



THE SHOFAR שופר

United Synagogue of Hoboken

AV/ ELUL 5778

AUGUST 2018

UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 2018

- 7 Shabbat in the Park 5:30pm
 - 9 Rosh HaShanah evening service 7pm
 - 10 1st day Rosh HaShanah
 - Morning service 9am
 - Public Shofar service 4:45pm
 - Mincha afternoon service 5pm
 - Tashlikh (casting away sins) @ Pier A followed by bring-your-own picnic dinner 5:30pm
 - Evening service 7pm
 - 11 2nd day Rosh HaShanah
 - Morning service 9am
 - 14 First Fridays – Musical Fri night experience 6pm
 - 18 Kol Nidre – services for Yom Kippur eve 6:30 pm sharp
 - 19 Yom Kippur Day
 - Morning service 9am
 - Yizkor memorial service 12 noon (approx.)
 - Yizkor public service 4:15pm
 - Mincha afternoon service 5pm
 - Neilah (concluding service) 6:40pm
 - Final Shofar blast 7:40pm (followed by light breakfast)
 - 23 Building the USH Sukkah
 - 24 1st day Sukkot 9:30am
 - 25 2nd day Sukkot 9:30am
 - 29 My Jewish Neighborhood Sukkah Hop 6pm
 - 30 Shmini Atzeret; Sukkot party for families with young children 4pm
- 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!

NESTING DOLLS:

A METAPHOR FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAY SEASON



by Rabbi Robert Scheinberg



(Abridged from Rabbi Scheinberg's Rosh HaShanah sermon, 2017)

I announced on Facebook shortly before Rosh HaShanah that I was looking to borrow some Russian nesting dolls over this Rosh HaShanah holiday. I clarified

that I was interested in the ordinary, non-ironic, non-humorous, non-political ones. (You would not believe how many people contacted me to offer to lend me sports-related nesting dolls, popular-culture-related nesting dolls, American-and-Russian-politics-themed nesting dolls....) As a child, I remember being fascinated by a set of these dolls that my grandparents had. Maybe I was most interested in the differential between what was revealed and what was hidden. When all the dolls were assembled, it was inconceivable that they could all be put away so neatly and compactly and efficiently. And when they were all put away, it was inconceivable that what looked like a solid wooden doll was actually just a hollow shell.

Each year on Rosh HaShanah I seek a metaphor that helps me, and hopefully can help us, to better understand the passage of time and the new year. For whatever reason, I have been fixated on this image of the Russian nesting dolls as a metaphor for the high holiday season. One of the themes of the High Holidays is opening ourselves up and descending deeply within ourselves.



Each holiday carries its own distinctive mitzvot - commandments and Jewish traditional practices. Many of our holidays entail mitzvot that are right at the surface of ourselves. On Pesach, eat specific foods. On Sukkot, we build the sukkah and carry the lulav and etrog. On Hanukkah, we light candles. But on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, the primary mitzvot are internal: listening to the sound of the shofar and allowing the sound to enter our ears and penetrate our heart, and the mitzvah of teshuvah -- of delving deep within ourselves.

(Continued on p.2)

Tashlikh will be on Pier A in Hoboken at 5:30pm on September 10, the first day of Rosh HaShanah.

"What's Tashlikh?"

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, Jews traditionally proceed to a body of running water, preferably one containing fish, and symbolically cast off their sins. The *Tashlikh* ceremony includes reading verses from the prophet Micah (7:19), "He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

At USH we are so very fortunate to be able to meet at Pier A on the Hudson River.

We follow the ceremony with Israeli dancing. And then we'll enjoy a bring-your-own picnic.

