

Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey Journal

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December 2020

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Rabbi's Message

Dear Friends,

מודה / מודה אני לפניך מלך סי ומי. שְׁהִתְרַם בִּי
נְשַׁמְתִּי, בְּחֶמְלָה. רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ:

*Modeh / Modah ani lefanekha melekh chai vekayam.
Shehechezarta bi nishmahti b'chemlah, rabah emunatekha.*

I give thanks to you, living and eternal Ruler, for
You have returned to me my soul with compassion; abundant is
Your faithfulness!

It is with these words of gratitude that we Jews have been
starting the day ever since they were written in the 16th century.
And before that, at least as far back as the Talmud, we've been
waking up with different yet similar other words of gratitude.
Either way, the point is that we Jews understand the value of
gratitude. Of course we do. It's only natural, given that, as we
learn in this week's Torah portion (*Vayetze*), it's right there in
our name. Jews (*Yehudim*), named after Judah (*Yehudah*), the
fourth son of Leah and Jacob, means "grateful." When Judah is
born, Leah proclaims, אודה את-יהוה--על-כן קראָה שְׁמוֹ, יהודה. I will
offer gratitude (*odeh*) to Adonai, which is why she named him
Judah (*Yehudah*) -- Gen 29:35.

Sometimes, though, it's hard to be thankful. To be honest, as I
sit to write this note to you today, Thursday, November 26,
2020, otherwise known as Thanksgiving, I am finding it less
easy than I would have liked to be thankful for the year that is
nearing its completion. I am hardly unique in thinking that
we've seen plenty over the past 11 months that we'll be

(continued on next page)

Calendar of Events

All Events are on Zoom until further notice
due to the continuing COVID-19 Pandemic

Weekly Events

Thursday, December 3, 10, 17

6:00pm: Mindful Meditation

Friday, December 4, 11, 18, 25

7:30pm: Shabbat Service

Saturday, December 5, 12, 19, 26

6:30pm: Havdalah

Sunday, December 6, 13, 20, 27

10:15am: Sunday School

Special Events

Saturday, December 5

7:30pm: The Armenian Century:

Resilience in the Face of Genocide

special presentation by Nvair Beylerian

Monday, December 7

7:00pm: Board of Trustees

Sunday, December 13

12:00pm: Sisterhood

Saturday, December 19

10:30am: Torah Study

Please Note: Calendar events are subject to
change, which will be announced by email.

Rabbi's Message (continued)

perfectly happy to forget, and I don't mean just the virus, because even before people started getting sick, it was **already** a hard year!

As January rolled around, we were already dealing with violent protests in Hong Kong, raging bushfires in Australia, and the impeachment of our sitting president. But that was just the start, because then came Kobe Bryant, the faulty mobile voting app at the Democratic caucus in Iowa, and the long-delayed conviction of Harvey Weinstein, which reminded us of the outrageous capacity for human evil. And all this, of course, was before we'd ever even heard of the disease "Covid-19," witnessed the murder of George Floyd, or felt the awesome horror of 2750 tons of ammonium nitrate exploding in Beirut, leaving over 200 people dead and another 300,000 homeless. Add to that the financial collapse, the politically inspired derision of science, the devastation of wildfires in the west and hurricanes in the east, the social isolation of too many, the uncertainty and anxiety felt by all, the racial and religious tensions that pitted citizen against citizen, the political vitriol that whipped huge crowds into a frenzy, the loss of truth as a universally protected value, the academic and social stagnation of our homebound children, and the utter, overall exhaustion. This is not even including the 61,000,000 people across the world who've been infected with Covid-19, over 13,000,000 just in our own country, or the 1.43 million who've died, 263,000 right here in America alone. After 11 months of 2020, we are tired, and we are, for all intents and purposes, done. None of us will be particularly sad to see this year fade away in just about four more short weeks.

Still, though, disheartened as we may be, the fact remains that Commandment #3 is **still** Commandment #3. We are no less commanded in 2020, "Do not use God's name in vain," than we were in 2019. In other words, since we are commanded not to invoke God's name unless we really mean it, when we say *Modeh / Modah ani lefanekha melekh chai vekayam*, we had better not profess gratitude without also trying to find it or feel it.

Fortunately, as an adopted member of the JCNWJ community, I have to look neither far nor wide to find convincing reasons to feel genuine gratitude. Recognizing that every congregation likes to think of itself as open and welcoming, I still wonder if any really is as warm and welcoming as ours. Even in this time of "no-hugging," I have no doubt that every newcomer who crosses our path feels the hug all the same.

