PSJC Newsletter Fall 2022/5783

From Rabbi Carie

Elohei Neshama shenata bi, t'hora hee.

O God, the soul that you have placed within me is pure.

-From the early morning service

I find myself thinking a great deal these days about the soul and the many souls that are about to gather in our Shul — in some cases, for the first time in many years. Each person who enters this space brings with them something unique, and there is something remarkable that happens when we encounter one another all together as we do around the High Holy Days. The potential during this season is palpable, for if we succeed in creating the community we most want during these most sacred days and beyond, people are able to be here and be in touch with and even share a bit of their *neshamas* — their souls.

According to Jewish tradition, each and every one of us is blessed with a *neshama t'hara* (a pure soul) that remains pure throughout our lives — no matter what we do. It is, I've come to believe, the essence of who we are — that best self whose light shines forward from deep within — a light that we are often unable to connect with in our daily lives.

In Hebrew, there are two additional words for soul. One, *ruach*, is the energizing spirit we carry within.

The second is *nefesh*. The *nefesh* is that part of our self/our soul that is influenced by our actions and experiences in the world. Our *nefesh* can be colored by our experiences, influenced by our own practices. If we have not learned healthy gratitude or a balanced sense of humility for example, our *nefesh* will be in need of repair.

When we are off-balance around our *nefesh,* or when we behave in ways that are hurtful, it acts like a curtain, blocking the light of our *neshama*. The light is still there, but there are times when we have covered it up so heavily, that the light can no longer be seen — by us or anyone around us.

Very often it is not major sins that do this, for most of us are not guilty of sins like murder or robbery. But all of us struggle with seemingly minor mistakes, misdeeds, harms inflicted, intentionally or very often unintentionally. And these are the harms that we must address. These are the harms that hurt not only others but ourselves as well.

They are the harms that very likely we never expected to be so hurtful: a nasty comment, a snide remark, gossip or judgement about another, an ignored friendship, a phone call not made to a family member. The list goes on and on. Sometimes, even well-intentioned interactions can cause great pain. There are moments when, due to our own ignorance or fear, we cause microaggressions — intentionally or unintentionally communicating derogatory attitudes. And when we do, we cause harm to another, making them feel that they are not included or valued. We fail to see their light and, in turn, place a veil over our *neshama*.

It is easy to focus on the major issues of the day — and there are so many that need to be addressed — from reproductive justice to climate change. And they demand and deserve so much of our time and energy...

But as we enter this reflective season of the year, let us not only look outward to the major challenges of our world...but also inward, to address those "little things" — those unintentional slights, those "small imbalances" that can cover the light in our souls or others.' By doing this, when we do gather together, we will remove the veils that keep us from being our best selves, and we will once again feel the brightness of the *neshama* that we carry within, and that of our entire community, shining forth.

From Interim Acting Board Co-Presidents Lena Katsnelson and Rachel Levine

In Judaism we often talk about the procession of time as a spiral, like a winding staircase, twisting further and further but remaining a tight coil. With each passing year, we end up in the same place but a floor higher, a step further. This time of year, familiar traditions abound: children select backpacks and notebooks and return to schools, fantasy football leagues hold boisterous drafts and get ready for nights of wings and beer, swimsuits and boogie boards are packed away as sweaters are pulled from the backs of our closets. And of course, we begin to ready ourselves for another series of High Holy Days and the transformative power of the months of *Elul* and *Tishrei*.

The staff and leadership at PSJC have been deep in the throes of planning for the upcoming *chagim* (holidays). As early as July, conversations began about how to move forward with yet another High Holy Day season rife with uncertainty and questions around the continuing pandemic. How do we create the sense of warmth and belonging that PSJC is famous for, while protecting our most vulnerable community members? This year, we will once again be offering both indoor and outdoor services (as well as Zoom!), creating opportunities for meaningful connection to everyone who comes through our doors, both physical and virtual.

Rabbi Carie, Aileen, and the *Avodah* Committee are combing over details many of us wouldn't even dream of considering, to ensure meaningful services that bring our community together in collective prayer, reflection and celebration. Stephanie, Patrick, and the PSJC staff are overseeing all of the crucial logistics that ensure that PSJC continues to provide a welcoming embrace to all those who wish to spend the High Holy Days with us. The Communications committee is ensuring that the message is spread far and wide: "Join us/ PSJC welcomes you home for the High Holy Days."

