

Whitestone Hebrew Centre Bulletin

12-45 Clintonville St. Whitestone, NY 11357



שלום

Inside this issue

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE	2
FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY	2
SISTERHOOD	3
TRANSPORTATION	5
FAMILY SHABBAT	6
BIRTHDAYS	6
WHC CLASSES	6
SISTERHOOD LUNCHEON PICTURES	7
DONATIONS	8
ADS	9

Volume XXVIII No. 6

February 2019

Shevat — Adar I 5779

SHABBAT ACROSS AMERICA

Friday March 1st

Following services at 6:30 PM

Join us for a Shabbat Dinner with Family and Friends

(See Enclosed Flier for Details)



CELEBRATE PURIM AT WHC



Megilla Reading

Wednesday, March 20th -- 7:30 PM

PURIM PARTY

Following Megilla Reading

(See Enclosed Flier for Details)



Family Shabbat

February 9th @ 10:00 AM

We look forward to seeing everyone there!



WHC Bulletin Staff

Rabbi Steven Axelman,
Editor
Sharon Samet
Patricia Smolker

WHITESTONE

HEBREW CENTRE

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Vice-President - Ellis Rosenblatt
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Corresponding/Recording Secretary -
Ron Kohn
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Esther Cohen
Rhoda Weinstein

FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

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The following is adapted from the article, Parshat Yitro: Mount Sinai and the Birth of Freedom by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, as printed in the [Jewish Press](#).

President's Message

By: Bruce Berenson

Dear Fellow Congregants ,

The following is an advertisement/promotion for what I consider the most valuable perk available as a member of the WHC....

It's said that Torah study is regarded as the most important of all mitzvot, because it opens the door for observance of all the other mitzvot.

We don't need to look any further than the Shema: in which we recite daily the words "You shall teach them diligently to your children" -- (directing us to transmit Torah to the next generation)... "And you shall speak of them (words of Torah) while you sit at home, while you walk on the way, when you go to bed and when you get up" -- which directs us to study the Torah ourselves. This need to devote ourselves to knowing the Torah is repeated over and over again throughout the Bible...

Our history demonstrates that the moment study of Torah is neglected, assimilation of the Jewish people into its surroundings makes its inroad. Without fail, every Jewish community in history that did not teach and study Torah as its first priority gradually disappeared from the scene.

As the world's first book-based religion, Judaism gained the flexibility to move the focus from sacred land to sacred text, making it portable. Had Judaism not effected that radical shift, it is unlikely that it would have survived the fate of exile.

The portability of a sacred book raised Judaism to a universal religion. God's presence was no longer restricted to the sanctity of a single sanctuary. Through the

(Continued on page 5)

The revelation at Mount Sinai – the central episode not only of the *parsha* of Yitro (the Torah Portion read on Saturday, January 26th), but of Judaism as a whole – was unique in the religious history of mankind. Other faiths (Christianity and Islam) call themselves religions of revelation, but in both cases the revelation of which they spoke was to an individual ("the son of God," "the prophet of God"). Only in Judaism was God's self-disclosure not to an individual (a prophet) or a group (the elders) but to an entire nation, young and old, men, women and children, the righteous and not-yet-righteous alike. From the very outset, the people of Israel knew something unprecedented had happened at Sinai. Moses had no doubt that it was an event without parallel:

"Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived?" (Deut. 4:32–33).

For the great Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages, its significance was primarily epistemological. It created certainty and removed doubt. The authenticity of a revelation experienced by one person could be questioned. One witnessed by millions could not. God disclosed His presence in public to remove any possible suspicion that the presence felt, and the voice heard, were not genuine.

Looking at the history of mankind since those days, it is clear that there was

(Continued on page 4)

SISTERHOOD

Sisterhood Message

Last month Sisterhood had its Winter Luncheon and Bingo at Ben's Kosher Restaurant, located in the Bay Terrace Shopping Center. As always, this event was very successful and a lot of fun. Thank you to Naomi Gukowsky for chairing this event. (See Naomi's article for more details). Be sure to mark your calendar for a Theatre Party, The Rat Pack of Opera: From Venice to Vegas, Sunday, March 17 at QBCC. (See enclosed flier for more details). Please call Naomi Gukowsky at 718-767-7432 to reserve your tickets.

Purim is on March 20th. Please fill out your orders for Shalach Monot. (See enclosed flier). Return the orders as soon as possible with your check, payable to the Sisterhood WHC.

Sisterhood has programs and other events planned in the coming months. Read future bulletins for more details.

