

THOUGHTS ON THE BETH ISRAEL HOSTAGE TAKING: ELI RUBENSTEIN

As I am writing these words, the headlines are dominated by the dramatic events that just unfolded in Texas, where a Rabbi and his 3 congregants were able to escape the Beth Israel synagogue after being held hostage for some 11 hours.

These events, like the tragic massacre of congregants in the Pittsburgh synagogue a few years ago, foster a deep sense of insecurity for Jewish communities around the world.

They are also a reminder of the fundamental irrationality of antisemitism. This age old disease can come from the extreme right, the extreme left, from white Christian nationalists to Islamic extremists, and even from the moderate left or right. Jews can be accused of being too weak or too strong, too foolish or too smart, greedy capitalists or arch communists, fabricators of an imagined Holocaust, or bemoaned because of the fact that "Hitler did not finish what he started".

How do we respond? Both internally and externally. By internally, I mean we cannot be naive about this age-old phenomenon or be lulled into a false sense of complacency even in more benign times. It does not take much to ignite the fire and spark a rise in antisemitism, as we have seen during recent conflicts in the Middle East. I am always reminded of the German Jew who arrived at the train station during WWII awaiting deportation wearing the medals he received fighting for Germany in WWI, believing that would still save him. A naive belief in the goodness of humanity or expecting gratitude for past contributions will not save the Jewish people.

One of the more interesting take aways from the Beth Israel hostage-taking event, was to what Rabbi Cytron-Walker attributed the successful ending to the crisis.

He told the news media that he waited for the right moment before throwing a chair at the assailant -- buying enough time for himself and two others to run out. "Over the years, my congregation and I have participated in multiple security courses from the Colleyville Police Department, the FBI, the Anti-Defamation League, and Secure Community Network," Cytron-Walker said in the written statement. "We are alive today because of that education."

Perhaps that is something Jewish communities around the world should consider as well.

How do we respond externally? Again, Rabbi Cytron-Walker provides us with guidance. As numerous media outlets reported, the rabbi is an interfaith champion "with deep-rooted friendships" among Christians and Muslims. According to Religion News Service: "Those friendships were evident in the command center set up at Good Shepherd Catholic Community nearby, where a group of rabbis, imams and pastors helped FBI teams negotiate with the hostage-taker. The team included Bob Roberts Jr., pastor of Northwood Church and co-founder of the Multi-Faith Neighbours Network; Imam Omar Suleiman, president of Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research; Azhar Azeez, a former president of the Islamic Society of North America and others.

THOUGHTS FROM ELI RUBENSTEIN: (CONT.)

Rabbi Cytron-Walker hosted the imam and members of a nearby mosque, and members of his Congregation Beth Israel celebrated iftar dinners during Ramadan with Muslim neighbours.

In the service he led on Jan, 17th, Martin Luther King Day in the US, Rabbi Cytron-Walker quoted the venerated civil rights activist: "Without love, there's no reason to know anyone. For love will in the end connect us to our neighbours, our children and our hearts."

Thus, we have two messages from Rabbi Cytron-Walker don't let our guard down, strengthen ourselves internally, but keep reaching out to others of good faith, keep building bridges with all of our neighbours.

This year, coincidentally, Jan. 17th, was Raoul Wallenberg Day in Canada. In 1985, the Government of Canada designated Wallenberg its first honorary citizen, and in 2001, named January 17 – the day of his disappearance in 1945 – as Raoul Wallenberg Day. In marking this day, PM Justin Trudeau noted that during WWII :“...over the course of six months, Mr. Wallenberg saved more Jews from the Holocaust than any other individual, group, or government”.

Raoul Wallenberg and his inspiring legacy remind us that while the Jewish people face many enemies, we also have allies outside our community whose heroism and courage give us hope in humanity.

Let me close with the eloquent words of Professor Irwin Cotler:

“Raoul Wallenberg Commemorative Day - taking place amongst the international drumbeat of evil and indifference today - reminds us that one person with integrity, commitment, and courage can make a difference. May today not only be an act of remembrance, but a remembrance to always act.”

RECENT UPDATES:

As we begin a new secular year at Habonim, I would like to share with you a few new developments.

