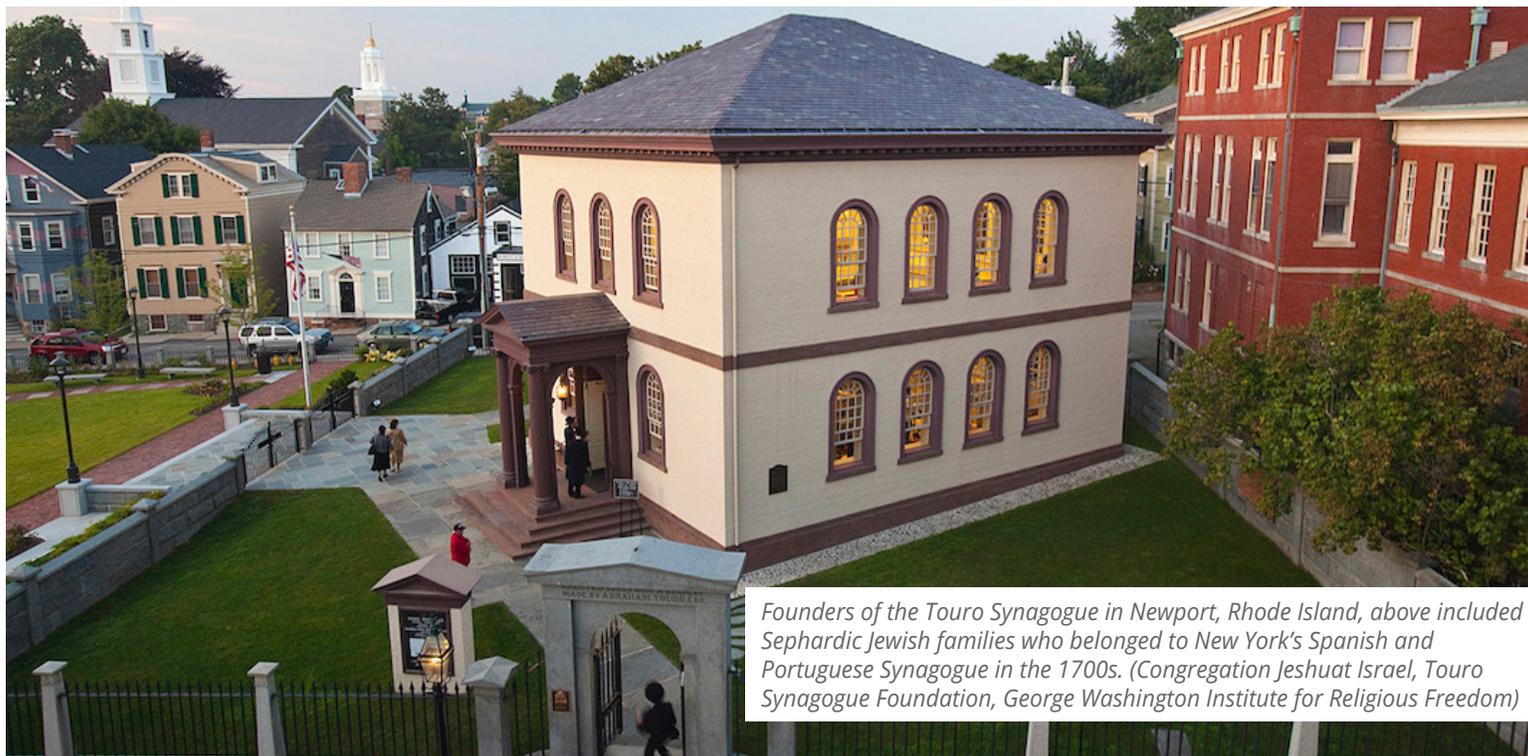


The New York Jewish Week/end

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Founders of the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, above included Sephardic Jewish families who belonged to New York's Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in the 1700s. (Congregation Jeshuat Israel, Touro Synagogue Foundation, George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom)

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● NEWS

Fed Up with Its Tenant, a NYC Synagogue Seeks to Replace Board of Historic Touro Synagogue

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

The historic New York City synagogue that controls the equally historic Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island moved to terminate the lease of the congregation that worships there.

But don't call it an eviction, leaders of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York say: They describe the filing as an effort to restructure the board of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, which has met at Touro for 120 years, and install a new slate of officers who will "ensure that Touro Synagogue is properly maintained into the future."

Shearith Israel says the current rabbi and congregants are "encouraged and

welcome to remain.”

Meanwhile, leaders of Jeshuat Israel called the court filing a “power grab.”

Tuesday’s filing with the State District Court, Second Division in Rhode Island is the latest twist in a tense and litigious relationship between Shearith Israel, North America’s oldest Jewish congregation, and Jeshuat Israel, which has leased the Touro Synagogue, a national historic site, since the early 20th century.

Founded by Sephardic Jews in the 18th century, Touro is perhaps best known for a visit by then President George Washington and a letter he wrote to the congregation promising Jews religious liberty.

Shearith Israel, also known as The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, has had a close relationship with Touro from its beginning, when Touro’s founders included Sephardic grandees who had belonged to Shearith Israel.

The Manhattan synagogue has owned the Touro Synagogue building since 1820s; when the original Sephardic congregation dwindled, Shearith Israel leased the building to Jeshuat Israel, an Ashkenazi congregation that claims 125 member households.

In a highly publicized dispute, the two Orthodox congregations clashed over the past decade when Jeshuat Israel tried to sell a valuable set of Torah decorations from Touro’s inventory. In 2019, the New York synagogue’s ownership of the building and its pricey artifacts was essentially confirmed when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to take up Jeshuat Israel’s claim that it was the rightful steward.

