



Hakol

הקול 'The Voice'



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Bobbi Shapiro

Our 20th Annual Interfaith Peace Chanukah ceremony will be on Zoom again this year. The date is Tuesday, November 30th at 5:30 p.m. Rabbi Judith will be our emcee again and we will have participants from many of the area's different faith communities.

Go to the TJC web site and follow the link to register. You will get an email with a link to the event.

Be sure to have a menorah or candle with you during the event as we'll all light them together.

Please tell your friends to join us for this inspiring event.





The Taos Jewish Center (TJC)

is dedicated to fostering positive Jewish identity, by providing programs and services that enrich the lives of the people it serves in northern New Mexico.

The **TJC** is open to all who wish to explore and participate in these experiences that reflect and incorporate Jewish ethics, culture and observances.

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EDITOR'S POV

I've always considered Chanukah as a holiday of magical thinking. Miracles are magic, right? We Jews have always turned to the Beyond to strengthen our resolve and faith. The Rabbi's Counsel addresses this through a discussion by Rabbi Nachman of Breslev.

The Eretz Shalom Cemetery is embarking on a much hoped-for landscaping and beautification. You'll find several pages here devoted this effort, including an opportunity to contribute.

Sadly, our community lost a longtime member, a distinguished poet, educator and activist, with the death of Phyllis Hotch. You'll find her eulogy and a selection of her poetry in Kolot.

Two writers, Robert Benjamin and Iris Keltz, sent stories written from the perspective of children -- one with a theatrical bent, the other a potential children's book. They're both delightful! Look for them in Kolot.

Rabbi Dr. Rob Lennert gave a lecture on Baruch Spinoza recently. I've based an illustrated article on his revered and controversial subject.

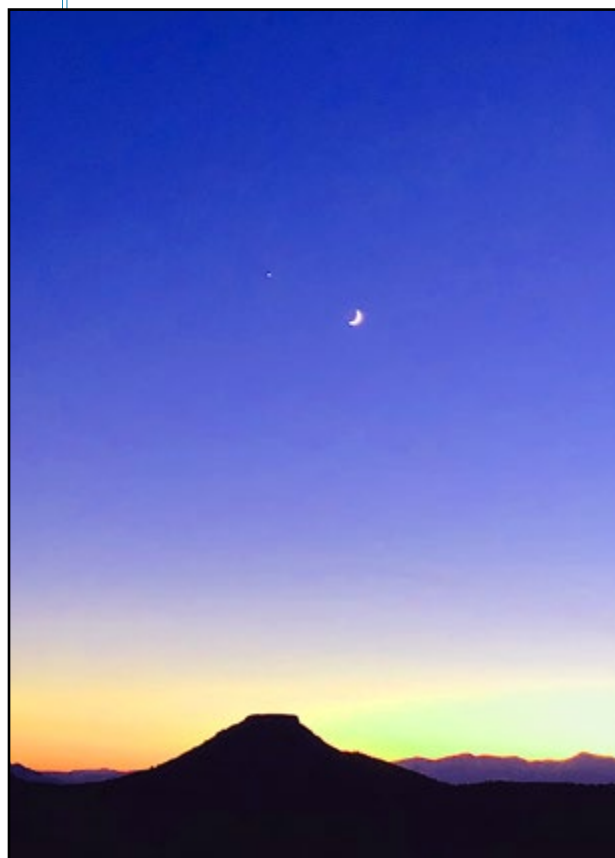
A show at The Israel Museum caught my attention. "Hear O Israel, the Magic of the Shema, explores the history of amulets in mystical and functional Judaism.

I took the photo below when driving home to Ojo Caliente from Taos -- Venus and a waxing moon at dusk over *Vibora* (Rattlesnake) Mesa.

May I suggest that you print this issue -- lots to read and enjoy.

L'Shalom,

Karen Kerschen,
Editor



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

November 2021

Dear Friends,

The passing of Phyllis Hotch overshadows anything else I have to say. Phyllis and her late husband Sy were founding members of the TJC, and Phyllis held a special place of love and honor, not only among our membership, but within the entire Taos Community. We are all blessed to have known Phyllis, and her poetry will enrich the world for eternity. As a personal friend, Phyllis cannot be replaced. I'll forever miss her wit and candor at lunch, visiting, or on the phone. I wish I did it more this past year. This edition of Hakol will feature a eulogy by Ariana Kramer and a selection of Phyllis's poetry.

We're still not planning any face-to-face gatherings during the remainder of 2021. We anticipate being back together sometime in 2022, but this decision is a ways off. We have quite a few new members this year, so I am eager to finally meet all of you in person. In the meanwhile, join us on Zoom twice a month for Shabbat and Saturday morning Torah study led by Rabbi Judith.

Phyllis cared deeply about refugees around the world, and would have been proud of this community's response to the Afghan refugee needs in New Mexico. I'm certainly proud of you! We have already raised over \$5,000 along with a small mountain of donated goods. We are still collecting money and goods. Donations of money should be sent to B'nai Shalom, and goods dropped off at the TJC by appointment.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Hakol, and that you will encourage your family and friends to read it too. We should all celebrate the life and memory of Phyllis Hotch.

Have a very happy Chanukah!

Gary Atias

TJC Board President



E-Blasts are the email notices you receive from the TJC. Submissions for the e-blasts should be sent to Neal Friedman, at friedendo@gmail.com, with *E-Blast* on the Subject line.

Deadline for a given week is the Wednesday before the following week's mailing, which goes out on the Monday before the Shabbat.

This means we request your input **ten days** before the Shabbat.

According to Rabbi Nachman (18th century Chasidic sage and great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov), the entire world is like a spinning dreidel.

Everything turns around and changes: from man to angel and angel to man; from head to foot and foot to head; everything is revolving and changing from one thing to the next, from top to bottom and from bottom to top.

According to Chassidic tradition, the Baal Shem Tov had a silver dreidel like the one at right

In truth, everything is in its root, one.

There are angels, which are totally separated from physicality. And there are also heavenly beings who manifest as physical, And there is shafel, the low world—that is, our world, which is complete physicality.

Even though each one of these three things is taken from its own place, everything is in its root, one.

Therefore, the entire world is a revolving wheel, and everything goes around and changes. Now something is at the top like a head and something else is at the bottom like a foot. Afterwards, the foot becomes a head and the head becomes a foot; man becomes an angel and angel becomes a man. As we find in the Talmud, angels were cast down from the heavens to this world, and they became completely physical, lustful creatures. Other times, angels came to this world and invested themselves in physicality. On the other hand, we find that people were transformed into angels.

This world is a turning wheel, which is a dreidel, and everything turns around.

In truth, everything is in its root, one.



Rabbi Nachman of Breslov Chambers of the Palace, Part 14

This time of COVID has certainly seen a world turned upside down. The strongest, richest country in the world (USA) could not control a pandemic that has claimed almost 800,000 lives.

As a Jewish community, we have been isolated in our homes while celebrating our festivals and Holy Days on small screens.

Angels, sometimes disguised as health care workers, saved lives, while sometimes, those same angels were claimed by death. Some struggled in the early days of this pandemic to be eligible for a COVID vaccine, while others spurned the opportunity.

Now, jobs go begging while many are unemployed. Meanwhile, the climate continues to whirl and spin, causing a furnace of fires across the globe, and torrents of floodwaters and mudslides in parched deserts.

Too wet, too dry, the world keeps turning. One moment up, one moment down.

And in the midst of all this chaos and confusion, we look for the light.

Chanukah is here to remind us that while the light may be hidden, it never goes out.

It is often said that the miracle of Chanukah is not that the small jar of oil that lasted for eight miraculous nights, but that the Maccabees had the faith to begin to look for the oil and light the menorah, understanding that it is always possible to cleanse, change, and begin anew.

At the end of another COVID year, we see that the earth keeps spinning, with much out of our control. It seems so easy to give up, shrug and say “Well, that’s fate,” and abandon all hope for positive change. >>

This is not the message of Chanukah!

Chanukah literally means *Chanukat Habayit*, a cleansing and rededication of the altar that was destroyed in destruction of the First Holy Temple. The Maccabees dared to pick up the mess, and start over, reclaiming the eternal light though eight days of miraculous oil.

As we light our candles, let us rededicate ourselves to cleansing our inner altars, and righting our spinning world. May we take this time of darkness to remember the essential light that permeates us and the universe, and that,

In truth, everything is in its root, one.

May the blaze and warmth of our Chanukah candles lead us to embrace the light of all humanity, and turn our world right side up again once more.

Chag Sameach
Rabbi Judith



CHANUKAH CANDLE-LIGHTING

Sunday, 11/28 -- First candles
Monday, 11/29 -- Two candles
Tuesday, 11/30 -- Three candles
Wednesday, 12/1 -- Four candles
Thursday, 12/2 -- Five candles
Friday, 12/3 -- Six candles
Saturday, 12/4 -- Seven candles
Sunday, 12/5 -- Eight candles



On the **first night of Chanukah**, recite --

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, shebecheyanu v-ki'y'manu v-bigianu la-z'man ha-zeh.

Blessed are you, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

These blessings are recited or sung **each night of Chanukah** --

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b-mitzvotav, v-tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are you, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, who makes us holy through Your commandments, and commands us to light the Chanukah lights.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, she-asah nisim la-avoteinu v-imoteinu ba-yamim ha-beim ba-z'man ha-zeh.

Blessed are you, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, who performed miracles for our ancestors in

HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) references this blessing on behalf of refugees -

Al ha'nisim, v'al ha'purkan, v'al ha'g'vurot, ve'al ha'teshuot ve'al ha'milchamot she'asita l'avoteinu ba'yamim ha-beim ba-z'man ha-zeh.

Thank You for the miracles, for rescuing us, for the courageous acts you performed, for saving us, and for the battles you waged in defense of our ancestors and at this season.

CANDLELIGHTING

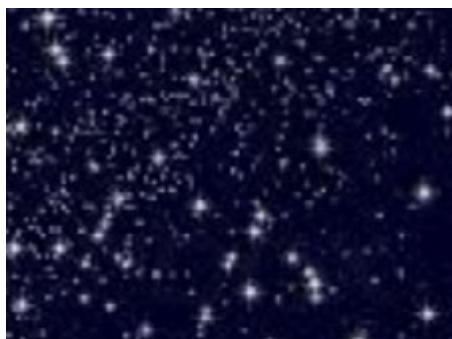


Shabbat	Torah	Havdalah
11/19, 4:33 pm	Vayishlach	11/20, 5:32 pm
11/26, 4:30 pm	Vayeishev	11/27, 5:29 pm
12/3, 4:29 pm	Mikeitz	12/4, 5:29 pm
12/10, 4:29 pm	Vayigash	12/11, 5:29 pm
12/17, 4:31 pm	Vayechi	12/18, 5:32 pm
12/24, 4:35 pm	Shemot	12/25, 5:36 pm
12/31, 4:39 pm	Va'eira	1/1/2022, 5:40 pm
1/7, 4:45 pm	Bo	1/8, 5:46 pm
1/14, 4:52 pm	Beshalach	1/15, 5:52 pm
1/21, 4:59 pm	Yitro	1/22, 5:59 pm
1/28, 5:06 pm	Mishpatim	1/29, 6:06 pm
2/4, 5:14 pm	Terumah	2/5, 6:13 pm
2/11, 5:21 pm	Tetzaveh	2/12, 6:20 pm
2/18, 5:28 pm	Ki Tisa	2/19, 6:26 pm
2/25, 5:35 pm	Vayakhel Shekalim	2/26, 6:33 pm



ROSH CHODESH

October 8	1 Chesvan
November 5	1 Kislev
December 4	1 Tevet
January 3	1 Shevat
February 2	1 Adar I
March 3	1 Adar II



Rosh Chodesh (name of month) haba alenynu v'al kol yisrael l'tovah.

May Rosh Chodesh (*name of month*) come to us and all Israel for goodness.

May you give us long life,

a LIFE OF PEACE, A LIFE OF GOODNESS, A LIFE OF BLESSING.

WELCOMING AFGHAN REFUGEES TO NORTHERN NEW MEXICO

The Taos Jewish Center and Bnai Shalom Havurah are collecting supplies and monetary donations to support Afghan refugees who have relocated to New Mexico. ***Todah raba*** to everyone who donated art, school and sewing supplies and made financial contributions to this effort!

We had planned to take supplies to Holloman Air Force Base for refugees housed there in late October. However, we were informed by our contacts at Holloman that it would be better to hold onto the items for now, and to gift them to the refugees once they have been settled in their home communities. Lutheran Family Services (LFS) is working to settle immigrants in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Vegas. We have notified LFS that we have supplies to give the refugees once they are settled and plan to work with LFS to deliver them to families settled in Santa Fe at the appropriate time.

The Taos Jewish Center and Bnai Shalom Havurah are also working with LFS to sponsor 1-2 families in the amount of \$6000 per family. And, we are collecting donations for special immigrant visa and humanitarian parole application fees to gift to Afghan families with Taos or NM connections. If you would like to contribute to these efforts, please send a check payable to Bnai Shalom Havurah (with "Afghan refugees" in memo) to Bnai Shalom Havurah, c/o Bette Myerson, 810 Dillon Lane, Taos, NM 87571.

Thank you again to all who have given so generously to welcome our new neighbors. For more information on this effort please contact Rabbi Judith HaLevy (radrava@gmail.com), Bette Myerson (bette@taosnet.com) or Ariana Kramer (arianakramer@hotmail.com).



Alms container
Masinekele, Let us Give
Jeremiah Maloi
Cape Town, South Africa, 2007

OUT AND ABOUT -- ON ZOOM AND LIVE



Live-on-Zoom performances of Robert Benjamin's play, **HUNKER UP**, about COVID times. Having bonded during the pandemic, two single seniors now struggle to emerge from the apparently ebbing pandemic (May 2021). Bari eagerly resumes her pre-pandemic social life with family and friends, but Kevin feels abandoned. ***Will Bari welcome Kevin into her "New Normal?"*** This live, online, heartwarming play will be presented by the Los Alamos Public Library on Thursday evening, **Dec. 16, 2021**. The 35-minute show will be immediately followed by an audience talkback. Register for the Zoom-link is at <https://laconm.libcal.com/calendar/events>. FREE admission.

Also, this play is tentatively scheduled for a Live-on-Zoom performance during mid-February, co-sponsored by Teatro Paraguas (Santa Fe) and Sage-ing International. Registration for Zoom will become available at <https://www.sage-ing.org/events/>.