One of the most visceral signifiers of *Elul* is the daily blowing of the *shofar* - meant to wake us up, to alert us to the important days ahead of the upcoming renewal. The plaintive cry of the *shofar* calls to us from all of our comfortable places and asks us to examine the ways in which we can be better, do better, and fulfill our role of creating a better world.

There are so many members of PSJC who are contributing to these ideas and ideals year round. Our *Rodfei Tzedek* Committee is committed to making PSJC inclusive and welcoming to all members of our community. The PAI Committee is continuing to engage seniors in meaningful and fun activities that foster community. The Security Committee has spent countless hours ensuring our safety and continuing to improve the security of the building. There is so much to highlight, but to list all that makes PSJC truly wonderful would necessitate significantly more time and attention than one newsletter can hold.

As we head into a time of both gratitude and repentance, we encourage everyone to thank a friend who has helped bring us into this season with their acts of loving kindness and service all year round. For our part, we want to take this opportunity to thank all of the people who lend so much of themselves to PSJC — their time, their talents, their resources — all of the things that continue to make our community grow and thrive. It is your commitment and dedication to this synagogue, this community, that make PSJC what it is. Time curls along its spiral staircase and every single volunteer steps forward once again to ensure that the work gets done, the community is cared for, and we enter another year with both hope and resolve.

The PSJC Newsletter was printed for Fall 2022/5783 by Park Slope Jewish Center (PSJC)

Newsletter Editor/Designer	Elizabeth Schnur
Acting Board Co-Presidents	Lena Katsnelson and Rachel Levine
Rabbi	Carie Carter
Director of Education and Engagement	Aileen Heiman
Administrator	Stephanie Cooke

From Aileen Heiman
Director of Education and Engagement

At PSJC Hebrew School we are entering the second year of our *Beit Midrash* framework, beginning with the premise that dynamic Jewish learning must incorporate community (*beit*) and an opportunity for students to engage with and develop their own interpretation of our tradition (*midrash*). Inspired by the work of the Jewish Education Center in Cleveland, we will also strive to demonstrate that through celebration of rituals, study of sacred text, and connection to others, we have the opportunity to discover, individually and with our community, meaning and purpose. There are no limits to the language that Jewish values give us to shape our daily lives, and one of our primary goals at PSJC this year will be to focus on the social -emotional-spiritual (SES) tools that learning and doing "Jewish" together has to offer.

Youth and Family *Shabbat* services and programs are returning with some new and exciting twists this year. Tot *Shabbat* with Amie meets approximately three times a month at a new, earlier time of 10:00 AM, followed on many weeks by our new *Minyan Mishpacha*, also led by Amie at 11:00AM. Junior Congregation Breakfast Club meets twice a month and will start each week at 11:00 AM with a nosh, followed by an engaging service and activities. *Shabbat Kulanu* and Family *Torah* offer families with children of all ages opportunities to celebrate and learn together on *Shabbat* morning. We also look forward to finding ways to gather together outside of *Shabbat* and holidays, with playground meetups, bike rides, and the return of Fire and Ice (skating). The Youth and Family programming committee is looking to grow, so please reach out if you would like to be involved.

PSJC Teens are engaged in a variety of activities to stay connected to PSJC and the broader Brooklyn Jewish community. *Gesher* has developed into a one-of-kind opportunity for a mix of learning and social connection. The bi-weekly dinners, from sushi to soup and DIY grilled cheese bar, have blossomed conversations about everything from anti-Semitism to TikTok to Among Us. We'll begin this year with a focus on Jewish values and the democratic process, but where our conversation leads is up to the teens. Our *Madrichim* team is still looking for volunteers on Tuesday and Sunday in particular; if you want to grow as a leader, give back to PSJC, and work towards a paid fellowship, join us this year! PSJC teens are also active participants and student leaders with our partner organizations, *Mellech,* BBYO, and *HaZamir*, the International Jewish Youth Choir. Check out the teen section of the weekly eblast for more updates each week.

Responses from the PSJC member survey tell us that many of you are looking for ways to connect and engage with PSJC, both in and out of the building. If you have not had a chance to complete the survey yet, there is still time at psjc.shulcloud.com/volunteer. As PSJC members seek to experience *Shabbat* in a variety of ways and we are finding new ways to join together this year, through the return of *Kabbalat Shabbat Kulanu* and our new Schmoozin' *Havdalah* in the winter months. As we look ahead towards spring, *Shabbat* on the Block aspires to bring the warmth and connection of a PSJC *Shabbat* to your neighborhood! Want to learn more or be on the planning team? Reach out to aileen@psjc.org.

