



Congregation Ahavath Sholom

The Creative Spirit Dwells Here

THE CAS NEWSLETTER November 2019

Upcoming services and events

Friday, November 1, 5:30 am: Erev Shabbat Service led by Rabbi Cohen.

Sunday, November 3, 2:00 pm: Panel Discussion: *Encounters with the Creative Process* with Arthur Hillman, Barbara Janoff, Linda Josephs and Ilene Spiewak. Admission free to CAS members; \$10 to non-members at the door.

Saturday, November 9, 10:00 am: Shabbat Morning Service led by Rabbi Cohen followed by coffee, tea, sweets and conversation.

Sunday, November 10, 10:00 am: Study Group at the home of Rabbi Cohen. Bagels and coffee included, so a commitment is needed for planning. Please send a firm RSVP as soon as possible to barbaracohen14@gmail.com.

Sunday, November 17, 2:00 pm: CAS Special Event: *Double Dutch*: a discussion about immigration by renowned Dutch journalists, Freke Vuijst and Reinout Wagtendonk. Admission is free to members and non-members \$10 at door.

Thursday, November 21, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm: People's Pantry at St. James Place, Great Barrington, MA. Generally 2 hour shifts: contact Rabbi Cohen barbaracohen14@gmail.com to participate.

Friday, November 22, 5:30 pm: Erev Shabbat Service led by Rabbi Cohen.

This month's newsletter features:

- **Panel Discussion: *Encounters with the Creative Process***
- **A CAS Special Event: *Double Dutch***
- **Milchidika with Marty: *Some quotes to think about***
- **Carol Killian's Rosh HaShanah Talk**
- **Marco Greenberg's Yom Kippur Talk**
- **CAS Book Group**
- **November Yahrzeits**
- **November Donations**
- **CAS Advertisers and Sponsors**

Panel Discussion: *Encounters with the Creative Process*

Congregation Ahavath Sholom will host a panel discussion "Encounters with the Creative Process" on Sunday, November 3rd at 2:00 p.m. in the synagogue. The panel will consist of photographer/printmaker Arthur Hillman, Professor Emeritus, Bard College at Simon's Rock; writer Barbara Janoff Ph.D., Associate Professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan; director, playwright and founder of the Workshop Playhouse, Linda Josephs; painter, therapist and educator, Ilene Spiewak. The panel will discuss the differences and similarities of the creative process within the various art forms. Audience participation is encouraged. No charge for CAS members; \$10 for non-members at the door.



From left to right: Arthur Hillman, Ilene Spiewak, Barbara Janoff and Linda Josephs Photo by Alison Adams-Weinberg

A CAS Special Event: *Double Dutch*, a discussion about immigration

Double Dutch, a discussion about Immigration in the Berkshires, the US and Europe will be presented by two Berkshires-based renowned Dutch journalists on November 17th at 2:00 p.m. at the synagogue. Based on their research as well as their personal experiences with immigrants, journalists Freke Vuijst and Reinout van Wagtendonk will talk about the need for immigration laws and the human rights violations in practice today. Reinout and Freke report on American politics and culture for Dutch media. Their podcast, *DoubleDutch*, is listened to by Dutch-speaking people throughout the world.

Freke Vuijst is American correspondent for the Dutch magazine, *Vrij Nederland*. She is an award-winning documentary film maker and the author of four books. Her latest book, "Alias Fortezza, a Hacker's Odyssey", was released by Audible this year. She has lived in Great Barrington for forty years.



Freke Vuijst

Reinout van Wagtendonk is a freelance journalist. He recently wrote the series called *Accents, the Stories of our Immigrant Neighbors* in The Berkshire Eagle. He was the US correspondent for BNR Nieuwsradio and other Dutch radio outlets.

No charge for CAS members; \$10 for non-members at the door.

