

HaKol The Voice of the Pelham Jewish Center

December 2020 *Kislev/Tevet* 5781

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We all know that in the pantheon of Jewish holidays, Hanukkah is one of the least significant occasions (so much so that there are countless ways to spell its name in English). It is not a Torah-based holiday, it is not *Yom Tov*, with restrictions on work and travel, it does not have a tractate in the *Talmud* devoted to the laws of its observance.

We generally conclude that the importance of Hanukkah in our lives today comes from the prevalence of another holiday that lights up homes in our neighborhoods around this time every year.

However, there is a passage in the *Talmud* that challenges this minimization of Hanukkah in our lives. As part of a conversation about poverty, the question is raised as to what a person should do who can only afford to buy either wine for *Kiddush* or oil to light their *menorah*, not both.

The answer here seems obvious: Shabbat is the holiest moment of the week and takes precedence over every holiday other than *Yom Kippur*. *Kiddush*, which is a shorthand for קדושת היום – sanctification of the day – is the means by which we partner with God in declaring Shabbat to be holy and separate from the other days of the week. It should be intuitive that our ability to sanctify Shabbat takes precedence over the lighting of a lamp for Hanukkah.

However, the sage *Rava* proclaims that the Hanukkah flame is preferred because it is the way we publicize the miracle of Hanukkah. He is teaching us that it is more important to share the miracle, the light, and the celebration of Hanukkah than to sanctify Shabbat. This is shocking, that it is more important to celebrate a holiday that doesn't make it into the Bible, rather than acknowledge God and the day of rest proclaimed at the conclusion of Creation and in the Ten Commandments!

It teaches us that in times when it is dark – literally or metaphorically – it is our

responsibility to bring light into the world, and to share it with all those around us. This is the most important thing that we can do in difficult times. This year, more than ever, we need to take this lesson to heart and seize every opportunity to bring light into our lives and the lives of our entire community.

Alex

Education Director's Message



Mi Yimale!? Who can retell?

Who can retell the things that befell us,
who can count them?

In every age, a hero or sage came to our aid.

Shm'a (listen!)

At this time of year in days of yore,
Maccabees the Temple did restore,
and today we sing a song of praise
to the heroes of our days.

(Folk Hanukkah song)

Since we started talking about how to celebrate Hanukkah this year at the Learning Center, I kept thinking about how Hanukkah celebrations here in the US are so different from those in Israel. Perhaps we can trace the difference to the different roles the Jewish community plays in Israel and in the Diaspora.

Many years ago, I was trained to be a Kindergarten-Elementary school teacher at the “*Hakibbutzim* Teachers’ College” in Tel Aviv. Our professors addressed the heroism of the Maccabee Revolt in 164 BCE as the main concept to be taught during Hanukkah. Likewise, the country echoes that idea by incorporating the historical iconography to visible sites around Israel. For example, many streets in different cities in Israel are named “*Yehuda Ha-Maccabee*”, in honor of *Judah Maccabee*, the leader of the revolt. The name *Maccabee* became a synonym of physical strength and fitness. Every Israeli town has its *Maccabee* sports team. Israel also publishes Judah Maccabee’s imagery, though no one really knows his likeness, in stamps, coins, and more.

Going back to how we were directed to teach the story of Hanukkah in Israeli schools, there wasn’t much emphasis on the miracle of the oil, in contrast with what we teach in the Diaspora. The true miracle, as per the Israeli ethos, was the victory of the few over the many. The miracle of reclaiming and restoring Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel. We taught stories and sang songs that continuously instilled those concepts into our students’ hearts and minds. Needless to say, those were the same students that later would join the IDF at

the age of 18. These are the students that would often need to face existential threats while serving in the army or as civilians when missiles and rockets flew over their homes in Israeli cities. It was clear to me at that time and more clear now why Hanukkah stories and songs in Israel always stressed the miracle of Jewish survival, the miracle of the struggle to keep Jewish life alive in the land of Israel- *Nes Gadol Haya Po*-“a great miracle happened here”.

