

Whitestone Hebrew Centre Bulletin

12-45 Clintonville St. Whitestone, NY 11357



שלום

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Volume XXVIII No. 5

January 2019

Tevet — Shevat 5779

Sisterhood Winter Luncheon and Bingo

Tuesday, January 15th @ 12:30 PM

Join Us for an Afternoon of Fun

at

Ben's Kosher Restaurant

Located in the Bay Terrace Shopping Center



Tu Bi'shvat

Monday, January 21st

For an explanation
of this holiday,
see page 2

Board of Trustees Meeting

Tuesday, January 29th @ 7:30 PM



Family Shabbat

January 12th @ 10:00 AM

We look forward to seeing everyone there!



WHC Bulletin Staff

Rabbi Steven Axelman,
Editor
Sharon Samet
Patricia Smolker

WHITESTONE

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Vice-President - Ellis Rosenblatt
Treasurer/Financial Secretary -
Barbara Parker
Corresponding/Recording Secretary -
Ron Kohn
Sisterhood Co-Presidents
Esther Cohen
Rhoda Weinstein

FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

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Tu B'Shevat: What and How Farming Religiously

President's Message

By: Bruce Berenson

I have to confess something that comes to mind every year at this time is a certain natural tension in reconciling celebration of the secular New Year with Jewish law and tradition. I won't say it's something I dwell on but in researching what they do in Israel I read (and checked with our resident Israeli Congregant as well as Rabbi Axelman to verify) about something called Chag Ha'Sylvester, the Israeli term for New Year's celebrations.

The most popular version of the Story is as follows....Sylvester was the name of an early Roman Pope (later declared a Saint by the Church) around the time of Constantine, who made it his mission to make life for the Jews of this period as difficult as possible. He introduced a good deal of anti-Semitic legislation, including trying to prohibit Jews from living in Jerusalem. The connection here is all Catholic Saints have a specific day on which Christians celebrate and pay tribute to that Saint's memory. December 31 is (for Catholics) Saint Sylvester Day. In Israel, celebrations on the night of December 31 are called Sylvester Parties. I'm guessing this is a riff on the old Jewish synopsis for many of our upbeat Holidays "They tried to kill us – we won – Let's rub their noses in it and party!"

The question whether we should be celebrating at all is a little more complex. It seems to be a problem only if we attach religious significance to this sort of secular event, an issue called Chukot Hagoy (customs of the Gentiles),

The 15th of Shevat, which falls this year on January 21st, is the New Year for Trees, known as Tu b'Shevat. According to Biblical law, there is a seven year agricultural cycle, concluding with the Sabbatical year. When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, on years one, two, four and five of this cycle, farmers were required to separate a tenth of their produce and eat it in Jerusalem. This tithe is called Maaser Sheni, the Second Tithe, because it is in addition to the (two percent which must be given to the Kohain, and the) ten percent which is given to the Levite. On the third and sixth years of the cycle, instead of the owners eating the Maaser Sheni in Jerusalem, they gave this second tithe to the poor, who were permitted to consume it wherever they wished.

It takes approximately four months for the rains of the new year to saturate the soil and trees, and produce fruit. [On the Sabbatical year, no tithes are separated. All produce which grows during this year is ownerless and free for anyone to take.]

It was therefore of vital importance to ascertain when the new year started for produce. Our Rabbis established that a fruit which blossomed before the 15th of Shevat is produce of the previous year. If it blossomed afterwards, it is produce of the "new year." [By comparison, grains, vegetables, and legumes have the same New Year as humans, the 1st of Tishrei.] Why is this so? In the Mediterranean region, the rainy season begins with the festival of Sukkot. It takes approximately four months (from Sukkot, the 15th of Tishrei, until the 15th of Shevat) for the rains of the new year to saturate the soil and trees, and produce fruit. All fruit which blossom beforehand are a product of the rains of the previous year, and are tithed together with the crops of the previous year.

