Another Pandemic Passover

Last year, the first major holiday we had to observe under pandemic conditions was Passover. We were all just learning Zoom, and the ability to have relatives from other parts of the country join us without having to travel was an exciting novelty.

The novelty has long ago worn off, but we have worked past many Zoom glitches, and there are still meaningful ways we can connect.

So we will hold our 2nd — and hopefully final! — Zoom Passover Seder this year, on Saturday, March 27, starting at 6 p.m.

Rabbi Daniel and Rabbi Marjorie will co-lead the seder, and if you’d like to do a reading, please email the temple and we’ll make sure to include you.

There will be no cost, and to connect, all you will have to do is click this link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88327350637?pwd=eUc4WENtZ3R6QmY0elM3OGlwSVp0dz09
Or from the Zoom app, enter Meeting ID: 883 2735 0637 and Passcode: Seder

We’ll have more details between now and then, including some recipes and instructions for home preparations. And feel free to invite family and friends.

Adult Education on “The Wilderness Journey” starting soon — Register now!

Our next adult education class will look a bit different. It will be a combination of text study, discussion, deep exploration and personal exercises, as we explore five steps of a spiritual “Wilderness Journey.”

The class will begin the week of March 28th and run for five weeks. Depending on the preferences of those who register, the class will be either Sunday mornings, Sunday Afternoons, Wednesday late afternoon, or Wednesday.
Donations to Temple Hesed

**BUILDING FUND**

In Honor of the Yahrzeit of Mindy Gromer  
Lee Gromer

In Honor of the Yahrzeit of Mildred Lambert  
Natalie Gelb

In Honor of the Yahrzeit of father, William Katz  
Sharon (Katz) and Saul Levy

**LINDA LEE LEVENTHAL TOY FUND**

In Memory of Keith Narrow  
Ellen Kline

**RABBI’S DISCRETIONARY FUND**

In Honor of the Yahrzeit of Oscar D. Leventhal  
Lindsay Leventhal

**RELIGIOUS SCHOOL**

In Memory of Anne C. Kramer, beloved mother and grandmother  
Carol and Paul Leiman and family

In Honor of the Yahrzeit of Tillie Fogel  
Ceil Rydzewski

**TORAH RESTORATION FUND**

In Memory of Charlotte Milliken  
Esther B. Adelman

In Memory of Jack Berman  
Esther B. Adelman

Major credit or debit cards accepted.
Minimum $10 donation for acknowledgment in the Messenger.
To donate contact Marlene Gianzanti, Temple Administrator at 570-344-7201
As I write this column, I’ve just received my second vaccine dose, so that I will be able once again to visit congregants in Elan Gardens and the Jewish Home, as well as in the hospital. I hope you either have received the vaccine already or will be scheduled soon. I am deeply grateful to all those (including Dolly Parton!) who helped move the vaccine development process along so quickly, as well as to the staff of Elan Gardens who arranged for my vaccine.

Other Plagues

But it also got me thinking, especially as we near the time of Passover, with its ritual recitation of the plagues. Certainly COVID-19 has proven to be a modern plague. But (among other things) we are also deeply plagued at the moment by social division, conflict, and group hatred. What might vaccinate us against that plague, and can our traditions shed any light on the development of such a “vaccine”?

Our sages teach (Pirke Avot 5:8) the “the sword [i.e., conflict and war] comes into the world because of justice delayed and justice denied or perverted.” Certainly, injustice breeds conflict, and a justice system that favors one group or another is bound to give rise to resentments and, eventually, open conflict. But the recent insurrection of January 6th demonstrated that even when there isn’t an actual injustice, people who have swallowed a propaganda campaign can be convinced that they have been treated unjustly. And that perceived injustice can lead to at least as much violence as actual injustice. After all, the Holocaust was promoted as being a “solution” to a “problem” that only existed in the minds of propagandists and those who came to believe the propaganda — that German would have triumphed in World War I if only the Jews in Germany hadn’t stolen victory out from under them.

What Do We Need?

So the next ingredient our vaccine requires is truth. In fact, in an earlier chapter of Pirke Avot, truth and justice are brought together, along with a third partner. Pirke Avot 1:18 teaches, “the world stands on three things: on justice, on truth, and on shalom.” In other words, these three concepts are interdependent. Without truth, true justice can never be achieved. And any attempt at delineating truth that is not built through justice will be inadequate. Truth must be spoken to power if it is to have any power. Moreover, both truth and justice need to be tempered through shalom — not merely peace, that is the absence of conflict, but also the active presence of wholeness. This means listening to those who are different and finding a way to hear their truths as well as your own, to lift up the voices of those who have been excluded and ignored.

How to get Shalom

Shalom can only be achieved when there is harmony — but harmony is dependent on our final vaccine ingredients — humility and Hesed. The prophet Micah teaches (6:8), “God has told you, o human, what is good: Only to do justice, to love Hesed (overflowing lovingkindness), and to walk humbly with God. Humility helps remind us that we are fallible — and thus need to listen more, extend more kindness and sympathy, because there is always the possibility that the “other” is right and we are wrong. And Hesed goes a step further, for it teaches us that the line between us the “other” is artificial — we are both part of the same river flowing from the Divine source.

