

Whitestone Hebrew Centre Bulletin

12-45 Clintonville St. Whitestone, NY 11357



שלום

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Volume XXX No. 6

February 2021

Shevat — Adar 5781

CELEBRATE PURIM AT WHC

Megilla Reading

Thursday, February 25th -- 6:30 PM



President's Message

My Dear Friends and Fellow Congregants,
Despite these unusual and difficult times that characterized 2020 and will no doubt continue well into 2021, I want to posit one of the (very) few advantages the pandemic has given us (extrapolating from my own observances). That is the quiet space to reflect on our portion from God and ask for strength to endure. Although our Yom Tov celebrations must be relatively muted this year we still can and should observe as much as is possible – aided by available technology.

We are commanded to rejoice on all Jewish festivals, but more than any other day, it is Purim that is distinguished by jubilation. In fact, we start celebrating when the month of Adar, in which Purim falls, begins (first day of Adar is February 12). Traditional rejoicing on our Holy Days nearly always includes food and drink of highest affordable quality.

The Talmud - which in general presents a severe view on overindulging (of nearly everything) - exhorts us regarding Purim: "drink until you can't tell the difference between "cursed is Haman, blessed is Mordechai". In other words, to get so inebriated that you can no longer tell the difference between the hero Mordechai and the villain Haman. What on earth is behind this?

In Judaism, alcohol (in moderation) is included in all festive occasions. Our Pesach Seders are not legal without the four cups. Weekly Shabbat observance requires the Kiddush. Most holidays, and Simchas, such as weddings and circumcisions, include a blessing on wine as well. Yet, getting drunk is the epitome of "unJewish" behavior, and is roundly condemned by the Sages.

(Continued on page 4)

Board of Trustees Meeting

Tuesday, February 23rd -- 7:30 PM

(Meeting will be streamed on Zoom—Details to follow)





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FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

In this column I would (again) like to present a very brief outline of Jewish history leading up to the events celebrated on Purim, based primarily on two websites: chabad.org and aish.com. The patriarch of Judaism (and related religions), Avraham (Abraham), was born c. 1812. B.C.E. His son Yitzchak (Isaac) was born 100 years later, c. 1712 B.C.E. Yitzchak's son Yaakov (Jacob), also known as Yisrael (Israel) was born 60 years later, c. 1652 B.C.E. The twelve sons of Yaakov are known to us as the twelve tribes. His fourth son was named Yehuda (Judah) from which the name "Jews" originates. The sons moved to Egypt along with their father when they reunited with Yoseif (Joseph) c. 1522 B.C.E. They were subsequently enslaved by the Egyptians until redeemed by God through Moshe (Moses) c. 1312 B.C.E. After wandering 40 years in the desert, they began to settle in Israel c. 1272 B.C.E. The first king of Israel, Sha'ul (Saul) was anointed c. 879 B.C.E. King David became the ruler only a few short years later. Around 836 B.C.E., King David's son, Shlomo (Solomon) began his rule and shortly thereafter began to build a permanent Temple to God, replacing the temporary Mishkan (Tabernacle). Less than 30 years later, with Shlomo's death, the kingdom of Israel was split into two kingdoms, the first of which was conquered by the Assyrians c. 555 B.C.E. With this event the legendary Ten Tribes of Israel were lost. The remaining two tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin, along with Kohanim and Levi'im (Priests and Levites) remained in Israel until conquered by the Babylonians c. 422 B.C.E. (Those with some familiarity with Jewish history have most often learned the date of the destruction of the First Temple to be c. 586 B.C.E. This

column follows a more traditional timeline of Jewish history; for elaboration see e.g., aish.com/jl/h/cc/48937787.html.) The Jews were then exiled to Babylon. Within about 50 years Babylon was conquered by the Persians and Medes. The Persian ruler, Coresh (Cyrus) soon issued a decree allowing all the indigenous peoples that had been exiled by the now-defunct Babylonian empire to go back to their homeland. As related in the Biblical Book of Ezra (1:3): *In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, ... the Lord aroused the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, and he issued a proclamation throughout his kingdom – and in writing as well, saying, "Thus said Cyrus the King of Persia, 'All the kingdoms of the earth has the Lord, God of heaven, given to me and He has commanded me to build him a Temple in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of His entire people – may his God be with him – and let him go to Jerusalem which is in Judah and build the Temple of the Lord..."*

Only approximately 42,000 Jews actually returned to Israel, the rest, presumably, were comfortable in exile by then. They began to rebuild the Holy Temple but this rebuilding was held up for 18 years as a result of the Samaritans reporting to the Persian ruler that the Jews would rebel if allowed to continue this venture. The story of Purim as related in the Megillat Esther (Book of Esther) takes place during this time period.

