

United Synagogue of Hoboken

IYAR / SIVAN 5777

MAY 2017





Perhaps you have heard a National Public Radio program (or podcast) called 'From the Top." It features live performances by young classical musicians, between ages 8 and 18. I remain very moved by something I heard on this program several years ago. The performers were a piano trio -- one twelve-year-old and two fourteen-year-olds - and they were playing a piano trio by Ernest Bloch. They received resounding applause from the audience.

Then the host of the program says, "We have a special treat for you today..." and he announces that in the studio audience that day is the famous pianist Menahem Pressler, of the Beaux Arts Trio! And Menahem Pressler is invited up to the stage.

The host of the show asks him, "So what did you think? How did the kids do?" He responds, "They were wonderful. Fabulous." (Continued on page 2)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sat. May 6, 10am Rabbi Scheinberg's 20th Anniversary

Wed May 10, 7pm Panel on Jewish diversity

Sat, May 13, 11am Shabbat Shira music program for families with children age 3 and under

Fri May 19, 6pm Shabbat in the Park, Church Sq. Park

Sun May 21, 12 pm Softball game with Temple Beth El

Tues, May 23, 11am PJ Library Baby Meetup: Jewish Stories and Songs

Tues, May 30, 8pm Tikkun Leyl Shavuot (Shavuot eve late-night torah study)

Wed, May 31, 9:30am Shavuot morning services

Thurs, Jun 1, 9:30am Shavuot morning services (including Yizkor memorial prayers)

Friday night services 7pm

Saturday morning services 9:30am

See www.hobokensynagogue.org & USH Facebook page for more info on these and other upcoming events!



IN THIS SPECIAL EDITION:

AVERYWARM TRIBUTE TO OUR BELOVED
RABBI ROBERT SCHEINBERG
ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS TENURE AT
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF HOBOKEN







(FEEDBACK Continued from page 1)

And then for each of the musicians, he comments on something they did especially well in the piece. It's obviously a very exciting moment for these three young musicians.

Then the host asks the kids: "Do you have any questions for Mr. Pressler?" One of them asks: "Did you ever play this piece?" He said, "Yes, a long time ago."

Then something surprising happens. The kid asks Menahem Pressler, "When you performed this piece, what did you do differently?"

Pressler pauses, as if to say, "Are you really sure you want to go there?" And the host of the program jumps in to save the kids, to give them another chance. After all, they're live on the radio around the country. All their friends and relatives are listening to them. They have just been complimented so warmly by this world-famous musician. And now they're asking him to enumerate the things that they could have done differently -- also live on the radio.

But the kids were so eager to hear the honest feedback, even knowing that it was going to be negative, that they quite literally begged for it. So Pressler responded honestly, doing a brief 'master class' on the air, as he went through and dissected their performance, pointing out various things he would have done differently.

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It was remarkable to see that these students had such a strong drive to excel that they were willing to endure public criticism for the opportunity to get feedback from a great musician. For most of us, our egos wouldn't be able to handle that -- and they especially wouldn't have been able to handle that at age 14.

I see a parallel to Jewish tradition. The Torah commands us to be ethically beyond reproach. This is supposed to be our specialty, our passion. Our tradition has long insisted that one gets better and better at ethics by seeking out "ethical virtuosos" and learning from them.

In Parashat Kedoshim (in the middle of the book of Leviticus, to be read on Sat., May 6), we are given an especially difficult commandment: 'hocheiach tochiach et amitecha.' 'You shall surely reprove your neighbor.' When you see your neighbor doing something wrong, you shall surely let them know.

This is a challenge - which you know if you have ever made an attempt to give someone constructive criticism, and ended up with the other person getting defensive and angry. Or if anyone has ever tried to give YOU constructive criticism and you've had a hard time taking it. But the Midrash tells us: "Rabbi Yosi ben Hanina taught: Any loving relationship that lacks tochecha is not truly a loving relationship." A loving relationship presupposes that people care enough about each other that they value each other's opinion and are willing to open up to each other with honesty.

