

Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey

Journal

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Rabbi's Message

On Friday night, March 18, we at the JCNWJ gathered for Shabbat Zachor (“Shabbat of Remembrance”). During this service, which immediately precedes Purim every year, we read from Deuteronomy 25:17-19, the portion in which we are commanded to remember (*zachor*) what Amalek did to us on our journey through the desert, when he and his warriors viciously attacked the most vulnerable among us from the rear. The connection, of course, is that we see Haman as a later-day manifestation of Amalek. The difference, though, is that in the Story of Esther, Haman is soundly defeated. And for this we rejoice with great fun and amusement.

As part of the Purim fun, when it came time for the expected sermon that Friday night, I began my remarks in a way that would have been completely unremarkable had it been delivered on any Shabbat other than this one, during which we were honoring the miracle of Purim.

“The rabbis of our Tradition,” I began, “teach that on Purim, the world is *nahafoku* (“upside down, inside out”). I fear we have come to a point in American political discourse that our country itself has become *nahafoku*. Look around and listen. It’s not hard to discern. As it stands today, roughly half of us are no longer willing or able to talk peacefully with the other half.

Continued on the next page

Mark Your Calendar

- Friday, April 1st
7:30 pm Shabbat Services
Oneg: Perfetti Family
- Saturday, April 2nd
10 am Hannah Perfetti’s Bat Mitzvah
- Sunday, April 3rd
9:30 am Sunday School
11 am Rabbi’s Class: *Jews in the American South*
- Thursday, April 7th
2 pm Mah Jongg
- Sunday, April 10th
9:30 am Sunday School
10:30 am Confirmation Class
- Monday, April 11th
7 pm Board of Trustees Meeting
- Friday, April 15th
7:30 pm Shabbat Services
Oneg: Rosenblum, Finkelstein, and Fesinstine Families
- Saturday, April 16th
10:30 am Torah Study
- Sunday, April 17th
9:30 am Sunday School Family Seder

Rabbi's Message (cont.)

How have we come to the point where differences in opinion result in violent confrontation? More importantly, what can we do to reverse this disappointing and terrifying trend?

This, my friends, is the sermon that needs to be given tonight, because this is single biggest challenge confronting the future of our society today..."

It was at the point that our beloved President Howie so "rudely" interrupted me (on cue, as planned) to remind me of the "memo" that had been disseminated by the URJ, advising that in the best interest of our congregants' spiritual lives, "the Union of Reform Judaism is calling upon member synagogues to eliminate the spiritually harmful practice of rabbinic sermonizing." It was great fun, of course, and totally in keeping with the spirit of Purim, but it also begged the question: "What about the sermon that I started but didn't finish?"

Unfortunately, a simple scan of the horizon provides every reason to assume our nation stands nowhere near our being able to heal this rift any time soon. It's distressing and it's worrisome. Unfortunately, yes, it does seem that I'll have plenty more opportunity to give this sermon before we as a nation begin to figure it out how and why to be civil with one another.

But Friday, March 18, 2016 was a banner day not only because it marked the beginning of Shabbat Zachor. It was a banner day in the history of American culture also because it marked the 38th birthday of a true American icon, for it was on this very day in, 1978, that Kim, Debbie, and Joni Sledge (Sister Sledge) released their chart smashing record, "We Are Family!"

We at The Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey are, first and foremost, family. We care for one another, we support one another, and we take pride in one another. At the same time, as with all families, there are times when we also disagree with one another. There are even times when we *vociferously* disagree with one another! What the rest of the nation might want to learn from us, though, is that no matter how staunch our political positions may be, no matter how passionate our differences are, we always put family first.

Mark Your Calendar (cont.)

- Monday, April 18th
7 pm Book Club
- Saturday, April 23rd
6 pm Potluck Second Day Seder
- Sunday, April 24th
No Sunday School (Pesach)
- Friday, April 29th
7:30 pm Shabbat Services
Oneg: Gross, Marinich, and Marr Families
- Saturday, April 30th
10:30 am Cantor's Class: *The Music of Mishkan Z'mirah*

PASSOVER FOOD DRIVE

As we have done in past years, the JCNWJ will be once again hosting our Passover Food Drive. Please fill a bag of non-perishable items (**no matzah**, please), and bring it to the JCNWJ any time from now until Passover. Your donations will help fill the shelves of local food pantries with much needed items.



If you have any questions, please contact Irish Hirsch at irishirsch@comcast.net or (908) 850-1030. Thank you for your continued support!

Rabbi's Message (cont.)

We love one another and we respect each other's right to arrive at our own individual conclusions, even if those conclusions oppose our own.

