

THE CAS NEWSLETTER **October 2017**

Upcoming Services and Events

Sunday , October 8, 11:00am: Sukkot Brunch Potluck in our sukkah. Please RSVP by Oct 3 to Alison Adams-Weinberg at 914-319-1621 or adamsweinberg@gmail.com to ensure proper planning.

Thursday, October 12, 9 am: Yizkor Service Shmini Atzeret

Friday, October 13, 7:30pm – 9:00pm: Simchat Torah Celebration followed by Dessert Potluck. Please RSVP by Oct 8 to Alison Adams-Weinberg at 914-319-1621 or adamsweinberg@gmail.com to ensure proper planning.

Sunday, October 15, 10:15 am Book Group: 'The Black Widow' by Daniel Silva. Place to be announced. For further information, please contact Diana Richter at drpajama1@gmail.com.

Monday, October 16, 5:30pm: Board Meeting. Congregants are welcome to attend. Please email Sandra Flannery at smflann@ix.netcom.com for more information.

Saturday, October 21, 10am – 12pm: Shabbat service followed by coffee, tea, pastry and conversation

Thursday, October 26, 9am – 1pm: People's Pantry at St. James Place. Generally 2 hour shifts: contact Walter Orenstein at ptcpa@roadrunner.com to participate.

Sunday , October 29, 10:00am – 11:30am: Study Session at the home of Spiritual Leader Barbara. Bagels and coffee included so a commitment is needed for planning. Firm RSVP by Thursday before to barbaracohen14@gmail.com.

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THE HIGH HOLY DAYS 2017

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Kol Nidre

Kol Nidre a Musical Inspiration

The Kol Nidre melody, stirring the hearts of Jews for a thousand years, is recited at the beginning of the evening service of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is such an inextricable part of this service that many call the whole service, Kol Nidre. The name, Kol Nidre, is taken from the prayer's first words, "All vows." The melody is so beautifully haunting that it has also become an inspiration outside the synagogue. In the first talking film, "The Jazz Singer," Al Jolson sang Kol Nidre.

Neil Diamond with his own rendition, followed years later in the remake. Jewish opera singers such as Rickard Tucker and Jan Peerce recorded Kol Nidre. Perry Como, a Christian, sang it annually on the High Holy Days in solidarity with his Jewish friends. Johnny Mathis chose Kol Nidre for his album "I Believe." The sixth movement of Beethoven's String Quartet appears to be based on the melody and Max Bruch's 1880 cello concerto is entitled Kol Nidre. In 1968, the rock band 'Electric Prunes' produced "Release and Oath", subtitled Kol Nidre.

So what makes this music so fascinating and engaging? Barbara Cohen has been singing Kol Nidre during High Holy Day services for the last 23 years. She says, "Singing Kol Nidre is not only a vocal and artistic challenge. It is a spiritual challenge, year after year, to infuse the text with emotional authenticity. Standing at the front of the congregation, I am spiritually supported in a holy space created by two congregants each holding a Torah scroll. Singing the text three times with varying style and tone requires understanding of the origins of the text and a profound belief in the power of words and promises. It is a time of awe and I take the sacred responsibility very seriously. I encourage anyone, Jewish or not, to find the opportunity to hear this powerful blending of music and prayer."

Shana Tovah

Presented by Alison Adams-Weinberg on Rosh Hashanah

Welcome to all of our members, families and guests. It is so nice to share this time with all of you.

My name is Alison Adams-Weinberg and I represent the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of Congregation Ahavath Shalom.

Shana Tovah!

We hope you are enjoying our services. The Ritual and Spiritual Life Committee and our Spiritual leader have worked very hard putting together all of the pieces that make up our High Holy Day experience. The RSL Committee arranged for this beautiful location and recruited congregants to give the D'var torah talks, read poems and share honors at the Bimah. Members of the board arranged and assisted with the transfer of our prayer books, ark, torahs, and everything else that transforms this large room into our very own worship space. We thank Wards Nursery and Garden Center for lending us

the wonderful plants. We thank so many other members of our congregation for helping with everything involved with these preparations. We give special thanks to Barbara Cohen, our spiritual leader for inspiring us and making these Days of Awe so meaningful. Finally, we thank all of you here in this room for your participation and support.

Since I represent the Board, I want to share with you some of the highlights and accomplishments of this past year.