As complicated as the manufacture and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is, building this vaccine against societal divisions would be orders of magnitude harder. But the task is no less urgent. To be Jewish means to be an advocate for justice, a devotee of truth, a seeker of Shalom, a practitioner of humility, and an instrument of Hesed. Not the easiest of job descriptions. But that is what we must try to do, if we are ever to bring some measure of healing to our torn and divided world.
I’ve been inspired! The word gratitude has been swirling about me for some time now, so I decided that it’s time that I pay it the attention that it deserves.

For close to a year, Shabbat morning chanting circles on Zoom have been a mainstay of a good-sized, very devoted group of us, most of whom are from outside of the Temple. Besides being inspired by and gaining comfort from the chanting which obviously brought us together, we enjoy learning from Rabbi Swartz, catching up on each other’s lives, and generally interacting with a diverse group of very nice people. We always start with a chant of gratitude. (In fact, the password for the chanting circle is Gratitude.) Not only are we grateful to God for all the usual reasons, but we are also grateful to each other for joining together each week.

While driving to the Temple to pick up my Schalach Manot goodies, I tuned into WVIA, the only station that my radio knows how to play. The TED Radio Hour was airing, and the subject was Gratitude. They were discussing why some people were seemingly happy so much of the time, even in the face of adversity in their lives. The several people in the discussion had all come to the same conclusion: that the happiest people were those who were grateful. It doesn’t even matter what you are grateful for, but that feeling of gratitude is both humbling and inspiring. It also makes you happy!

Then I thought about why I was in the car in the first place. I immediately realized how grateful I was to the people who had made this act of Hesed possible. From Sascha Novak and her family who happily worked together to help her bring her Bat Mitzvah project to fruition-to Rabbi Swartz, Marlene, and the Temple Board who helped with carrying it through to the Temple Hesed Family. I found myself smiling. It does work!

So while you’re putting on your masks, washing your hands, and not hugging your family and friends, try to remember that there are things to be grateful for. Be grateful that God instilled in humankind intellect and creativity, which come very much into play in these difficult times. Be grateful for Facetime, Zoom, texting, and even the telephone. Be grateful that, because of this technology, we can still share our lives with those that matter to us. Be grateful that the world is still a beautiful place, even when the sun is brilliantly shining on piles of glistening snow. Be grateful that life goes on, no matter what, and that you are a part of it!

Esther Adelman

March Chanting Circle: A Wilderness Journey

For March, our Chanting Circle theme will be “A Wilderness Journey.”

We’ll explore some of the spiritual aspects of wilderness, both as imagined in the Torah and across our planet today, through study, conversation, support, and chant. As always, people from any faith background or none are most welcome to join.

No prior chanting experience is necessary — all our chants are relatively simple to learn.

And, as Esther Adelman wrote in this month’s President’s column, you’ll leave in a more grateful state of mind! So join us at 11:30 on March 6, 13, and 27 (no chanting circle on the 20th).

To join, just click: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83570030002?pwd=TE8xQ2NDTi8xSk83cnRSQXFMY2lUdz09
Or from the Zoom app, enter Meeting ID: 835 7003 0002 and Passcode: Gratitude
RAC Backs Clarke For DOJ

This letter was sent to all senators by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism Supporting the nomination of Kristen Clarke:

February 3, 2021

Dear Senator:

As you consider the nomination of Kristen Clarke to lead the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division, I write to add my voice to the chorus of others who have worked positively and productively with Ms. Clarke over her many years as a civil rights leader.

The Reform Jewish Movement, the largest denomination in American Jewish life with more than 1.8 million congregants, 2000 rabbis, and 850 congregations, has long worked to address the many civil rights challenges facing our nation. Indeed, the Religious Action Center, where I serve as the director, was founded during the height of the Civil Rights Movement to ensure we had a permanent presence and voice on these issues. In our earliest days, we were proud to provide workspace for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he came to Washington. We continue to celebrate the fact that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 were drafted largely in the building that remains our home today. In the more than six decades since our founding, we have worked alongside generations of civil rights leaders to ensure equity and opportunity for all, no matter race, religion, gender, national origin, and ability or disability.

Kristen Clarke has taken her place among those leaders whose voices have been essential to ensuring that every individual’s civil rights are affirmed and protected. That was true during her tenure at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, as the leader of the Civil Rights Bureau within the New York State Attorney General’s office, and more recently as President and Executive Director of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. We were especially proud to partner with Ms. Clarke and the Lawyers’ Committee on our nonpartisan civic engagement campaign focused on ensuring every eligible American could cast their vote and have that vote counted.

The civil rights challenges facing the nation are so significant, and a leader of Ms. Clarke’s experience is so vital, that I believe it is important to share with you our conviction that her nomination is of the utmost importance.