Shearith Israel’s move to reshape Jeshuat Israel’s board seems to have been precipitated by two disputes in the summer of 2021. The New York synagogue’s leaders complained after learning that Jeshuat Israel allowed the erection of a new gravestone at Newport’s historic Jewish cemetery, which Touro operates. The gravestone is reserved for Amb. John Loeb, an investment counselor and philanthropist for whom the synagogue’s visitors center is named. Loeb is still alive.

Shearith Israel leaders said in a press release that the gravestone “would never have been permitted by Shearith Israel without research into some important

issues of Jewish law and aesthetics.”

The New York synagogue and Newport congregation also clashed when Jeshuat Israel — known as CJI — claimed they would need to raise between \$2 million and \$5 million for repairs to the Georgian-style Touro building, according to Louis Solomon, Shearith Israel’s parnas, or president. Shearith Israel said they had been previously told the Touro building was not in need of any significant repairs.

“It is really about transparency. It’s about trust. It’s about decision making. It is not about money,” said Solomon. “They’ve never raised funds for [repairs]. The Touro Synagogue Foundation and Shearith Israel congregants are the ones who have given the big money. CJI doesn’t have to do that.”

In a statement to congregants on Jan. 22, the leadership of the Newport congregation said that the gravestone was installed at the cemetery without the synagogue’s knowledge, and that the congregation apologized to Shearith Israel and “worked closely with Ambassador Loeb’s representatives to have the stone removed until his passing.”

The statement was signed by Jeshuat Israel’s co-president, Louise Ellen Teitz; past president David Bazarsky; Laura Freedman Pedrick, board chair of the Touro Synagogue Foundation, and treasurer Michael Pimental.

In response to queries from The New York Jewish Week, Teitz sent a two-paragraph statement.

“We are shocked that Shearith Israel seeks to expel Rhode Island’s Congregation Jeshuat Israel from the historic Touro Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in the country and the nation’s cradle of religious liberty. The members of the Jeshuat Israel Congregation have been the faithful stewards of and peaceable worshippers at Touro Synagogue for more than 140 years,” Teitz wrote.

She added: “At a time of unprecedented attacks on American Jewry, we are devastated that our Congregation has become the target of a shameful power grab by another Jewish congregation that over the years has not provided us or Touro any meaningful support at all. We condemn this destructive attack on our congregation and displacement of our community, and call upon Shearith Israel to let Jeshuat Israel live and pray

in peace.”

Solomon says the 450-member New York synagogue is only asking for what’s best for the future of Touro and what’s in its rights as the owner. The new board, he said, “are going to be people who are willing to talk to us and they’re not going to slam the phone down and not going to hide from us and there’s going to be transparency.”

Under the restructuring, the current services will not change, and the rabbi and current congregation will be allowed to continue services in the building, he said. Solomon said the dispute did not reflect any differences over the Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions of the two congregations.

As part of the restructuring, Shearith Israel, also known as CSI, said it would claim two seats on a reconstituted board. The other seats, said Solomon, would go to interested philanthropists, current CJI members, local academics and “other passionate stakeholders.”

“I intend to invite several of the current board members,” he told The New York Jewish Week.

The Jeshuat Israel congregation objects to the call for board members from the New York synagogue “without any promise of either a long term lease or that CSI will not make future demands at any point,” according to its letter to congregants. “In other words, granting CSI its demand of two Board seats will not provide any long term stability or comfort with respect to CJI’s future ability to pray at Touro Synagogue.”

Both sides agree that the move to dissolve the current board came after months of attempts at peacemaking; each side blames the other for their breakdown.

The Newport congregation says they agreed to a mediator chosen by Shearith Israel — Frank Williams, a former chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court — who asked for in-person mediation. Jeshuat Israel blamed the New York synagogue for insisting they would only meet via Zoom due to concerns over COVID. Solomon, a litigator, says he has engaged in dozens of legal proceedings over Zoom during the pandemic.

Two other attempts at mediation were unsuccessful.

Ultimately, Jeshuat Israel says their independence has been earned over its years of tenancy at Touro. “We may

own the building in trust — but we are a proud congregation with a proud history — and our independence is vital to our future. In other words, no landlord participates in its tenants’ activities on a day-to-day basis like what CSI is asking of CJI,” according to its statement to congregants.

Solomon said the restructuring will allow Shearith Israel to go ahead with plans to expand Touro as a pilgrimage and educational site serving Jews around the country and the world. Shearith Israel’s rabbi, Dr. Meir Y. Soloveichik, he said, has a keen interest in American colonial history. “There’s no reason why Touro should not be an important center of the Jewish historical world in America,” said Solomon.

● NEWS

A Jewish School for Kids with Learning Disabilities Is Building Big on the Upper West Side

By Julia Gergely

The Shefa School, a Jewish school for students with learning disabilities whose Hebrew name means “abundance,” is living up to its moniker.

On a chilly Tuesday morning on the Upper West Side, Shefa staff and families celebrated the beginning of construction on a new campus at 17 West 60th Street that will expand the school from 25,000 square feet to 75,000 square feet.

The new campus — located just a block from Central Park and Columbus Circle — will be situated in a building that has not been occupied for more than 40 years. Renovation on the 12-story building will include building out classrooms, a beit midrash for study and prayer, a large gym, a cafeteria, gathering spaces for programming and celebrations and an outdoor rooftop. The project is set to be completed in the spring of 2024.

"It has been an amazing journey from a school of 24 students in a few classrooms to our own building, in a prime location, where we will be able not only to accommodate more students but also provide a robust facility, and serve as a hub for serving the larger Jewish community in better serving children with learning disabilities," founder and head of school Ilana Ruskay-Kidd told The New York Jewish Week.

According to the New York Post, the school purchased a 99-year ground lease for the entire building for \$49.5 million. To help fund the move and the renovations, the school announced the Sowing the Seeds of Abundance: A Capital Campaign for the Shefa School in August, with an early goal to raise \$20 million.