Already in the Talmud, our sages noticed that this commandment of tochecha, constructive criticism, doesn't really work the way it is supposed to. Two rabbis debate why that is. We read: "Rabbi Tarfon said: I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation who knows how to receive constructive criticism, for if one says to him: 'Remove the mote from between your eyes,' he would answer: 'Remove the beam from between YOUR eyes!' Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah responded: I wonder if there is anyone in this generation who knows how to give constructive criticism!" (Babylonian Talmud, Arakhin 16b).

In other words, Rabbi Tarfon says the problem with tochecha is that everyone is too sensitive and belligerent. We receive constructive criticism and we immediately get defensive. We have a hard time taking criticism from anyone who has any faults. But Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says that offering criticism is a delicate and careful art, and not enough of us are actually skilled in this art. It's

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YOUR FEEDB

a challenge for the one who wants to share words of critique to know the listener well enough to know how to say it so that they will listen. And that's why it's specifically in loving relationships that tochecha is most important. As Rabbi Yosi ben Hanina taught: "Any loving relationship that lacks tochecha is not truly a loving relationship." Since the natural reaction when someone rebukes us is for us to get defensive, it stands to reason that the only criticism that will actually be accepted is criticism that is truly offered with love.

May our month to come be enlightened by the spiritual and ethical virtuosos of our tradition, and may we always realize that confronting our shortcomings is a necessary component of striving for excellence. ❖

RABBI ROBERT SCHEINBERG: AN APPRECIATION

by Ken Schept



When Susan and I arrived in Hoboken, it would have been easy for a rabbi—if we had one—to name the few kids on the bima—if we had one. What was left of the local Jewish community met in a makeshift sanctuary at 830 Hudson Street. I liked the old building, but change was inevitable. What it would look like depended a lot on a young couple who moved to Hoboken in 1997 and lived over a store on Washington Street.

We'd sometimes been a community with no rabbi, and now we had two—Rabbis Robert Scheinberg and Naomi Kalish. Twenty years later, we also have a new building, a restored historical synagogue, a membership that has doubled, a calendar filled with programs, and a bima filled with children. If Rob were only a great teacher who helps adults and children connect or reconnect with Judaism, that would be enough; or a scholar who edited our prayer books; or a spiritual leader who inspires and guides with words and music; or a community leader who voices opinions while respecting those of others. Dayenu. And he does it all with humility, a natural inclination no doubt reinforced by living in a household with three teenage daughters.

Recently, I attended an interfaith forum that Susan organized at Stevens Tech. Rob was among the panelists. While an interfaith forum is not a time to feel excessive pride in your own team, I could not help quietly kvel as Rob succinctly explained the Jewish impulse to protect the stranger, the practical ways we can intervene to help refugees in our midst, and the fact that all religions have passages within their sacred texts that inspire, and others that are better hidden in the basement. The talk was smart, on-point, delivered within the allotted time and, I'm sure, squeezed into a crowded schedule.

That schedule reminded me of Rob's "Mr. Potato Head" story, explaining that Shabbat is the one day when, for just over twenty-four hours, we replace the computer, or other tool that normally rests on our shoulders, with our genuine self. Much rests on Rob's shoulders, including responsibilities as rabbi, father, husband, teacher, administrator, spiritual leader, commuter, chauffeur of kids, homework helper, guitar player, choirmaster, book editor, writer, scholar, interfaith leader, community activist, bereavement counselor, mediator, membership recruiter, and more.

