



THE SHOFAR

שופר

United Synagogue of Hoboken

TISHREI / CHESHVAN 5778

OCTOBER 2017

THE FRUIT THAT REMEMBERS:

What Botanists Say About the Etrog

by Rabbi Robert Scheinberg



The Etrog is undoubtedly one of the most unusual Jewish ceremonial objects.

If you have spent some time with an Etrog, you know that it smells wonderful, it doesn't taste so great, and it looks like a mutant lemon, (usually) with a distinctive protrusion on one end. It is one of the *Arba Minim*, the four kinds of plants that Jews use ceremonially during prayers on the holiday of Sukkot (this year, Oct. 4-11).

As I learn more about the Etrog, both Judaically and botanically, I realize what a powerful symbol it is for the Jewish people.

In English, an etrog is called a 'citron,' and it's a very early member of the citrus family. According to many botanical scholars, it's the very first citrus fruit to be cultivated. In fact, almost all of the citrus fruits that we know of today - grapefruits, oranges, lemons, limes - are human creations, cultivated by crossing the four original citrus fruits (citron, mandarin, pomelo, and papeda) with each other. This would indicate that not only is the etrog the relative of the lemon, lime, orange, and grapefruit, but the etrog is actually their ancestor.



(And from a more somber perspective: those who theorize what would happen to our planet in the absence of human beings suggest that various cultivated plants would quickly revert to their original states, reversing the process of thousands of years of cultivation. If so, then an earth without humans would again be full of etrog trees).

(Cont'd on p. 2)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

BY David Swirnoff



Thoughts About Legacies

I'm trying something new with this month's article, treating it like a serialized story. I hope you'll join me next month for Part 2.

I want to talk about legacies. The dictionary defines a legacy as "something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor." I thought about this while reflecting on Steve Sperber's speech a few years ago describing his connections to USH which stretch back to his grandparents. For me, having been connected to four different shuls in my lifetime, the idea of having an active connection to a congregation that stretches back for many decades seems foreign to me but also wonderful.

I thought about this while looking over the list of past Presidents on the USH website. There's a legacy there of generations of people who committed their time to the leadership and stewardship of the organization.

And now I think about it again whenever I look at the plaques dedicating the Star of Israel building, going as far back as May 1915.

I think about the names of the congregants. What did they think as they helped raise money to construct the building? What simchas did they and their families celebrate over the years? What sorrows did they share amongst themselves and the community? And who were the children who were born when the building was first constructed? Who grew up here, contributed their stories and efforts, became adults in the community, and have since passed into blessed

UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER 2017

- 1 Building the USH Sukkah
- 5 1st day Sukkot
- 6 Sukkot guest speakers from The Lighthouse and First Friends
- 7 My Jewish Neighborhood Sukkah Hop
- 8 Sukkot party for families with young children, 10am
- 10 Young Professionals Wine/Sushi in the Sukkah, 7:30pm
- Shmini Atzeret; Simhat Torah celebration (6:30pm)
- 14 Volunteer fair
- 15 Fall Foliage Nature Hike
- 19 Shalom Baby – 1 session class for expectant parents
- 24 *The Ethical Life* course begins

NOVEMBER 2017

- 1 Introduction to Judaism course begins (24 sessions), see introjudaismnj.com
- 4 Benji Lovitt: *What War Zone?* - Israel through Stand-up Comedy
- 5 USH participates in Hoboken Studio Artists' Tour (12-6pm)
- 9 *Planning a Jewish Wedding* workshop
- 12 Kaplan Preschool Open House
- 12 Interfaith Service of Unity, Jersey City
- 14 Film: *My Hero Brother*
- 19 Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, Hoboken

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!

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Like botanical historians, the architects of rabbinic literature also describe the etrog as one of the very earliest fruits with which human beings had contact. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, and the snake tells them to eat from the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, what kind of fruit was it? The torah doesn't say - it just refers to it as a 'pri,' a 'fruit.' Christian folklore says it was an apple. But Midrash Rabbah says it was an etrog tree. Both science and rabbinic literature agree that the etrog belongs in our very deepest antiquity. So don't ever call an etrog a mutant lemon, because - literally, truthfully - it's the other way around: from a historical and scientific point of view, a lemon is actually a mutant etrog.

