

# THE SHOFAR

# שופר

## United Synagogue of Hoboken

CHESHVAN / KISLEV 5779

**NOVEMBER 2018** 



# MITZVAH DAY MAGIC

## **WOW! HERE'S WHAT WE DID:**

- Over 250 participants.
- 11 projects.
- 14 homebound seniors visited.
- 600 sandwiches made for the Hoboken Shelter and St Lucy's Shelter in Jersey City.
- 225 hygiene kits made for the Hoboken Shelter.
- 1,700 pounds of food donated to Hoboken Emergency Food Pantry (special thanks to USH Cub Scout Pack).
- Clean-up of cemetery graves.
- 100 bears donated to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (special thanks to Raphaelson Levine Law).
- Thousands of art supplies collected for Hackensack Hospital and Camden Street School in Newark.
- 11 USH high school students prepared and served lunch for 100 guests of the Hoboken Shelter.
- 9 USH middle school students made 36 jars of cookie ingredients for the Hoboken Emergency Food Pantry.
- Volunteers cleaned and organized The Lighthouse home for asylees.

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



#### **NOVEMBER 2018**

- 1 Learning Center Parents Night Out. Little City Books with author Marjorie Ingall 6:30pm
- 2 First Friday musical Shabbat service 7pm
- 3 Shal-Ohm Yoga 10:30am
- 4 Brunch speaker: Dawn Raffel: The Strange Case of Dr. Couney 10:30am
- 6 Planning a Jewish Wedding 7:30pm
- 7 Intro to Judaism Course begins 7pm
- 11 Book Fair Family Day 11am 5pm
- 15 Film: Shelter 7:30pm
- 27 Women's Torah Study Group 7:30pm

### **DECEMBER 2018**

- 3 NJ Devils Chanukah celebration, Newark Prudential Center 7pm
- **8** An Intimate Evening of Storytelling in honor of Chanukah 8pm
- 9 Holiday Mini-Series (age 3-5) 9am
- 9 Young families Chanukah Party 10am
- 15 Shal-Ohm Yoga 10:30am

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!







## MAY THIS BE A YEAR OF LISTENING AND AFFIRMING

BY RABBI ROBERT SCHEINBERG

First day Rosh HaShanah sermon, 2018, Pt. 2

There's a remarkable passage in the Mishnah - the central Jewish law text from almost two thousand years ago - that describes a particular ritual that people would follow when they would come on pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem. It was a ritual that would help them to listen to and affirm each other's stories.

The Temple precincts included a couple of concentric courtyards. And there was a gate to get into the outermost courtyard. Like places where there are big crowds today, they employed crowd control measures such as directing everyone to walk in the same direction. When you walked into the temple precincts, you would be directed to make a circle to your right.

But there were certain categories of people who were told to circle to their left. So who are these VIPs who walked in the opposite direction from everyone else? The passage tells us: The people who would circle to the left are the people who experienced something difficult, including a person in mourning, a person who had been shunned by their family or community, the caregiver of an ill family member, or one who is preoccupied because of the loss of an important object.

And the passage goes on to describe what would happen when you have a small group of people circling in a different direction from everyone else. It means that they would pass by a lot of people whom they would not previously know; and those other people would see that they were walking to the left. And those other visitors would inquire - מה לך מקיף לשמאל? Why are you circling to the left?

The person might respond, "Because I am in mourning." And the person who asked would then offer a prayer on his or her behalf: "May the One who dwells in this house comfort you."

Or the person might respond, "I have an ill family member," prompting the person who asked to offer a prayer, "May the one who dwells in this house have compassion upon your relative." Even the person who was in *nidui* -- who was shunned by his or her family or community -- was encouraged to come to the temple and to

circle left, so that those that that person encountered could offer a blessing, "May the one who dwells in this house cause the hearts of your family or community members to draw you near." And by offering this blessing, each Israelite would be communicating: "I have listened closely to you and I have heard what you most want and need, and what you hope for you is exactly what I also hope for you."