I'm grateful to Rob—personally, and for my family and all of us—for all he has carried on his shoulders since that young couple chose to raise a family in Hoboken and be part of our USH community. Twenty years later, Rob is still engaged, energetic, even tireless. But sometimes, after choir practice, Rob will sit at the keyboard and play quietly for himself. That moment, late in the evening on Monday (Rob's "day off"), seems to be the rabbi's well-earned Shabbat. \$\phi\$

Musical Transformations

by Louise Kurtz



I was in the recovery room murmuring pitifully about the pain. I had just had surgery to screw my wrist back together and was no long under anesthesia but not yet under whatever would come next. Rabbi Scheinberg was sitting beside me and suggested, "Why don't we sing?"

My snarky self thought, silently of course, "Yeah, like that's gonna work" but my better self joined him in Debbie Friedman's *Mishebeirach* song. In no time I was distracted from my discomfort and I'm told the rabbi continued to sing the whole song after I fell asleep. He had completely changed the energy in the room. We have all heard him do that many times when he quietly starts chanting a niggun in the sanctuary and a room full of lively conversations changes a little at a time into a room full of people ready for prayer; transforming a meeting hall into a sacred space and bringing us along with him.

I had the good fortune to hear Rabbi Scheinberg sing El Malei Rachamim in the Valley of the Communities outside Yad VaShem during our congregational trip to Israel a few years ago. It elevated the moment and provided a beautiful musical space where we could stand together and deal with the complicated feelings we were all experiencing. And if you have not heard him chanting Adonai Hu HaElohim before the final shofar blast on Yom Kippur, I hope you will take the opportunity to join us for Neilah next year. We are blessed to have a rabbi that tunes into the spiritual potential of the moment and invites us in. I'm looking forward to the next twenty years! \$\phi\$



THE UNDERGROUND SCHEINBERG TAPES by Marc Cobert



What is so special about this cassette tape? It is a major league recording of the religious services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These recordings have taught and/or helped any number of people to lead the High Holyday services at both Hoboken USH and other locations.

In 1995, when he was studying in Jerusalem, some friends asked Rabbi Scheinberg to make some recordings of High Holiday Nusach. He recorded them on cassette tapes and they were circulated throughout the Jewish Theological Seminary community for several years.

A few years ago, Rabbi Marc Wolf put them in digital format. They are extremely large files, and in 2015, soon-to-be-Rabbi Dena Trugman (our own Joel Trugman and Razel Solow's daughter) created an index to help people to navigate them.

The recordings are intended for those learning to lead High Holiday services in Conservative congregations. They can be found online at http://rabbischeinberg.blogspot.com/p/music-links-high-holidays.html

THE OUINTESSENTIAL TEACHER

by Joel Trugman (and Razel Solow)

Rabbi Scheinberg is the quintessential teacher. During the "D'var Torah" portion of the service, he hands out a two-page sheet that has quotations from diverse sources. That works well for me because I need to see ideas written down; I'm not as good at listening and absorbing unfamiliar information. Some of the lines may come from this week's parashah, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, a book he's reading, someone he admires, or something historical. By citing sources from the biblical age, the Middle Ages the 18th or 19th century, and today, he always provides different points of view, different ways of interpreting things, different approaches to concepts, and even different ways of translating a sentence or a word. He presents the ideas of various commentators whom I'd never heard of, like Daniel Gordis, which then prompts me to learn more about Gordis, read his books and follow his work.

Although Rabbi Scheinberg has his own viewpoint on things, he is very open-minded. He's never judgmental about what congregants say Instead, he'll say, "That's a good point. That's an interesting point. I never thought about it that way." He never dismisses anything or anybody, so everyone feels validated. The two-page sheet has great substance. I take it home and reread it. A lot of it stays with me. It's like getting a weekly mini-course in modern Jewish thought or on the Jewish approach to anything.

Rabbi Scheinberg always takes your questions seriously, answering you directly and right away. I told him once, "I can never figure out which way the Israelites are crossing the Jordan. Why would they have to cross the Jordan to get into Israel?" The rabbi said, "The easiest thing is to look at the map at the back of the chumash." So we turned to the map, and he traced the way that the Jews went from Egypt to the Sinai to Jordan. "And then coming back from Jordan," he said, "they have to go back west into Israel." I really appreciate that he actually showed me the map and the route. The answer was clear and concrete, which makes it easy to remember.

