending commitment we showed as a family. Our composition as a



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Creating a Jewish-Buddhist Family With Love

By **Shareena Clark and Adina Ascher**

Shareena, a former staffer at OFC, and her wife Adina consider their spiritual roots, their queer identities' reflection in them, and the influence of their Jewish-Buddhist theology as they expand their family.

Judaism was simply a part of Adina's family, a glue that held the family together. She grew up immersed in these traditions, foods and holidays. She retains an appreciation for several very beautiful elements of the Jewish traditions and culture: highly valuing education and family, and the large role food, drink, and dancing always play at any Jewish event. Adina recalls attending shabbat dinners at her maternal grandmother's home on a regular basis and eating homemade challah and brisket.

As Adina grew into a young adult, she began questioning



her Jewish upbringing. She always felt that Judaism was a patriarchal religion, created by and for men. She never felt that her experience as a woman, and especially as a lesbian, was truly reflected in Judaism. In orthodox communities, women do not even sit with men; they are seated behind a curtain off to the side. Adina went on a search to find reflections of herself and her own experience in a religious or spiritual system.

It was around this time that Adina became very interested in the study of religion as a whole. She studied religions from around the world and became especially drawn to Wicca and Buddhism. As a result, she has incorporated a Buddhist understanding of the world and Buddhist teachings into her private practice as a psychotherapist. At the same time, she has never lost connection to her

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

A Leap of Faith

by Renata Moreira, Executive Director



“Se joga!” is a pretty common expression we use in Brazil to encourage folks to face an unknown situation with courage. It literally means “throw yourself in,” underscoring the sentiment: it’s time to take a leap of faith!

As parents and caregivers, we are constantly invited to take leaps of faith, regardless of our religious backgrounds or the denominations we may identify with at this point in our lives. We consider the values we were raised with, align with new perspectives that resonate with us as we grow and, ultimately, hope to raise our children with love, respect, and a sense of belonging. We dwell on how we’ll best teach them to have faith in themselves while letting go of what we cannot control; we throw ourselves into modeling justice and reconciliation; we teach life and death issues whether consciously or not.

Many of us who experienced deep religious trauma in faith-based spaces (because of who we love or who we are) tend to reject mainstream religious practices. For folks like me, who choose to return or are called to new spiritual homes later in life, it is an interesting journey to heal, shed our armors, assumptions and biases and to unlearn much of what we may have had internalized so deeply from oppressive and exclusive theologies and religions.

Parenting has become that new spiritual home for me, where I grow the soft and vulnerable parts of myself that had been shut down for decades; where I practice questioning all of my assumptions that hinder the manifestation of just love in my work; where I practice trusting that the loving Spirit and the beloved community will see me through.

As my daughter learns to see and experience the world, I, too, grow new eyes to be able to see my friends, family, and foes with compassion, new hands to be able to serve our people with

gratitude, new ears and lips to better connect with my brothers and sisters and to interweave our knowings for a better world. I observe her natural human tendency to connect every moment, her capacity to integrate with me and through me. To embrace each moment anew, to accept the gifts and challenges that come with each moment. Even in this moment where the alt-right continues trying to hijack the notion that only “they” are the chosen good people, I keep on practicing how to best put love in action. To slow down enough to hear our call to work for transformative justice and conscious parenting.

The cover stories for this summer’s newsletter offer two other stories of how religion and spiritual practice—or both together, or neither!—have guided other Bay Area LGBTQ families and families-to-be. Our stories are many and varied, and we hope the ones here inspire not just thought, but the desire to tell your own (we’ll help: media@ourfamily.org).

My wish for all of our families—no matter how quiet or how loud, no matter the academic/ political/ intellectual debates, no matter the very real consequences of policies that use religion to justify discriminatory practices—is that we may continue to practice surrendering to the whispers of Spirit/Love. My wish is for us all to develop the trust (at an experiential level) that there is a higher calling connecting each one of us to each other and into this moment, and that we can dig deep within ourselves and our communities to collectively experience liberation here, and now. To “throw ourselves into” the journey that it is to be alive. Civil rights visionary and leader Rev. Dr. William Barber, II puts it this way, succinct, and mindful of the times: “Silence is not an option.”

Se joga. We’re here to catch you. 🌈

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Spirituality and Family ...

(continued from page 1)

family was never questioned, nor our loyalty to our son or to our positive belief in the role that spirituality plays in our life. Indeed, my spirituality has always been embedded deeply within my DNA, as is my sexual identity. I have not had to hold onto my faith more because I am a lesbian; my faith is my core—who I am—and being a lesbian is just also that: who I am.