SISTERHOOD DATES TO REMEMBER

Tue. Feb 5th	Sisterhood Board Meeting	10:00 AM
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Sisterhood Winter Luncheon

On Tuesday, January 15th, Sisterhood held its Annual Winter Luncheon at Ben's Kosher Restaurant in the Bay Terrace Shopping Center, and a good time was had by all. (See pictures on page). Thirty sisterhood members and friends enjoyed a delicious luncheon, which included potato latkes with applesauce, overstuffed sandwiches, coleslaw, potato salad, assorted pickles, soda, coffee or tea and rugalach. We played bingo and had many lucky winners. A \$5.00 gift card was won by Rose Fenway. \$10.00 gift cards were won by Rose Fenway, Meryl Hoffmann and Roz Weinstein. A \$25.00 gift card was won by Lilian Gradofsky. Two mugs were won by Meryl Hoffmann. Jewish Fortune Cookies and Star of David Pasta were won by Rose Fenway, Mena Petelis, Selma Reiss and Rhoda Weinstein. A special thank you to Patricia Smolker for making all of the arrangements and to Hal Simon, Area Supervisor and David Czegledi, General Manager of Ben's, whose help made for a wonderful day. Thank you to Evelyn Apter for driving some of our members. Please join us when we have our next event. Look for fliers in future bulletins. You'll have a great time.



PRAYER BOOK FUND DECEMBER 2018

In memory of Gertrude Schneider

- Bonnie Buxbaum
- Adele Rothman

Inscribed Prayer Book in memory of Elliott Keller

- Patricia Smolker

Inscribed Prayer Book in memory of Gertrude Schneider

- Patricia Smolker

Making Contributions

For many years Sisterhood has offered the service of sending cards from all those who wish to acknowledge both Simchas and Condolences. The response from the recipients is most heart warming. The following funds are available:

Simcha Fund	\$10
Chai Fund	\$18
Prayer Book Fund	\$10
Inscribed Prayer Books	\$25

The recipient receives an acknowledgement of the contribution and it is printed in the monthly Bulletin so all can share the feelings expressed. To place orders, call Patricia Smolker at (718) 746-7068.

Naomi Gukowsky
Chairperson

**Best Wishes for a
speedy and complete recovery**

Lenny Hartman



FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

(Continued from page 2)

another significance also – one that had to do not with religious knowledge, but with politics. At Sinai a new kind of nation was being formed, and a new kind of society – one that would be an antithesis of Egypt, in which the few had power and the many were enslaved. It was to be, in Abraham Lincoln's words in the Gettysburg Address, "a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that *all men are created equal*." Indeed, without the covenant at Mount Sinai, Lincoln's words might have been inconceivable. For nowhere else do we find anything like the politics of Mount Sinai, with its radical vision of a society held together not by power but by the free consent of its citizens to be bound, individually and collectively, by a moral code and by a covenant with God.

Standard works on the history of the politics of freedom trace it back through Marx, Rousseau and Hobbes to Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, and the Greek city states (Athens in particular) of the fifth century BCE. This is a serious error. To be sure, words like "democracy" (rule by the people) are Greek in origin. The Greeks were gifted at abstract nouns and systematic thought. However, if we look at the "birth of the modern" – at figures like Milton, Hobbes and Locke in England, and the founding fathers of America – the book with which they were in dialogue was not Plato or Aristotle but the Hebrew Bible. Hobbes quotes it 657 times in *The Leviathan* alone. Long before the Greek philosophers, and far more profoundly, at Mount Sinai the concept of a free society was born.

Three things about that moment were to prove crucial. The first is that long before Israel entered the land and acquired their own system of government (first by judges, later by kings), they had entered into an overarching covenant with God. That covenant set moral limits to the exercise of power. The code we call Torah established for the first time the primacy of right over might. Any king who behaved contrarily to Torah was acting beyond legitimate authority and could be challenged. This is the single most important fact about biblical politics.

Democracy on the Greek model always had one fatal weakness. Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill called it "the tyranny of the majority." J.L. Talmon called it "totalitarian democracy." The rule of the majority contains no guarantee of the rights of minorities. As Lord Acton rightly noted, it was this that led to the downfall of Athens: "There was no law superior to that of the state. The lawgiver was above the law." In Judaism, by contrast, prophets were mandated to challenge the authority of the king if he acted against the terms of the Torah. Individuals were empowered to disobey illegal or immoral orders. The first example was the Hebrew midwives who "feared God and did not do what the Egyptian king had commanded" (Ex. 1:17). Another key moment was when King Saul ordered his servants to kill the priests of Nob, who had given shelter to David, "But the king's servants would not raise a hand to strike down the priests of the Lord" (Samuel 22:17). It was on this tradition that Calvin – inspiration of the

seventeenth-century Puritan radicals in England and America – drew, when he said "prophets and teachers may take courage and thus boldly set themselves against kings and nations." [6] It was on the same tradition that Thomas Paine based his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), widely credited at the time as the inspiration that led to the American revolution. Historically, it was the covenant at Sinai and all that flowed from it, not the Greek political tradition, that inspired the birth of freedom in Britain and America, the first people to take that road in the modern age.

