Reflections on Shabbat in Pittsburgh

BY RABBI ROBERT SCHEINBERG

I spent a recent Shabbat in Pittsburgh, as part of a rotation of visiting rabbis providing additional support for the New Light Congregation -- one of the congregations that met at the Tree of Life Synagogue building, and which lost three of its beloved members in the shooting.

I am so grateful for those who led services, read torah and gave divrei torah at USH in my absence last week, including Joel Freiser, Merry Firschein, Audrey Merwin, Jenny Labendz, and Jake Becker.

The New Light Congregation is now meeting at a different synagogue, Beth Shalom. I shared with their community - though I knew they already knew it - that though Jewish tradition tells us to face the direction of Jerusalem when we pray, for the past few months our community and all Jewish communities around the world have had their hearts oriented towards Pittsburgh, and towards their community.

I found the people of the New Light community to be so friendly and welcoming, and so tenderly and valiantly supportive of each other in their enduring pain. While much of the Jewish world has been focused on various implications of the tragedy - including the need for increased security, and increased focus on antisemitism - their community is, not surprisingly, focused primarily on their grief, on their memories of the specific people they lost, and on their desire to support each other.

Over the course of Shabbat, I learned much more about the beautiful lives of Dan Stein, Richard Gottfried, and Mel Wax of blessed memory, and the roles that they played in that congregation. They were three of the most active leaders of the community. Mel z"l, in his 80s, was in the process of leading the preliminary psalms of the Shabbat morning service when the massacre began. Richard z"l had served as the lead Gabbai - the person who assigns the torah honors and coordinates the logistical aspects of the torah reading - a role into which his sister has now stepped. Dan z"l had served as the congregation’s president and was the Men’s Club president at the time of his death; he was a consummate volunteer who was part of the glue holding the community together. We pray that their memories, along with the memories of the other eight people who lost their lives on that day, be for a blessing always.

Many people have asked me what are the best ways for us as individuals and as a community to respond to the tragedy in Pittsburgh. Many of us have already responded by making donations to the funds established for the victims’ families, to organizations that are vigilant against antisemitism, (continued on p.2)
(continued from p. 1) or to organizations that promote the kind of Jewish values that the Pittsburgh murderer found to be so objectionable. Many of us have also donated towards our synagogue’s dramatically increased security costs since the Pittsburgh tragedy.

And yet it has been uncomfortable for me that so many of our responses to this tragedy are connected to fear and vigilance, rather than to perpetuating the values of the people who died. It is important for us to respond by increasing our level of security and being more knowledgeable and vigilant about antisemitism, but I hope our response to this tragedy will not stop there.

I would like to suggest two additional, non-monetary ways that we can respond as a community to this tragedy, strengthening our own community and putting into practice some of the values that I saw expressed in the New Light community:

### Shabbat Dinner Initiative:

Many in our community are fortunate to have developed strong bonds of friendship with others in our community – bonds similar to those that I saw and admired during my visit to New Light, bonds which are helping the people in that congregation to endure at a time of tragedy.

It is often easier to develop these bonds in small groups, through the act of sharing a meal together in one’s home. There are many people in our community who are excited about hosting shabbat dinners, and who are excited to host dinners for people they do not yet know or do not yet know well, and there are many people in our community who would be delighted to be invited for a shabbat dinner – but the guests and the hosts do not always find each other.

We would like to try a new approach to encouraging people in our community to share shabbat meals together. We invite you to fill out this questionnaire [http://bit.ly/USH_Shabbat_Dinner_Initiative_2019](http://bit.ly/USH_Shabbat_Dinner_Initiative_2019) and to indicate if you are interested in hosting a shabbat dinner and inviting others from our community, and/or in being a guest at a shabbat dinner. We also invite you to indicate your approximate age and life stage, if you would be interested in connecting with people who are demographically similar to you. We will then work with the hosts to help them to invite people who have indicated a desire to be guests. We also have resources available to help people to learn and lead the Shabbat evening rituals (see [http://rabbischeinberg.blogspot.com/p/resources-for-hosting-shabbat-dinner.html](http://rabbischeinberg.blogspot.com/p/resources-for-hosting-shabbat-dinner.html)). It is our hope that this initiative will strengthen the bonds that connect us to each other, as well as strengthen our connection to Shabbat. There is also an opportunity on the evening of March 8th to participate in a Shabbat Dinner Initiative [http://bit.ly/abbat_Dinner_Initiative_2019](http://bit.ly/abbat_Dinner_Initiative_2019)

These two simple initiatives are but two of the many ways we can honor the memories of those whose lives were taken on that terrible day in October. The tragedy had already felt very near to me as soon as it happened, all the more so now that I have visited the community and met the loved ones of those who have died. I pray that we can find ways to make our lives, our community and our world better as a tribute to their memory.