Milchidika with Marty: *Some quotes to think about*

Bob Monkhouse: When I die, I want to go peacefully like my grandfather did in his sleep, not yelling and screaming like the passengers in his car.

Joan Rivers: I'm Jewish, I don't work out. If God had wanted us to bend over, he would have put diamonds on the floor.

Unknown Author: Always borrow money from a pessimist. He won't expect to get it back.

Rita Rudner: Men who have pierced ears are better prepared for marriage. They've experienced pain and bought jewelry.

Isaac Asimov: People who think that they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.

Margaret Mead: Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.

Jewish Proverb: A pessimist confronted with two bad choices, chooses both.

Henny Youngman: I once wanted to become an atheist, but I gave up...they have no holidays.

Milton Berle: Any time a person goes into a delicatessen and orders a pastrami on white bread, somewhere a Jew dies.

Jewish Proverb: Don't live in a town where there are no doctors.

Albert Einstein: When you are courting a nice girl, an hour passes like a second. When you sit on a red hot cinder, a second seems like an hour. That's relativity.

Woody Allen: I took a speed reading course and read "War and Peace" in twenty minutes. It involves Russia.

John F. Kennedy: Forgive your enemies. But never forget their names.

Albert Einstein: The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.

Zsa Zsa Gabor: I am a marvelous housekeeper. Every time I leave a man, I keep his house.

David Brent: Accept that some days you are the pigeon, and some days you are the statue.

Groucho Marx: The secret of life is honest and fair dealing. If you can fake that, you've got it made.

Golda Meir: Let me tell you the one thing I have against Moses. He took us forty years into the desert in order to bring us to the one place in the middle east that has no oil.

Rita Rudner: I love being married. It's so great to find that one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life.

Sholom Alechem: No matter how bad things get, you've got to go on living; even if it kills you.

Albert Einstein: If my theory of relativity is proven successful. German will claim me as a German and France will declare that I am a citizen of the world. Should my theory prove to be untrue, France will say that I am a German and Germany will declare that I am a Jew.

Carol Killian's Rosh HaShanah Talk

September 30, 2019

Those of you who know that I am a Christian, a Protestant, a UCC minister, must wonder what I am doing up here. I wonder myself.

Perhaps Barbara's word *Momentum* might be a good way to describe this process. Or if you are a Star Trek fan – there is a tractor beam of hospitality and kindness that keeps me attached to this congregation.

At first, if someone asked me why I attended Jewish services, I would have said that because Jesus was a Jew, and this was his ritual, by better understanding your rituals, I could better understand his words in the New Testament – and that has been true.

Then, I would have said that I started coming to High Holy Days in support of Barbara – and that is also true.

But somewhere along the way, I fell in love with the ritual and with this congregation. Although I still don't understand Hebrew, my spirit is nurtured and fed by the chanting and I can settle into the tractor beam of the deep peace of the service.

And I have come to deeply appreciate and respect this congregation. You are a wonderful, caring, talented, creative group of people who make the idea of radical welcome a reality.

To be invited to reflect on the story of Sarah and Hagar is a great honor. But I am very aware that my reflections will be shared through my Christian lens and you will hear what I say through your Jewish lens. Hopefully, there will be sufficient overlap to carry us through.

Every family, every team, sect, denomination, faith tradition, political party, nation believes that God loves them best – and I think that is true. It, however, does not follow that God loves the others less. Yet, most of us are conditioned to believe that our tribe is strong, true, and righteous, and other tribes are not as equal, not as worthy, not as loved. Some go as far as declaring the “other” as enemy.

When I was growing up in a thoughtful, kind, conservative (theologically and politically) military family, my father called anyone who held an opposing view a “damn Communist.”

The new language that my brother uses is a “hate mongering liberal.” I might be tempted to laugh, but when anyone is convinced that they are absolutely right, the “other” has to be wrong--worthy of being dismissed, thrown out, detained, even killed.

