

MY JEWISH JOURNEY

Angelo Verga

I don't remember a time when I didn't know my mother was Jewish and came from a Ukrainian Jewish family. And even though my maternal aunts sprinkled their conversations with Yiddish, I was sent to Catholic schools. As they say on Facebook: It's complicated. My mother was estranged from her parents and from Judaism. I never had a childhood Passover seder meal. The Haggadah was unknown to me. We did eat matzah brei occasionally for breakfast because my Sicilian American dad liked how it tasted, especially combined with a slab or two of bacon. Have I mentioned that my childhood was a mishmash? My mother made prune butter hamantaschen in the spring and called them triangle cookies.

While I didn't really know exactly what it meant to be Jewish, even though I was raised as a Catholic, I did know that I was a Jew. By the sixth grade I read and identified with Primo Levi, the only Italian Jew I knew about. As a young adult I read the Hebrew Bible as literature, and found it to be a great book, full of great stories, and amazing characters, indeed, whole

families of them; seemingly written in a variety of styles and containing passages of poetry that moved me.

While I hadn't yet "come out as a Jew," I attended and even co-hosted a few seder meals together with my Jewish second wife, her Conservadox family, and a few Jewish neighbors, various and sundry friends. It was as an adult that I began to learn what Passover was about. The themes of oppression, resistance, freedom, the rituals of the seder, questions, discussions, the cups of wine, all appealed to my long-standing leftist political associations, and my sense that community and solidarity were essential for anything good to be accomplished in a difficult, often hostile, world.

Then I met a charismatic rabbi; I know what you are thinking, no, not Rabbi Buchwald, he was waiting somewhere in the future, still unknown to me. The charismatic rabbi I met was Rabbi Sarah, a woman with whom I became friends because we shared a strong interest in poetry. Over the course of years and through the twists and turns of our hearts seeking completion in each other, Sarah and I became partners in life.

Through my life with a religious, Zionist woman I became immersed in Jewish holidays, her family gatherings, and the important Friday night rituals of blessing the wine, blessing male and female children, washing of hands, blessing the bread, and the Shabbat songs she sang beautifully after we had eaten. Sarah gave me a Hebrew primer which I studied just like kids in grade Aleph do (it had illustrative drawings!), and slowly and with much effort I learned

to recognize Hebrew letters and to pronounce the sounds they make.

We went to *Kabbalat Shabbat* and Shabbat morning services at a number of Upper West Side synagogues, but I found it very difficult to follow in my baby Hebrew, and the underlying structure of the service was largely lost on me. Still the singing appealed to me greatly and I learned some of the melodies well enough to hum them to myself between Saturdays.

At kiddush meals sometimes my first name attracted blank stares or questions about how an "Angelo" came to be Jewish. But

most congregants were welcoming, and it was at a birthday of a friend whom we met at kiddush that I finally met Rabbi Buchwald. I was taken by his Bronx accent, his Catskill sense of humor, and his commitment to help aspiring converts and those like myself who were underdeveloped as Jews to learn and grow. I started attending the Beginners Service at Lincoln Square Synagogue, and through the

National Jewish Outreach Program Hebrew classes began a more systematic and communal study of Hebrew.

Again it took time, but I became more comfortable with the Hebrew alphabet and could arduously sound out the Amidah, also learning when and how to bow while praying.

I became bar mitzvah on Simchat Torah 2017 when I received an *aliyah* and chanted Torah. The *bencher* I received that day with my name on it is one of my most prized possessions. Finally, I became a Jewish adult! My maternal grandfather Chaim Gerber, who I barely knew, must be kvelling. Even now, as I write this, I'm tearing up a bit. My Jewish journey, my personal exile hasn't been easy or quick.

For the last few years I have helped Sarah in bringing Passover seders and services to an assisted living facility in Albany, NY, where residents and their families can join with the entire Jewish People in our journey away from bondage to the freedom to be a nation and worship as my ancestors did. It means so much to me to be a part of this, to claim my delayed birthright and to fully own my Jewishness.

Angelo Malachi Yosef Verga has appeared in over 150 poetry publications; he is widely anthologized and has been translated into a dozen languages. His seventh and most recent book is Long & Short, including The Street in Your Head (2016), which can be purchased @Amazon.com.



SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Fri April 3, 2020 - 9th of Nissan

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Candle Lighting 7:06 PM
Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:10 PM

Sat April 4, 2020 - 10th of Nissan**Tzav - Shabbat Hagadol**

Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Beginners Service 9:15 AM
Mincha 6:40 PM
Shabbat Hagadol Drasha 7:05 PM
Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:08 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:15 PM

Tues April 7, 2020 - 13th of Nissan

Morning Services 7:10 & 8:30 AM
Bedikat Chametz after 8:00 PM

Wed April 8, 2020 - 14th of Nissan**EREV PESACH, TA'ANIT BECHORIM**

Morning Services with Siyum 6:30 AM
Latest time to eat Chametz 10:47 AM
Latest time to burn Chametz 11:11 AM
Candle Lighting 7:11 PM
Mincha/Maariv 7:20 PM
Begin Seder after 8:01 PM

Thurs April 9, 2020 - 15th of Nissan**PESACH**

Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
Mincha 7:20 PM
Candle Lighting 8:12 PM
Maariv/Start Seder after 8:13 PM

Fri April 10, 2020 - 16th of Nissan**2nd DAY PESACH**

Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
Candle Lighting 7:13 PM

Sat April 11, 2020 - 17th of Nissan**CHOL HAMOED PESACH**

Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
Mincha 7:00 PM
Ma'ariv/Havdalah 8:15 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:25 PM

Sun April 12, 2020 - 18th of Nissan**CHOL HAMOED PESACH**

Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM
Mincha/Maariv 7:20 PM

Mon April 13, 2020 - 19th of Nissan**CHOL HAMOED PESACH**

Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM
Mincha/Maariv 7:25 PM

Tues April 14, 2020 - 20th of Nissan**CHOL HAMOED PESACH**

Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 AM
Candle Lighting 7:18 PM
Mincha/Maariv 7:25 PM

Wed April 15, 2020 - 21st of Nissan**7th DAY PESACH**

Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
Candle Lighting 8:18 PM
Mincha/Maariv 7:25 PM

Thurs April 16, 2020 - 22nd of Nissan**8th DAY PESACH - Yizkor**

Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
Mincha 7:25 PM
Ma'ariv/Yom Tov ends 8:20 PM

Fri April 17, 2020 - 23rd of Nissan

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting 6:15 PM
Regular Candle Lighting 7:21 PM
Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:25 PM

Sat April 18, 2020 - 24th of Nissan**Shmini**

Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Beginners Service 9:15 AM
Beginners Mishnayot 5:25 PM
Bible Class 6:10 PM
Mincha 7:10 PM
Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:22 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:30 PM

Fri April 24, 2020 - 30th of Nissan**ROSH CHODESH**

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting 6:21 PM
Regular Candle Lighting 7:28 PM
Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:30 PM

Sat April 25, 2020 - 1st of Iyar**ROSH CHODESH****Tazria-Metzora**

Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Beginners Service 9:15 AM
Beginners Mishnayot 5:45 PM
Bible Class 6:15 PM
Mincha 7:15 PM
Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:30 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:40 PM

Wed April 29, 2020 - 5th of Iyar**YOM HA'ATZMA'UT**

Morning Services 7:00 & 7:50 AM

Fri May 1, 2020 - 7th of Iyar

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting 6:26 PM
Regular Candle Lighting 7:35 PM
Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:40 PM

Sat May 2, 2020 - 8th of Iyar**Achrei Mot-Kedoshim**

Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM

Beginners Service 9:15 AM
Beginners Luncheon 12:30 PM
Beginners Mishnayot 5:35 PM
Bible Class 6:20 PM
Mincha 7:20 PM
Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:37 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:45 PM

Fri May 8, 2020 - 14th of Iyar

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting 6:32 PM
Regular Candle Lighting 7:43 PM
Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:45 PM

Sat May 9, 2020 - 13th of Iyar**Emor**

Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Beginners Service 9:15 AM
Beginners Mishnayot 6:00 PM
Bible Class 6:30 PM
Mincha 7:30 PM
Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:44 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 7:55 PM

Tues May 12, 2020 - 18th of Iyar**LAG B'OMER**

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM

Fri May 15, 2020 - 21st of Iyar

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting 6:37 PM
Regular Candle Lighting 7:49 PM
Mincha 7:55 PM

Sat May 16, 2020 - 22nd of Iyar**Behar-Bechukotai**

Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Beginners Service 9:15 AM
Beginners Mishnayot 6:05 PM
Bible Class 6:35 PM
Mincha 7:35 PM
Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:51 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 8:00 PM

Fri May 22, 2020 - 28th of Iyar**YOM YERUSHALAYIM**

Morning Services 7:10 & 7:50 AM
Candle Lighting 7:56 PM
Mincha 8:05 PM

Sat May 23, 2020 - 29th of Iyar**Bamidbar**

Morning Services 7:45, 9:00 & 9:45 AM
Beginners Service 9:15 AM
Beginners Mishnayot 6:15 PM
Bible Class 6:45 PM
Mincha 7:45 PM
Ma'ariv/Shabbat ends 8:57 PM
Daily Mincha & Ma'ariv 8:05 PM

