

NEWS & VIEWS

חדשנות והשקיות

NOVEMBER 2022 / CHESHVAN-KISLEV 5783

SIG WESTERMAN TURNS 100!

I had the honor of spending part of an afternoon with long-time Fair Lawn Jewish Center member Sig Westerman this month. I left totally enchanted! I realize many of you already know how charming Sig is, and while I had a general sense this delightful centenarian, I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to sit with him one on one, and share with you his remarkable life story.

When I first arrived at his home in Fair Lawn, Sig protested the value of the interview, exclaiming, "I didn't do anything!" I explained that it's not about "doing anything," but rather, who he is.

Sigmund Westerman was born November 10, 1922 in Paterson, NJ. He was born at home on a Friday night. His mother, Edna, prepared the Shabbat meal, and then yelled out to his father, Louis, "Call the doctor!" The doctor came to the house, and Sig's father, older sister, and the doctor ate the Shabbat meal while his mother labored in the bedroom. Sigmund Westerman made his entry into the world later that night.

Sig's father, Louis Max (Leib Motol) came from a shtetl in Latvia. He came the US alone, in 1904, when he was 13. Sig detailed how his father spoke no English, yet navigated a train to Riga, a boat to Southampton, England, and another boat to New York. He was met in NY by his uncle, who sponsored him. Sig's mother, Edna (Ettel) was born in Manhattan and grew up in Brooklyn.

Siggy grew up in Paterson and attended Eastside High School. His family owned Westerman's Infants and Childrenswear, a

landmark clothing store on the corner of Van Houten St. and Washington St. in Paterson. After Sig graduated, there was no money to go to college, so he got a job at Larkey's, a men's clothing store in Paterson. He also took some night classes at Columbia University.

In 1942, when the US entered World War II, Siggy enlisted in the Air Force. He took college classes while taking coursework to become an air force forecaster, achieving the rank of Second Lieutenant. Sig was never deployed overseas, instead serving at weather stations at various air bases around the United States.



While stationed at a base in Illinois, he met Frances "Frannie" Hochman through relatives who lived in Chicago. It was love at first sight. However, Siggy was soon transferred to a base in Georgia for 2 years, and the two lost contact. When he was sent back to the base in Illinois, he called Frannie, but she wasn't home; she was at a USO dance. Siggy went to the dance, found her, and said to himself, "that's the girl I'm going to marry." Fran and Sig wed in 1946; they were married for 75 years until Frannie passed in October 2021.

After Siggy was discharged from the army, he and Fran came back to New Jersey, and Siggy entered the family business. They lived in Saddle Brook for a short time, before moving to Fair Lawn in 1949. He managed the clothing store, which eventually relocated out of Paterson and into Ridgewood, until 1978, when he turned the day-to-day management of the store over to Fran. (The store closed

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RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Sunday through Thursday—7:30 PM on ZOOM

Go to Zoom.us or dial 1-929-205-6099
Meeting ID: 992 9922 2789
Password: 609729

Friday Evening

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Shabbat Morning
Shabbat Services 9:30 AM
In Person and via Livestream
www.fljc.com/worship

Havdalah at the conclusion of Shabbat on ZOOM

Go to Zoom.us or dial 1-929-205-6099
Meeting ID: 940 7714 6714
Password: 215407

Sunday morning services 9:00 AM

In the Chapel and on ZOOM
Go to Zoom.us or dial 1-929-205-6099
Meeting ID: 991 2258 1312
Password: 731712

CANDLELIGHTING TIMES

| Date | Lighting | Havdalah |
|-------------|----------|------------|
| | Time | (next day) |
| November 4 | 5:30 PM | 6:31 PM |
| November 11 | 4:23 PM | 5:24 PM |
| November 18 | 4:17 PM | 5:19 PM |
| November 25 | 4:13 PM | 5:16 PM |

Remember to turn your clocks back
1 hour on November 6!

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RABBI SALSTON'S CLASS

Coffee & Commentary will be held on WEDNESDAYS

At 11:00 AM in the Sanctuary and on Zoom

Next class will be November 2

Go to Zoom.us or dial+1 929 436 2866
Meeting ID: 943 0394 9434 Password 226478

RABBI ROTH'S

Nosh & Knowledge Series:

Contemporary Jewish Ethics

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נחמו, נחמו עמי

Member Jeffrey Zerowin, husband
of Roni Zerowin

Esther Schwartz, sister of Irving Pollack
Doris Gado, sister of Ephraim Levy
Jeffrey Honig, brother of Robin Honig Willens

MAY THE LORD CONSOLE AND SUSTAIN YOU,
TOGETHER WITH ALL THE MOURNERS FOR ZION AND JERUSALEM

RABBINIC REFLECTIONS

Rabbi Rachel Salston



Shanah tovah! Now that the holiday season is behind us, we begin our full programming year! I would like to share with you my Erev Yom Kippur sermon to set the tone for some of the conversations we will continue in this New Year.

Beginning this summer and up until this moment, I undertook a theological experiment that you've all been witnesses to. As often as possible, when pressed to use a gendered pronoun for God, I have actively used female pronouns. I have done this both in print and in my speaking.

It is almost comical for me how challenging and productively discomforting it has been to force myself to call my God female. That has been a surprising outcome of the experiment. I am a feminist. I was raised by feminists. I have been told all my life, as a female, I can be whatever I can envision. And here I am, standing in a role, in a calling that was 99.9% male, but not exclusively, until the final quarter of the 20th century. And yet, unconsciously, I default to envisioning my God as a male.

In our Selichot, confessional service, which we recite 5 times throughout Yom Kippur, we introduce the list of our confessions with a prayer asking for God's forgiveness. It's one of Yom Kippur's greatest hits. *Eloheinu v'Elohei Avoteinu v'Imoteinu, Shlah lanu mehal lanu kaper lanu, ki anu amekhah v'Atah Eloheinu, anu vanekhah v'Atah Avinu.* Our God and God of our ancestors, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement because we are your people and You are our God. We are Your children and You are our Father. We are your slaves and you are our Master. We are Your vineyard and You are our guardian. With one exception, all of the parallel statements are hierarchical. We are small; God is big. We are weak; God is strong. We are vulnerable, God takes care of us.

We know on an intellectual level that God has no human body. The Force that holds the universe together can't actually have a gender. Maimonides, the Rambam, spends Part 1 of his *Guide for the Perplexed* explaining how mistaken one would be to assume that the Image of God in which we are created means a corporeal body; rather it is our intellect that is God-like, unlike any other creature on Earth. In summation, the Rambam teaches that anything that we humans can say about God is only an approximation in our limited human language. How could you possibly describe the *Ein Sof*, That Which Is Without End?

But we have to, in order to have a relationship with God. The God that we speak to, imagine, visualize, know, is described in human terms with human honorifics and with human power. The feminist poet-theologian-liturgist, Marcia Falk, identified in her 1987 essay "Notes on Composing New Blessings: Toward a Feminist-Jewish Reconstruction of Prayer," that even in our modern world, the nouns, the gender-neutral terms that we try to use for God, come from the male realm of power, that is, King and Lord. The way that we conceive of the Being that is more powerful than any of us is with traditional powerful people.

Yes, women are judges, doctors, astronauts, vice presidents of the United States of America, but there is still an otherness about women in power. It's not something that we're supposed to talk about. But ignoring it is like trying to be colorblind. When I write the word H-E as a proper noun, I know that God is the subject. When I write S-H-E, it looks strange and takes me a moment to understand that the sentence is about God. I try to avoid this altogether by using God as the pronoun for God.

In an ideal world, says the Feminist Theologian Rabbi Dr. Rachel Adler, the default pronoun for God would be neuter. But Hebrew does not have a neuter, a gender-neutral pronoun. English does, and it is valuable to use They/Them/Theirs for God. With the greatest respect and love for the trans and non-binary community, referring to a God without or transcending gender, works much better when we are speaking of the well, Transcendental Force of the Universe. But the God of the Torah and the God of the Jewish liturgy is one we speak to. And that is a God with human emotions and human parts.