The project was first announced to families at the school last August.

Founded in 2014, Shefa is a pluralistic Jewish day school serving students with language-based learning disabilities. The current campus in Manhattan's Nomad neighborhood, at 40 E. 29th St., is open to students in grades 1 through 8.

In 2018, JTA reported on Shefa's approach to learning and how the school's first graduating eighth grade class fared in the transition to traditional high school environments.

From 24 students in the school's first year the school has grown to more than 200. With the new campus, the school aims to expand capacity to 350 students, as well as formally establish a teaching lab for Jewish special educators and leaders, which will be known as The Shefa Center, according to Ruskay-Kidd.

"While we know that there is actually no ground to break here, this is a moment we are delineating as we have completed some significant milestones, thanks to the help of many who will be joining us at the groundbreaking," Ruskay-Kidd said ahead of the ceremonies Tuesday meant to mark the start of the building project.

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● NEWS

Manhattan Synagogue Marks Its 100th Year as Reconstructionist Judaism's Flagship

By Stewart Ain

One hundred years ago this March, a girl was called to the Torah at a Manhattan synagogue.

Her short walk from pew to lectern was a giant leap for American Judaism: When she got there, Judith Kaplan became the first Jewish girl in America to become a bat mitzvah.

The synagogue where it happened, SAJ, Judaism that Stands for All, a Reconstructionist synagogue on Manhattan's Upper West Side, still stands, and last week began celebrating not only its own 100th anniversary but a century of innovation by the youngest of Judaism's four major denominations.

Judith was the oldest of four daughters of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, a legendary teacher at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and the founder of what was then called the "Society for the Advancement of Judaism."

Deeply traditional in his own practices, Kaplan viewed Judaism as an evolving civilization rather than just a religion. According to his approach — eventually called Reconstructionist Judaism — traditional Jewish law was a resource, but not binding on individual Jews. As a result, its practitioners could interpret Judaism in the light of contemporary life and thought without abandoning its traditional values. Judith became a bat mitzvah — a coming-of-age ceremony previously reserved for boys — on March 18, 1922, just two months after the synagogue's founding.

"There are many innovations and contributions that Reconstructionist Judaism has made that helped shape Jewish life in the 20th century," said Rabbi Deborah Waxman, president and CEO of Reconstructing Judaism, the

central organization of the Reconstructionist Movement.

She said Kaplan used SAJ as “the laboratory environment that could test his ideas to see how they worked before they were circulated to the wider world.”

This past Shabbat, SAJ celebrated its 100th birthday with a lecture about 1920s New York.

It’s the first of a year-long series of events that also marks the centennial of Reconstructionist Judaism and the profound impact it has had on the Reform and Conservative movements.

“We were the first seminary to admit openly gay and lesbian students in 1984,” Waxman said. “We established a commission on homosexuality, we embraced same-sex relationships in 1994, and our decision in 2015 to graduate rabbinical students who are partnered with non-Jews was groundbreaking — something no one else is doing yet” at the seminaries associated with other denominations.

In addition, Reconstructionist Judaism was the first to adopt patrilineal descent, which considers a child born of either a Jewish father or mother to be Jewish if the child is raised as a Jew. The Reform movement later adopted this policy, while the Conservative and Orthodox movements consider a child to be born Jewish only if the mother is Jewish.

As the congregation marks its 100th birthday, it is celebrating “not just the past but where we are going in the next century,” stressed Donna Katzin Altschuler, a co-chair of the centennial committee.

SAJ’s congregation today is 270 families, its largest number in the last 10 or 15 years, according to its spiritual leader, Rabbi Lauren Grabelle.

Reconstructionist Judaism did not become a movement until the founding of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia in 1968. Until then, SAJ “was the center of the world for us,” said Miriam Eisenstein, 83, the daughter of Judith Kaplan and her husband, Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, who helped implement Kaplan’s ideas and was the founding president of the rabbinical college.

“Our Haggadah and the siddurim — everything that came out of the Reconstructionist movement — came

from SAJ,” she said, referring to its Passover liturgy and prayer books.

The movement’s Haggadah was published in 1941 as an “explicitly political Haggadah that expanded the concept of what constituted liberation,” noted Deborah Dash Moore, a professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan who delivered last Shabbat’s lecture about 1920s New York. “It opened up possibilities for rewriting the Haggadah.”

Today the Reconstructionist movement has 97 congregations and about 50,000 members worldwide, the smallest of the major movements.

Kaplan, however, did not initially intend to create a separate Jewish movement. Instead, he believed instead that his philosophy would become the norm within the Conservative movement, according to David Kaufman, founding director of the Center for New York Jewish History.

Kaplan was ordained at JTS in 1902 and taught there for more than 50 years. He became principal of its teachers’ institute in 1909, its dean in 1931 and retired in 1963.

“He was enormously influential on multiple generations of Conservative rabbis and teachers,” said Kaufman. “What he hoped he would do is shape American Judaism. And what happened is that Reconstructionist philosophy was absorbed by most American Jews without them knowing. He said Judaism is part of a civilization and that its folkways — such as the practice of Shabbat and keeping kosher — are followed not because Jews are being obedient to a commanding God on high, but rather because Jewishness in the modern world has to be about something more than the halachic system [Jewish law] of Judaism.”

“He took the supernatural out of Judaism and planted [Judaism] in this world,” he added.

Kaplan also envisioned the synagogue as being more than a just place for prayer — it could also serve as a community center. At SAJ today, said Hermann, “we have a knitting group and we’re starting a running group. We have classes that run during services for those who might prefer the modality of learning over prayer. We have an art gallery in the social hall and concerts that feature connections with Jewish composers or themes, and a happy hour Shabbat with live music.”

