

Kesher

THE NEWSLETTER



Passover seder 2020 via Zoom.



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May-June 2020 / 5780

Welcome to Kesher

Connection is the force that binds members and clergy to Judaism and to The Village Temple.

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ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING ONLINE • Wednesday, May 27, 6:30 pm

Dear Congregants,

We hope you will join us at The Village Temple annual congregational meeting, which for the first time will be ONLINE! This is an important event at which we will review and vote on the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year, as well as the proposed slate of Board of Directors. Proxies will go out prior to the meeting for you to complete and send in.

Please mark your calendars and plan on joining us via Zoom. We will provide a link in an upcoming eblast to the congregation. It is important we get a quorum of congregants present online, so please plan to join us for the Q & A and voting.

Join in a Celebration of Rabbi Deborah Hirsch

On Sunday, May 31 at 3:00 pm, The Village Temple community is invited to gather in a giant ZOOM celebration of Rabbi Deborah Hirsch. Over the past four years in her interim rabbi role, Rabbi Hirsch has transformed our congregation and guided us with warmth, wisdom, humor, and a steady hand through many difficult days, weeks and months. Building on the good will she found, she has been a catalyst for spiritual exploration and community building. We can never thank her enough for the work she's accomplished, including her help in paving the way for our permanent rabbi, Diana Fersko, who will be joining us on July 1.



We'd planned to join together for a special in-person *Shabbat* service, but as we've all learned, our plans have had to change. But let's show our resilience by Zooming together, for an afternoon of talk, video, and musical celebration with performances by Anita Hollander and the children's choir, Cantor Nancy Bach, jazz pianist Hila Kulik, and other special guests. Please be there to show your thanks to Rabbi Hirsch! Zoom link to come via email.

The Newsletter of The Village Temple

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of New York

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We invite all who wish to join us to enter our doors: Jews by birth, Jews by choice, interfaith families. Inside you will find a community of people who are on a quest to reshape Shabbat and holiday worship, reinvigorate Jewish learning, and renew our commitment to tikkun olam through social action and justice.



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A LETTER FROM RABBI HIRSCH



Counting the Days

Dear Friends,

When you read this article, Jews around the world will be almost mid-way through the counting of the Omer, the period marking the span of time between the Israelites' redemption from Egypt and revelation at Mount Sinai. Many of us have been spending the last few weeks counting the days of self-quarantine, the days of continued health, and the days of healing. We look forward to counting the days when a semblance of normalcy will return—seeing our family face-to-face without a mask, hugging a friend who has lost a loved one, dining *IN* at our favorite restaurant, or seeing classmates at school.

In addition to the above, I am keenly aware of a different countdown: my final days with the temple and Rabbi Fersko's exciting new beginning. Just over 4 years ago, the congregation voted me as its one-year interim rabbi. That tenure was extended, and I have been blessed to serve The Village Temple community for these past four years. When I began, my world was in order and the temple was in disorder—a lack of resilience, optimism, and vision. Today, our daily worlds seem out of sync as we struggle to adjust to a world overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, despite our own sense of personal uncertainty, The Village Temple community thrives, firmly grounded in its core value of creating and serving a sacred community, despite the restrictions imposed by social distancing.

As I reflect upon the past four years, I am so grateful to my lay and professional partners who have been true blessings to me. Julie Salamon and Jerry Arbittier righted a waffling spiritual ship. Fred Basch and Sarah King assumed the helm and continued to steer The VT in a direction of growth and stability. The 'incredible four' were not just my 'lay partners' but have become cherished friends. The executive committee's and board's love of and commitment to the congregation have been evident every mile of this journey, and I am grateful to all of them for partnering with me, taking my counsel, and working to ensure a dynamic

VT for the future. And I have been blessed to have such an amazing professional team: Cantor Bach, Sandy Albert, and Alex Tansky have been my professional partners, teachers, and friends. I'm aware trust and teamwork were sorely lacking when I arrived in 2016 and I am grateful to them for staying the course and forging ahead with creativity and dedication. In recent months, they didn't miss a beat in adjusting the temple's day-to-day programming to fit into a Zoom world. It has been an honor working with Cantor Bach each week in creating an inspirational

We look forward to counting the days when a semblance of normalcy will return—seeing our family face-to-face without a mask, hugging a friend who has lost a loved one, dining *IN* at our favorite restaurant, or seeing classmates at school.

Shabbat worship. Sandy, Alex, and the cantor have worked closely with Liotte Greenbaum, Anita Hollander, Hila Kulik, Kalix Jacobson, and Santiago Astacio who have helped ensure our children continue their religious studies, teens connect, choir voices rise, adults meaningful connect and socialize, and for the temple building to be secure and safe. I also want to extend a special shout out to all of our religious school teachers who have continued to make learning fun from a distance. Each staff person has been a precious link in The VT chain of excellence. Thank you to them all!