Despite the Rambam's insistence that these statements are purely metaphorical, in the Torah and in Rabbinic literature, the God of Israel has a body. We can't really describe what that body looks like, and mystery is embedded in the Torah itself. Or should I say herself? Torah is a feminine noun. God says in Parshat Ki Tisa, on the very first Yom Kippur, when Moshe begs to see God's presence, "A human being cannot see My face and live. So God agrees to pass in front of Moshe and Moshe gets a glimpse of God's back. There's an amazing midrash that teaches that what Moshe saw was the back knot of God's tefillin. Not only does God have a body, God has a head and just like Jewish humans, puts tefillin on that head. In the Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 6a, the Rav Hiyya bar Avin teaches that there is one verse in

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CANTORIAL CONTEMPLATIONS

Cantor Yoni Stokar



Shalom! I hope you all enjoyed an amazing holiday season and are feeling healthy in body and spirit and ready to dive into the new year.

We find ourselves now in the month of Cheshvan. The fall is fading into winter, we've changed the clocks, taken out our coats, and begun to buckle down for the dark and the cold. This in and of itself could be one explanation of why the month is also known as "Mar Cheshvan," *Mar* the Hebrew for bitter.

Before Tishrei we spoke about the process of Teshuvah, repentance and it being an ongoing process of change not specific to the month but rather amplified due to the increase in Hashem's presence in the world during this time.

Having already celebrated the new year, taken stock of the previous year, and set new intentions and goals for this coming year, we have to remember that we are human and as our Sages have taught us "All beginnings are difficult." I remarked on this idea to a friend on *Leil Hoshanah Rabbah* in Jerusalem this concept during a discussion in his Sukkah. Rav Nachman of Breslov taught that we are always beginning anew. That every moment is a new beginning, and even if I set out to do something good or to not do something wrong and then I didn't come through or fell back into a habit, right now there is a new opportunity for me to begin again. I mention this because we've all experienced this sensation of starting something new and falling off the train, whether it's a diet or trying to learn a new skill. Now we have a new special opportunity in this time of year to restart the restart.

I mentioned above the bitterness of this time; another explanation for this nature is the lack of chagim, holidays. The chagim give us a boost in energy, intention and focus. After such a lengthy and roaring holiday season we all probably set out of the gate with an increased sense of purpose and enthusiasm. But naturally that flame can dissipate over time without feeding it more fuel. We've spoken in previous months about taking inspiration from chagim through song, by continuing to sing those songs after the holiday has passed, using that as fuel to tap into the holiday energy and spirit to maintain that attachment and relationship with Hashem.

I want to offer another form of fuel to maintain and strengthen our Godly connection for this month. The Lubavitch Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel

Schneerson, compiled an anthology of Hasidic aphorisms and customs arranged according to the calendar for the Hebrew year of 5703 (1942–43), called *Hayom Yom*, Today is the day of...

On the 8th of Cheshvan the Rebbe writes:

"*Mitzva* is an idiom of *tzavta*—"joining," "attachment." Whoever performs a *mitzvah* becomes joined to the Essence of God, who issues that particular command. This is the meaning of "The reward of a *mitzvah* is the *mitzvah* (itself)": His becoming attached to the Essence of the *Ein Sof* (Infinite or Without End) Who ordained the command, is itself his reward.

The above can be understood through an analogy from the physical world: An extremely simple person has an inner sense of *bitul* (nullity) before the wisdom and greatness of a scholar - a *bitul* in which he senses himself to be an utter nonentity. The sage in turn does not sense or perceive the simpleton as belonging at all to the category of human beings! Not that the scholar dismisses or rejects him, God forbid, for that would be an evil trait; he simply sees no connection or relationship with him whatsoever.

Now, when the sage instructs the simple man to do something for him, that command brings the simpleton "into being." In his own self-perception he is no longer a nonentity but a "somebody;" he has assumed a status unto himself in that he is able to carry out an order of the sage, and it is *him* that the sage addressed and instructed. In the eyes of the sage too, the simpleton now "exists;" he is a "somebody" to whom he (the sage) can speak and instruct. What is more, the command actually *unites* the lofty, exalted sage with the gross simpleton. The analogue is obvious.

It is understood that in the above analogy there is no difference at all what the command is about, whether a great, lofty matter or a simple trivial one.

Whether you are a person with a lot of time or barely any, someone who likes big challenges or someone who has a fear of commitment, there is something for all of us that can ignite our efforts. Maybe you've wanted to tie new tzitzit or lead a service, maybe you always wanted to try a specific *mitzvah* out for some time or maybe you just learned about it. When someone asks you this month, Hey, how have you been? What are you up to these days? You can tell them: I'm great! I am learning XYZ or just started doing ABC at shul. That is how we continue this re-

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PRESIDENTIAL PONDERINGS

Evan Marcus



As just about everyone knows by now, minutes after Yom Kippur ended, the FLJC/CBI lost a huge part of our family when Jeffrey Zerowin passed away. As I said in services on the Shabbat after he passed, Jeff did so much for the Center, for the town of Fair Lawn, and he was truly a mentor for me personally. I really don't like the expression "he will be missed;" *I* will miss Jeffrey. A lot. I believe that many of us will. And I am heartbroken at the loss to Roni, the rest of his family, and to our community.

As President, I have to take an additional perspective on the loss of Jeffrey. Jeff was an incredibly active volunteer here at the FLJC/CBI, even as his illness took its toll. Jeff was an officer of the synagogue. He was the Vice President of Fundraising. He managed the Kol Nidre appeal every year. He put together the Ad Journal for the annual gala. And whenever anyone asked him for time or energy to support the shul (or, to be sure, his beloved Knights of Pythias), he was ALWAYS there.

Jeff's loss leaves huge holes in all of those areas.

In my opinion, the very best way to remember Jeff's life and to honor him in death is to step up and volunteer for the FLJC/CBI. There are LOTS of places where we need help. The list of things that Jeff did are among the most critical, but there are others as well. Please don't wait to be asked. Reach out to me or to Steven Montag or to Thorin or to Rabbi Salston. There's plenty to do, and we'd love to have you.

The first paragraph of my column last month read as follows:

L'shana tovah! And welcome to the year 5783. A new year means new beginnings. To me, it's likely the year that we'll be able to put the 2½ year mishegoss of Covid behind us. If I could make a wish right now, that would be it: let's get Covid behind us.

That paragraph generated emails and phone calls from several members. I was accused of making light of the deaths of the more than 6.5 million people worldwide and the over one million people who died in the US, including some of our very own congregants and their family members, when I used the word *mishegoss* to refer to Covid.

Let me begin by apologizing for leaving room in my writing for that interpretation. I hope you know that I would never make light of the death or illness of a single person, never mind 6.5 million. But in retrospect, I can certainly see how that interpretation was there.

What I meant by *mishegoss* was the masks, the vaccines, the social distancing, the tents, the staying home, the isolation, and the disagreements over all of these things, and all the other annoying stuff that has inserted itself into our lives since March 2020. I stand by my hope that 5783 is the year when that stuff fades further into the background, and life returns to a more comfortable balance.

It was certainly never my intention to disrespect or insult anyone, much less someone who was ill or who died from Covid. I was extremely upset that what I said could be interpreted so differently from what I meant. I am genuinely sorry. I hope that in the future, if something I write or say can be misinterpreted, that you'll give me the benefit of the doubt. And I pledge to be more careful in the future.

Evan Marcus

BOARD ROUND-UP

At the October board meeting, the board approved a revised investment policy. The High Holiday ticket requests and updated membership numbers were presented, and the year-to-date financials were distributed to board members. There were no major maintenance issues in September, but we are still awaiting estimates on damage in the upstairs dairy kitchen before replacing the refrigerator.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Thorin Tritter, PhD



As I hope you have noticed, the Center has been buzzing with activity. Although things are always busy at this time of year, with Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah, Shmini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah, I have been impressed at the range of programs that have been created by the Sisterhood, MPC, Rabbi Salston, Rabbi Roth, and other congregants. If you have been in the synagogue recently, I hope you noticed a table in the lobby covered with flyers for all these events, ranging from intellectually stimulating classes and book talks, to an arts & crafts workshop, not to mention a host of social gatherings like lunch, dinner, poker, and even an outdoor hike.

