

Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey Journal

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February 2022

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Rabbi's Message

Dear Friends,

As the old joke goes: What do you get when you ask the same question of ten different Jews? Eleven opinions! It's funny, because it's true. At the same time, there's more to the joke than mere self-effacement, because not only does it spotlight a truth about our cultural eccentricities, it also focuses on one of the religious cornerstones of Jewish tradition; we are heir to a tradition that not only *tolerates* multiple perspectives, it actually *demand*s it.

It may seem counterintuitive to celebrate disagreement as a necessary component in the search for truth, but in point of fact it is exactly within such a milieu that Judaism truly succeeds. When understood properly, disagreement is a necessary prerequisite to the opening of doors to a healthy, productive, and successful path forward.

Not that we encourage bickering or baseless positions of argument, but it is one of the fundamental truths of Judaism that we make the very best decisions only when we are confronted with a healthy marketplace of ideas, all competing one against another.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Talmud, our tradition's fundamental record of Rabbinic wisdom, is the fact that when all is said and done, it wouldn't be so terribly wrong to describe this treasure as being an extended chain of

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Calendar of Events

Note: All events will be virtual on Zoom until further notice.

Friday, February 11

7:30pm: Shabbat Evening Service

Sunday, February 13

9:30am: Sunday School

11:00am: Torah Cantillation

Saturday, February 19

11:00am: Torah Study

Sunday, February 20

9:30am: Sunday School

11:00am: Shabbat in Hebrew

12:15pm: Sisterhood

Monday, February 21

7:00pm: Book Club

Friday, February 25

7:30pm: Shabbat Evening Service

Sunday, February 27

9:30am: Sunday School

11:00am: Torah Cantillation

Sunday, March 6

9:30am: Sunday School

Monday, March 7

7:00pm: Board Meeting

Rabbi's Message (continued)

competing answers to a bunch of questions. Even more remarkable is the fact that in the midst of this fabulous abundance of opinions, almost never are we ever given the definitively “correct” and accepted answers to any of those questions. This is because tradition values the search for understanding, and the questions that are asked along the way, even more highly than the arrival at specific answers themselves, given that it is so often in life that there simply isn't just one single right answer that is universally applicable to every person. Again, this is not to say that some opinions aren't flat out wrong and unworthy of consideration, such as the notion that our government is seeking to implant microchips to read our minds through the vaccination process, but when we get down to it, one of the beauties of life is that each child of God is indeed unique. Regarding the most personal issues in life, there are as many (or more) answers as there are people asking the questions. In addition, if the only opinions we ever consider are the ones that come naturally to us anyway, chances are we'll never find deeper meaning.

This notion comes to life especially vibrantly in the traditional mode of Jewish study called *hevruta*, in which a small number of students (usually two) sit across the table from one another, debating the meaning of the sacred text they are reading together. Whether or not the study partners reach consensus is irrelevant. The true value of learning in *hevruta* partnership is in considering the challenges our partner throws at us.

To put it more artfully, as is done in the Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 7a 8:

תענית ז' א:ח

אמר רבי חמא (אמר רבי) חנינא מאי דכתיב (משלי כז, יז) ברזל בברזל יחד לומר לך מה ברזל זה אחד מחדד את חברו אף שני תלמידי חכמים מחדדין זה את זה בהלכה

Babylonian Talmud, Taanit 7a:8

Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17)? This verse comes to tell you that just as with these iron implements, one sharpens the other when they are rubbed against each other, so too, when Torah scholars study together, they sharpen one another in *halakha*.

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Rabbi's Message (continued)

Indeed, if the whole point of study is to sharpen our understanding, how better to sharpen a knife than to rub another piece of metal up next to it in a way that causes productive friction? So long as we attempt to go through life avoiding all possibilities of discomfort and challenge, we can be sure never to grow as thoughtful thinking human beings. Which brings me to the point of this message that I am writing to you.

As you've no doubt heard by now, the School Board of McMinn County, Tennessee found it appropriate recently to remove Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel, Maus: A Survivor's Tale, which depicts his parent's traumatic experience during and following the Holocaust, from the school curricula. Ironically, the decision came not because of concerns about the unspeakable horror that is presented in the story, but because:

"the book includes a few 'cuss' words, as one county school board member put it, and depicts nudity (that is, illustrated animal nudity). The offending phraseology was 'bitch' and 'god damn.' Of course, it's ridiculous to object to an account of the mass murder of 6 million Jews and millions of others because of salty language and (animal!) nudity. But that's what happened. Spiegelman told the *New York Times* it seemed to him the board members were asking, 'Why can't they teach a nicer Holocaust?'"