For the past few years we have sung the following words from the *Rosh Hashanah* melody, *May This Be A Year*, by Michael Ochs: "A new year/ A good year/ A chance to start all over/ A new year/ A sweet year/ A chance to bring us closer." The High Holy Days give all of us a chance to take a deep breath and leave behind what we do not wish to take with us into the next year and make new commitments for the future we want to build. I look forward to being a part of that journey with you. *Shana Tovah*.

Kitah Gan

Kitah Zayin

***Kitah Zayin* Graduation**

A Note from Rabbinic Fellow Talia Kaplan

It has been such a pleasure beginning to get to know the PSJC community over the past few weeks. As I recall some of our encounters over Labor Day *Shabbat* and plan to meet the rest of you in the days ahead, I become even more excited about the ways that we can learn from one another.

I am an organizer, educator, and spiritually-oriented community builder pursuing rabbinic ordination at JTS. I look forward to bringing my experiences advocating for immigration justice in D.C., teaching at Brown RISD Hillel, and serving as a chaplain at New York Presbyterian to the PSJC community. At PSJC, you might find me teaching *Torah* or leading services on *Shabbat*, supporting social justice initiatives, or providing rabbinic care at life cycles, in pastoral moments, and over holidays.

During the current month of *Elul*, as we head towards *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot*, the "reason for the season" is *teshuva*. "*Teshuva*" is often translated as "repentance," but I prefer to translate it more precisely as "return." At this time of year, we do the necessary spiritual and interpersonal work to try to return to the most essential, authentic versions of ourselves.

In a Jewish Hasidic story, the great Reb Zusha tells his students that when he encounters God after he dies, God will not ask him, "Why were you not more like Moses," but rather, "Why were you not more like Zusha?" It is easy at this time of year, and always, to hold ourselves to external standards, or to look over our shoulder and see what the person next to us is doing. Instead, I encourage each of us to have our "Zusha" moment – How can we be more like our true selves? It might take some soul searching to figure out what that is, but it is a deeply Jewish and deeply important process for each of us to undergo.

I hope to get to know each of you and learn what makes you unique over the coming months. It would be my pleasure to connect, though I admittedly have more availability after the holidays! You can reach me any time via email (rabbinicfellow@psjc.org) or schedule a time to meet at calendly.com/ rabbinicfellow. Warm wishes for a *Shanah Tovah*!

From our new Administrator Stephanie Cooke

It feels extra sweet to be a part of PSJC this fall! These next few months will be filled with joy and learning as we host many *B'nai Mitzvah*, workshops, and Hebrew School beginning again. There's something for everyone at PSJC, from *Shabbat* to workshops, yoga, children's programs, and more. We continue to meet the daily demands of the congregation, but have shifted our focus to preparations for successful High Holy days.

For starters, we have begun the upgrade to our IT systems in the synagogue. This full modernization of our systems was made possible by your generous support. It will enable us to continue meeting our mission for the next several years.

As part of our security updates, the PSJC yard has new fencing! Additional upgrades will be put in place over the next few months to help ensure the safety and security of our community. Thank you to Patrick and our amazing staff and their dedication to making PSJC a wonderful place to be.

I am humbled to have arrived in a synagogue that is so passionate about its own community and the world outside. I look forward to meeting members face-to-face at this year's High Holy Day services and at other events throughout the year. Wishing you a season full of good health, peace, and happiness. *Shanah tovah*!

Stephanie and her Family

Positive Aging Initiative (PAI) Update

Spring/Summer 2022 provided a transition for PAI from largely at-home activities to the re-emergence of several in-person activities. Both types appear to have proponents among our members!

Our "Shared Wisdom" series, offered remotely, featured a broad range of topics. In April, Dr. Barbara Kellerman presented a talk on Putin and the continuing conflict in Ukraine. PSJC member Ronnie Wax offered an overview of Trusts, an important consideration for estate planning. In May, Dr. Sarah Rosen presented a discussion of aspects of anthropology and its contemporary uses. Members also had the opportunity to join a presentation on proposed changes to Medicare, sponsored by Good Neighbors of Park Slope. We also made a virtual visit to a state-of the art recycling plant.

In June, Merrie Handfinger offered in-person workshops in the PSJC yard exploring our internal biological systems; the "What's Under Your Skin?" series refreshed our understanding of the material we may have encountered in high school, with added attention to the aging process. Also in June, Susan Kranberg offered advice on reorganizing and decluttering our homes. In July, Faye Honig offered a behind-the-scenes look at the field of Trial Consulting.