Probably the 1st adult encounter with those who were “other” happened at an introduction to seminary day where we listened to short lectures from some of our faculty and then broke into discussion groups. This was fun...I love to talk theology. But after one lecture, I entered the group discussion with no memory of the lecture. It took time and some expert spiritual direction for me to figure out that the professor was a lesbian and I had been so thoroughly conditioned that the moment I learned she was a lesbian, my ears, heart and mind closed. This was not a conscious choice – it was a programmed response.

Remembering this eye opening, mind opening story gives me some understanding of and compassion for my brother and our patriarchal white supremacists.

The question is how do people change? My experience tells me that logic and argument not only don't work, but they cause entrenchment. Sometimes kind questions will create an opening. I changed and the people I have seen change did so because of love. They loved and respected someone who, woops, turned out to be other. And the mind and heart had to enlarge to make a place for this loved one to remain.

It doesn't always work. When my aunt fell in love with and married a Catholic, she was declared dead to the family. And the ability to reach out to her didn't happen until after her husband and my grandmother and grandfather had died.

My uncomfortableness with my own belief system and the belief system of my family, helps me to imagine how uncomfortable Sarah must have been with the choices she made. I can't tell you how many times I have become an atheist because I faithfully believed in and prayed for something and God didn't listen and/or didn't respond.

For me, the decision to send myself into the spiritual desert of unbelief was like Hagar sitting in despair under a tree and preparing to die. Sometimes it takes a human angel to shout, “Carol, what are you doing here? Open your eyes, everything you need is at hand.” But I also have had my Sarah moments when I run out of patience with God and take matters into my own hands.

Abraham is the father and the holder of the promise. And Sarah shares in the promise by overhearing. Because her primary relationship was with an overheard promise, she was month after month disappointed and the months grew into years. Could this promise be trusted? Apparently not, and so she took matters into her own hands and gave Hagar to Abraham with a very human contract.

Hagar would only be a conduit, and the baby thus birthed would be her son and Abraham's son. But Hagar's son was not the son promised by God, and Sarah was only human, and she was angry and jealous, and began to see Hagar as a rival, and Hagar's son as a usurper.

Hagar must have felt this growing animosity because while she was pregnant she fled and ran into the desert about 80 miles – quite a feat for a lone pregnant woman. I wonder if it took 80 miles for Hagar's strength and determination to falter and/or for her to slow down enough to be able to listen to God.

Finally, when she was ready to listen, she heard God speak to her and she was sent back with the promise that her child Ishmael would also be the father of nations. However, not a nation of "the Promise" but a nation of "the other."

I suspect this impulse to take matters into our own hands is universal. I know when I was young, I would spend months in prayer. I would ask for guidance, then in a burst of frustration I would announce, "OK God, I could use some guidance here. I have prayed, yet you, O God, have remained silent, so this is the direction I am going. If it is the wrong way, you better give me a clue!"

My college roommate and I have had a 60-year running theological conversation. In college she was the good Catholic and I was the atheist. I have always had a habit of talking to, arguing with God, and she, more than once said, "If you don't believe in God, who you talking to?" Over the years she plunged into atheism – for good reason I believe; and I started actually developing some rituals that required me to listen to, and not just talk to God.

I know Sarah's frustration in what she thought was a promise not coming to pass, at least not in a timely fashion. I know the temptation of taking things into my hands when God seemed impotent.

But what about Hagar? She is also a child of God, and she is also part of God's promise and God's plan, only she doesn't yet know this. I don't doubt for a moment that when she was able to give Abraham the child he so longed for, that she rejoiced, perhaps smirked, perhaps evenwell she was a slave and probably thought she was a nobody, and now, now she had a child of the promise – not Sarah's promise, but a promise none the less.

What makes Sarah decide to throw Hagar out into the desert? Surely that is an act of violence toward a child of God, for to be without a community in the desert is to die? And yet, God does not shame or judge her.