My own background, as some of you know, has been in Holocaust education and so I wanted to draw particular attention to the program on November 5 when Rabbi Roth will be presenting some of his research about the Pacov Torah scroll and when the Center will be remembering the Jewish residents of Pacov who were victims of the Nazis (see page 12 for details).

Early November is, of course, one of several times in the year when we have a date on our calendar to mark the history of the Holocaust, as it was on November 9th and 10th of 1938 when the Nazis launched an organized attack against Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues that we now remember as "Kristallnacht." (Holocaust Remembrance Day in January and Yom HaShoah in April being the other two dates.) I always think the name "Kristallnacht" is misleading, as it draws our mind to the shards of broken glass the covered the sidewalks outside Jewish businesses which had been targeted, but diverts our attention away from the

30,000 Jewish men who were arrested and sent to concentration camps, the hundreds of synagogues that were burned, or the thousands of Jewish homes that were ransacked. Some historians have begun to refer to this pogrom as the "Night of Flying Feathers," to highlight the experiences of many women who watched as Nazi vandals broke into their homes and ripped apart mattresses and pillows, sending feathers flying, as part of the violent spree. I suppose no single name could adequately capture the violence and destruction. I have trouble imagining such an outburst of hate.

Rabbi Roth's presentation on November 5th comes as the 84th anniversary of "Kristallnacht" approaches. However, Rabbi Roth's work ranges far beyond the events of November 9th and 10th. He is, as I'm sure you know, working on revising his earlier short book about the history of Pacov and the history of the Pacov Torah to provide a greater understanding about what happened when the Nazis arrived in this one town, located 60 miles southeast of Prague, and what followed during the years of Nazi occupation. Some of what he uncovers will be horrifying, but Holocaust scholarship also highlights the amazing resilience of individuals and the larger Jewish community in Europe who found ways to survive and sustain Jewish culture.

The Pacov Torah in our sanctuary is one hint of their efforts. It stands as one of more than 1500 Sifre Torah saved by the Jews of Prague even as their world was being torn apart. Rabbi Roth's presentation and his larger work on this topic help us to remember that community and their resilience; and add power and importance to our role as the keepers of this scroll.

Thorin Tritter

A Note from the Garger Family

Thank you everyone for making our family's simcha so special!! Thank you to Rabbi Salston for teaching Eli and all of us, for your wisdom, your warmth and constant support. Thank you to Steve Montag and Sara Cohen for helping set up Kiddush, to Charlie Cohen for being the guide for everyone on Shabbat, to Carol Marcus for being Gabbai and for your guidance (now and always!), thank you to Neil Garfinkle and Evan Marcus for your support and kind words, thank you to Rosemary, Marge and Thorin for helping put everything together so beautifully.

Thank you to the entire FLJC/CBI community for always supporting our family and for being together on Shabbat, making it so much more special!



RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Sanctuary – Cheshvan 5783
Steve Montag



Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan starting the evening of October 25 through October 26 marks the month in history that the Holy Temple, built by King Solomon, was completed around 827 BCE. The First Temple served as the epicenter of Jewish national and spiritual life for 410 years, until its destruction by the Babylonians in 423 BCE. The Second Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem for 420 years (349 BCE–70 CE). Unlike the period of the First Temple, when the Jews were for the most part autonomous, for much of the Second Temple era the Jews were subject to foreign rule: By the Persians who vanquished the Babylonians, the Greeks led by Alexander the Great, and eventually the Romans. Aside from the troubles caused by these external powers, the Jews were also plagued internally by tumultuous politics, and they divided into many factions—a phenomenon that ultimately led to the Temple's destruction and our nation's torturous exile. It is said, while the First Temple was destroyed due to idol worship, illicit relationships and murder, our Sages attribute the destruction of the Second Temple after King Herod's death to the baseless hatred that prevailed among the Jews. If the Jews had been united, they would have merited G-d's protection. They would have withstood the Romans. It was the factionalism among Jews that ultimately brought about the destruction of the Second Temple.

The story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (Hebrew: קמצא ובר קמצא) is the most famous midrash regarding the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The story appears in the Babylonian Talmud, [Tractate Gittin, folio 55b:17](#), and in the Midrash, Lamentations Rabbah 4:3. The story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza was the pivotal event that ignited Nero's rage and caused the destruction of the Holy Temple:

A Jew who had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy named Bar Kamtza made a feast. He told his servant to invite Kamtza, but by mistake the servant invited Bar Kamtza. Bar Kamtza took this as a gesture of forgiveness and put on his finest clothes and attended the feast. But when the host noticed Bar Kamtza, he demanded that he leave.

Bar Kamtza was embarrassed. "Since I am here," he requested, "let me stay. I will pay for whatever I eat and drink." But the host refused his offer.

"Then allow me to pay half the cost of the whole feast," begged Bar Kamtza.

"No!"

"Then I am willing to pay the full cost of the feast, but do not embarrass me any more..."

The host had Bar Kamtza dragged from the feast and thrown into the streets.

Bar Kamtza stood up, brushed the dust from his clothing and said to himself, "Since the rabbis were present at the feast and did not stop him, this shows they agreed with him. I'll slander them to the Emperor!"

Bar Kamtza went to Emperor Nero and told him that the Jews were planning a rebellion against him. "How do I know that to be true?" Nero asked. "Send an offering to the Temple and see if it will be accepted," Bar Kamtza said.

Nero sent a choice calf with Bar Kamtza, along with a delegation of Romans. During the journey, Bar Kamtza secretly made a blemish on the animal, disqualifying the animal as a sacrifice, and the animal was not accepted.

The delegation returned to Rome and told the emperor that his offering had been refused. Emperor Nero was furious, and the ramifications of his fury brought about one of the darkest chapters in our history.

Rabbi Elazar said, [Tractate Gittin, folio 57a:5](#), "Come and see how great the punishment is for causing embarrassment—for G-d assisted Bar Kamtza [i.e., He allowed Bar Kamtza's plot to succeed because of the embarrassment caused him] and He destroyed His house and burned His Tabernacle."

The point to all of this history lesson is that we must be cautious not to cause our own demise. It is imperative that we respect each other and avoid causing shame and embarrassment. Our shul, the FLJC/CBI, is our temple, our sanctuary. It is a place for communication with G-d and a place for peace and serenity from the outside troubles of the world. When we come each Shabbat and on each of our holidays or special occasions, we must leave any outside issues at the door.

As a reminder, we also have specific written policies as follows: "To maintain the sanctity of the day we observe certain restrictions and refrain from smoking,

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SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Mark Meisel



We thank you for donating food and money to the High Holiday Food Drive last month. We have included a photo (right) of some of the food collected that was delivered to the Fair Lawn Food Pantry. Monetary donations went to the Center for Food Action. Your contributions do make a difference to people in our community in need and we thank you.

Social Action along with our religious school, the Community Hebrew School of Bergen County, ran a Ukrainian Supply Drive, that Neil Garfinkle suggested based on a drive he was running with his students in New York City. (Thank you Neil!) We collected socks, protein bars and dried fruit and worked with the Ukrainian Orthodox Holy Ascension Church in Clifton, NJ to get the donated items to Ukraine. Thank you for your generous support of this effort.

We also ran a drive at the end of October into early November to collect 16.9 oz bottles of water and desserts for the Walk-in-Dinner program run by Family Promise in the Hackensack Shelter. Family Promise broadly reached out to organizations like us, who help them with providing dinners every night to 150 people in need every night. They needed our help with these items because they were running low.