Interacting with the etrog sends us back to deepest antiquity, to the earliest years of human civilization on this planet. It is a powerful symbol of the beginning of the Jewish year, when we seek to rewind, to turn back the clock, to be what we used to be and what we know we can be again.

What is most distinctive about the etrog is its protrusion, which some refer to as a 'stem' though it is clearly not a stem. The stem, or *oketz*, is on the other side. This protrusion is analogous to the little dot or speck you sometimes find on the bottom of a peach or a nectarine or orange. In Hebrew, it's called a *pitom* - though if you look very closely, you see that it is made of two distinct parts. Rabbinic literature calls them the *pitom* (which is the wooden-looking part) and the *shoshana* (the flower). If you look closely at the tip of an etrog, you can see a little dried-up flower - and this is what makes the etrog truly unusual. (Not every etrog grows with a *pitom*, but most do.)

Like most fruits, every etrog began its life inside a flower. Usually, as a fruit grows, the flower dies, and it either separates from the fruit, or dries up and falls off. What is distinctive about the etrog is that it keeps the dried remains of its flower with it - it keeps the flower with it. This makes the etrog a palpable symbol of the Jewish people, which does not forget where it came from. It keeps the memory of its origins present all the time. It doesn't ever cut itself off from its past; its past influences its present.

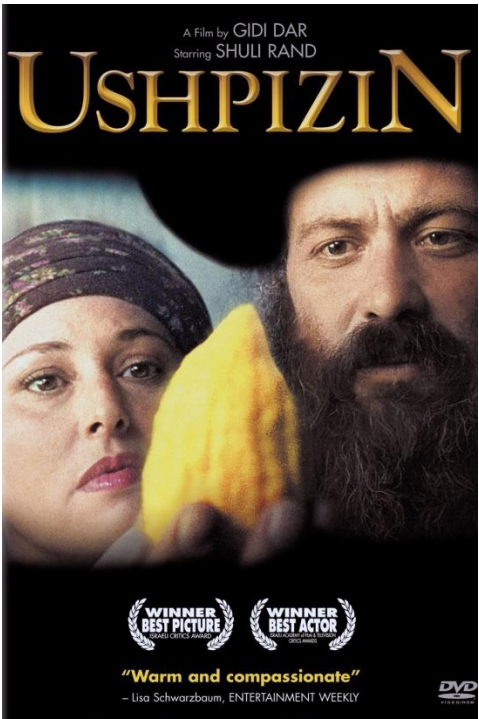
But of course the *pitom* is the most fragile part of the etrog. Just a little bit of rough handling and the *pitom* will fall off, rendering the etrog unfit for use. Truly, it doesn't take a lot for us to be severed from our memories of where we came from -- our memories of ourselves as individuals, and, for the Jewish people, our collective memories of our experiences throughout Jewish history.



Bar Kochba coin with etrogs & lulav

There is one more way that the etrog, together with the palm and willow and myrtle branches, send us back to the past and to our early communal memories. There are some places in the world where etrogs are plentiful. But for most of the last millennium, the largest

Jewish communities were in places where etrog trees (and palm trees and myrtle trees) were rare.



Picture a Jewish village in Poland or Russia 200 years ago. Somehow, that Jewish community would figure out how to acquire these semi-tropical palm branches and Mediterranean etrogs and myrtles, and bring them to Poland and Russia. Often, at great expense, entire villages would buy an etrog together that they would all share, taking turns using it, saying the blessings and marching with it. (Jewish folklore is full of stories of mishaps involving the purchase, sharing and care of etrogs; the contemporary film *Ushpizin* pays homage to this folklore motif). The etrog and the other plants of the Four Species served as a reminder to these communities: We may live here in Poland or Russia, but we are not **from** here. We are **from** the place where these plants grow. It served as yet another reminder to Jewish communities in the Diaspora of their ties to the land of Israel, and it is yet another way in which the etrog connects us to our deepest past.

