

Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey Journal

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Rabbi's Message

Dear Friends,

On Sunday, August 26, 2018, Shira, Liron, Ari and I woke up earlier than we would have chosen to otherwise in order to drive Noa to Kennedy Airport to give her a proper send-off to Israel, where she would be spending the first semester of 11th Grade at the URJ Heller High School (alas, so close to Rosh Hashanah, their cantor-mother had professional obligations that kept her from being able to join us in person). While this month's message is not specifically about Heller High, let me just say that we couldn't have asked for a better experience for our daughter. The academics were excellent and the opportunities for personal growth were even better. I couldn't recommend it more highly, and if anyone wants to know more, please ask me!

One of the seminal units of study during the four-month program is the week spent in Poland where students walk the killing grounds of Majdanek, Auschwitz, and Birkenau. Recognizing this would be a particularly emotional time, many of us parents chose to write personal letters to our children. With Noa's permission, I now share with you what I wrote to her:

11.15.2018

Hi, Sweetheart,

I witnessed my first concentration camp (Dachau) when I was just a few months older than you. It was during my train trip across Europe with my two friends (ANDY Bernstein and ANDY Weisman) between my Junior and Senior years of high school. I know this trip must be really hard for you, because it was really hard for me, too.

(continued on next page)

Mark Your Calendar

- **Friday, May 3**
7:30 pm – Shabbat Service
Yom Hashoah Memorial Service
Guest Speaker: Esther Bakonyi
- **Sunday, May 5**
9:30 am – Sunday School
10:30 am – Israeli Independence Day Celebration
- **Saturday, May 11**
6:00 pm – Reel Theology: *A Serious Man* including Havdalah, Dinner, Movie, and Discussion
- **Monday, May 13**
7:00 pm – Board of Trustees Mtg.
- **Friday, May 17**
7:30 pm – Shabbat Service
- **Saturday, May 18**
10:30 am – Torah Study
Outdoor Havdalah Service – Time & Location TBD
- **Sunday, May 19**
9:30 am – Sunday School
10:00 am – Sisterhood
- **Monday, May 20**
7:30 pm – Book Club
- **Friday, May 31**
7:30 pm – Shabbat Service
- **Sunday, June 2**
9:30 am – Sunday School

Rabbi's Message (cont.)

But you have an advantage that I didn't have. You have teachers and guides who are with you who love you and know how to help you see the most important lessons. When I went, it was just me and Andy and Andy. We were all on our own.

Even though Dachau wasn't an extermination camp, I still remember – 35 years later – how violating and inhumane it felt to walk through the barracks. And then when we saw the furnaces, I could only imagine the horror of that place.

And then, during the summer of 1991, I saw Auschwitz. This time I was completely on my own. This time was even worse, maybe because I understood more, maybe because I was alone, maybe because so many more people were murdered in Auschwitz than in Dachau. I don't know, but it was terrible. I remember especially feeling how thick and stale the air was in the shower room. I remember also how offended I was when I saw some local farmers cutting the grass and making bales of hay out of it. I'm not entirely sure whether the land they were farming for hay was technically on the camp grounds or directly next to it, but I do remember feeling outraged that this land was being used as if nothing had ever happened there. It was an anger I carried with me for a few days. But then, when I had a bit of distance, I began to think about it in a new way. I began to think of Emil Fackenheim and his 614th Commandment. Have you studied that? I think you probably have. Fackenheim (who, by the way, was a member of Kol HaNeshama) wrote that:

"We are commanded, first, to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember our very guts and bones of the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted."

Fackenheim summed this up into a 614th Commandment that said, in short, we are commanded never to allow Hitler to have a posthumous victory – that no matter what, we can never let Hitler win by continuing to control us even after he died. So as I thought about what I had seen with the farmers at Auschwitz, I began to see their activity in a new light. Maybe it wasn't so bad after all that they were collecting the hay. The land, after all, didn't do anything wrong. And neither, so far as I know, had these farmers done anything wrong. Maybe their parents had, or their grandparents, but certainly not them. They weren't even born when Hitler was alive. So why not? Why not let the place of so much murderous death become a place that could be transformed into a source of life and nourishment, at least for the innocent animals who would benefit from the hay?

Granted, it's a hard line to draw. I don't think we can ever let Auschwitz be anything other than Auschwitz. The memory has to be preserved in order that history never be allowed to repeat itself, but still, we do have to keep on living. We cannot let Hitler continue stealing life from us so many decades after he was defeated...

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Rabbi's Message (cont.)

Apologies for interrupting my own letter, the final paragraph of which follows below, but I do want to explain why I have chosen for this particular month to share this particular very personal correspondence.

Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Memorial Day – falls annually on the 27th of Nisan, which corresponds this year to the evening of May 1 through the evening of May 2. As we reflect on the horrors of the past, we are under a particularly Jewish obligation to reiterate the well-known charge: Never Again. Never again to us. Never again to anyone else. And so, just days after the latest synagogue shooting in California, just a week after the Easter Day Church attack in Sri Lanka, just a month after the series of African-American church burnings in Louisiana, just six weeks after the Christchurch mosque shooting, I conclude with you as I concluded with Noa.

So, I guess what I am saying is, be sad when you are inside the camps. Be sad when you are learning about them. They are sad places. Feel angry, too, because anger is the natural response. But I hope you all also spend time trying to feel strong and resilient and maybe even inspired more than ever to keep living as a proud Jew, because we cannot let the Nazis win. Fortunately, even with all the hatred that is coming to the surface in the U.S. and elsewhere today, I know with my full heart that love is so much more powerful than hate. I know that even while the Nazi hatred will undoubtedly keep trying to make itself known from time to time, human beings are overwhelmingly better than that. And now that you have become a personal witness to the inhumanity, you can play a role in helping the rest of the world become even more committed to love over hate.

*I love you,
Abba*

Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin

A Reminder from the Sunshine Committee



Please let us know when someone has passed away, is ill or otherwise in need of a little sunshine so that the Jewish Center may be there to support and assist as best we can. Please contact Ruth Schutzbank at (908) 329-6036 or Howie.ruth@hotmail.com.

President's Message

I continue my story in 1993 when Sam turned 4 years old. I knew that as Iris was still Catholic, most of our children's Jewish education would fall on me. I relished this role. My first task was to find a temple, as the temple in Bound Brook was 50 minutes away, and if they were still holding classes 5 days a week, I would not be able to take Sam, and later Allison and Caitlin, to Hebrew school.

I started looking in the area, and the first temple I found was the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey, 18 minutes from my home. I visited the temple on a Friday night and was very impressed by the family atmosphere and the *haimish* feel of the temple. It reminded me very much of the temple I grew up in. I made plans to investigate further, including going to High Holidays services. I requested a ticket and was told that there were no tickets. I was very impressed by this. We sat in the rabbi's classroom where I could barely hear the service, but I still got the feel of the place. I went to a Friday night service in the spring and still felt this was the right place for me and my family, and I believe there was a gentleman rabbi. At that point, I had never considered that a woman could become a rabbi. I decided to become a member the next year.

I began by enrolling Sam in Hebrew school. The first services I attended were for Rosh Hashanah, 1994. In the week between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I had a life-changing event. I fell out of a third-story window while doing repairs around my house, and I spent Yom Kippur in the hospital. I remember Art Sirkis coming to visit me. I did not know who he was, and he told me he was a member of the temple, and he brought me a copy of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. As I had no ability to read for long periods of time, these short stories were perfect and truly inspirational.

Iris brought Sam to Sunday school for the first few months, as I was under doctor's orders not to drive. My new goal was that I wanted to be able to dance at my cousin Erik's Bar Mitzvah four months later, and with the help of my family, friends, and a great physical therapist, I was able to accomplish that. One of the driving forces of my life is that we need to celebrate as often as we can with our family and friends. Life is too short not to take advantage of these celebrations, and we should celebrate with gusto.

It was at this point that I met Rabbi Ellen Lewis, who had just signed on to be the rabbi at the temple. Rabbi Lewis would become a close friend as well as my spiritual leader during the time I was raising my children. I loved and still love Rabbi Lewis. She has taught me so much. One of the things I learned was what it means to live a Jewish life, which is that Torah study is good to do, but if you do not put what you learn into practice and go out and do good in the world, you really haven't learned the lessons of Torah.

One of the things I remember was that in the spring of 1995, we were getting ready to have a Purim carnival. I was still not in great shape from my fall and needed to come up with an idea that would be fun for the kids and easy for me. That was when I devised the Hit Haman Booth, which enabled the children to throw wet sponges at me. I did not realize what a HIT it would become over the years. I loved watching the kids grow up in front of me, and trembled when the pre-Bar Mitzvah class would line up to see who could throw the sponge the hardest.

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President's Message (cont.)

Somewhere around the third year of being a member, Richard Eisenberg, who was the treasurer, asked me if I wanted to be on the Finance Committee. I was apprehensive and asked what the commitment was. At the time I had three children, aged 8 (Sam) and 7 (the twins), and they were getting involved in all sorts of activities, and I did not have time to dedicate to the temple (or so I thought). Rich told me the committee met twice a year. I thought I could handle that. The next year, Rich resigned as treasurer and I was asked if I could do the job. That was where my involvement in the temple really began.