Rabbi Cantor Aviva Rajskey

Our beloved Cantor and my dear friend and colleague, Aviva Rajskey, now has a new title to add to her name: that of Rabbi, having successfully completed all her course work and studies and graduated from her rabbinical program this past December. I am so thrilled for this important milestone in Aviva's life, and look forward to seeing her use her new skills in the service of our congregation. Aviva (now Rabbi Aviva) has been with us for over 10 years, and as many of you know has already effectively served in a pastoral role for so many of our members during weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs, funerals, unveilings, baby namings etc, so this is a very natural step for her. We'll have much more to say about this exciting new development in the coming

months, please see our President's note below as well. Oh, and for those who may be worried, Aviva will continue in her role as Cantor, so we will not miss out on any of her beautiful singing and no, I will not be undertaking any cantorial studies or duties.

Avrum Rosensweig Weekly Torah Study Class

Avrum Rosensweig has graciously agreed to welcome Congregation Habonim members to his weekly Parsha discussion held on Zoom on Thursdays at 8pm. I encourage you all to consider joining Avrum for his weekly one hour dose of eloquence, wisdom and insight as Avrum applies the lessons of the weekly Parsha to contemporary life, all through his passionate Tikkun Olam lens. I hope to join Avrum for some of his sessions, but he alone is good enough reason to attend!

Susan Kendal's Personal Journey with Grief

In the coming months, Habonim member Susan Kendal, will share with us her personal journey with grief and how she can help others going through a similar experience. While this is a difficult and challenging topic it is a necessary one, one that we too often avoid. As the quote goes, "What is unmentionable is unmanageable" and an honest, open conversation about grief and the mourning process, can ultimately provide a measure of comfort for a path that all of us one day must tread upon.

Living Jewish Wisdom Course

In 2022, Habonim will be home to the Living Jewish Wisdom program, designed for those interested in conversion or those in an interfaith relationship who would like to know more about Judaism.

The Living Jewish Wisdom course was created over a decade ago by Eli Rubenstein and Rabbi Yossi Sapirman. They were joined a number of years later by Rabbi Miriam Margles of the Danforth Jewish Circle. Together, they lead Canada's only multi-denominational course for those looking to explore their journey into Judaism.

The course's outstanding instructors also include:

Rabbi Aaron Levy – Makom
Rabbi Jarrod Grover – Beth Tikvah Synagogue
Shayna Kravetz – Jewish Educator
Rabbi Louis Sachs – Beth Tikvah Synagogue
Rabbi Lori Cohen – Temple Shalom, Waterloo
Avrum Rosensweig – Jewish Educator
Rabbi Cantor Aviva Rajskey – Congregation Habonim

The instructors' backgrounds span the major Jewish denominations - Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist - providing students with a diverse and pluralistic approach to Jewish wisdom, life and learning.

For more information, please see <http://livingjewishwisdom.org/> or contact Roseanne Mason roseannemason@hotmail.com



FROM OUR PRESIDENT

It will probably surprise Eli to hear this, but he has been one of my most regular sources of information and entertainment during the pandemic. While to some this would indicate that I need to expand my social circle, to me it reveals how lucky I am to be on Eli's "speed dial" (if that were still a thing). In addition to being brilliant and learned and having a great sense of humour, Eli is a treasure chest of knowledge. I consider myself somewhat scholarly but whenever he asks if I am familiar with a particular fact, person or event in history, and I sheepishly answer no, he humbly and patiently enlightens me. His mastery of all things Jewish is not limited to the biblical texts. It most definitely crosses over to the secular, and in fact can sometimes be quite obscure. So when I recently clicked on one of the links that Eli sent me, I found myself perusing articles on the Aish website that I wouldn't normally stumble upon. One of these caught my attention because it highlighted the incredibly talented Leonard Cohen.

The article was written around Hanukah in 2016 at the time of Leonard Cohen's death, but resonates loudly in 2022. The author Ilana Kendel, who I am quoting here, recalls as a child discovering in Leonard Cohen a poet who reminded us that "there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in". The world might be deeply imperfect, but that didn't mean it was bad. She goes on to say "As Jews, we don't run away from the struggle; we face it head on... We know that the human experience will inevitably contain moments of darkness. Even when the prospective pain is unfathomable, we show up."

According to the author, that is the Jewish soul – to find ourselves in a world steeped in darkness and stay awake to our reality. "To read of unthinkable destruction and experience our own "I can't go on" moments and continue to say "Hineni, here I am." When the world is busy numbing out, trying to forget or at least take the edge off, we can choose to stay awake; even if, and especially when, reality is painful." If this doesn't speak to our collective experience over the last 2 years, I don't know what does.