Food from the High Holiday Food Drive

Thank you for helping and donating to this important need within our community. Many recipients of these dinners tell the volunteers serving the meals that the dinner we help provide is the only meal they have during the entire day.

Please watch for our next Hackensack Shelter Dinner project coming up in December.

The Social Action Committee can also help congregants in their recovery from illness when returning from the hospital or rehab facility by bringing them a Friday night meal. Please let the office know if you would like us to bring you a meal.

Thank you again for all your support!

If you are interested in joining the Social Action Committee please reach out to me.

Mark Meisel



MEN'S PROGRESS CLUB

Neil Garfinkle

As I write this month's article, I am feeling quite thankful and grateful! The world, and our little corner of the world here at FLJC/CBI, is gradually and cautiously beginning to open up again. I am happy to share multiple IN PERSON activities sponsored by your Men's Progress Club.

We closed out the month of October by schmoozing and keeping our home safe on Goosey night. Thank you to all who came out to share some donuts.

Thank you for paying your club dues; now please join us for our annual Paid-Up Membership Breakfast on Sunday morning, November 13th, as Ed Schlossberg will be speaking and sharing his experiences as an AP sportswriter for many years. He will give a short presentation, and then take your ques-

tions. Are you all in?!

Our Fall Poker Tournament is back in person Thursday night, November 17th! Please attend minyan first, and then join your friends downstairs in the Polka Room.

The fun continues next month in December. Have I mentioned that Bob Sokol is our Man of the Year? Please join us on Sunday, December 4th to celebrate all he has done for our club and temple!

Any questions? Comments? Ideas for programs? Please reach out to me or any member of our club.

Thank you and stay safe,

Neil Garfinkle



Men's Progress Club Fall Poker Tournament In the Pulka Room

NOVEMBER 17, 2022

\$25 ENTRANCE FEE

MINYAN AT 7:30 PM
POKER TOURNAMENT AT 8:00

PRIZES FOR
1ST, 2ND AND 3RD PLACE

QUESTIONS: CONTACT NEIL GARFINKLE AT
[FINKLEY@aol.com](mailto:finkley@aol.com)

All attendees age six months and up must be vaccinated.
(Covid policies may be revised due to changing conditions.)



THE MPC'S ANNUAL PAID UP MEMBER BREAKFAST PRESENTS DAN SCHLOSSBERG



Former AP sportswriter, Dan Schlossberg, will join us to talk about our "National Pastime." He is the author of 40 baseball books and has covered baseball since 1969 for forbes.com, Latino Sports, USA TODAY, Sports Weekly, Sports Collectors Digest, and the Hall of Fame's Memories & Dreams Magazine, among others.



Sunday, November 13 at 10:00 AM in the Pulka Room

Questions? Contact Neil Garfinkle at finkley@aol.com

All attendees age six months and up must be vaccinated.
(Covid policies may be revised due to changing conditions.)

ADULT EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Charles Cohen



Shalom Friends,

Rabbi Salston will hold her regular Wednesday Coffee & Commentary class at 11:00 AM each week, with explanation & interactive discussion of the Parshah of the Week. This class is held in person in the rear of the Sanctuary. This is an ongoing learning program, so please join us whenever you can during the course of the year.

Rabbi Emeritus Roth continues his popular "Nosh and Knowledge" series on Jewish Ethics & related topics via Zoom each Tuesday at 11:30 AM. Rabbi Roth expounds on Jewish perspectives on contemporary ethical and moral issues. This class informs and enlightens with lively discussion. The class is usually repeated on Tuesday evening at 8:00 PM for congregants who are not available during the day. Watch **The Insider** for each week's schedule.

Rabbi Salston will be presenting a new series of classes in person prepared by the Shalom Hartman Institute, a pillar of Jewish Learning based in Israel.

This ongoing series, "Engage: Together and Apart: The Future of Jewish Peoplehood," discusses contemporary issues in both America and Israel and the many challenges faced by American Jews and Israelis. There will be 7 Hartman multimedia classes over a period of 7 months. Each session is 2 hours. Rabbi Salston will facilitate a Hevruta ("partnership," the traditional mode of Jewish study) & Discussion. Source material for entire course is \$15. Please RSVP to office by Monday, November 14th. The first class, scheduled Monday, November 28th, 8:00 PM-10:00 PM, is "From No Home to Two Homes."

On Monday night, November 21st at 8:00 PM we will have a Zoom study session on Pirke Avot. The concept is to present some of the famous and well-known sayings of our sages and explore their relevance to our life today. Your input and ensuing discussion will be enlightening. Please join us for some or as many of these learning opportunities as you are able.

Happy Learning!

Charles Cohen



Through video lectures, interviews, and textual sources, this seven unit course addresses the complex features of Jewish peoplehood and the contemporary challenges to the Jewish people in an era in which we have moved from having no home to having two different, vibrant, homes in Israel and in North America.

The 2-hour multimedia learning sessions, facilitated by Rabbi Salston, will include video presentations from faculty at the Shalom Hartman Institute, leading rabbis, public figures, and intellectuals.

MONDAY, NOV. 28, 2022, 8-10 PM, FROM NO HOME TO TWO HOMES

SUNDAY, DEC. 11, 2022, 1-3 PM, THE JUDAISM OF BEING

MONDAY, JAN. 16, 2023, 8-10 PM, THE JUDAISM OF BECOMING

SUNDAY, FEB. 12, 2023, 1-3 PM, ON UNIVERSALISM AND PARTICULARISM

MONDAY, MAR. 13, 2023, 8-10 PM, NATIONALISM, ULTRA-NATIONALISM & FASCISM

SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2023, 1-3 PM, THE MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF JEWISH NATIONALISM

MONDAY, MAY 15, 2023, 8-10 PM, THE ISRAELI NATION-STATE LAW

\$10 SUGGESTED DONATION FOR PRINTING OF SOURCE MATERIALS, OR PURCHASE A BOUND COPY OF THE SOURCE MATERIALS FOR \$15.

Register at <https://fljc.shulcloud.com/form/iengage-together-and-apart-2022.html>



COMMUNITY HEBREW SCHOOL OF BERGEN COUNTY

Marcia Kagedan

It has certainly been a busy few weeks since I last wrote. Tishrei is the busiest Hebrew month of the year! With the High Holidays behind us, the Hebrew School students and families got into the joy of Sukkot and Simchat Torah. Many families came out to help build and decorate the sukkah at the FLJC/CBI. Thank you to Lily Shinkar for being the point person and getting the job done! Some new styles of decorating were introduced this year and I hope that many members got to visit and enjoy.

Simchat Torah as well was well attended and everyone enjoyed the holiday. The students will revisit the stories of the Torah in class, starting at the very beginning.

The next Jewish month is Cheshvan, otherwise known as Mar Cheshvan, meaning sad Cheshvan, as it has no holidays in it. However, here in the Hebrew School it too is a special month as our learning settles into a regular pattern and some special events are planned.

Fair Lawn Jewish Center/Congregation B'nai Israel

Tot Shabbat with Morah Vivian
Saturday mornings 9:30 AM
Weather permitting, we will stay outside.
Indoors will be in the Youth Lounge

October 1 • October 22
November 5 • November 19
December 3 • December 17



Vivian Gibilisco is a Jewish educator and song leader who has been teaching, leading song, and family worship for many years all over Greater Metro West, New Jersey. She loves teaching Jewish values and creating community and connection to our people through song.

Open to the Community!

FLJC/CBI • 10-10 Norma Avenue, Fair Lawn, NJ
Security on Premises
All attendees age six months and up must be vaccinated.
(Covid policies may be revised due to changing conditions.)