When I moved with my family to the US and started teaching here, I understood that the songs we sang in Israel were not familiar, not popular, and did not make any sense in the cultural life of the local Jewish community. In the Diaspora, our sages emphasized the miracle of a small jar of oil that was enough to light the *Menorah* in the Temple for eight nights. Many songs are about the latkes, the dreidel, and the candles in the *Hanukkiah*. No one needs to sing about the few against the many, about fighting away an empire. The emphasis is on keeping and shining the bright light of Judaism. Keeping our Jewish identity and spreading the humanistic ideas of Judaism in the places where Jewish communities live, away from Israel. Thus, “a great miracle happened there”, *Nes Gadol Haya Sham* - there, far away, to those who once lived there. It's not about us here. It's about there.

This year, since the pandemic touched every ounce of our “normal” life, and as we struggle to keep our routines, I look on fearfully as our beautiful Learning Center, a place of joyous and vibrant Jewish learning, our collective work of love has fewer and fewer voices echoing within its walls. It is as if the pandemic slowly resembled that historic Seleucid threat, from which we are trying to physically survive, but also, keep alive the flame of our traditions. And the songs we sang with our students in Israel, those that told about the strength of the Maccabees and the power of the few against the many, the powerless against the powerful, started to resonate stronger and stronger with me.

The example and the ethos of the Maccabees were strong enough to resonate with the fighters of *Bar-Kochba* many years after 164 BCE, with the Ghetto and the partisan fighters during WWII, with the *halutzim*, the pioneer founders of Israel, the soldiers of the Israeli wars, and still inspire us today. That's the magic power of our stories. They strengthen our ability to cope and help us believe that this too, shall pass. They give us a reason to hang in there, to hold our spirits high and keep the hope alive.

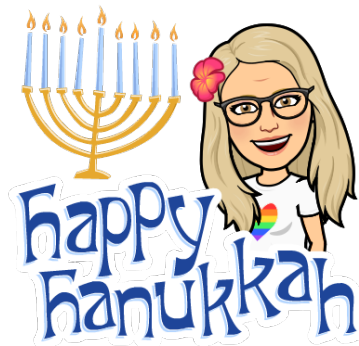
At the Learning Center this year, we focused our Hanukkah learning on the idea of who is a hero and challenged our students to reflect on who are the heroes of their times. Different classes chose different heroes to honor when we light the *Hanukkiah* and families shared videos telling about their heroes. Here is a [link](#) to a video we made with contributions from different families.

As we enter the 10th month of this pandemic, almost a whole year of Jewish and personal life celebrations apart from each other, may we continue to be inspired and strengthened by the deeds of those who came before us, and may we inspire the future generations by our ability to cope, and find creative ways to keep our traditions despite adversity. May the miracles of our forefathers continue to serve as a lighthouse to keep us stepping forward, keeping our chins high and hope in our hearts and minds.

Wishing each one of you a joyous and meaningful Hanukkah. May G-d keep you and protect you; May He shine His light on you and your loved ones.

Chag Hanukkah Sameach

Ana



President's Message

Friends,

As we begin to see the horizon brightening in the dawn, so are we preparing to resume more normal life at the PJC - - recognizing that there will be a new day. Though it may be hard to tell from our individual vantage points, we weathered the dark night of the virus well and intact. Our membership has remained stable and our finances, though “dinged” by the pandemic, are only moderately affected.

Religious life has metamorphosed into a new Zoom format, with Jack Klebanow creating a truly beautiful and participatory *Shacharit* service. The musicality is his gift to us, and I expect many aspects of this service, will be carried forward into our sanctuary once we can reassemble together, hopefully before Memorial Day.

I will not say anything about the Rabbinic search since Darren Lee has updated us all on the organization and progress that has been made to date. You will

appreciate the email he sent out to the entire congregation.