We continue to experiment with, and enhance, our Shabbat services. We are happy to tell you that our spiritual leader, Barbara Cohen is continuing her rabbinical education and next year at this time, if all goes as planned, she will be the ordained Rabbi of our congregation.

Barbara will continue to offer a series of study sessions. She is bringing back Nosh and Drosh on or around October 18, 2017. More information will follow in our eblasts and our website.

Our website has become comprehensive, and is ever-expanding. We now publish the monthly newsletter on line. Special thanks to Andi Goodman, Arthur Hillman and Vivian Scheinmann who continue to improve our on line presence. I also want to highlight Marty Stransky's column Milchidika by Marty. It's so entertaining and I always get a few chuckles.

Other ongoing programs include an active book group, the screening of many interesting films and helping to staff the People's Pantry along with other area religious groups. On the second floor of our synagogue, we continue to feature exhibits by our talented congregational artists with a series of exciting painting, photography, collage and quilt shows. Currently Molly Pomerance has a colorful exhibit of her paintings. Check on the website to see who we have featured in that space.

Special programs this year included our own congregant, Karen Chase, speaking about her new book, "FDR on his Houseboat" to a fascinated crowd. We welcomed Chaplain Sharif Rosen from Williams College, who focused his study session on words from the Koran. We are planning to have him back again this coming year. Judy Schumer presented the fascinating story of her parents' escape from Nazi Germany via China.

Our special holiday events were highlighted by our congregational second night seder at the Apple Tree Inn and our Chanukah Party at the Applegate Inn. We also just celebrated our annual Elul in the Pool service which was a delightful event this past August.

The Spring kickoff and Welcome for New Members was a delicious brunch for our whole congregation held at Linda Joseph's house. She was a gracious hostess.

This past year, with financial support from all of you, we did some renovations and painting in the interior of our building. Many thanks to both Linda Joseph and Barbara Cohen for over seeing it. Thanks again to all of you for your ongoing support. This new year we need more work done as our building shows its age. With that aging in mind we will be celebrating a centennial of our building and presence in GR in a few years. We have the start of a committee titled CAS History Project. It currently consists of Arthur Hillman, Linda Josephs, Michele Waldman and Barbara Janoff. We would love more volunteers for this committee.

I truly believe we are ready for this new year! Please consider joining the congregation and becoming a vital part of our wonderful community.

Again thank you for joining us today. Shana Tovah!

Lisa Chamberlain's D'Var Torah

Rosh Hashanah, 2017

In 1963 my grandfather died, then my grandmother died, then Kennedy died, and with him much that the world hoped for also died, and in the midst of this our family sold our beach house on the Connecticut shore. I was four years old.

Four might be an inconsequential age for some. That was not my experience. The youngest of three children, twelve and sixteen years younger than my brother and sister, the youngest cousin on both sides of the family, surrounded by adults, I was a pair of huge black eyes staring out at all of these enigmatic enormous creatures. The upheaval of that spring, summer, and fall, rocked my world.

At an intersection in a Boston suburb, on the way to her brother's unveiling, my grandmother, Lillian Rabinowitz, my mother's mother, was killed by an inattentive driver while riding in my uncle's car. Gone in an afternoon. My mother's father had died just six months earlier, a stroke and a steady decline. He was 76, normal for those days, an old man, but she was 66. And there was absolutely no way to know or to prepare for how that changed our lives, changed my mother, changed my expectations about my life that up until then seemed to me like most kids, I suspect, predictable.

Between these pillars of my grandparents' deaths in April and October of '63, we gathered as we always did at their house on Beach Avenue in Woodmont. My mother, the eldest of four and we, her family, would move from our New Haven house 25 minutes away and reside for the summer at The Beach, which was what we called it, always. We still do. Closing our "regular" house, just as my grandparents did, we spent the end of June through Labor Day at this rambling enchanted cottage on the water. And of course, everyone came. Cousins, aunts and uncles, my sister's boyfriends, kids from the neighborhood, the dinners and the card games and the carousing. It was marvelous. I had my own room. It was a lot of work for my grandmother and my mother. My grandmother decided that summer after her husband, my grandfather, had died, that it was too much work, and by the end of that summer, it was gone.

And then the car accident, and then Kennedy. And I knew who he was, President Kennedy, because my mother had taken my brother and me to the New Haven Green to see him speak and my brother had lifted me up onto his shoulders to see above the crowd. And besides, I was this tiny kid with those big eyes and no one was paying attention to how hard I was paying attention to all of them and the endless stream of conversation, a wealth of information for my waiting brain.

