

# Whitestone Hebrew Centre Bulletin

12-45 Clintonville St. Whitestone, NY 11357



## שלום

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Volume XXXVI No. 4

May - June 2026

Iyar - Tammuz 5786

## Schedule of Shavuot Services



Thursday, May 21st — 7:00 PM

Friday, May 22nd — 9:30 AM & 7:00 PM

Saturday, May 23rd— (Yizkor) 9:30 A.M.

Tikkun Leil Shavuot — Study and Discussion

Following first night services — May 21st

Blintzes and cheesecake will be served!

### President's Message

With all that's going on in the world, it can only be described as an embarrassment of riches searching for a bulletin topic. But please forgive me, friends for once again going for the low hanging fruit in choosing one conveniently placed just at the right moment of the current Festival Season. As I write, we are preparing to observe one of the most important Holidays on the Hebrew calendar, Shavuot, commemorating the Giving of The Law (aka The Torah) to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Rabbi has suggested (and after decades of informal personal polling I'm finally forced to agree) that too many of our fellow Jews are unaware of the Holiday that follows 49 days after the 2nd day of Pesach. Referenced in the Torah, it is one of the Festival Holidays

requiring Jews to travel to Jerusalem and bring their first fruits as offerings to God at the Holy Temple, celebrating the summer grain harvest and - paramount to our existence as a unique people, the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after the Israelites left Egypt. As we've learned from the Rabbi's Judaism 101 classes (brief promotional message - every Monday night @ 7p - via Zoom), this is an intense period no less spiritually charged than that between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (the far better known of the two intervals). As important as it is, unlike other holidays, Shavuot has no specific ritual object attached to it—no shofar to blow, no sukkah to build, no matzah to eat. It seems obvious, but I only

*(Continued on page 6)*



### Board of Trustees Meeting

Tuesday, June 30th -- 7:30 PM



### WHC Bulletin Staff

Rabbi Steven Axelman,  
Editor  
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Sunday June 21th

### WHC ADMINISTRATION

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## Overview of Shavuot

by Rabbi Axelman



Shavuot begins this year on Thursday evening, the 21st of May and continues until nightfall on May 23rd. Though it is one of the Three Festivals repeatedly mentioned in the Torah, it seems to be the least known. It is no less important than Sukkot and Pesach--all three were pilgrimage festivals during which everyone living in Israel used to go to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps it is overlooked because according to the original Torah commandment, Shavuot only lasts one day, though the custom for the last two thousand years or so is to add an extra day to each Jewish Holiday when living in the diaspora. And there is far less preparation in anticipation of Shavuot--no cleaning the house, preparing a *Seder*, building a *Sukkah* or buying an *Etrog* and *Lulav* set. For Shavuot all we need to do is to make blintzes and buy or bake cheese cake. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to mention why Shavuot is indeed an important and relevant holiday. How exactly Shavuot became connected with the Revelation and the receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai is the subject of much discussion, but our liturgy in the *Amida* and in the *Kiddush* describes Shavuot as "*Z'man Matan Torateinu*", the time of the giving of our Torah. Personally, I have difficulty with the concept that Judaism can be separated from or exist without the Torah. Whether we are comfortable with the concept or not, the blessing we all make when we are honored

with an aliyah, reads "who chose us from amongst the nations and gave us the Torah". Either following or rebelling against the Torah could easily be said to define the entire historical existence of the Jewish People.

The word, Shavuot, literally means weeks, a reference to its being celebrated on the fiftieth day (seven complete weeks having gone by) after the second night of Passover. How is Shavuot celebrated (other than the cheese cake thing)? We read the Ten Commandments from the Torah on the first day. Prior to beginning the Torah Reading, a beautiful and esoteric poem, *Akdmut*, is read, which describes the relationship between God, the Torah and the Jews over the years. And for many centuries, at least some have stayed up all night studying Torah, a practice usually referred to as *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*. According to one *midrash*, the Jews slept through the night preceding the giving of the Torah and needed to be awakened. Since most of us have trouble sleeping in anticipation of major events the next morning, this was considered a lack of enthusiasm. Compensating for this failing is one of the reasons given for staying up all night studying on Shavuot.