On a side note, I was very impressed by the quality of our programs and of our young members lately. The recent book talk on *Spies of No Country* by Matti Friedman was informative, lively and absolutely worth the time spent.

Also, hats off to Madison Cohen who presented a video and discussion on a summer project through the Hartmann Institute called “Reflection on Jewish Peoplehood”. She sparked a lively and thoughtful discussion on the issues and made me proud that she is a member of our community.

So to sum it up, we are ok, have new ideas, a strong community and cannot wait to reopen our doors.

David

A Message from the Editor of *Hakol*



Dear Friends,

Hanukkah celebrates the Maccabees cleansing and rededication of the Temple that the Syrian-Greek King, Antiochus, had desecrated and its return as the place of worship for the Jewish people. This *Hanukkah* we can rededicate ourselves to our PJC community and take pride in all we have accomplished. Although we will be celebrating the Festival of Lights in our separate spaces, we are fortunate to be able to Zoom into each others homes to light the *chanukkiyah* and rejoice together. Our gratitude goes out to all who shed light into the darkness of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On each of the **Eight Crazy Nights** we will offer a different way to bring light into our community. And, at 5:00 p.m. some of us can gather together on the PJC lawn to watch the lighting of the Pelham Jewish Center *chanukkiyah*.

This is the last issue of *HaKol* for 2020. It is my hope that 2021 will be filled with light and joy.

I wish you all a healthy, joyful and memorable holiday.

Barbara

High Holiday Fundraiser Liz Tzetzso, Chair



Dear Pelham Jewish Center members,

Thank you for your generous pledges during our 5781 High Holiday campaign. Because of your support in this unprecedented year, we were able to match our donations from last year, which is a testament to the love and respect we all have for our community. To

access a list of this year's contributors, please click [here](#).

Liz Tzetzso

December Book Notes

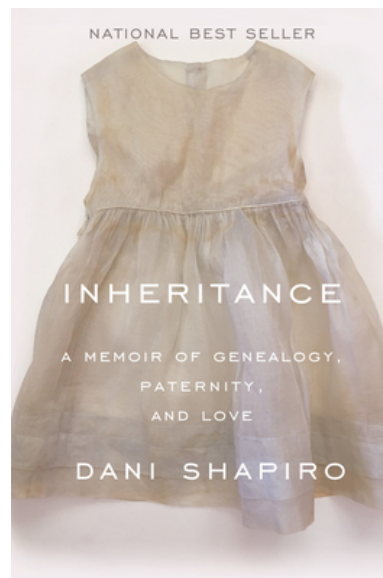
Inheritance

A Memoir of Paternity, Inheritance and Love
by Dani Shapiro

Imagine learning as an adult, from a DNA kit, that your father *is not your father*? This actually happened to the author, Dani Shapiro.

Shapiro grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family with famous rabbis in her paternal ancestry. She went to a Jewish Day School, was *Bat Mitzvah* and lived most of her life as an Orthodox Jew. How could her genetic make up describe her as only half Jewish?

Dani's world implodes. She goes on a quest to discover what she can about her biological father. She uncovers family secrets she would rather not know



and wonders if the father she grew up with and adored "knew" she was not really his daughter. Dani's struggle to reinterpret her identity and reconcile her life as the daughter of two vastly different fathers is the meat of this memoir.

Inheritance reads like a mystery. You will want to accompany Dani Shapiro on her journey of self-discovery.

