



אור חדש

New Light Congregation

5915 Beacon Street, Pittsburgh PA 15217 • 412-421-1017 • info@newlightcongregation.org

New Light News May 2021

From the Desk of the Rabbi

Dear friends,

I am at my desk preparing my lesson for the annual Tikkun Leil Shavuot on Saturday night, May 15th. It will be broadcast on the Federation's Zoom platform with teachers from every synagogue. Ho hum. I look forward to Shavuot every year -- the crowds of people jamming the hallways of the JCC coming to learn Torah. We stood around the cheesecake table and kibbitzed with our friends. We met new people from all the different area synagogues of all different stripes. Sadly, as we enter into the second year of the pandemic, we are sequestered in our homes behind our computers. We are not bodies (and souls!) in a classroom. We exist somewhere on the Ethernet. Through the miracle of wiring and Wi-Fi, we bring our community together.

But is it a community? We discovered Zoom as brilliant way to communicate "face to face" even at a time when we were told to shelter in our homes. We used Zoom to limit the spread of tiny Covid 19 germs and the terrible onslaught of super spreader events that were occurring in classrooms, conference rooms, worship spaces, and living rooms worldwide. We created a bridge using Zoom technology to the community of the future that would flourish after the pandemic was over. Zoom was only a bridge.

Most of us would agree that the synagogue community in its idealized form is about being there inside the sacred space. It is about singing with one voice. It is about greeting one another, eating pie, and drinking a *l'chaim* as we share news about the previous week (sitting at tables as is a New Light tradition). "Facetime" is about seeing one another face to face. Religion is about the experience about being together in one room whether it is using the symbol filled *Beit Knesset* model (based on the Jerusalem Temple) or the study model of the *Beit Midrash*.

I have spoken to many people about their worship experience on Zoom. A religious Catholic woman in the hospital who has never missed a daily mass told me that her church closed temporarily last year and masses were offered on Zoom. They are meeting in person again. Now she faces a choice. During the year, she moved her cursor to a church in Wisconsin that offered beautiful choral music and short homilies from a coterie of priests. Wisconsin offered much more than her small church in Republic, PA and she does not know if she will return even in person. A rabbi told me that he sees Zoom as a continual membership drive for the synagogue because Zoom expands their reach everywhere. He boasts of having members in California, Canada, and Australia! And what of the worth of uttering Hebrew prayers together? Said one of

my friends: members can avoid the archaic ritual and jump on the screen when they want. They can clean their kitchens and press the camera video tab to reveal themselves when they choose. Most of them are coming to hear me give the derasha, my friend says, so they can tune in to the part of the service holds their interest.

I'm sorry. Jews have never aspired to create televangelist leaders. I never thought of myself as a Joel Osteen or Joyce Meyer asking people to join my mission and send money and never mentioning one prayer we could say together.

Zoom will continue to be a bridge for some of us. I have discovered after talking with members that the decision to return in person is highly personal. As one person told me, after a year of sheltering in place, we have to re-learn how to be social. We have to re-learn how to work the room. We have to re-learn to be comfortable sitting or standing at a pace from the next person breathing in our direction. I have met people terribly nervous about entering the closed oven filled with aerosol-projected microorganisms even if we are 100% vaccinated. It is a little like the difference between those who jump into the pool and those who nervously climb down the ladder first putting a toe in, then a thigh, and maybe the whole body ten minutes later. Because we are stepping across the bridge at our own pace, it is difficult to tell others ahead of us or behind us what we should do together. Can we have a public discussion about returning without putting others down and causing acrimony? I think not.

Zoom allowed us to be in safe spaces and see one another at safe distances. It makes me glad that we did not lose one person who normally attends services on a weekly basis. Zoom did what it was intended to do. It provided electronic strings to keep us together in an emergency. I believe that for the future, community building happens in real spaces. Zoom has not changed that. Zoom is still a bridge.

Don't get me wrong. Zoom has been a blessing to tele-medicine, international business meetings (to an extent), family gatherings, and real time webinars and lectures. Zoom falls short in religious expression where hugs, blended voices, being attentive (not being distracted at home), catching the group vibe and eye contact is necessary. I think the same could be said of going to a concert or experiencing one on TV. "Make me a sacred space," says the Torah, "And I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8) – read "them" not "it" says the commentary. Sanctity happens among those who fill the sacred space. An artifice is not a goal in itself.

For us, Zoom is a bridge.

Shalom,
Rabbi

Rabbi's Movie Club

A club for film-lovers exploring the best in spirituality and religion in the movies.

"The Women's Balcony" (Israel 2016) is the May film.

A comedy about a small Sephardic synagogue in Israel and their future as a community. When a charismatic rabbi enters their lives, some women see him as a threat and attempt to unite their community and preserve their traditions.

See it on Amazon-Prime, YouTube or DVD (from the Rabbi)

Discussion with the rabbi: Tuesday, May 25 at 7:00 on Zoom. Use the same Zoom connection as for Shabbat.