When we hold the etrog on this Sukkot holiday, may it help us to contemplate and connect with our most distant past, and remind us to carry that past with us into the future.☆

(President's Report, continued from p. 1)

It's this idea of a legacy that interests me so much. Not focusing on the names so much, although it helps to see a name on the plaque or to read a name on the *yahrzeit* boards in the rear of the sanctuary. It's easy to try and imagine what they were like and what drew them to Hoboken and to this community. But I'm now realizing that those people, while they were almost certainly NOT thinking about what would happen more than a century later, were the ones who helped to create a community that still exists. One that has, certainly, changed over time...probably to an extent that they wouldn't even recognize it. But those people left us a legacy.

It's a community that has certainly changed over time - probably to an extent that they could never have contemplated - but it is a legacy that those people left for us. We have inherited from them a marvelous community here in Hoboken that embraces Torah, that celebrates our Judaism, and that strives to teach all of us how to live Jewishly, whatever that may mean to us as individuals. As I have said, a legacy is something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor. So our community here is a legacy that was given to all of us by the people who built the Star of Israel building, with its Moorish-styled architecture and its elaborate Aron Kodesh. That is the legacy of those early congregants.

I hope you'll join me next month for Part 2 of my article.



USH MITZVAH DAY 2017 BY THE NUMBERS

160 participants, on 11 projects :

VISITED 14 homebound seniors with pre-Rosh HaShanah gifts.

MADE 600 sandwiches for the Hoboken Shelter.

MADE 540 hygiene kits for the Hoboken Shelter (special thanks to team captain and recent USH bar mitzvah Jason Schreiber).

DONATED 1,100 pounds of food to Hoboken Emergency Food Pantry (special thanks to USH Cub Scout Pack).

CLIPPED \$4,761.42 of coupons for Coupons for Troops.

CLEANED cemetery graves.

CLEANED / POLISHED Torah crowns and decorations, other silver and metal polished in the sanctuary.

PREPARED AND SERVED lunch for 100 guests at the Hoboken Shelter (11 USH high school students).

MADE 34 jars of cookie ingredients for the Hoboken Emergency Food Pantry. 11 projects. (13 USH middle school students).

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Mitzvah Day chairpeople Merry Firschein, Melissa Sandler, Adam Berkowitz, and Hope Koturo, and all project captains!



At the Emergency Food Pantry - Kaveh and Krista Shabtaie, Adriana Pacheco, captain Rochelle Ohring, Pantry Director April Harris, Karen Jurman



Marilyn Freiser cemetery clean-up - before & after



Rhonda's Bakery



Ethan Malekar decorating cookie jars



The Coupon Cutters



Shira Pearlman ironing a tallit



The Sandwich Brigade



At the Shelter



Making decorations for the sukkah



Berkowitz & Newfield families prepare hygiene kits



The Malekars of MUMBAI and Hoboken

By Jeremy Morley

The delightful Malekar family – Shamira and Soren, and their lovely children, Simone, 16 and Ethan, 12 – have graced our community since moving here from Mumbai, India in 2012.

Soren and Shamira hail from the Bene Israel Jewish community, which is the largest of India's three Jewish communities. The community's oral tradition maintains that they are the descendants of the sole survivors of a trading vessel from Judea which sank 2,100 years ago off the coast of western India, even before the destruction of the Second Temple. A nearby cemetery commemorates the event. Since many Bene Israelis were oil pressers, a trade that in Temple times was reserved for Levites, the theory arose that they were members of that tribe.

Shamira attended a Jewish school, the Sir Jacob Sassoon High School. The Sassoon family, who were known as the "Rothschilds of the East" due to the great wealth they accumulated in trade, were of Baghdadi Jewish descent before they moved to Bombay (now known as Mumbai) and then spread to China, England, and other countries. Hebrew was the third language course at the school, and tuition and lunch were free for Jewish children. The school was affiliated with the Magen David synagogue, one of Mumbai's seven operational synagogues.