(Religious Affairs Committee—Continued from page 7)

photography, writing or handling money. All cell phones must be turned off before entering the synagogue. (Medical personnel, please set your phones to vibrate.) These restrictions apply to the entire premises of the Center, including the parking lot. During this Covid-19 pandemic, surgical and KN95 masks are optional for those fully vaccinated and social distance seating is available. We apply these rules based on the honor system and hope that

On the Shabbat before a new Jewish month begins, there is a special prayer said during the morning Torah service, blessing the new month. It happens to be one of my favorite prayers as it is a monthly renewal of hope and wishes for peace, blessings and success. For both Cheshvan and Kislev, the Hebrew School kids are invited to synagogue to be part of this occasion and to enjoy Shabbat together. For blessing Kislev students are invited to the JCCP/CBT on Saturday, November 19th.



A celebration for our 4th and 5th graders will take place on Sunday, November 20th when they will receive their own siddurim. This is always a special occasion that due to Covid has not taken place for a few years. I am excited for it to be once more on our calendar.

Have a good month everyone.

Marcia Kagedan



Sukkah decorating with Rabbi Salston

those in attendance respect these rules while in our shul.

Thank you for your consideration to maintain our place of worship and sanctuary for all those who come to pray.

Rona and I look forward to seeing you in shul. Stay safe and be well.

Steve Montag

Commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Deportation of the Jews of Pacov

Shabbat Morning, Saturday, November 5th

On the Shabbat before the anniversary of Kristallnacht, Rabbi Roth will deliver the D'Var Torah to recall the Jewish community of Pacov. Before the mourner's Kaddish, the names of those from Pacov who were murdered by the Nazis will be read.

If you would like to read some of the names please contact Neil Garfinkle or Rabbi Roth. (See emails below.)

May their memories be a blessing.

This Program Is Open to the Community



The Pacov Synagogue



The Pacov Torah Scroll

Questions?

Contact Rabbi Roth (haravroth@gmail.com)
or Neil Garfinkle (finkley@aol.com)

(All attendees age six months and up must be vaccinated.)

An Update from Rabbi Roth about Pacov

I am continuing to work on the new edition of my book, *The Jews of Pacov Remembered in Fair Lawn, New Jersey*. I am refining the list of the Jews from that town, about 100, that the Nazis murdered. I also hope to publish many photos of them. I have set my goal of \$2500 to pay for printing, postage, editing and the design of the book. I thank those who have already contributed. I have about one quarter of that amount already in hand. You can send your donation to the synagogue with the check made out to Fair Lawn Jewish Center/Congregation B'nai Israel and put "Pacov Book" on the memo line.

An Update From Karen Koblitz, Recalling the Jews of Pacov, the Town That Our Holocaust Memorial Torah Came From

I wanted to share images from this summer's recent six-week stay in the Czech Republic. During that time, I visited Pacov on a number of occasions. I hope you share the excitement as we discover new things and update the restoration of the synagogue. We also are continuing our programming to bring attention to the former synagogue and former Jewish community of Pacov.

We opened the Pacov Synagogue on August 13th and 14th for Czech Jewish Heritage Day. We installed an exhibition in the synagogue with photos of many of the Jewish families of Pacov, before the Holocaust. Over 50 people attended the tour of the synagogue. Above is a photo of Tikkun Pacov Synagogue Association Chair, Pavel Tychtl, speaking about the synagogue to interested guests.

Recently, the staircase to the women's gallery was discovered inside the entry wall (see photo to the right). We believe there was an outside entrance that went directly to this staircase and up to the women's gallery.

Now that the second story has been removed, the interior is open as it was during the time the building

functioned as a synagogue. We are in the process of restoring all of the original windows. We are working with the Czech Heritage Society and Jewish Community of Prague on restoring the synagogue to near its original state and with an architect who has worked on the plans for a number of synagogues in the Czech lands.



On night one of Czech Jewish Heritage Day, the Rural Jewish Band ended the day with a concert of Jewish music (see photo above). It was very emotional to think of how many years it had been since music was heard within the walls of the synagogue.

Tikkun Pacov also now owns the former Pacov Rabbi's home, which also housed a shul, kosher kitchen, and mikvah. For Czech Jewish Heritage Day, we en-



larged images of a number of members of Pacov's former Jewish community, and installed their portraits looking out of the windows towards a main street (see photos above and below). The photos in the windows present a powerful image, and have grabbed the attention of the people of the city today.

They will remain in the windows at least until our event in November. Also, there is a sign that has been installed that tells the history of the building. Most residents of Pacov today do not know this was Pacov's former rabbi's house.



SISTERHOOD

Ann Golick



I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season. Sisterhood, as you can read below, is extremely busy this fall.

In the past few weeks, Sisterhood has:

- Provided snacks for the children on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (thank you Lily Shinkar) and provided apples and chocolate for Simchat Torah.
- Coordinated decorating of the Sukkah along with the Religious School. I hope you had a chance to see how lovely it looked before it rained. Thank you Lily & Alex Shinkar for all your efforts.
- Organized Sushi In the Sukkah dinner October 13th. About 30 people joined us for a lovely evening. Thank you Lisa Urbanski for organizing this event (and Jen Mendelsohn and Fran Laniado for your help).
- Took our annual B'reisheit Hike at Ramapo Reservation (see photo).



As of the writing of this article, the following activities are upcoming. We hope that you will join us in at least one of our upcoming events.

- October 29th – In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we are holding our **Pink Shabbat** service. We are partnering with Sharsheret, an organization supporting Jewish women and their families facing breast or ovarian cancer.
- November 1st – **Paid Up Membership Murder Mystery Night** with a Kosher Chinese dinner. The theme is the 80s where attendees are encouraged to dress in 80s-style clothing and help figure out the mysteries.
- November 13th 10:00 AM – The Book Club will be discussing **The Thread Collectors** by Shauna J. Edwards - Moderated by Pauline Mont.
- December 20th – Vodka & Latkes – our annual fun evening. Save the date.
- January 21st – Sisterhood Shabbat. You will be hearing more about that soon, but if you would like to read a Torah portion, please let Nina Gold know so you can have the time you may need to practice.

On a personal note, Bob and I were truly humbled to have been honored on Simchat Torah services.

Thank you to all of you who shared in the occasion.

I look forward to seeing many of you at one or many of the synagogue events. If you have any ideas for Sisterhood, please give me a call. We always welcome new members.

Ann Golick

Fair Lawn Jewish Center / Congregation B'nai Israel

OPEN TO SISTERHOOD PAID UP MEMBERS MURDER MYSTERY & CHINESE DINNER

DRESS FOR THE 80S

Everyone's a suspect

Can you figure out who did what?

November 1st 7:00 PM FLJC/CBI

RSVP REQUIRED BY OCTOBER 22ND TO LISA URBANSKI VIA TEXT AT 201-341-0586
OR EMAIL ANN GOLICK AT ABGOLICK1@GMAIL.COM

SENIOR INITIATIVES



Jewish Community Center
of Northern New Jersey
ACTIVE SENIORS

BAKING WITH CHALLAH RITA



Tuesday, November 22 at 11 AM

Temple Avodat Shalom

385 Howland Ave. River Edge

Culinary enthusiast, Rita Kron, will teach you to braid a three or four strand apple challah for Thanksgiving (or save it for Shabbat the following night!) "Take and bake" home and enjoy!

\$5 Suggested donation includes catered kosher lunch.

Pre-registration required. Call (201) 666-6610 x2.

This program is sponsored, in part, by a generous grant from Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey and the Bergen County Division of Senior Services.



NOVEMBER
2022



Jewish Community Center
of Northern New Jersey
ACTIVE SENIORS

EXERCISE
10 AM

Tuesdays
Chair Yoga

Thursdays
Dance &
Fitness

PROGRAM
11 AM

KOSHER
LUNCH
12 PM

SUGGESTED
DONATION:
\$5 pp/day
includes
kosher lunch

TEMPLE AVODAT
SHALOM
385 Howland Ave.
River Edge

TUESDAY

THURSDAY

1

3

FIVE WISHES:
Advance Directive Planning
with Shana Siegel, Esq.