Cynthia Freeman-Valerio and Ben Teitelbaum are performing in Taos Onstage's play; **Three Wise Guys and One Christmas Eve**, live at the TCA **Dec. 14-15**. A witty, charming adaptation of two short stories by Damon Runyon, evoking the guys and dolls of 1930's NY, done in radio-play style.



He was called the Michael Jordan of bridge, considered the world's greatest player, and accused of cheating in a scandal that rocked the bridge world to its core. **DIRTY TRICKS** is the detective-like story of Lotan Fisher, the self-confident Israeli who seemed invincible until his nemesis, Norway's Boye Brogeland, brought him down. ***But was Fisher cheating?***

Streaming, 3:00 pm Sunday, November 21 — 10:00 PM Saturday, November 27th



Photo by Serena Bolton

New Times Best Selling Author

Anne Sebba

In conversation with Bonnie Ellinger

"riveting biography
...thanks to Sebba's marvelously gripping narration"
-- Washington Independent Review of Books

Ethel Rosenberg
An American Tragedy

Zoom Webinar

Sunday, Nov. 21
11:00 am MT 1:00 pm ET

PASSINGS

Yahrtzeit Records

To add or correct a Yahrtzeit record, here's what's needed:



Complete name of loved one.

Hebrew name (including parents), if known

Complete memorial date, day/month/year

Relationship to the loved one (parent, sibling, etc.)

Please send the information to directly to
Bruce Grossman, at grossman@taosnet.com.

Eretz Shalom Cemetery

Owned and dedicated in 1993 by Havurah B'nai Shalom, Eretz Shalom has affordable plots available on a pre-need or as-needed basis. It is located on Llano Mesa, south of town.

Your family would appreciate having your arrangements already made.

Contact cemetery administrators Steve Natelson (575/758-1094), Bruce Ross (575/758-8258) or Bruce Grossman (575/741-0888).

Cemetery Beautification Has Begun!

Our Cemetery Beautification Committee, made up of Bruce Grossman, Nancy Tetenbaum, Bonnie Korman, Roberta Lerman, Betty Backer, Sam Goldstein and Jay Levine has been working hard on plans to landscape the Eretz Shalom Cemetery.

On the next page is a rendering by Taos Landscaping.

The new latilla fence on the two sides facing the roads was completed October 27th.

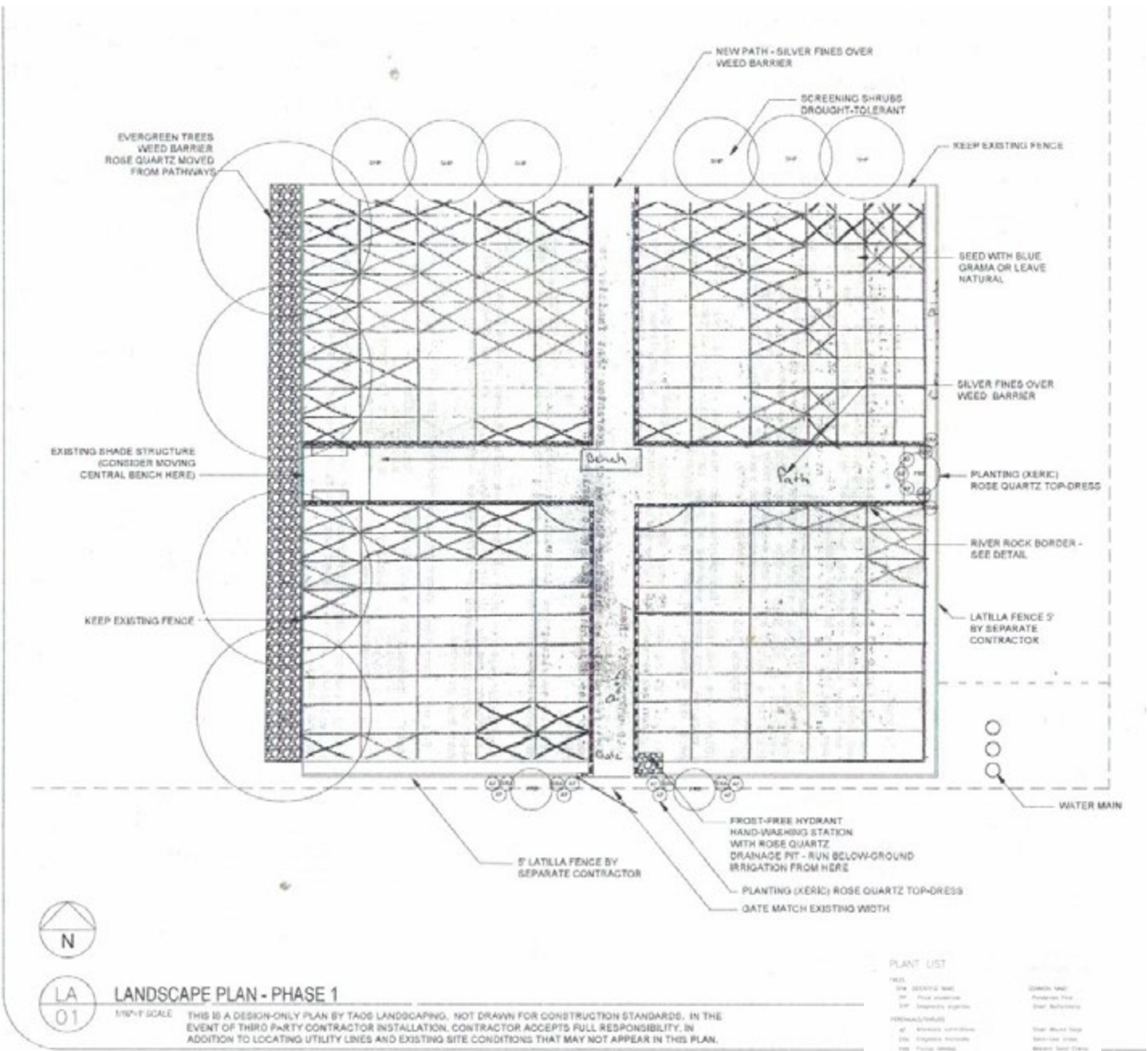
We hope to complete a large part of the project in the spring or summer of 2022.

In order to complete this project, we need to raise the necessary funds.

A letter which will go out in early November to the mailing lists of the Taos Jewish Center, B'nai Shalom Havurah and all interested people requests your generosity. It's printed as well after the drawing.

Please support our Jewish community's cemetery with a tax deductible donation to B'nai Shalom Havurah. Send it to 810 Dillon Lane, Taos, NM 87571 and put "Cemetery" on the memo line. For questions, please contact Bruce Grossman, Annette Rubin or Bette Myerson

Thank you!

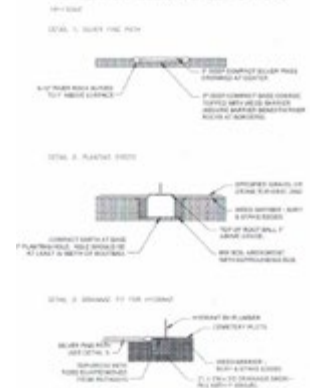


CEMETERY LANDSCAPE PLAN -- PHASE 1

by Taos Landscaping



INSTALLATION DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS



ERETZ SHALOM CEMETERY FUNDRAISING APPEAL

Dear members and friends of the Taos Jewish Community,

We in Taos are very fortunate. Our Eretz Shalom Cemetery, located in Llano Quemado is the only stand-alone Jewish cemetery in New Mexico. Traditionally, the first thing that is built and consecrated in a Jewish community is a cemetery. Eretz Shalom Cemetery was established in 1992 by B'nai Shalom Havurah, which is its legal owner. The time has come to embark on a beautification project of the grounds.

This project will include new pathways, trees, shrubs, drip irrigation, new fencing and an exquisite gate. Recently, B'nai Shalom purchased a membership in El Valle Domestic Water Association for the cemetery. A water line is now at the edge of the property. We have not yet installed a meter and hydrant, but that will happen once we embark on our landscape plan.

To accomplish the beautification of the cemetery based on the landscape plan approved by the B'nai Shalom board, we would like to raise approximately \$45,000. There is exciting news. We have already received a generous donation. Given the current costs of labor and materials, that will only get us part of the way to our funding goals. We would like to raise sufficient funds to cover all the initial costs, as well as create a fund to cover maintenance and water costs into the foreseeable future. On the other side of this letter is the rendering from the Taos Landscaping plan.

We have accepted the sacred responsibility of honoring and preserving the memory of our loved ones. Fortunately, we are now in a position to not only sanctify, but beautify our cemetery. This is your opportunity to be part of this enduring project. We hope that you will consider making a heartfelt contribution for the landscaping of our Eretz Shalom cemetery. Please send a check to B'nai Shalom Havurah, 810 Dillon Lane, Taos, NM 87571 in the enclosed return envelope. Put "cemetery" on the memo line. Our Treasurer, Bette Myerson, will send you an acknowledgement letter for tax purposes. This is a tax deductible donation as B'nai Shalom is a 501©(3) nonprofit corporation. IRA contributions (RMD's) are welcome. Thank you so much!

Shalom,

Annette Rubin, President
B'nai Shalom Havurah

Gary Atias, President
Taos Jewish Center

TJC KABBALAT SHABBATS

Typically the second and fourth Fridays of each month, Rabbi Judith HaLevy conducts Shabbat via Zoom. We light Shabbat candles, make Kiddush, honor the Shabbat bride, sing blessings for those in need of healing. And we remember the deceased with the Mourners' Kaddish. The Rabbi leads prayers and discussion pertinent to the time, season and Torah. It's always a stimulating and grounding hour and a half to usher in the Shabbat.

Check out Rabbi Judith's videos of the Torah *parashat* on the TJC website at taosjewishcenter.org/rabbi-s-corner-new

B'NAI SHALOM HAVURAH

To join us for this or any event, please contact Annette Rubin (rubin.annette@gmail.com 575-776-5426) or Bette Myerson (bette@taosnet.com 575-758-3376) and we'll send you the Zoom link.

We will continue meeting on Zoom until the pandemic ends and it is safe to gather live. If you'd like to host a Shabbat, contact Annette or Bette. In the Zoom context, that means Annette handles the Zoom set-up and invitation. We'll answer your questions and give you more details.

If you have not been receiving B'nai Shalom emails, please email Annette and Bette and we'll add you to our list.



An Opportunity to Help Members of Our Community

For the last two years, members of the Taos community have contributed to a program of **Medical Debt Relief** which helps erase debts that former patients cannot afford to pay to Holy Cross Hospital. Last year over \$1 million was erased to prevent bills from being sent to collection agencies.

B'nai Shalom is one of several faith groups to participate in this very worthy program.

If you would like to give a tax deductible donation to this effort,

please send a check to *B'nai Shalom Havurah, 810 Dillon Lane, Taos, NM 87571.*

I will send you a receipt for your taxes and see that the money gets to Holy Cross Hospital to help with this effort. Please make your donations by October 15, 2021.

If you want more information about the program, feel free to contact me. Thank you for this support for this wonderful effort.

Bette Myerson
bette@taosnet.com
575-758-3376

TJC Roger Lerman Library

The library is closed. Contact person is William Westbury. wmarthurwestbury@gmail.com.

TJC Program Content

Contact Lucy Melamed at lucymmel@hotmail.com

B'nai Shalom Mitzvah Fund

B'nai Shalom maintains a small fund that gives a little help to folks in the Taos community with financial needs. If you want to contribute to this effort, you can send a tax deductible donation to *B'nai Shalom Havurah*, 810 Dillon Lane, Taos, NM 87571 and Bette will send you a receipt for your tax records. Know that you are contributing to tikkun olam and your money will be used wisely. Make a tax-deductible donation to help someone local who is in need.

For questions or information, contact Bette Myerson (575-758-3376 or bette@taosnet.com).

Chaverim of TJC

The Chaverim (*Hebrew for Friends or Volunteers*) can provide assistance and support to members of our congregation, such as rides to appointments, picking up groceries, prescriptions, or borrowing library books.

Send your request to tjc@newmex.com, with *Chaverim* in the subject line or call the TJC at 575-758-8615.

Meals for the Men's Homeless Shelter

Distribution of meals every 3rd Thursday. Please be part of this important community mitzvah. Participate when you can. Contact Roberta at rlerman57@gmail.com.

Taos Elders and Neighbors Together (TENT)

A membership, non-denominational community organization to provide transportation, caregiver relief and minor home repairs to help elders maintain independence at home. Further info: TaosElders.org
For further information, visit TaosElders.org or call 575-224-6335.

**TAOS ORGANIZATIONS THAT FEED THE HUNGRY**

The Shared Table, c/o El Pueblito United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 1302, El Prado, NM 87529 www.elpueblitoumc.org

The Taos Coalition to End Homelessness, P.O. Box 1516, Taos, NM 87571
www.taosmensshelter.org

St James Episcopal Church Food Pantry, 208 Camino de Santiago, Taos, NM 87571 www.stjamestaos.com

Taos Immigrant Allies, c/o B'nai Shalom Havurah, 810 Dillon Lane, Taos, NM 87571 www.taosimmigrantallies.org

Sin Fronteras, P.O. Box 531, Ranchos de Taos, NM 87557 (you can find them on Facebook)

HEART of Taos, P.O. Box 613, Taos, NM 87571 www.HEARToftaos.org
Help for Afghan Refugees in New Mexico c/o B'nai Shalom Havurah, 810 Dillon Lane, Taos, NM 87571 Put "**Afghans**" on the Memo line of your check.

Neem Karoli Baba Ashram and Hanuman Temple
416 Geronimo Lane, Taos, NM 87571 www.nkbashram.org

Thank you for anything you can give. No donation is too small.