This whole story is so remarkable. I feel grateful to be an heir to a tradition that understood that people coming to the Temple didn't need to tell people that they were "fine, thank you" when they weren't. The story sends the message that when someone would come to the Temple while coping with a life difficulty, if they chose to share this information with the community, they would be recognized and understood and supported. (I should add that this story only makes sense to me if the person who was enduring a life difficulty had the option to be private about it if they chose - but

even then with the knowledge that **had** they shared the information they would have been validated and affirmed.)

There are so many ways in which our synagogues today are so different from the ancient Temple. But I would hope that part of our purpose today in our synagogue mirrors that of the Temple, in that we are also creating a place where we show concern for each other, including asking each other: "Why are you circling to the

left? What is your burden?" and communicating that if they answer this question, they will be affirmed and supported.

As you know, ours is a very transient community -- less so than it has been in the past, but we are blessed with new people moving in to our area all the time, many of whom remain for just a few short years before they move (often to suburban New Jersey towns.) And we can rise to the challenge of helping people feel a

greater sense of community support and validation even during a brief period of time.

My teacher Rabbi Eliezer Diamond likes to say that we have a tendency to compare our insides to everyone else's outsides. In other words, we see the polished exteriors of other people who seem to present their lives as perfect - especially on social media - and we compare that with all the life difficulties and turmoil that we know we are dealing with - whether it's illness, loss, conflict, financial challenges, loneliness, dislocation, crises of life meaning, or any other challenge.

But not every story is easy to share. And on my mind today are especially the difficult stories of some in our community which are challenging or uncomfortable to share. Let me give one specific example, though it is a painful one. I think of the people in our community who have been touched in a direct way by the current





Rabbi Eliezer Diamond

opioid crisis -- which affects people from every walk of life, and every stratum of society. I am so pained that there are a number of people from our community who have lost dear family members to drug overdoses that are linked to this unprecedented crisis.

As agonizing as it is to lose a family member under any circumstances, the stigma and shame associated with drug use make it hard to seek and find support (just as it is harder for people who are struggling with addiction, and their families, to seek support). As a result, people who have this particular difficulty in their family are sometimes unsure if others will really offer the support they should, or if they will be judged by the people who should be supporting them.

why-im-still-alive-d7f0c3925439 for an example of his powerful and brave writing on this topic.) I so hope and pray that we are moving towards a world where for him to be public about his struggles would simply be normal. I so hope and pray that we are moving towards a world where mental illness is truly stigma-free. In such a world, more people would seek mental health treatment -- more people would get support -- family members would get support -- and people would not have to feel so alone. And it's so sad that people feel alone, because when you look at the statistics of how many people in this country live with mental illness, or serious mental illness, it's a large percentage of us.

Thousands of years ago, it was understood that the Temple in Jerusalem was a place where if you made yourself vulnerable by

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Another painful category on my mind are those who have family members who have died through suicide. That's also a life situation that is so terrifying that it's a source of shame and stigma. We have seen this year, as every year, that people in all segments of society -- including some of the most prominent and successful people in the world -- sometimes deal with mental illness, and like any serious illness it can have deadly consequences.

walking to the left, you could expect those you would encounter to take an interest in you and validate you and pray for you. This is and ought to be one of the functions of a synagogue today. It's part of what we mean by the word 'community.' A community is a group of people who are not simply a circle of friends, but a group who may not even all know each other but realize that they are bound together.