(Continued on page 4)

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SISTERHOOD

Sisterhood Message

Sisterhood celebrated Chanukah at its General Meeting on December 4. For lunch we served potato latkes with applesauce and sufganiyot (Jelly Donuts) for dessert. Thank you to Sharon Samet for picking up the sufganiyot for our dessert. After lunch we all had fun playing dreidel. Those who attended had a good time celebrating Chanukah.

We are looking forward to our annual Winter Luncheon and Bingo on Tuesday, January 15 at Ben's Kosher Restaurant, located in the Bay Terrace Shopping Center. Don't be left out in the cold. Come join us in a warm atmosphere, enjoy conversation with your "Sisters," friends and/or family, eat a delicious lunch, play bingo and win prizes. This is always a popular and fun event. If you have not made your reservation, it's not too late. Please call our Chairperson, Naomi Gukowsky at 718-767-7432 (see enclosed flier).

Look for future events and functions in the upcoming bulletins.

SISTERHOOD DATES TO REMEMBER

Tue.	Jan. 8th	Sisterhood Board Meeting	10:00 AM
Tue.	Jan. 15th	Sisterhood Winter Luncheon and Bingo	12:30 PM

PRAYER BOOK FUND DECEMBER 2018

In memory of Melvin Gradofsky

- Adele Rothman
- Bonnie Buxbaum

Inscribed Prayer Book in memory of Melvin Gradofsky

- Sisterhood WHC
- Meryl Hoffmann

Inscribed Prayer Book in memory of Elliott Keller

- Sisterhood WHC
- Meryl Hoffmann

Inscribed Prayer Book in memory of Gertrude Schneider

- Sisterhood WHC
- Meryl Hoffmann

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".

Sponsor a Family Shabbat, a Shabbat Kiddush or a Friday night Oneg



Celebrating a birthday, anniversary, recent achievement
or observing a loved-one's Yahrzeit?

Just want to honor someone?

Sponsoring a Family Shabbat, a Shabbat Kiddush
or a Friday night Oneg in honor of a loved one
is a great way to share a special occasion.

Minimum donation - \$36.

Please contact the Centre office at (718) 767-1500
to arrange your sponsorship.

BLESSING FOR THE NEW JEWISH MONTH — BIRKAT HACHODESH

This coming Shabbat, January 5th, as we do every Shabbat that precedes the first day of the Hebrew month, we recite a special prayer before returning the Torah to the Ark after the Torah Service. It has been my custom to recite this prayer aloud, in English. These are the words of the prayer:

May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, to renew our lives in the coming month. Grant us a long life, a peaceful life, with goodness and blessing, sustenance and physical vitality, a life informed by purity and piety, a life free from shame and reproach, a life of abundance and honor, a life embracing piety and love of Torah, a life in which our heart's desires for goodness will be fulfilled. And let us say, Amen.

Every month when I recite these words I try to bear in mind that all of us are alive at this moment and I pray that we will be when we next recite these words and until 120. This coming Shabbat when I recite these words, I will be very conscious of the fact that since the last time I did so, the Whitestone Hebrew Centre lost three people who were long-time, very involved members: Melvin Gradofsky, a past President of our shul on the 8th of the Jewish month of Tevet, followed by Gertrude Schneider and Elliott Keller who both passed away on the morning of the 19th of Tevet.

At the funeral of Elliott Keller, Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller, who is Elliott's younger brother and the Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) of a very prominent Yeshiva in Chicago, shared that the importance of going to a funeral and a house of mourning is borne out by what the living take from it and learn from it. Rarely are we more aware of the importance and fragility of our own lives than at a funeral and it hopefully focuses us on the things that are truly important in life—not our possessions, but our relationships and our good deeds.

May we meet only at Simchas and may we enjoy much joy and fulfillment in our own lives!



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

(Continued from page 2)

The Torah, in Vayikra 18:3, says that Jews are forbidden to copy the customs of non-Jews. Some of our Greatest Rabbis commented on this prohibition.....

The Vilna Gaon said that all customs were deemed 'Chukat Hagoy' unless we are certain that they have a valid Jewish basis (doubtful he would have shown up at your Sylvester Party).