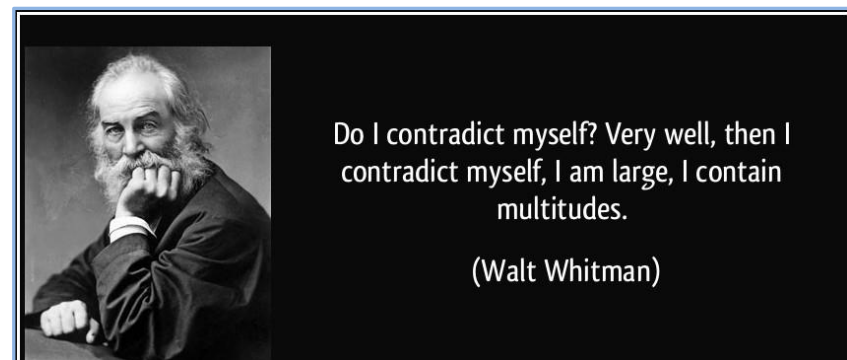


It's a very special and inspiring community event for adults and children that is not to be missed.

(Continued from p.1) These days are the most psychologically oriented holidays of the Jewish year, as well as the most individually focused holidays of the year. Many of the prayers for this time of year use such palpable physical metaphors that they really feel like God is supposed to open ourselves up like a Matryoshka doll and peer at what's inside. In the popular Sephardic poem for the High Holiday season - called "Adon haslichot" - "Master of Forgiveness" - God is described as *bochen k'layot*- "who investigates the innermost parts of us" -- and *goleh amukot*- "the revealer of deep things."

On its most basic level, the image of these dolls can remind us that for all the time and energy that most of us spend focusing on polishing our surfaces, our essence is deep, deep within us. In one famous episode in the book of Samuel, the prophet Samuel is trying to figure out who is going to be the next king, and he arrives to the home of Jesse, and he is about to crown as king Jesse's oldest son - a tall strapping young man named Eliav - who just "looks like" he would be a king.

Even Samuel, who had always been considered a fine judge of character, nearly makes this disastrous error of confusing the surface with the essence. But God stops Samuel and says: "Don't look at his appearance or his height. God doesn't look at people the way that humans do - humans look with their eyes, or evaluate based on the eyes, but God evaluates based on the heart." Already in the Bible,



Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I
contradict myself, I am large, I contain
multitudes.

(Walt Whitman)

our people have been taught repeatedly: superficial characteristics, especially those about appearance, are truly irrelevant to determining ANYTHING significant about someone's essence.

How we wish that we would have achieved consensus on this in this country. How we wish we would have by now achieved consensus that surface level qualities like personal appearance are not at all relevant to someone's worth, or talents, or intelligence, or likelihood to commit a crime. How making such judgments based on personal appearance is part of what has been called the original sin of this country. And how

sadly we learn just how much this sin persists.

In the Jewish mystical tradition, looking inside ourselves isn't such an easy process. It's not as if we simply consist of an outer shell and a meaningful interior. In fact, according to the Zohar, each of us is composed of different layers of soul, quite like Russian nesting dolls. One text in the Zohar says we are each composed of at least 4 layers - the garment, the body, the soul, and the "soul of the soul."



According to a different version, the innermost level of the soul is called the *neshamah* - which is "inherently whole and pure" - for everyone. The next level out is the *ruach*, which is "the source of animation and vigor." Then the next level out is the *nefesh*, which is the part of the soul most easily accessible to us, "where we find all the familiar human traits like anger and love, trust and worry, generosity and stinginess, pride and humility, lovingkindness and judgmentalism, and so on. The scholars of Musar say that the *neshamah* - that innermost level of the soul that is pure in everyone - is like a candle that burns brightly at the center of our being -- as it says in the book of Proverbs, "God's candle is the human soul." But the other levels of the soul are like various shades or filters placed over and around the soul such that its light is blocked and occluded. And allowing the soul to shine brightly is sometimes a matter of figuring out what is blocking it and removing the blockages.



From a Jewish perspective, we are a bundle of all these different qualities, and even these different levels of souls. As Walt Whitman said, "I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes." How would our lives be different if we remembered that every person we meet is like one of these dolls, with layer upon layer upon layer, far more complex than we could imagine. Would we be

so quick to judge others? Would we be so quick to use just a few characteristics that we observe in a couple of brief interactions to sum up a person and his or her value to us? And would we be so quick to claim to understand ourselves?