We were also able to meet in person for several events. In April, members attended two local art galleries on 6th Avenue , and then in May we visited a solo collage show highlighting the work of Jan Orzeck. Members who had contributed knitted or crocheted squares to a charitable project were able to get together in May at the PSJC yard to assemble them into blankets.

The PAI Book Club has continued to meet in person at members' homes. During this season, the group had a wide assortment of titles including *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, Raven Leilani's critically acclaimed novel *Luster*, Viet Thanh Nguyen's 2016 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Sympathizer*, dealing with the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Yan Lianke's Chinese surreal novel *The Day the Sun Died*, and, most recently, Alice Hoffman's magic realist work, *The World that We Once Knew*. The next season will get underway during the Fall, and promises to be just as varied and challenging.

PAI Book Club

The very successful Food for CHIPS program continued in a hybrid form. Some members met to produce peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and hard boiled eggs, while others provided the same items made in their own homes. This program was very much appreciated by the people who regularly turn to CHIPS for a meal.

During the Fall, the PAI group anticipates the launch of programs in Bridge and Tai Chi, as well as at least one Sing Along session. We are looking forward to a presentation on the Webb Space Telescope in September.

PSJC members who are fifty years of age and older are eligible for PAI membership, and should check off PAI in their accounts under PSJC's "My Subscriptions" tab to receive weekly information from PAI.

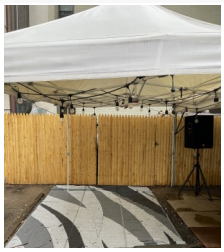
- Michael Rieman

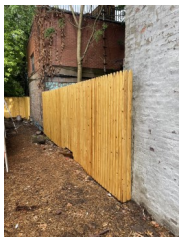
PSJC Security Committee

As many of you know, in 2019 and 2020 PSJC was awarded two federal grants to enhance security in our building. Each grant provides $100,000 for labor and equipment, and the proposed work was split between the two grants. Grant recipients initially have three years to complete the grant-funded work, with the opportunity to request additional time. To do the work most efficiently and cost-effectively, we planned to do the work under both grants at the same time. Unfortunately, we did not receive final approval to begin the 2020 grant work until this past Spring.

We are happy to report that contracts have been signed with vendors, and we have begun the work! (We have also requested additional time to complete the 2019 grant work on the 2019 grant.) While the bulk of the work will be completed in 2022, some work requires permitting and will be completed in 2023, after we obtain necessary City approvals. The grants will fund the following work: 1) Replacing yard fencing; 2) Replacing the main doors at the top of the stoop and installing new hardware and electric latches; 3) Retrofitting the yard gate with an electric closer, panic bar, and push-button lock on the outside; 4) Enhancing the existing locking systems at the doors to the yard, the 14th Street entrance, and the 14th Street rear stairwell entrance; 5) Upgrading interior door hardware and adding electronic lock-down features to critical doors to secure the sanctuary and social hall spaces in the event of an emergency; 6) Adding visual and audible alarms (siren/strobes) in critical locations throughout the building with alarm notifications sent to an outside central station for notification to authorities; 7) Adding bullet-resistant glazing to lower-level windows; 8) Adding to and upgrading our video security camera system and recorder, and adding viewing monitors in critical locations; and 9) Security training for staff and community members.

So far new wooden fencing has been installed in the yard and we have begun to add the electrical infrastructure needed to install the new security equipment and lockdown mechanisms. Once this electrical work is completed, another vendor will install the hardware and security equipment described above. We anticipate that this major part of the grant work, which will significantly improve security to our building, will be completed in this calendar year. - Leslie Salzman





New Fences in the Yard

PSJC Member Engagement

The Membership Committee is growing, bringing together voices from across the PSJC community to plan new ways to engage new and current members. We hope that you will join us for the Fall Membership BBQ and Open House, on Sunday, October 16th in the sukkah, to learn more about ways to get involved with PSJC. We have welcomed almost two dozen new households in the past six months, and we look forward to getting to know all of our new members in the coming months. Whether you are new to PSJC, just checking us out, or have been around a long time want to learn more, reach out to Aileen Heiman, Director of Education and Engagement at aileen@psjc.org or our Membership Committee Chair, Naomi Sunshine, at membership@psjc.org to meet for a cup of coffee or find us at an upcoming event. - Aileen Heiman

Speaking of Israel Update

Initiated in winter 2021, this program features talks and presentations that connect PSJC and Israel. Events focus on a range of topics, with speakers from all walks of life in Israel and the U.S.