The second key element lies in the prologue to the covenant.

God tells Moses: "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel. 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now, if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured possession, for the whole earth is Mine. You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...'" (Ex. 19:3–6)

Moses tells this to the people, who reply: "We will do everything the Lord has said" (Ex. 19:8). Until the people had signified their consent, the revelation could not proceed. The principle at stake was that there is no legitimate government without the consent of the governed, even if the governor is Creator of heaven and earth. I know of few more radical ideas anywhere. To be sure, there were sages in the Talmudic period who questioned whether the acceptance of the covenant at Sinai was completely free.

The Talmud itself says that "Nonetheless, they re-accepted it in the days of Ahasuerus," that is, at the time described in the book of Esther. In that context there could be no question of divine coercion. However, at the simplest level, this is the significance of the two covenant renewal ceremonies, one at the end of Moses' life, as the Israelites were about to enter the land (Deut. 29–31), the other at the end of Joshua's life, when the people had conquered the land (Joshua 24). The covenant was renewed precisely so that no one could say that it had been entered into coercively when there was no alternative. At the heart of Judaism is the idea – way ahead of its time, and not always fully realized – that the free God desires the free worship of free human beings. God, said the rabbis, does not act tyrannically with His creatures.

The third, equally ahead of its time, was that the partners to the covenant were to be "all the people" – men, women and children. This fact is emphasized later on in the Torah in the mitzvah of *Hakhel*, the septennial covenant renewal ceremony. The Torah states specifically that the entire people is to be gathered together for this ceremony, "men, women and children" (Deut. 31:10–13). A thousand years later, when Athens experimented with democracy, only a limited section of society had political rights. Women, children, slaves and foreigners were excluded. In many respects this held true until very recently. In Britain, women did not get the vote until 1918. In America, women's suffrage was complete only in

(Continued on page 5)

FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

(Continued from page 4)

1920, though some states had enacted it earlier. According to the sages, when God was about to give the Torah at Sinai, He told Moses to consult first with the women and only then with the men. The Torah, Israel's "constitution of liberty," includes everyone. It is the first moment, by thousands of years, that citizenship is conceived as being universal.

Perhaps the greatest testimony to the politics of the Hebrew Bible was given by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in an unpublished manuscript discovered after his death:

"The Jews provide us with an astonishing spectacle: the laws of Numa, Lycurgus, Solon are dead; the very much older laws of Moses are still alive. Athens, Sparta, Rome have perished and no longer have children left on earth; Zion, destroyed, has not

lost its children.... What must be the strength of legislation capable of working such wonders, capable of braving conquests, dispersions, revolutions, exiles, capable of surviving the customs, laws, empire of all the nations...to last as long as the world?...any man whosoever he is, must acknowledge this as a unique marvel, the causes of which, divine or human, certainly deserve the study and admiration of the sages, in preference to all that Greece and Rome offer."

With the revelation at Sinai, something unprecedented entered the human horizon, though it would take centuries, millennia, before its full implications were understood. At Sinai, the politics of freedom was born.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

(Continued from page 2)

portal of Torah, Jews could access God everywhere.

Beyond all the good, rational reasons, Torah is the mysterious bridge which connects the Jew and God, across which they interact and communicate, and by means of which God fulfills His covenant with His people to sustain them and protect them.

So it's no surprise that Torah study is so central with us. Our prayer books are filled with petitions to God to help us understand His Torah...

When we study Torah, we are not studying an abstract, arcane text of the ancient world. We are studying the way in which God wants us to live on this earth. We are in fact engaged in discovering the essence of Judaism, and so, the essence of ourselves...

For nearly as many years as we've had him as our Spiritual Leader – our Rabbi Axelman has taught a Talmud Class on Sundays. In case there is any confusion I should mention that

Talmud Study is the essence of Torah Learning and is in effect a "Readers Guide" for the 5 Books of Moses, Prophets, Psalms and so on. Our Rabbi is a first class scholar with a gift for opening Hearts and Minds to the Treasures contained in these Ancient Writings. And as if that weren't enough – Refreshments are provided!

If Torah study is our most important mitzvah – providing the means for our members to study Torah can only be slightly less important. Please join us Sundays at 12:45 p.m.

Should you wish to explore other topics in Judaism, in the news or just on your mind, we have a class on Monday night at 7:30 p.m., where refreshments are served as well!

B 'Shalom

Bruce Berenson

Transportation to and from WHC now available!