It's no secret that our country is as painfully divided today as it has been since at least the 1960s, and maybe even since the 1860s. Unfortunately, we have a appalling dearth of role models to demonstrate the benefits of civility. But the JCNWJ is different. We are a family united in sacred purpose. We have conservatives and we have liberals. We have Democrats and we have Republicans. We have hawks and we have doves. And we have everything in between. But through it all, no matter our commonalities or our differences, to quote three wise sisters, "Just let me state for the record, We're giving love in a family dose." Just think of it. If the rest of the nation would just follow suit, how beautiful that would be, and how many fewer sermons would I have to write! Talk about a win-win situation!

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin

LAY-LED TORAH STUDY

Saturday, April 16, May 21, June 25 at 10:30 am

On April 16, the group will review the text of Numbers 25 and attempt to figure out the meaning of and connections between the murder and the cessation of the plague. We will continue to study the book of Numbers at the May and June sessions. It is conceivable that we will begin Deuteronomy later in the summer. This group has been ongoing since 1998. New participants are always welcome. Summer dates TBD.

CLASSES

JEW OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

With Rabbi Dubin

Sunday, April 3rd at 11 am

Join us as we celebrate the 123rd birthday of famed actor, Leslie Howard (b. April 3, 1893). Yes, the blue-eyed British-born blond who played the quintessential Southern gentleman Ashley Wilkes in *Gone With the Wind* was indeed Jewish! During this one-hour session, we will take a close look at the history and contributions of Jewish life in the American South.

THE MUSIC OF MISHKAN Z'MIRAH

With Cantor Labow

Saturday, April 30th at 10:30 am

Join Cantor Labow to learn new Jewish music from his upcoming release of 150 pieces in the *Mishkan Z'Mirah* collection.

IN SEARCH OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

With Cantor Labow

Saturday, May 14th at 10:30 am

The Ancient Temple periods are well-known in Jewish history, but the search for Israel in more ancient times is more challenging. We will look at opinions and texts that relate to Ancient Israel.

ISRAELI CIVIL RELIGION

With Rabbi Dubin

Sunday, May 15th at 11 am

Join us as we experience what many consider to be the single most intense period of time in the annual Israeli calendar: the rollercoaster ride that is the two-week three-Israeli civil religious holiday cycle of Yom HaShoah → Yom HaZikaron → Yom HaAtzmaut (Holocaust Day → Memorial Day → Independence Day)

President's Message

For those of you who were not fortunate enough to be a part of the service on March 18th, I want to relate what a special service it was. One of the complaints over the years in our service is that we do the same thing week after week. The same prayers, the same melodies. For some, the repetition is warm and welcoming. For others, it is simply a rote repetition of the prayers and they have lost the meaning. I find the repetition comforting, but I also need a little shaking up at times to remind me of the meaning of the prayers.

Rabbi Dubin was able to shake us up a bit at this service. Instead of reciting the prayers as we normally do, he would have us turn to the page in the book, let us read the prayer silently, give a short story of the meaning of the prayer, and then read a haiku for each and every prayer. Some of the prayers received more than one haiku. Some were funny, some were inspirational and some went over my head. But it served to remind me that looking at our prayers and our lives from more than one direction is a healthy thing to do, because we easily get into our lives and let things pass by without giving them too much thought. The coolest haiku we did was the S'hma, which the rabbi pointed out is a haiku all by itself. This Shabbat service gave me the opportunity to see how our prayers are meaningful in a different way, and I for one truly appreciated it.

In addition, we had a special section of the service where the women in the Kahan family received Jewish names. I have known Molly and Emma since they were babies, so being there for this special moment in their lives was very special to me. Each woman chose a name that was special to them.

If you do not have a Hebrew name, please speak to the Rabbi.

I wish you all a wonderful Pesach.

Howie Hirsch

SECOND DAY SEDER

We will be having a potluck second day Seder on Saturday, April 23, 2016 at about 6:00 pm.