As we are gearing up to celebrate Israel's 75th year of independence, we will feature programs that show Israel's many facets, colors, and achievements. With our commitment to connect with Israel and its culture, upcoming programs include a special screening and discussion with Nirit Ben Yosef, an Israeli tour guide in Berlin, and her film "You Look So German" on November 13th, in cooperation with Behind the Candle; this is presented in commemoration of *Kristallnacht*. A discussion about Israeli food with Adeena Sussman is scheduled for December 11th, and other plans include a Sighd celebration (last year's was epic!), a special session with our past *Shinshinim*, and many other cultural presentations, including films and music.

- Daniel Marcu

Hevra Kadisha

PSJC has a strong, dedicated *Hevra Kadisha*. Following a move to virtual *shmira* forced upon us by the pandemic, we are now returning to in-person rituals that help ready those who have died for burial with love, respect, and care. We will be hosting a number of learning opportunities to explore aspects of the *Hevra Kadisha* in more depth this year, but here is a little about the *Hevra* in general:

A *Hevra Kadisha* ("sacred society") is a group of volunteers who assist with preparations for a Jewish burial. Historically, and due to the vital role itt plays, the *Hevra Kadisha* is one of the first institutions established in any new Jewish community. In many places, one *Hevra* serves the whole community. Today, some *Hevras*, like ours, are based out of individual synagogues.

Volunteers from the *Hevra* work with local funeral homes to provide Jewish burials for deceased members of the community, and support for those who have lost their loved ones.

In Judaism, providing a proper burial is called *chesed shel emet* ("the ultimate kindness"), since it is a loving task done for the deceased, which can thus never be repaid.

The rituals around preparing the deceased for burial are performed with humility, deference, and respect, and are meant both to honor the deceased and to provide comfort and peace of mind to those who have lost a family member or loved one.

Some of the services that our *Hevra Kadisha* provides are *shmirah* (sitting and being present with the deceased before burial, while reciting psalms or other inspirational words or simply meditating), and *taharah* (the ritual washing and dressing of the deceased in plain white garments just prior to burial).

A meaningful part of Jewish communal life is to be found in the practices that have been developed over centuries to honor and care for people when they die.

The PSJC *Hevra Kadisha* is always in search of volunteers from the community to help strengthen and grow this important group. If you'd like to learn more about us, or to volunteer for *shmirah*, *taharah*, or both, please email us at hevra.kadisha@psjc.org.

- Eden Wofesy

Behind the Candle Update

Each person had a name, every name is a candle, and behind each candle there is a story.

The inaugural year of the Behind the Candle project culminated with a very emotional *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust Memorial Day) ceremony this past April. We came together with songs, stories, and candles personalized with the names of individuals who perished in the *Shoah*, with their life stories shared through a QR code on the candle labels. These stories had been researched by families and by teens who partnered on the research. In preparation for the ceremony, each PSJC family received a candle, prepared by the PSJC Hebrew School 7th graders, and were hand delivered to members' homes. One of the moving presentations at the ceremony included PSJC's longtime member and *Shoah* survivor, Miriam Tyrk, who partnered on her family story with Rose Mark, a community teen.

The project has been quiet over the summer, but we are hoping to add more names to the project in the coming months. If you are interested in submitting names for the project, helping a teen with research, or translating stories and documents, please contact Rabbi Carter, Danny Marcu, Joel Levy, or email behindthecandle@psjc.org.

Remembering six million is tough. Commemorating one name, learning one story, reminds us that there were individual lives before the fire, that life continues on with relatives that survived, and that new family members will remember what happened, forever. – Daniel Marcu

Miriam Tyrk & Rose Mark

PSJC Teens prepare candles

Hebrew School students learn about the project with Danny Marcu and Rabbi Carter

Rodfei Tzedek Update

Rodfei Tzedek (literally: Seekers of Justice), the social justice wing of PSJC has been growing rapidly over the past few years. We continue to send alerts to the PSJC community about opportunities to get involved in volunteer activities and programming. Despite pandemic disruptions, the MLK Day of Service remains an annual event that attracts the efforts and engagement of many congregants, who work collectively to serve people in need, in Brooklyn and beyond.