WITH GREAT APPRECIATION FOR RABBI SCHEINBERG

by David Plotka

For the past twenty years, Rabbi Robert Scheinberg has been at or close to the center of much of what our family has celebrated and endured, including welcoming our daughter Hannah into the world, helping to preside at the bris of our son Henry, helping us all to persevere during and immediately after 9/11, visiting Hannah in the hospital after her appendectomy, officiating at Hannah's bat mitzvah and Henry's bar mitzvah, overseeing Monica's conversion to Judaism, and being there for us during Shiva when Monica's father passed away.



For our family, like many in the USH community, Rob helps us connect to life events in a manner that is spiritual and meaningful while allowing us to celebrate our rich Jewish traditions. Rabbi Rob is an anchor of our community and he serves many roles for us including that of spiritual leader and teacher. Whatever role Rob is asked to play he performs it with aplomb and humility however for me, Rob is at his best when things are most dire. Seeing Rob and listening to his soothing voice is always welcoming when someone is sitting Shiva.

One moment that sticks out for me is my friend's father's funeral a couple of years ago. Rob's presence, as always, was comforting, as he instructed us in the rituals of the burial ceremony including the custom of having each mourner take a turn to fill-in the grave with several scoops of dirt. The image that remains ingrained in my head from that day is that of Rabbi Rob diligently working to fill-in the grave of the deceased after we had each taken our turns. It wasn't enough for Rob to toss three customary scoops of dirt in the hole. No, Rabbi Rob continued to shovel until the grave was completely filled and a small mound had formed on the top as Jewish tradition prescribes.

That is the essence of our Rabbi: whether leading from ahead on the Bimah while delivering a sermon, or leading from behind with a shovel is his hand, Rabbi Scheinberg has been there for us over the past twenty years, always ready to do whatever is needed. We hope and pray that he is with us until he is 120. ❖

WHAT AN IMPACT!

by Amanda Grant

Rabbi Scheinberg has been connected to us at the most important moments in our life as a family. It meant a lot to my father to know that I had found a Jewish home in Hoboken and to hear about this wonderful rabbi that I felt connected to so quickly. When my father died Rabbi Scheinberg supported me even though we had just met recently.



When I adopted my son Isaac, Rabbi Scheinberg was there to help convert him to Judaism at the mikvah. I will never forget the prayers as I let him drop into the water and brought him into Judaism. At Isaac's bris I appreciated so much the rabbi's careful attention to detail – and his impeccable timing - by having me say a prayer out loud in front of everyone so as to distract me at just the very moment that the mohel did his duty and Isaac cried out. I will be forever grateful.

The rabbi's reach into our family has also extended to my mother, Pamela, who regularly attends the rabbi's Torah study classes, assists in the stained glass window project and has become a very active nonresidential member of the synagogue.

I recently asked Isaac, now seven years old, "How has the rabbi touched your life?" He answered that, "The rabbi has taught me to speak up for myself." I didn't know that Isaac ever had any trouble in that regard! That "the rabbi had taught me to speak Hebrew though I'm still working on it, it's pretty good. And he has taught me the special prayers to honor people who have died and to be kosher." And he remembers him being at his bris!!! Obviously the rabbi has already made quite an impression on a young boy!

And so I say to you, Rabbi Scheinberg, "You have touched all of us as a family and as a congregation with your grace, your sensitivity, your calm through storms and your enlightening words and perspective, no matter the situation. We are so thankful to have you in our lives and in our community. We love you and we wish you Mazeltov on your 20th anniversary." \$\phi\$

MY ENTIRE JEWISH LIFE

by Anne Pettit

Even though I'm considerably older than he is, Rabbi Scheinberg has been there for literally my entire Jewish life. He taught the Judaism course I took when I returned to the practice of Judaism (we found out I had been born Jewish halfway through the conversion process). He taught me how to leyn Torah and lead services. If I needed a melody for something, he'd whip out his phone, record it and send it to me. He helped me get into JTS Rabbinical School, although the souring



economy ended my dream of becoming a rabbi myself. And when I married Marc (to whom he introduced me), he conducted our wedding.