*JCNWJ Sisterhood cordially invites
you to a*

Tea Party

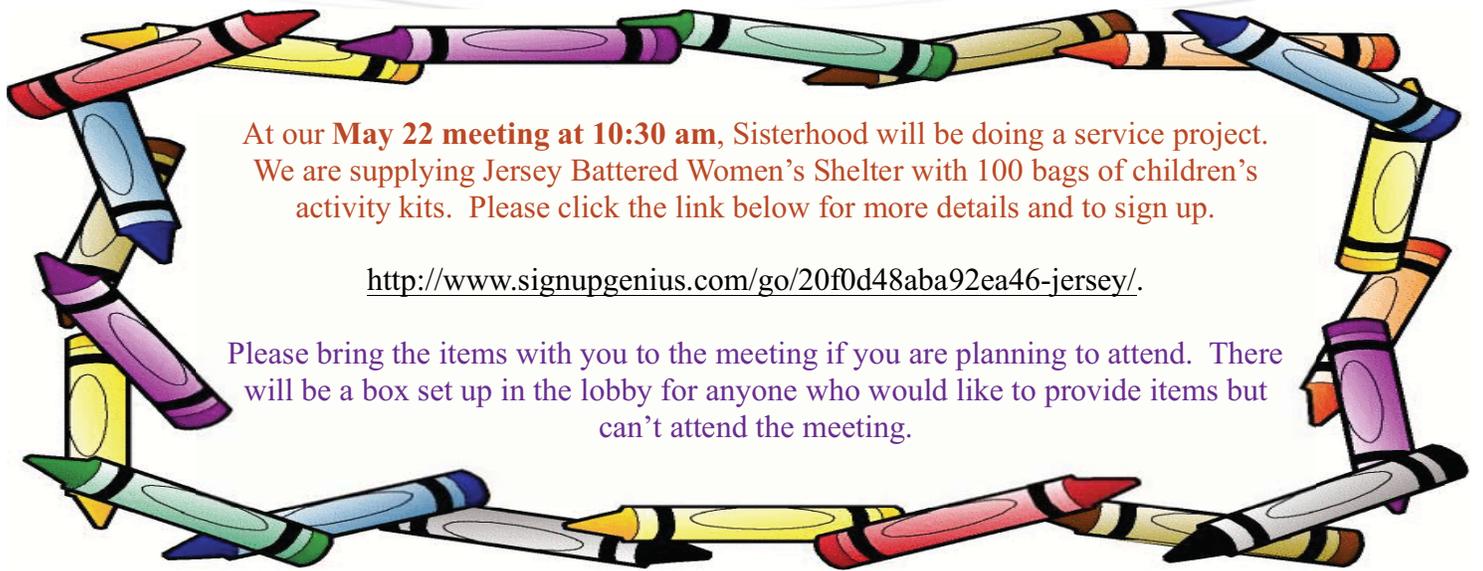


Saturday, May 7 at 2 pm

*Please click on the evite below for details
and to RSVP.*

<http://evite.me/jNEb9Kedzu>





At our **May 22 meeting at 10:30 am**, Sisterhood will be doing a service project. We are supplying Jersey Battered Women's Shelter with 100 bags of children's activity kits. Please click the link below for more details and to sign up.

<http://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0d48aba92ea46-jersey/>.

Please bring the items with you to the meeting if you are planning to attend. There will be a box set up in the lobby for anyone who would like to provide items but can't attend the meeting.

Haiku, Heller, and Hysterics

By Sharon Herson

Haiku for Shabbat? This was the thread for the Shabbat-before-Purim, a half-serious, half-comedic series of *haikus* on the Shabbat prayers, some written by Rabbi Dubin, some by others. Purim, as we know, is a celebration that turns everything on its head, and, we learned, the Shabbat-before-Purim can be/should be almost equally crazy. On Purim, we are supposed to “drink until we can't distinguish Haman from Mordechai,” as someone in a position to know once told me. We didn't get drunk at the service (or even after at Oneg), but the “sermon” dealt in a roundabout way with this topic. It was an hysterical spoof, a “memo” from the URJ (Union of Reform Judaism) higher-ups instructing URJ rabbis to cease and desist from giving sermons (“they make people sleepy”) and instead, to introduce longer Onegs where congregants stuff their mouths with food and drink to such an extent that serious—or any—conversation is quite impossible. . . . And seriously, as Rabbi Dubin pointed out, if you say the *Shema* and count the syllables, you will see that it's a real *haiku* (5-7-5).

The *bar mitzvah* of Walker Heller on Saturday morning, March 19, was joyful, as all our *b'nei mitzvah* are, and special, as all are, too. But Walker's was special in several unique ways. First, his grandparents, Leslie and Murray Heller, are former members of our congregation; it was lovely to see them in such good spirits, having made the trip from their new (several years) home in Virginia. Second, the Torah scroll from which Walker chanted so beautifully was a Torah that has been in his family for four generations before him (from his great-great-grandfather); his uncle and his father Erik chanted from that same scroll. Walker led the service with confidence, poise, and grace. I felt honored and privileged to be part of the congregation that helped this young man to achieve so much. Walker's parents, Carrie and Erik, his grandparents, Rabbi Dubin, and his tutor, Robin Hall, are rightly proud of him and the work he has done that carried him so magnificently through the morning service.