But without The Beach, and without my grandparents, and without a president, I look back and I see this little kid with a deep sense of dislocation. Of sudden and irrevocable change. Like the Jack-in-the-Box toy that always terrified me – still does, by the way – there was a “pop” and there goes the weasel. The absence of these very substantial figures in my life, The Beach and the life that went with it, brought deep and abiding loss. An exile.

I am paraphrasing our friend, John Slote, who has said we should remember that the Torah has everything in it, and perhaps he was paraphrasing the Torah itself that speaks, in the book of Numbers, of the seventy faces of Torah. To me, this announces the cymbal crash of contradictions and incongruities that Torah offers.

So who do we meet today in this parsha of Rosh Hashanah?

- God, of course
- Abraham, formerly Abram, newly of the covenant and his adult self-circumcision, brave guy, right?
- Sarah, his wife, teetering on the edge of old age.
- Isaac, their late-in-life baby, not yet in this parsha more than a baby, but tomorrow, stay tuned, more to come.
- Hagar, Sarah’s maidservant, newly Abraham’s concubine,
- And Ishmael, Abraham’s first son.

We, most of us Judeo-Christians in this room, have learned this story from the perspective of the mothers and fathers of our heritage – Sarah, Abraham, and Isaac. But can we turn the story around? Can we relate to the ones being cast out, the exiles, Hagar and Ishmael? Can we surmise what their lives were before the coming of Yitzhak? The favored concubine, the first and only son. Living the life at the center of their household. What might have that been like – and in the cry of a new baby, in the instant that this new life appeared, Ishmael’s life changed. And with a few words of comfort, something about founding a great nation from his line, the same line God uses with Abraham about his line, Ishmael is sent on his way.

But I am not here to ask you to feel sorry for Ishmael and Hagar, or to consider how life would be if you cast your lot with them, and had to suffer the depredations and marginality of their suddenly-changed existing. I’m not going to ask you to do that, because I suspect you already have. Who among us here is not an exile? Who here hasn’t felt the breeze of the door swinging closed, and in not too gentle a matter, as we danced away so it wouldn’t hit us in the tush? Ever been fired? Divorced? Had a door-slammer with a lover, a parent, a sibling, a friend? And even if your answer to all of these is no, let me pose this another way: What exactly are you doing here? How many of us grew up here? Not many. How many were Reconstructionists growing up? Even fewer than the Berkshire natives, I suspect. Nope, we all somehow managed to find our way here, exiles of someone else’s making, or exiles of our own making.

I, for one, was made itchy by the community I grew up in, the synagogue I grew up in, the school system, the country club, the cloying normalcy of it all. It didn’t reflect my quirky, disorienting family situation – everyone at the synagogue and the country club had such perfectly ordinary families --parents who were the right age, siblings who were the right age – a shared frame of reference. And for God’s sake – they were all KIDS! I didn’t know much about kids, I didn’t have any around me at home. I lived in the land of giants!!! But it wasn’t Kansas, either. It was New Haven in the 60s and 70s, bastion of liberal ideology, intellectual rigor, and New England work ethic. All good and positive and substantive. And the good part about growing up surrounded by adults was their understandable focus on their own adult lives and not particularly on mine.

So those were my particular challenges. But with adversity, if we’re lucky and persistent, comes resiliency. And it’s that resiliency that we as Jews claim for ourselves, right? That’s the mantra we repeat year after year, Pesach after Pesach, it is the moral to our story. But not just our story. Isn’t it Ishmael’s story? The story of a people who has been around for thousands of years, despite all that the world has done to marginalize it? It’s the exile’s story. Our civilization’s story. Our story.

In my life, there were alternatives. Good ones. I found a family, connected enough to my parents and our extended family to be thought a safe, positive influence but in just about every other way the most delightful, engaging, off-the-wall bunch of brilliant intellectual misfits you would ever want to meet and I welded myself to them, forever. They introduced me to the possibility of another way, which was messier and more stimulating, and chaotic. And freer. The air tasted different and was filled with colors

bright and subtle and riotous. It's not that I rejected what I grew up with when I was exposed to this other way. It just broadened my palette.