TJC BOOK GROUP

Nov. 15: ***The Dream Daughter***, by **Diane Chamberlain**. A page turner with a superb plot line. In 1970, Caroline Sears is told her unborn baby has a heart defect. ‘This story literally jumps , with totally unexpected twists.’ (Sarah Green)

Dec. 20: ***The Authenticity Project***, by **Clara Poole**. An old man writes in a journal and leaves it in a public place, to be found and continued. Numerous people pick it up, write in it, leave it, but also connect, form friendships, experience change. (Robyn Rosenwald)

Jan. 17, 2022: ***The Elves of Lily Hill Farm***, by **Penny Kelly**. The author encounters elves, and undertakes a project to produce a bountiful grape harvest without using chemical fertilizers or pesticides. She enters the private world of plants, insects, animals, devas, and nature spirits, and as the elves teach her intense and powerful lessons, an amazing drama emerges between people and nature, both struggling to survive in a world where communication between them has been lost. (Gale Dorion)

Feb. 21: ***Snow in August***, by **Pete Hamill**. NYC, 1947. 11-year-old Irish-American Michael Devlin befriends Rabbi Judah Hirsch, a refugee from Prague. Michael teaches the Rabbi about baseball and America, and the Rabbi teaches Michael about Judaism and Kabbalah. A fine fable from NYC’s quintessential columnist. (Bette Myerson)

Mar. 21: ***A Long Petal of the Sea***, by **Isabel Allende**. Described as ‘an immersive read about love and survival.’ Epic in scope, it’s set during the Spanish Civil War, and partly in Chile, where the protagonists again witness the fight between freedom and repression. Was Spain’s most popular book, April 2019-2020. (Diane Friedman)

April 18: ***News of the World***, by **Paulette Jiles**. Powerful tale of an unexpected relationship between two very disparate characters, a grizzled old man and a lost young girl of different cultures. Set in the wilds of untamed Texas in the 1870s. Beautifully told. (National Book Club Award finalist, 2016) (Nancy Harris)

May 16: ***The Boston Girl***, by **Anita Diamant**. 85-year-old Addie tells her life story to her 22-year-old granddaughter, who has asked her “How did you get to be the woman you are today.” She begins in 1915, the year she found her voice and made friends who would help shape the course of her life. From the one-room tenement apartment she shared with her parents and two sisters, to the library group for girls she joins at a neighborhood settlement house, to her first, disastrous love affair, Addie recalls her adventures with compassion for the naïve girl she was and with a wicked sense of humor. (Beth Levine)

June 20: ***The World That We Knew***, by **Alice Hoffman**. Berlin, 1941. Two women create a golem as a protective companion for a 12-year-old girl’s flight to safety from the Nazis. A thriller with Jewish mystical, magic-realist touches. (Karen Kerschen)

July 18: ***The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek***, by **Kim Michele Richardson**. 1936. Deep in the woods of Troublesome Creek, KY, lives blue-skinned 19-year-old Cussy Carter, the last living female of the rare Blue People ancestry. Lonely, she joins the historical Pack Horse Library Project, riding across slippery creek beds and up treacherous mountains on her faithful mule to deliver books and other reading material to the impoverished hill people of Eastern Kentucky. (Diane Friedman)



TJC Book Group meets every month on the **third Monday** at **noon**, via Zoom.

Join us, even if you haven’t read the book or are shy about sharing your thoughts.

Contact persons: Diane Friedman, dianecda5@gmail.com, or Karen Kerschen, kkerschen@gmail.com

NOMINATED BOOKS WE PASSED ON,

... for the TJC book club's choices -- interesting reads, all!

***Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor Frankl.**

This early psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor posits that Love is Everything. His discussion of meaninglessness and meaning cuts to the heart of what's wrong in our suffering world with compassion, as he delves into what we are and can be as humans.

***A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*, by Suzanne Joinson.**

Interwoven story of English women missionaries on the Silk Road in 1923 and a contemporary English woman and pieces of a puzzle that reveals links between them..

***Watermelon Snow: A Novel of Survival in the Washington Wilderness*, by William Liggett.**

A climate scientist discovers something remarkable in the Washington wilderness. A mysterious illness sickens her team, leading to fears of unleashing a pandemic. An intense storm traps her and a NASA scientist in a struggle to survive.

***Indigenous People's History of the United States*, by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz.**

An important, award-winning book that reinterprets America's past from a perspective not studied in school, with genocide at its core. The prose is crisp and compelling, the research impeccable.

***The Discovery of Chocolate*, by James Runcie.**

Read this historical fiction at your peril! A sumptuous sensual ride exploring the divine nuances of chocolate making. A first novel from the writer of the PBS Grantchester mysteries.

***Unexpected Bride in the Promised Land: Journeys in Palestine and Israel*, by Iris Keltz.**

An absorbing, eloquent memoir of a young Jewish woman caught in sanctuary with Palestinians during the 1967 war. Rich in Palestinian and Israeli history. A compassionate account by a lifelong activist.

SERVICES, RESOURCES TO SHARE

Are you an individual with a skill you'd like to make known to the TJC community? Write a brief classified and send it to kkerschen@gmail.com for a listing.

Hebrew Lessons

Planning a trip to Israel?

In need of Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation?

Wanting to improve your Hebrew literacy?

Call TJC member and experienced Hebrew tutor and native speaker, Judah Botzer at (575)-751-0779 email -- jbotzer@outlook.com

Debora Seidman, Private Writing Coaching and Mentorship

Sacred Writing Circles are held twice a month, Sunday noon via Zoom

<https://deboraseidman.com/programs/circles/>

Come Back Home Through Writing: a 21 day online writing program

offered through DailyOm.com. Trust Your Voice: A Soul Writing Journey website -- www.DeboraSeidman.com email -- Debora@DeboraSeidman.com

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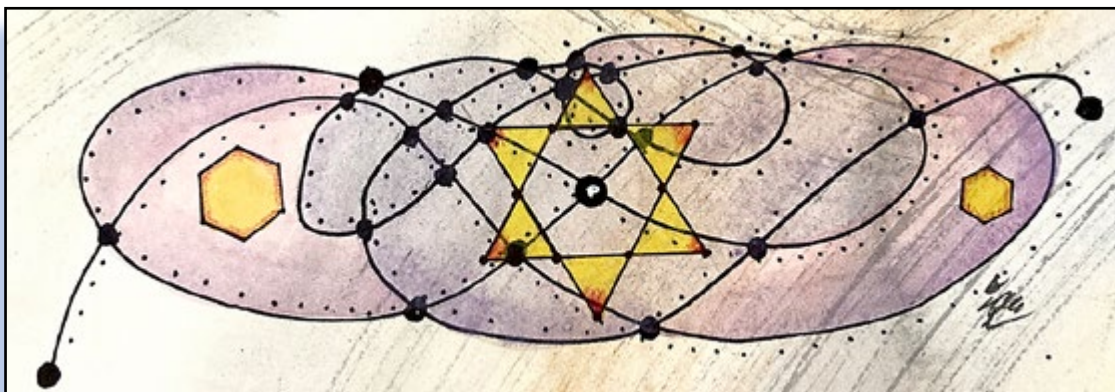
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TJC COVID-19 GUIDELINES

Reopening will not occur until approved by a majority of the Board of the TJC. Each event will need to be approved by the Board until all restrictions are lifted.

Re-opening attendance be limited to those members who have been fully vaccinated at least 2 weeks before. Only members will be permitted to attend indoor events at the TJC.

No non-members will be admitted unless they are fully vaccinated at least 2 weeks before.

Maximum occupancy at gatherings is considered to be 80 attendees. 20 attendees be considered 25% occupancy, 24 = 30%, 40 = 50% and 60 = 75%. We will adhere to percentage recommendations by county or state.

At least 1 Board member will be available at each event at the door to screen people entering. No member will be admitted without screening. No event will take place without a Board member present.

No member will be admitted if not feeling well, sneezing or coughing or having an elevated temperature, fully vaccinated or not.

The TJC will be thoroughly cleaned after each use.

Hand sanitizer and soap and water will be available at all times.

The wearing of masks is suggested for all attendees indoors -- especially those with chronic health conditions. As per current guidelines, this is not mandatory, but strongly suggested.

We should continue to offer ZOOM services from the TJC as long as there is a demand and attendance.

All chairs should be placed and maintained at least 3 feet away from each other.

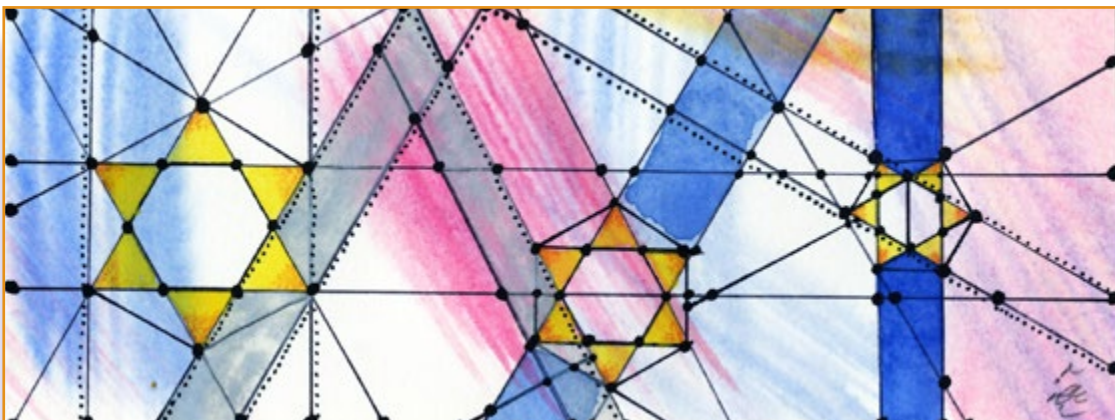
No worship items should be physically shared, i.e. Kiddush cups, wine cups, Challah.

Maximum ventilation will be maintained at all times. This includes either both doors being open, or one door and several windows. The library and the loft will have at least one window open at all times.

Outdoor events may be attended by all TJC members and guests. Fully vaccinated members and guests may be unmasked. All non-vaccinated members and guests must be masked at all times and be at least 6 feet distanced from other individuals.

Any member not adhering to these guidelines will be evaluated for termination from the TJC by the TJC Board.

Neal Friedman, MD



TJC ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP PLEDGE 5782 (2021-2022)

Name _____ Date _____

_____ *Renewing* _____ *New Membership*  _____ *Individual* _____ *Family* _____

Last name _____ First name _____ DOB _____ Email _____

Last name _____ First name _____ DOB _____ Email _____

<i>Child's Last name</i>	<i>First name</i>	<i>Birth date</i>	<i>Child's age and grade in Sept.</i>

Mailing address _____

Physical address _____

Land line _____ Cell phone _____ Cell phone _____

Yahrtzeits

Name _____ Date _____

Name _____ Date _____

Name _____ Date _____

Membership Level

Sustaining -- \$ 1854 and above _____

Family -- \$375 _____

Platinum -- \$ 1440 _____

Individual -- \$ 200 _____

Contributing -- \$ 720 _____

Student -- \$ 90 _____

Other _____ *(Please call us at (575) 758-8615 to discuss what you can afford.)*

Ongoing Community support -- always appreciated!

Rabbi Fund _____ Torah Fund _____ High Holy Days Pledge _____

I pledge to pay in Full _____ *Monthly* _____ *Quarterly* _____

By Check _____ *By PayPal* (taosjewishcenter.org) _____

If by Credit Card _____, *phone number* _____

Note: A 3% service charge will be added to all Credit Card payments.

To pay by credit card, call 575 / 758 - 8615 and leave a message.

Someone from TJC will call you back to make the transaction.

Mail form and check to Taos Jewish Center, 1335 Gusdorf Road, Suite R, Taos NM 87571.

Another option for senior members taking a **Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)** from your retirement funds is to instruct your fiscal intermediary to disburse your membership contribution to the TJC funds or pledges directly to the TJC before your RMD is taken for the year.

This reduces the taxable portion of the RMD, providing both you and TJC a mitzvah!

THE TAOS JEWISH CENTER, a faith-based non-profit 501c3 organization,
is a beneficiary agency of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico.

All donations are tax deductible & greatly appreciated.

The Taos Jewish Center is located at 1335 Gusdorf Road, Suite R, Taos, NM 87571.

Visit our website at taosjewishcenter.org. Email us at tjc@newmex.com. Call us at (575)-758-8615.



Taos Jewish Center

1335 Gusdorf Road, Suite R

Taos, NM 87571

(575) 758-8615

Email: tjc@newmex.com

Website: taosjewishcenter.org

Support The Taos Jewish Center (TJC)

Membership at any level includes participation at all High Holy Days services, as well as community gatherings and events throughout the year.

No family or individual is turned away for lack of funds.

Build the Taos Jewish Center Legacy

Your charitable contributions sustain our growing Jewish community and provide a home for Jews in Taos for generations to come. Consider contributing through planned-giving vehicles.

Bequests -- Include the TJC in your will or living trust.

Life Insurance -- Name the TJC as a beneficiary.

Gifts of stock or securities -- Donate and get a significant tax deduction.

The TJC appreciates the support of the



Torah Fund



Add your name with a donation that remembers a lifetime.

A book of the Torah-- \$ 1800 - \$ 7200

A Favorite Parasha-- \$ 180 - \$ 1800



Rabbi Fund

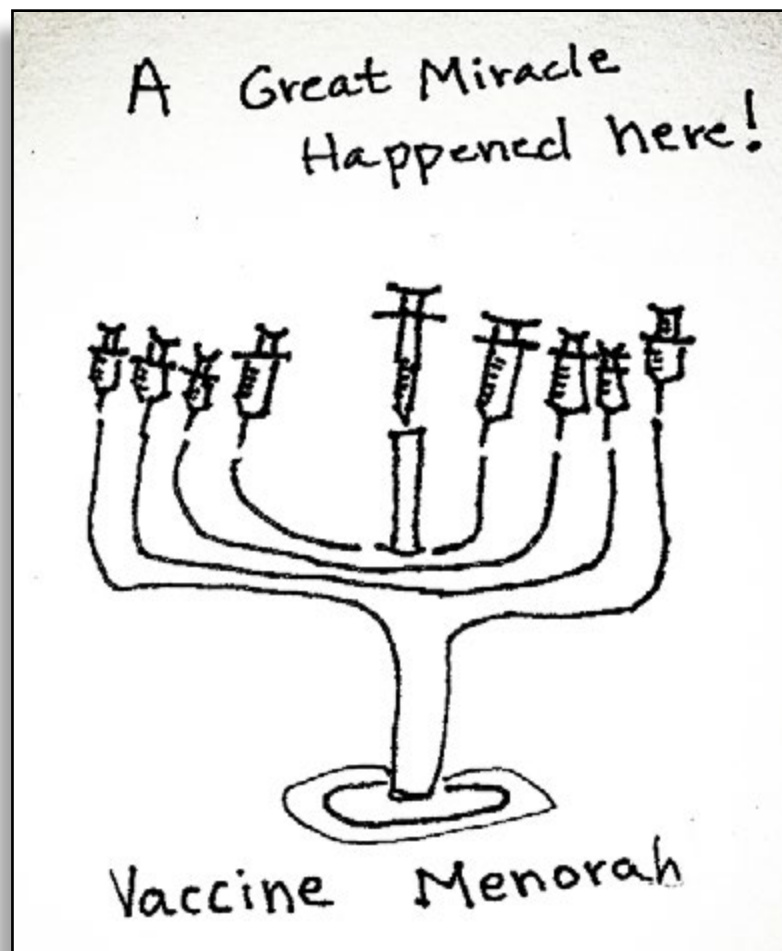
Your generous donation supports the TJC's programming, including Zoom Shabbatons with Rabbi Judith HaLevy.