The shul's new Anti-Racist Committee (ARC) has met weekly over the past two years to develop programming for the entire PSJC community; ARC's official kickoff event featured a two-part zoom workshop on anti-racism from a Jewish lens with Lindsey Newman of *Be'chol Lashon* (please check out videos on PSJC website). We are planning several opportunities for learning about Jewish perspectives on social justice and anti-racism, as well as chances to take action. These events include both activities integrated into other shul events (for example, celebrating the diversity of Jews in the Sukkah during *Sukkot Across the Jewish World*) and stand alone events (e.g., an Anti-Racism workshop on November 2nd to continue our efforts at building a PSJC community as truly a welcoming place for Jews of color). There are also a series of *Shabbatot* to recognize important social justice issues. Please see the schedule below for all RT events this year – further details about these events will be shared as they draw closer.

ARC members have also become active with the Jewish Coalition on Criminal Justice Reform (JCCJR), which advocates for prison reform and the rights of former prisoners who reintegrate into society following their sentences. They have excellent educational sessions about current justice reform issues — which we share via the *Rodfei Tzedek* listserv as they are scheduled. Together with the JCCJR, we are planning virtual visits with incarcerated individuals and lobbying activities to support New York State legislative initiatives promoting reform. Again, watch for these and other events on the listserv.

Finally, two of RT members, Laura Wolff and Rachel Danzig, have been overseeing the work PSJC does to help refugees who are new to New York City. They will be coordinating events put on by HIAS, and sharing information and activities at PSJC events, including during the MLK Day of Service.

If you are passionate about any aspect of social justice work and would like to commit to helping PSJC volunteers with the work we do, please contact us at rodfei.tzedek@psjc.org. If you'd like to get updates on what we're doing or learn about opportunities to volunteer, be sure to sign up for the *Rodfei Tzedek* listserve on your PSJC ShulCloud account.

Upcoming events scheduled for this year include:

Sukkot Across the Jewish World	October 9-16
Be'chol Lashon Anti-Racism Workshop	November 2
Martin Luther King Day of Service	January 15
Jewish Perspectives: Criminal Justice	January TBD
Living Room Conversations	Spring 2023 TBD
Tikkun Olam Shabbatot	
Indigenous People Shabbat	October 7-8
Rabbis Against Gun Violence Shabbat	November 11-12
Human Rights Shabbat	December 9-10
Refugee Shabbat	February 2-3
Reproductive Rights Shabbat	February 17-18
Juneteenth Shabbat	June 16-17
Pride Shabbat	June 23-24

- Lisa Altschuler

Introduction to Judaism… a Brooklyn Tradition!

Our community-based *Introduction to Judaism* course has long been the heart-center of my rabbinate. For decades, it has been my pleasure and privilege to teach and coordinate this seminar for adults who are exploring the place of Judaism in their present and future. This course attracts a diverse range of highly motivated participants — lifelong Jews and prospective converts; singles and couples; long-time shul goers; members of the High Holy Day crowd; and complete newbies — all seeking a rigorous exploration of Jewish life and learning.

PSJC was pivotal in the creation of this class. Nearly 30 years ago, then PSJC member and newly ordained Rabbi Pamela Wax (HUC-JIR, NY) asked: why not start an *Intro to Judaism* seminar in Brooklyn, rather than sending adult learners to Manhattan? Four conversations later with two Reform and two Conservative rabbis then serving congregations on either side of the Gowanus — Sue Ann Wasserman of Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, Debra Cantor of Kane Street Synagogue, Gerry Wieder of Congregation *Beth Elohim*, and Sami Barth of PSJC — the Brooklyn *Intro to Judaism* class became a reality.

In 1996, I was fortunate to be invited to teach Intro *to Judaism* when Pam headed to a pulpit in New England for the next chapter of her rabbinate. Since then, I have been teaching and learning with sophisticated adult beginners who want to deepen their engagement with Judaism. I took necessary pauses during my graduate studies in Vermont and four years of living in Tel Aviv. Each time I returned to Brooklyn, I came home teaching and coordinating *Intro to Judaism*. Over time, the group of co-sponsoring congregations has grown significantly and shifted slightly. Eleven egalitarian communities in Brooklyn & Queens now co-sponsor this course, and PSJC has been a constant among them.

Each year three or four classes participate in this interactive 20-week seminar that focuses on: the Jewish week, the Jewish year, the Jewish life cycle, and various contemporary issues. Each session begins with song, blessings & nosh and concludes with weekly Torah study.

I'm regularly informed of the special nature of this community-based course. Whether at co-sponsoring *shuls* or walking on Court Street, 7th Avenue or Cortelyou Road, I'm likely to run into *Intro to Judaism* alumni, and I learn about the next stages of their (and often their kids') Jewish journeys and Intro classmates who have become lifelong friends.