HOLLYWOOD YIDDISHKEIT:
JEWISH IMAGES IN AMERICAN FILM
with Film Historian, John Kenrick

Rehearsal: Swingin' Through the Year

8

10

ONE DAY UNIVERSITY
Peggy Guggenheim: Her Life and Legacy

THE ART OF AGING

Part 1: Positive Aging

Rehearsal: Swingin' Through the Year

15

17

CONNECTING THE DOTS
TO PATERSON
Historical Lecture with Freddie Kelen

SWINGIN' THROUGH THE YEAR
A JCC Community Theater Production
C'hal-ah-ah-missed!

22

24

COOKING WITH RITA
Apple Challah for Thanksgiving
in collaboration with TLJC

CLOSED FOR
THANKSGIVING

29

29

UNDERSTANDING &
MANAGING STRESS
with Myrna Bravin, Bergen County Div. of
Senior Services
in collaboration with Hadassah

SAVE THE DATE!

HANUKKAH PARTY
DEC. 26TH



QUESTIONS? CONTACT US! info@jccnnj.org 201-666-6610 x2

Yiddishe Vinkle

Our Senior Initiative is partnering with Temple Beth Rishon for a monthly gathering to speak and listen to Yiddish. Open to all levels! Program will be Tuesdays at 1:00 PM on the following dates:

November 15

December 13

January 17

February 14

March 14

April 18

May 16

June 16

Just show up and introduce yourself!

Temple Beth Rishon
585 Russell Ave., Wyckoff
Questions? Contact Kristine Len,
(201) 891-4466

FAMILY MATTERS

Refuah Shlema to:

Ahava bat Hadassah
 Avraham ben David v'Shaindel
 Esther bat Yakov v'Sora
 Malka Aviva bat Chana Golda
 Avraham ben Chaya Sarah v'Yisrael
 Sally Baker (Sarah bat Chana)
 Gary Borer (Gedaliah ben Freyda v'Chayim)
 Chana bat Rivka
 Nava Deena bat Sternia
 Laili Golda bat Reuvat v'David
 David Gotlib (David ben Sarah u'Binyamin)
 David Hayim ben Batya u'Refu'el
 Leo Henner (Eliezer ben Shoshanah v'Yosef Meir)
 Beth Karetnick (Blima bat Devorah)
 Natalie Klein (Nechama bat Chasha v'Leib)
 Mayer Leib ben Yarna
 Moshe Leib ben Rivka
 Liat bat Chava
 Neal Lipshitz (Nahum ben Haya Perel v'Yaakov)
 Shimon Ma'aravi ben Edna u'Mordechai

Irene Mandel (Itka bat Yente v'Chaim)
 Larry Mandel (Leibel ben Chaya)
 Judi Margolis (Zisa Ita bat Rachel v'David)
 Naomi Michaelson (Nechama bat Miriam VChaim)
 Pincus ben Mina Sora
 Irv Pollack (Yehezkel ben Sarah v'Yaakov)
 Raisal bat Aviva
 Tova Raiza bat Yitzhak v'Malka Esther
 Debbie Rosenzweig (Devorah Surah bat Tzirl v'Eliyahu Meyer)
 Jesse Rosenzweig (Yehuda Laib ben Rachel)
 Stanley Sanders (Sender ben Ettie v'David haLevi)
 Kenny Schmier (Kalman ben Rivka)
 Judith Shain-Alvaro (Yehudit Chasida bat Perel)
 Bob Steinberg (Reuben David ben Tzviya)
 Giszel Szackamer (Giszel bat Golda)
 Dalia Tzril bat Riva Braina
 David Wertheim (Binyamin ben Eta Shifra)
 Ilene Wolosin (Chaya Rossa bat Celia u'Max)
 Yochevet Tzini bat Moshe
 Yosef ben Devorah u'Moshe
 Roni Zerowin (Rachel Chana bat Tamar)

Mazel Tov to our November Birthdays: Carol Aig, Sima Alper, Seymour Baumstein, Beverly Beer, Philip Fenster, Lillian Gotlib, Edward Gruber, Gary Haar, Roger Haberman, Gerald Hanik, Jeffrey Herrmann, Debbie Honigstock, Leonard Kaufmann, Evan Leibowitz, Floyd Levy, Bella Meyrich, Stacey Murray, Steven Newdorf, Pauline Novick, David Ressler, Raviv Ron, Mike Rothenberg, Eileen Schwimmer, Carolyn Shenberg, Lily Shinkar, Tammy Smith, Martin Spector, Robin Spokony, Jessica Walker, Alan Wallan, Michael Wallstein, Sig Westerman, Ilene Wolosin

Mazel Tov to our November Anniversaries: Nancy & Larry Bach; Rochelle & Steven Baltin; Rose & Gary Baskind; Sheila & Jack Granowitz; Nancy & Howard Hymovitz; Ruth & Harold Kirschenbaum; Ann & Herbert Lefkowitz; Jane & Arthur Levine; Debbie & Mark Oppenheimer; Monica & David Palmer; Beth & Ken Perlman; Jaime & David Ressler; Eileen & Steven Schwimmer; Marsha & Robert Thaler



Fair Lawn Jewish Center / Congregation B'nai Israel

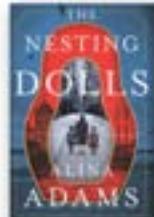
November 13th



Thread Collectors
 by Shaunna J. Edwards
 Moderator: Pauline Mont



January 8th



Nesting Dolls
 by Alina Adams
 Moderator: Tammy Smith

Sisterhood Book Club

Reading Selections 2022-2023

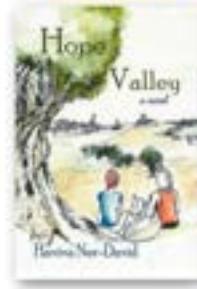
In Person and on Zoom

March 5th



Matzoh Ball
 by Jean Meltzer
 Moderator: Jen Mendelsohn

April 23



Hope Valley
 by Haviva Ner-David
 Moderator: Ilene Laufer

All attendees age six months and up must be vaccinated. (Covid policies may be revised due to changing conditions.)

(Sig Westerman Turns 100! Continued from page 1)

for good in 1994.) He had had his fill of retail, and wanted to do something different. At age 56 he began a second career in nuclear medicine technology at Good Samaritan Hospital in Suffern, NY. He remained there for 20 years (10 years full time, and 10 years part time).

By this time, Sig had 160 college credits between his classes at Columbia and courses he took while in the military, but no college degree. After applying to and being turned down for a degree by Fairleigh Dickinson University, who required 2 years of on-site matriculation, he turned to Thomas Edison State College. In 1983, more than 40 years after taking his first college class, he finally received a BS in applied health.

Siggy has 2 daughters—Sally, who sadly passed away from cancer in 2007, and Laura, who lives in Ridgewood (see photo, below). He has 2 grandchildren, Evan and Dena, and a great granddaughter, Mia, who is 5 years old. His older sister Selma is also deceased, and he has a younger sister, Ella.



Sig and daughter Laura Brody

Sharing the names of his parents and siblings, he always identified them by both their English and Hebrew names. He took Hebrew classes frequently over the years, but still feels he can't converse well in the language. His greatest disappointment is that most Jews in the US don't speak Hebrew. Sig has visited Israel many times (daughter Sally made Aliyah and lived in Tel Aviv for many years) and has a deep, unconditional love for the State of Israel. He recalled the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 with excitement, recognizing that it led to a cosmic change in the way American Jews felt about Judaism.

Sig and Fran joined the Fair Lawn Jewish Center in 1954, primarily to enroll their daughters in religious school. Fran became active in Sisterhood, while Sig joined the Men's Progress Club. Sig enjoyed participating in the FLJC Players, which performed Broadway-style shows. He became very close friends with Rabbi Glustrom, and has admired all of the rabbis who have served our congregation. He also served

for 10 years as president of the Paterson Hebrew Free Loan Association.