This past Shabbat, in addition to the lecture, Herrmann and Cantor Lisa Shapanka Arbisser were joined during the service by the synagogue's Hiddur Band. There were also greetings from Waxman and several public officials, including Rep. Jerry Nadler, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, New York City Councilmember Gale Brewer, the Rev. Nigel Pearce of Grace Church and other interfaith leaders.

On Sunday, SAJ's musical legacy was celebrated at an event featuring Arbisser and musicologist/cellist Paula Eisenstein Baker and musicologist Edward Serooussi.

SAJ plans to commemorate Judith Kaplan's groundbreaking bat mitzvah in March, with festivities that will be held in conjunction with the Jewish Women's Archive, according to Hermann. She added that, due to COVID restrictions, attendance at all events in the synagogue in the near future will be limited to 75 people, even though the sanctuary seats 250.

"We expect hundreds to watch online," she said, "including the children and grandchildren of some of the founders."

Anniversary events this year will include a talk and panel discussion Feb. 19, "Social Justice at SAJ: Past, Present and Future," and a program on March 19, "Rise Up/Bat Mitzvah at 100: A National Shabbat."

Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, the first woman ordained by the movement in 1974, consulted with Judith before writing a children's book about the bat mitzvah, "Judy Led the Way."

She said Judith had been asked to sit in the front row with men on either side of her before she was called. "She said, 'I had to talk loud and say every syllable. I had mixed feelings. I was certainly happy to be important, but on the other hand I was uncomfortable.'"

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● NEWS

In Manhattan, 24 Women Artists Celebrate 24 Women Rabbis Who Blazed a Trail

By Emily Jaeger

The glass ceiling of rabbinical ordination was broken at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati in 1972 when Rabbi Sally J. Priesand became America's first female rabbi.

Fifty years later, HUC's New York City branch is celebrating the milestone with an exhibit at its Dr. Bernard Heller Museum. The exhibition, called "Holy Sparks," pairs 24 female rabbis — all "firsts" of some kind — with 24 female Jewish artists asked to portray their stories.

A collaboration between HUC and The Braid (formerly Jewish Women's Theatre), a Santa Monica, Calif.-based Jewish theater company, "Holy Sparks" reflects upon the radical and essential shifts in Judaism over the past five decades through the inclusion and rising profile of female rabbis.

The artworks — which span a variety of mediums and aesthetics, including photography and mixed-media collage — work as the jeweled tiles of a larger mosaic, portraying the women's often-difficult journey to the rabbinate, along with their tireless work to build a better Judaism.

Some of the included artists had long, close friendships with their rabbis; others referenced transcripts and videos provided by The Braid. The artists only had to follow one rule: keep their pieces within the dimensions of 24"x 30" for easy transport. With its next stop at the Skirball Museum in Cincinnati, "Holy Sparks" is intended as a traveling exhibit, to share the story of these inspirational women internationally.

For Jean Bloch Rosensaft, director of Heller Museum — located at HUC's campus in Greenwich Village — the ex-

hibition represents the culmination of a three-year project. The museum was initially approached by the leaders of The Braid to transform “The Story Archive of Women Rabbis,” a filmed collection of 200 interviews, into works of original art by contemporary women artists.

Rosensaft and her curatorial team had the difficult task of winnowing down the profiles to a manageable number; they then arranged the 24 “pairings” of artists and subjects. Artists were intentionally chosen with diverse aesthetics, including Debra Band, who is known for intricate paper cuttings, and Judy Sirota Rosenthal, who is known for mixed media installations. The result, according to Rosensaft, is one of “unity without uniformity.”

“Holy Sparks’ shares our deep sense of appreciation and gratitude to women in the rabbinate, for the journey they have taken and struggles [they] confronted,” she told The New York Jewish Week.

Photographer Joan Roth captures Priesand with a subdued photograph that is overlaid with a famous quote from the rabbi: “The world moves forward every day because someone is willing to take the risk.” In the photo, Priesand simply stands on the bimah, the raised stage at the front of a synagogue, as a trickle of rainbow light plays on the wall next to her. The picture exudes a quiet power: She is right where she belongs.

The exhibit then progresses chronologically by ordination year. Featured rabbis include Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon (ordained in 1981), the first woman to serve as a community rabbi in Israel, and Rabbi Denise L. Eger (1988), the first gay person to serve as president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. “The order is intended to manifest how each generation and decade of women rabbis have built on the previous decade,” Rosensaft said.

What’s striking about the pieces in “Holy Sparks” is how well they work together, despite the wide range of materials and styles. They all grapple with the intersections of Judaism and feminism, and many highlight art forms that were, for centuries, considered simply “women’s work,” such as embroidery and weaving. Each individual piece reflects on crucial elements of a rabbi’s essence: her being, her words, her tradition, her actions, her devotion to her community.

The process could be difficult at times. Painter Marilee Tolwin, for example, struggled to encompass the es-

sence of Rabbi Rachel Adler — one of the first ethicists to interpret Jewish texts through a feminist lens — on a mere 24” x 30” canvas. Her piece evokes both Agnes Martin’s modernist grid paintings and micrography, a Jewish form of calligraphy where quotations written in tiny Hebrew letters are used to create designs. Tolwin copied Adler’s entire landmark feminist essay, “The Jew Who Wasn’t There,” in miniature and overlaid it with the structure of a Talmud page.

“I stood back and saw which sentence had fallen in the center: ‘From which women are anatomically excluded,’” Tolwin said. “It was bashert [destiny], the essence of Rabbi Adler’s life work.”

For Emily Bowen Cohen, the Jewish and Native American cartoonist behind the mini-comic “An American Indian Guide to the Day of Atonement,” working on a single canvas for her painting, “Rabbi Julie” — about Julie S. Schwartz, the first woman rabbi to serve on active duty as a chaplain in the U.S. military — meant departing from her medium entirely. “Working on this portrait challenged me to communicate a whole story on just one page,” she said.