One of the people I admire most in my life is my brother. And he recently gave me yet another reason to so deeply admire him. He decided, while serving as a successful professional and communal leader in various organizations, that the time was right for him to become very public about his struggles with depression and with suicidal ideation. And it's just the kind of person he is that this means that now, in addition to all the other causes he is active in, an exhausting schedule of community

ומגערבָן ביחחרים ימישויתגבעתתל יחסדימאתרלא יבריתשלומיל אַמְרמִיחַקְּרְּ אַמְרמִיחַקְּרָּ

involvement and volunteer roles, he has also become an activist for suicide prevention. And in his various overlapping communities, he has helped to make what is often a problem that festers in the dark into a problem that can be addressed in the light, because of his courage in speaking about his own experience. (See <a href="https://medium.com/@mr\_shiny/13-reasons-">https://medium.com/@mr\_shiny/13-reasons-</a>

May this coming year 5779 be a year of listening and affirming - with the knowledge that the Hebrew word מאזניים moznayim - - the scales of justice - includes the Hebrew word אזניים oznayim meaning 'ears' - reminding us that there can be no justice without the opportunity to listen.

May it be a year when those who are courageous enough to open a window into their struggles will encounter people from their communities who respond as the priest Eli did: "Go in peace - and may God grant

you your request that you have asked for." \$\phi\$

NOTE: The Mishnaic passage described here is Mishnah Middot 2:2 and see parallel passage in Tractate Evel Rabbati. I am grateful to my colleague Rabbi Ari Sunshine who pointed out this passage to me, and my colleague Rabbi Sharon Brous who has taught extensively about this passage.



# Karen Siegel Makes (Fabulous) Music:

by Jeremy Morley

**Karen Siegel** is an amazingly talented, accomplished, successful, busy and in-demand composer, conductor and vocalist.



**"Singing has always** been like breathing for me," Karen says. It all began as a young child in Great Neck, when car trips with mom, dad and big sister Laura always meant fun and rousing group

renditions of her parents' beloved doo-wop tunes and sixties folk revival songs. She sang throughout all her school years and then, while a psych major at Yale, "I spent just as much time in rehearsals for various musical groups as I did in class. I was always in at least two ensembles, typically rehearsing for each twice a week."

She never saw music as a career, working instead in establishing peer mediation conflict-resolution programs for middle school children for Safe Horizon. But music was always her passion and as she gained more experience in performing she realized that it was not a merely selfish activity but was indeed a way to make a meaningful contribution to the community. And so she changed course and attended NYU and then The CUNY Graduate Center for a master's degree and then a Ph.D in musical composition.

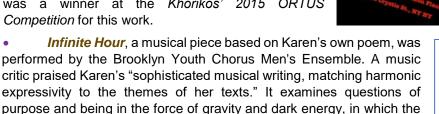
In this short overview I can only reference a little of Karen's career-so-far, which is clearly very much of a work in progress. Here are just a few highlights:

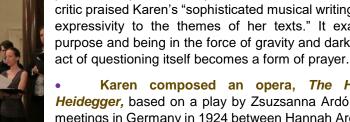
• Karen co-founded C4: The Choral Composer/Conductor Collective, as a new kind of ensemble of singers, composers and conductors working collaboratively and democratically to create and perform choral music. It has been a tremendous success and is

now in its thirteenth season. It is a unique group performing pieces written within the last 25 years, premiering new choral works, and mentoring emerging singers, composers, and conductors of today's choral music.



• Shirei Shira, meaning "Song of Songs" or "Song of Poems," is a collage of traditional and joyful Ashkenazi Jewish songs that Karen composed, for C4, in a uniquely alternating layered format. Check it out on her website. While you'll surely recognize the music, you'll probably hear it in a completely new way. Karen was a winner at the Khorikos' 2015 ORTUS Competition for this work.





noto by Harold Levine

• Karen composed an opera, The Hat: Arendt Meets Heidegger, based on a play by Zsuzsanna Ardó. It imagines the first meetings in Germany in 1924 between Hannah Arendt, who was then a young Jewish philosophy student, and Martin Heidegger, her married

and much older philosophy professor who became a member of the Nazi party. A reading of the full opera as part of the *Composers Now Festival* was presented last year at the Lounge at Dixon

Place. It featured Karen in the soprano title role. The fully staged and orchestrated version of The Hat will be premiered by Thompson Street Opera Company in Chicago, in April 2019.