Sun May 24, 2020 - 1st of Sivan**ROSH CHODESH**

Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM

Mon May 25, 2020 - 2nd of Sivan**MEMORIAL DAY**

Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 AM

Thurs May 28, 2020 - 5th of Sivan**EREV SHAVUOT**

Morning Services 7:00 & 7:50 AM
Earliest Candle Lighting 6:32 PM
Regular Candle Lighting 8:01 PM
Mincha/Maariv 8:10 PM
Beginners Shavuot Learn-In 12:00 AM

Fri May 29, 2020 - 6th of Sivan**1st DAY SHAVUOT**

Morning Services 7:00 & 9:00 AM
Book of Ruth 6:05 PM
Early Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat 7:05 PM
Light Candles 8:02 PM
Mincha/Maariv 8:10 PM

Sat May 30, 2020 - 7th of Sivan**2nd DAY SHAVUOT Yizkor**

Morning Services 8:00 & 9:00 AM
Book of Ruth 6:55 PM
Mincha 7:55 PM
Ma'ariv/Yom Tov ends 9:03 PM

SAVE THE DATE**Beginners Shabbat Luncheons**

Sat, 12:30 PM - \$25

May 2, June 6

Beginners Shmooze - Free

Mon, May 4, 8:15 PM

All Night Shavuot Learn-a-thon

Fri, May 29, 12:00 AM - 7:00 AM

DAVID SIMONS

We are all saddened by the sudden and unexpected passing of David Simons at age 83, one of the most "colorful" personalities at the Beginners Service. While not everyone always agreed with his strong political opinions, we all admired his strong convictions and devotion to the Jewish people. May his memory be a blessing to all.

CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

ENGAGEMENTS

Ilana Ruminov and Yisroel Meir Ashin

Mazal Tov to parents, Yehudis and Moshe Ashin

Halleli (Haley) Chapman and Aaron Ishida

Sara Kaweblum and Benzion Kahan

Mazal Tov to mother, Nina Kaweblum

Devorah Haller and Daniel Kaufman

MARRIAGES

Jessica Fleisch and Brian Lissak

Mazal Tov to father, Aviel Fleisch

BIRTHS

Jenna Nelson and Lev Beltser on the birth of a

daughter, Bina

Yehudis and Tani Einzig on the birth of a son,

Rafael Yosef Tzvi

Mazal Tov to grandparents, Loren and Reuven Adler

Mazal Tov to great-grandparents,

Sarah Leah and Lou Vynerib

Malkah (Monica) Mayoral on the birth of daughters,

Isabela Marie and Catalina Lourdes

BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Nava Miriam Bousbib

Mazal Tov to parents,

Polly and Gabriel Bousbib

Michael Benjamin Hoffen

Mazal Tov to parents,

Sandra and Howard Hoffen

Tzvi Aryeh Kaweblum

Mazal Tov to mother, Nina Kaweblum

Aaron and Joshua Mitchell

Mazal Tov to parents,

Rabia and Oliver Mitchell

Daniel Wagman

Mazal Tov to parents,

Adina and Philip Wagman

CONDOLENCES

Dr. Janice Bennett, on the loss of her mother,

Annette Fay Parnas Drandell

Dr. David Fox, on the loss of his mother,

Vicki Fox

Steve Gerber, on the loss of his mother,

Mildred Gerber



Cody Simons on the loss of his father,

David Simons

Bill Witkin, on the loss of his mother,

Mildred (Mitzi) Witkin

SPEEDY RECOVERY/REFUAH SH'LAIMA

Geraldine Katz, *Gershona Yehudit bat Rochel*

Ruth Nelkin, *Rochel bat Sarah*

Barbara Reader, *Baila bat Clarissa*

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Reich,

Mordechai Menashe ben Henya Ruchama

Louis Vynerib, *Elazar HaCohen ben Malka*

Bill Witkin, *Ze'ev Velvel ben Michlah*

CONGRATULATIONS

Yona and Dr. Steven Lazar

on being honored at NJOP's 32nd Annual Dinner

Anat and Dr. Gabriel Levi

on being honored at NJOP's 32nd Annual Dinner

TODAH RABBAH

Thank you to Megan Messina for writing and directing the

Purim Play and thank you to all the wonderful actors

(Shpielers)