This decision to create an "other", to throw people out, to rip children out of their mother's arms and put them in detention centers/ concentration camps is nothing new. What makes people act this way, and why do the rest of us allow them to get away with that kind of behavior?

I hate where this question takes me, but I will say it any way.

God knew, even if Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar did not, that things were playing out and would eventually be a blessing. I started to say, as God planned, but I do not, cannot believe that God, the Holy One, could or would plan evil. But when God's partners create evil, because we are gifted with free will and the ability to create, when we create evil, God can walk those who will listen into blessing. And God's blessing is often not what we suspect or want.

When Hagar despaired and left her beloved son under the shadow of a bush, God did not leave her. In fact, our scripture says that God called out, "What's wrong with you, Hagar? Don't be afraid." And then because Hagar is finally listening she hears her promise, "Arise now take the boy, and hold him with your hand, for I shall make him a great nation!"

Perhaps this is why this is the text for the 1st day of the New Year. When Hagar heard God call, "Hagar what are you doing?" Her eyes were opened and she saw the well and realized there was hope. Hope leads to a new beginning. For Hagar it is the receiving of her and Ishmael's promise and the beginning of a new life.

I believe God gives us all a promise but knowing what that promise is is our life's work. As I reach retirement, I wonder if I have fulfilled my promise, or am I still working on it. I hope I am still a work in progress because I am having so much fun learning new things.

So, here I am. With half my heart belonging to this community....and yet, I don't believe I could or should convert, because the other half of my heart is securely planted in my Christian tradition.

When Barbara first asked me about becoming a member of this congregation, I couldn't imagine how that would be possible. To become a member of my congregation one must make promises and publicly profess certain beliefs. And I have read that this is true in many Jewish congregations. However, not here. Perhaps that is why I feel drawn to be here. So last month I finally said yes to becoming a member of this congregation.

Exactly what this Christian who will probably never be more than a friend is doing here, I still don't know, but I am trying to listen to my inner spirit, and I'm noticing the small, steady tractor beam that has pulled me to this moment.

Marco Greenberg's Yom Kippur Talk

October 8, 2019

My Jewish journey began in the second grade at St. Augustine's By the Sea, Episcopal School in Santa Monica, California.

I had found refuge there after a bullying incident at my local public school. In those days, teachers and administrators viewed it simply as one kid hitting another kid in the face on the playground. No big deal. But my parents felt differently.

"Don't worry, there are plenty of other Jewish kids there," my mom said trying to reassure me. There were, and, like me, many were leading double lives, at once very Jewish and not at all: It was a unique blend of buckwheat pancakes and "polichitin," bacon and cream of wheat, lighting the Shabbat candles and then watching TV, driving to Sinai Temple on Wilshire Blvd in a Mercedes Benz. It was a dual existence. And, at some point, I needed to escape it.

And so, eventually, I found myself moving to Israel, serving in the IDF and telling myself that I can hack it, that I will find peace if I managed to become an Israeli. But that, too, didn't work out—the duality of my life, American and Jew, too much of a gentile for the Yids and too much of a Jew for the WASPs, caught up with me. At the start of 1997, I told an orthodox cousin living in Petach Tikva, Chozer Betshuva, that after three plus years I was leaving Israel. My dad's first cousin Jody (now Yoel) made a last-ditch effort to get me to stay in Israel. When none of the arguments were working, he told me that G-d would no longer protect me if I left Israel and went back to America, that it was a one-way ticket, that I mustn't go. At the time, I was dumfounded, insulted and hurt. But I've since reflected on his words a lot, and have come to find new meaning in them, meaning that comes from this week's parsha:

Nitzavim **DEUTERONOMY 29:9 - 30:20**, literally means the "ones standing." I don't pretend to be a rabbinic scholar, and my imposter syndrome is currently triggered by even trying, but I want to tie this family history, that might mirror or contrast with your family history, that you heard into the parsha today. It's one rich with moments both uplifting and terrifying, but one portion of it grabbed my attention:

"Surely, this instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. ¹² It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" ¹⁴ No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it."