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**Thank You – from Ken Schect**

My mother’s death in late December reminded me in a deeply emotional way how fortunate we all are to be part of this loving community. Being on this side of a bereavement, I understand more fully how comforting it is when people take time out of busy lives to be present, or call, or send a note. I understand more fully the work of Jane Klueger and the Sarah Condiotti Chesed Committee, which handled necessary details, so my family and I could spend more time together and with friends. And in a most direct way, I once again benefited from the wisdom, kindness, and dedication of Rob Scheinberg, our exceptional spiritual leader. My brother Peter, sister Margi, and I thank you all for these gifts.

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**BOOK BRUNCH**

Dr. Elisha Waldman, author of "This Narrow Space: A Pediatric Oncologist, His Jewish, Muslim and Christian Patients, and a Hospital in Jerusalem"

Sunday, March 3, 2019 10:30am

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**USH SCHOLARSHIP AVAILABLE FOR JEWISH CAMP EXPERIENCE FOR CHILDREN & TEENS**

An anonymous USH member has generously established the USH Jewish Camp Experience Scholarship Fund to encourage synagogue youth to attend Jewish sleepaway camps and other Jewish summer experiences (such as USY on Wheels) for the summer 2019 season. All USH children and teens (preferably under the age of 14), who will be returning campers are eligible to apply for this need-based scholarship.

The deadline for applying for the scholarship is February 15, 2019; awards will be announced no later than February 25, 2019. Jewish summer camps which are eligible for this scholarship can be found on the Foundation for Jewish Camp list: [http://jewishcamp.org/find-a-camp](http://jewishcamp.org/find-a-camp)

If you have any questions about the scholarship, or if your child or your family meet the requirements to apply, please contact Rabbi Scheinberg at 201-659-4000.

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**A 5-part course beginning Tues 2/28:**

**disagreeing constructively**

This 5-session course, developed by the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution and taught by Rabbi Scheinberg, addresses Jewish views of contemporary thinking on these questions including:

- When do we agree to meet with our political adversaries, and when do we refuse?
- When should we trust the sincerity of our adversary’s intentions, and when should we not?
- What’s the line between negative reporting and “fake news”?
- How does Judaism understand our responsibilities to and relationship with “the other”?

Free for USH members; non-members $45/person

RSVP office@hoboken synagogue - United Synagogue of Hoboken - 11 Ivy Avenue - 201-659-4000 - hobokensynagogue.org

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**"Pair for Prayer" Initiative:**

The skill of leading Jewish prayer services has long been an important aspect of Jewish leadership. A knowledgeable Jewish community like ours has many people who have these skills (and all bar/bat mitzvah students in our community acquire some of these skills), but we can always use more. I was inspired to see how members of New Light paid tribute to those who had died in the tragedy by taking on some of the roles that their friends used to play. Among the various ways we can respond to this tragedy, we can pledge to take on new synagogue service leadership roles.

You are invited to fill out this form [http://bit.ly/pair_for_prayer_USH_2019](http://bit.ly/pair_for_prayer_USH_2019) to indicate what skills you have and what skills you are willing to teach as a volunteer. We will then make an effort to pair people together to acquire these skills. Many recordings, texts, etc are available to assist you, whether you are a teacher or a learner, at rabbischeinberg.blogspot.com. (Note: this program is modeled after the successful “Pair for Prayer” program of Hagall USY, our synagogue’s youth group region.)
13TH ANNUAL CASINO NIGHT
& 6TH ANNUAL POKER CLASSIC

Join the fun ~ Hold the date!