In an effort to answer this question, we started a synagogue program several months ago called "have a drink with a political opponent." Realizing that in this most polarized of seasons, it would be a good idea for people in our community who disagree to get to understand each other's complexity, to see that not everyone who supported candidate A, or candidate B, or candidate C is exactly as you would have expected. There were, of course, some who preferred not to participate in such a program because it felt like "fraternizing

with the enemy." But fortunately, a number of people did participate. I don't think anyone's mind was changed -that wasn't the objective. But some people's minds were opened, in that they previously could not imagine that a reasonable, sensitive, thinking person could have voted for such-and-such a candidate or advocate such-and-such a policy.

And now they know that each of us is significantly larger and more multitudinous than was assumed. Maybe you have seen a similar phenomenon, when you're talking with someone who you know in a general kind of way -- a person with whom you can make small talk -- and suddenly the conversation shifts and you're talking about something that is genuinely real. You're sharing your most deeply held values. You are hearing that person's deepest concerns are for the future. And suddenly it's like the shell has been penetrated, and two people who had known each other peripherally suddenly start to feel like they know each other well. They might agree or they might disagree - but at least they have peered below the outer shell of the other.

My opinion is that a synagogue should be a place where those kinds of genuine conversations happen. We do what we can to facilitate conversations like that -- where in an atmosphere of trust, people can share a glimpse of their souls.

It's my hope that this year you have sought and then had a conversation like that here. If not, it's my hope that you will seek one and have one for the coming year. Because one definition of the word "community" is the aggregate of those shell-breaking conversations, in which people come to truly understand each other in all their multiplicity. ✨

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

BY David Swirnoff



Over the past few months,

I've written a number of articles talking about the things that you,

both as individuals and as members of the Jewish community in Hoboken, can do for USH. So, as we enter the new year, I want to focus on what USH can do for YOU, the members of our congregation and our community. The easiest way I can think to do this is to ask you some questions. **So, here goes...**

- **What** do you want to get out of your membership at USH that you don't already?
- **When** was the last time you went to a program or event, other than Shabbat services? Why did you go to it? Why haven't you gone to one since?
- **What** is the single best experience you've had at USH?
- **Of the 10 people** you are happiest to see or speak to on a regular basis, how many of them are connected to you because of USH? Do you value your friendship with them and do you value USH because it has facilitated those friendships?
- **If you regularly visit USH**, what's the main reason? Is it for religious services? Or opportunities for education (for you or your children)? Or is it for opportunities for social events?

I'm serious about finding out the answers because it's the answers to these questions that can help us ensure that you get what you value from your time at USH and KPS and LC. Please think about this and email me at President@hobokensynagogue.org so I can share your ideas and comments with the rest of the board. It is up to us to provide you with programs, education, and opportunities for interpersonal interaction that you value. Help us with this task and share your ideas.

Shalom, David

HIGH HOLY DAYS



Synagogues
don't work.

The High Holy Days
don't work.

The Shofar *doesn't work.*

Sermons *don't work.*

Fasting *doesn't work.*

Praying *doesn't work.*

The Al Chet *doesn't work.*

Yizkor *doesn't work.*

Kaddish *doesn't work.*

Kol Nidrei *doesn't work.*

Unetaneh Tokef *doesn't work.*

Neilah *doesn't work.*

Ashamnu *doesn't work.*

Responsive Readings *don't work.*

Tashlich *doesn't work.*

Torah Readings *don't work.*

Prayer *doesn't work.*

Some Greetings *don't work.*

YOU work.

Mitzvah Day is coming: Sunday, Oct. 14, 2018!

Get ready -- lots of favorite projects and some new ones, too!

As is our tradition, we will be collecting travel-sized toiletries to be donated to the Hoboken Shelter.

If/when you travel this summer and stay in a hotel, please collect mini packages of toiletries (shampoo, conditioner, soap, and toothpaste) and bring them to USH. A box will be placed in the synagogue lobby.

More information about various projects and a sign-up sheet will come in the weeks ahead.

Have a great summer and we look forward to seeing you on Oct. 14! Mark your calendars!