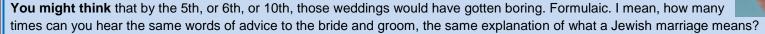
One of my favorite Rabbi Scheinberg stories, however, involved the kiddush my friends (including the Scheinberg-Kalishes) sponsored for me when I graduated from the Drisha Institute's Scholars Circle, after completing a yeshiva program that totaled five years of study. I

One of my favorite Rabbi Scheinberg stories, however, involved the kiddush my friends (including the Scheinberg-Kalishes) sponsored for me when I graduated from the Drisha Institute's Scholars Circle, after completing a yeshiva program that totaled five years of study. I used to sing in the USH Choir, and when we got downstairs after services, he surprised me by announcing that the choir had learned a special song for me − a "Modern Major General"-style rendition of the names of all 63 tractates of the Mishnah, which, he pointed out, I was in a unique position to appreciate. As I recall, he had written this piece during his time in his acapella group, Pizmon, in college, and a fine piece of music it is. Now, it was having its USH debut, and I certainly did appreciate it! This had taken a great deal of dedication on the part of the choir, and a great deal of logistical attention, because I'm still on the choir's e-mail list and had to be edited out of all their communications about this lovely surprise. Rob is the best at inspiring that level of attention in everything we do at USH. ❖

NOT JUST ANOTHER WEDDING

By Marni and Russell Kriegel

In the late 90's and early 00's, we attended a lot of weddings. That made sense - we, and most of our friends, were at the age where people tend to get married. Because much of our social circle revolved around USH, many of those weddings were officiated by Rabbi Scheinberg.



You'd be wrong, though - and that has everything to do with Rob. Each wedding was so personal, so unique, so completely right for that couple. At every reception we heard the same comments from family and friends who didn't already know Rob: What a beautiful ceremony. He captured so-and-so perfectly. That was the best wedding I've seen.

We even referred Russell's cousin, who was dubious about having a Jewish wedding at all, to talk to Rabbi Rob. We knew that, without compromising his principles on what a Jewish wedding should entail, he would make the ceremony meaningful for them. He did - and they have not stopped raving about him.

This ability is not limited to weddings. Marni's mother was touched, and amazed, by how Rob spoke about her mother at her funeral as though he had known her for years, rather than learning about her in the 24 hours since her death.

Rather than being a function of many years of experience, all of this occurred not many years after Rob's ordination. It is a skill that speaks to his ability to truly listen, to connect, to understand people at their essence. It is what makes him an exceptional rabbi and a special friend to our family, for the past 20 years and hopefully many, many more.

CREATING A NATURAL AND SAFE SPACE

by Howard Olah-Reiken

Perhaps one of the most special things about Rob Scheinberg, as a rabbi and as a person, is his sense of acceptance and inclusiveness. When Rob first became our rabbi, I had been a USH member for many years, and Donna, who was not Jewish at the time, had joined me for several synagogue occasions and classes. We soon found ourselves in the *Intro to Judaism* class, as a way for me to learn new aspects and for Donna to become more familiar.



Truth be told, she was a Long Island girl with several Jewish college friends and was quite familiar already. Rob never made Donna feel out of place or any less welcome. As infants, each of our sons went through the several steps of conversion required by Conservative Judaism for children born of non-Jewish mothers. Rob guided us and made the experiences meaningful, never suggesting Donna consider converting, and simply rejoicing with us in our choice to raise our children Jewish. Donna converted to Judaism several years later on her own volition. Rob led her through the process, and though he was clearly happy for her, it wasn't from a sense of "Success! We nabbed another!", but rather the true joy of a friend and leader in seeing her happy in her choice. Would we have raised our children Jewish if not for Rob? Maybe. Probably. Would Donna have eventually chosen to convert? Who knows? Who cares? However, I am convinced that Rob's open, welcoming philosophy and demeanor created a natural and safe space for our family and for Donna to make the choices we made. Guess what, Rob? Donna just read this, and she agrees!