Moshe wants to make sure that the people understand that while the laws of the Torah certainly aren't simple, they aren't impossible either, and that the best -- the only -- way to observe them is for each of us to grapple with them, to take responsibility, to study and work hard and do good. He wants us to remember that we should resist the temptation to say that we're not good enough Jews because we don't observe all the commandments or haven't read all the text. He wants us to understand that we all have troubled, challenging family histories.

Most of us, when confronted with challenges, expect change to come from above. As a kid, I expected it to come from my parents and grandparents, and it took me a long time to realize that, like me, like all of us, they were human beings, deeply flawed and deeply wonderful and not in the position to be perfect. This week's parsha is a reminder that we're all far from perfect, which is why we should never look to anyone else to save us. Redemption is found within each of us, and the only way we can fail to find it is by waiting for someone else to come along and show it to us. Instead, let's remember this year, in our professional and personal lives, to roll up our sleeves, do the hard work, and be the engines of our own salvation.

Easier said than done you might think. How exactly can I uplift myself?

It's a question I've contemplated often, and every time I did, I got back to my Nana. She was born in 1911 in San Francisco, speaking German, and not Yiddish, to two Jewish immigrants, from what is now the Austrian/Polish border. She led a long and good life. At 91, she joined me at Tanglewood on the lawn. She flew back to LA the next day and drove herself to the Hollywood Bowl that night. A few months later, she hit her head in a fall in the bathroom, and that was it. She would exclaim how lucky she was.

She was faced with a choice in 1930, a momentous year, attend UC Berkeley or go visit cousins in Europe. She picked Europe. She loved those cousins, and the pictures of picnics, hiking, skiing and her polishing her German.

She was haunted by the memory of visiting her cousins, almost all of whom were later murdered but, she didn't call it trauma or go to endless therapy sessions, she didn't talk about it.

These are also the relatives of my cousin Jody, which gives him, understandably special joy at having moved to Israel and having a sprawling Orthodox family.

My grandmother, chose life, albeit a different form of Judaism, more forgiving, more liberal, more relaxed, more enlightened European, more historical and cultural, than dogmatic. She had compassion for the “other,” incredibly charitable, grateful and outspoken (including a point of pride in our family, she was named to Richard Nixon’s Enemies List)!

And this the turning point in this parsha, the defining moment, or at least I see it that way. “Choose life — if you and your offspring would live — by loving the Lord your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him.”

My nana took me to Israel for my Bar Mitzvah, introduced me to Teddy Kollek, the legendary Mayor of Jerusalem, made sure we lit Chanukah candles every night, and made Jewish history come alive. She brought me here today by choosing life.

That’s the uplifting message of today.

Standing before you today is a first, thanks to our wonderful Rabbi, Barbara Cohen, inviting me to speak to you today. I’ve attended, modern orthodox, conservative, reform and even had a reconstructionist rabbi for my bar mitzvah, and I’ve spoken at synagogues about current events, etc., but I never have been asked to give a dvar torah. It might be the first and last time , but I’m honored she asked.

Here’s another unimaginable first for me and a long way from blushing 50 shades of red as a student at UCLA who felt lost and insignificant in a 400-person lecture hall, often suffering from sore throats, so afraid to speak out. The fear, the fear of trying something new, never goes away: When I learned, earlier this year, that my very first book was bought by a major publisher, I felt happy but also nervous. What right did I have to be an author? Did I really know anything worth imparting on others? Following my grandmother’s wisdom, I overcame my anxiety and finished the book, hoping that its message of connecting to a wonderful and primitive energy we all have in us would help other people and, by so doing, make the world a little bit better. I hope you will all do the same thing this year: whether it’s taking a stab on that big idea at work, or starting that novel you always had in the back of your head, or going on that trip you had always dreamed about, I hope this is a year of daring firsts for you.