When it's safe to do so, we'll again enjoy Friday night potluck dinners & Kabbalat Shabbats, Saturday morning Shabbat services & Torah studies.

Sponsor -- \$ 600.

Co-Sponsor -- \$ 300.

Assoc. Sponsor -- \$ 150. - \$ 180.



Joan Logghe

KOLOT VOICES



The next issue of **HaKol** will be posted roughly the beginning of March, about two weeks before Purim and the start of Spring. I look forward to receiving your writings and art, for what one friend calls **The Creative Pages.**

Optimistic deadline: February 13th;
Firm deadline: February 17th.

Send submissions to
Karen Kerschen, Editor
kkerschen@gmail.com

V'ahvta, Sam Goldstein, p. 21

The beggar with no nose, Rabbi Judith HaLevy, pp. 22-23

Homescape Rewilding, Richard and Annette Rubin, pp. 24-25

Phyllis Hotch (z"l), pp. 26-28

The Magic of the Shema, Israel Museum show, pp. 29-31

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Akedah -- The Perspective of a 12-year-old, Robert Benjamin, pp. 35-36

Santa in the Synagogue, Iris Keltz, pp. 37-42

Chanukah Recipes from chef Carole Levy, pp. 43-44

Machu Picchu -- A Mystical and Miraculous Trip,
Katherine Soskin, pp. 45-46

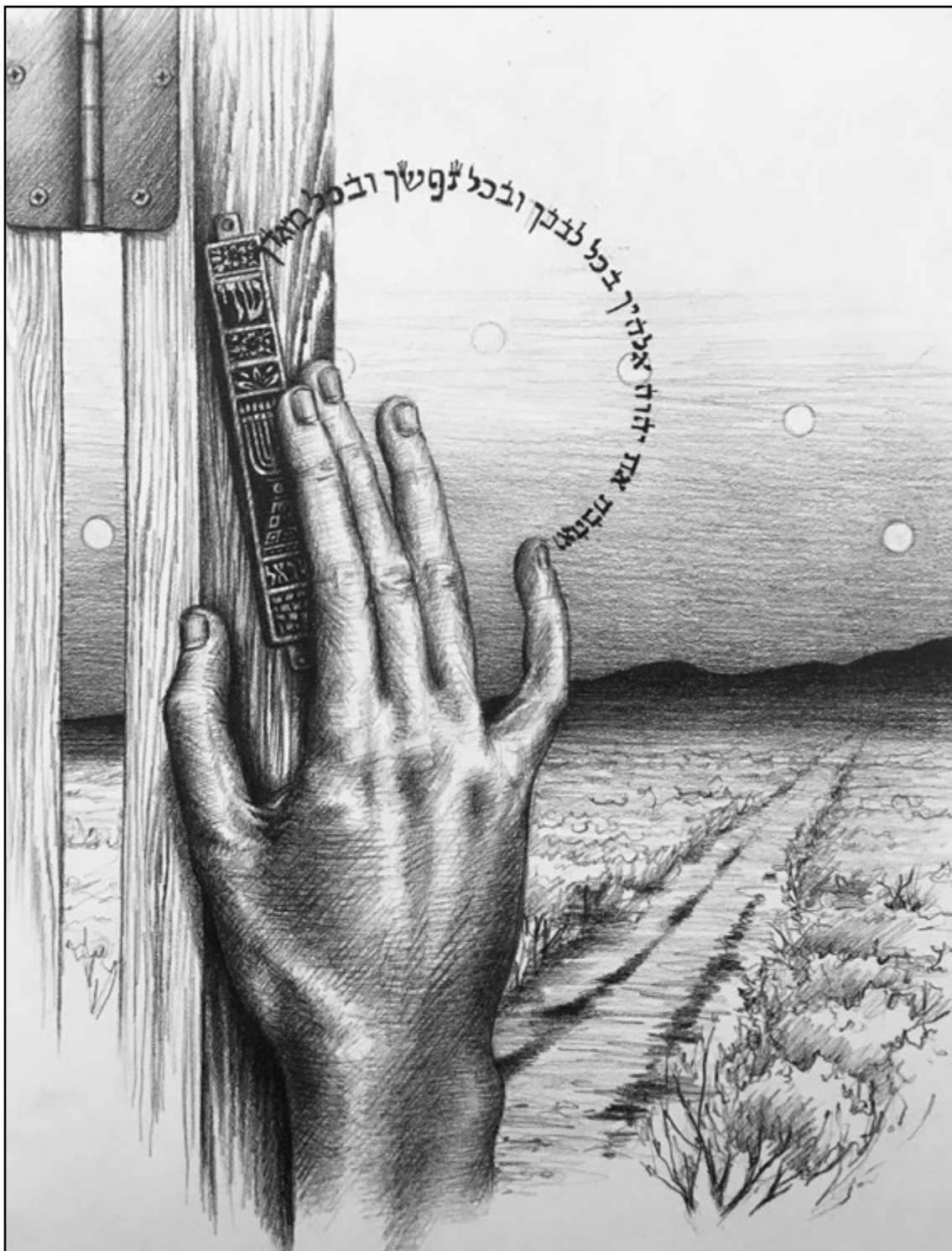
Insights, Albert Einstein, p. 46

Taos Sunset, Barbara Crews, p. 47

Sacred Geometry by Bobbi Shapiro, pp. 16, 17

Graphics by Carmi Plaut, pp. 3, 27, 46

Miscellaneous graphics from the calendars of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam and the Jewish Museum, NY.



[The Hebrew text is] the first line of *V'ahavta*, which includes the commandment to hang a mezuzah and is also inscribed on the scroll inside it.
Graphite, 2021.

Sam Goldstein

THE BEGGAR WITH NO NOSE

Last December, I underwent a routine skin cancer treatment that turned into a complex operation that almost removed my nose. When the bandages were first removed, I was dismayed to see that my nose seemed crooked, even sideways, and breathing was painful. I was almost the Rabbi with No Nose!

For many years I have taught the story of the Seven Beggars of Rabbi Nachman of Brezlov, a complex mystical tale featuring seven beggars, each one of whom has what looks like a physical defect- blind, deaf, stutter, hunch-back, no hands, no feet-and in each case the supposed deformity enables the beggar to reach a higher spiritual level.

Inspired by this tale, I have added an additional beggar, The Beggar With No Nose. One year later, my nose has miraculously healed, but I would like to share my story. — JHL



www.sacred-texts.com/jud/gm/img/33500.jpg

Let me tell you how people once rejoiced!

On the eighth day, when the wedding celebration was at its height, circles of women surrounding the bride, and men bonding shoulder to shoulder, a strange figure appeared at the door. Suddenly, the music stopped, and the strange cloaked figure made his way to the center of the room.

The groom tentatively approached the stranger, a man whom he had never met, not even when they were children long ago in the woods. “Who are you?” he asked?

“I am the Eighth Beggar, known as the Beggar with No Nose. And I have come to bless you, that you should be like me. In actuality, I am the Seventh Beggar, as my brother, the Beggar with No Feet is the eighth beggar, the Beggar of Infinite Completion who will bring the Messiah, soon and in our days, and his story has yet to be told.

“But I have a great story, and a wonderful blessing, and of course, I wish to give my blessing to you as a gift you on your wedding day.”

The assembled wedding guests gasped as he removed his hooded cloak, exposing his face to the

light. He had no nose, only an ugly red gash across his face.

“You think that I have no nose, the beggar began, but I have a beautiful nose, only I no longer wish to smell the putrid odors of this world.

“My transformation began many years ago, when I attempted to root out an evil tumor, sent by the *sitra achra* (evil inclination) to distort my sense of smell. All that I could smell was the garbage and feces of this world. With a doctor’s help, the cancer was exorcised, but my nose was gone, leaving only this slash.

“Now, I no longer am consumed by sniffing out the evil of this world, and have an exquisite sense of smell that can breathe in the most subtle of fragrances. I have the most powerful nose in the world.”

Immediately, the wedding guests gathered, men on one side, women on the other, to dispute the beggar’s tale.

“My nose is so sensitive,” boasted the first, “that I make my living testing wines and perfumes.”

“That is nothing,” said the next. “I can smell corruption and deceit even when it masquerades as goodness, and am therefore called to be an expert witness in many political trials.”

The third offered that he could smell rain days before it actually was manifest, the next that he could sniff the virus of contagion years before a disease emerged in the world.

“That is nothing,” claimed another. “I can smell the sweet talc of a newborns neck before the embryo enters a womb.”

“Well done,” said the next, “but I can even smell the perfume wafting from the apple tree in the Garden of Eden.”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed the Beggar, reaching for one of the wedding delicacies on the nearby table. “But my nose is the most beautiful, the most sensitive, the most powerful nose of all. Let me tell you a story.

“Notice that the red gash is not straight up and down, but slightly crooked to one side, enabling me to smell sideways. Sideways? Why would that matter, you ask? Well, I am so old that I stood with the other elders at the bottom of Mount Sinai, as Moses endured the wrath of the Holy One over the incident of the golden calf.

“Now let me be, that my anger may blaze forth against them that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation.” (Ex 32:9)

“God’s very own nose, The Divine Af(Nose) is so bent out of shape that Moses could not answer, or even breathe. Moses could not breathe in and digest God’s anger, which was from a Sacred nose bent sideways, but as my nostrils are already bent, I was able to inhale and breathe strength into the straight nostrils of Moshe, who then found the force to implore the Lord not to let the Holy nose be bent with anger, lest the Egyptians speak falsely of an angry God.

“You know the rest of the story. Moses goes down and sees the dancing in the camp, and his own nose is bent out of shape with anger. I, however was able to breathe calm into the camp, despite the ensuing plague, and the people marched on.

”This, however, is not my ultimate power and blessing, to be able to breathe calm in times of crisis. My real power exists from the time of creation, and

without my help, the world would struggle to exist.

“When the Holy One, Blessed Be, blew the breath of life from his nostrils into Adam, I was sent along to make sure that this new speaking spirit remain mindful of his breath. Adam, alas, was easily distracted, but I was there, without a nose or even a body, to remind Adam to acknowledge Gods bounty with every out- breath of praise.

“We know that mindfulness was not Adam’s strong suit, and so I was invited to use my powerful nose to ensure that God’s breath could flow in and out of all creation.

“Therefore, when The Holy One, YHVH, exhales Divine breath into this created world through the out breath of YAH, I receive that breath, then exhale that Divine breath into all creatures, who breathe in God’s breath and glory. They in turn exhale back words and sounds of appreciation and praise, but sometimes I need to intervene and clean up their language a bit.

Of course, mindful beings with a direct connection to Above don’t need my help, and their out breath is always of praise, but I remain around to assist whenever the channels are blocked, and the world needs assistance, as the breath must never cease no matter how distracted the earth’s creatures may become.

“Therefore, my nose is the most beautiful nose in the world, bringing God’s breath to all, and assuring praise to the Creator on the return, so that the world can continue to function. I give this breath to you as gift, just as God has given this gift to all creatures, that you may be like me.”

The entire wedding party took a deep breath, and burst into song, a song of praise, and love, and gratitude for every breath, as they danced and sang until the dawn to celebrate the endless wedding of all creatures, above and below, in harmony.

Rabbi Judith HaLevy

HOMESCAPE REWILDING

It is not until the transect is completed that the tree falls, and the stump yields a collective view of a century. By its fall, the tree attests to the unity of the hodge-podge called history. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949.

When engaged in the drafting of this chapter, we realized that Tu b'Shvat is soon, the fifteenth of the month of Shvat in the ancient Hebrew lunar calendar. This was established in the biblical kingdom era as the birthday of all cultivated trees, so that a tax of produce could be collected when the trees reached their fourth year.

However, prior to this economic management of agriculture, in times of more pastoral life, the season was celebrated for the renewal signaled by the first tree budding in the Middle East, usually almonds.

This had sacred meaning in the old Hebrew oral tradition, eventually written into Genesis. The importance of trees was profound.

A teaching we recently received from modern Hasidic Rabbi Gershon Winkler relates that “Tree is older than Sun and Moon and Stars and Planets.”

In the Biblical Genesis story, “Tree is created in the third day cycle, whereas Sun does not appear until the fourth, making Tree representative of the Point of Beginning within which Creator sowed the seeds

of endless possibility in the rest of the story:

Stars, creeping-crawlies, fish, animals, birds, insects — until we get to Human, who, like Tree, is created singular. ... And so, the Bible calls Human the Tree of the Field.” We relate this teaching to suggest sources of the spiritual power and ecocentric relationship we can feel with trees.

Personal Ritual with Trees

Rewilding can be expressed in the significant rituals of personal life. Our oldest son Brady, Albuquerque-born in 1975, had lifelong severe developmental disabilities. These got the better of him nine years ago and let his soul free.

Soon after we began full time retirement in the Taos house, we established a *descanso* called “Brady’s Bosque.”

According to Ruben Cobos’s 1983 *Dictionary of New Mexico and Southern Colorado Spanish*, a *descanso* is a shrine or rest, usually marked by a heap of stones and a wooden cross. These are seen frequently along highways here.



However, reflecting our Jewish heritage, we planted ten native Colorado blue spruce, *Picea pungens*, close together in our homescape southwestern corner instead of a cross. Ten is the traditional number of mourners that sanctify a memorial service, called a *minyan*.

In the center of the group within a spruce log tepee frame, we placed a sculpture of Kokopelli, the ancient Hohokam hunchback flute player. Originally eighteen inches high, the trees are now seven to eight feet tall. Maybe they, too, appreciate the community closeness.