Yosef Cairo (Shulchan Aruch) was more lenient and said they didn't need to have a Jewish basis (he might have made a brief appearance at your celebration). The Rema, (Rabbi Moshe Isserles) wrote the prohibition against copying non-Jewish customs applies to activities that encourage inappropriate or immodest conduct (so one could attend a Party that served

non-alcoholic beverages with conversation limited to the weather and your Health) .

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (regarded in the late 20th Century by many as the supreme halakic authority for observant Jews) addressed the issue directly, writing that as New Year's Day nowadays is detached from its religious origins, it is permitted to take note of the day.

My feeling is anytime we take a pause to reflect on (and possibly make corrections to) the path our lives are taking is worthwhile. May I be bold enough to suggest you use this time to consider your relationship with G-d and how best to fine tune your Faith in the coming (secular) year?



Help us to Direct your Checks and Mail to the Correct Person



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.

Thank You

December Family Shabbat Sponsors



Evelyn Apter in memory of
the yahrzeit of her husband, Marty Apter

The Berenson Family in memory of Alana's birthday

Naomi and Leon Gukowsky in memory of
the yahrzeit of Naomi's father, Morris Dubin

Arlene Kline and Melodie Schneider in honor of the
birthday of their mother, Dorothy Schneider

Ellis Rosenblatt in memory of the yahrzeit of his
grandmother, Rose Rosenblatt, and in honor of the
birthdays of Barbara Friedman and Dorothy Schneider

The Smith family in honor of Tricia's birthday

Patricia Smolker in memory of
the yahrzeit of her grandfather, Samuel Smolker

January Happy Birthdays



Esther Cohen

Peter Skow

Faye Mandel

Frank Smith

Mark Safran

Jared Young

*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.

Best Wishes for a speedy and complete recovery

Lenny Hartman



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

New WHC Security System

In light of the desire for increased security following the horrible events in Pittsburgh, we have installed a new security system with cameras that allows us to keep all the doors locked all the time. To enter the building from either the front or the side door, ring the bell and you will be buzzed in. During times of regular Shabbat services and other events, someone will be monitoring the doors at all times and will let you in as soon as you approach the door.



FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

(Continued from page 2)

Although this day is Rosh Hashanah for trees, we attach special significance to this holiday because "Man is [compared to] the tree of the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19). Through cultivating strong roots – faith and commitment to G-d – we produce many fruits—Torah and Mitzvot.

Observances and Customs

On this day it is customary to partake of the fruit with which the Holy Land is praised (Deuteronomy 8:8): olives, dates, grapes, figs and pomegranates. If tasting any of these fruits for the first time this season, remember to recite the

Shehecheyanu blessing. (A blessing recited on joyous occasions, thanking G-d for "sustaining us and enabling us to reach this occasion." This blessing is recited before the standard "Ha'etz" blessing recited on fruit.)

Due to the festive nature of the day, we omit the Tachanun sections (petitions for forgiveness and confession) from the prayers.

The article above was written by Naftali Silberberg and posted on Chabad.org.

(For more on the spiritual side of eating, see article below)

Spiritual Food Chain

By [Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz](#)

From [The Jewish Press](#) – December 14, 2018

The act of putting into your mouth what the earth has grown is perhaps your most direct interaction with the earth.

-Frances Moore Lappe

The end of the Torah portion that we read on December 15th, *Vayigash*, describes Joseph's economic efforts, how he singlehandedly saved the Egyptian people from starvation, redistributed the land and imposed a tax rate of 20% on the Egyptian farmers.

The [Berdichever Rebbe](#) (1740–1809) explores the unusual phraseology in Genesis 47:24, "You will give a fifth to Pharaoh and four hands will go to you to eat and for your household." (which means Pharaoh gets twenty percent of your produce, you get to keep the remaining 80%). Expounding on the verse and the "four hands," the Berdichever Rebbe explains that God established four different levels of creation in our world:

1. "Inanimate": earth, water, stones, minerals ("Domeim" in Hebrew);
2. "Grows": vegetables, plants, trees ("Tzomei-ach" in Hebrew);
3. "Alive": animals ("Chai" in Hebrew);
4. "Speaks": man ("Medabeir" in Hebrew).

