Dearest Members and Friends,

If there is one president of the United States whose personality and character we are all intimately familiar with, it is undoubtedly the current incumbent. Between his incessant tweeting and the 24-hour news cycle, we are endlessly exposed to every facet of his temperament, and have been for years. And whether one is enthralled or appalled by what one knows of Donald Trump, we can all predict with great confidence how he will react in any given situation.

This was not true for previous presidents, with the possible exception of Richard Nixon. Presidential personas were generally press-generated caricatures or uneducated assumptions based on public appearances. Ronald Reagan was a jovial crowd-pleaser; Jimmy Carter was frugal, and a stickler for the rules; Gerald Ford was an incompetent ditherer. Possibly, but their real personalities were by-and-large hidden from public view.

What were they like as friends? As spouses? What made them laugh? What really ticked them off? These aspects were a mystery during their time at the helm, to be revealed much later in well-researched biographies. Although, in the case of Harry Truman, one notorious public outburst exposed a facet of his personality that was widely out-of-sync with public perception and generated a wave of negative reaction.

On December 5th, 1950, Truman’s only daughter Margaret sang before an audience of 3,500 people – including her father, who was president at the time – at Washington DC’s Constitution Hall. And although her singing talents were at best pedestrian, Margaret’s performance was greeted with rapturous applause, to her father’s deep delight and pleasure.

But the following day, a withering review appeared in the Washington Post, written by music critic, Paul Hume. “Miss Truman cannot sing very well,” he wrote, “she is flat a good deal of the time – more last night than at any time we have heard her in past years... [she] has not improved in the years we have heard her; she still cannot sing with anything approaching professional finish. She communicates almost nothing of the music she presents.”

An enraged Truman promptly dispatched a letter to Hume that one would imagine even his current successor would hesitate to post on Twitter. Writing on White House stationary, Truman thundered, “I’ve just read your lousy review of Margaret’s concert. I’ve come to the conclusion that you are an ‘eight ulcer man on four ulcer pay’. It seems to me that you are a frustrated old man who wishes he could have been successful. When you write such poppy-cock as was in the back section of the paper you work for it shows conclusively that you’re off the beam and at least four of your ulcers are at work. Someday I hope to meet you. When that happens, you’ll need a new nose, a lot of beefsteak for black eyes, and perhaps a supporter below! [Westbrook] Pegler, a gutter snipe, is a gentleman alongside you. I hope you’ll accept that statement as a worse insult than a reflection on your ancestry.”

The Washington Post dutifully reached out to Margaret Truman, who told them that her father could not possibly have sent this letter to Hume, and it had to be a forgery. But it was not a forgery, and the revelation was fierce. One Washington Post reader wrote that he considered Truman’s letter embarrassing proof of his ‘ungoverned temper’ and “gutter vocabulary”, while another worried openly about Truman’s “sole power of unleashing the atom bomb.” Yet another reader – an American living in Australia – viewed the letter as a national embarrassment, and asked: “How long must Americans living abroad be humiliated by such ill-chosen words and threats by the President?”

Almost no one championed the president for leaping to his daughter’s defense, even though the letter revealed a human side that should have been lauded as natural and instinctive. Truman was a hurt father going the extra mile for his child, even if it exposed him to ridicule and worse. Rather than bowing to convention, or the expected dignity of his position, Harry Truman had done what we should all do – he stood up passionately for the daughter he loved, revealing just how much he loved her, and how such love should move us to do something when the object of our love is threatened.

Toward the end of Balak and at the beginning of Pinchas (Num. 25) the Torah records a strange episode involving the prince of Simeon, who publicly engaged in an immoral act with a Midianite woman. Moses and the nation’s leadership are frozen in the face of this grave desecration of God’s name, despite the real danger – physical and spiritual – that this moral aberration posed for the nation as a whole. One man, Pinchas, witnessed both the act and the reaction, and decided to take matters into his own hands, assassinating the prince and his paramour in full view of the gathered crowd. God immediately informed Moses that Pinchas had saved the day, and awarded him the “covenant of peace” along with a permanent place in the priesthood.

The rabbis of the Midrash and Talmud struggle to justify Pinchas’ vigilante justice, but are rather more focused on the extra-judicial aspect than on the feelings that drove it. Later Commentaries do acknowledge his passionate feelings, but are at pains to isolate them to Pinchas, who is cited as a unique example of someone untainted by any kind of personal agenda.