Naturalists have described the phenomenon of a tree root matrix. And by the way, *bosque* is Spanish for a tree grove. In the 1970s, we rode our horses from our Baja Corrales home through the cottonwood bosque along the Rio Grande in the North Valley area called Alameda. New shopping center sprawl now blocks the way.

Like this Kokopelli in Brady's Bosque, we think spiritual figures from diverse cultures can be expressions of Rewilding — not to culturally appropriate, but to honor meaningful symbolism.

Kokopelli has become a cliché in the southwest, even exploited on t-shirts and trinkets. However, I was introduced to him by my first Native American teacher, Alfonso Ortiz, from Ohkay Owingeh (formerly called San Juan Pueblo). When Anthropology Dept. faculty at Princeton, Al included me in an initiative for a dozen Anglo students with useful skills to work at the new Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo Nation in 1968.

Knowing I was headed to medical school, Al gave me an article from the Journal of the American Medical Association describing research on why Kokopelli's ancient petroglyph images have a hunchback and

a flute. Tuberculosis of the spine, called Pott's Disease, was common among Southwestern tribes, and collapsed vertebrae caused hunchback.

One anthropology view ascribed the flute to the cultural role of hunchbacks becoming minstrels and entertainers, like medieval European dwarf court jesters. However, some petroglyphs show a phallus instead of a flute. It so happens that Pott's disease can cause a male condition known as priapism, an abnormal persistent erection. This may have endowed such men with a reputation for magical fertility powers.

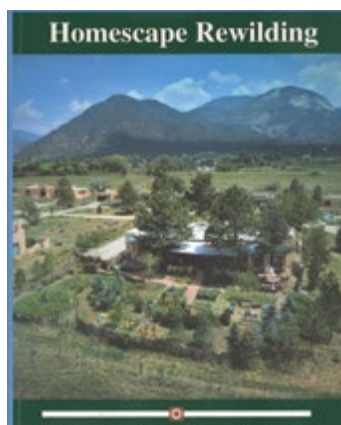
One popular novel portrayed Kokopelli as a wanderer who spread his seed, and we don't mean for apple trees. A more sanitized commercial version has him with a backpack and flute as a minstrel, not handicapped.

Kokopelli helped us have a tree regeneration experience. The three-foot sculpture was bought about twenty-eight years ago at Phil Bareiss's Gallery nearby, made by Wilson Crawford. This little guy lived on the house patio before moving to Brady's Bosque.

The same year we built the Taos house, Hurricane Andrew blew through our Pinecrest, Florida, neighborhood and destroyed dozens of our tall Dade County pines. For our rebuilding and replanting project there in the storm's aftermath, we commissioned Wilson to make a five-foot Kokopelli to be stationed on a stump and serenade the new trees. He now stands back here amidst the garden beds and native flowers at the Taos house.

Maybe his ancient music we imagine helps inform us of Rewilding values. His seed is now spiritual.

Richard and Annette Rubin



Homescape Rewilding: Stories of Ordinary Ecological Practices,
by **Richard and Annette Rubin** from Nighthawk Press, Taos,
is due for release in November. Now available in the Local Authors section of
SOMOS, as well as Amazon.

**THIS, IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TU BISH'VAT,
THE NEW YEAR OF THE TREES! -- ED.**

PHYLLIS HOTCH (ז"ל)

Eulogy by *Ariana Kramer*

Note: Phyllis Hotch passed away peacefully on October 21, 2021. I wrote this eulogy for her funeral.

We are here today to remember, honor and celebrate Phyllis Hotch. A poet to the last she passed away this past Thursday, the morning after a full moon night. She died peacefully in the company of her daughter, Janet and her caregiver, Ramsey.

I first met Phyllis and her husband, Sy, around 2007 through our involvement with the Taos Jewish Center. Then, I became familiar with her life here as a poet through her books and readings. For the past several years we met regularly for a small poetry group she hosted in her home. We came to know each other better through the words that we wrote. Phyllis was kind, smart, sweet, and always to the point. She had a wonderfully wry sense of humor, strong convictions, and cared deeply about the world. She was a mentor and a guide and became one of my dearest friends. I had the opportunity to interview Phyllis for an article I wrote on her life and poetry in 2017, and I will draw from that material here.

Phyllis was born on January 2, 1928 in the Bronx, NY to Mae Speller Fonfa and Gustav Fonfa. She was raised by her Jewish parents in a neighborhood of mostly second-generation Italian and Jewish-Americans. Her parents were socialists, and her father worked as a labor union organizer and a clothing designer. Phyllis loved to watch him work as he made fabulous spin-offs of the latest New York fashions. She also loved playing in the open spaces of her Bronx neighborhood and sledding on the wooded hills in wintertime.

Phyllis had an older brother, Gilbert, and was the youngest of what she called a "tribe of cousins."

She started writing poetry at the age of twelve. She told me she remembered "it was that terrible feeling of being a teenager" when "you're not a child and you're not a grown-up" that inspired her first poems.

After marrying her high school sweetheart, Sylvan (Sy) Hotch, Phyllis earned a degree in English from



Brooklyn College with minors in Psychology and Sociology. She graduated in 1948 and worked as a welfare investigator in Harlem until becoming pregnant with her first daughter, Deborah. Phyllis and Sy had two more daughters, Amy and Janet. When her youngest was in kindergarten, Phyllis began to teach high school English in Framingham, Massachusetts.

Over the course of her teaching career Phyllis also taught Creative Writing, Humanities and Journalism. She especially enjoyed introducing her students to Langston Hughes, a poet she describes as "smart, deep and wonderful."

As a poetry coordinator for Arts Wayland, a creative arts center in Massachusetts, Phyllis organized readings, seminars, and workshops and supervised competitions for poetry manuscripts. Poets and manuscript judges she was privileged to work with included Denise Levertov, Edward Hirsch, and Robin Becker.

Phyllis and Sy moved to Taos in 1989, and both became involved with SOMOS. Phyllis served on the board for over two decades, and as the President of the Board for much of that time. Phyllis and Sy were also very involved with the Taos Jewish community and the Taos Jewish Center. She was involved with many programs the TJC developed, including the Chesed Project through which she helped feed the homeless of Taos. She also served on the Chesed Project's advisory board.

In 2013, the Taos Jewish Center honored Phyllis and her writing. TJC member Marianne Furedi remarked to The Taos News, "Phyllis Hotch has been a leading light in the literary community of

Taos. She and her husband Sy have also been lights in the life of the community at the Taos Jewish Center through their generosity, steadfastness and faithfulness since its inception...”

Phyllis published four wonderful books of poetry while she was in Taos and was regarded as a teacher, mentor and inspiration by many poets and writers in Taos and beyond. Renowned New Mexico writer Rudolfo Anaya, who was a friend of Phyllis, said of her work,

“Your poems renew our faith in the human spark that lights our path.”

Phyllis’s first poetry book was *A Little Book of Lies*. Her second, *No Longer Time*, chronicled her experience of losing her daughter to cancer. In her third book, *3 A.M.*, Hotch explored aspects of aging, including her husband’s Alzheimer’s disease which led to his death at the end of 2013. She said writing those poems was like having “a thread to hold onto.” Published by 3: A Taos Press, “3 A.M.” won first place in the Poetry Book category at the 2014 New Mexico – Arizona Book Awards. Phyllis’s fourth book, *Carousel: A Distillation of Time*, was published in 2019.

Phyllis was preparing her fifth manuscript with her friends Carol Terry, editor Barbara Scott and myself. She wrote her last poem just last week.

Phyllis loved a good party, was a gracious and fun hostess, and was especially vibrant at the celebration of her 90th birthday three years ago which was beautifully organized by her caregiver and companion, Ramsey Scott. It was attended by Phyllis’s daughter, Janet, and many friends and admirers.

We all have our own memories of Phyllis, and our individual understandings of her life. I will remember Phyllis for her love of community, her transcendent poetry and for her strength of will. But, most of all for her delightful laugh, and the twinkle in her soft blue eyes. ♣



♣ Phyllis Hotch wrote her last poem based on a prompt chosen by her poetry group, “I almost forgot.”

October 16, 2021

It’s the fifteenth
I almost forgot
That howling storms
Don’t last forever.

That good company
Keeps the heart
Nourishes the soul.

The stressed days
Tire us
Like weary children
After a day.

Worry sits on our shoulders
We want to rest
Grateful for company
And companionship.

Dependent on others
Eager to sleep
The heart pulls,
Says wake up.
I almost forgot.

Chanuka

Children mirrored in a dark window
reach to light candles
tall and small in line
Songs dance above the flames,
Songs of a miracle in
Ladino, Yiddish, English
They turn and turn to music
from a shtetle across a faraway sea.

Two big frying pans,
latkes in peanut oil,
not frybread not sopaipillas in lard.
Bottles of sweet wine, platters of cakes,
piles of pennies on the floor
and a dreidle carved by a santero
who shrugged as he cut a piece
of the story into each side.

All on the floor with the children
Tewa, Taoseño, and mestizo Jews
twirling a wooden dreidle —
a miracle in each face.

Eine Kleine Nacht

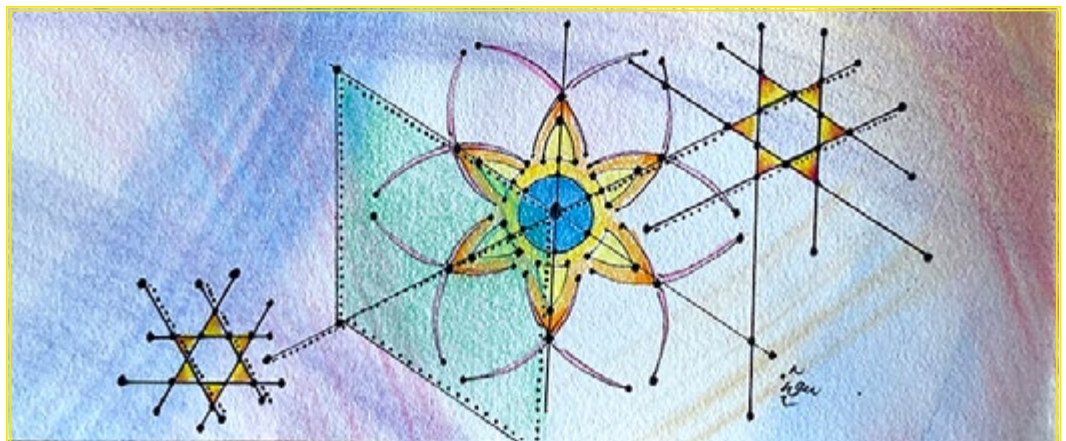
Night was tight around me
and the moon sent
a ray -- only one --
along my bed
I played it
with my fingers
like a harp
and filled
the room

Chants of Childhood

For the Kosivor on the evening news
who is coming to America

He studies what to remember.
Every movement necessary history:
how she cooked the eggs for breakfast,
where they ate
who sold the cucumbers on market day
what money looked like on payday
the children holding hands at school.
He will begin a new life
one like ours.
He comes burdened with emptiness
and will leap into the glut
of wheels chips discs digits
that will crowd out the chants of childhood with
food wet kisses.
Soon
he will look more like us. Individuals:
one plus one plus lonely one
each building a self by the hour
choice by choice and thing by thing.

Phyllis Hotch described her first job after graduating from Brooklyn College. She worked in Manhattan's financial district, for HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), phone-calling on behalf of Jewish refugees, looking for their American relatives. She and another young woman worked at a table equipped with two telephones and piles of telephone directories, hoping to locate family members. Each one a tiny victory. **KK**





ISRAEL MUSEUM CURRENT EXHIBIT, HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE MAGIC OF THE SHEMA

The Hebrew words Shema Yisrael, “Hear, O Israel,” mark the opening of the Jewish declaration of faith, a text cherished and preserved by the Jewish people for over two thousand years. But few realize that the Shema is also connected to magic, specifically magic used for attaining protection, health, and success.

The use of the Shema in protective magic is attested throughout the Jewish world and continues to the present day. This is the first exhibition to explore the uses of the Shema in magic and thus raises thought-provoking questions about the complex relationship between religion and magic.

Yemen, silver amulet, 19th century

Since ancient times, the Shema has been incorporated into Jewish amulets and in books of Jewish magic, for performing beneficial rituals and reciting at transitional moments characterized by anxiety and fear.

Amulets of all sorts have a long history in Jewish practice and their use was accepted by the ancient rabbis, who appeared to believe in their power.

We’ve tried to protect ourselves from misfortune by using objects considered holy or magically potent — wearing it as an article of clothing or jewelry. Evil spirits wouldn’t dare to attack one so protected.

People carried amulets — pieces of paper, parchment, or metal discs inscribed with formulae to protect the bearer from malady or the “evil eye,” *ayin hara* in Hebrew, a Jewish folk superstition that a person or supernatural being can harm a person by looking at you.

The use of inscription as a means to ward off evil spirits stemmed from a belief in early times in the holiness and power of words, sometimes as simply as one of the written names of God.

The Priestly Blessing was considered effective against the evil eye. Permutations of the different names of God were used, as were names of angels. The simplest amulet had an inscription of the name of God on a piece of parchment or metal, usually made of silver; *He* and *Shaddai*, (“Almighty”) being very popular. These still feature prominently on pendants worn by Jewish women today. The amulet’s

potency depended on the inscription, but also on the piousness of the person who wrote it.

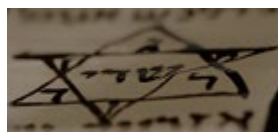
While the Hebrew texts inscribed on Jewish amulets in the different countries, East and West, often share similar formulae, names, and selection of biblical verses, the imagery varies greatly, reflecting folk beliefs and traditions.

During the Middle Ages, the rabbinic attitude to amulets varied considerably.

Earlier magical traditions, including the use of amulets, magic charms, names of angels, combinations of Hebrew letters, etc. subsequently merged with the Kabbalah; many mystical texts contain instructions for making amulets and other charms, for a variety of purposes. Maimonides, a staunch rationalist, decried the “fools” who believed that a mezuzah is an amulet that affords protection. He opposed amulets for curing sickness, while others permitted their use.

After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the belief in the efficacy of amulets spread to Eastern Europe. In Eretz Israel, it spread from Safed, the center of Kabbalah, to all parts of the country.