And so I find myself here with you today. And Eric and I, two quirky exiles from whence we came have made a life here. It is in this place where we have become rooted, a very conscious choice on our parts. I suspect it's the same for many of you. As a gardener I know that it only takes a few ingredients to create a flourishing landscape. You need water, enough but not too much, some sun, enough but not too much, good root stock, for which I thank my parents, and a little mazel, for which I thank my grandparents and all of you. I thank them for figuring out that it was time to get out of Russia, and I thank all of you for being part of this community of self-selected exiles ready to grow together. Ken y'hi ratzon. May it be God's will.

A Poem by Lee Schwartz: "We are All"

Yom Kippur, 2017

We are All

We are all the Wailing Wall,
Storing secrets of hope and pain
Tucked inside us, we claim
The dust of all people's dreams.

We are all the Bread of Affliction,
Holy, scorched, broken,
We cross deserts seeking
A homeland under our breastbone,
The flour and water of peace.

We are all the Five Gates,
The towers and the walls,
A fortress against loneliness,
Come, take my hand, let's walk
In the sunlight and dare to live.

We are all immigrants, dusty and new,
Starting over to face ourselves and find
The strength to believe our dreams,
We left behind lives that disappear,
We must look forward.

Not to follow a man in a rumpled suit
And orange haze, money on eye balls,
Follow the names on gravestones,
words in old books and ancestors' lives,
Because terror is a state of complete understanding.

We cannot leave our land black and fallow,
Stripped of all resources, flowers and hope,
For this last day on earth, the doors are closing,
Don't grow bored with raging and rising,
Every moment is a new journey of hope.

Let's walk home together, talking softly and laughing
Sweating in our suits and fine clothes,
The ordinariness of our lives, our families,
Inquiries of children and signs of growing,
We kick up the dust in the parking lot.

Brenda Butler's D'Var Torah

Yom Kippur, 2017

I am humbled to stand before you today.

My continued journey toward living a Jewish Life absorbs me in the complexity of making choices, renews my spiritual life and brings me to a covenant with the people of the reconstructionist community.

Moses proposed the covenant to “those standing” and “those not standing”. He included everyone, reminded the Israelites of their history, and offered them an opportunity to return to God when they could. He encouraged the people to understand that the covenant was not beyond reach but was instead, “very close, upon your mouth and in your heart, it can be done”. As a progressively evolving civilization, Reconstructionist Judaism understood Jewish Law (Halakhah) not as binding but made of valuable cultural remnants that should be upheld unless there was reason not to.

To quote Mordecai Kaplan, “God is the power in the cosmos that gives human life the direction that enables the human being to reflect the image of God”

What would I become in the world? Would I have the courage to make a covenant to God?

With tenderness, and in the dream-like storytelling tradition of my Irish Grandmother Nora, my story begins.

(Like a stranger in the midst where you encamp) I am the second of three daughters born to a quiet, handsome blue-eyed Irishman and a very strong-willed Italian woman with beautiful hazel eyes and broad smile. Both sets of my grandparents were dedicated to a monotheistic God.

Tom and Nora Butler were fortunate to make an easy exit from Ireland. He worked as a plumber and loved to make soup. Nora cleaned houses and enjoyed telling stories. My grandmother was easy going and shared her delight for magic and folklore with us. She loved a cold beer with good conversation, and took in anyone who was in need of food or shelter. They raised four children in a household filled with warmth, (soft butter) good books and good humor.

Things were quite different for my Italian grandparents, Frank and Mary Genova. With tears in his adolescent eyes, Frank left his family in Naples with his father and nothing else. He feared that he would never see his mother again. On the voyage to America, Frank's father died. Frank was 17 years old and alone.

In Italy my grandfather's family was poor and like many other immigrants, they dreamed of coming to America with the promise of a prosperous life. When he reached Ellis Island, my grandfather had very little and had lost so much, so he enlisted in the Army and fought for the United States in WWI.

Frank and Mary raised seven children in a household filled with the smells of Sunday gravy, but rife with tension and fear. They struggled financially and lived in a segregated community of other Italian immigrants. Frank had a nursery at the end of a dead end street in Glen Cove, Long Island. I fondly remember 2 greenhouses (one with a fig tree) and 2 plots of land which were abundantly planted with beautiful vegetables. The sign for his nursery was flanked by frighteningly large sunflowers. My grandfather's land was studded with fruit trees, berry patches, and grape vines from which he made wine. He also sold plants and vegetables to his neighbors. Grandpa Genova also helped build the Saint Rocco Church. Every Christmas we adorned the church with wreaths. I remember the cold nights in the greenhouse, windows full of steam, the smell of pine all around us. The men made the wreaths, the women decorated and the children played.