(this quote from the article at <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2022/02/the-inside-story-of-the-banning-of-maus-its-dumber-than-you-think/>)

Friends, we cannot sit silently and just watch this kind of thought-control close the minds of our children, because if we do, how will we ever be able to live up to the promise we made just this past week, on International Holocaust Memorial Day, that we will not permit such an atrocity to happen ever again? The horrors of history repeat when we do not remember them well enough. We cannot afford to allow the next generation of America to grow up ignorant of the Holocaust, even if – and especially if – learning about it causes friction, because it is only with that friction that they will be able to sharpen their minds to live life as responsible and upstanding citizens.

And while we're at it, let's commit also to forbidding *any* book to be off-limits, no matter how challenging or offensive. Yes, there will be books that require skilled teachers who can place them in proper context (such as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion) but so long as we forbid our students from being confronted by sharpness of reality, we are merely dooming our own society to harmful dullness. After all, how is it that we protect ourselves from being cut in the kitchen as we prepare dinner? By keeping our cutting knives extra sharp. It is the dull knife that causes injury when cutting, not the sharp one.

And remember, our objection to this kind of censorship cannot be limited to matters of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. As strongly as we object to the School Board of McMinn County, Tennessee for removing Maus, so too must we be equally concerned when other celebrated books are banned,

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Rabbi's Message (continued)

especially those whose objective is to address issues of racial equality, ethnic, religious, and gender dignity.

So for those of you who are in between books right now and looking for something worthwhile, I encourage you to click https://www.barnesandnoble.com/b/banned-books/_/N-rtm, peruse their assembled list of "banned books," and choose to read one of them yourself. As well, I encourage you to borrow it from your local library (even if you already own it) rather than purchasing it, in order to let our librarians know that there is demand for them. We cannot allow closed minds to keep our society in the dark. These books must remain available to all who seek to read them, because, as Oscar Wilde pointed out, "The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame." If we refuse to see our own shame, how then will we ever find our own glory?

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin

JCNWJ ADULT EDUCATION

HEBREW READING & TORAH CANTILLATION

READING HEBREW

TAUGHT BY RABBI DUBIN

STUDENTS WILL LEARN TO READ THE HEBREW ALEPH-BET.

NO PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE IS REQUIRED.

OCTOBER 10, 17*, 24, 31

SHABBAT IN HEBREW

TAUGHT BY RABBI DUBIN

STUDENTS WILL LEARN THE FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICE IN HEBREW.

ABILITY TO READ HEBREW LETTERS IS A PREREQUISITE.

NOVEMBER 14*, 28; DEC 12, JAN 9, 23, 30; FEB 6, 20

TORAH CANTILLATION

TAUGHT BY STUDENT CANTOR SHAYNA BURACK

STUDENTS WILL LEARN THE ART OF CHANTING TORAH.

ABILITY TO READ HEBREW LETTERS IS A PREREQUISITE.

NOV 7, 21; DEC 5, 19; JAN 30; FEB 13, 27; MAR 20

Sunday Mornings
11:00-11:55

*(10/17 & 11/14 will be after Sisterhood, from 12:05 - 1:00)

Every session will include a Zoom option.



CHOOSE 1, 2, OR ALL 3 CLASSES!



Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey

President's Message

And so it goes...

Occasionally, you do the right thing for the right reasons, and life throws you a curve.

This past month, my brother and I threw a 90th birthday party for my dad. The invitations to the party said that you needed to be fully vaccinated against COVID 19 to protect my dad.

Despite testing before we went out to San Diego, my daughter Allison, my grand daughter Abigail, my wife Iris, myself as well as my dad and his partner all tested positive for COVID-19. We had the party as no one had tested positive until after the party. No one else had any issues despite there being about thirty people at the party. Why only my family? Well it was my idea to throw the party in the first place. Omicron had not been an issue when we made the plans in November, and since everyone was vaccinated, we did not feel the need to cancel the party, even though I was concerned. Despite our best efforts, Omicron won, and we got to stay in a hotel room for a week in quarantine. When I called to tell Vice President Marsha what was going on, I found out that she and Karl also caught the virus.

To keep our temple family safe, we cancelled all in person temple activities for January. We will discuss the upcoming month at our board meeting on February 7th at 7:00 PM via ZOOM. If you wish to listen in on the conversation or make your opinions known, you are always welcome to join in.

Zoom information for the board meeting is:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81229128229?pwd=MTBveitmRmpWVFI2YXZxdVJNQXJqUT09>

or go to zoom.us, click JOIN MEETING and enter this information:

Meeting ID: 812 2912 8229

Passcode: 654630

As of today, everyone in my family is healthy and we are back to our daily routines.