Her solution: twist an entire book of comic panels behind the portrait of the rabbi. Schwartz had to juggle the regimented image of a naval chaplain with her radical role as first woman rabbi serving on active duty. Inspired by the aesthetic of naval advertisements from the 1940s, “Rabbi Julie” evokes a Jewish Rosie the Riveter, optimistic and bursting out from the traditional framework patterned behind her.

As with many ventures touting diversity of representation, there are notable omissions. There are no pieces dedicated to Rabbi Lauren Tuchman, the first blind woman rabbi; Rabbi Sandra Lawson, one of the first openly queer, Black rabbis and the inaugural director of Racial Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the Reconstructionist movement, or Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor, the first trans woman rabbi.

With any luck and wisdom, we won’t have to wait until the 100th anniversary of women’s ordination to celebrate these trailblazers. As Rosensaft writes about the 24 women rabbis chosen for the exhibit, “May these builders of a vital Jewish future go from strength to strength.”

“Holy Sparks: Celebrating 50 Years of Women in the Rabbinate” is on view at the Dr. Bernard Heller Museum, 1 West 4th St., New York, from Feb. 1 through May 22.

● EDITOR'S DESK

Why Synagogue Is Like 'Cheers' Without the Booze

What we lose by staying home, and praying alone.

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

70 Faces Media, the parent company of the New York Jewish Week, lost a colleague last week: Nate Geller, a director on our fundraising team, died after a struggle with leukemia. Nate took genuine pride in everything 70 Faces does, and his colleagues loved him for his interest, for his insights and his menschlichkeit.

Nate and I weren't close friends, but our families belong to the same synagogue. His death got me thinking about that unique extended family that forms among synagogue regulars. Before COVID we could count on seeing each other every Shabbat and catching up at kiddush. Sometimes our conversation consisted only of a quick exchange of "Shabbat Shalom."

But if you spend enough time in synagogue, you know these casual — even hurried — exchanges forge tighter bonds than others might expect. I've heard a community defined as a place where you can depend on accidentally bumping into someone you know. Synagogue is a little more intentional than that, but it still fosters that sort of unplanned intimacy. We know each other's business: how the kids are doing, who's ill, who's mourning. Stick with a community long enough and you see families expand and contract. (I joke that every new wave of babies is just pushing me that much closer to the retirement home.)

You may not be invited to the wedding of a synagogue-mate's son, but you are in the pews for the aufruf and, peh peh peh, the baby naming.

This version of synagogue is an example of what the sociologist Ray Oldenburg called "third places" — the cafés, bars, Main Streets or town squares that serve as "institu-

tions of mediation between the individual and larger society." In his 1989 book on the subject, "The Great Good Place," Oldenburg defines third places as "public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."

In short, they are places where everybody knows your name.

Third places create the habit of association, drawing people out of their suburban anonymity and weaving them into the broader fabric of community life.

Third places also serve as havens between family and workplace, where you can enter into a web of casual friendships that do not come burdened with the emotional demands of lifelong friendships, family ties or professional relationships.

Synagogues aren't perfect as third places — for example, there are very few synagogues that offer opportunities to meet across socio-economic class. Racially they tend to be homogenous. And even the most liberal synagogue stands for a set of beliefs that is bound to alienate someone.

"Third places create the habit of association, drawing people out of their suburban anonymity and weaving them into the broader fabric of community life."

And I understand that my take on synagogue-going is idealistic and maybe a touch profane. There are as many reasons for going to synagogue as there are Jews: tradition, obligation, guilt, commandment, spiritual attachment, professional advancement, study, mourning, celebrating, social climbing, a deep connection to God.

I happen to be like the guy in the old joke, who gets shushed for talking in the back row of shul. "Listen," he replies. "Some people come to synagogue to talk to God. I come to talk to Ginsberg."

The pandemic has put a crimp in my synagogue-going — more than a crimp, as Omicron and winter have reduced our minyans to a small and hardy crew of stalwarts. I admit to hunkering down at home, even though I am vaxed and boosted.

Once confident that synagogue life would rebound after the pandemic, now I am not so sure.

That would be tragic. More than anything, what I need right now is what Johann Huizinga, the great theorist of human play, called “the feeling of being ‘apart together’ in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, or mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms.”

Nate understood that feeling: At his funeral, the rabbi and Nate’s family spoke about how he was often among the last people to leave kiddush on Saturday afternoons — and would keep the conversation going on the walk home. Our third place won’t be the same without him.

Andrew Silow-Carroll (@SilowCarroll) is the editor in chief of *The New York Jewish Week* and senior editor of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (@SilowCarroll).

● OPINION

Funding Security Is Now a Priority for Jewish Charities. Here’s How We Do It.

Keeping Jews safe is a responsibility for private foundations, philanthropies, donors and the government, writes the CEO of UJA-Federation.

By Eric S. Goldstein

Crises have a way of exposing weaknesses in an ecosystem and of fast-tracking critical enhancements and structural shifts. After Hurricane Katrina revealed the levees were structurally unsound, the government made improvements to better secure New Orleans. And, of course, 9/11 irrevocably changed how Americans thought about national security and risk.

For the New York Jewish community, change came after the Pittsburgh Tree of Life massacre in October 2018, followed by violence against Jews in Poway, Jersey City and Monsey. These attacks precipitated a reckoning

within the Jewish community, compelling us to reassess how we could do a better job ensuring New York Jews could feel safer living visibly Jewish lives.

Given the current climate, it’s hard to believe that as recently as 2018, most Jewish institutions in New York City, Long Island and Westchester had only modest support from the organized Jewish community for their security needs and otherwise managed on their own. There was one professional at the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York who served as a resource to the community for security-related issues.