And now, The Village Temple stands on a new horizon—one hued with hope, leadership, passion, and excellence. I am so thrilled to be passing the spiritual torch to Rabbi Diana Fersko on July 1. During the past few months I have felt her warmth and passion for Judaism. She has vision and knowledge that will guide The VT family into a meaningful and exciting future. *Ashrei*—how fortunate you and she are to begin this journey.

In my first High Holy Day sermon, I quoted

A LETTER FROM THE CO-PRESIDENTS



Dear Friends,

We hope that you and your families had a joyous and meaningful Passover, despite the separation and uncertainty we've all been experiencing. Like many of you, my family celebrated in our home via Zoom. The pre-*seeder* schmooze was replaced by tech sessions with some octogenarians and a newly minted senior citizen. Looking at the screen was clearly not the same as being in the same room, but it was not less; it was different. Telling the story—of how we passed from slavery through a narrow space to freedom—seemed to resonate more powerfully than ever.



At The Village Temple, Passover's theme of transition took on special meaning this year. As most of you know, we are in the process of transition, as Rabbi Hirsch ends her tenure with us on June 30th, and we welcome Rabbi Fersko. It is a poignant and exciting moment: saying good-bye to a spiritual leader who has transformed our congregation, saying hello to a permanent rabbi uniquely qualified to build on that foundation. We will keep you posted on the details over the next few weeks. Rabbi Hirsch, Cantor Bach, Sandy Albert, Alex Tansky, and Rabbi Fersko have been working together to make the changeover smooth and natural: working with *b'nei mitzvah* families, prepping students for the fall, planning high holiday services.

Quarantine has not diminished our community. Our members have delivered groceries to homebound congregants and reached out to one another through emails and phone calls. Many of you have joined us online for services on Friday night, Torah study on Saturday morning, religious school classes, the VT choir, concerts, book club, coffee with the rabbi, Sunday jazz with pianist Hila Kulik and other virtual get-togethers. The response to these events has been overwhelmingly positive, proving that while we may be physically distant, we can be spiritually connected. If you have not been able to join one of these events, please let us know by [emailing the office](#). The social action committee has put together a list of ways you can volunteer to help the community: for details, visit [VT Opportunities to Volunteer](#). If you are a senior citizen or homebound for any reason and need assistance with groceries or errands, please email [Nelly Szlachter](#) or [Rachel Glube](#). The experience of the last few weeks has clarified the qualities that make the Village Temple truly a village. Hard times shouldn't keep you away. If you are having financial problems and think you need relief on dues or tuition, please let us know by contacting [Sandy Albert](#) or by phone at 212-674-2340 extension 6. We may be apart physically, but we are here for one another.

Stay Well,
Fred Basch & Sarah King
fredbasch@nyc.rr.com, sarahking123@gmail.com
Co-Presidents

.... Moving on

Dear Village Temple community,

This is my last column as co-president and a good time to reflect on these past two years and what a privilege it has been. I find myself feeling grateful and confident in our future. I am so grateful for having had the opportunity to lead our congregation at an important time in its history; to work with and learn from the amazing Rabbi Hirsch; to do it in partnership with Fred Basch whose great poise, expertise, and sense of humor make him the best co-president anyone could wish for; and for the connections I have made with so many of you in our congregation, from our Friday night regulars to our Alabama trip crew, our religious school families, and our many volunteers and board and temple members. These were years of rebuilding our congregation, welcoming many new families, and preparing our temple for the clergy transition to Rabbi Fersko. I am so excited about the future ahead under her leadership.

Over the past two months, the new reality of a city shut down by the COVID-19 epidemic has been difficult for a congregation defined by its warmth and connection to one another. I miss seeing everyone in person, Mimi's hugs, Judy and Sandi's *Shabbat*

dinners, our children's choir, and much more. But what a miracle it has been that we can still enjoy our rabbi's words of wisdom and our Cantor's joyful praying and singing via Zoom! Also, that our students still have religious school, now online, and that so many programs are there to engage us from Saturday morning Torah study to Hila's Sunday concerts, social gatherings, and workshops led by our own congregants! Our temple has truly recreated a sense of community despite physical distancing. I am incredibly thankful for our staff: our outstanding Executive Director Sandy Albert and her son David who has become our tech guru; our Religious School Director Alex Tansky who led our school's seamless transformation to online learning, supported by Liotte Greenbaum, Kalix Jacobson, and our teachers; our choir director Anita Hollander who keeps our choir going strong; and of course our beloved Rabbi Hirsch and Cantor Bach. We are very blessed to have them.

