

New Light News May, 2018

A Word from the Rabbi

Why is there a practice not to get married during the days of the Omer?

The Omer is the name given to the days between Passover and Shavuot, 49 days in all, mentioned in the Bible as having an agricultural significance. This were the days of the “counting up” to the giving of the new fruits of the summer season in Jerusalem on the day of Shavuot which means “weeks.” We Americans can appreciate the start of the fruit harvest when the waving wheat of the plains states is ready for picking. Soon will come other fruits; each has its season until we are overwhelmed with fruits in the fall in all their bounty. On the other hand, Shavuot is a day of the divine revelation from Mount Sinai, though not specifically described in the Bible as such. The tradition draws the connecting line through the days of the Omer; if Passover is about liberation then Shavuot must be revelation. For the agrarian man, the counting in Temple times between Passover and Shavuot had a dual component, sacred and mundane, each independently a time to rejoice.

Nonetheless, a late tradition starting with Rabbi Akiva and his students, drops a collective pall over the Omer of joy. No weddings or other public expressions of joy are celebrated. The story told in the Talmud is of 12,000 pairs of disciples who died at the same time because they did not treat each other with respect. They all died of “croup,” an illness that strangles one to death. (Yevamot 62b). Later rabbis in the Middle Ages felt that the nature of this period was harsh, despite the perspective that this was a time of joy. The Talmudic story was an anchor for turning the period into a time of mourning. How could the students not be forgiven? The Medieval rabbis offered a new interpretation and began to connect the Omer with the Crusades, pogroms, and blood libels suffered by Jews during this season of the year in its close connection to the Christian Holy Week and the days that followed.

To this day, the harsh setting of the Omer is still controversial. Modern Jews celebrate Yom Haatzmaut inside the Omer, Kabbalist attached great importance to Shimon Bar Yochai and Lag Ba’omer. Banquet halls are champing at the bit to open their doors when the Omer is over. Rabbi Akiva was one of the truly optimistic people of history. He felt that the causeless hatred between his students could be overcome and that this and other interpersonal strife could be ended and usher in the days of the Messiah. Unfortunately, the people failed; the students and disciples did not rise to the occasion, and instead of redemption, further destruction ensued. The Omer then marks a redemption that did not happen. We mourn that failure.

Passover sparks the interest to have “Next Year in Jerusalem!” and to bring redemption into our own lives. We must face the reality, however, that this was not true for every community. The Omer in its “counting up” must also be viewed as a “coming down,” doing an analysis of our interpersonal relationships especially so we can join in response on Shavuot to the call of Torah for our lives.

Hag Sameach,

Rabbi

Presidents' Message

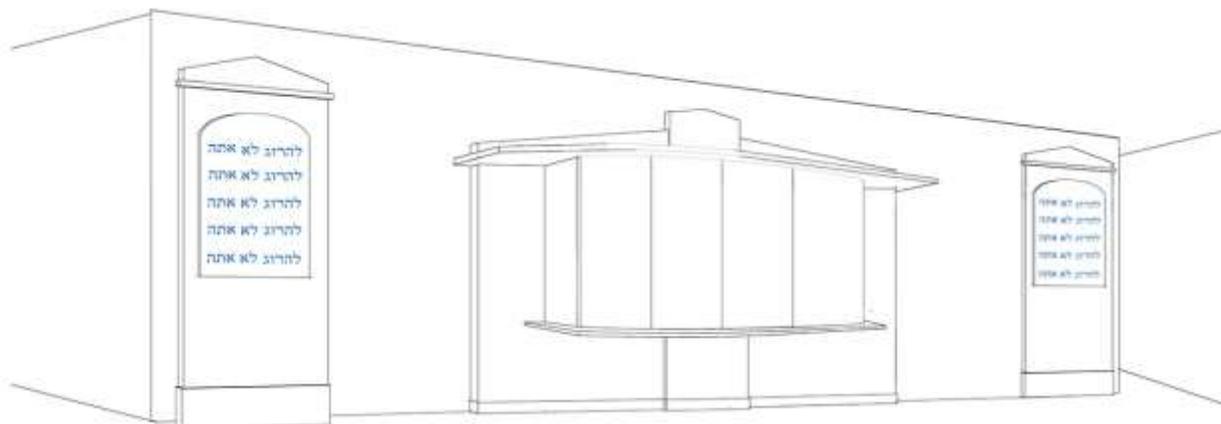
At the last Board Meeting the Board raised three issues that affect the entire Congregation. First, many Board members expressed deep concern with attendance at our services. Since moving to our new home, there have been a number of Friday nights and Saturday mornings where we did not have a minyan. (Sunday morning has always had problems making a minyan. This year was no exception.) Of course, not all members attend on a regular basis. The question posed by Board members: why has attendance dropped since moving to our new home? Is it distance? The building? The room? The service?