With the Colleyville hostage situation again putting a spotlight on the security of Jewish institutions, it’s important to assess what’s in place, what’s working, and what more might be needed in this, the city with the largest Jewish population outside of Israel.

Since 2019, UJA-Federation of New York, with thanks to generous funders, has invested over \$5 million and partnered with JCRC-NY to launch the Community Security Initiative, a community-wide response to security threats and preparedness.

Fast forward to today: CSI is led by Mitch Silber, former NYPD director of Intelligence Analysis, and employs nine additional full-time staff including five regional directors, a cybersecurity specialist, a procurement officer, and an online threat intelligence analyst.

New York Jewish institutions include synagogues, camps, day schools, Hillels, museums, senior living centers/nursing homes and Jewish community centers. In 2021, CSI conducted 135 physical security assessments for these organizations. CSI security experts met with local staff to review the physical building, visitor policy and procedures and the need for armed guards, metal detectors, fortification of doors and windows, threat detection, active shooter and other training drills.

Another important component of CSI’s work is cybersecurity, which typically covers issues such as ransomware and hacking attacks, cyberthreats against people and institutions, and training for staff to detect and prevent cyberattacks.

Importantly, security assessments are also the first step in accessing government security funds. This past year, CSI successfully helped guide 177 organizations to secure

\$27 million in federal nonprofit security grants, almost 30% of the Department of Homeland Security's national nonprofit security funds for urban areas. Once nonprofits are awarded government security funding, they are required to pay all costs upfront and submit receipts for government reimbursement. For institutions without large reserves, that poses a challenge. This is why UJA offers through our partner, the Hebrew Free Loan Society, interest-free loans to nonprofits that qualify for government security grants but don't have the cash on hand to pay for upgrades before being reimbursed.

CSI has today become an integral part of the security infrastructure across our community. Just one recent example: When the hostage taker in Colleyville, Texas, contacted Rabbi Angela Buchdahl of Central Synagogue here in New York, she called her synagogue security, who in turn reached out to CSI. Mitch Silber spoke to Rabbi Buchdahl as she waited for the FBI, advising her on what to do should the hostage taker call back. CSI also shared real-time security alerts with synagogues, schools, JCCs and museums in the New York area.

To be clear, the scope of security needs extends far past New York borders, and so on the national level, UJA also allocates over \$500,000 annually to support the Secure Community Network (SCN) and the Community Security Service (CSS.)

SCN, co-founded by the Jewish Federations of North America, provided the security training that Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker in Colleyville credits with quite literally saving his and his fellow hostages' lives. CSS trains volunteers who add another critical layer of watchfulness on top of the physical security and presence of guards and police.

"Funding for security is a call we must heed as a community. Private foundations, philanthropies, and donors should reexamine their allocations for organizational security needs."

While UJA remains firmly committed to investing in communal security, philanthropy alone cannot remotely shoulder the burden. In that regard, we're very heartened by the response of government. For example, on Jan. 26, Sen. Charles Schumer (D-New York) came to UJA's offices, along with religious leaders from across the metropolitan area, to announce a "major push" to

double the current annual funding for the federal Non-profit Security Grant Program to \$360 million.

This increased funding is essential. Last year in New York State, for example, only one-third of the nonprofits that applied for federal security grants received them. And we know that the security enhancements put in place with these funds — reinforced doors, cameras, sidewalk barriers — can and will save lives. We urge members of Congress immediately to approve this allocation.

More broadly, funding for security is also a call we must heed as a community. Private foundations, philanthropies, and donors should reexamine their allocations for organizational security needs.

The need to focus on security today is a sad but necessary reality, but we must also remember that security is a means to an end — not the end itself. The purpose of a fortified door is not to keep us locked in or make us smaller, but rather to let us enter our Jewish communal spaces unencumbered by fear, so we can live proud and expansive Jewish lives.

Eric S. Goldstein is the CEO of UJA-Federation of New York.

● SABBATH WEEK PARSHAT TERUMAH

Finding the Divine in the Builders, not the Building

We are inextricably bound to one another in a web of mutual responsibility.

By Rabbi Leora Frankel

"If you build it, he will come."

This iconic quote from "Field of Dreams" is whispered from on high to Kevin Costner, who plays an Iowa farmer ambling through his cornfield. Costner's character,

Ray Kinsella, interprets the call as a charge to build a baseball field on his farm, upon which will ultimately appear the ghosts of Shoeless Joe Jackson and other 1919 Chicago White Sox players.

While Kinsella must overcome both skepticism and scandal, by the end of the movie not only has the famous baseball player indeed arrived, but so, too, have thousands of fans.

This week in Parashat Terumah, the newly-freed Israelites are similarly challenged: "If you build it, He will come..." (Exodus 25:8). The "it" in our case is the Mishkan or Tabernacle, that first portable sanctuary that accompanied the people through their wilderness journeys. And if they build it, God instructs Moses, then the Divine presence will come "to dwell among them."

Thus begins the first and arguably most successful synagogue capital campaign, replete with detailed architectural blueprints and an inspired fundraising pitch: Let every person whose heart is moved bring gifts. With abundant generosity, the Israelites gather so many contributions that a few chapters later Moses actually tells them to stop. (Had he lived today, perhaps Moses would have instead used the surplus to seed an endowment fund!) The people are also encouraged to lend their skills as craftsmen to help make the elaborate vestments to adorn the Mishkan and the priests who will serve in it.

For all the charm of this portion, though, a question nags at the Sages: Why does God, both transcendent and omnipresent, need a sanctuary?

Fifteenth-century Portuguese commentator Isaac Abravanel underscores the oddity of God requesting a bricks-and-mortar sanctum. After all, he reminds us, God clearly declared, "The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house can you build for me?" (Isaiah 66:1). From the perspective of the Israelites too, it makes little sense to assemble an elaborate structure they will need to constantly break down and carry with them on their wilderness trek.