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Abraham Carson in memory of his mother, Harriet L. Carson Norman and Myrna Kasser Jeremy and Eriko Morley Alix Biel

Grace Gurman-Chan and Ken Chan in honor of Jade's bat mitzvah and the USH warm and welcoming community

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Scheinberg Memorial Lecture

and our entire family.

Hal Scheinberg Harvey and Phyllis Jay Seth and Judith Lerner

THANK YOU FOR SPONSORING KIDDUSH:

Apr. 1 Grace Gurman-Chan and Ken Chan in honor of Jade's bat mitzvah

Apr 8 Steve Rubin and Sandra Grossman in honor of Ben and Zack's bar mitzyah

Apr. 15 USH

Apr. 22 Avi and Keren Siegel in honor of their niece's baby naming

Apr 29 Danny Cohen on the engagement of his daughter, Shifra Cohen, to Marshal Grobois

CONGRATULATIONS TO:

Jade Chan on her bat mitzvah and to her parents, Grace Gurman-Chan and Ken Chan and Jade's grandma, Micki.

Zack and Ben Rubin on their bnei mitzvah and to their parents, Steve Rubin and Sandy Grossman

Avi and Keren Siegel on their niece's baby naming

Louis Hoffman (Learning Center teacher) and GraceAnn Furnari on the birth of their daughter Olivia

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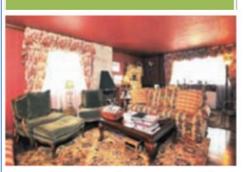
Thomas Sessa on the loss of his father Dennis Sessa and to Thomas's wife Dayna and daughter Madeline

Martin Schnabel, on the loss of his mother, Esther Schnabel and to his wife, Tracey and son, Jacob.





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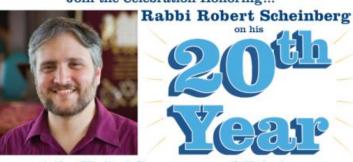
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Join the Celebration Honoring...



at the United Synagogue of Hoboken

In 1997, when Rob Scheinberg and Naomi Kalish arrived in Hoboken, a young couple about to start a family, we were a reviving community approaching our centennial. Twenty years later, with Rabbi Scheinberg's inspired leadership...

- Our community has more than doubled in size
 Our children attend an exceptional learning center and preschool
 Our services are musical and uplifting
 Our calendar is filled with lectures and lunches
- Our prayer books contain our rabbi's words and wisdom

We meet, pray, and learn in a restored historic synagogue. And, with Rob and Naomi, we have celebrated the b'nai mitzvoth of Adina, Shoshana, and Talia.

Please plan to honor Rabbi Scheinberg with your presence at Shabbat services...

Saturday May 6th 9:30AM Services 12:30PM Kiddush

To honor Rob and commemorate these 20 years, our community will endow the

Rabbi Robert Scheinberg Scholar-in-Residence **Annual Weekend**

This is our opportunity to express appreciation to Rob - spiritual leader, scholar, musician, and friend, who has devoted himself to USH with endless energy, unfailing modesty, and amazing memory, tested every week when he recognizes each child by name on the

Please consider donating to this endowment. A donation of \$118 is suggested, but all amounts are gratefully accepted. Donations can be made online at www.hobokensynagogue.org, or checks can be dropped off at the synagogue office, made out to United Synagogue of Hoboken, with Rabbi Scheinberg 20th in the notes line. Donations received by April 25 will be listed in the printed program.

crowded bima.