Briefly, the new ruler of Persia, Achashveirosh had calculated that the prophesized period of 70 years of the Jews' exile had come to an end, and confident that they will no longer be redeemed by God, he throws a party lasting 180 days,

(Continued on page 6)

PURIM LAWS AND CUSTOMS

Purim 5781 begins on the evening of Thursday, February 25th and ends at dark the next evening. Though sometimes thought of as a "minor holiday", because one is allowed to do work on that day unlike Shabbat and "major holidays", Purim celebrates the Jewish people being saved from total annihilation throughout the Persian empire. These events, described in the Megillat Esther, which we read publicly on Purim, took place some time between the 6th and 4th centuries B.C.E. (there are sources for several different time periods) before the Jews were allowed to return to Israel from exile and re-build the Temple. (For more detail see "From the Rabbi's Study on page 2.) Considering how we appropriately mourn the various times in Jewish history when the Jewish people were subjected to slaughter and genocide, I often think that the celebration of avoiding such a catastrophe should be more deeply felt. This year Purim in Jerusalem falls on Shabbat, leading to some very interesting halachic questions, for discussion at another time.

Purim is celebrated with four Mitzvot and several customs

- (1) Reading of the Megilla, preferably with a minyan in a synagogue, on both the evening and the day of Purim.



- (2) *Shalach Manot* (or *Mishloach Manot*): sending gifts of food to a friend. This Mitzvah is fulfilled by delivering two food items to at least one person, each requiring a different *Bracha* (blessing) before eating. For example, an orange and an apple are both fruit, the blessing before eating them is the same and therefore this does not fulfill the Mitzvah. Luckily, chocolate has a different blessing. Always a good thing to send along with the fruit! Same with wine or liquor.



- (3) *Matanot La'evyonim* (gifts to the poor): this Mitzvah is more important than *Shalach Manot* but unfortunately often receives less attention. This mitzvah is fulfilled by giving monetary charity to at least two poor people. This is often accomplished collectively by giving money beforehand or on Purim to the Rabbi (or anyone so designated) who will turn the money over to poor people.



- (4) *Seudat Purim*: having a festive meal on the day of Purim. This custom has been neglected in many communities, but is alive and well in many places in Israel as well as in the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities in N.Y. and elsewhere. The Mitzvah of getting drunk "until one does not know the difference between Haman and Mordechai" during this meal, cited in the Talmud, has been interpreted literally and has also been interpreted as drinking more than one is accustomed to and going to sleep.



- (5) Among the other customs of Purim are making noise when Haman's name is mentioned during the reading of the megilla, eating Hamantashen and wearing masks or costumes.



SISTERHOOD

Sisterhood Message

Sisterhood wishes everyone a Happy Purim. Please do a mitzvah and call our senior members to ask if they need anything or just to chat for a while. Hearing a friendly voice will lift their spirits.

President's Message

(Continued from page 1)

Wine is a key factor in the Purim story. It's Achashverosh's drunken demand that Vashti show herself off that brings her downfall and clears the way for Esther to become Queen. It's to a wine feast that Esther invites Haman and the King - which results in Haman's demise.

Each year on this Holiday, when we rejoice in the traditional way it is here that we find our primal love of G-d and renew our loyalty to Him. When the barriers to the Jewish Heart are washed away by the wine of Purim, it is then that we are able to experience heightened awareness of our ties with The Creator and with His Torah and commandments. Maybe in the end we don't have enough wisdom to know the true difference between one who is cursed and who is blessed. Despite our efforts to plan ahead, attempting to bring order to our own lives, it is only God who controls the world. The intent of our Prayers should direct us to the realization everything comes from the Almighty – the goal being to carry this level of trust in God to all aspects of our lives.

Purim Samayach (and L'Chaim)



From the website of Shabbat Across America:

Out of an abundance of caution due to the spread of the Coronavirus and heeding the recommendation of medical professionals to forego large gatherings for the time being, NJOP will not be going forward with in-person Shabbat Across America celebrations in 2021, but will be promoting a Shabbat Across America At Home experience that will focus on couples, immediate family, and individuals celebrating in their home on March 5, 2021.