We would appreciate your comments – positive or negative. You can send comments via email (info@newlightcongregation.org) or regular mail. Feel free to make your comments anonymous.

Second, the Board voted to add a sign outside our new home. The sign will be identical to the Dor Hadash sign, except in "Israeli Blue". It will be same height and width, as well as the same fonts (the picture below is an approximation). Installation is anticipated prior to the Congregational Meeting in early June.



Finally, the Board voted to begin a fund raising campaign to replace the borrowed ark with one of our own. We have retained Bruce Berman (he developed the ark for Temple David in Monroeville) to develop a "concept," below. If you are interested in joining the committee to oversee the design of the ark and to raise the necessary funds, please contact Stephen Cohen at 412-421-3999.



Elijah and Elisha

Our study of Elijah and Elisha continues on May 1st and 15th at 7:00 PM.

May Meetings

- Board Meeting, Monday, May 7th, 7:00 PM
- Men's Club Meeting, Monday, May 14th, 7:00 PM
- Sisterhood Meeting, Thursday, May 17th, 7:00 PM

Shavout

Services are Sunday, May 20th at 9:45 and Monday, May 21st (with Yizkor) at 9:45.

We will read the Book of Ruth on Sunday, May 20th at 5:00 PM.

Special Oneg Invitation

We will celebrate Merle Blumenfeld's 80th birthday with an Oneg on May 18th, following Friday evening services.

Hill District Tour

On Sunday, June 10, New Light Congregation will join Rodman Street Missionary Baptist Church for an in-depth tour of the Hill District in Pittsburgh. See the attached flyer.

Casino Trip

The next casino trip is Sunday, July 8th. See the attached flyer for details.

Holocaust Museum Trip

We are planning a trip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. on August 19th. See the attached flyer for details.

Hold the Date

The congregational meeting is Sunday, June 3rd, 10:30 AM

TOLOLS Sisterhood Book Club Invitation

Book: Salt to the Sea by Ruta Sepetys

Wednesday, May 9th, 7:30 PM, Berkshire Hathaway Office Conference Room

5801 Forbes Avenue (at Murray, under the library). Kindly RSVP to joyce.fienberg@gmail.com
(from the NYT review)

A group of teenage refugees meet on the road in the chaotic countryside of East Prussia in winter 1945. The Nazi Reich is collapsing all around them, and they, like hundreds of thousands, are fleeing the wrathful Soviet advance. They are trapped between their German conquerors and their terrifying Russian "liberators." Their story is told through the voices of Joana, a pretty Lithuanian nurse; Florian, a Prussian with a mysterious letter of passage from a high-ranking Nazi officer; and Emilia, an idealistic but damaged Polish girl in a pink knit cap. Thrown together, struggling to survive, they at first hardly trust one another enough even to exchange names, and so they often just use epithets: "the knight," "the nurse," "the Polish girl," "the wandering boy," "the shoe poet." (The last, an old cobbler, gets his name from his philosophy: "The shoes always tell the story.") Each has secrets — the galling histories that haunt anyone who has lived through war, flight and deprivation.

May Birthdays

Merle Blumenfeld
Marvin Feldman
Naomi Greenblott
Rachelle Grobstein
Harvey Issenberg
Fay Neft
Ronald Rager
Nadine Reck
Sheldon Reck
Reva Simon
Jo-Ann Tuckfelt

May Anniversaries

Carol & Marvin Feldman
Jenny & Steve Swerdlow
Gerry & Dr. George Tessler
Brenda & Barry Werber

Reminders

- To purchase Memorial Plaques, Simcha Tree Leaves or Stones contact Ileen Portnoy 412-683-7985
- To sponsor an Oneg in honor of that special person/event or for no reason at all call Hugh Casper 412-421-7619
- To sponsor a Sunday morning breakfast contact Dan Stein 412-521-5231
- To purchase bricks for our "Garden of Freedom" or sponsor a Kiddush luncheon contact Barbara Caplan 412-521-4332
- To purchase Giant Eagle gift cards contact Marilyn Honigsberg at 412-521-7174
- For information on our cemetery contact Myron Snider at 412-235-7085

NEW LIGHT CONGREGATION

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