But it's not only newcomers who feel the warmth. Perhaps even more than they, it is our regular members and close friends who truly know the unabashed kindness with which we support one another, both in times of joy as well as in times of sadness. Whether it be the celebration of a happy life-cycle event, the scare of a cancer diagnosis, or the death of a loved one, our community always puts the needs and feelings of others front and center. Not every rabbi gets to say they've lucked into a congregation that cares so much about each other or for each other – both in spirit and in action – but I can. And I do. Often. So when I wake up and say *Modeh ani*, one of the parts of my life that jumps to the front of my mind – Covid or no Covid – is the generous spirit of the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey. Thank you.

I am grateful also for a number of unexpected opportunities that have revealed themselves by way of Zoom. Though I hate the disease of Covid-19 as much as one can hate anything, and while I truly cannot wait until we are all worshiping together in person once again at 115 Youmans Avenue, the truth is that had we never been forced by circumstances to figure out Zoom gatherings, I never would have discovered how wrong I was in my perception of the interest level of some of our now-regular Shabbat

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Rabbi's Message (continued)

worshippers. For the first 4½ years of my tenure at JCNWJ, I figured that certain members of the community simply weren't interested in Shabbat worship, because I saw them only rarely in the pews. Now I see just how wrong I was! I know this, because now that we've been meeting online, a number of these members and friends have joining us in worship on a regular basis. It seems that what I assumed was a lack of interest was actually something very different: a reluctance / disability to drive at night, especially at the end of a long week. So, just as I am thankful for that insight, so too am I thankful for the ability to continue with Zoom once we resume in-person worship when all is once again safe. As inclusive as we were pre-Covid, I have every confidence that we'll be even more inclusive post-Covid.

I am grateful to 2020 also for finally putting black and brown lives at the center of our national discussion. Though it was because of unmitigated tragedy (both in a series of police actions that left unarmed black and brown Americans dead as well as the outrageous disproportionality of minority deaths from the virus) that our collective attention has been drawn to persisting racial disparities in our country, I am grateful that at long last, the decision-makers in government seem finally to be thinking in serious ways about how to even the playing field across racial lines. As tragic as 2020 has been, if one of the after-effects is that our country will move towards become a more just union for all, regardless of race, at least we can be thankful that perhaps the pain and suffering will not have been entirely for nothing post-Covid-19, once the virus is no longer consuming the lion's share of our national attention.

Speaking of post-Covid-19, I am particularly thankful for the brilliant scientists who have been working day and night to develop what now appears to be at least three different effective vaccines, with more surely to follow. It's remarkable what the human mind is capable of creating when the need presents itself. We still have enormous darkness ahead of us to navigate, but the light does finally appear to be shining at the end of a much too long and far too windy tunnel.

So as we stand poised to kindle our *Hanukiyot* for the Festival of Lights (the first candle will be lit on Thursday night, December 10), let us be grateful not only for our victory over Greek oppression over 2 millennia ago, but for the victories that yet lie ahead of us over both the Covid-19 Coronavirus and the persistent scourge of racial injustice. Though I'm sure Covid-19 will be a thing of the past long before racism gets there, I have faith that with hard work and diligence, we will one day get there with race relations as well.

Kein yehi ratzon,
May this be God's will,

Rabbi Dubin

President's Message

Shalom,

I am going to start off this month's message with part of my message from October 2005 and I am terribly upset that I must do this again.

From October 2005:

NEVER AGAIN. How often do we use those words to describe the Holocaust? Do we remind ourselves that we must be diligent in searching out those who seek the destruction of a people? If we are ignorant of a situation and we hear of it, we must do our best to become informed. And once informed, we must act. There is a crisis in Darfur where people are being annihilated. As people of conscience, we need to educate ourselves and do what we can to help. Being a Jew is not to be passive, but to participate in "Tikkun Olam," the repair of the world.

2020 Update:

There is now an ethnic cleansing happening in Armenia. Rabbi Dubin has set up a special program for December 5 after Havdalah on the Armenian genocide of 1915-1923 and the volatile situation that is HAPPENING TODAY in that country. The guest speaker is Nvair Beylerian. Please become informed on this subject and let's make our voices known that NEVER AGAIN does not only pertain to the Jewish people, but any section of the human race that is being persecuted. Let's do what we can to raise awareness and help stop this injustice.