I hope to see you all soon, but the board will make the decisions that we feel are best to keep our congregation as safe as we can.

Love, Howie

Updates & Events

FOOD DRIVE

Although we are not collecting food at the Temple right now, we encourage all members to give to charities helping those in need.

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

THANK YOU

I would like to thank the anonymous donor who arranged for the plaque for my mom. I am deeply touched. I am also thankful for all the sweet support I received during my time of mourning.

I love our congregation.

Shalom,

Debbie Apsel

TORAH STUDY

We will continue our exploration of the Book of Joshua on Saturday, February 19 at 11:00am on Zoom. Please see the next page for additional information and examples of artwork inspired by the Book of Joshua.

Future meeting dates are as follows:

- March 5
- April 2
- May 7
- June 4

Anyone is welcome to join, and it is not necessary to read the text ahead of time. It is helpful to have a copy of the Tanakh (Bible) so that you can follow along. We appreciate Rabbi Dubin's continued participation and insights.

Please watch your email for the Zoom links, which will be emailed out the week before each meeting.

DONATIONS

In memory of Rebecca Goldenthal
- Bernie and Nancy Robins

In memory of Ellen Field and Rose Margolin
- Alison and Andrew Shelofsky

In memory of Lonnie Bier
- Sharon Herson and Daniel Fleckles

Updates & Events

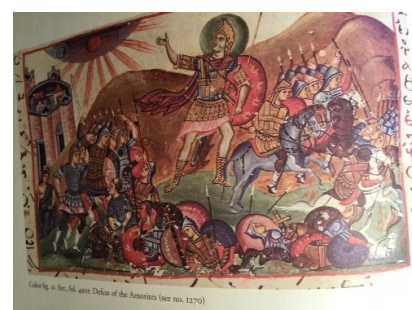
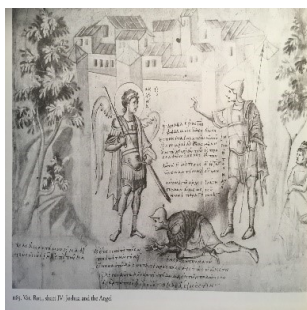
TANAKH STUDY: BOOK OF JOSHUA

Led by Rabbi Dubin, the Torah study group has been engaged with the book of Joshua for the past several months. This book continues the story of the Israelites after the death of Moses: crossing the River Jordan with the Ark of the Covenant, circumcising all the Israelite men and boys who were born after leaving Egypt, conquering the many cities in the land of milk and honey, including Jericho, and suffering at least one disastrous defeat for not following God's commands. And these episodes bring us not even halfway through the book.

The book of Joshua captured the interest of medieval Christian (Byzantine) scholars and was included in what is now called the Octateuch, a collection of biblical books that comprises the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) and the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. The six illustrated extant Octateuch manuscripts, plus the so-called Joshua Roll (the book of Joshua only) date from the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries and are preserved in libraries throughout Europe and Asia Minor.

The images included here come from the manuscripts just noted. I thought it would be interesting for us to see—and perhaps examine—some images in light of what we are learning as a Jewish community. Note that the text, where visible, is in Greek and comes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation said to have been made for the Jewish community in Egypt under Ptolemy II, 3rd century BCE). These images are a tiny sample of the hundreds of illustrations in these Octateuch manuscripts. I will bring the Octateuch publication to Torah study when we meet again in person.

—Sharon Herson



Two versions of Joshua and the angel (before capture of Jericho)
(the second image was available only in black-and-white)

Defeat of the Amorites



The Levites carrying the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan

Fall of Jericho

Updates & Events

SISTERHOOD

Sisterhood Schedule

2/20 - Sisterhood Chit Chat (on Zoom) - 12:15pm

Week of 3/14 - Evening Meeting with zoom followed by Mishloach Manot assembly ~ date TBD

4/9 - Anything You Can Carry Fundraising Swap Party - 7pm

5/22 Mother's Day Tea at Suzi's - 1pm

June - Skip

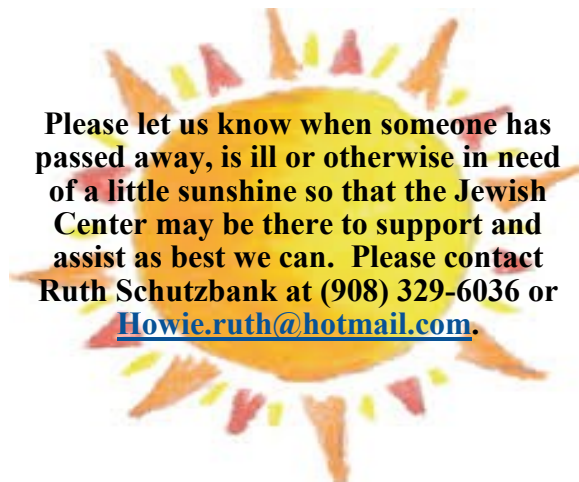
July - Pool Party at Beth's / date TBD

TBD - Paint 'n Sip Fundraising Party

This zoom link is good for all Sisterhood meetings -

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89160376912?pwd=Smh5dDFZY3lWWlg3cTY2eTdRdWtmZz09>

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.