-- the Mitzvah Day Committee

JENNY LABENDZ: On the One Hand; On the Other Hand

by Jeremy Morley

On the one hand, Jenny Labendz has always followed the traditional path that parents in the Conservative Jewish world would love their kids to follow.

On the other hand, Dr. Labendz is a fiercely independent freethinker who, in her own most understated way, is quite unconventional in her interests and opinions.

Jenny went “religiously” with her family every week to the synagogue, attended The Hebrew Academy of Morris County then to Solomon Schechter High School (which is now Golda Och Academy). She spent many summers at Camp Ramah, was a leader in USY and then spent a year in Israel with Nativ, which is “USCJ’s gap year program for Jewish high school graduates, dedicated to creating and inspiring the Conservative Jewish leaders of tomorrow.” She then attended Barnard College and did the double degree program with the Jewish Theological Seminary, three years in Israel including studies at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies Kollel Program and earning an MA at Hebrew University, and then obtained her Ph.D. from JTS in Talmud, and has taught Torah, Talmud and other Jewish topics at schools and colleges ever since.

And then she married a nice Jewish boy named Zalman and they moved to Hoboken where they have two delightful little girls, Liba age 7 and Maya age 5, and are active members of the shul. (We had a laugh about the picture in her mind’s eye when she first contemplated meeting a guy named Zalman).

So who would guess, when seeing her lead the chanting in shul, and encouraging her darling children to lead parts of the service, just how opinionated she really is?

Jenny is a true Talmudic scholar, in a field formerly dominated by men, though rapidly filling its ranks in academia with women, both older and younger than Jenny. But her academic focus is most unconventional. She studies the Talmud through a literary, cultural, and historic lens. She gravitates towards “outliers,” meaning people and topics within rabbinic literature who sit at the margins of traditional rabbinic society and study. She looks to texts that are overlooked or on the fringes. She identifies connections between ancient Jewish materials and the outside world.

Torah study is conventionally thought to be an intellectual arena in which rabbis were extremely unlikely to look

beyond their private domain, but Jenny has found a body of rabbinic texts which show that rabbis in ancient times were engaged in productive dialogue with non-Jews about biblical and rabbinic law and narrative. She identified these texts as “Socratic Torah,” which is the title of the book she published on the topic in

2013, based on her dissertation. She advances the proposition that, for some rabbis, their participation in Greco-Roman society was not a begrudging concession but was a principled choice.

We may think that religious discussions in ancient times between rabbis and non-Jews were always polemical and hostile, with the Jewish side being both defensive and anxiety-ridden. But Jenny’s work reveals that the presence of non-Jews in rabbinical discussions about the nature of religion was sometimes “a welcome opportunity for the rabbis to think and speak differently about Torah.” It allowed the rabbis to bring the wider world into their intellectual orbit, to

consider intuitions and life experiences common to Jews and non-Jews, and to consider non-Jewish literature and ideas, including Plato’s dialogues, other Jewish texts of the Second Temple period, and even the New Testament.

A reviewer noted that, “Labendz’ argument is fascinating – it echoes the endeavors of advocates of Jewish universalism, eager to defend the cosmopolitan essence of Jewish culture.”

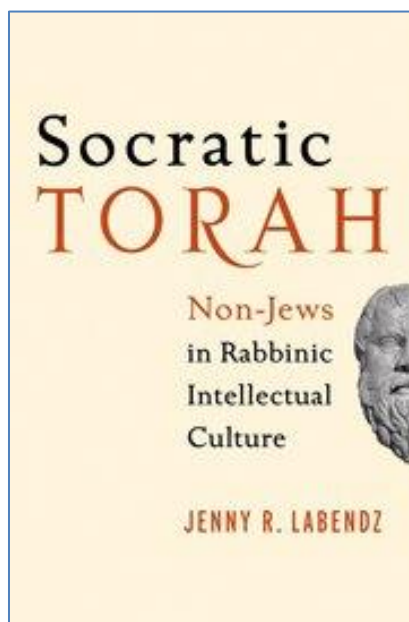
Jenny also published a scholarly article entitled Aquila’s Bible Translation in Late Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Perspectives. Aquila was a second century c.e. Jewish proselyte who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Both Jews and Christians in the ancient world utilized his translation, but in different ways. Jenny shows how the rabbis managed to distance him from rabbinic authority – given his controversial status as a proselyte and non-rabbi – while also incorporating his fascinating translation into their midrashic and Jewish legal work. Jenny also used this article to analyze the subtle array of diverse Christian perspectives on Aquila’s translation. Contrary to previous scholarship, Jenny showed that the reception