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.

Checks for the above funds should be made payable to "Sisterhood of WHC".

January Happy Birthdays



Esther Cohen	Peter Skow
Faye Mandel	Frank Smith
Mark Safran	Jared Young

February Happy Birthdays

Benjamin Mandel

*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 us your date of birth. Thank you.

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

Evelyn Apter





Recent positive news generated by Israel, of which we can all be proud.
(Articles below are excerpts of originals only)



12 Israeli researchers among world top 50 in their field, 333 in top 2%

December 24, 2020

www.jpost.com



A dozen Israeli researchers from Tel Aviv University (TAU) were ranked among the world's top 50 in their disciplines, a new study from Stanford University has revealed. Some 333 TAU researchers were among the top 2%, with 155 of them included in the top 1% and 74

in the top 0.5%, said the study, making TAU's achievement even more impressive. "This is a cause for real national pride. TAU is known for its academic excellence and recognized as a leading interdisciplinary university," said the university's vice president for research Prof. Dan Peer, adding that it is ranked among the top 0.4% in the world in nanotechnology.

Israeli Doctors Perform First Robotic Knee Replacement in Galilee

By Yakir Benzion Jan 5, 2021

unitedwithisrael.org

Doctors at the Galilee Medical Center in the northern Israeli city of Nahariya carried out robotic surgery for knee joint replacement, giving two women renewed mobility. "Performed on two women aged 60 and 68 who were suffering from advanced cartilage erosion, it is the first time in northern Israel that a robot helped guide the process," reported The Jerusalem Post. The innovative operation was performed at the medical center to replace the knee joint by Dr. Inal Bathish, an orthopedic specialist in the field and director of the orthopedic arthroscopy unit at the hospital.

The damaged cartilage was removed during the operation and a prosthetic knee implant was inserted in its place, but using the new technique by which the new implant was adapted to the precise anatomical structure of the patient under the guidance of the robot. Dr. Bathish said that the use of a robot allows the knee joint to be optimally prepared for surgery, while improving the surgery to give the highest level of accuracy.



Israel performs first-ever augmented reality, 3D eye socket surgery

By Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman January 1, 2021

www.jpost.com

"The future is already here," according to Prof. Masad Barhoumm, director-general of Galilee Medical Center, after a team of Israeli doctors from his medical center successfully



completed the first-ever repair of a fracture in the floor of an eye socket using augmented reality (AR) and three-dimensional technology. The surgery, which was performed on a 31-year-old resident of the Galilee, was led by Prof.

Samer Srouji of Galilee Medical Center's Center for Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery in partnership with doctors from Sheba Medical Center, Tel Hashomer.

The patient had been severely injured in his face, fracturing his left eye socket, resulting in double vision and impairing the aesthetics and symmetry of his eyes. "The innovative technology utilizing a 3D printer and augmented reality resulted in both a particularly accurate execution of the operation, and a significant reduction in time," said Srouji.

New technology allows for an accurate reading of the heart

December 24, 2020

www.jpost.com

Researchers of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and their Russian counterparts have developed a new system that is able to accurately detect heart problems, based on routine electrocardiography (ECG) exams. In addition, they have also built a database providing an "automated diagnosis of a combination of eight common types of heart disease," quickly and with unprecedented accuracy. An ECG is a mobile device that can be used to monitor and provide a printout of a person's heart rhythms. Medics and doctors are able to "read" the print

out and, based on that information, can tell if the heart is suffering from some sort of disease. Currently, a cardiologist can interpret different information based on the printouts. In effect, two doctors can give two different diagnoses based on the same printout. However, this new accurate technology can cut down on the confusion and give a more definite result which will lead to a more accurate diagnosis and treatment.



Israeli Surgeons Restore Sight with Artificial Cornea After 12 Years of Blindness

By Yakir Benzion Jan 17, 2021

unitedwithisrael.org



An Arab man from Haifa regained his sight after Israeli surgeons performed an artificial cornea transplant, which required no human donor tissue. Jamal Furani,

78, from Haifa, had undergone four cornea transplants, but each one eventually failed and he kept returning to almost total blindness. That all changed earlier this month when

Israeli surgeons performed a totally artificial cornea transplant, which required no human donor tissue. Furani was the recipient of the CorNeat KPro, the first artificial cornea that completely integrates with the eye wall, with no reliance on donor tissue. The innovation here stems from the ability to take something totally synthetic that has no cells or tissue and implant it in the wall of the eye so that it essentially turns into a part of the body," Litvin said.