Growing up proudly as both Jews and Indians in Mumbai, Soren and Shamira experienced no antisemitism, and that appears to have been true in general throughout the Jewish community there. Keeping kosher was easy because most food in Mumbai was vegetarian. But getting non-vegetarian kosher food was tough because it was sold only in a select few locations where the most Bene Israelis lived. On Fridays, depending upon the quantity of the orders, a Shochet would slaughter a goat and once the Jewish families had received their shares, the rest was sold to Hindus.

Mumbai had a thriving Bene Israel community until the 1950s and 1960s when most of them, including most of Shamira's family, moved to Israel.

Shamira and Soren's marriage was arranged between their families. We had fun as Shamira described the scene of her first meeting with Soren. She was in her third year of pharmacy school, and was still living at home in her parents' very small apartment. Soren's family called to suggest a meeting, and so Soren came to the apartment with his parents. As a young unmarried woman, Shamira was not allowed to leave the house with Soren. The "adults" sat on one side of the room while eventually Shamira and Soren were permitted to talk together on the other, with everyone openly listening to their conversation.

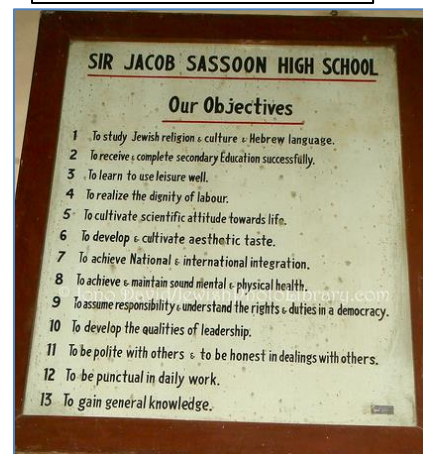
Both families valued education and Soren had a



The extended Malekar family



Magen Hassidim Synagogue



Origins of the Bene Israel Community

Ever since the early 19th century, Christian missionaries and Jews have offered diverse suggestions of the community's origins. For example, the centrality of the prophet Elijah in Bene Israel tradition produced the theory that their ancestors lived in the Holy Land in the time of Elijah (eighth century BCE) and that the "country to the north" was actually Israel.

At the end of the 1940s, the Bene Israel population in India peaked at about 25,000.

After 1948, many members of the community began emigrating, mainly from the cities, to the new State of Israel. They were motivated by a combination of three equally compelling factors: a sense of Jewish identity, Zionist idealism, and concern over Bene Israel economic prospects in the newly-independent India.

good academic record and a progressing career as a civil engineer with Asian Paints. He had completed a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from Mumbai University and a Post Graduate degree in Management from the renowned Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies. They were engaged within a couple of months but then Shamira made poor Soren wait another year before their marriage so that she could be introduced as a fully qualified pharmacy graduate.



After their marriage Soren worked as a Director of Castrol India while Shamira obtained her Ph.D. in Business Management, wrote prize-winning research articles on business management and taught business at Mumbai University's Institute of Management & Research. Both Simone and Ethan were born in Mumbai.

In 2012 the family moved to Hoboken when Soren was asked to take up an Executive Director role in Supply Chain in New Jersey with BP's Castrol. Once here, Shamira resumed her teaching career. She taught at Touro College - Graduate School of Business and Lubin School of Business

and is now a Business Management professor at Manhattan Community College. Her latest book, *Success with Emotional Intelligence*, with a co-author, is both a theoretical study of Emotional Intelligence in the workplace and a highly practical analysis of methods of improving the emotional well-being of workers, managers and institutions.

Simone is a senior at Léman Manhattan Prep School, has completed an internship in tissue regeneration at New York Presbyterian Hospital and plans to apply for more internships in the future. Her goal is a career in clinical psychology.