So today, I’m happy to speak out and reaffirm my grandmother’s attitude of always choosing life, and always choosing Judaism. She understood better than most that no matter if you were born Jewish, converted to Judaism, or just feel a deep love for the tradition, we are all Jews by choice.

And we have to choose being Jewish again and again, even—or especially if—our lives aren’t the model of stability we had hoped for. Mine certainly hasn’t been: I’ve spent life living in a Sukkah, and have counted my moves, 37 times to 37 different apartments. If someone told me, a graduate of Beverly Hills High School, that’d I’d be living here in Western, Mass, I wouldn’t have been able to locate the Berkshires on a map.

Yet, in words of, Randy Newman feels like home to me.

This is my resting point. This is where I want to be buried in the Berkshires. Hopefully, many years from now, but the larger point is, that means this is where I want to live. One day, hopefully not far away, but more reason to revive the call for carpe diem, or as we say,

Hayom, Hayom, Hayom.

Staying hungry and compassion for ourselves and for others, and also letting go, not just on Tashlich or Yom Kippur.

Let go of people who are bringing us down. Let go of the guilt and the discomfort. Muster the courage to say, this isn’t working out for me. Let go of self-talk that holds us back and instead reaching out and grabbing the goodness, fulfilling the dreams, that are in your reach.

Appreciating the past but realizing these are the good old days. As Carly Simon sang,

“I’m no prophet and I don’t know nature’s ways So I’ll try and see into your eyes right now And stay right here ‘cause these are the good old days”

The CAS Book Group

The CAS book group recently met and has a bold new plan.

We will now meet every two months on the last Sunday of the month beginning on January 26, 2020. The book for discussion on that date is, “Irena’s Children: A True Story of Courage” by Tilar Mazzeo. It is the story of the rescue of thousands of children from the Warsaw Ghetto by Irena Sendler, “the female Oskar Schindler”.

We welcome new members to the group to come and enjoy brunch along with discussion. For more information contact Helen Radin at 413 443-1349 or hradin1@gmail.com

More books will be chosen during the month of November (the November 17th meeting has been cancelled). Books will be chosen by email submission sent to hradin1@gmail.com. Please send title and a brief description and whether you would like to host a meeting.

November Yahrzeits

“Much of our experience of divine goodness, grace and love has come to us through those whose lives have touched our own.”

Kol Haneshamah

Walter Brill	Cheshvan 03 5741	11/1	Irma Waller's brother
Joseph Kogan	Cheshvan 10 5752	11/8	Cathy Kogan's father
Beverly D. Shimmin	Cheshvan 10 5761	11/8	CAS member
Irv Rubinstein	Cheshvan 18 5739	11/16	Abbey Rubinstein
Ethel Emily Branstein Lipson	Cheshvan 19 5748	11/17	Joan Davidson-Winston
Henrietta Slote	Cheshvan 20 5775	11/18	John Slote's mother
George Tickner	Cheshvan 21 5724	11/19	Claire Mayers
Judith Weinstein	Cheshvan 23 5765	11/21	Marcy Ross sister
Samuel Cutler	Cheshvan 24 5763	11/22	Anita Bakst's father
Harry S. Duke	Cheshvan 25 5737	11/23	Abbey Rubinstein
Thomas Josephs	Cheshvan 26 5769	11/24	Linda Joseph's husband
Ludwig Maier	Cheshvan 26 5714	11/24	Lynn J. Maier's father
Arthur Rothstein	Cheshvan 27 5746	11/25	Dan Rothstein
Sam Shapiro	Cheshvan 27 5775	11/25	Marjorie & Barry Shapiro
Anshel Tessler	Cheshvan 28 5721	11/26	Joseph Gellert
Jacob Greenside	Kislev 01 5746	11/29	Vivian Scheinmann's father

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