My grandmother Mary died at the age of 60. I was just 5 years old and have very little memory of my grandmother. My mother called her a “saint” and it pained her to know the adversity her mother had suffered during her short life. At the end of her life we ate at my grandparents' house every night so that my mother could feed my grandmother. Later in life, I realized she died of Lou Gehrig's Disease. There was no help or relief for this disorder, especially for a poor uneducated Italian refugee. My grandfather remained widowed for the rest of his life. Most of his children lived close by. We spent holidays, birthdays, and just about any day with family for one reason or another. As a teenager my mother charged me with the daunting responsibility to bring my grandfather dinner every night. I cautiously entered his house, calling his name, always afraid that I would be the one to find him dead. Once, he gave me an airplane that he welded out of large bullets from WWI. He picked carrots just for me from his garden. Grandpa drank wine, ate Italian bread and strung peppers and garlic like Christmas lights around his porch. To my

mother on the other hand, he was a temperamental, volatile man. She blamed him in part for my grandmother's death. Were they cursed people in a foreign land? Were they blessed people on a difficult journey?

My parents met in high school. My father was introspective, kind, gentle, and intelligent. My mother was anxious and insecure but also feisty and charismatic. Brendan asked my grandfather for Rose's hand in marriage. He thought he would be chased away with a rake, or maybe even a rifle. In those days the Italian and Irish communities were very separate and mistrustful of one another. My grandfather had disowned and driven his daughter, my aunt Fanny, from the family for marrying a Polish man. But he recognized the goodness in my father and blessed the marriage to his 5th child.

After their wedding, my parents lived with Frank and Mary until my sister Debbie was almost 3 years old and my mother was 6 months pregnant with me. They moved to a small ranch house that was walking distance from both sets of grandparents and equally close to most of my extended family. My childhood was enriched with family, 16 aunts and uncles, 21 cousins and even the occasional visits of lively relatives from Ireland. The Irish relatives insisted on having my mother's cooking. She would set up a long table in the garage for their feasts because they could get rowdy with drink and song. Many nights ended with my Irish relatives peppering the neighborhood streets, singing and arguing over who was "on or off the drink".

Woven into the fabric of my sisters and I were these two very distinct cultures. We were expected to continue the traditions we inherited. Staying close to family, marking life events together, and blindly following Catholic Law. But I wanted a vote, a voice, and a choice. For the most part, choices in my life have not been conceived out of thought or planning, rather they have felt like callings - instinctive and unformed.

So, who was I in the world?

As a little girl I would lie on the front lawn and look up at the sky. Watching planes as they went by. Where were they flying? Who was going? Could I go too? I yearned to ride to the airport whenever I could. I wondered if today was my turn. At an early age I began to announce that I would go away to college". It was never the plan my mother had for her daughters; she really expected us to stay at home until we married. Both my sisters complied. But I did not. Nor could I accept the religion of my birth. In their church I felt dissatisfied. For me there was a lack of spiritual life, no religious education and no role models or mentors. I yearned to know more. I asked questions and chafed at the constriction and dogma.

I did not fit. I was the only blonde-haired blue-eyed youngster in an Italian American Church filled with dark-haired melancholy parishioners. I refused to "confess" to someone I did not respect. Couldn't I communicate with god without an intermediary? As in the Reconstructionist tradition, can a lay person have a vote? A voice? An active role in a spiritual life?

In the church I felt resentment and fear. My soul did not sing.

At the age of 13, I was invited to Ricky Arnstein's Bar Mitzvah. I remember walking into the Synagogue and having a sense of Sukkot Shalom. I remember hearing the Hebrew prayers, which brought tears to my eyes and filled my searching soul. This did not feel like a conscious choice. But what would I do? Could I break with my family traditions and mostly, how could I break my mother's heart. There were many times when I rebelliously challenged my mother's wishes for me.

It was my father who took me to Vassar College for my interview. He saw boundless hopes and dreams in my eyes and kindly said "You want to come here don't you? If you get in, we will make it work". Vassar's tuition was \$5,600 a year, making it the most expensive college I applied to. It was the what I yearned for...intellectual stimulation, worldly experiences, creativity, and freedom...away from home. A place to meet all kinds of people.