Now you no longer have to worry about a ride to and from shul. The Whitestone Hebrew Centre has set up an account with Four Two's. This was set up for our members that are no longer able to drive or find it difficult to drive to shul. The way it works is simple: Four Two's has a list of members' names that will be using this service. You need to call Four Two's, preferably 2 days in advance, 1 day in advance the latest, and tell them your name, address, what time you need to be picked up, and if you will need them to come back to shul to take you home, at what time. You can use this service anytime you need to come to shul, whether it be for services, an event, or a meeting. The tip is already included, so there is no cost to you! Four Two's phone # is 718 746-2222.



If you think you are not on the list, please call the shul office to ensure that you are.

Sharon Samet

January Family Shabbat Sponsors



Liliya Berezovsky and Alex Ratner in honor of the birth of their granddaughter, Miriam Eva

Esther Cohen in honor of her birthday

Naomi and Leon Gukowsky in memory of the yahrzeit of Naomi's mother, Rose Dubin and in honor of their son Jacob's 40th birthday

Arthur Isman in honor of the congregation

Ellis Rosenblatt in memory of the yahrzeit of his Uncle Boris Barron and in honor of Esther Cohen's birthday and in memory of Gertrude Schneider

Adele Rothman in honor of her birthday and in memory of the yahrzeit of her daughter Carol Rauschkolb

The Smith Family in honor of Frank's birthday

Patricia Smolker in memory of the birthday of her mother, Goldie Smolker

The Young Family in honor of Jared's birthday

February Happy Birthdays



Bemjamin Mandel Abraham Weinstein

*Editor's note: If your birthday should be listed on this page and is not, please call the office at (718) 767-1500 and give them your date of birth.

Thank you.

SCHEDULE OF WHC CLASSES

(led by Rabbi Axelman)

Sundays @12:45 PM -- Talmud Class

The goal of this class is to reintroduce people to the wisdom of the Talmud. As Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz writes in Essential Talmud:

"The Talmud is a very hard book to define ... from content to style, every definition is incomplete or contradictory. ... The Talmud is completely unique--a book that has no parallel anywhere.... If the bible is the cornerstone of Judaism, then the Talmud is the central pillar, soaring up from the foundations and supporting the entire spiritual and intellectual edifice.... In many ways the Talmud is the most important book in Jewish culture, the backbone of creativity and of national life. No other work has had a comparable influence on the theory and practice of Jewish life, shaping spiritual content and serving as a guide to conduct.... [t]he Jewish people have always been keenly aware that their continued survival and development depend on study of the Talmud.

Mondays @7:30 PM -- Judaism 101

Explores Your Questions: Why?... Because...

A class at which you can ask any question, dispel misconceptions, and discuss any current issues and concerns relating to Jews, Judaism or Israel, in a non-judgmental, open and candid forum. This is an ideal venue for individuals who wish to discuss basic principles of Judaism and express their views, questions, etc.

Refreshments are served at every class.

Your donations are greatly appreciated.

New WHC Phone System



Due to the increase of business being conducted more on the internet than in the past, coupled with our new virtual phone system, we no longer need someone staffing the office during the day. Anyone phoning the shul will be presented with options to hear hours of services, directions, or to be connected

to me or the Rabbi. If you are not connected directly to me or the Rabbi, please leave a message and your call will be returned in a timely manner. When the calendar states that the office is closed, that means that messages may not be returned on the same day. When you need to conduct business in shul in person, please leave that in your message and we will arrange to meet you.

Sharon Samet



Sisterhood's Annual Winter Luncheon



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If you are interested in becoming a member or for any additional information, please contact:

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Option 4: Go to our website at
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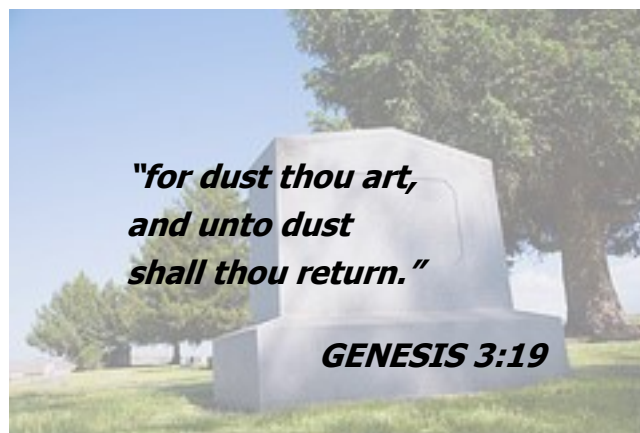
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When mailing checks and other notes or correspondence to WHC, if for Sisterhood, please write in the lower left hand corner of the envelope: ATTN: SISTERHOOD (and if you know the name of the Sisterhood member, please include it as well).

If you are enclosing multiple checks and/or correspondence in the same envelope, and they are for different people, please include a note as to the distribution of the checks and/or correspondence. This will ensure that the office will direct your checks, notes and/or correspondence to the proper person in a timely fashion.

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