During Ms. Clarke’s tenure as chief of the New York Attorney General’s Civil Rights Bureau, among the many achievements she oversaw was a Religious Rights Initiative that was a critical tool in enforcing anti-discrimination statutes. That effort, along with her strong fight for religious accommodations, was of particular consequence to us as Jews. In the same spirit, while at the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, she led a lawsuit against white supremacists who were harassing an African American student leader at American University while also fighting the proliferation of online antisemitism.

Americans’ civil rights are at a critical moment. Antisemitism and hate crimes are rising. More than four centuries of systemic racism have left a widening gap between the lived experiences of white Americans and Americans of Color. In education, health care, employment, wages, and all areas of life, we have yet to realize the promise of civil rights for Americans of Color. LGBTQ individuals, women, and people with disabilities also continue to experience civil rights violations that inhibit the United States from achieving its highest aspirations. A strong and experienced leader at the helm of the DOJ Civil Rights Division, like Kristen Clarke, can help address these injustices.

As you consider the nomination of Kristen Clarke, I hope you will consider her outstanding record, her partnership with us and others in the Jewish community on issues of shared importance, and act in the best interests of a strong DOJ Civil Rights Division.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner

Rabbi Pesner
### Holiday Calendar

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**Torah Portions**

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*More information available from URJ.org*

“A good man can’t be corrupted by the tavern nor a bad one reformed by the synagogue.”

*From 1001 Yiddish Proverbs—By Fred Kogos*
YAHREITIS

Week Ending March 6 (Service March 5)


Week Ending March 13 (Service March 12)


Week Ending March 20 (Service March 19)


Week Ending March 27 (Service March 26)


Week Ending April 3 (April 2)


Get Wells

Michael Cornfield
Mark Davis
Don Dembert
Lynne Fragin
Larry Golden
Maggie LoRusso
Rich Mates
Chelsea Minkoff
Harriet Noble
Jane Oppenheim
Charlene Ostro
Emily Trunzo
Joel Vener

A Shalach Manot Recap — and what comes next?

Our first ever (or at least first in many, many years) Hesed Shalach Manot (sending of tasty treats) was a wonderful success. For her bat mitzvah service project, Sascha Novak, with a little help from her parents Ross and Jennifer, baked several hundred hamentashen, put them in nearly 100 bags with a variety of candies, and decorated all the bags with a Purim greeting.

Then, on February 21, Rabbi Daniel greeted Hesed families at the doors of the synagogue and made sure everyone left with something to celebrate and nosh on. We also delivered dozens of bags to congregants who couldn’t get to the synagogue. Many thanks to Sascha and family, to the Temple Hesed board that contacted synagogue members, and to all the drivers who delivered bags. Do you have an idea about how we can continue to connect and support each other in the coming months? Let the Temple office know, and we’ll try to put volunteers together to make it happen.
evening — register now with the Temple office to put your preference in.
During the class, we will journey together through a five step process:
Step 1: Stuck in the Narrow Place.
We can’t move toward freedom and the “promised land” until we first develop an awareness of where we are stuck and constricted. We’ll look at Pharaoh’s “heart diseases” to diagnose our narrow place, as well as understanding that a Divine response can only come after we learn how to “cry out.”
Step 2: Crossing the Sea
How do we prepare to “cross the sea,” to take a leap of faith, and to step into unknown waters? We’ll look at some mystical texts about that leap, and also listen to some musical explorations.
Step 3: The Sweet and the Bitter
Wilderness can be purifying, but it can also highlight bitterness. Through the metaphor of the Exodus struggles with water bitter and sweet, we’ll explore what’s hidden in our own wells, what needs to bubble up, and the purposes of bitterness.
Step 4: Standing at Sinai
What does the idea of revelation mean to us as modern, Reform Jews? Can we really receive something new? Can we find new ways of seeing, or tear through the veils we have created around ourselves? And what is the connection between revelation and wilderness?

Step 5: Building the Holy Place
Why was the sanctuary built in the desert? What does it mean to create a space for the Holy to dwell? What is the difference between building out of obligation and building through generosity? And how do we make the holy “portable” — something that is able to remain with us and to continue to adapt through our various life changes.

Because this class will be taught online, it is also open to non-Temple members, so feel free to tell your friends.

ABOUT TEMPLE HESED:

Temple Hesed, a Reform Synagogue founded Aug. 20, 1860, is Scranton’s first and oldest Jewish congregation. It is one of the earliest congregations to join the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, now the Union for Reform Judaism. It has been a member since Dec. 12, 1874.

The synagogue serves the needs of individuals and families in Lackawanna County and surrounding areas. Situated on Knox Road, off Lake Scranton Road in the East Mountain section of Scranton, the current building opened in 1973. Temple Hesed operates a cemetery on West Warren Street in Dunmore.

The office is open Tuesday—Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Friday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Rabbi Swartz is happy to set appointments at any convenient time. Contact him to set a time. The rabbi also has "drop-in" hours every Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Friday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The Rabbi holds these times open for visits or calls for which an appointment was not or could not be made.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, appointments should be made for all meetings with the rabbi.

The Temple Hesed Cemetery is open for visitation six days a week. Visitation hours are: Monday–Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 8 a.m. till dusk and it is closed for Shabbat on Saturday. For more information, call the office.