But in my view, however, Pinchas’ visceral reaction as he witnessed the destruction of something he loved appears remarkably similar to the reaction of a parent seeing their child hurt or in danger. In that situation, all bets are off. The lesson of Pinchas, so dramatically underscored by God’s reaction, is for us to aim for a relationship with God that is buried deep within us. A meaningful relationship that transcends the transactional, mundane connection which for many God-believers is the only relationship they know. The reward for such a bond is, as we know from our children, immeasurable.

Wishing you Shabbat Shalom and a great week ahead, Rabbi Pini Dunner
Sisterhood Corner

The Sisterhood proudly presents the following upcoming events!

JULY

Beauty & Beasts: J. Paul Getty Center Museum Tour
Join Art Historian & Museum Educator Deborah B. Thompson for an engaging tour of the beautiful masterpieces in the Getty Center collection, including artwork by Rembrandt, Bernini, van Gogh, Monet, Cézanne, and many more!
Encounter magical creatures of golden manuscripts in the "Book of Beasts" exhibition, and stroll through the beautiful gardens for stunning, panoramic views of Los Angeles.

10:00am
Member: $20
Non-Member: $30
YP: $16
*Please ride-share; parking is an additional $20
Please RSVP!

Happy Birthday!
Evan Cohen
Victor Cohenca
Ethan Fialkov
Teddy Fogelman
Elie Gindi
Jeff Gross
Zalman Harari
Faye Kellerman
Amy Kestenbaum
Daniel Kohanbash
David Markowitz

PAUL FEDER z”l GEMARA SHIUR
Join Rabbi Dunner for his Gemara shiur on Shabbat morning 45 minutes before Shacharit.

EXPLORING HALACHA
Join Nati Baram every Shabbat afternoon 35 minutes before mincha as he explores an interesting topic of Jewish law with the aid of ancient and contemporary texts.

Happy Anniversary
Bill & Linda Levin
Barry & Annie Novack

SAVE THE DATE
Rav Stav
September 13-14
Scholar in Residence
TISHA B’AV
Sunday, August 11, 2019

Fast Begins: 7:46pm  Shachrit/Knotted: 8:00am  Mincha: 7:45pm  Maariv: 8:10pm

FILM SCREENING: AMNESIA
Film Begins at 6:30pm

AMNESIA combines the personal, political, and historical, tracing the horror of a pogrom committed against the Jewish residents of the Polish city of Kielce on the 4th of July, 1946. This atrocity was committed by their neighbors, fellow Poles of Kielce. This film seeks to gain some perspective on the Kielce Pogrom, an event that has been all but scrubbed from the history of Poland. The filmmaker searches for answers, even reflecting on his own family’s complicity (and perhaps more) in the event.

Our Synagogue has donated all the blankets that were put out as shawls at our Gala to Jewish Family Services Hope. The blankets are the size of baby blankets and will be given to all residents of the emergency domestic violence shelter. When the residents come to the shelters, all electronics are taken away from them for their safety. We were told that as a result, the residents tend to cling to comfort items, such as blankets, so this is very much needed and appreciated.

Jewish Family Services Hope has helped victims of intimate partner violence and breaks the cycle of violence and become empowered to move towards independence and self-sufficiency. They provide two crisis hotlines, two counseling Centers (Valley and Pico Robertson), and three residential shelters. They offer victims and their children a continuum of care, including counseling, case management, advocacy, referrals, housing assistance, and job readiness skills.

For more information, you can visit jfsla.org/hope

ISMRAEL HEADLINES
YINBH Beverly Hills Synagogue is now producing a weekly bulletin titled “Israel Headlines.” You will find them on the tables every Shabbat. The mission of “Israel Headlines” is to make Jews in the Diaspora aware of current events in Israel. Sponsorship for Israel Headlines is available for $100. If you are interested in sponsoring a weekly bulletin please email israelheadlines@gmail.com

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Young Israel of North Beverly Hills

Presents

High Holidays Discovery Concert

Get Inspired by the Music, Melodies, and Prayers of the Yamim Noraim

Sunday, September 8th | 12pm

Featuring

Rabbi Pini Dunner, Senior Rabbi
Professor Mark Kligman
Professor of Ethnomusicology and Musicology, UCLA
Cantor Netanel Baram
UCLA Chamber Orchestra
Rinat Shlomo Choir
Yavneh Boys Choir

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