Some read a fixed text of study compiled specifically for this night, which covers several verses from every portion of the Five Books of the Torah, the book of Ruth, parts of the *Mishna* (Oral Torah) and readings from the *Zohar* (the original book of *Kabbala*). Many have a custom of studying any area of the Torah that interests them. Chag Samayach!

# SISTERHOOD

## Sisterhood President's Message

Sisterhood wishes you a Happy and Healthy Mother's Day and a Happy and Healthy Father's Day. We also wish you a Happy and Healthy summer. We all pray that there will be peace in Israel and also around the world. 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.



**May Happy Birthdays**

Binny Axelman	Kathryn Safran
Melvin Mesnick	

**June Happy Birthdays**

Kayla Berenson	Ashley Samet
Max Berenson	Yechezkel Yamen
Alex Ratner	

\*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.

## **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".

## **Prayer for the Sick**

If you would like a name mentioned in the weekly Prayer for the Sick, please email the name of the sick person and the name of that person's mother (if available) to the Rabbi, at rabbiaxelman@outlook.com. If you do not have access to email, please leave a message on the WHC office voice mail. There are names on our list for a very long time and we have no way of knowing who are still in need of prayers. Thank you.



Rabbi Axelman

## SCHEDULE OF WHC CLASSES

(led by Rabbi Axelman)

- Sundays @ Time TBA -- Talmud Class**
- Mondays @ 7:00 PM -- Judaism 101**
- Explore Your Questions**



Please check our website for updated days and times of classes.  
Currently classes are being streamed on zoom and not being held in person.



## Summer Fast Days

by Rabbi Axelman

During the summer, two fast-days are observed by traditional Jews, Shiva Asar B'Tammuz (17th day of the month of Tamuz, which this year falls on Thursday July 2nd ) and Tisha B'av (9th day of the month of Av, which this year begins on Wednesday evening, July 22nd). The following is based on articles on [Chabad.org](http://Chabad.org) and [Aish.com](http://Aish.com).

### Shiva Asar B'Tammuz

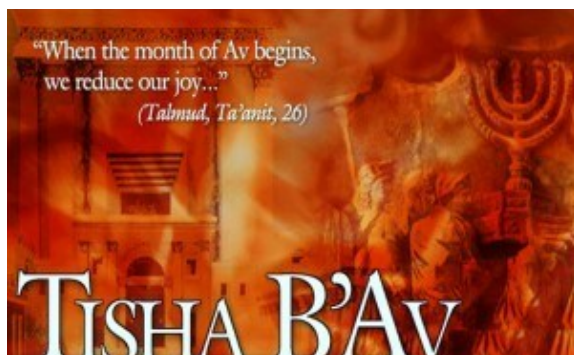
The 17th of Tammuz, which this year falls on Thursday the 2nd of July, is the first of four fast-days mentioned in the Prophets. This day marks the start of a three-week mourning period for the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy Temples. The fast also commemorates five tragic events that occurred on this date, according to our tradition:

- 1) Moses broke the tablets when he saw the Jewish people worshipping the Golden Calf. 
- 2) During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the Jews were forced to cease offering the daily sacrifices due to the lack of sheep.
- 3) Apostomos burned the holy Torah.
- 4) An idol was placed in the Holy Temple.
- 5) The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans, in 69 CE, after a lengthy siege. The Jerusalem Talmud maintains that this is also the date when Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on their way to destroying the first Temple. 

On this fast day, healthy adults—Bar- or Bat-mitzvah age and older—abstain from eating or drinking between dawn and nightfall. There are also some modifications to the daily prayers services.

### Tisha B'Av

Tisha B'Av, which this year begins on Wednesday evening, July 22nd and ends at nightfall on Thursday July 23rd, is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. It is the culmination of the Three Weeks, which began on the 17th of Tammuz, a



period of time during which gradually intensifying mourning customs and rituals are observed by traditional Jews. During these three weeks, weddings are not celebrated and live music is forbidden. During the first nine days of the month of Av, people refrain from eating meat and drinking wine (other than on Shabbat), as well as bathing for pleasure (e.g., swimming) and certain other pleasurable activities. Like Shiva Asar B'Tammuz, Tisha B'av also commemorates five tragic events that occurred on this date according to our tradition.