I look forward to staying involved in our temple and I am very excited to pass the baton to my good friend Jill Wilkinson (pending a vote at the annual meeting) whose great qualities will serve our temple so well.

Wishing you all peace and good health
Sarah
sarahking123@gmail.com

TEENS AT THE VILLAGE TEMPLE



Teenagers are probably the best at using technology to communicate. While so many adults are struggling to use basic features like FaceTime and Zoom, our VT teens are taking full advantage of technology and all it has to offer in order to stay in touch during the COVID-19 pandemic.



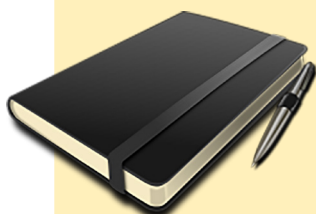
Many of the VT teens are also helping in our online classrooms with younger students.

Each week, the teens gather in a big Zoom meeting and take a few moments for a mental health check-in to share how they are doing.

Then it's time for the fun stuff: live trivia games, talent show, Netflix watch parties, Houseparty game night with guacamole and chips, Scribble/Pictionary, charades, and Heads Up, and cooking demonstrations, yoga and dance lessons, Breakout Room debates, scavenger hunts, an online group Escape Room, virtual museums, theme parks, and National Parks tours. And, of course, sharing our favorite funny memes and TikToks.

Many of The VT teens are also helping in our online classrooms with younger students. They are running interactive games, leading *Alef-Bet* yoga, singing songs and prayers, leading discussions, helping with Hebrew, and being wonderful role models. Their dedication to the temple community, whether in-person or online, is truly commendable.

VT Connection Opportunities



Journaling Workshop

A free Workshop on the power of journaling called "Journaling for your Health" is offered by Lisa Wood Shapiro, a regular contributor to *Wired*, *Vogue*, *Refinery29*, *Outside Magazine*, *Real Simple*, and REI's *Coop Journal*. Along with being an essayist, she covers tech, culture, and the future of work. She is also the author of the humorous memoir *Hot Mess Mom* and is currently finishing her second book. You can read her work [here](#).

Classes are still being held Monday Nights, 6:00 - 6:45 pm via Zoom Meeting. If you don't have access to a computer or cell phone, there is a call-in option. To RSVP email lisawoodshapirowrites@gmail.com.

Online Yoga Class

Every Wednesday morning at 9:00 a.m., Village Temple member Orly Mallin, experienced Yoga, Pilates Teacher and personal trainer, will be offering a yoga class designed to uplift our spirits, helping us connect to our core and entire body. Learn breathing techniques, do some physical exercises and start the day off right. Class will cater to all levels with modifications and ways to advance if interested.

Please RSVP by email to Orly Mallin at orly.mallin@gmail.com. First class started Wednesday, April 29, 2020. at 9:00 a.m. Orly will send you a zoom ID and passcode.



Shalom! EDUCATION NEWS

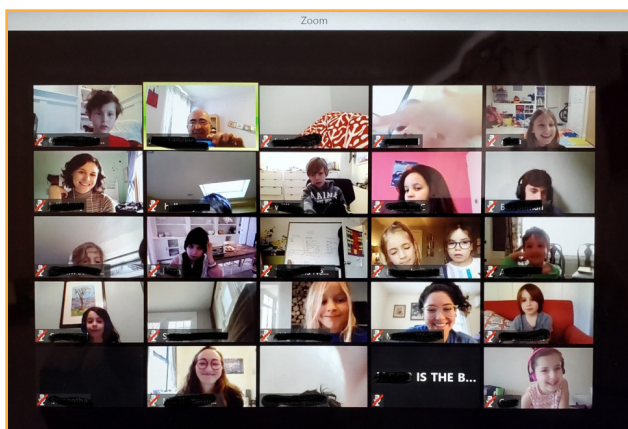


Shalom,

I hope everyone is safe and healthy and managing well during these trying and extraordinary times. I am writing this column from my home in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn.

My family and I are safe and healthy, and we are blessed to be together at this difficult time.

For many years The Village Temple Religious School has been a thriving community within the larger Village Temple family. Its intimate and nurturing environment is an active and exciting one. Peer support, caring and creative teachers, wonderful teens serving as Teacher Assistants and role models to our younger learners, combined with engaging, relevant, and fun content all contribute to making the Religious School one that is valued by both the children and their families.