Simone Malekar



Ethan attends All Saints, volunteers as a teacher aide in the Learning Center and is crazy about sports and video games. His bar mitzvah will be held on October 7th, to be followed after Kiddush by *You are Funny, However You Don't Look Jewish*, a performance by Shamira's ex-classmate, stand-up comedian Samson Koletkar aka *Mahatma Moses*.★



Ethan's Tefillin Ceremony

"The Bene Israel are probably the only Jewish community in the world today which did not experience anti-Semitism.

Living in harmony with their Indian neighbors for two thousand years, they were free to practice Judaism and develop as a community. The Bene Israel were fully absorbed into Indian society, yet still retained a separate sense of identity; however, they remained isolated from the mainstream of Judaism for centuries.

The process of rapprochement with world Jewry culminated in the recognition given in 1964 by the Israeli Rabbinate that the Bene Israel are 'full Jews in every respect'". *Dr. Shalva Weil*

The USH Refugee Support Committee

is planning another dinner for Saturday, December 2nd! It will take place at the Hobart Gallery in the Monroe Center (due to the generosity of Liz Cohen, an artist in the collective), will be all vegetarian, and will have two types of cuisine: Eritrean, which is like Ethiopian food, as well as Fadila's Syrian Kurdish dishes. [Fadila is a Syrian refugee, who has cooked all the dinners in this series.] The Monroe Center will accommodate more diners than were previously possible when the dinners were held at someone's home. We are excited to offer this opportunity to the synagogue members and to the greater Hoboken community. Stay tuned for more details. Anyone wishing to attend a dinner or to hold a dinner at their residence may contact Ben Zablocki at zablocki@rutgers.edu.

We now have four USH members tutoring (or about to tutor) refugees. Thanks to all of you: Bess Morrison, Eve Mensch, Shamira Malekar, and Razel Solow. If you would like to offer your English language tutoring services, please contact Razel Solow at razelsolow@gmail.com.

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DATE	TOPIC	TEACHER/SPEAKER
10/28	Raising a mensch : does religion help or hurt?	Rabbi Robert Scheinberg
12/2	How can Judaism help our children to be resilient at difficult times?	Rabbi Naomi Kalish
12/9	How do we transmit Jewish identity to our children?	Rabbi Steve Wernick, CEO, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
1/20	How can Jewish values help our children to thrive and flourish ?	Grace Gurman-Chan
3/17	How can Judaism help us to respond to illness and death ?	Rabbi Naomi Kalish
4/21	What can Shabbat do for our family?	TBA
5/12	How do we talk with our children about Israel ?	Rabbi Robert Scheinberg



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Soren and Shamira Malekar in honor of Ethan's tefillin ceremony
Dante Medici in memory of his parents Nicholas and Theresa Medici
Eliot and Bonnie Nierman in honor of Avi Knishinsky's 70th birthday, father of Oren Knishinsky and Ran Knishinsky
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Mark and Debbie Spector in honor of their granddaughter, Molly's baby naming
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CONGRATULATIONS TO:

Jason Schreiber on his bar mitzvah and to his parents Michael Schreiber and Kim Huang and to his brother Luke
Logan Miller on his bar mitzvah and to his parents, Frederick Miller and Bess Morrison and to his sister, Lauren
Sierra Messner on her bat mitzvah and to her parents, Jon and Phyllis Messner and to her brother, Seijan

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Aug 26 Michael Schreiber and Kim Huang in honor of Jason's bar mitzvah
Sept 2 Andrew Reibman and Elisabeth Oldmixon in honor of Tziporah's 7th birthday
Sept 9 Frederick Miller and Bess Morrison in honor of Logan's bar mitzvah
Sept 16 Jon and Phyllis Messner in honor of Sierra's bat mitzvah
Sept 23 Jon Gellman and Mimi Lavine

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 **IMMIGRANTS, ASYLEES AND REFUGEES IN OUR COMMUNITY**

SHABBAT/ SUKKOT:

On this holiday of Sukkot, when we focus on what it means to have a permanent home or to lack one, Sally Pillay, from First Friends, and Jill Singleton of The Lighthouse, will tell us about their organizations' advocacy for immigrants, asylees, and refugees in Hudson County.