- 1) During the time of Moses, (1312 BCE) the Jews in the desert accepted the slanderous report of the 10 Spies, and the decree was issued forbidding them from entering the Land of Israel. 
- 2) The First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians (586 or 423 BCE), led by Nebuchadnezzar. 100,000 Jews were slaughtered and millions more exiled. 
- 3) The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans (70 CE), led by Titus. Some two million Jews died, and another one million were exiled.
- 4) The Bar Kochba revolt was crushed by the Roman Emperor Hadrian (135 CE). The city of Beitar – the Jews' last stand against the Romans – was captured and liquidated. Over 100,000 Jews were slaughtered.
- 5) The Temple area and its surroundings were plowed under by the Roman general Turnus Rufus. Jerusalem was rebuilt as a pagan city – renamed Aelia Capitolina – and access was forbidden to Jews.

Later on in our history, many more tragedies happened on this day, including the 1290 expulsion of England's Jews and the 1492 banishment of all Jews from Spain.

Tisha B'av is the only fast-day that, like Yom Kippur, begins at sunset the night before. Also, like on Yom Kippur, leather shoes are not worn and there is a custom to sit low to the floor (as during Shiva) until after prayer services the morning of Tisha B'av. The custom is not to greet people in the customary manner the entire day. Services are usually conducted with dimmed lights and in the morning Tallis and Tefillin are not worn during services, but they are donned during the afternoon services instead.



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



### American Combat Pilot Calls Israeli Air Force “Best in the World”

By Valerie Locke

[www.israel365news.com](http://www.israel365news.com)



Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, publicly praised the Israeli Air Force this week, calling Israel a “brave, capable, and willing ally” as senior American defense officials highlighted the close military coordination between Jerusalem and Washington during the recent campaign against Iran. The cooperation between the two militaries was underscored by a recent statement from an American combat pilot, whose praise for the IAF quickly spread across military and media circles. The pilot, a veteran of three wars with hundreds of combat sorties, described watching

Israeli aerial operations over Iran as a humbling experience. “I’ve flown over Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. I thought I had seen everything,” the pilot wrote. “But when I saw what the Israeli Air Force is doing in Iran, I realized I’m still a student.” He marveled at the IAF’s execution of long-range strike missions, describing the logistical complexity of sending 200 aircraft over 1,500 kilometers in a single night, hitting 500 targets, and returning safely without using American refueling bases. Israeli support also reportedly played an important role during the recent rescue of two American airmen after their F-15E Strike Eagle was shot down over Iran.

## Antisemitism in our times

by Rabbi Axelman



Having served as your Rabbi for more than 22 years, I assume it is well known that I try to avoid political discussions, especially in writing. However, as I have mentioned on many occasions, the line between politics and strictly Jewish subjects, especially antisemitism, is often quite blurry. Two recent articles came to my attention that I feel are worth sharing. Within a few days of writing this article, the New York Times published a column by a Pulitzer-winning writer claiming Israel has perpetrated “widespread... sexual violence against men, women and even children — by soldiers, settlers, interrogators in the Shin Bet internal security agency and, above all, prison guards” including using dogs to rape Palestinians. (I purposely do not link to this article, so as not to give it more clicks.) To most of us, blood libels are claims that were propagated in the distant past, something we read about in history books. This current one is as heinous as any, and though most of my readers will give it no credence, millions of people all over the world will, or at least use it to stoke further hatred against the Jews and Israel. My feelings about the New York Times are somewhat known, and hopefully some will reconsider their views of it in light of its publishing this horrible libel. The second article was in a newspaper from Israel called the Times of Israel, which argues that, no matter what Israel does, it leads to antisemitism. I will share a few quotes from that article, along