March 9th, 2019
Doors open at 7PM ~ Gaming starts at 7:30
at
The Elks Club
1005 Washington St, Hoboken, NJ 07030

Purchase tickets to the event & find all details at HobokenSynagogue.org

Buy tickets by MIDNIGHT Feb. 10th, 2019 & receive $100 in casino chips!

PURCHASE EARLYBIRD TICKETS AFTER THAT:
Feb. 11th - March 6th & receive $60 casino chips
At the door, get $40 casino chips

BLACKJACK
DINNER
OPEN BAR
MUSIC
CRAPS
ROULETTE
POKER

50/50 CASH RAFFLE
Tickets are available today in the USH Office!
PLEASE help us sell tickets before the event!
Last year’s pot of cash was almost $6000!!!

6TH ANNUAL USH POKER CLASSIC

POKER PLAYERS:
Seats are limited
Details coming soon
Be ready to grab your seat!

If you are interested in joining our committee, becoming a Casino Night sponsor or making a prize donation, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please email us ... CasinoNight@hobokensynagogue.org to learn more.
When Lauren Calmas sees a need, action quickly follows, and great results are accomplished. USH and the City of Hoboken are most fortunate to have her in our community.

Lauren built a career as a successful single professional woman. At Tufts University she majored in Asian studies, learned Mandarin Chinese and spent a dramatic and eye-opening junior year in China which culminated in the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre. She then worked as a researcher at the Council on Foreign Relations she chose to leave the “ivory tower” for the real world of business. She obtained an MBA at Wharton, and then travelled the world as the international marketing manager for one of the world's premier watchmakers, focusing on brand management, merchandising and business development.

At a friend’s wedding, Lauren almost literally bumped into Steve Calmas, who, entranced as he noticed her, pushed his brother out of his seat and offered it to her instead. The rest was history. After a long-distance courtship - with Lauren then living in Hoboken and Steve in Boston – they married in 2002 and settled here.

Lauren and Steve had continued to attend the synagogues of their respective parents and had never thought of joining USH. But when Sam, their first child, was born they investigated preschools and sent Sam to Kaplan Preschool. There they met Rabbis Scheinberg and Kalish, whose daughter Talia was the same age as Sam, and they gradually became more involved in the USH community. They increasingly realized that there was something very special - intellectually, culturally, socially and religiously - about the USH community.

And so Lauren asked herself, “Are you going to be in the audience watching, or are you going to be an active member?” Once she made a commitment to participate, she took action. That’s just the way she is! At the time, there was a desperate need to restore the synagogue’s derelict sanctuary. The roof was leaking, and water and debris would fall on the congregation, even during services. And so, with Ken Schept, Heidi Learner and Talya Schaeffer, she co-chaired the capital campaign committee to raise the money that was needed to restore the sanctuary.

With many others, Lauren worked relentlessly for two full years, energized because they knew that they were doing important work and, indeed, were creating an important legacy to be proud of. As she worked to help raise the needed funds, Lauren met and collaborated with so many people in the community whom she would never have known so well if they had not worked on a common project together. The energy of their committee was fantastic. Lauren explains that, “I was just drawn in. We were doing important work that was needed. The commitment was contagious.” This was her first foray into professional community activism, and she loved it. With so many others, they restored the sanctuary to its former glory. It was rededicated during Hanukkah, 2011.

Lauren loves the fact that USH is a true community, in which the members participate fully in services and in all synagogue activities, and are encouraged to step up to new roles, whether in leading parts of the service, organizing Mitzvah Days and other charitable projects, creating social events, teaching in the preschool and Learning Center and supporting the synagogue in so many other ways. She loves that we have a rabbi but no cantor, so that our members are the ones who create the music.

Indeed, Lauren says that without the synagogue she and Steve would not have remained in Hoboken. In fact, their closest friends are mostly people they met at USH.

After Kaplan, both of Lauren and Steve's children, Aly and Sam, attended Hoboken Charter School. Here, Lauren found another important cause. HCS totally fit their value system. It is a public school that is based on cooperation between teachers and parents, and between administration and parents. She explains that the school is committed to service learning that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Lauren feels strongly that educating children is everyone’s responsibility. Once again, she found herself in an environment
which “is only as good as you make it.” And so she again asked the basic question, “How can I help?” Her answer was to join the school’s parents’ association and eventually to represent the parents as a member of the Board of Trustees.