May Presidents' Report

Spring brings tulips, rain and new beginnings. As the COVID-19 vaccination process opens to the general population, spring also brings the possibility of a return to (modified) pre-pandemic possibilities.

In-Person Services

Working with the Beth Shalom COVID-19 Task Force, we have had fairly rigorous rules governing our in-person and Zoom services since last March. Based on new CDC guidelines, we are implementing new rules, including:

- Per the CDC guidelines issued April 2, fully vaccinated individuals can join together in-person. Beginning with Shavuot we will restrict Friday night and Shabbat Service attendance to *only* vaccinated individuals. This date allows our younger members to obtain the required two vaccine shots. We will continue to enforce mask wearing and social distancing guidelines until the CDC recommends that these requirements can be dropped. (Those who are not old enough to be vaccinated or have a medical exemption are excluded from this restriction.) Non-vaccinated members can continue to join our Zoom service.

Please email janet@newlightcongregation.org with the date you are considered fully vaccinated (2 weeks after the second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine or the single Johnson & Johnson vaccine).

- Food is permitted following services. We have permission to use the Palkovitz Lobby as long as we maintain social distancing. Initially, it will be restricted to pre-bagged items handed out at the end of services.
- We will continue to restrict some halachic rituals, including parading and kissing the Torah.
- We will continue to use Zoom.

Cemetery Chapel Construction

Every month we announce that the interior and exterior of the Chapel are almost complete. This month is no exception: we are waiting on the painting of the columns around the front door and the installation of better door hardware. Planning is now underway for the final design of the interior of the Chapel, the stained-glass doors and windows, and the name of the Chapel.

We have received a grant to install security control and video recording capability to the interior and immediate exterior area. Work should be completed by the end of May.

We intend to submit a grant in the fall to Pennsylvania for external security, including adding bullet proof glass in the door and windows and building a security perimeter around the Chapel, as well as adding lighting and video security to the upper parking lot of the cemetery itself.

Memorialization Workgroup

The Workgroup held several meetings in April, working on the first of three “purpose” statements for the memorialization effort. The first statement, as *currently drafted* is:

- (1) *This memorial honors and remembers the eleven Jewish lives taken while they gathered to celebrate Shabbat with their congregations in a sacred space. Each leaves behind loved ones who will forever carry their memories as a blessing.***

The group tentatively proposed that the second statement be eliminated and/or integrated into the third statement. Additional meetings are scheduled in May:

(2) *This memorial will foster programs and events to educate and study Jewish values and the existence and danger of anti-Semitism in our country and throughout the world.*

(3) *This memorial is created to ensure that we never forget what happened and work together to ensure that we never again experience such a tragedy and assault on a safe place to worship.*

We will discuss this at the next board meeting.

Board Meeting

The next board meeting is May 3, 7:00 P.M. Use the same Zoom connection as for Shabbat Services. The annual congregational meeting is Sunday, June 6 at 10:30 A.M.

Shabbat Services

Friday night and Saturday morning services are held in Helfant Chapel and via Zoom. If you want to attend in person on Shabbat please email janet@newlightcongregation.org so that you can be on the list we provide to Beth Shalom each week for security purposes and to receive the Zoom connection.

Shavuot Schedule

Day 1 Services, Monday, May 17, 9:45 A.M., reading of the Ten Commandments, in Helfant and via Zoom.

Day 2 Services, Tuesday, May 18, 9:45 A.M., Yizkor service, in Helfant and via Zoom.

Tikkun Leil Online

Saturday, May 15, 10:00 P.M. to 12:50 A.M.

There are 22 learning sessions available. For details and to register see <https://jewishpgh.org/tikkun/>

Rabbi Perlman and Dr. Beth Kisseleff will conduct a session - *The Tablets as Symbol in the Commentary of Netviot Hashalom [20th Century]* in the 11:00-11:50 P.M. time frame.

May Birthdays

Marvin Feldman
Naomi Greenblott
Rachelle Grobstein
Fay Neft
Aryeh Sherman

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 purchase bricks for our “Garden of Freedom” 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 Stephen Cohen at 412-421-3999

NEW LIGHT CONGREGATION

5915 Beacon Street
412-421-1017

www.newlightcongregation.org

Rabbi	Jonathan Perlman	412-904-3601	
Co-President/Social VP/ & Yahrzeits	Barbara Caplan	412-521-4332	barbaracaplan@comcast.net
Co-President/Cemetery/ Website	Stephen Cohen	412-421-3999	stephenr.cohen@gmail.com
Membership	Debbi Salvin	724-444-6324	dgsalvin@pobox.com
Sisterhood	Sharyn Stein	412-521-5231	
Treasurer/Men’s Club	Harold Caplan	412-521-4332	haroldcaplan@comcast.net
Onegs	Hugh Casper	412-421-7619	
Recording Secretary/ Simcha Tree & Memorial Plaques	Ileen Portnoy	412-683-7985	ileenportnoy@gmail.com
Religious Committee	Carl Solomon	412-421-2165	
Corresponding Secretary/ Calendar	Janet Cohen	412-512-0949	janet@newlightcongregation.org