Be informed: <https://fordhamobserver.com/52231/opinions/the-armenian-genocide-of-2020-the-fight-for-indigenous-armenian-land/>

Shalom,
Howie Hirsch

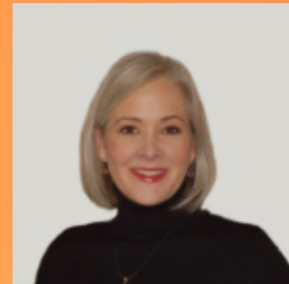
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NVAIR KADIAN BEYLERIAN, M.ED.

Adjunct Professor of History and Co-Director
of the Center for Peace, Justice and
Reconciliation at Bergen Community College

The Armenian Century

Resilience in
the Face of
Genocide

A Jewish Community Discussion

DECEMBER 5, 2020

7:30 PM (EST) HAVDALAH

7:45 PM (EST) LECTURE & DISCUSSION

Zoom Link Sent Under Different Cover

Updates & Events

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

Sunday School continues online. Check the WhatsApp for the latest updates and schedule.

ZOOM LESSONS

If you would like to learn how to use ZOOM, Howie is willing to help you get familiar with this technology.

Please contact him at jcnwjprez@gmail.com or call him at 908-295-0073 to set up a time for assistance.

FOOD DRIVE

During this time when our building is closed, we encourage members to donate to relief organizations and food pantries online. We will resume collecting food at the JCNWJ after we reopen.

The food pantries are in dire need of supplies to fill their shelves as more and more people are in need and your generosity will help fill that need.

Thank you for your continued support!

-Iris

TORAH STUDY

The Torah Study Group, which began in the fall of 1998 with the reading of Genesis 1 (In the beginning . . .), will soon (probably by the end of this calendar year or early in 2021) reach the end of Moses' last speech in Deuteronomy. This twenty-two year exploration of the Pentateuch has been inspiring and eye-opening for all who have been participating.

This year, since the start of the pandemic, we have been meeting, successfully, on Zoom, and have had the pleasure of Rabbi Dubin's participation for the past several months. All of us are hoping that he will be able to continue with us as we go forward—even after we resume in person—as his presence and his knowledge contribute greatly to the group's efforts.

The group is now considering what we will read next: Start over again with Genesis? Move "forward" into the histories—Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, etc.? Jump to the Prophets? We want to encourage potential new participants at this time to help us decide. Please call or email Sharon if you would like to make a suggestion or two and would consider joining the group. Folks are welcome to come in at any time, even now—or perhaps especially now, as we read Deuteronomy 31 next time, when we will learn about the passing of leadership from Moses to Joshua, followed in January, February, and March by Deut. 32, the Song of Moses; Deut. 33, the Blessing of Moses on each of the Tribes of Israel; and finally, in Deut. 34, the Death of Moses. PLEASE JOIN US!

Upcoming Schedule (meetings on Zoom):
December 19 at 10:30.

-Sharon

Updates & Events

DONATIONS

In Honor of the High Holidays

- Beth and Harold Lappin
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- Rhonda Jordan
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- Edward and Roseann Weinstein
- Leon Glass
- Laurie Post
- Adam Tucker
- Jerry and Ginger Nathanson
- Bernie Robins
- Jerry and Rita Berkowitz

DONATIONS

Thank You for Mindful Meditation

- Sharon Herson and Daniel Fleckles
- Risa Smith
- Blanche Davidson
- Howard and Iris Hirsch

In Memory of Celia Robins

- Bernie Robins

On the Yahrzeit of Belle Shure

- Helen and John Mattson

On the Yahrzeit of Steve and Dave

On the Yahrzeit of Doris Tarlowe

- Paul and Laura Tarlowe

In Memory of Barbara Simons

- Rhonda Jordan

WEBSITE

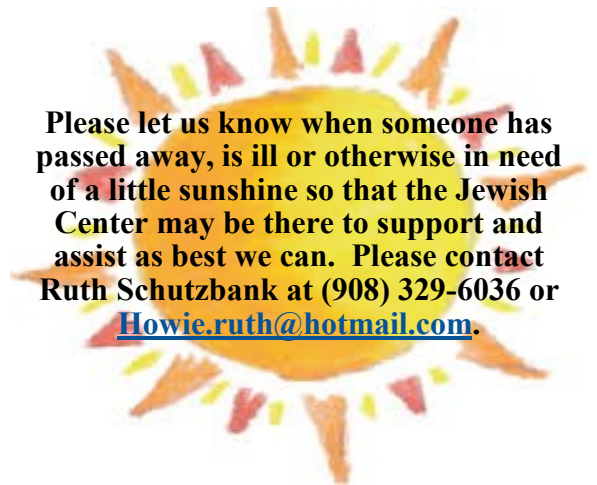
Members Only!

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.

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.



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