He quotes from Kabbalistic sources that detail God's plan and desire for each element to be elevated and raised to the next level: When earth, water, minerals and other nutrients are converted from their base state into some type of vegetation, they are somehow elevated to a higher spiritual level. They have moved from the lowly "Domeim/Inanimate" state to the slightly more elevated "Tzomei-ach/Grows" state.

When plants, in turn, are consumed by animals, they are now elevated from the "Tzomei-ach/Grows" state to the even higher "Chai/Alive" state.

Finally, when man consumes the flesh of an animal, be it fish, poultry or beef, that person is elevating those molecules from the "Chai/Alive" state to the highest terrestrial level of "Medabeir/Speaks."

Man's God-given ability to somehow convert the matter around him, be it mineral, vegetable or animal into a part of his very self, is nothing less than a form of creation. It relates to a Talmudic discussion as to the phraseology of the blessings we recite when we eat. We bless God, who "creates" these products. We say "creates" in the present tense, as opposed to "created" in the past tense, because it is a current, ongoing, creative act by God. The quarks, atoms and molecules that make up our reality are constantly given life and existence by God. It is that divine aspect that also allows us to absorb these elements into our being and in some fashion that we have trouble comprehending, elevate the spiritual sparks of these items by consuming them.

As always, for further discussion of this concept, please attend our Judaism 101 Class on Monday evenings.



Thank you for Donations -- December 2018

Yahrzeit

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Howard Davidoff
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Alice Hecht Soliman
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General Donations

Thanks for the congregation's kind support

Shirley Safran

In memory of Trudy Messinger

Stan Simon

End of year donation

Ellis Rosenblatt

Donations are accepted by Credit Card in one of the following ways:

Option 1: Phone our office and your card information can be given by phone



Option 3: Request an emailed invoice from our office, which will include a "pay now" button

Pay now



Option 2: Come into our office and your credit card can be read by a chip-enabled card reader



Option 4: Go to our website at www.whitestonehebrewcenter.org, and click on the "Donate" button



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

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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

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To the Gradofsky family on the loss of Melvin Gradofsky

To the Keller family on the loss of Elliott Keller

To the Schneider family on the loss of Gertrude Schneider

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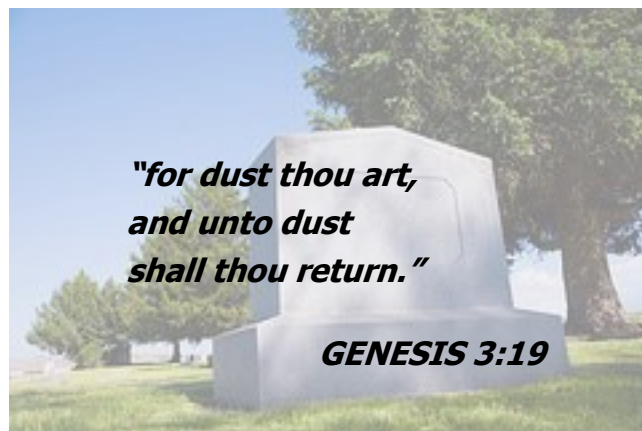
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Contact: Ronald Kohn

Cemetery Committee Chair

at WHC (718) 767-1500



*"for dust thou art,
and unto dust
shall thou return."*

GENESIS 3:19

WHC BULLETIN BY EMAIL!

If you would like to receive a copy of the bulletin by email, in addition to the printed version, please send your email address to haxelman@gmail.com and let us know. The email version is in color, has hyperlinks and will reach you several days before the hard copy. Thank you!



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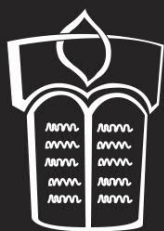
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