Somehow my father convinced my mother to let me go. It was miraculous! In my family the matriarchs rule. I knew that my mother resented how close I was to my father. But on some level she knew that she herself had been held back by poverty, obligations, fear and uncertainty. A small part of her did not want to hold me back despite the sacrifices my parents would make. My family knew that this would be the first of many irrevocable choices I would make that would go against my mother's wishes.

But are they choices or decisions to follow a calling, a leap of faith?

After college in Poughkeepsie, I happily moved to Manhattan, where I did cardiology research at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Because I was a biopsychology major and an art history minor in college, I didn't feel like I had a lot of options for work. While at this job, I met David Tepper and decided to go to medical school. David was an Orthodox Jew whose dream was

to become a cardiologist. His father was a Rabbi. David and I had many clandestine conversations in his apartment after work. He wasn't supposed to be alone with other women, but his finance didn't mind our scholarly discussions.

For Reconstructionist Jews, Jewish Laws are non-binding customs, derived from the social and historical development of the Jewish people. We believe that keeping Hebrew in prayer and the study of Torah are sacred. God is defined as the sum of natural powers or processes that allow mankind to gain self-fulfillment and moral improvement. This is a good fit for me.

David Tepper introduced me to his father who agreed to meet with me. I talked with my him about the experience I had in the synagogue at the age of 13. I told Rabbi Tepper about the pull I felt towards Judaism. Shortly afterward, I was accepted into medical school and left New York for Lille, France and Philadelphia. Following medical school, came residency, fellowship and psychoanalytic training. I began my years of education and training thinking I would become a cardiologist. But I discovered that Child and Adolescent Psychiatry is my passion and my calling. The words of Mordecai Kaplan resonate deeply for me personally and professionally: "Experience holiness as the quality or value that comes from helping people become fully human".

My work is impossibly demanding.

At the age of 33 living in Philadelphia and working as the Medical Director of an adolescent service at the hospital where I trained, while running to my mailbox before rounds I am stopped in my tracks. Ilene was sitting in the lobby. She is there for an interview. Ilene, newly divorced at 39 and with two sons, will be the art therapy intern on my unit.

Again, this pressing opportunity, this event didn't feel like a choice.

With little hesitation Ilene's family welcomes me. We are together for 25 years now. In our comforting family life, I find a renewed sense of tradition, have sons who will provide future generations, and a covenant to one another and ourselves.

Many years later at the age of 42 I was listening to a Rabbi on NPR radio one night on my way home from a long day's work. Once again, I felt overwhelmed with emotion. I walked into our house and proclaimed "That's it!" We are joining a synagogue and I am finally going to begin my conversion". Ilene asked "Oy, does this mean we have to go to Shul".

We happily joined Mishkan Shalom in Philadelphia and regularly went to services - Mishkan is a Reconstructionist Synagogue with a diverse congregation. I took a class with about 20 other students, some wanted to become "Jews by choice", some born Jewish who were turned away by too strict a religious upbringing and others who yearned for more religious study. We were all on a journey together and it felt right. I finished my class and began individual meetings with Rabbi Jeff but he needed to leave our pulpit. In addition, my father was gravely ill and as a result, my journey was stalled yet again.

I reflect.

Isn't Moses' offer to make a covenant with God timeless?

Our lives continue with the usual vicissitudes and Ilene and I are now living in rural West Stockbridge. After many personal losses we moved to the Berkshires in 2008, seeking a greener, cleaner, and less congested life. More nature. Balance. Most importantly we needed to find a new Shul.

Choices.

We connect with and join Congregation Ahavath Shalom. How fitting we move from a "tabernacle of peace" (Miskan) to "lovers of peace" (Ahavath).

In our new community, and with Barbara Cohen I return to my study, to my covenant, and I choose a Jewish life, life by a loving and unique God. Are these choices or decisions? To decide, from the old French "to settle a dispute", from the Latin "to cut off" and as my wise friend Liz told me: from the root Deciduou, which means to fall.

Moses asks us to choose between life and death, prosperity and adversity. On this day of Yom Kippur we find ourselves in the 5th and final book of Torah. Deuteronomy from the Greek "second law" begins with Eleh ha Devarim or "these are the words". Moses delivers these sermons to the Israelites in the plains of Moab just before his death. Standing with the Israelites Moses can see the promised land. Moses recaps the last 40 years in the desert and retells the book of Torah as told to him by God at Mount Sinai so that he may implore the people to adhere to a covenant with one God. Earlier in Deuteronomy we hear "Shema

Yisrael”, “Hear O Lord, the Lord is Our God, The Lord is One”. In today’s Parsha Nitzavim Moses reminds us that the covenant is open to all and if we turn our hearts away we may later return and be taken back in love.