with a [link](#) to it. “For Israelis, success on the world stage has increasingly become a trigger for hostility rather than celebration. Whether in technology, medicine, humanitarian aid, sports, or culture, Israel’s achievements are too often met not with applause, but with suspicion, outrage, and organized calls for boycott... Israel is expected to compete in a world that often denies it the same legitimacy automatically granted to others. When Israelis defend themselves, they are condemned. When Israelis succeed, they are accused. When Israelis simply participate, protests emerge demanding exclusion... Israelis do not ask for special treatment. They ask for equal treatment. If national pride is acceptable for every country, it should be acceptable for Israel too. If artists from every nation deserve to perform without harassment, Israeli artists deserve the same basic respect... When Israel mourns, the world debates. When Israel defends itself, the world condemns. And when Israel succeeds, whether on the battlefield of survival or the stage of Eurovision, hate too often returns.”

I am straying from my normal avoidance of political topics because many of us wonder what the rabbis were saying (or not saying) in the 1930s in Europe, and I hope that claim will not be made about me decades in the future. Though I do not consider myself an alarmist in any way concerning antisemitism, it probably is incumbent upon me to at least make sure my congregants are aware of the most important manifestations of it. I apologize for having to share these unpleasant stories.



WHC's Yom Hashoah observance on April 14th  
in memory of the Six Million who perished in the Shoah.



### President's Message

*(Continued from page 1)*

recently read an article that laid it out as basic and simple as you'd want: Every other holiday symbol exists because the Torah commanded it. The shofar, the matzah, the sukkah—none of them would exist without the Torah that gave them their meaning and purpose. Shavuot, then, doesn't need its own symbol, because it is the source of all the other symbols. It is the holiday that makes every other holiday possible. If it lacks the in-home celebration aspect of Pesach and Sukkot, what it does provide is an opportunity to reset your relationship with The Almighty. When the Hebrews - through Moses - received the Torah they were in a sense (to borrow a phrase) born again, literally a new people. We became more than descendants of the first Patriarch Abraham, or an enslaved Middle-Eastern people. We had now become God's people, chosen to learn His Torah and keep its laws. We don't need to look any further than the Shema: where 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 repeatedly stressed throughout the Bible. Our history demonstrates that the moment study of Torah is neglected, assimilation of the Jewish people into its surroundings accelerates. For the most part, every Jewish community in history that did not emphasize the teaching and study of Torah as a priority gradually disappeared from the scene. We are fortunate in having the in-house resources to fulfill this commandment as I direct your attention to the Rabbi's Judaism 101 Class referenced above. I very much hope you will join us in Synagogue for this important observance (check the calendar for the dates) and remember the Whitestone Hebrew Centre is here throughout the Summer months for all your spiritual needs. See you in Shul!





### Thank you for Donations -- February - May 2026

#### Yahrzeit

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#### Kiddush

**In memory of  
 the birthday of  
 his mother, Seena Slutsky**

Bruce Berenson

**For the yarzeits of David  
 and Barbara Friedman  
 and In honor of Liliya and  
 Alex's granddaughters'  
 recitation of Ashrei**

Joshua Friedman

**In honor  
 of his birthday**

Ellis Rosenblatt

**In memory of his  
 grandmother,  
 Doris Wolkin,  
 on her yarzeit**

Joseph Wolkin

#### General Donation

**Thank you to the WHC for all their support throughout Jeffrey's illness and passing**

Cheryl Wolkin



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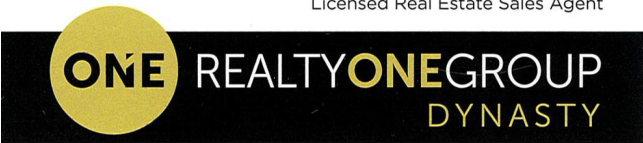


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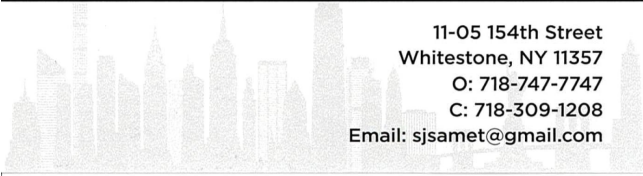


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