**Early in the morning** of September 6, 2012 Lauren received a call that all parents dread. The school building with both of her children inside, was on fire. She ran to the school at top speed. Black smoke was billowing from the building. Police, emergency and fire vehicles lined the street. Firemen were breaking the windows. The teachers were putting their own safety on the side. They managed to evacuate the children in record time. The kids were safe.

**Lauren’s next instinct** was to get to work in crisis management mode. They had lost the school building. All the school supplies were destroyed. Everything was gone – except for what was truly important – the people. Lauren amazed me as she described some of the overwhelming challenges that her team faced and how they overcame them.

In an amazing swirl of non-stop energy, they found a temporary school (the Archdiocese of Newark came to the rescue with an empty school building in Jersey City Heights); they negotiated and signed a lease; they “begged, borrowed and stole” books, computers, flags, sports equipment, pens, paper and innumerable other supplies); and they organized bussing from Hoboken with special bus parking from Ss Peter and Paul. Amazingly, within just ten days the school was back in business at a suitable although very temporary location.

And that was when the long-term hard work began. They needed to rebuild the Washington Street School. And if that’s what they had to do, why not do it even better than before? So Lauren headed the Rebuild 713 Committee. And Lauren and Steve went back into mega-fundraising mode and their team raised so much money that the school they built was far bigger and far better than its burnt-out predecessor. Previously, the school had not had the funds to occupy more than 2/3 of the building. Now they were able to build out the entire space. They worked with synagogue member and HCS architect Sergio Neissen, synagogue members Harold Berlowe, Jason Altberger, Elissa Brachfeld and a host of other USH members to “Get the Job Done.” And it was done – because it needed to be done.

**Lauren’s latest project** is to re-enter the world of business. Her background is in the luxury watch business. She is Chief Marketing Officer for Troverie, “the first brand authorized omni-channel platform offering luxury watches across the United States online, partnering with luxury watch brands and leading jewelers to execute a unique omni-channel model.

As we completed a delightful interview, Lauren shared with me that, “For the first time in my life, I have found a place of incredible comfort, love and support. In times of difficulty, especially after the school fire and after family losses, sitting in the sanctuary and hearing the songs and the prayers and the Rabbi’s words is incredibly comforting. It wasn’t something I was looking for, or ever had before, but now it’s something I treasure. I am so thrilled that our children, Sam who is now 15 and Aly who is 12 and soon to celebrate her bat mitzvah at USH, have “grown up” in the synagogue and that they continue to participate enthusiastically in all that USH has to offer.” 🕉
Q & A WITH RABBI NAOMI KALISH ABOUT INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT

Q. You seem to spend lots of time and energy being with people from other religions. (Perhaps especially with Muslims, tho’ I’m not sure if I’m right about this).

A. I do spend a lot of time with people from other religions, as I will elaborate on below. I want to include in this discussion that I also spend a lot of time with Jews talking about Judaism and helping to create Jewish spaces and experiences. When I became a chaplain, my first job was specifically as “the Jewish Chaplain” in a palliative care hospital. I have held High Holiday positions and also am a past president of Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains. I periodically teach at the Academy for Jewish Religion, a non-denominational rabbinical school. It’s important to me to have a firm foundation as a Jew and as a rabbi when I go into interfaith settings.

Q. What kinds of things are you doing with people of other religions?

A. 1. Chaplaincy: Since I was ordained in 1998, I have worked within the field of chaplaincy, which is inherently diverse. In the United States even though a person may focus on providing spiritual and religious care to people from his/her own religion, we are trained and required to be able to provide emotional and spiritual care from a humanistic perspective to people from all religious backgrounds, including non-religious. That doesn’t mean that we appropriate other religions’ rituals; we make referrals when they are needed. Through this work I organize educational programs for hospital staff and healthcare students about how to support people in their faith when hospitalized and how religion and spirituality impact people’s experience of illness, hospitalization, and medical decision-making.