Israelis Develop Plastic-Eating Bacteria to Revolutionize Recycling

January 24, 2021

unitedwithisrael.org

Every year, more than 300 million tons of plastic are produced worldwide, and around half of the produced materials are designed for single-use purposes. In fact, more plastic has been produced over the last decade than throughout the whole last century. Its inexpensive cost, its rigid and flexible properties, and its wide versatility have facilitated and normalized a culture conditioned to waste, thereby degrading and polluting the environment.

Researchers from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev are looking into biodegradation by bacteria — a simpler and more environmentally friendly way to break down and recycle PET (polyethylene terephthalate), the most common type of plastic in food and beverage packaging and textile products. In

November, a research collaboration agreement was signed between BGN Technologies, the technology company of Ben-Gurion University and Portuguese company Ecoibéria as part of a one-year project to study and demonstrate the effectiveness of bacterial biodegradation of PET. The results of the joint study may streamline the presently cumbersome plastic recycling process used today, which involves plastic bottles being collected from recycling bins before being separated by type and color and then ground into small chips and melted into sheets of raw material and fibers.



FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

(Continued from page 2)

followed by a seven-day party for all the inhabitants of his capital, Shushan. Though the party is at least in part celebrating the hopelessness of their situation, the Jews attend his party per his invitation. While inebriated, Achashveirosh orders his wife Vashti to appear (nude, per the Talmud) and when she refuses, he has her executed. He follows the counsel of his advisors and picks a replacement queen through an empire-wide beauty pageant, which is how Esther, a cousin of the Jew, Mordechai, comes to be Queen of Persia.

Achashveirosh's top minister is a man named Haman HaAgagi, a descendant of the nation of Amalek, who are sworn enemies of God and the Jewish people. Haman persuades Achashveirosh to agree to issue a secret decree to annihilate the Jews of Persia on the 13th day of the Hebrew month of Adar. Haman arrived at this date by drawing lots, or *purim*, hence the name of this holiday. Mordechai learns of this decree and approaches Esther to do her utmost with

Achashveirosh to rescind it, reminding her that the only reason she ever became Queen of Persia was to be in a position to help the Jews in time of need. Eventually Esther reveals to Achashveirosh that she herself is Jewish and that Haman is plotting to kill her and all her people. Haman ends up hanging on gallows that he had planned to use for his arch-enemy, Mordechai. Achashveirosh then issues a new decree allowing the Jews to avenge themselves from those who would have destroyed them.

Curiously, the name of God is never mentioned in the Book of Esther. Some comment that this was to specifically illustrate that even though the era of prophesy and direct encounters with God was coming to an end, God will continue to act on the Jews' behalf in a more hidden way, keeping his promise that they will eternally be His people, never allowing them to be fully annihilated.



Thank you for Donations -- December 2020 & January 2021

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**In appreciation of
the latkes deliveries for Chanuka**

Shirley Smith

**In memory and gratitude for my
uncle and aunt, Rabbi Marc Cohen
and Rebbetzin Giselle Cohen**

Eli Albagli

In Memory of Marty Apter

Zula Schibuk

End of year donation

Ellis Rosenblatt

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WHC BULLETIN BY EMAIL!



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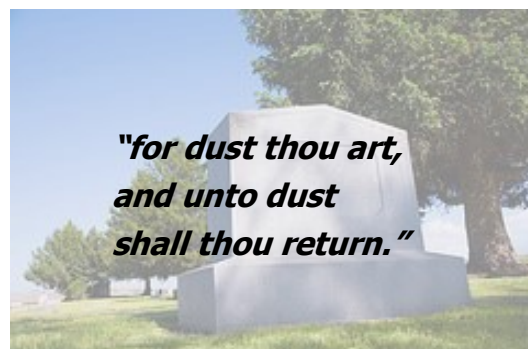
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New Montefiore Cemetery
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Contact: Ronald Kohn
Cemetery Committee Chair
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(led by Rabbi Axelman)

Mondays @7:00 PM -- Judaism 101 Explore Your QuestionsPlease check our website for updated days and times of classes.
Currently classes are being streamed on zoom and not being held in person.