What's more, anyone who has prayed out in nature — at summer camp, by the seashore, and especially in the deserts of ancient Israel — knows that we don't need a building to sense God's presence. Through our backyard, tented and Zoom minyans over the past two years,

the pandemic has only affirmed what the Kotsker Rebbe famously taught: "God dwells wherever we let God in."

So why the call for such an elaborate construction project? Because while God cannot be contained by the four walls of any building, God may well be found in the collaborative efforts of the builders. The Torah is clear that even once the Israelites make the Mishkan, God will not dwell "in it" but rather "among them," or translated another way, "within them." After the solitude of slavery in Egypt and the spectacular but fleeting Revelation at Sinai, maybe they needed a reminder that God can be present in more mundane, daily acts of devotion to one another.

"It is what we do in our sacred spaces that make them holy, not their adornment."

We too catch glimpses of God when we witness those who selflessly step up on behalf of others, sometimes in wildly unexpected moments or even at the risk of their own lives. God was there in Colleyville, not in a supernatural miracle that saved the hostages, but in Rabbi Cytron-Walker's remarkable calm and courage, in his choice to send his congregants out to safety first when he finally saw an opening, and then be the last one to escape himself. For it is what we do in our sacred spaces that make them holy, not their adornment.

However empty our modern sanctuaries might have been again during the recent Omicron spike, Divine sparks were certainly present in the humbler hospitals and schools, emergency services stations and soup kitchens that remained full of people ready to pitch in. And God was there among my congregants who showed up to shiva last week double masked and in the dead of winter to comfort mourners, because they understand that's what it means to live in covenant.

It is no linguistic coincidence that the word Shechinah, a name for the Divine presence, shares the same Hebrew root as shachen, "neighbor." If COVID has taught us anything, it is that we are inextricably bound to one another in a web of mutual responsibility. We've learned that we are connected even to strangers halfway across the globe who we will never meet but whose lives may be affected by our decisions.

As we emerge from another season of isolation, and of being tethered to our iPhones and iPads, may we find

ourselves in more of what Martin Buber called I-Thou moments: really seeing and serving those around us, and in so doing, also the Divine presence. And the next time we are invited to share our resources, our time, or our talents for a greater good, let us respond wholeheartedly as the Israelites did in Terumah. For whenever and wherever we heed that call, God will surely dwell among us.

Rabbi Leora J. Frankel is the Associate Rabbi of Larchmont Temple, a member of the Westchester Board of Rabbis' Executive Committee, and mother of three.

● MUSINGS

The True Disciple

By David Wolpe

There is an old story about two students who studied with the same great rabbi. After the rabbi died, they separated and did not see each other for many years. One of them meticulously followed all he had learned from his teacher. The other developed his own interpretations as well, and in many matters diverged from what they had learned.

After many years the two met. The first said to his former friend, "I don't understand. We had such a magnificent mentor. Why didn't you live as I have, and remain faithful to the teachings of our master?" The second answered, "I did. Indeed, I followed his way more scrupulously than you. You see, he grew up and left his rabbi. I grew up and left mine."

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Adar I 3, 5782 | Friday, February 4, 2022

- **Light candles at:** 4:59 p.m. (NYC)

Adar I 4, 5782 | Saturday, February 5, 2022

- **Torah reading:** Terumah, Exodus 25:1–27:19

- **Haftarah:** Kings I 5:26–6:13

- **Shabbat ends:** 6:01 p.m. (NYC)

If we are fortunate enough to have figures in private or public life whom we admire, we will naturally share many of their teachings and inclinations. Yet in the end we must each forge our own path in this world. No one else can live our lives for us. We learn what we can from our teachers, and then leave them to become ourselves.

*Named the most influential Rabbi in America by Newsweek Magazine and one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world by the Jerusalem Post, **David Wolpe** is the Rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, California.*

● NEW YORK NOSHER

These Modern-Day Jewish Spice Merchants Want to Revolutionize the Spice Industry

By Shira Hanau

Try to come up with the most Jewish spice out there and you might have some trouble answering. But ask Ori Zohar and Ethan Frisch, the founders of the single-origin spice company Burlap & Barrel, and you'll quickly get a list of spices with a robust claim to the title.

"Jewish food uses so much cinnamon, baking sweet and savory," Frisch, a native New Yorker, said, noting cinnamon is used in babka, rugelach, sweet noodle kugel and tzimmes.

Zohar, whose family moved to Baltimore from Israel when he was 5 years old, offered up nigella seeds, which are often used in Middle Eastern baking, and cumin, a staple of Middle Eastern savory dishes. But, ultimately, he went with poppy seeds. "Obviously bagels and hamantaschen and all the other wonderful pastries that use either poppy seeds or poppy seed paste," he said. "I think poppy seed has a deep history there."

Since starting their Queens-based company in October

2016, Zohar and Frisch have traveled to Tanzania to visit cinnamon and black peppercorn farms, to Guatemala to find cardamom and chili producers, and to India to source turmeric, among many other countries.

Along the way, they said, they found a commodity that they say was ready for the kind of “supply chain revolutions” that happened to the coffee and chocolate industries. The New York Jewish Week spoke to Zohar and Frisch about how they first learned about the spice industry, what makes for a higher quality spice and why you should find out where your spices come from.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

How did you first become interested in spices and the way they're sourced?