and interest in Aquila’s translation did not reflect a binary division between Jews and Christians.

Her current research project is to study the ways in which rabbis in ancient times wrote about the end of the world. There is a huge amount of ancient Jewish texts about the end of the world, which has not yet been dug deeply into. Jenny looks at the



Hanging out with Socrates



material from a functional perspective. "There must have been a reason that the literature on the topic was so prolific," she says. Her initial findings, based on a group of Talmudic texts she researched, is that rabbis sometimes used their musings about the End Times as a safe space in which they could express relatively daring thoughts, and present controversial opinions. She thinks that it was a way for them to "push the envelope" theologically. Last year she published an article showing that rabbis were sometimes far more radically self-critical when discussing the end of the world than they were in ordinary rabbinic conversation.

"In Socratic Torah, Jenny Labendz sets out to challenge assumptions of insularity and parochialism among the rabbis of late antiquity. By laying out an alternative understanding of their perspectives and epistemology, she seeks to demonstrate that some rabbis in the Talmud did allow non-Jews to take part in shaping Jewish self-understanding.

Labendz claims that such lesser-known worldviews which give a voice to non-Jews were probably more widespread than scholars have been willing to acknowledge. In doing so, she portrays the rabbis as cosmopolitan teachers, genuinely willing to venture beyond their immediate surroundings."

Professionally, Jenny is most excited that she is about to start a new position, as an Assistant Professor at St. Francis College in Brooklyn Heights, where she will be teaching classes on Jewish studies and on world religions. Previously she has taught at City College, JTS, Barnard, and Drew University, as well as the Solomon Schechter School of Westchester, Carmel Academy in Connecticut, and most recently Solomon Schechter in Bergen County.

Jenny and her beloved partner and husband Zalman moved to Hoboken the day after they were married in 2010. Zalman is himself a rebellious soul. He grew up in a strict and isolated Lubavitch community in Crown Heights, Brooklyn from which he was expected never to stray, could not read English until he was 16 years old, bravely escaped from that path, and ultimately obtained a B.A., M.A. and Ph.D., taught sociology courses in New Jersey state prisons in a Rutgers University program, and is now an Assistant Professor in Social Sciences at Borough of Manhattan Community College. His story is in the May 2016 Shofar.

Upon moving to Hoboken, Jenny and Zalman immediately joined USH. Jenny gushes that our

synagogue is "the least judgmental Jewish community in the world." She and Zalman have committed to staying in Hoboken and raising their family here. Zalman was excited that Conservative Judaism offered a great alternative to the Judaism that he had grown up in. The fact that they may have "unorthodox" ideas about a whole variety of topics, whether it's about their attitudes to Israel, ideas about theology, or even whether to wear a tallis, is completely irrelevant to their place in the community.

They are active in the shul for the social and family and experiential side of Jewish practice and to participate in an active and vibrant Jewish community.

On the other hand, despite several years in Israel and her entire Conservative Jewish upbringing, Jenny has distinct ideas about Israel that would be "sacrilegious" if told to AIPAC.

She also has distinct political views. In a city increasingly home to upwardly mobile entrepreneurial millennials, she's distinctly progressive.

As a progressive Jewish mother in Hoboken, she and Zalman have decided to send their children to their neighborhood public school, Connors, and they are proud to be participating in the integration of a formerly quite segregated school district. Both Liba and Maya spend time every day with Jenny and Zalman studying Hebrew language and Torah, and they have both learned and grown tremendously from Marilyn Freiser's Gan/K class on Shabbat mornings.