After Sig and I had been talking for an hour, he exclaimed, "But you haven't asked about my avocations!" He needed no coaxing to tell me how he spends his spare time. His primary hobby over 40+ years was sailing. Sig used to sail once or twice a week, primarily out of Long Island Sound and City Island. In addition, he routinely rented sailboats on his travels, and has sailed off the coasts of Tel Aviv, Barbados, Saint Martin—and many others. He said that it was his love of sailing that kept him from becoming more involved in the FLJC.

As with many active seniors, Sig is a lifetime learner. In 1995, he learned to paint. He has painted over 100 oils and pastels on canvas, many of which are hanging in his home today. He continued painting until Sally became ill.

Ever a patron of the arts, Sig was an active participant too. In 1992 he joined the Orpheus Men's Chorus in Ridgewood, singing in their baritone section for 10 years.

He proudly shared that he even had a few solos!



Some of Sig's artwork.

Painting, singing, sailing—but that wasn't all. Sig enjoyed acting, and in the 1970s and 1980s signed up to be an extra on movie sets. He appeared in movies, TV shows, and was a patient on a TV commercial for a medication.

These days, Sig is mostly at home, cared for by his daughter Laura and a host of aides who seem to adore him (one was there when I visited him). He is legally blind still took me on a "tour" of his art which hangs on the walls all over his house. It was beautiful, and something I would be proud to hang in my living room. But more than the art, the stories, the history, I was truly astonished by the details he recalled so easily from all periods of his life, his enthusiasm in sharing so much about himself, and his warm, open mannerism. I was totally enchanted. Shimon Ma'aravi, I hope you continue to live a happy, healthy, and fulfilling life for many more years.

Carol Marcus, Editor

God's tefillin, "Who is like Your people, Israel, one nation in the land?" Just like we wear tefillin on our bodies to remind us of God, God wears tefillin on His/Her/Their Body to remind God of us! God puts tefillin on an Arm and a Head. As an aside, the piyut *Anim Zemirot* is all about seeing God's tefillin. Take a look.

Anyway, we know from the book of Shemot, that we are redeemed from Egypt by God's strong Hand and outstretched Arm. God has a hand and an arm. God is angered. God cries. "And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image of God—creating them male and female." The origin of the human being is the image of God. Ask a child what an image is and they will tell you: a picture. Not the metaphor that the Rambam spoke of. We look like God, we are Male and Female and in between and neither, and so is God.

We human beings need the metaphor of God as a Person with a Body because we need someone whom we can talk to. We can't speak in an abstract all the time. Academics can't even do that. We'd all go insane. We need a story to make sense of God. As I discussed before, Professor Adler says it better than I ever could. In her 1998 groundbreaking book, *Engendering Judaism*, one of the top 10 books that shaped my theology and the assigned reading that I give to all couples I will stand under the huppah with, Professor Adler writes,

Vivid images and powerful feelings accompany the words *mother* or *father* but do not attend the word parent. Moreover, in a male-dominated society, neuter language is still assumed to refer to males. If the referent is female, it is customary to signify this difference through a modifier: "a woman rabbi," or "a woman judge."

Professor Adler wrote this at least 25 years ago. Much has changed. There are more judges and rabbis who are female, but I know that the modifier is still often used. Gender neutral language has become more widespread but is not yet in universal use. So in order to speak of a God we can relate to, we speak of a humanized God and that God, in emotionally charged English, more often than not, has a gender. And more often than not, that gender is male.

I could pick out the verses in Tanakh that refer to God in the feminine. They do exist, although they are fewer in number than the masculine references. In this coming Shabbat's parshah, *Haazinu*, which is a poem that Moshe recites before he dies, God is called figuratively and impossibly, the Rock who

gave birth to you. What better an encapsulation of the complexity of describing God in physical and human terms: God is both unchanging and inorganic, a Rock and organic and alive, and female, capable of childbirth.

So why, for most of our history, and in the tradition I and most of us have inherited, do we default to the masculine? Maybe, likely, we're influenced by the culture around us. We have a mitzvah to not have graven images, for the exact reason that we will never say, as Aharon did at the Golden Calf, "That is your god, Jewish people," and point to an object. We can't contain God in a statue, a painting, or any visual representation. But the rest of the world doesn't follow our rules. If only we weren't such a minority.

As an inheritor of the foundational story of the Western world, I have seen, not yet in person, the fresco on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*. There, God is an old white man with a beard, reaching out his hand to his creation, a mirror image youth. Is this the container of God I received as a child that made God male for me? Or, as a child of the 1990s, was it the similar image of God I saw on TV, on *The Simpsons*? By the way, there's an awesome midrash that Matt Groening built into the illustration of God on the show. All of the other characters have 4 fingers and toes on each hand, but God has 5. God is like humans, but greater. We collect images around us.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, I spoke about how our conception of the world, like a Platonic ideal, is formed when we are children. What things are supposed to look like, what things are supposed to be. The images of the basic or perfect chair, school, synagogue, New York Rangers team (the 1994 Stanley Cup Champions of course), parent, rabbi, are all drawn in our consciousnesses by what we experienced when we were children.

Now I want to talk about one of the first Hebrew words you probably learned as a child, whether you were raised Jewish or not. Native Modern Hebrew speakers, I'd love to hear your experience here, and I apologize that I am speaking from my own experience and addressing my fellow speakers of Hebrew-infused English. The word is amen. Ay-men. Ah-mein. Same word, one that most of the world doesn't realize is a Hebrew word. What you say after a prayer, what you say as a response to another person's words. Three letters. Alef Mem Nun. In the Babylonian *Talmud Berakhot 53b*, Rabbi Yosi teaches, "greater is the one who responds amen than the one who says the blessing." But what does this word mean?!

The Hebrew root Alef-Mem-Nun is found in the word

emunah, belief, faith. Amen means trustworthy. An *omein* or an *omenet* is a person entrusted with something very important, say another human being, so, a caretaker. There is a verse in the book of Bamidbar where Moshe reminds God that he is not God, saying:

Did I produce all this people, did I en-gender them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a caregiver carries an infant,' to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers?

Moshe is saying that he is not God, but in his negation, he describes God. God carries us in God's bosom as a caregiver carries an infant. A caregiver. A babysitter. Another place that this usage appears in the Tanakh is Naomi's relationship to Ruth's son, whom she adopts as her own; she is his *omenet*. Then we have in Esther, "*Vayehi omen et Hadassah*," *Mordechai was the omein to Hadassah*, aka Esther. He raised the orphan. This word means adoptive or foster parent, nanny, babysitter. Anyone who takes care of a young child.

The image of God holding us to God's *heik*, and *heik* means bosom, breasts, nurturing female part, you know, the warm embracing part of the body that is the best part of a hug. If I describe God as a mother, a nursing-father (that's what *omein* is translated as in the King James and many subsequent English translations), a nanny, or a foster father and you as a toddler, what is the feeling that comes to mind? Warmth? Safety? Calm? Trust?

I am grateful to my teacher Rabbi Jason Rubenstein for bringing this midrash to my attention. Our ability to say amen and mean it, to say, I believe, is based on the *omein* we envision God to be. That is, the God we believe in is shaped not just by the powerful beings that we knew as a little kid, but by the care that we received. Yes, the examples of God using feminine pronouns are few and far between in the Tanakh. But El Emunah? The Trustworthy God? The One we believe in? That's all over the place.

The title we use for God in much of our liturgy today is *Av Harahamim*, Father of Mercy. By the way, *rahahim* is another example of us using female anatomical terms all the time. A *rehem* is a uterus. *Rahahim* is the warm embracing love of a mother. Womb-feeling, as my College Bible Professor Marc Brettler called it. But since God provides it, and because so many of us have and have had loving fathers, we know that fathers can have *rahahim* for their children as well. Complicated genderbending, but no more complicated than trying to describe the Infinite God in human terms.

The liturgist Dr. Marcia Falk argues that we shouldn't use gendered terms for God at all. In contrast to Professor Adler, Professor Falk writes that limiting God with a human gender is a form of idolatry. She has written much new liturgy, opting for God-terms like "Source of Life." Her blessing recited over wine is translated as "Let us bless the source of life that ripens fruit on the vine." Worth a try in our liturgy some time.