But it is not enough to just show up to the darkness she says, our mission is to find the light and a reason for hope. Cohen demonstrated that same Jewish ability to show up to the darkness in his last album "You Want it Darker", released just weeks before his death. In the haunting song of the same title, with backup from the cantor and choir of his childhood synagogue in Montreal, he sings "Hineni, Hineni, I'm ready my Lord". And in describing the inspiration for creating "Hallelujah" Cohen said, "I wanted to stand with those who clearly see God's holy broken world for

what it is, and still find the courage or the heart to praise it." The author says, "In a time of deep darkness and confusion, it is easy to run away. But there is a light that is calling to us. We all have our own "single jug of pure olive oil." The place in ourselves where we don't have enough - money, love, energy or hope – and that's when we need to find the courage to keep on going, to find a cause to praise. It's not about denying the difficulties; it's about discovering goodness hiding in their wake."

So what is the goodness that I see hiding in the wake of all the difficulties of the past 2 years? One is the strength and courage that Eli has shown throughout his illness and continued recovery. And the second is the "showing up" that I have witnessed amongst all of our clergy – Eli, Aviva, Noam, Kim and Ilyse – in the many moments of darkness and confusion. We are so fortunate to have such an incredible team of dedicated and talented clergy who work collaboratively to enrich the lives of our members as well as the broader communities they serve, and for that I am grateful.

I want to highlight a particular light, and that is the very recent ordination of our Senior Cantor Aviva Rajskey. Over the last 12 months Aviva has been enrolled in the Rabbinical Studies program at the Jewish Spiritual Leaders Institute (JSLI) in NY, a transdenominational institute which welcomes students from all Jewish denominations. Aviva worked incredibly hard to complete the weekly curriculum of lectures and sermons at the institute, while continuing in her role at Habonim. Her studies were completed under Eli's leadership and with his guidance, culminating in her S'micha ceremony on December 18th. I know you all join me in wishing Aviva a huge Mazel Tov on this very significant personal accomplishment and milestone in her career. Aviva will continue to lead the congregation as our Senior Cantor, as well as support Eli as Associate Spiritual Leader.

As JSLI states, "The designation of "Rabbi" is far more than a title or a job; it represents a life committed to the fundamental precepts of Judaism and a dedication to serving our communities with honesty, sincerity and with an ethical behaviour appropriate to all human beings in this world." I am very excited to welcome Aviva in to this expanded Cantor/Rabbi role, and look forward to she and Eli continuing to bring light in to all of our lives for many years to come. Hallelujah!

*Cheryl Grammer,
President*

PROGRAMMING

Despite the ongoing pandemic, Habonim continues to provide a wide range of programming for the congregation. While programs at this time remain virtual, we hope to restore in person programming as soon as it is safely possible to do so. In the meantime, a programming committee has been convened to plan new and exciting initiatives and programs.

The committee is integrating the feedback that members provided in the recent programming survey. Some of the suggestions put forward include speakers on Israel arts & music, psychosocial adjustment issues and Jewish

education, among others. In addition, there was strong interest to continue to build on Habonim's history of enhancing Holocaust awareness and support for social justice initiatives. Stay tuned for further programming updates and opportunities to engage with the Habonim community!

If you have any suggestions for future programming please contact:

Michelle Goldman at michelle@congregationhabonim.com



UPCOMING SERVICES/EVENTS

Monday, January 31, 7:00 pm
"EXPLORING LGBTQ+ THROUGH A JEWISH LENS".
Let's explore together what our sacred texts have to say about gender and sexuality. You may be surprised by what we uncover!

Thursday, February 3, 7:00 pm
"PERIPHERY" is a documentary that illustrates the ways that Jewish people in Ontario who come from non traditional Jewish backgrounds are regarded in the larger Jewish community. These individuals, all proudly Jewish, reflect on how their perception of living on the "periphery" of the Jewish community feels to them.

Friday, February 4, 6:00 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat

Thursday, February 10, 7:00 pm
"TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL".
This class is for all parents, grandparents, educators, aunts, uncles...anyone who interacts with children. What does it mean to educate Jewishly? What might it mean to teach our children WELL?

Tuesday, February 22, 7:00 pm
"WHAT'S JEWISH ABOUT HIP HOP?".
Are there hints in our sacred texts to the art and spirit of Hip Hop? Who are the Jewish Hip Hop stars of today and what is their message?