Fri., Oct. 6. Services 7pm; presentation 7:40pm, followed by refreshments in the Sukkah.

Free; RSVP requested.
Sponsored by the USH Refugee Committee.

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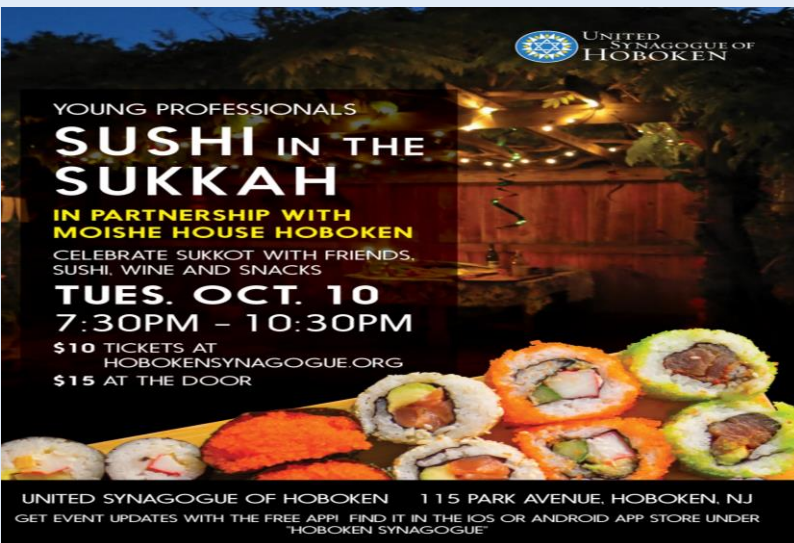
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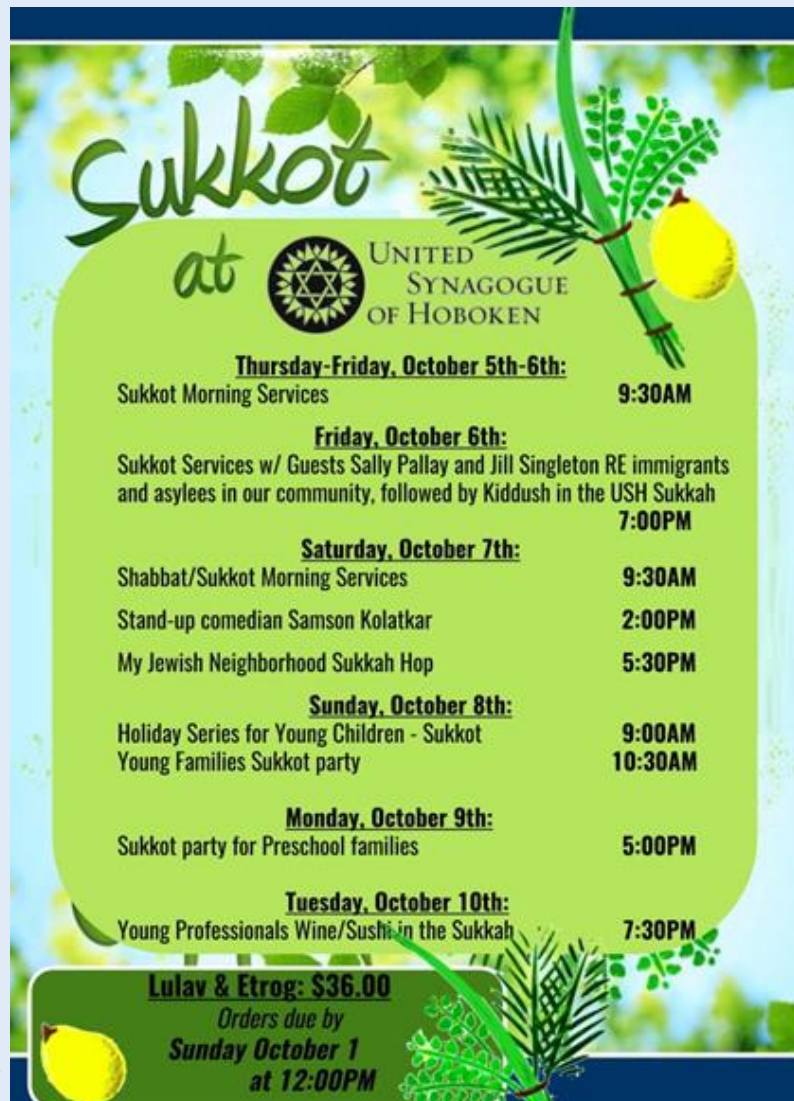
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Sukkot
at **UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF HOBOKEN**