- Why Do We Love Our Guns? This is the title of a powerful and provocative short work that Karen wrote for treble chorus in which the phrase "Why do we love our guns more than our neighbors?" gradually unfolds and repeats. She says, "it's an experiment in creating powerful music through simple ingredients." It will be recorded this year by Tonality, the LA-based chorus which focuses on addressing social justice issues through music.
- The Te Deum Chamber Choir commissioned Karen, in honor of Leonard Bernstein's centennial, to set an English translation of the *Birkat Kohanim* for a concert of music by Jewish composers to be performed alongside Bernstein's Chichester Psalms. The piece, entitled





Why Do We Love Our Guns? **Blessing**, was just premiered as part of the concert. Karen says, "The choir focuses on performing sacred music, and this is the first time that they had performed any Jewish sacred music. Much of the chorus and their audience are Presbyterian, as their home base is a Presbyterian church, and they were glad to see that the Jewish community turned out for this concert. The concert went very well and I will be posting a recording on my website soon."

• Karen's To Be Free, an arrangement and expansion of Simple Gifts, a well-known Shaker song, is the winner of the 2018 Yale Glee Club Emerging Composers Competition. It will be premiered by the Yale Glee Club in November 2018, with a performance by the Hofstra Chamber Choir the following week. It draws on the Shakers' history as an immigrant group to the colonial United States. Karen has added a new second verse and chorus. She explains that, "It emphasizes the second clause in the opening line, that it's a gift to be free, and it elaborates on the idea of being in "the place just right," expressing gratitude for our communities and emphasizing the importance of showing kindness to the



newly arrived stranger. I have taken many rhythmic liberties with Brackett's song, in addition to fragmenting and layering the tune, but it is still recognizable as the song that is as quintessentially American as the idea of freedom itself."

• Karen's Saguaro was inspired by a visit that she made to Tucson, Arizona. She was commissioned by the Manhattan Choral

Ensemble to set to music her original poem about the landscape, history, and people of the Arizona desert, and explains that, "The seemingly endless expanses of this beautiful desert are reflected in the music's evocation of space." The piece was recorded by C4 and is on the album *Volume 1: Uncaged*.



Karen and her beloved husband Charles Natt knew each other as children growing up in Great Neck. They met again, as adults, in shul in Great Neck on Yom Kippur (Charles' version) or Rosh Hashanah (Karen's version). They lived originally in Astoria and have two absolutely gorgeous boys, Ari and Isaac.

Charles had lived for a while in Hoboken and then he and Karen visited Hoboken from time to time because Karen's sister Laura lived here. They visited USH for Laura and husband

Brian's family events and immediately felt completely at home. Karen explains, "I loved the environment. The group singing. The informality. The relaxed atmosphere. The value that the synagogue leadership placed on providing a welcoming environment for children. The way that the kids were encouraged to be on the bimah. It was all so different from my previous synagogue experiences."

There is so much more to say about Karen's career and her family, but no more space. So please check out her website, www.karensiegel.com, listen to some of her wonderful music that you can find there and be

We laughed as she remembered that she had even listened to Rabbi Scheinberg's sermons, which she found to be interesting, balanced, sensible and stimulating. Indeed, it was her and Charles' desire to raise their children as a part of the USH community that was a significant factor in their decision to move to Hoboken.



Karen Siegel writes: "I sing the first three measures of 'Ana El Na' with my synagogue congregation on Shabbat mornings with the traditional words "r'fa na la" ("heal her") from Moses' prayer for his sister Miriam. I have adapted the prayer, adding text from the 'Mi sheibeirach' prayer, which

includes a plea for both physical and spiritual healing.

alert for all the wonderful music that she surely will create in the future. \$\pi\$

This song is therefore a prayer for the healing of all of our minds and hearts, and I like to think it is especially for those among us consumed by anger."

# Ana El Na A USH ORIGINAL??

Karen has adapted *Ana El Na*, the prayer that we chant at USH during the *Mi Sheibeirach*. She uses our very own USH melody as part of a three-part canon.