Through the eyes of my students, I am ever learning about dynamism and constancy, the zeitgeist and through-lines of thought and perception. Their insights and questions, against the backdrop of our ever-changing world, prompt me to ask new questions, to tweak and revise the syllabus, to deepen my thinking, and to take my own pulse. The name of the course remains the same – though I long for a more accurate one, since there are no true beginners in this intensive seminar – and the learning continues…for this community of energetic, probing learners and for me.

For more information on Introduction to Judaism, contact me at introclass@earthlink.net.

- Rabbi Sue Oren

Editor's note: My husband and I took this class many years ago, and it was amazing. Even with one of us starting with a substantial base of Jewish education, we each learned a lot and found the class to be fun and incredibly valuable!

Avodah Committee Update

Every year Rabbi Carter goes on vacation and lets me fill in for her by doing the *drash* (*Torah* commentary) one week. Since this typically takes place in the Summer, we're usually in the depths of Deuteronomy (or in this year's case, Numbers), where the story is tempered by a lot of commandments and rules, many of them incomprehensible to modern audiences, and many of them problematic. This year, I had *Parshat Re'eh*, which despite some pretty troubling exhortations, seems really focused on space and place. Throughout, G_d emphasizes that there is a SITE where worship should; happen, where offerings should be brought, and where sacrifices should take place.

This made me think a lot about how we constitute sacred space apart from that particular place. If the place is so central to our narrative, what do we do when we're not there, and how do we, in our diasporic lives, build and define a sacred space in the absence of this site?

What defines a sacred space? We can clearly see the architectural elements that PSJC's founders believed would make our shul a sacred space; the soaring ceiling painted with clouds and the sunburst of the dome, perhaps there to remind us that G_d is of the heavens and the earth — that while we walk on one, we can aspire, can look to the other. The repetition of that theme in the *Bima* underlies this idea, and both seek to elevate the quotidian, to change our focus from the mundane to the transcendent. Just watch the light coming through the dome on *Yom Kippur* and you'll know what I mean. Stained glass changes the quality of light into something magical. The arches do something to sound. (Sadly, I have no idea what that wacky chandelier is supposed to do!)

But for the past two and a half years, our sacred space has only been partially available to us. Sometimes it has moved online or outdoors, to Zoom or the Tent. Have those spaces also been sacred?

I know I have found a great sense of the sacred weekly at Zoom *Kabbalat Shabbat* as we sang together and the light slowly faded, closing out the mundanity of the work week and opening up the transcendent spaces of *Shabbat*. Morning *Minyan* too. Being in the yard, in the tent, made beautiful and homelike by Patrick and his crew with these twinkling lights and new fence has truly felt sacred. Being back in our building, in large numbers on Purim, or smaller ones on Shabbat, does too. I think what I have learned is that wherever the PSJC community is, it is the being together that makes the place sacred. The PSJC community is a site both literal and mobile; it's our beautiful building –but it's also the work of our beloved staff that keep that standing and functioning, keeping the literal place together, making the sacred space happen, and facilitating all the other wonderful things we do. Thank you to Patrick, Sherrod, Rabbi Carie, Aileen, Stephanie, Antonia, all the volunteers in the community and everyone who shows up to embody the PSJC spirit and make the magic happen in our promised land of Brooklyn.

May PSJC in all its iterations remain our sacred space, a place where we bring the offerings of our hearts as we move towards a new year and find many ways to be holy.

L'shanah tovah u'metukah!

- Angela Weisl

We often note that PSJC runs on collaboration. This is very much the case with our services — even when our wonderful cantor, Judy Ribnick, is with us on the High Holy Days, most of our services are still led by PSJC members. During the year, when Judy is not with us, we are totally "lay led," and we are always seeking new leaders to widen our leadership bench. Please consider bringing your voice and energy to leading services, *leyning* and chanting *haftorah*. If you have always wanted to lead a part of the service, but don't yet feel confident with your skills, we can help! Members of the congregation are happy to partner with you to build your skills so that you can contribute to our services. We currently have a small Zoom class under way of nascent daveners, and are excited to have them soon join our roster! Please email davening@psjc.org if you would like to lead services or learn to lead services. We look forward to having your relationship with our shared community deepen through participation.

What is "Pitput?"