I have attended churches where LGBTQ individuals have been members mostly because they have needed a safe haven from others who feel their belief gives them privilege to place others on a spiritual rating scale. In San Francisco, I sang in the choir in one such church, attending for many years with my children. I believe it was a support to many in the congregation who struggled with those who didn't believe that a gay family and church could be connected. I remained because I loved the congregation, but also

Jewish-Buddhist Family...

(continued from page 1)

Jewish roots. Today, Adina and Shareena belong to a synagogue in which they are fully accepted for who they are, and Adina considers herself a "Jew-Bu."

Shareena was raised in the Church of God In Christ (COGIC) and spent a great deal of time in church with her grandmother, who was an Evangelist. Culturally she feels close ties to COGIC and its traditions, particularly when it comes to music, celebration, and practicing gratitude. Yet something never quite sat right with the way she fit into her COGIC community. She was often left with burning questions about salvation, punishment, and being different, and was very bothered by the many things that could send one to Hell.

When she was in high school, Shareena attended a few services at a Shul with a friend, and became interested in Judaism. But it wasn't until she was an adult that the idea of conversion became a reality. After several years of study, Shareena officially converted to Judaism, and has been a Radical Conservative Jew ever since.

When it comes to raising children and expanding their family, spirituality is a pretty big deal. It is important to Shareena for her future youngins to be raised with a sense of being a part of something bigger that connects all of us. As of now, raising kids in a Bu-Jew home feels like the best fit for their family. Why not raise kids to mindfully argue with G-d?

Adina feels that religion can be a powerful binding force in a family. She believes that traditions and rituals are important for children and thus, along with the accompanying moral and ethical lessons within Judaism (and most organized religious practices), religious practice

because I knew that my presence as an 'out' woman of color with a family gave strength to others who wished the support of their family.

I look at potential conflicts with others who may be compelled by religious belief to find fault with my family as "life time." I have been so close to seeing my son without that time—that life, that I view time differently now. Conflict with such people represents time that I use up from my life. Churches and spiritual centers who are open and affirming value the time and life of those around them. In such life-affirming spiritual places, there is no need to waste time—precious moments of one's life—trying to determine whether a minister or denomination will accept one's family. Unity in Marin, where I attend and lead the choir, is such a place. I cannot but believe that all that is good, and all that is God, would embrace this manner of love for all people—for all families—like mine. ↻

is important within a family. Adina and Shareena are in the process of adopting a child. They both envision Judaism playing a large role in family life, along with other spiritual practices that are in line with their experiences and identities in the world. ↻

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CALENDAR

THU July 6 Aug 3 Sept 7 6pm–8pm	Teen & Tween Drop-In Support Services OUR FAMILY COALITION OFFICE, 1385 MISSION ST., STE 340, SAN FRANCISCO Raising teens, tweens, (or both!) can often be filled with awkward moments, confusing times, and maybe some stress. With a parent-peer leading the charge, you will have time (away from your child!) to really connect and decompress about your experiences. Simultaneously, under the relatable eye of a Youth Leader, youth will have a chance to chill, laugh, and talk about...whatever teens and tweens talk about. Meets the first Thursday of every month.	SF
FRI–SUN July 14–16 5pm Fri– 12pm Sun	OFC Family BBQ and Campout GILLESPIE GROUP CAMPSITE, TILDEN REGIONAL PARK, BERKELEY Join us at Tilden Park’s beautiful Gillespie group campsite for fun, games, food, and family time in the great outdoors! NOTE: We are unable to accommodate walk-ins or day-of registration.	EB
SUN July 23 11am–7pm	LGBTQ Family and Friends Day at Six Flags Discovery Kingdom 1001 FAIRGROUNDS DR., SW, VALLEJO Close out the summer with a bang by celebrating LGBTQ Family and Friends Day at Six Flags! Enjoy discounted tickets, food included; earlybird registrants park for free (\$20 value). The lakeside picnic area will provide a fun, community-filled home base for the day, with a Looney Toons character visit and entertainment. The park has little kid rides, hair-raising big kid thrill rides, and amazing animal attractions. A blast for all ages.	EB
SAT July 29 12–4pm	Día de la Familia DIMOND PARK, OAKLAND Please join Somos Familia and Our Family Coalition for our annual Día de la Familia celebration! There will be food, family, and friends, so bring a guest or two. We’ll be at the Sequoia Grove Picnic Area, near the tennis courts; use the Fruitvale Avenue entrance.	EB
SUN July 30 10am– 1pm	Habitot Pride Day HABITOT CHILDREN’S MUSEUM, 2065 KITTREDGE ST., BERKELEY Meet and play together with other LGBTQ families in an afternoon of fun and community-building at Habitot Children’s Museum. Infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their grown ups can explore the rocketship, get messy in the art studio, splash around in the water play area, and more!	EB
SUN July 30 10am–12pm	Baker Beach Family & Doggie Meet Up BAKER BEACH, SAN FRANCISCO, CA Do you love your pooch almost as much as you love your kid(s)? Bring them both to Baker Beach (North of Lobos Creek) for an afternoon of leash-free fun in the sand.	SF
THU Aug 10 5:30– 7:30pm	Perinatal & Early Infancy Workshop COMMUNITY WELL, 78 OCEAN AVE., SAN FRANCISCO Join OFC in this facilitated workshop as we address perinatal physical and emotional well-being, including information about prenatal care, labor and delivery, all in an LGBTQ+ family centered environment.	SF
SUN Aug 13 10am–12pm	Mission Cliffs Youth Trip 2295 HARRISON ST., SAN FRANCISCO Rock climbing is a fun activity for kids of all ages and abilities. While parents take photos, MC’s party staff will do all the work of belaying the kids and encouraging them to climb as high as they want. This activity is for youth ages 6-12 years old	SF