She explains: In my research for publication by the Justice Choir Songbook, I discovered that the tune we sing at USH is unique and may have originated here at our shul. Rabbi Rob says it predated his arrival, and no one I spoke with among the long-timers at USH could tell me who wrote it or where it came from.

Through the Justice Choir Songbook, which aims to provide songs for group singing in today's protest movements, it's being distributed free of charge under the Creative Commons license. I'm delighted to hear that it is being performed across the country in public gatherings and church services. For example, a Presbyterian Music Director in Saint Paul included it in a Lectionary, listing suggested Christian scripture with which it may be paired).

I'm thankful to Jenny Labendz and Rabbi Scheinberg for their help with my adaptation and the translation.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT





## VOLUNTEERING AT USH

I want to take a moment to talk to you about an extremely

important topic...time. We never seem to have quite enough. We (most of us) spend a lot working, eating, sleeping, being with our friends and families and even ourselves. But I'm going to ask you all to try and find a way to carve just a little bit of time out of your schedules to help out USH.

We currently have 424 adults as members of USH, but we never seem to have quite enough people to help at all of the events and programs we put on. We can't merely rely on financial support – though financial support is **vital** to what we do and I don't want to minimize that – because we have so many places where we need volunteers that we'd have to hire a huge staff which would be impossible to manage.

**So, after talking to a congregant** who said, basically, "Be specific about what you'd like me to help with," I'm going to mention the places where we need your help to keep things running. I hope you'll look at the list below and reach out to the synagogue office to <a href="mailto:volunteer@hobokensynagogue.org">volunteer@hobokensynagogue.org</a> or email me at president@hobokensynagogue.org.

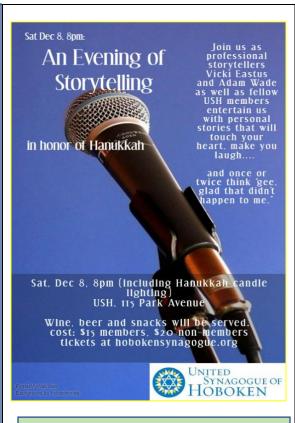
Shabbat greeter: 1.5 hours on non-bar/bat mitzvah Shabbatot. 1.75 hours for bar/bat mitzvot. Basically required on all Shabbatot, about 10 months a year.

- Kiddush: 3 hours or so to buy the food, set it up on a Shabbat morning and help clean up afterwards (we can team you up with others to spread the time and financial commitment).
- Mitzvah day committee: each event on Mitzvah Day requires a captain to help organize attendees during the actual day. This is about 3 hours of work on Mitzvah Day and there are as many as 8 concurrent events.
- Cemetery chair: ½ hour a month for calls/emails unless someone needs a cemetery plot (fortunately not a frequent occurrence), in which case it's about 2 hours of calls/emails. This can happen during the day.
- Shofar editor: 4 hours a month in emails and laying out the Shofar for the printer (experience with MS Publisher and/or Word is required). Plus writing time.
- Committees (building, education, membership, programming): depends, but maybe ½ hour to 1 hour a month, after hours. Your voice and help on directing committee activities is vital.
- Casino Night: both the committee (10 hours over the year plus Casino Night) and one-off helpers (usually on the day before/of Casino night) are needed to help sell raffle tickets and obtain items for the auction.
- Mishloach Manot delivery: one Sunday a year (approximately 90 minutes). A car is not required.
- Other programs/events like the BBQ, Hoboken Arts Festival, etc: depends, but usually 2 to 3 hours, often on a weekend, but almost always after hours. This includes helping to set up events (build the Sukkah, cook food at the BBQ, etc.) staffing check in tables, greeting people and answering questions at the Arts Festival, and cleaning up.
- Services, holidays: depends, but could be 4 hours for High Holiday ushers. A couple of hours helping to stuff books for the HH services, etc. Security staff are also needed for all of the High Holiday services and shifts vary from 1 to 2 hours.