Do you speak Hebrew? If so, you are invited to participate in two Zoom-based programs for Hebrew speakers, affectionately known as: *PiTPUT* (chatter) and *DiFDUF* (turning pages). Both programs started out in-person but migrated to Zoom during the time of COVID isolation (in Hebrew: *bizman bidud*). The programs' dates and times are listed in the PSJC weekly schedule.

PiTPUT BiZMAN BiDUD is a Hebrew conversation group that usually meets twice a month at 1 AM on Sundays. The participants' proficiency in conversational Hebrew ranges from native speakers to those whose conversational skills are a bit rusty to those who mostly listen in to improve their comprehension skills. Each *PiTPUT* session is built around a different theme, from the sublime (Memorials in Israel) to the ridiculous (Funny Encounters with a *Dude Shemesh* (solar water heater). Danny Marcu brings each session to life by introducing us to popular Israeli songs that begin and conclude each *PiTPUT* meeting.

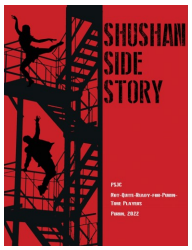
DiFDUF BiZMAN BiDUD is a Hebrew short-story reading group that meets monthly on Sunday afternoons through Zoom. The stories tend to be very short (1-4 pages) and the discussions quite lively. We read stories by well-known authors, such as Etgar Keret and Meir Shalev as well as emerging authors, such as Armen Avanov and Tomer Gekler. Our *Shaliach*, Elad Bar Ilan brings his unique perspective to reading the stories by enabling us to understand them in the context of various Israeli cultures. To enjoy reading the short stories, proficiency in reading modern Hebrew is helpful, although reading at the proficiency level of a native speaker is not required. We usually prepare a vocabulary list to translate unusual or specialized words.

To clarify any questions or add your name to the e-mail list for *PiTPUT* or *DiFDUF*, please contact Michal at: Kishkush.at.PSJC@gmail.com

- Michal Tamuz

PSJC's Spring Fundraiser

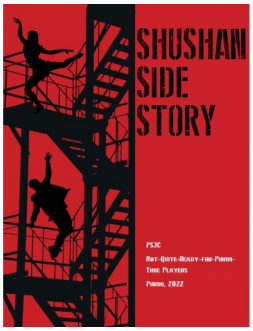
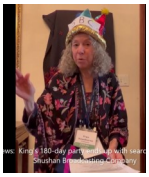
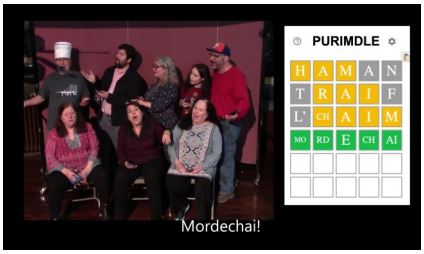
This year's Spring Fundraiser was a resounding success. Thanks to Esther Schwalb and her stalwart team, along with our generous sponsors, bakers and attendees, we were able to raise over $40,000! Moreover, a great time was had by all — members of all ages enjoyed the silent disco, amazing food, baked goods raffle and riding the carousel itself. Despite worries about weather, about 100 PSJCers got together and talked and danced and ate and schmoozed. Take a look at the back page photos to get a sense of all the fun!



With abject apologies to Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim Z"l, PSJC's Not Quite Ready for Purimtime Players presented their Purimspiel, Shushan Side Story, to great acclaim! Spoofing off the classic musical, the Players interpreted the story of Esther through witty lyrics and dance. A video of the Purimspiel is available on the PSJC website and photos can be viewed on the back page of this Newsletter. Thanks to all who participated:

Videos Producer – Elizabeth Schnur; Cinematographer – Erik Lieber; Audio/Musical Magician – Nir Sadovnik; Video Editors – Erik Lieber, Nir Sadovnik, Elizabeth Schnur; Subtitles – Elizabeth Schnur; Choreographer - Louise Heit

Cast Fran Hawthorne (Narrator); Peter Holmes (Chorus); Abby Ingber (Esther/Chorus); Erik Lieber (King/Chorus); Isabele Lieber (Haman Minion/ Chorus); Gavrielle Levine (Beautician/Haman Minion/Chorus); Alan Palmer (Mordechai/Chorus); Naomi Sunshine (Esther/Chorus); Elizabeth Schnur (Zeresh/Chorus); Joan Seittelman (Chorus); Julie Weintraub (Esther/Purimdle Leader/Chorus); Eli Wolfhagen (Haman/Chorus)

PARK SLOPE JEWISH CENTER

PSJC's Spring Fundraiser