**Free childcare and food are provided at all events, with advance registration.
For further information and event registration, visit www.ourfamily.org.**

TUE
Aug 29
6-8pm

The Gender Creative Child

BANANAS, 5232 CLAREMONT AVE., OAKLAND

Join us for a special evening with Dr. Diane Ehrensaft, pioneering advocate and champion for gender nonconforming children and adolescents. She'll bring her 30 years of experience to bear in a discussion of how we can nurture and support children who live outside gender binaries, and how we can prepare all children to be their authentic gender selves.

EB

THU
Sept 14
6-8pm

Ages & Stages Youth Development [0-5 Years] Workshop

OUR FAMILY COALITION OFFICE, 1385 MISSION ST., STE 340, SAN FRANCISCO

In this facilitated workshop, we will be providing information and inviting conversation on the emotional, physical, and social development of infants and toddlers.

SF

TUES
Sept 5, 12,
19, 26
Oct 3, 10, 17,
24, 31
Nov 7, 14, 21
6-8pm

Group Positive Parenting Program [2-10 Years]

OUR FAMILY COALITION OFFICE, 1385 MISSION ST., STE 340, SAN FRANCISCO

OFC staffers will guide LGBTQ parents and caregivers through this 12-week Positive Parenting Program. Triple P is designed to promote positive parenting practices in the community, prevent a range of social and behavioral problems in children, and aims to support parents to promote their child's social, emotional, and behavioral development. For parents and caregivers with children 2-10 years old. Class meets weekly on Tuesdays for 12 weeks.

SF

SUN
Sept 10
10:30am-
4:00pm

Oakland Pride Parade, Festival, & Family Garden

PARADE: BROADWAY & 14TH ST.

GARDEN: FRANKLIN & 21ST ST., OAKLAND

Celebrate family and march with us at the Oakland Pride Parade! Then explore and relax in the Family and Children's Garden with a giant slide, bounce houses, art activities, games, petting zoo, story time and more.

EB

OFC in the State Capitol

This May 16 we brought a family perspective to LGBTQ issues on LGBTQ Advocacy Day, alongside Equality California and many others. And on May 22 we joined our partners in the California Work & Family Coalition to highlight LGBTQ families' stakes in a host of family justice issues. Current legislation affecting our families addresses everything from gender recognition to paid family leave to anti-bias work in school.

The Capitol LGBT Association launched on Harvey Milk Day, and we were there to celebrate, with Bay Area Assemblymember-heroes David Chiu and Evan Low, along with a host of other elected officials and staff.

We're your LGBTQ parent and caregiver voice in Sacramento: let us know what matters to you! Email policy@ourfamily.org.

MAY
16 & 22



Sonoma County Pride

OFC was proud to be a community partner to the 2nd Annual Family Campout and Celebration for Sonoma County Pride organized by North Bay LGBTQI Families. We had an amazing time kicking off our Pride month by walking with North Bay families in Guerneville!

JUNE
4





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PLAYGROUPS

TUESDAYS

July 11, 18, 25
Aug 1
Sept 12, 19, 26
Oct 3
10–11:30am

LGBTQ Parent-Child Interactive Playgroup (0-5 years)

DESTINY ARTS, 970 GRACE AVE., OAKLAND

Interactive play and circle time for infants, toddlers, and their grown ups, including fun activities like music, movement, and storytelling, at Destiny Arts' beautiful Northwest Oakland space. Healthy snacks provided! We'll be taking various field trips in July and August. Check out our website calendar for the venues! No meetings Aug 8–Sept 5.

EB

FIRST SAT

Aug 5, Sept 2,
Oct 7
11:30am–2pm

East Oakland Community Playtime

YOUTH UPRISING SKATE PARK, 8711 MAC ARTHUR BLVD., OAKLAND

Enjoy outdoor games, a community market, fun multicultural activities, arts and crafts, and story time by the Oakland Public Library.