Friday, March 4, 6:00 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat

Wednesday March 16
PURIM - details to follow

Friday, April 1, 6:00 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat

Saturday, April 23, 11:00 am
Yizkor Service

Friday, April 29, 6:00 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat

THE JEWISH HERITAGE SCHOOL UPDATE

Shalom, Habonim community!

While 2022 has started off differently than we imagined, we've been so lucky to have had a fantastic Fall at our Habonim Jewish Heritage School! We've been able to work together to safely learn inside our beautiful building – masked and happy.

Our amazing teachers – Summer, Rebecca, and Shelley – along with myself, have loved putting together engaging educational experiences. We started the school year with a Sukkot celebration – making decorations to put up in our community Sukkah, constructing delicious Sukkot out of candy (and eating them of course), and shaking the lulav and etrog. We celebrated Simchat Torah by unrolling some of the Torah scroll and learning about how it's made, then making our own little Torah scrolls. Students have dived into learning about the power of names in Judaism, the importance of advocacy starting from Abraham all the way until today, and we've focused on understanding the Hebrew lunar calendar by placing ourselves in it each week. We've learned some ancient Jewish spells, enjoyed classic songs and modern Israeli music, and made our own newspaper set in the time of Joseph.

A focus last semester was also on learning about the diverse experience of Jews here and around the world - we're all Klal Yisrael, one community of Jewish People. We've enjoyed celebrations of holidays like Sigd (an Ethiopian Jewish holiday) and saw videos of Chanukkah services in Uganda. We learned how people identify as different sects and their practices reflect that, diversity in gender and sexual identity, and that many Jewish people are homeless and food insecure.

One of our Electives was Tzedakah Party – students who chose this one learned about tzedakah and social justice in a Jewish context and put that into action with important projects. Our Drama elective saw the students write a play and perform it – a girl ends up being transported to different moments in ancient Jewish history and learn lessons in each one. In the Dance elective, students learned some

rikudiyah (Jewish folk dances) and even wrote their own song and dance about Chanukkah.

Our Hebrew language learning has been centred around games – playing Shimon Omer (Simon Says) to learn about body parts, HaRuach Noshevet (the wind blows) to learn about action words, and Headbandz and Match Game to recognize written words. With the Word of the Day students can practice words in context, and we use Hebrew words within our learning so that speaking them becomes more comfortable – we greet each other with Boker Tov (good morning) and ask each other how we're feeling to practice responses.

The community Chanukkah celebration that was held during one of our school days was a huge success! Families made beeswax candles, drew cards which were distributed by Meals on Wheels, constructed beautiful Chanukkiyot which were then entered into a contest, and enjoyed brachot and songs with Rabbi Ilyse Glickman. They left not only with delicious sufganiyot and gelt, but also smiles and the knowledge that Habonim is a place for everyone.

While we've had to start our new year online, we're happy to be able to do exciting activities like a Tu Bishvat Seder and welcome special guests. No matter what the next months bring, we can be proud of that fact that we're coming together in pursuit of raising young people who are proud to be Jewish!

If you have any questions or ideas for future programming, please feel free to get in touch.

L'Shalom,

Mira Lyonblum
Director of Education
habonimschool@gmail.com

To register please visit:
<https://www.congregationhabonim.org/form/school-registration-2021/2022>



The Dance elective performing 'Mayim' while we see Chanukkah cards that the Tzedakah Party made up on the screen



Having fun at our Community Chanukkah Party!



Using graham crackers, icing and candy to make edible Sukkot

HANUKKAH 2021



Mazel
Tov!

Karen Adivi and Stephen Hornberger on Gabriel's Bar Mitzvah

Aaron and Lucinda Goldberg on Dinah's Bat Mitzvah

Rabbi Noam Katz & Jaimie Walman on Mikayla's Bat Mitzvah

Stuart Lewis & Shiphra Ginsburg on Sage's Bat Mitzvah

Alan & Marketa Gross on Shay and Alani's B'nei Mitzvah

Liane & Neale Ginsburg on Jack's Bar Mitzvah

Michael Rattner & Justine Sherman on Aiden & Jacob's B'nei Mitzvah

Michael & Cindy Rosen on Ruby's Bat Mitzvah

Zach Lieberman and Amy Greenspoon on the birth of their son

Jacob Lev

Mark and Sharon Friedberg on Ethan's Bar Mitzvah

Alex Abiscott and Davit Sevitt on Theo's Bar Mitzvah



Barbara and Nathan Haber
on their 65th Anniversary



Sage Lewis' Bat Mitzvah

ANNUAL DUES

Annual fees for 2022 will be increased to \$1290 for families, \$645 for singles, and \$310 for young adults 26-30 years old (from \$1200, \$600 and \$290 respectively in 2021).