This offering is timeless and transcends Moses. It is for those here and not here and for future generations. Teshuvah from the root Shuv, to turn back, to repent, to return to God, to review ourselves, not necessarily returning to the same point.

Now I sit with Barbara and begin to learn the Hebrew alphabet, the roots, the timeless stitches that will join one another as I sew together threads I have been gathering for many years. Symbols of our heritage, the generations of people here and not here, people who have come from scattered points on the horizon and I continue to fall, to decide, as I have fallen so many times in my past.

I follow my soul.

Before my mother died she said to Ilene “Brenda has two religions, the one she was born into and the one she has chosen”.

So after decades, my mother accepted my freedom to choose a Jewish Life.

I wandered all over the place and I am no longer stalled.

I am free to reconstruct my spiritual life and commit to myself and to you.

Milchidika with Marty: “It’s library not liberry”

My mother was born in Budapest, Hungary, arriving in the United States as a little girl and was, in later years, very proud that she spoke English without an accent; while the rest of the family who arrived at the same time, spoke with a Hungarian accent and tended to mix up their "v's" and "w's"; pronouncing water as "vater" and vegetables as "wegetables."

So, when I was growing up, I would say to my mother, who was very concerned with proper pronunciation, "Mom, I'm going to the liberry to get a couple of books."

She would say to me, "It's library, not liberry." Or when I would say to one of my friends, "Hey, let's play handball," she would say to me that "Hay, is for horses."

But the one thing that I would never forget was her advice, "To always do the right thing and be a mensch."

I usually tried to do the right thing, but I decided that I would try to find the definition of a mensch and see if I really qualified.

Here's what I found. A mensch is someone to admire and to emulate, someone of noble character, with a sense of what is right. A mensch is a particularly good person, a person with the qualities that one would hope for in a friend or trusted colleague.

That's a pretty high bar to get over, so I dug a little deeper to see if I could find some easier standards. But the more I searched, the higher the bar seemed to go. Here are some examples of what you have to do to be considered a mensch.

1. Help others:

A mensch would be the person who might go over to a new member of the synagogue and not only introduce them to others, but also keep up with them after everyone else has said "hello" and then gradually walked away. Or you might visit someone who can't drive, is homebound and lonely and offer to take them out to lunch.

2. Do the right thing the right way:

How about helping out a friend in a difficult situation or helping them in getting a job, and not bragging about it later, or saying that "you owe me."

3. Be a peacemaker:

If you are driving down the road and see someone you greatly dislike standing next to their broken down car, you should not think to yourself, "Ha, that's what he deserves"! and drive on by. Rather you should stop and help him.

4. Strive to be a better person:

Take the time to appreciate the gift of another day. Enjoy life to the fullest.

That's a tough list, and although I would like to think of myself as a mensch, I don't really think I qualify. I wonder if there is such a thing as "almost a mensch.

Meanwhile, a mensch joke:

Four Jewish men are playing poker in the condo clubhouse when Meyerwitz loses \$500 on a single hand, clutches his chest and drops dead at the table.

Finklestein looks around and asks "Now, who is going to tell his wife?"

They draw straws. Goldberg, who is always a loser, picks the short one. They tell him to be discreet, be gentle, don't make a bad situation any worse than it is.

"Gentlemen! Discreet? I'm the most discreet mensch you will ever meet. Discretion is my middle name. Leave it to me."

Goldberg schleps over to the Meyerwitz apartment, knocks on the door, the wife answers, and asks what he wants.

Goldberg declares, "Your husband just lost \$500 playing poker."

She hollers, "TELL HIM HE SHOULD DROP DEAD."

Goldberg replies, "He just did."

The October Book Group: "The Black Widow"

The CAS Book Group will meet on Sunday, October 15th at 10:15 a.m. to discuss *The Black Widow* by Daniel Silva. In the 16th novel of the Gabriel Allon series, Gabriel is expected to become the chief of Israel's secret intelligence service. However, on the eve of his promotion, ISIS has detonated a massive bomb in the Marais district of Paris. He had to enter the field for one final operation.