Near the end of our talk, I asked Jenny about her children's names. By now, I was quite sure that there would be something

special and interesting about even that topic. Of course, I was right. Liba's name is the Aramaic word for heart. There is a rabbinic saying that external circumstances are not what's important. What is important is to have a warm and caring heart. "We were moved by that," Jenny says.

Their younger child, Maya, is named after Jenny's grandmother, who spent time on three continents. Maya is a name that has meaning in the Spanish world as well as many other languages, and it is the Aramaic word for water. There is much Talmudic literature in which water is used as a metaphor for Torah, indicating that Torah to Jews is as vital as water to all humans, but more importantly, that it can function in the same myriad different ways that water does: slowly and softly, as gentle raindrops, or as a torrent and a storm.

There is also a biblical verse about water being reflective the way that a person's heart should also be open and reflective back to other people's hearts.

USH is extremely fortunate to have such beloved and committed members of our special community as Jenny, Zalman, Liba and Maya. ☆




Wedding Day



Jenny with Liba and Maya





High Holy Days 5779 (2018)

() refers to a service at which tickets are required.

All other services, marked by (*), are free and open to the public (though registration is required), but ticket holders have seating priority.)

First Day Rosh HaShanah

 *Evening Service: Sunday, September 9, 7:00 pm*

 Morning Service: Monday, September 10, 9:00 am

Afternoon: Public Shofar service: 4:45 pm

*Mincha (afternoon service) 5:00 pm *

*Tashlikh (casting away sins, @ Pier A Park, followed by bring-your-own picnic dinner) 5:30 pm *

* Ma'ariv (evening service) 7:00 pm *


Second Day Rosh HaShanah

*Morning service, Tuesday, September 11, 9:00 am (includes Shofar blowing)

Kol Nidrei (Yom Kippur evening)

 Tuesday, September 18, 6:30 pm (sharp)

Yom Kippur day


 Morning: Wednesday, September 19, 9:00 am

 Yizkor memorial service: 12 noon (approx)

Yizkor public/community service: 4:15 pm


 Mincha (afternoon service) 5:00 pm

 Neilah (concluding service): 6:40 pm

 Final Shofar blast 7:40pm (followed by light Break-fast

***Worshippers are invited to attend all or part of each High Holy Day service.** Torah readings begin at approx. 10am during morning services. Babysitting and youth services/activities available for ages 1-12; registration is required. See www.hobokensynagogue.org for the registration form and full schedule.

For all services indicated with an asterisk, admission is free, but please pre-register at www.hobokensynagogue.org.

**For all services indicated with a ticket icon (

Tickets are available for USH members at no extra charge and will be sent following receipt of the membership application and initial payment. If you would like to attend services for which tickets are required as indicated above, we encourage you to become a member of the United Synagogue of Hoboken. We are an open, inclusive, and eclectic congregation. There is a place for YOU in our community! Please see www.hobokensynagogue.org for information about membership. **Please note that if you are a full-time student, recent grad or a senior, the cost of USH membership may be significantly less than the cost of tickets.****

If you would prefer to attend High Holy Day services without membership, you are welcome to do so. However, in order to support our outstanding programs and services, we recommend the following donation to USH: **\$320.00 per adult guest not associated with a current USH member, or \$180.00 per adult guest of USH members.** (Note that paying by PayPal or credit card incurs an additional 3% fee.) Please note that these donations may be applied towards Synagogue membership later on in the year. **No prospective member of our community will be turned away because of financial hardship.**

In order to ensure security and safety of worshippers at our services, we reserve the right to require the presentation of tickets for admission.

Mail this form to the USH office, 115 Park Avenue, Hoboken NJ 07030, to order tickets by phone & pay by credit card. Tickets may also be purchased on our website, www.HobokenSynagogue.org.

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(For USH members only) I would like to order _____ guest tickets at \$180 per ticket. Total _____

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We strive to include everyone in our High Holy Day services. Contact office@hobokensynagogue.org to discuss individual needs.

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STORY"

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