Thursday-Friday, October 5th-6th:
Sukkot Morning Services **9:30AM**

Friday, October 6th:
Sukkot Services w/ Guests Sally Pallay and Jill Singleton RE immigrants
and asylees in our community, followed by Kiddush in the USH Sukkah **7:00PM**

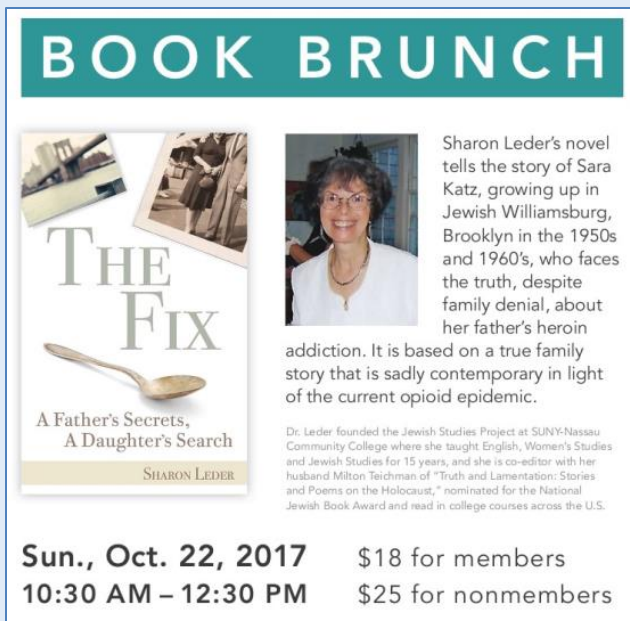
Saturday, October 7th:
Shabbat/Sukkot Morning Services **9:30AM**
Stand-up comedian Samson Kolatkar **2:00PM**
My Jewish Neighborhood Sukkah Hop **5:30PM**

Sunday, October 8th:
Holiday Series for Young Children - Sukkot **9:00AM**
Young Families Sukkot party **10:30AM**

Monday, October 9th:
Sukkot party for Preschool families **5:00PM**

Tuesday, October 10th:
Young Professionals Wine/Sushi in the Sukkah **7:30PM**

Lulav & Etrog: \$36.00
Orders due by
Sunday October 1
at 12:00PM



BOOK BRUNCH

THE FIX
A Father's Secrets,
A Daughter's Search
SHARON LEDER

Sharon Leder's novel
tells the story of Sara
Katz, growing up in
Jewish Williamsburg,
Brooklyn in the 1950s
and 1960's, who faces
the truth, despite
family denial, about
her father's heroin
addiction. It is based on a true family
story that is sadly contemporary in light
of the current opioid epidemic.

Dr. Leder founded the Jewish Studies Project at SUNY-Nassau
Community College where she taught English, Women's Studies
and Jewish Studies for 15 years, and she is co-editor with her
husband Milton Teichman of "Truth and Lamentation: Stories
and Poems on the Holocaust," nominated for the National
Jewish Book Award and read in college courses across the U.S.

Sun., Oct. 22, 2017 **\$18 for members**
10:30 AM - 12:30 PM **\$25 for nonmembers**

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