But we can still say, "Blessed are You Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine." We've established that the gendered, human terms are used metaphorically. God continuously creates fruit in the same way that God comforts us and holds us. By the way, Rabbi Rubenstein's teaching reminded me, and I'll remind all the parents and grandparents of young children this—when you respond to your child's cries with love, the won't-you-please-go-to-sleep-Mommy-is-tired moments, you are teaching your child what Divinity can be. Especially on Yom Kippur, this 25 hour prayer marathon, we're keeping God awake late into the night. We need God to be the patient parent we can trust to hear our cries at all hours of the night. And this is the God described in *Mahzor Lev Shalem*.

I know that the adoption of this Mahzor has been somewhat controversial. Know that the purchase of the over 350 copies was funded entirely by voluntary donations. We even exceed our fundraising goal. But I know that the finances were not the only concern. The gender neutral language may be forcing you to envision God in the "wrong" way. Barely any of the core Hebrew has been changed, or when it has, the text is consistent with well-debated Conservative theology and is almost always presented alongside the longer-used "traditional" text. In this Mahzor, God is still *Avinu Malkeinu*. It's just that the rabbis who wrote the translation opted not to limit the English translation, because the Father that God is, is not necessarily a male father. Yes, gendered language gives me challenges even as I try to deconstruct it. *Avinu*, our Father, also means our Mother. So if you look at the English side page of *Avinu Malkeinu*, the English translation says...*Avinu Malkeinu*.

Based on my own experience as a child in school and a Jew in the pew, I know that I have a great responsibility as your rabbi. As rabbi and teacher, I have an even greater influence on the image that our children construct of God in their minds. I try my hardest to use gender-neutral language when I teach in Hebrew School. The beginning of my service to the Fair Lawn Jewish Center/Congregation B'nai Israel coincided with the birth of the Community Hebrew School of Bergen County, our joint sup-

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plementary school with the Jewish Community Center of Paramus/Congregation Beth Tikvah. In the first or second lesson I taught in our brand new school, I was explicitly tasked with teaching selections of the High Holiday liturgy to the 3rd through 7th grade classes. Implicitly, I was tasked with setting the tone for the character of our new institution. That meant teaching the greatest High Holiday hit, *Avinu Malkeinu*. I reminded myself, as we know, some children's *omein* or *omenet* is not a mommy or a daddy, but a grandparent or other relative. So I translated *Avinu* as our Grownup. Imperfect. Imperfect for my emotional connection to the prayer. As much as I want to set gender-neutral English as a norm, I was raised with the false myth of the gender binary, so like Professor Adler, I have a stronger emotional resonance with the word father than with the word grownup. But we have to translate *Avinu* to mean, "The adult in whom we have the most trust, who is also disciplinarian, progenitor, and piggyback ride giver, and breastfeeder, and cuddler, and teacher," all in one word. But Jews have always been great at taking one word and understanding it to mean more than one thing at once.

As Professor Adler taught, the closest thing that the Hebrew language has to a neuter, general term, is masculine. The way you say human being in Hebrew is *ben adam*, literally Son of Adam. The person addressed in the Torah is always assumed to be a man, unless specified otherwise. This has led feminist philosophers, such as Judith Plaskow, to question whether women are even Jews, since Jews in Hebrew is *B'nai Yehudah*, the Sons of Judah. But we know that *b'nai* means all children just as much as it means sons. Yes, women are Jews, but you can understand that once we start dissecting the language of the Torah, the masculinity is striking.

In the very recent past, some thinkers have highlighted this in an even brighter color. Last year, I was invited to participate in a project called *Toratnah*, literally Her Torah. Starting in 2016, Israeli American artist Yael Kanarek has been leading an effort to re-gender the Bible. In 2020, the Five Books of Moses were completed. The project flips the gender of every person, animal, place, and God in the Torah, that even means that the name of our people is *Tisraela*, She who wrestles with the Female God. According to the project's creators, the purpose of the project is thus:

[the Bible] describes the theology, politics and law of a patriarchal world. The biblical law favors men over women and most of the exemplary figures it paints are male. The Regendered Bible, by contrast, offers a matriarchal structure for the sacred mythology, for

the narratives that establish self and national identity, for politics and the law. *Toratnah* reveals other existential possibilities for women and men. The gender reversal unsettles the reader. At the same time, it opens horizons for non-binary gender realities, as well.

"The gender reversal unsettles the reader." Its implications further unsettles me. It is a really interesting and thought provoking huge artistic project. So where do I come in? I was approached by Ms. Kanarek to sew together the first pair of *Toratnah*, gender-flipped *Tefillin*. I grappled with the decision. Would I be doing it as an educator, an artist, an artisan, as a rabbi, or as a *Soferet STaM*? As a scribe, literally a counter, if we translate the word *sofer/et* most accurately, I must copy the Torah letter for letter from a Torah that came before it. These items would not be *tefillin*. As important and thought provoking the project and I am overjoyed that they exist, I could not be a participant. It was my red line. Sealed in their black leather boxes, by my own hands, these would not be distinguishable from the *tefillin* that I wear, which yes, are written primarily in masculine language. Because Judaism, evolving, is still rooted in the original Hebrew. And that Hebrew is one that is expansive enough to include me. It has to be, or I, or most of you would not be in this room right now.

Indeed, I, and every other woman who has ever approached Torah or Judaism or even most English texts, have learned to translate the masculine language to include us. The neuter of the Torah, the *ish*, the man, the individual, is also me. Not just the *ishah*, who in the time of the Torah was almost always chattel-like and at the whim of her male relative or husband. I am an *ishah* in Modern Hebrew and an *ish* in Biblical Hebrew. That's how complicated identity is to translate. It's always been like this. Women have to read the masculine in order to understand that it applies to us too. I do this automatically. Gender roles have changed. The language of the Torah has not. But our understanding of the Torah has. Thus, we're allowed to write new prayers and translate old prayers in new ways. We're allowed to pray to a Feminine God or a Masculine God, because all of these images are part of the Infinite One True God.

If traditional powerful male terms help you relate to God in prayer, great! Keep using them. No one is taking away your ability to pray to a male bodied Father King. But if you are willing, if you are looking for a new angle, or really an old one, see how it feels to pray to God, the warm Mommy who gives the best hugs and smells like chocolate chip cookies. Or Whatever the most comforting Image is for you. Not

(Continued on page 23)

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(*Rabbinic Reflections—Continued from page 20*)

all of us in the room have healthy relationships with our fathers, but all of us were taken care of by someone. And the attributes of the person who changed your diapers inform the attributes of the Force that is listening to your prayers. It's hard to change the Hebrew and we rarely do. We are primarily a community of English speakers. I challenge myself to trust in God like I trusted my babysitter, and finding that feel-

ing in the prayers we recite today might be a more important goal than any of the words we're going to recite over the next 23 hours. But we're going to say a lot of words, and we're going to use a lot of Hebrew and also compromise with gender neutral English in our Mahzor. *G'mar hatimah tovah*. May you be sealed in the Book of Life. Can I get an Amen?

Rabbi Rachel Salston



(*Cantorial Contemplations—Continued from page 4*)

finement and connectivity to Hashem and to each other. We start again. We get back to where we started and go further.

This is all with a disclaimer from Rashi. He writes on Exodus 19:5

ועתה. אם עתה תקבלו עלייכם, יערב לכם מכאן ואיליה, שכל הפתוקיות קשות (מכילתא):

And now. [i.e.,] if you will now accept it, it will be

pleasant for you from here on for all beginnings are difficult (Mechilta).

Knowing that starting something new is one of the most difficult things to do, but we're in this together. Please, if this is speaking to you and/or you would like assistance in this endeavor, feel free to email me at cantor@flic.com.

Wishing us all a month of growth,



10-10 Norma Avenue
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410



Happy Thanksgiving!