This is not every place we need volunteers, but it gives you an idea of where we need people. We have 260 member- families who take part, in some fashion, in the programs we offer. Please consider how much effort it takes to make everything work and please consider finding some of your valuable time. We can do this programming without you, but if we do, it means someone's doing a LOT of work that they could use help with.

**Thanks** for your, well, time in reading this. And I look forward to seeing you at shul soon.

Shalom. David



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS

#### **General Fund**

Joel Gernsheimer Nina Kanovitch Allison Kerzner Alan M. Leon

### **Learning Center**

Glen and Samantha Myers

### Rabbi's Discretionary Fund

Arielle Amchin

#### **Meistrich Speaker Series**

**Tracey Meyers** 

#### **Book Fund/Siddurim**

Richard Epstein and Susan Lazev Donald and Merle Payne in memory of Vivian Greene's cousin, Fredienne Wendy Joseph

# THANK YOU FOR SPONSORING KIDDUSH:

10-6 USH

10-13 Adam and Lindsay Berkowitz in honor of Mitzvah Dav

10-20 Refugee Support Committee

10-27 Zalman Newfield and Jenny Labendz, and Rachael and Michael Kerstetter

### **MAZAL TOV TO:**

Minna and Wayne Packer on the birth of their grandchildren, Michael and Sara Packer, son and daughter of Soren and Elina Packer

Joel Cohen and Lauren Scheller on the birth of their daughter, Iris, and to big sister

Josephine

Christopher and Christina Casini (KPS parents) on the birth of their daughter, and to big sister Audrey

Refugee Support COMMITTEE

The Refugee Support Committee has had a busy, fulfilling and very tasty month.

**A lucky group** of USH members enjoyed Syrian Kurdish food in the Haas Family sukkah on September 29th. The conversation about the global refugee crisis, the impact on those people resettled locally, and ways to get involved, was lively and informative. All funds raised by the dinner go to the chef.

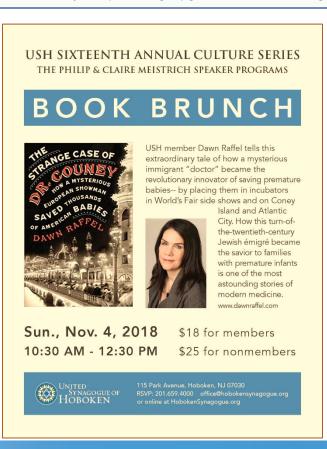
On October 19-20, USH participated in National Refugee Shabbat, along with over 200 other synagogues in the U.S. Friday evening Rebecca Kirzner, Campaign Director at HIAS, the oldest resettlement organization in the world, spoke about the current refugee crisis, the largest in human history. She urged us to let our elected officials and neighbors know that supporting refugees is a priority for us. Learn more by visiting <a href="https://www.hias.org">www.hias.org</a>.

**During services on Saturday,** we learned about ways to help refugees living locally. Afterwards we again ate delicious food prepared by local refugee chefs, Fadila and Asmeret.

**During services,** Alain Mentha of Welcome Home Jersey City, an all-volunteer organization devoted to helping refugees and asylees begin their lives in the greater Jersey City area, spoke about a terrific new initiative called Fun Club.

**Since Fun Club's inception** three weeks ago, kids have gotten several hours of homework help, adults have gotten conversational ESL classes, and everyone has gotten dinner, and an activity. The best part has been the wonderful sense of community felt by both the refugee families and

the volunteers, many of whom are USH members. Fun Club occurs on Thursday nights in the Journal Square area. Sign up for one or more Thursdays: https://m.signupgenius.com/#!/showSignUp/10C0548A8A92CA4F58-jersey

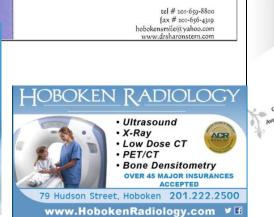


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