References to amulets are found throughout the Talmud, which suggests that the practice of keeping them was common. One talmudic passage suggests that amulets were used by ancient rabbis to repel demons. The Talmud goes on to state that an effective amulet is one that has healed a person three times, whether it is a written amulet or one made of herbs, and whether the person was seriously or moderately ill.



Amulets for Safe Childbirth and Protection of Infants

Amulets and talismans intended to protect women in childbirth and their newborns were a significant part of Jewish folk religion in Christian Europe and the Islamic world.

We see this in childbirth amulets – the most prevalent in Europe and the lands of Islam from the 17th century on, reflecting the high mortality rate of children before the modern era.

The late ninth to early tenth century Alphabet of Ben Sira promulgated the legend of *Lilith, the “first Eve,” who claimed that she had been created to harm newborn babies.

Sefer Raziel (Amsterdam, 1701), a compilation of mystical teachings popular among both Ashkenazi and Sephardim, had a recipe for an inscribed amulet, to protect a laboring woman and another for a newborn, against Lilith. Polish and Russian Jews put the book itself under the pillow of women in childbirth; in Iraq it was placed on the Chair of Elijah, in the center of the birthing room for protective powers.

In Europe, amulets to protect mothers and infants were generally written or printed on paper, sometimes with illustrations.

Paper German childbirth amulets are often printed with small, crude figurative woodcuts expressing the ideal roles expected for the newborn when he/she grows up. In Poland handmade colorful papercut amulets were preferred, featuring intricate designs, including a wide selection of animals, such as a pair of rampant lions, which symbolize ideal human qualities (“be strong as the lion ...” Pirkei Avot).

The Muslim world preferred metal protective objects especially in gold and silver, to adorn women, infants and small children, who were considered weak and susceptible to the evil eye.

Perhaps the best-known Jewish amulet is the *khamsa*, a palm-shaped charm with an eye or fish, symbols with deep Jewish meanings. It is also considered to be the hand of Fatima, who was Muhammad’s daughter, but hands have appeared on North African amulets since the times of the Carthaginians and these people antedate the Muslim tradition by more than a thousand years.



Top: Depiction of Lilitu, a female demon found in cuneiform texts of Sumer, Assyria and Babylonia on childbirth amulet. On her body: Protect this newborn child from all harm. under her arms: Bind Lilith in chains!

Middle: Three angels, Sanoi, Sansanoi, and Semangalof, convinced Lilith that she would be unable to enter a house to harm a baby or its mother if their images were present.

Below: Fillipino Lippi, Adam and Lilith, fresco, Florence 1502.





The *khamsa*, as well as the closely related number five, were viewed as bearing potent magical powers based on Jewish textual sources (for example, five is associated with the monogram-maton, he, the holy single-letter name of God, which is often inscribed in the center of amulets). Persian Jews also depicted a fantastic image of *Lilith, usually shown “in chains.” In modern Israel some of the designs, the *khamsa* and *khai*, in particular, have been revived and enjoy widespread popularity. Images of rabbis considered holy, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi, are common in modern Israeli amulets as well.

Illuminations on amulets are seldom purely decorative, but weredesigns, symbols, and letters believed to be efficacious in warding off the evil eye, disasters, or sickness. They consist of magical triangles, squares, rectangles, and other geometrical features, e.g., the Hexagram (“Star of David”) and the Pentacle (“Star of Solomon”). The menorah with its seven branches, as well as an outstretched hand, is often used. More rarely, birds, animals, human figures, Satan, and the angel Metatron may appear. Letters which are not as yet completely understood and which are known as “kabbalistic writing” have also figured on amulets.

By gradually reducing the size of an inscription, the evil spirit is eased out of its victim and its influence is thus diminished. Magical triangles therefore serve a useful purpose and when used in writing amulets it is with this idea in mind.

These are divided into several boxes each of which contains one or more letters. In this way acrostics may be formed in which powerful inscriptions may be secretly placed in the amulets to exert their beneficent influence without the knowledge of the uninitiated. The squares vary from those of nine boxes to those of 64 or even 100 boxes. The rectangles are usually small and often contain hidden verses from the Bible. Their use and influence naturally depend on the particular biblical verse inscribed.

Mysterious and unexplained to this day, the interpretation of these letters has long aroused controversy. There is no proof that they were made in Jewish circles but apparently they were adapted to the needs of Jewish magic. Some scholars derive the origin of these signs from cuneiform writing.

Summarized and screen-captured from Israel Museum, myjewishlearning.org and others, by

Karen Kerschen



SPINOZA: HERO OR HERETIC?

Was Spinoza a hero or heretic?

In a recent lecture based on his doctoral thesis, Dr. Rabbi Rob Lennert posed this question, the subject of controversy for nearly 350 years.

With religious piety, we inform our experience from knowledge that comes from the beyond — faith as magical thinking. In contrast, Baruch Spinoza argued that the naturalistic world affirms truth from living, learning, observation, science, and represents the existence of God. Those perspectives come into conflict all the time. Spinoza was asking us to look at this dilemma.



Rabbi Lennert laid out a picture of Baruch and his privileged family — Portuguese Sephardim who fled the Inquisition in 1580 to the liberal haven of Amsterdam. By 1632, his father was a successful merchant, an importer of dried fruits, and his grandfather was Chief Rabbi in Amsterdam. The young man was praised as a prodigy for his mastery of the Talmud.

But young Spinoza's curiosity extended beyond the Medievalism of Jewish tradition into the rational thought of early Enlightenment. Philosophically, he was influenced by the Kabbalah and by Descartes. He reasoned that anything could be understood through examination of the world itself. Intense, humble, handy, clever, rebellious,

Spinoza set out to apply science to Jewish religion. Spinoza asserted that the Bible was the written by mortals. He spoke out against the dogmas others were fearful to challenge, arguing that Chosenness is ridiculous: all Humanity is of the same origin and fate. His assertions challenged parochial holiness in the clutches of priests and shamans: all humanity is a universal gift from God. Holiness is in the unity of

all causes.

Among his Theological Stunners, Lennert cited Spinoza's ideas about miracles and the existence of God and the Universe:

- * Miracles do not exist; rather, they are part of a natural unity.

- * Truth is Universal Connectedness.

- * All inquiry into the universe is inquiry into God. God is Creative Nature. The mind of God is reflected in the mind of humanity as a whole: If God is God then all people must be equal.

In his *Ethics*, Spinoza examines nature's universal laws and rules, considering hatred, anger, envy, appetite, human love and hate, pride, fear, hope, sympathy, honor, regret, cruelty, cowardice and more. Perhaps Spinoza's most controversial ideas centered around joy: Joy was not just from adherences to mitzvahs. Joy is not just an obedience, but an experience of truth, a pleasure.

His declarations shocked the community's Jewish governing board.

First, they attempted to pay him off, if he cease espousing his heretical ideas. When he refused, leaders of Amsterdam's Sephardic synagogue imposed Herem, banning the 23-year-old Baruch Spinoza from the Jewish faith.

The Senhores of the *ma'amad* [the congregation's lay governing board] having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza, have endeavored by various means and promises to turn him from his evil ways.

After 'investigation by rabbis', they have decided, with the [rabbis'] consent, that the said Espinoza should be excommunicated and expelled from the people of Israel.

By decree of the angels and by the command of the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of God, Blessed be He, and with the consent of the entire holy congregation, and in front of these holy scrolls with the 613 precepts which are written therein; cursing him with the excommunication with which Joshua banned Jericho and with the curse which Elisha cursed the boys and with all the castigations which are written in the Book of the Law. ...

No one should communicate with him, not even in writing, nor accord him any favor nor stay with him under the same roof nor [come] within four cubits in his vicinity; nor shall he read any treatise composed or written by him. ...

Spinoza's was the harshest of forty *kherem* pronounced by the Jewish governing board from 1622 to 1683. Accounts indicate that he moved to the Hague, held fast to his beliefs, worked as an optician, a lens grinder, and lived the ascetic, solitary life of a sage. He taught Hebrew and Latin and was highly respected among Christian thinkers of the time. The herem dogged his life, and was known to the older, successful Jew, Rembrandt van Rijn, who painted Spinoza's face into his canvas, Saul and David, as the younger man.



Although the herem has not carried the same severity since the Enlightenment period, when Jewish governing boards had political autonomy over their ghetto communities, there have been declarations of herem in modern times.

In 1918, the Rabbinical Council of Odessa is believed to have excommunicated Leon Trotsky, presumably because of his anti-religious socialist ideas.

In 1945, the Orthodox rabbinate in the United States excommunicated Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement, because he published a prayerbook that altered traditional liturgy.

David Ben-Gurion published an article in 1953, renewing discussion about his excommunication.

Israeli politicians, rabbis and Jewish press worldwide joined the debate. Some called for the herem to be reversed, but this can only be done in Amsterdam.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel issued a herem against the anti-Zionist group Neturei Karta in 2006, when the group participated in a conference in Iran that tried to argue that the Holocaust never took place.

In 2012, the Portugees-Israëlietische Gemeente te Amsterdam (Portuguese-Israelite commune of Amsterdam) asked the chief rabbi of their community to reconsider the herem after consulting several Spinoza experts. He declined to remove it, citing Spinoza's "preposterous ideas, where he was tearing apart the very fundamentals of our religion."

In December 2015, the present-day Amsterdam Jewish community organised a symposium to discuss lifting the cherem. Most would have liked to see the ban lifted, but the rabbi of the congregation ruled that it should hold, because he had no greater wisdom than his predecessors, and that Spinoza's views had not become less problematic over time.

<https://www.neh.gov/article/why-spinoza-was-excommunicated>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_Spinoza

The Ethics of Spinoza: The Road to Inner Freedom, by Baruch Spinoza; edited by Dagobert Runes, Citadel Press, NJ, 1957.

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/herem/>

<https://blogs.cul.columbia.edu/jewishstudiesat-cul/2021/07/29/spinozas-death-mask-and-reflections-on-working-at-the-rbml/>

(based on Ron's lecture and my own readings and curiosity)

Karen Kerschen

INTERESTING ARTICLES

J Street — Occupation and deFacto Annexation — in depth videos

<https://jstreet.org/occupationtoannexation/#.YSz-98ZMHUJ>

https://forward.com/fast-forward/474687/spanish-university-cancels-auschwitz-gaza-seminar-comparing-holocaust-to/?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_2793180

Peter Beinart

<https://jewishcurrents.org/teshuvah-a-jewish-case-for-palestinian-refugee-return/>

Kaleem Hawa

<https://jewishcurrents.org/the-nakba-demands-justice/>

<https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/israel/articles/books-you-should-read-before-visiting-jerusalem/>

https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/.premium.MAGAZINE-why-the-world-s-most-ancient-terrain-hasn-t-changed-in-2-million-years-1.10214721?utm_source=mailchimp&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=weekend&utm_content=94a49e1065

Tour of Prague and the Czech Jewish Community

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lpmH-mr6y8>

Secrets of the Prague Astronomical Clock

<https://interestingengineering.com/the-secrets-of-the-prague-astronomical-clock>

Kristallnacht - The Night of Broken Glass

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynypuxgCbH4>

A Short History of Jews in the American Labor Movement, by Bennett Muraskin

<http://jewishlaborcommittee.org/> (many interesting articles; this one is under 'things to read')

Gary Shteyngart's tsuris

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/10/11/a-botched-circumcision-and-its-aftermath>

Whose Promised Land? A Journey into a Divided Israel

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/25/world/middleeast/israel-jews-palestinians-journey.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/05/opinion/israel-moves-to-silence-the-stalwarts-of-palestinian-civil-society.html>

<https://jewishcurrents.org/ritchie-torres-is-the-future-of-pro-israel-politics>

The Forward on Santa Claus

<https://forward.com/articles/133958/the-real-truth-about-santa-claus/>

Shalom Hartman podcast, Identity/Crisis: The Ideas Behind the News

<https://www.hartman.org.il/no-76-the-conflict-about-the-conflict/>

Listed in the order I encountered them. ככ

AKEDAH — THE PERSPECTIVE OF A 12-YEAR-OLD

So my Sunday school teacher, Ms. Schwartz, insists Genesis is mostly a family drama. I get this. Like with Mom, Dad and my sisters – drama all the time. She also says Genesis is literature. Mom says this means I need to look at the big picture and little details at the same time. That's tough. I'm better with just details.

So if Torah is both family drama and literature, who's the dramatist? Because Torah is so awesome, I bet there was a writing team. Like maybe someone composed it, then it got rehearsed, then someone else wrote it down. The write-it-down people are called "redactors" according to Ms. Schwartz. But she warned that "redact" sometimes means to block some writing in a document. That's confusing.

So I've been pondering where God fits in. In the "family drama," is God the grandparent? Or maybe an ancestor whose spirit stayed alive after

their body died? Is God part of the writing team, even though he's also a character? Dad said that a famous playwright last century, Neil Simon, did a lot of being a character in his own plays. So maybe God is like Neil Simon.

So in class we're now studying the end of a relationship in Genesis 22. They're still father and son, but they become majorly estranged for the rest of the father's life. "Estranged," like they never talk to each other again. The father named Abraham made a humongous mistake. Or was it God's fault? Just before he made this blunder, Abraham and God became buddies. I mean God, the character. I don't know whether Abraham knew God on the writing team.

How do I know for sure Abraham and God were buds? Last week, Dad played for me a super-funny, ancient comedy called "Who's on First?" Hilarious. The guys who do it, Abbott and Costello, are clearly great buddies because they love to joke and argue with each other. I mention this because Abraham and God talking about what to do about Sodom sound just like Abbott and Costello. Abraham says, "But what if forty people are righteous? What if thirty? Twenty?" That happens just before Abraham's Big Blunder.

So here's a mystery that Ms Schwartz can't explain. Before the Big Blunder, Abraham and his son hike up the mountain, but Abraham leaves behind servants who were carrying wood. Why did he tell them to stay put? I love mystery stories.

The answer obvious to me is, so the servants would not witness a crime. But Torah is way too tricky for such a simple answer. Without a more complicated answer, what would rabbis and prophets argue about? How about ... how about ... so the servants would not witness the absence of a bad event? That would be an awesome twist.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Abraham and Isaac*, oil on canvas, 1634.



Ibrahim's Sacrifice, The Angel Hinders the Offering of Isaac; Shiraz. Timurid empire, Persia 1410.