The first task I had to do as treasurer was to give the Yom Kippur appeal. I had never spoken before a large group of people and was really scared to have to deliver the appeal. But I went ahead and did it. Then I gave the appeal two more times, and each time I did, I became better at public speaking and less nervous.

Three years later, Iris was diagnosed with breast cancer and I had to give up my position as treasurer and my position on the board to take care of her and my family.

By the next June, she was free of cancer and I made a request to be back on the board. Sharon Herson wanted me to be the vice president with the intention of being a future president. When she called me to ask, she said that the person who was "in line" to be president had had a falling out with the rabbi and would I do it instead. The thought of having that kind of responsibility was frightening, but after talking with my father, who to this day still gives me unsurpassed advice, I decided to give it my best.

Part 3 will continue in next month's newsletter.

Love, Howie

See also...

Howie was recently profiled as a "Person of the Week" by *Inside Warren*:

<http://www.insidewarren.com/a-man-of-many-balloon-hats-howie-hirsch-is-this-weeks-person-of-the-week/>



Sisterhood

SISTERHOOD NEWS

The Judaica Evening and Fundraiser was a Big Success. Thank you to all who attended and helped set up the event. Extra jewelry was donated to DASAAC. Thank you to Suzi Marr for all of your efforts coordinating this event!

Final Mishloach Manot total: **\$3,587.00** Thank you to the congregation for your generous donations. All proceeds will be donated to the Temple to be used for security purchases.

Final meeting of the year: : We will hold our final meeting on May 19th at 10:00 at the Washington Diner. We will vote on new officers and wrap up the year. Please respond by email to Alison Shelofsky if you plan on attending. I need a count for the diner by May 14th. I will be treating for breakfast.



JEWISH CENTER OF NORTHWEST JERSEY YOM HASHOAH MEMORIAL SERVICE

*A FIVE-YEAR-OLD ENCOUNTERS HISTORY:
PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS*



Friday, May 3, 7:30 pm
Shabbat Acharei Mot

SPECIAL GUEST PRESENTER: ESTHER BAKONYI

Updates & Events

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

Upcoming Schedule:

- May 5
- May 19
- June 2
- June 9

Note: No Sunday School on May 12 or May 26

TORAH STUDY

Torah Study continues at the JCNWJ. The next meeting will be Saturday, May 18 at 10:30am. All are welcome. We are in the middle of Deuteronomy. Our remaining schedule for the year is:

- May 18
- June 22

BUILDING UPDATE

Kitchen and Bathroom supplies

If you notice that any kitchen or bathroom supplies are getting low, please email Iris Hirsch at irishirsch@comcast.net.

MAH JONGG

Mah Jongg continues at the JCNWJ. Contact Rhonda Jordan at helpmerhonda171@yahoo.com if interested!

WEBSITE

Members Only!

The JCNWJ website has a section for temple members only. Here you'll find the latest membership list and other documents not for public consumption.

To access, go to www.jcnwj.org/members/ and enter the user name jcnwjmember and password. Forgot the password? E-mail website@jcnwj.org.

FOOD DRIVE

Our congregation continues to donate food all year round to the food pantry. The Jewish Center is collecting non-perishable items such as canned soup, pasta, and cereal on an ongoing basis to help out those in need.

Updates & Events

PERSON OF THE YEAR

We will be having a celebratory picnic on Sunday, June 23rd to honor Jeff Berkowitz for the years that he has spent lovingly taken care of our building and our grounds. We will be celebrating at the home of Jerry and Rita Berkowitz.

A Perfect Potluck invitation will be sent out as well as an evite for planning purposes.

I urge you to make time to help us honor Jeff.

-Howie

DONATIONS

In Memory of Sheila Kalisher
– Helen and John Mattson

In Memory of Trudy Weil
– Rita and Jerry Berkowitz

On the Yahrzeit of Betty Berkowitz
– Rita and Jerry Berkowitz

On the Yahrzeit of Estelle Shelofsky
– Alison and Andrew Shelofsky

On the Yahrzeit of William V. Pinn
– Helen and John Mattson

To all those who gave so generously with their donations, thoughts, and prayers and to Rabbi Dubin for his inspirational Shiva service – Thank you from the family of Gertrude Weil – “May her Memory be a Blessing”

Tzedakah for Marvin Leiter
– Audrie and Kenneth Sonzogni

DONATIONS

In Memory of Gertrude Weil
– Helen and John Mattson

In Memory of Irwin Finkelstein
– Karen and Shelley Finkelstein

In Memory of Jerry England
– Helen and John Mattson

In Memory of Jerry England
– Rita and Jerry Berkowitz

In Memory of Molly Finkelstein
– Karen and Shelley Finkelstein

In Memory of Molly Goldfarb
– Helen and John Mattson

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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.