The whole *megillah*? Do we ever read the whole *megillah*? Hopefully not, because—as the saying implies—it would take a VERY long time—probably several hours. But on Purim we usually read essential portions from this singular scroll in which the name of God does not appear even once. WHY? If you had been present, you would have heard Rabbi Dubin's explanation, so come next year.

Continued on next page

The JCNWJ is fortunate to have among its congregants a group of zany adults who enjoy hamming it up once a year to perform a Purim shpiel. It has become our tradition to do musical versions of the Purim story—we've done shpiels to the music of *Grease*, *Wizard of Oz*, the Beatles, *Guys and Dolls*, to name a few—and this year, it was “*Rock around the Clock*” *Megillah*, rock n' roll music from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, music that I and a few other performers actually remember. With Debbie Kahan as King Ahasuerus (remember, things are turned upside down) and Stephanie Fletcher as Esther (channeling Cher), the performance rocked the sanctuary. Both women, in fact, have fabulous voices, and their duet of “I've got you, Babe” formed the perfect culmination to this shpiel, which had the audience laughing hysterically and clapping for most of the forty minutes. The bad guys, Haman and his wife Zeresh (Sandy Kahan and Sharon Herson), sang the title song, slightly adapted to the Purim story (One, two, three o'clock, four o'clock lot), and belted out a Purim rendition of “The Great Pretender,” which morphed into “The Great Jew-Hater.” The hero, Mordechai (Howie Hirsch), danced and sang his way through “Johnny Be Good/Esther Be Good” and fought with the evil Haman in his inimitable way. Queen Vashti—you could say she was an early feminist—was unforgettable as interpreted by Cheryl Orenstein, who sassed her way through “It's my party and I'll cry if I want to/It's my castle, I won't dance, I don't want to”). The narrators, Edythe Herson and Debbie Fesinstine—the play's organizer and director—kept the plot moving and were key in the group songs. Debbie's casting was perfect. She worked us hard but results paid off! Special thanks to Paul Tarlowe for providing the musical accompaniment and helping to keep most of the cast on key most of the time. And thanks, too, to Ed Orenstein for his cameo dance appearance.

Incidentally, each year Debbie Fesinstine issues an open call for people to participate in the shpiel—and the rehearsals are a great part of the fun of doing it. If you missed the shpiel, you can see it on YouTube, thanks to Howie. Here are the links:

Part 1 : <https://youtu.be/vVpDwx1dCNo>

Part 2: <https://youtu.be/NKjvpEXfAII>

Part 3: <https://youtu.be/EqEoq5r0QxU>

If you missed any of the preceding, there's always next year for Purim—BUT don't wait till then to participate. There is a *bat mitzvah* coming up on April 2 (Hannah Perfetti's), AND more Shabbats and activities, including classes for adults taught by Rabbi Dubin (on Sunday mornings, April 3 and May 15) and by Cantor Labow (on Saturday mornings, April 30, May 14, and June 11).

Wanted: Advertisers for JCNWJ Journal

Kindly take note of the ads at the end of our Journal and whenever possible, support these establishments with your patronage. It's also a good idea to mention that you saw their Temple Ad. If there are any businesses that you use regularly that might be interested in taking an ad in the Journal, please contact Rita Berkowitz (berk721@aol.com) or Ruth Schutzbank (Howie.ruth@hotmail.com). You can also go to our homepage, print out an advertising form and give it directly to them to mail in.

May Journal Deadline

The deadline for submitting articles and advertisements to be included in the May Issue of the JCNWJ Journal is **April 19, 2016**. Please email articles, photographs, or news items to the Journal Editor, Abby Bauer at abbybauer@comcast.net.



Please join Jewish LIFE for these upcoming programs in April:

Tired of the “same old” Passover recipes?! Join Chef and cookbook author Paul Shoyer as she presents The New Passover Menu, Wednesday, April 6, 12 Noon at the Birnbaum JCC. Passover has never been so easy or delicious! Fee includes program and lunch: \$18/person in advance or \$22 day of the program.

Register Now!!... 4th Annual Celebrate Israel, Tuesday, April 12 at 6:30pm to benefit Israel Bonds and the State of Israel. The event will be held at Raritan Valley Country Club in Bridgewater. This year’s honorees are Marjorie & Jonathan Slass, and Evan Gottesman, a Rutgers Hillel Student. Distinguished guest speaker is Malcolm Hoenlein Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. The evening will include a special remembrance of Rabbi Evan Jaffe . The registration fee is \$50/Adult and \$18/Student and includes full buffet. Cash bar available. You can register by mailing payment (check payable to “JCC”) to the Shimon and Sara Birnbaum JCC, 775 Talamini Road, Bridgewater, NJ 08807, on line at www.ssbjcc.org, or by calling the JCC at 908-725-6994 x201.



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