So the bad event that almost happened was a “test” according to Ms. Schwartz. God’s schtick was testing Abraham again and again – uprooting him and his family, then making him circumcise himself, then telling him to send away his other son and the son’s mother. God makes more tests than my teachers at regular school. Why don’t we celebrate God for being a great tester, when we celebrate God’s mercy and forgiveness?

I’m surprised Abraham was willing to become God’s friend because I would not be a friend of someone who was always testing me. I prefer friends who trust me and I trust them.

But Ms. Schwartz said that many of Abraham’s neighbors sacrificed their children to ask their gods for help.

God wanted Judaism to be different – no killing humans for God. So God needed a story to show this. God’s story was for Abraham to almost kill his son, but then God would stop him at the last second. Now, that’s drama! So God (on the writing team) needed to stage this event. God (the character) and Abraham co-produced this play within Genesis.

But I think Abraham didn’t fully trust God and was tired of being tested. That’s why he made his servants not come up the mountain. Abraham thought he might have to do some improv if God didn’t send the angel at the right time. Like if the script said the angel would arrive at 3:00, but God got the time zone confused. Then Abraham would have to do a song-and-dance improv to wait for the angel to stop him and for the crew to put the ram into the bushes.

Abraham didn’t want his servants to tell neighbors that this almost-bad-event didn’t go according to the script. But Abraham goofed majorly. He didn’t show the script to his son or wife, so bad things happened.

Mom and Dad didn’t like how I thought the mountain story could have been a staged event to convince Abraham’s neighbors of God’s will. They say the mountain story was a test of how Abraham was willing to do what God said because how we respond to God’s tests is a super big deal in Judaism. Ms. Schwartz says the same.

I hope when I grow up, I’ll understand this better.

Robert Benjamin

SANTA IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Chapter 1: The Discovery

I could not believe my eyes. There he was, holding a prayer book and calmly sitting two rows in front of us in the synagogue. He was wearing an ordinary gray suit and red tie.

Noticing my stare, he winked at me like we shared a secret. His sapphire blue eyes twinkled over a snow white beard and smiling red lips. Was this really possible? Could he really be Santa Claus?



How many times had mom told me, “Santa is story for children who celebrate Christmas. Bubbie and Zadie give you Chanukah presents. And so do I.” I knew her speech by heart. It made sense.

No one could possibly know what every kid was dreaming about, let alone deliver the goods in a flying sled pulled by eight flying reindeer. And we’ve all heard about the reindeer with nose so shiny it glowed in the dark guiding the team on snowy nights. The story was simply unbelievable—and yet, I wished it were true.

I touched my kid brother’s hand and pointed to the old man with the white beard. “Who does that guy look like Davey?”

“Santa.” He said confirming my suspicions. “What’s he doing here?” No one else seemed to notice the special guest praying with us tonight. They just kept on swaying and singing the familiar sabbath prayers.

The synagogue was brightly lit. Sabbath candles flickered near the candles burning in the menorah. The Eternal Light hung from a brass chain in front of the arc that housed the Torah. Day and night that ruby light burned. I imagined the Eternal Light as an endless row of naked red light bulbs dangling from chains attached to an invisible ceiling. Tomorrow was the last night of Chanukah. Everyone joined the rabbi and cantor



as we sang holiday songs with gusto.

Chanukah, O Chanukah

Come light the menorah

Let’s have a party

We’ll all dance the hora

Gather round the table

I’ll give you a treat

Dreidles to play with

And latkes to eat.

Yum! Greasy potato pancakes. I still tasted them. My feet started tapping as my voice grew louder.

And while we are dancing

The candles are burning low.

One for each night

That they shed their sweet light

To remind us of days long ago!

“Hey!” shouted the cantor and rabbi who started to dance the hora, holding out their arms as an invitation to join. Davey and I were irresistibly drawn into the circle. Round and round we went, tracing circles on circles until the room became a whirling blur. I held tight to someone’s hands to keep my balance. When I stopped spinning, the Eternal Light was staring at me like a giant ruby eye. That’s when I saw him again. Santa was dancing the hora and singing in Hebrew—as if he were Jewish!

Catching our breath, we sat down to rest but my eyes never left him. Through out the rest of the service,

I stared at the white bearded man, hoping to force him into letting out a great big ho, ho, ho.

Chapter 2: The Meeting

"Amen. Good Shabbos. Happy Chanukah," announced the rabbi. When the service ended, I grabbed Davey's hand and led him to the Kiddush table set with red wine, grape juice, cookies and jelly doughnuts. We wiggled our way through the crowd until Davey and I found ourselves face to face, or should I say face to belly with the old man. This might be the chance of a lifetime. No way were we going to let him slip away into the night.

The old man, leaned over and handed each of us a jelly doughnut. As if reading our minds he smiles and invited us to pull his beard. "It's okay children. It won't come off." My brother immediately gave a hard tug.

"Ouch," complained the old man rubbing his hands across chubby cheeks. Getting right to the point, Davey asked, "Are you Santa?" Without giving him a chance to answer, he barraged the bearded old man with questions. "Why are you here? Do your reindeer really fly? What's it like in the North Pole? Do you have a trillion elf helpers?" When the apple-cheeked old man sighed, I swear I could see the North Pole workshop reflected in his eyes.

"You must know what a busy time of year this is for me. So many letters from so many children and so little time. I've been coming to synagogues on the Friday night before Christmas Eve for hundreds of years, whenever I'm in from the north." It's peaceful and relaxing here.

"Hey mister, are you for real?" I asked doubtfully. The old man shook his head up and down quickly, ignoring the cookie crumbs that were finding a home in his beard. He sure did love sweets! Trying to get some time alone with him, I sent Davey on a mission to get more cookies and doughnuts."

Questions poured fourth like a cloudburst. "How

do you know what a kid wants if they don't write you a letter? What's your address? Do you do email? Do you leave coal in the stockings of kids who've been naughty? My mom told me that Santa is a made up story. Is she right? Mostly I was wondering if you could come to our house?"

His blue eyes wrapped around me like a cloudless summer's sky. His wrinkles were as deep as garden rows. I reached out to hug him just as Davey came bounding back with a plateful of sweets. The old man carefully wrapped cookies and doughnuts in a white napkin before slipping the tidy package into his pocket. "Treats for the reindeer," he confided. "I never forget my friends."

Before disappearing into the starry night, the old man bent down and whispered to us. "Thanks for keeping my secret and Happy Chanukah to you." His soft fleshy hand squeezed ours.

I whispered back. "I want to believe in you. Please visit us this year. I'll write to you. If you are Santa you know where we live. And I'll leave some sweets."

Then he was gone. And we stood there, wondering.

Chapter 3: The Walk Home

Mom, Davey and I walked the three long blocks home admiring the rainbow colored lights flickering from porch awnings. They hung like necklaces around windows and bony-branched trees. There was one living room window framing an electric menorah with eight orange light bulbs. I knew this family celebrated Chanukah like mine. All the lights made the cold, lonely streets feel festive.

I walked fast, digging gloveless hands into my pockets. A trail of warm breathe from Mom's voice steamed into night air.

"Tasha, who was that sweet looking old man you and Davey were talking to in the synagogue?"

"Mom, you know who that was." I bluffed.

"He looked familiar but I really couldn't place him."

Warming my face, I breathed into the woolen scarf around my neck.

"Mom, do you think Santa Claus could be real? Maybe most Santas are fake, but there is one who is real, isn't there?"

"Tasha, we've been through this before. You know that Santa is a fairy tale, a make-believe story. Besides, he doesn't come to Jewish homes."



“But mom,” I argued, “Mrs. Ackerman, our social studies teacher told us there are lots of unexplained mysteries—like the Loch Ness Monster who lives in the deepest lake in Scotland. A friend swore that she saw a UFO in the mountains when she was on vacation with her family. I looked it up in the dictionary. It said “anything that does not conform to presently known aircraft or missiles, or cannot be clearly identified is a mysterious UFO.”

“Millions of people have seen ghosts—the spirits of dead humans or animals. Some ghosts even move through solid objects. Others can slam doors or throw objects across the room. Science cannot prove or disprove their existence.”

“The Abominable Snowman, an ape-like man taller than the tallest human, lives in Siberia and the Himalayan Mountains. And places as far away as the North Pole.”



German postcard, 1920s.

“Everyone has a guardian angel, right mom? They surround us, especially on certain holidays. Some say they’re made of light. The Bible is full of stories about angels— an angel led the Israelites through the desert into the Promised Land; angels guard the Garden of Eden; Jacob wrestled all night with an angel who looked like a man; an angel protected

Daniel in the lion’s den. Angels can heal the sick, announce a birth, save someone in danger, or dance on the head of a pin. But no one can prove if they exist or not. Maybe Santa is just another unexplained mystery.” I was pleading my case.

Mom sighed and looked at me as if I was hopeless. I didn’t care. Christmas Eve was two days away. Most of my friends had stockings filled with unknown treats and treasures hanging near a decorated evergreen tree shading a manger with shepherds, wise men, and parents adoring a tiny baby. Nearby was a mountain of presents.

I planned on spending Christmas with my best friend Pamela who lived across the street. I would stay with her Italian family until the last cannoli was eaten. And there was always a present with my name under the tree.

Suddenly I got a brilliant idea! Davey and I could decorate the huge jade plant that lived in the living room. We’d call it a Chanukah bush! My toes were icy but inside I felt warm. I turned to tell Davey about my plan, just as a snowball came whirling in my direction. I ducked. The snowball hit mom.

Pow! Direct hit! Mom bent down and made a snowball of her own. Davey and I didn’t stop running down the block until we were home. Opening the door to the house, mom surprised us with a handful of snow. “A snow wash for your face,” she laughed.

As the cold snow stung my cheeks, I remembered the old man with the twinkling blue eyes, curly white beard and apple cheeks. Was he the real Santa Claus?

Chapter 4: The Mall

Davey scrambled past my room on his way to breakfast. “Hey Tash, wasn’t that something last night! Wait till I tell my friends.”

“No, no don’t tell anyone!” I warned. “Remember what Santa said about keeping this secret? Besides, your friends will never believe that you saw Santa in the synagogue.” Davey shook his curly hair in a wild motion, letting me know he agreed and raced downstairs to the kitchen.

Tonight was the last night of Chanukah and Mom was cooking up a storm. I poked my nose into the soup pot. Cream colored matzo balls floated over chicken wings and drumsticks. Carrots sunk towards the bottom like golden carp. The smell made me



hungry. Challah dough was rising in the blue clay bowl. Mom's eyes were teary from chopping onions and her knuckles were bruised from grating potatoes for the latkes we would eat tonight with warm applesauce, a meal she only made once a year.

Guzzling some o.j. and toast, I turned to my kid brother. "Hey Davey, let's go to the mall." He eyeballed me with suspicion. I hardly ever invited him to go anywhere with me.

I announced to mom that we wanted to decorate the jade plant in the living room, cover it with lights, tinsel, hanging glass balls, and whatever lovely things we could find. We want a Chanukah bush!

"Call it what you will," she complained, "It's still a Christmas tree and I don't think Bubbie and Zadie are going to like the idea at all." Bubbie and Zadie, my grandparents, were the holders of Greater Wisdom, the keepers of tradition. One phone call later let me know they truly did have Greater Wisdom. They said that if we believed it to be a Chanukah bush then that's what it was. Davey and I headed out the door before anyone could change the ruling.

People carrying armloads of packages rushed along crowded sidewalks. Christmas trees tied onto car-tops flew by like green birds. The shopping mall was mobbed. Tinsel, tinsel, everywhere. Christmas carols sifted through the air on invisible speakers, overriding the hum of the crowd. Every corner of the mall warned us that Santa was coming to town so we better behave. I kept a close eye on Davey. With his blonde curls and chubby body, I didn't want him to be mistaken for an angel!

Store windows displayed tiny sleds with gleeful children sliding down snowy hillsides created by sparkling cotton batting. Red lipped jack-in-the-boxes winked at us. Nutcrackers grew large before

my eyes. Dolls, toys, clothes and treats jumped out at me asking to be bought. I wanted everything.

A roped off area with a raised platform spotlighted Santa sitting on a golden throne. His mouth formed a circle as he said, "Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas," but his eyes were as flat as burnt pancakes. The cuffs of blue-jeans showed at the bottom of red felt pants. Black stubble on his chin poked through the white dangling pasted-on beard. He sneaked looks at his watch to see if it were almost quitting time. Children took turns sitting on his lap while a photographer blinded them with flashbulbs. Anxious mothers held onto screaming children who did not want to sit on a stranger's lap even if he was wearing a red flannel Santa suit.

Ducking into one of the shops, Davey and I bought colored lights, tinsel, wooden reindeer, a dozen silver stars and an angel. Then we left the mall. Neither of us spoke while walking home. I held Davey's cold hand in mine feeling the warmth between them. Pink and purple clouds met us as we rounded the corner.



Chapter 5: The Chanukah Bush and the Menorah

A rainbow of eight candles in the menorah waited to be lit. With a white linen cloth and blue napkins even the table looked dressed up. The smell of freshly baked bread and roast chicken made my mouth water. Bubbie and Zadie would be here soon loaded down with presents.

We just had enough time to decorate the jade plant. Davey's chubby fingers gently roamed through the branches hanging tinsel while I draped lights and hung stars and reindeer. Instead of the store bought angel, we pasted the Halloween photo of Davey dressed like cupid to a piece of cardboard, sprinkled glitter over it, and hung it at the top.

\We plugged in the lights and stood back to see our creation.

“Awesome!” I whispered.

“Wow! Our own Chanukah bush,” Davey said excitedly. Even Mom was impressed when she came into the room, smiling at the photo of her own angel crowning the plant. Flickering lights lit up the silver stars while reindeer pranced through a forest of jade.

I went upstairs to change. As I stared at my soapy face in the bathroom mirror, the face of the white bearded old man from the synagogue seemed to stare back. Was he really Santa? Would he come to visit Davey and me even though we celebrate Chanukah?

A knock at the front door—Bubbie and Zadie! I bounded down the stairs pushing ahead of Davey.

“Tasha, Tasha, how lovely you look tonight. But what is that troubled look in your eyes?” I hugged grandma while trying to burrow into her soft fur coat.

Outside it grew dark as the family gathered around the old maple table. Mom lit all the candles using the red Shamash candle that stood for the light in the world that never goes out. With our unique melodies that wandered through the house like a magic carpet, we sang the blessings over the Chanukah lights. The last notes hung in the air as we stared into the candle flames.