Ethan Frisch: I'm the culinary half of our business and Ori is the business half of our business. My background is half in restaurant kitchens — I worked at a high-end Indian restaurant here in New York City called Tabla under a chef named Floyd Cardoz, a kind of iconic Indian American chef, so I learned a lot about spices. And then I left kitchens to go to grad school to work in international development, got a master's degree, moved to Afghanistan. I lived there for about two and a half years and was working for a big nonprofit, spending a lot of time in this pretty remote mountainous area of the country in the northeast, a province called Badakhshan, which is famous within Afghanistan for this amazing wild cumin that grows in the mountains. I'd never tasted anything like it so I started bringing it home to share with friends in the restaurant industry and they got really excited about it. And as these things sometimes go, they started to ask if they could buy some, or could they get it into the restaurants. And so I called Ori and said, “There isn't a business here, right?” And he said, “Maybe there is.”

What are the social issues involved with the spice industry? What do people not know about their spices that they should know?

Frisch: What we realized pretty quickly was that there had been these sort of supply chain revolutions in coffee and tea, in cacao, even in veggies, right? People go to the farmers market, they want to know where their food is coming from, and that had not extended into spices at all. But spices are traded in similar ways to other agricul-

tural commodities — farmers are pushed to grow for volume, not for quality. When an individual farmer is doing something different, like growing an heirloom variety or using regenerative techniques, kind of taking a more holistic approach, it all gets lost, because that special thing that they grew is just getting mixed with everybody else's. So most people are accustomed to cooking with pretty low-quality, stale spices that have been sitting around forever, [that] have no sense of terroir, no origin, no farmer behind them who created something special.

Ori Zohar: I'd say spices are the food in your pantry that people know the least about — about where it comes from, about what it is. What's been really cool is we've been able to kind of demystify that and go back to origin and create a connection directly from the cinnamon that you're kind of sprinkling over your oatmeal or floating in your coffee and the farmer that got that cinnamon tree when they were a kid from their parents and watched it grow for 20 years as the bark matured and became more fragrant and more flavorful.

Frisch: That was exactly my experience working in high-end restaurants in New York City, where we would list the name of the farm that grew the lamb, but the spices were totally generic, big brands.

Where do you go to find the producers of these spices?

Frisch: That's the fun part. We've been in the business five years and so we built a really strong network. We now source from 20 different countries and close to 300 farmers. We meet them through NGOs — that's how we met the farmer in Guatemala. We meet them through the local government offices, that's how we met our partner star anise farmers in Vietnam, and a few others [through the] ministry of foreign affairs or ministers of agriculture, people [who] know who the best farmers are in a particular region. And then, more and more, we're meeting farmers online, or they're finding us on social media. We work with a nutmeg farm in Grenada where the niece, who is in her late 20s, is taking over the business from her aunt and uncle, and found us on Instagram and reached out. We went to visit in July, and now I have four shipments from them.

Do you any of your spices come from Israel or the West Bank? Are there any other spices that you're thinking about bringing in from that area?

Frisch: We just got a shipment of Palestinian za'atar from Ein Sabiya, right outside of Ramallah. And it's all Palestinian-grown ingredients — the za'atar herb itself, the sumac, the sesame. But there really is not that much grown in Israel or in the West Bank. We've looked at a few other things. There's some interesting things happening around seaweed and Ori's father has connected us with some seaweed producers.

Zohar: My dad is a marine biologist, so he works with kelp and seaweed and all that. I'm Israeli, we go back every year, my parents spend a fair amount of time there. So it has been really nice to be able to come back and have some business there, too. We're always trying to find ways to sneak flavor into people's foods in better and more interesting ways. And that's the general story around spices and how people should be cooking with them more often. You know, people often build flavor with salt and fat and sugar, which we love. But there's a much broader palette to paint with. And we think that seaweed should be part of that palette.

Is there any Jewish history of the spice trade that you've thought about or that motivates you?

Frisch: We were just in Hungary in October to meet a paprika farmer who we are starting to work with, and we went to visit the Szeged synagogue. Szeged is a famous Hungarian paprika-producing region. Ori's family went to that synagogue many, many decades ago. We were both really struck by, in this stained glass [in the] synagogue, there were all of these spice plants — there was ginger, there were peppercorns on the vine, there were fresh cloves. I mean, things that most people wouldn't even recognize; most people don't know what fresh cloves look like, and there they are etched into the stained glass. So that was pretty incredible to see that.

Zohar: You know, the spices that you smell after Havdalah, it's cloves. And so there is this big connection between Judaism and spices and also in the foods that we eat.

Why is cinnamon so iconic in Jewish cooking?

Frisch: I think it's a connection to the Middle East, a trading hub for spices going all the way back. There were stories that cinnamon sticks were from the the nest of a giant eagle, and you had to lure the eagle away with meat so that you could steal the sticks from the nest. And it was Jewish and Arab traders, going all the way

back, who were transporting spices around the world, through ultimately to and through the Mediterranean. So we picked up some some interesting flavors.

Zohar: I also think that it's worth mentioning that the creator of Old Bay Seasoning was a Jewish immigrant who came to Baltimore, got a job at McCormick, and was fired almost immediately. McCormick, years later, acquired the brand, so I think that's a really fun connection between Jews and trading and spices. There's always been a deep connection, historically, in this area, and I'm very happy that the crab seasoning that is so famous was started by a Jew. It feels like, you know, we did it.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY 6 | 12:00 p.m. Free

The Jew Who Ruled Persia: The Story of Sa'ad ad-Dawla

Live on Zoom, Richard Sassoon discusses the life and legacy of Sa'ad ad-Dawla, a Persian Jew who served as the Grand Vizier of the Mongol Ilkhanate in 1289, the most powerful position in the country below the Ilkhan himself.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3GrMYUi>

FEBRUARY 9 | 7:00 p.m. Free

Spotlight on Anti-Semitism: Jonathan Greenblatt with Brooke Baldwin

Jonathan Greenblatt, head of the Anti-Defamation League, and Brooke Baldwin discuss what history teaches about intolerant societies, the roots of America's prejudices, and how to fight for a better future.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3gjNrx5>

Do you have an event coming up?

Submit your events online at www.jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/contact/submit-an-event