In Remembrance

Remembrance of Charlotte Fels by Sharon Herson, with a Meditation on Sight by Charlotte

At the end of January, we remembered Charlotte Fels on the tenth anniversary of her death (28 January 2012). To many in the congregation, Charlotte was a beloved friend, patient Hebrew teacher, knowledgeable Torah study partner, amazing story-teller, and lively companion. Charlotte was also my godmother, so I have memories of spending weeks in the summer together with her and her husband Larry at Lake Taghkanic State Park (1950s); several months living with them in their tiny house on Hill Road in Lebanon Township, meeting their unusual friends (fall 1961); acting as their tour guide in Rome (1970); together with Daniel and my folks, hosting Charlarry (as they liked to be called) for all the holidays, secular and religious (1990s–2011); together with Daniel, caring for Charlotte in our home for several months following Larry's death (1999); and, finally, introducing Charlotte to the Jewish Center shortly thereafter. Despite her deep education in Jewish learning, Charlotte had been away from active Jewish life for more than fifty years; her return was something she treasured; and her contributions to temple life were "beyond measure."

Charlotte wrote the following essay in May 2000. I found it on January 18, 2022, when I was cleaning out some old files . . .

SIGHT

Often I ponder in amazement that being eighty-one years old means that every organ and part of my body have been functioning for eighty-one years. That some get tired or rusty or painful should not be surprising, but that they all manage to stay alive is quite remarkable to my unscientific turn of mind.

As recently as a generation or two ago, blindness was a common companion of old age. Even in the Bible, there is a concise description of cataracts: "When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see . . ." (Genesis 27:1). It used to be a race between dying and blindness—whichever won, we lost.

For me, cataract surgery has become a metaphor for facing life, and the more I meditate upon it, the more I learn about myself, my inner and outer worlds. To call cataract removal "surgery" is an exaggeration. It takes less than half an hour, and the discomfort and slight pain that follow fade away by the next day. For me, it was a thoroughly perfected "procedure," which I call cataract surgery only when I want sympathy.

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In Remembrance

I always realized that several people looking at the same scene and using the same words do not necessarily see the same thing. Surely, a colorblind person does not see autumn colors as most of us do. What I saw before and after were very, very different. It made me wonder whether one's outlook on life has at least something to do with visual reality. While it is not the only factor, it sure plays a role.

My left eye was the first to undergo "the change." I will never forget my ride home that night. All outdoor lighting turned the dark world of night into a wonderland. The actual source (an electric light) became the centerpiece, and radiating from it were strands of light that glimmered in a beautiful pattern of intricate interconnecting small lines, almost like the naked branches of a tree that had suddenly been turned into light. It was a spectacle that surpassed any man-made Christmas light display that transported me to a place where beauty reigned wherever there had formerly been a mere light bulb. Even the headlights of oncoming cars became part of the celebration. It was my own private world but one I could never have imagined and one whose delicate beauty remains with me to this day.

The second eye procedure was performed a month later, and the discomfort was greater than after the first one, yet slight enough to be relieved by Tylenol. I went to bed early, hoping that by morning I would feel better. When I got up, I found that the world had been transformed overnight. My house is situated at the edge of woods and the shade of the trees always made the rooms seem dim. But that morning the light had somehow burst through. It was so bright I almost could not bear it and felt as if I needed sunglasses even indoors. I looked out the window and discovered what green was, what the sky was. What had I been missing all these years? Every leaf on the rhododendron bush became alive, each stood out so sharply. I could almost not bear the power of it all. Could heaven be anything like this? To be able to see with new eyes, with a clearer understand of what seeing is all about?

When sounds become fainter, when bass notes lose their intensity, when taste buds need stronger stimuli, when infirmities of all manner of description cause us to back away from the goings-on of the twenty-first century, when, tragically, we lose the support of our life-providing mate, then the greatest paradox of old age reveals itself: once again, we see the world as we did when we were children—sunny, bright, clear, with hope. We can see as we have never seen for years, not even with corrective glasses. We can see as children see, with wonder and amazement and with eyes open-wide. It is a blessing no old people before us could even have imagined and one we should revere whenever we wake up and open our eyes.

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