This modest increase in dues is necessary to address the ongoing higher operational and maintenance costs associated with the new building, which are incurred regardless of occupancy, and significantly lower revenue than was projected in 2020 and 2021 due to the cancellation of all outside rentals, events and large simchas during Covid. While the building may feel "closed", our dedicated staff and clergy continue to work incredibly hard to deliver on-line programming and on-site B'nei Mitzvot, weddings and services (as allowed), and maintain our beautiful building for our eventual return.

Much thought goes in to setting the dues each year, with a thorough review of all costs and revenue opportunities prior to submitting them for board approval. Even with this increase, our dues remain far below the average for Toronto synagogues of a similar size to ours. We have been able to maintain lower dues partially through the long term rental of the 2nd level to Brightpath, which offsets some of the operational costs (including the interest payments on our debt), and through diligent fiscal and operational management.

While we continue to work towards reducing the \$3.8MM debt on the building, we expect to still have a \$2.5MM shortfall after all current pledges are fully paid up in 2025. None of us expected Covid, and the physical, emotional and financial toll it has taken on most of us and our livelihoods has been significant. Habonim is not exempt from this pressure. The board's strong desire is not to place any additional burdens on our members, and to that end we will be asking for a voluntary contribution on your dues statement rather than imposing a significant dues increase or building levy. Any amount that you can contribute will be greatly appreciated.



We recognize that many members have already made donations to the building fund, and are very appreciative of our congregation's generosity. To assist in our debt reduction, all new members joining in 2022 will be required to make an \$1800 contribution to the synagogue building fund. Current members who joined subsequent to the original building campaign will not be required to make an additional contribution, but we certainly encourage you to make a voluntary contribution of any amount if you are able. The board will continue to work diligently to manage the finances of the synagogue, and with your help, keep Habonim strong. We very much look forward to the day when we can put Covid behind us, and gather to worship and celebrate together without restrictions. May it be soon!

Should you have any questions, please contact the office at **416-782-7215** or email office1@congregationhabonim.org



IN MEMORIAM

Mourning those who passed away

**Marilyn Anita Berger
Kaylee Miller
Frank Fleisher
Eleanor Cohen
Hanna Drukmaler
Susan Gorewich
Marvin Pearl
Donald Cherm**

**Steven Feuer
Leslie Burstyn
Renee Unger
Ben Souroujon
Howard Halter
Julie-Rae King
Jerry Shulman
Marion Bogo**

**Dennis Kavelman Sr.
Victor Shawn
Mary Winemaker
Harold Whalen
Nina Muskat
Harry Gorman**

May their families be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Yahrzeits

Yahrzeit reminders are now being sent. To receive your reminder please update your family Yahrzeits by contacting the office.

Honour the memory of your loved one.

**Memorial Plaque \$360
Oval Shaped Eitz Chaim Tree leaf \$180**

Please contact the office for more information or to send tribute and condolence cards.