2 Chaplaincy education: In addition to providing direct spiritual care to people from diverse backgrounds, I also teach Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) which is a one-hundred-year-old educational program for teaching clergy and seminary students pastoral counseling. It utilizes a case method as is common in medical and other healthcare training. It is a fairly standard internship requirement for students studying to become clergy in the United States. (In fact, I first learned about hospital chaplaincy through a required internship at the Jewish Theological Seminary.) I have had students from across the Jewish spectrum; I have had a particularly strong teaching engagement with two Modern Orthodox yeshivahs in New York City – Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (for men) and Yeshivat Maharat (for women).

Dialogue for local community building and peace-building: Board Member, Hudson County Brotherhood Sisterhood Association; Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Hudson County Chapter of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom; National Chair of Sadaqah-Tzedakah Day for the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom; Founder and Director of the Hudson County Teen Dialogue Initiative (for which I received a JTS Innovation Grant, a KAICIID grant, and an Islamic Relief USA grant). Through the KAICIID Fellowship, I have been able to do my own training in how specifically interfaith dialogue can contribute to conflict resolution.

Q. Why? What’s important about it? Why do you in particular (more than many others) feel it’s important?

A. Basically, engagement with people from other religions has the potential to save lives.

I once was asked the opposite question. After working at the Seeds of Peace summer camp (a program for teenagers from high conflict areas) I met up with a group of staff for a reunion in a restaurant in the village. These staff members ran conflict resolution programs, and most were teachers for the New York City Public Schools. Upon finding out I was studying to become a rabbi, one asked me, “Doesn’t religion fuel much of world conflict?” I gave him an ethical answer: “Then it is even more important to know from where we come, to be aware of our biases.” I had seen some people try to take an “objective third party” position in conflict, not realized how they too – all of us – have perspectives and carry biases.

But that explanation still blames religion for fueling conflict, which historically it did. However, over the past century, much more conflict has been fueled by nationalistic or ethnic conflict. Through my study as a Fellow in Interreligious Dialogue with KAICIID, I gained insight into the importance of (1) disentangling religion from nationalistic and other conflict and (2) leveraging religion for promoting peace. This is done through teaching texts from each religion that promote peace and humanize the other.

For me personally, I am working to integrate my work as a chaplain and my place in interreligious dialogue and peace-building. Caring for people emotionally, spiritually and religiously during times of difficulty and crisis is valuable in and of itself. When it happens between people from different backgrounds, it has possibility of transformation.

I’ll give an example. I work with a nurse who is Muslim who founded a non-profit organization to provide food during the month of Ramadan when it is traditional to fast for Muslim families at the hospital. Many have traveled from abroad for medical care. I met a family who are from a country in the Gulf States who were so amazing that not only Muslims, but also Jews and Christians were making sure they could observe Ramadan. They told me that sometimes people hesitate to travel during Ramadan because they don’t want to compromise their religious observance. This becomes a dilemma if they have a family member who urgently needs medical care that is not available in their home country. They told me that they will go back to their country and tell people that they could trust us. In this situation there was a very real impact on how cross-cultural/cross-religious care-giving built trust that helped ensure – or promote – receiving medical care. But I wonder also about other possible long-term effects – what happens when a person has an encounter

“Caring for people emotionally, spiritually and religiously during times of difficulty and crisis is valuable in and of itself. When it happens between people from different backgrounds, it has possibility of transformation.”
Q. Did some specific event provoke your decision to get to know members of other religions / Muslims especially?
The specific antagonism in the United States and in Europe toward Muslims creates an ethical responsibility.

Q. What do you personally get from these interactions? What have you learned? What has surprised you?
A. I have especially enjoyed the text study in interfaith dialogue contexts. These have included learning about the portrayal of Hagar and her relationships with Sarah and Abraham in the Muslim texts of the Quran and Haddith and in Christian feminist and womanist theology.

I recently participated in a symposium in Rome on “Gender, Faith and Culture” and heard one particular speaker discuss scholarship in jurisprudence and Sharia law and feminist approaches to religious legal studies.

Q. Does your work / interest in these issues result (in a positive or negative way) from your own Jewish studies / Jewish experience?
A. Judaism, like all religions, has texts that portray others and the encounter with the other in positive and inspiring ways and has texts that portray them in negative ways. Greater knowledge of one’s religion, and of Judaism for me, is empowering for being able to find guidance for living peacefully and knowing what and how to critique what is challenging.