EB

FRIDAYS

July 7, 14, 21, 28
Aug 4, 11
9:45–11am

Baby & Me: Infant Class (0–18 months)

COMMUNITY WELL, 78 OCEAN AVE, SAN FRANCISCO

Want more quality time with your little one? OFC will be hosting a weekly infant class for LGBTQ parents and caregivers. This parent-child interactive helps support child bonding, health, and increase your know-how about your infant's cognitive, physical, and language development! Group meets weekly on Fridays for 6 weeks; next 6-week series starts in October.

SF

FRIDAYS

July 7, 14, 21, 28
Aug 4, 11, 18, 25
Sept 1, 8, 15, 22
11:30am–12:45pm

Toddle with Me: Music & Movement Class (18 months—5 years)

COMMUNITY WELL, 78 OCEAN AVE, SAN FRANCISCO

For walkers, toddlers, and tumblers this weekly music and movement classes is a fun opportunity for parents and children to two-step! Group meets weekly on Fridays; no meeting Sept 29.

SF

SUPPORT GROUPS

WEDNESDAYS

Aug 2
Sept 6
Oct 4
5:30–7:30pm

Rainbow Family Night

HABITOT CHILDREN'S MUSEUM, 2065 KITTREDGE ST., BERKELEY

LGBTQ parents are invited to join our facilitated support group to connect, share experiences, swap tips, and discuss issues relevant to our families, while kids have a great time playing in the Habitat Children's Museum. No meeting July 5.

EB

SAT

July 22
Aug 19
Sept 16
12–2pm

Transgender Parent Group

OUR FAMILY COALITION OFFICES, 1385 MISSION ST., STE. 340, SAN FRANCISCO

Trans parents, prospective parents, and co-parents connect and share what's on their minds. From the workplace to trans activism, transition to temper tantrums, discuss whatever you'd like to in a safe space with friendly, supportive people. Light refreshments, and fun child care provided. Newcomers welcome!

SF

TUE

July 25
Aug 22
Sept 26
6–8pm

LGBTQ Family Night for Solo & Partnered Parents

CHILDREN'S DAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, 333 DOLORES ST., SAN FRANCISCO

Eat dinner and play with your kids, little and big, with the playground and classroom space of the Children's Day School all to ourselves. Then grown-ups split into groups—solo parents and coparents/caregivers—for facilitated discussions about family and child-rearing issues while OFC staff play with your kids.

SF

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Support Our Family Coalition at www.ourfamily.org.

BOOK CORNER

Queer, There, and Everywhere: 23 People Who Changed the World

Written by Sarah Prager and illustrated by Zoe More O'Ferrall

Queer author, activist, and fresh mama Sarah Prager delves deep into the lives of 23 people who “fought, created, and loved on their own terms.” Publisher Harper notes: “From high-profile figures like Abraham Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt to the trailblazing gender-ambiguous Queen of Sweden and a bisexual blues singer who didn’t make it into your history books, these astonishing true stories uncover a rich queer heritage that encompasses every culture, in every era.” We like the “tl;dr” summaries at the beginning of each bio. And a 12-year-old reader we know said of the book: “Very interesting! There were so many stories that I hadn’t heard before this book, and I was engrossed in it the whole time.” Sold!



WELCOME PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Nadi Suhaimi



Nadi has nearly a decade’s experience working with incarcerated people and their families as a counselor and case manager, work which has made him acutely

aware of systemic oppression inherent in our societies. In Singapore, where he hails from, he was also actively involved with the Yellow Ribbon Project, which helped recently incarcerated people reintegrate into society by engaging support of their families and communities.

Nadi graduated from the National University of Singapore with a BA in Sociology, and is a recent transplant to the Bay Area. He’s excited to join OFC as the East Bay Family Program Coordinator where he has the opportunity to advocate for and connect with LGBTQ families—and, for the first time, be able to be “out” as queer and trans at work.

Jeannette Page



Jeannette is a dedicated and passionate advocate for youth and families, with ten years of nonprofit programming experience. Raised in her mom’s home

daycare on the Sacramento River, she’s been helping raise children since she herself was a child.

She has worked primarily in sexual assault response and prevention providing direct services to survivors of violence and their loved ones, navigating criminal justice and social service systems, and facilitating community education workshops on abuse prevention. Jeannette also has significant experience in youth social justice programs, empowering youth to take action and be change agents in their schools and communities.

Jeannette has a B.A. in Sociology, is a California state-certified sexual assault and domestic violence counselor, and is excited to bring her skills and training to OFC’s family programs.



Our Family Coalition advances equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) families with children through support, education, and advocacy.

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NEWSLETTER

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