Walter Orenstein will lead discussion. Please contact Diana Richter for the location of this meeting: drpajama1@gmail.com

A reminder about CAS and AmazonSmile

CAS has recently registered with Amazon.com as a recognized charity. What this means is that anyone who purchases from Amazon using smile.amazon.com will be contributing to the synagogue! We've added an Amazon Smile button to the home page of the CAS website (under the Donate button) to make this even more convenient!

Here is some information from their website about this program:

What is AmazonSmile?

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite charitable organization (CAS) every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to your favorite charitable organization.

How do I shop at AmazonSmile?

To shop at AmazonSmile simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device. You may also want to add a bookmark to smile.amazon.com to make it even easier to return and start your shopping at AmazonSmile.

Which products on AmazonSmile are eligible for charitable donations?

Tens of millions of products on AmazonSmile are eligible for donations. You will see eligible products marked "Eligible for AmazonSmile donation" on their product detail pages. Recurring Subscribe-and-Save purchases and subscription renewals are not currently eligible.

Can I use my existing Amazon.com account on AmazonSmile?

Yes, you use the same account on Amazon.com and AmazonSmile. Your shopping cart, Wish List, wedding or baby registry, and other account settings are also the same.

How do I select a charitable organization to support when shopping on AmazonSmile?

On your first visit to AmazonSmile smile.amazon.com, you need to select a charitable organization (list Congregation Ahavath Sholom) to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping. We will remember your selection, and then every eligible purchase you make at smile.amazon.com will result in a donation.

How much of my purchase does Amazon donate?

The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases. The purchase price is the amount paid for the item minus any rebates and excluding shipping & handling, gift-wrapping fees, taxes, or service charges. From time to time, we may offer special, limited time promotions that increase the donation amount on one or more products or services or provide for additional donations to charitable organizations. Special terms and restrictions may apply. Please see the relevant promotion for complete details.

Can I receive a tax deduction for amounts donated from my purchases on AmazonSmile?

Donations are made by the AmazonSmile Foundation and are not tax deductible by you.

Yahrzeits – October 2017

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

Kol Haneshamah

Ethel Broverman
Tishrei 13 5729 10/3

Herman Felber
Tishrei 14 5747 10/4

Arthur Stavisky
Tishrei 14 5764 10/4

Mildred Steinberg
Tishrei 14 5765 10/4

Seymour Isserson
Tishrei 18 5747 10/8

Goldie Goodman
Tishrei 20 5733 10/10

Rudi Grosser
Tishrei 20 5750 10/10

James Mitsuda
Tishrei 22 5769 10/12

Sidney Yurmark
Tishrei 23 5728 10/13

Herb Moskowitz
Tishrei 23 5759 10/13

William Pozefsky
Tishrei 23 5707 10/13

Joseph Richter
Tishrei 25 5722 10/15

Harry Aaron Orenstein
Tishrei 25 5757 10/15

David L. Miller
Tishrei 25 5769 10/15

Vivianne Frankel/Chava Miriam
Tishrei 26 5773 10/16

Florence Lipshitz
Tishrei 28 5767 10/18

Baruch Gans
Tishrei 30 5701 10/20

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Heshvan 02 5761 10/22

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Heshvan 10 5752 10/30

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Donations – October 2017

In loving memory of Diana Berkowitz
Barbara Delanty

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Louise and Arthur Hillman

In memory of Diana Fisher Berkowitz
Buffy and Scott Lord

In memory of Diana Fisher Berkowitz
Sheila Eisenberg

In memory of Diana Fisher Berkowitz
Jordan Summers

In memory of Diana Berkowitz
Annette Johnson

In memory of Diana Berkowitz
Rachel Coopersmith

In memory of Diana Fisher Berkowitz
Diana and Richard Richter

In memory of James Mitsuda
Louise and Arthur Hillman

In honor of Miriam Weiner
Keren Weiner

High Holy Days donations
Lisa and Eric Chamberlain
Joseph Gellert

Other donations
Charles and Gayle Mazursky

Federation Program: No Easy Answers: Middle East Update 2017



Jewish Federation
OF THE BERKSHIRES

No Easy Answers: Middle East Update 2017



Kenneth M. Pollack, PhD

Sunday, October 15 at 7:30 pm

Tina Packer Playhouse, Shakespeare & Company
70 Kemble Street, Lenox

Kenneth M. Pollack is an expert on Middle Eastern political-military affairs. A former CIA intelligence analyst and former director of the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, Pollack is currently a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

Program is free & open to the public

East Update