Davey’s eyes grew large when mom brought in a platter of sizzling potato pancakes. “Why have we eaten so many latkes this week,” he asked, not in the form of a complaint. Then she told us this years version of the Chanukah story.

“Thousands of years ago, around 200 BC, a country priest and his five sons started a rebellion. Judea had come under the control of a Syrian king who outlawed the Jewish religion. Soldiers had destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. They sacrificed pigs at the altar they built for the Greek gods.

“But the fierce army of farmers, shepherds and teachers, known as the Maccabees, proved to be greater than the strongest force. With Judah as their leader, the Maccabees were victorious.

“But the holy temple needed to be cleansed and rededicated. Immediately, the Jews built a new altar and started to make new oil for the lamp that must never go out—the Eternal Light. They found a jar of olive oil with enough to burn for one day. But it



burned for eight days, enough time to make new oil. Chanukah is the miracle of the light.”

“We eat oily food on Chanukah to remind us of the miracle of the oil,” chimed in Bubbie. My mind wandered to a forgotten corner of the universe where a light burned forever. The flickering flames from the menorah met the lights on the Chanukah bush. The house seemed to be lit by a flaming rainbow.

Chapter 6: Christmas Eve

The next morning, I awoke from a weird dream. Fat men with white beards and red Santa suits were laughing at me while patting their bellies and ringing loud bells. When I went downstairs, the living room window looked empty. Mom had put the menorah away till next year.

Tonight was Christmas Eve. Outside the gray sky seemed to sit and wait, deciding what to do next, like me. The day crawled on. The gray sky turned charcoal. I turned on every light in the house. Mom came home carrying a hot cheesy pizza.

After dinner, the three of us watched Christmas specials on T.V. One show was about a man who claimed to be the real Santa. He looked amazingly like the man I had met in the synagogue. In the program, Santa got arrested for breaking and entering a home.

Truth is, if a chubby man in a red suit tried to climb down our chimney in the middle of the night, we might call the police too. The kid in the show sprung Santa out of jail by knocking out a wall with the help of the flying sled and reindeer.

The story was impossible to believe and added to my growing doubts. If I heard a strange noise on the roof tonight, should I tell mom, or lie quietly in bed?

Mom let us stay up till eleven thirty but Davey and I had made a secret pact to stay up all night. If either of us heard anything suspicious, we would go to the other’s room and warn them. I lay in bed willing my eyes to stay open. Hours later I heard a noise.

Davey appeared at the edge of darkness in his floppy rabbit slippers.

“Do you think I could wait awhile with you? Mom’s asleep and I’m lonesome.” The wistful way he looked at me, I wished the tooth fairy was hidden in the blankets.

During that long cold winter night, we heard many sounds: sirens, the creaky walls, the roar of the furnace, the fridge tuning off and on. We heard the whoosh of passing cars. We even heard the icy tick of the snow as it began to fall. But we never heard the sound we were waiting for—the sound of eight tiny reindeer pattering across the roof.

Chapter 7: Special Delivery

Night shadows gave way to sun streaming through the bedroom window. We had waited. He hadn’t come. I could handle it better than Davey. From the start, I figured that the chances of Santa being real were not great. Davey sat on the bed, breathing deeply as if he were crying on the inside but would not let the tears escape. Mom was plugging in her coffee machine when the two of us slowly walked downstairs. The house was so quiet Mom asked how we were feeling.

“I hope you kids aren’t coming down with the flu.” Pancakes with melting butter and goopy syrup sat in front of me getting cold. I had no appetite, neither did Davey. Mom stood at the counter squeezing fresh orange juice and shaking her head like she did when she was worried.

“We got some fresh snow last night. How would you two like to get bundled up and go sleigh riding, that is, if you’re feeling well enough.” Davey and I nodded our heads to say yes but we couldn’t show her any of the enthusiasm she was waiting for.

I didn’t even feel like going over to Pam’s house for Christmas dinner. I sat at the kitchen table twirling my glass of orange juice wondering. Maybe Santa had gotten caught in rotten weather or ran out of presents—or got arrested for breaking and entering. Any number of things could have happened. The only thing that was certain was he hadn’t come to our house last night.

Of course he hadn’t come, because there’s no such person as Santa Claus. Any reasonable adult will tell you that. It’s just a story made up for little kids like a fairy tale. The sound of the doorbell surprised me,

and the juice glass slipped out of my hand making an orange puddle.

I uncovered the round peephole to see who was on the other side of the door before opening the latch. What I saw made my heart beat like a drummer-gone crazy. My stomach leaped like it had wings. My mouth felt as dry as a desert in summer. Twinkling blue eyes filled the entire peephole. Wrinkles at the corner told me the eyes were smiling.

I opened the door wide and saw a postman with the face of the Santa from the synagogue. But he was dressed in a postman’s uniform and carried large packages. I wanted to hug him, pull his beard, or at least invite him in for hot chocolate. Instead I stood in the doorway like a puppet whose strings have been cut.

The postman grinned, showing off his dimples and sang out, “Special Delivery! Here are some packages for Tasha and Davey. Special Delivery!” He winked and was gone.

“Who was that at the door dear?” called mom from the kitchen.

“It was the postman. He delivered some packages for Davey and me.”

“Darling, that’s impossible,” said mom, wiping her hands dries on a towel. “There’s no mail delivery on Christmas Day.”

Two huge brown paper parcels stood in our living room waiting to be ripped open. “Oh mom, it’s a skateboard!” screamed Davey.

Carefully working my way through tissue paper, I uncovered a porcelain ballerina doll that twirled around to the music when you wound her up. I loved her immediately.

Mom was on her knees, searching the wrappings for a card or a return address. She never found one.

I’ll never forget that holiday season. The light from the menorah melted into the twinkle in the old man’s eyes. Was he Santa? All I know for sure is that I have this giant hug waiting for him.

Iris Keltz



Who doesn't love potato latkes, with homemade applesauce? A few years ago when I changed my diet to not include any dairy and eliminated sugar, oil and salt. I thought oh no, all the Jewish foods I love so much, include eggs, sugar and oil.

Part of celebrating any of the Jewish holidays has always been carrying out traditional foods.

I had to learn how to adjust dishes to my new whole food, plant-based, sugar-, oil- and salt-free preferences.

In these latkes, I combine flaxseed with water, to replace the eggs. Baking replaces frying. \

As Jews, we all understand the miracle of the oil associated with Hanukkah. Why not keep the oil in the menorah? The health benefits from not eating greasy foods is profound.

My house still has that heavenly smell of latkes, and I can eat as many of these without feeling guilty.

Baked Potato Latkes

(Yields 6 latkes, approximately. 4 inches round)

Ingredients:

- 1 Idaho/Russet potato, peeled and grated
- 2 Tablespoons grated white or red onion
- 1 Tablespoon ground flax seed + 3 Tablespoons water
(makes one flax egg substitute, equivalent to one egg)
- 1 Tablespoon flour (spelt, oat, or all-purpose)

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or Silpat baking mat. (This way you won't need any oil, and cleanup is a breeze!)
3. Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and mix well.
4. Split batter into individual latke portions.
You should get 5-6 latkes.
5. Bake for 20 minutes.
Once the bottoms are brown, flip and cook until done for approximately another 20 minutes.



Serve hot with unsweetened applesauce.

(See recipe on next page.)

Unsweetened Applesauce

(Yields 4 – 6 cups)

Ingredients:

- 3 – 4 lbs. of apples, cored and roughly chopped,
peeled or unpeeled
- Approximately 1 cup of water,
to barely cover the bottom of the pot

Instructions:

1. Place the sliced apples and water over apples in a large pot or saucepan.
Cover and cook over medium heat until it simmers.
Watch that the water does not evaporate entirely; you might need to add more water.
2. Reduce heat to low and continue cooking until the apples are very tender.
(This will take approximately 30 minutes.)
3. Stir occasionally and mash apples with the back of the spoon.
Cook until you have the desired consistency.
If you want smooth applesauce, puree the apples using a potato masher, immersion blender, or food processor.
4. It is ideal to serve the applesauce warm.
You can cool to room temperature, then store in the refrigerator for up to one week.

Chef's notes:

Apples: Granny Smith, Fuji, Gala, Honey Crisp, Pink Lady or any heirlooms from local orchards.
Add ground cinnamon to taste or insert a cinnamon stick when cooking sauce.
Add lemon juice or apple cider vinegar to taste.
Add cranberries, raspberries or apricots.



Montoya Orchard, Velarde NM

MACHU PICCHU – A MYSTICAL & MIRACULOUS TRIP

2008. We had flown into Lima, Peru on route to Cuzco, which is at 11,000 feet above sea level. Pretty daunting elevation for two Hoosiers. I was fighting yet another virus, plus the time change wasn't helping. Yet, we were going to the fabled Machu Picchu to traipse, trek and see the mystical views and the land of the gods. The landscape of the Andes mountains was pretty exquisite, although also pretty high at 7,900 feet. Not bad for Taoseños, but for sea level folks it was challenging.



After a terrific, if slow train ride round the mountains, during which we were given a concert and fashion show by the crew, we trekked up the road to first glimpse the Incan gods. I noticed a group of llamas just on the other side of the rocky hill to the left of us. There was one brownish-gray straggler closer to us. I slowly moved towards him, with the wall still between us.

He stopped grazing and gazed into my eyes. For a few minutes we stood like that. It was pretty amazing. The pack of the llamas hung together and rarely separated, but this brave soul grazed to his own drum!

To accompany us on our day was a gentle, mist. Soft against our faces but cold and penetrating. I was glad I had dressed in layers. Ron, not so much. He was much healthier than I and didn't feel he needed the extra warmth.

After feasting our eyes on the beauty surrounding us, I felt pulled by some other-worldly force to seek out the "god of healing" stone. It resembled a whale from one vintage point and something quite different from another. I couldn't quite place my finger on it. Just as I was about twenty feet away, a group of school children, all adolescent boys, rushed ahead of me to the front of the large, (about 15 feet across) "healing god". I changed direction and slowly made my way to the back of it by a stone wall where I was able to be alone with it and to lean against this sacred stone. Closing my eyes, with the

rain coming down harder now, I pulled up the hood on my jacket for protection as I prayed to God to "heal me and refill me with energy and Light."

I felt nothing but the pressure of cold rain on me at first, but a few minutes later, I began to feel a warmth in my head plus some tingling. It spread down as I began to do some deep yoga breathing, I moved it down into my body, and wherever I felt it would do the greatest good for my highest self. When I was done, the energy and warmth stayed with me for over three days, despite the rain!

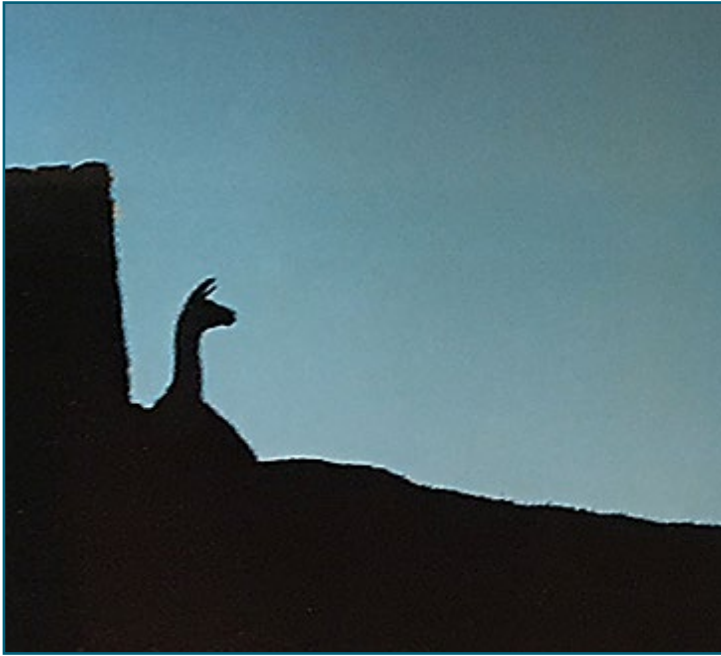
That first night after I received that miraculous gift, I laid awake all night in our sparse room in the Machu Picchu Monastery. My mind racing and my body feeling fantastic, all my symptoms had simply vanished!

The next morning after walking thru the gods again, I noticed that same llama away from the pack once more. He ambled towards me, but wouldn't let me come too close. We connected again, staring into each other's eyes. I spoke to him and told him how brave he was, leaving his pack and coming to me each time I was in the vicinity.

This gentle llama seemed to understand what I was saying. I felt a lovely connection to him. Perhaps we had some past history. I didn't have much time to ponder it for it was time to get our bags and begin the long journey back to fly to the port for the second part of our trip.

Ron had woken up after a tough night with a bad virus, coughing and sneezing. He was so weak he could barely lift himself, let alone all our baggage.

I thanked God for the incredible energy, so that I was able to schlep all the luggage — a first for me. Usually, my wonderful husband carries the lions' share and I just have a small rolling bag or two. He calls himself *my scherper*, especially for all my art shows!



As we lumbered down the rocky, walled road, heading towards the van that would take us down the mountain towards the airport, I stopped to take one more breath-taking view of this mystical land of the gods and the Andes mountains. The clouds seemed to part and some light lit up the peaks of the mountains across from us. It seemed like a blessing for us.

As I took in the beautiful view one last time, my llama friend came up to the wall, and gazed once more into my eyes. I pulled out my camera this time and asked permission for a picture. He turned profile for my shot and I took it. The photo has made it in one of my photographic shows. What a gentle gift he was!

At the airport, the Universe had the Philadelphia Eagles assistant coach awaiting a flight also. We began a conversation and I told him about my husband and his viral infection. He carried a black medical bag full of supplies and gave me some medicine to help Ron. He said it would kick in, in 2 days.

The miraculous effect of my healing began to wear off just as Ron's medicine took effect. Was it a coincidence? I don't believe in them.

Albert Einstein said, "You either subscribe to nothing is a miracle or everything is a miracle. Me, I subscribe to the latter."

So, do I. Here's to a miraculous Hanukkah Season!

Katherine M. Soskin

"I didn't arrive at my understanding of the fundamental laws of the universe through my rational mind."

"Time and space are not conditions in which we live, but modes by which we think."

"I think 99 times and find nothing. I stop thinking, swim in silence, and the truth comes to me."

"The intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, the solution comes to you and you don't know how or why."

Albert Einstein