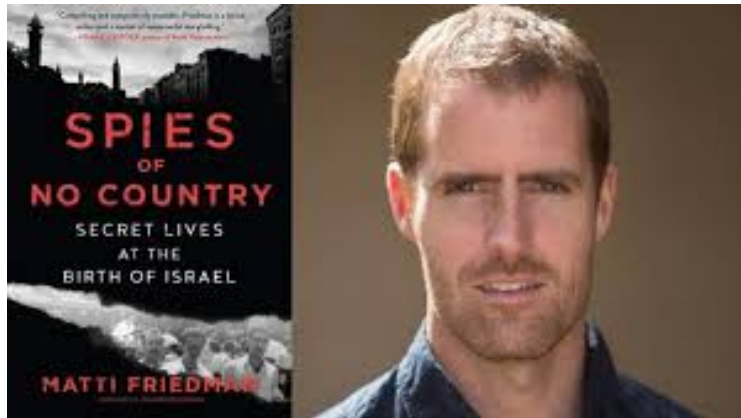
Barbara

Author Matti Friedman Speaks At The PJC Book Group

Spies of No Country

Secret Lives At the Birth
of Israel

by Matti Friedman



We were honored to have the author and journalist, Matti Friedman, speak at the November Book Group from Jerusalem. Thank you Ana Turkienicz for making this *shidduch* happen. There were 19 participants on our Zoom meeting, each of whom said they learned something new about Israeli society from the questions and answers.

Matti is a wonderful speaker, with a treasure trove of knowledge about the founding of Israel and the direction the society is taking. All of our participants were fascinated by his thoughtful and honest answers to our questions.

According to Friedman, today's Israel looks very different from Herzl's European dream. Half the population is made up of Jews from Arab lands. *Mizrahi* culture is dominant. Friedman told us that the biggest mistake the pioneers made was condescending to the Jews of Arab nations and pushing them to the fringes of society, rather than exploring their knowledge of the Arabic mindset and Middle Eastern culture.

Asked about the Palmach's refusal to consider the evaluation of the spies that - "Israel's unwilling neighbors were never going to accept this defeat (1948) by a minority in their own territory", Friedman replied that Jews from Arab lands were not taken seriously. The follow up question, "Are we still fighting the 1948

war?" was responded to with a resounding, "Yes."

When asked what gives him hope of a brighter future, Friedman said that negotiations with Israel's Arab neighbors can only be helped by the influence of Jews from Arab lands.

Barbara

Food for Thought

Jacob and the Angel

Before sunrise she groaned, caught him
and grasped thus, won him.
And he caught her thus, too, winning
so that both knew such holding
came to death.

They were beyond introducing, past names.

But at dawn, with first light
he saw her body,
still white
in the places the bathing suit covered,
yesterday.

Then, the sudden call for her
from upstairs, twice,
the way a girl's called in from play
outside

so that he knew her name
and he let her go.

-- Yehuda Amichai (1962)

Share a *Simcha*

simcha!

"Share a *Simcha*" allows congregants to share their news with our PJC community. Please submit news about family members -- engagements, births, job updates, kid achievements, community acknowledgements and any other milestones -- to our Communications Director, **Barbara Saunders-Adams**.

- **Mazel Tov** to **Neco & Ana Turkienicz**, on the occasion of their **38th Wedding Anniversary**.
- **Mazel Tov** to **Catherine Levene** on her promotion to **President of the National Media Group at Meredith**.

This will continue to be a regular *HaKol* feature, so keep your news and updates coming!

Tributes & Donations



Did you know you can make tributes and donations online? [Click here to learn more.](#)

Donations to the PJC from...

- Martin Dvorkin, in honor of Michael & Michelle Dvorkin
- Wendy Prince & Marc Shepherd, in support of the December 27th Jewish Genealogy Workshop
- Barbara Saunders-Adams, in memory of the *Yahrzeits* of her parents, Charles & Selma Saunders
- Gary & Evelyn Trachten, in memory of Alfred & Shelley Klein's son, Robert

At any time, if you wish to pay by check, please make it payable to "**The Pelham Jewish Center**" and mail it to our bookkeeping firm at: The Pelham Jewish Center, P.O. Box 418, Montvale, NJ 07645.

All donations to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund, at any time throughout the year, should be made payable to "**The Pelham Jewish Center -- Rabbi's Discretionary Fund**" and mailed directly to Julia Coss at the PJC office. Thank you!