CONGREGATION HABONIM OF TORONTO



Habonim Speaker Series Presents: **Rabbi Ilyse Glickman**



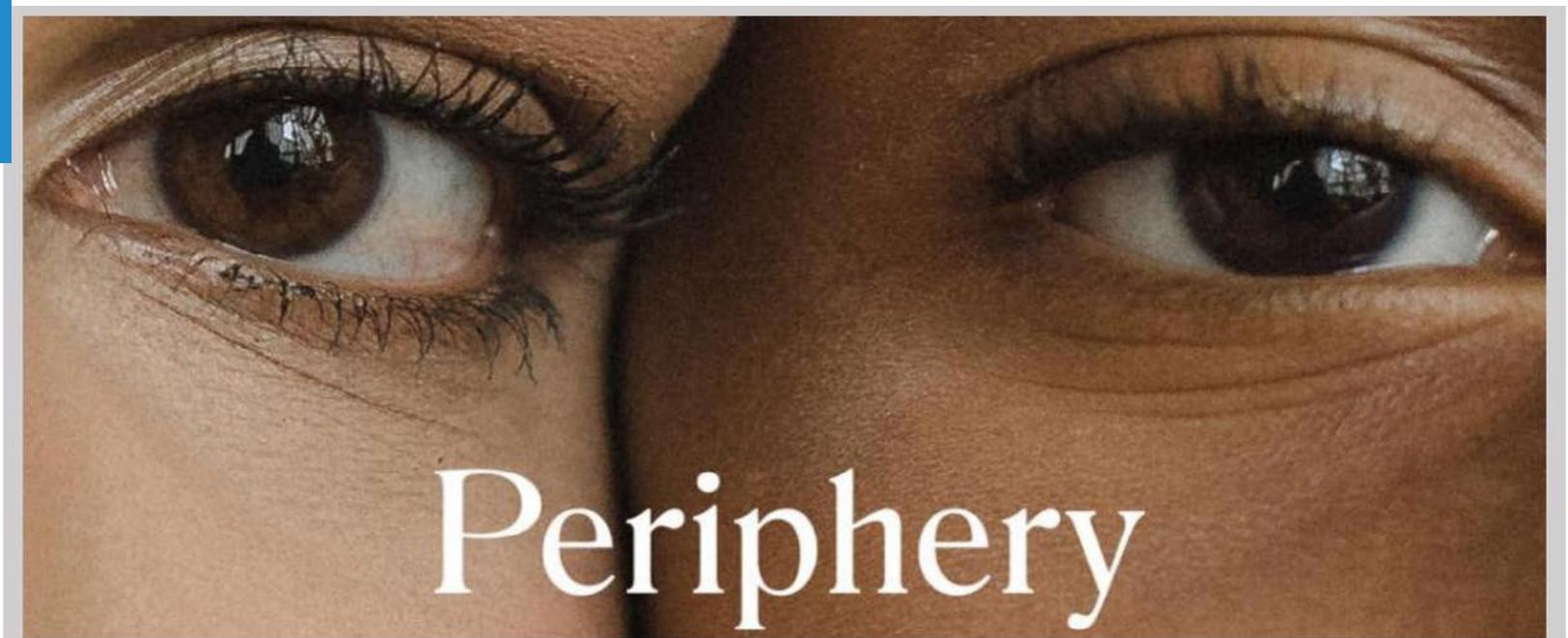
January 31, 7:00 pm on Zoom

"Exploring LGBTQ+ through a Jewish Lens"

Let's explore together what our sacred texts have to say about gender and sexuality. You may be surprised by what we uncover!

Click **HERE** to register

<https://www.congregationhabonim.org/event/-exploring-lgbtq-through-a-jewish-lens-with-rabbi-ilyse-glickman.html>



Periphery

PERIPHERY

Thursday February 3 at 7 PM on Zoom

Register Here

Join us online for an exciting viewing of the documentary film "**Periphery**", followed by a Q & A with Director Sara Yacobi-Harris and film participant Ariella Daniels.

Multiracial and multiethnic Jews have a long and rich history globally, and here in Ontario as well. Yet within our Jewish community, there exists a lack of understanding of our ethnically diverse Jewish world. The newly produced documentary film, "Periphery", explores the lives of multiracial and multiethnic Jews within the community. It broadens our concept of Jewish identity that has historically privileged Ashkenazi Jewish culture and presents a call to action to the Jewish community about the need for greater education on Jewish ethnic diversity within the Jewish world both in Ontario and nationally.

Periphery illustrates the ways that Jewish people in Ontario, with intersecting social identities, negotiate a sense of place and recognition and reflect on what periphery means to them. This film bears witness to the rich ethno-racial diversity that exists within the Ontario Jewish community. It is illuminating, eye-opening and thought provoking.

We are privileged to have Sara and Ariella joining us to answer our questions and provide further depth and understanding of the issues.

NO SILENCE ON RACE



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The main sanctuary offers 4,000 sq ft of open space with a partition that can divide the room in half. There is a large second space in the lower level, which is also available for your private use. Our state -of-the-art kitchen mirrors a restaurant inspired setting, and we offer a variety of sizes of round tables, tableware for 250 guests, as well as 2 acrylic white and chrome bars and 4 matching high top cruisers. We have a capacity of 250 guests seated, up to 400 for a reception, and an industry leading sound system. Our building is fully accessible, and street parking is available.



PLEASE CONTACT MICHELLE AT 416.782.7125 OR
MICHELLE@CONGREGATIONHABONIM.ORG

TO BOOK YOUR NEXT EVENT



Congregation Habonim
קהילת הבונים



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THE BULLETIN**

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