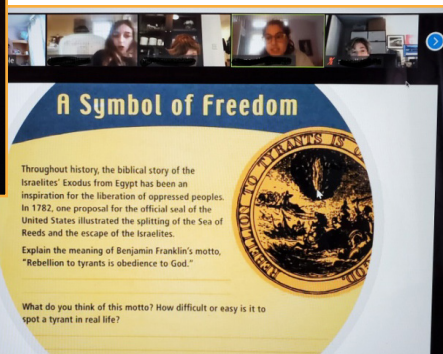
Ongoing innovation is one of our core values that make our education program so successful. The changes we constantly implement range from small structural or timing adjustments to major curriculum overhauls, including reevaluating our pedagogy. In the past years, we have successfully introduced new curricula, expanded our Tuesday program, implemented camp-inspired Sunday electives, and much more. These changes came about as a result of a well-thought process, strategic conversations, trial and, sometimes, error.

Our position was quite different on Thursday, March 12, when we made a difficult decision to close The Village Temple building in response to the quickly spreading COVID-19 virus. At the time, we were seriously stuck as there was no way for us to continue Religious School in the same much beloved way via our in-person community format. However, I had to continue to be able to provide some sort of Jewish connection and to remain a source of communal support for our Religious School students in this challenging time.

Enter Zoom! I was somewhat familiar with the Zoom teleconference platform, as I had participated in Zoom meetings in the past, but not as a presenter or host. I liked its interactive

features and the presenter's ability to share their own computer screen and other media content. But Zoom's ability to allow a 'breakout room' enabling me to group and assign participants to smaller groups, each with its own presenter, was exactly what convinced me to try Zoom as our new Online Religious School platform. I was thrilled when every member of our faculty stepped up to the challenge and quickly adapted their content and teaching style to this new online platform. They not only quickly adapted to this new format but also, and most importantly, continued the most precious connection and nurturing nature of the learner-teacher relationship.

Miraculously, on Sunday morning, March 15 my computer screen filled up with dozens of little boxes filled with little faces and each wearing a huge smile. Some of our students were wearing their PJs, others were holding their favorite plush toy, yet others were still working on their breakfast. It did not matter at all. What mattered to me was that we were together, united by our commitment to Jewish learning and each other, joining together as a community for learning, singing, chanting, discussion, Hebrew practice, art, and prayer. I could not have been happier and prouder that day because we managed to reinvent Jewish learning and make it possible while in this temporary isolation period.



I know that it is much harder to teach in front of the computer screen with no ability to interact with learners face-to-face, and I am very grateful to Liotte Greenbaum, Kalix Jacobson, Julia Duffy, Julia Levine, Mia Hamermesh, Maddie Weikel, Samantha Brooks, and Samantha Mehring for their

wonderful teamwork and creativity in these challenging times. They made this school year such a great experience for all.

My end-of-the-school-year Thank You also go to Fred Basch and Sarah King, Village Temple Co-Presidents, Marina Levin, Religious School Chair, and to all Religious School Committee members and parent volunteers who helped throughout the year to organize and coordinate the many Religious School events and holiday celebrations. A very special thank you goes to The Village Temple professional team—Rabbi Deborah Hirsch, Cantor Nancy Bach, Sandy Albert, Liotte Greenbaum, and Anita Hollander. And a hearty *Todah Rabbah* (Thank You) to all parents for entrusting us with the care and Jewish education of your children. It is always a joy and a privilege to be a part of their lives from September through June.

Lshalom,
Alex Tansky
Director of Education
atansky@villagetemple.org

A Letter From Rabbi Hirsch, *continued from page 2*

Dannan Parry's, *The Parable of the Trapeze*. It is now time for all of us to let go of the present VT trapeze bar and acknowledge that much growth and goodness have happened during this time of transition. The parable ends with "So transformation of fear may have nothing to do with making the fear go away, but rather, with giving ourselves permission to 'hang out' in the transition between trapezes. Transforming our need to grab that new bar, any bar, is allowing ourselves to dwell in the only place where change really happens. It can be terrifying. It can also be enlightening in the true sense of the word. Hurling through the void, we just may learn how to fly."

As the congregation transitions to its next iteration, it is my hope and prayer, that everyone will grab hold of the trapeze bar and continue to be woven into the fabric of this special community and together, with Rabbi Fersko's hands firmly on the bar, soar into a wondrous and dynamic future.

Carole joins me in thanking you all for making these past four years a treasured part of our lives.

Lshalom,
Rabbi Hirsch

How We Celebrated Purim

On Tuesday, March 10, after a wild and crazy *Purim* service, our children's choir and staff performed the *Purimspiel Esther of a Hamletown*, written by Anita Hollander. It was one of the last in-person events before New York State went on "Pause."



May calendar

WEEKLY EVENTS

TUESDAYS, MAY 5, 12, 19, 26, 10:00 AM:
Coffee check-in via Zoom with Rabbi Hirsch

THURSDAYS, MAY 7, 14, 21, 29, 7:00 PM:
Schmooze and Booze via Zoom with Liotte.

FRIDAYS, MAY 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 6:00 PM:
Pre-*Oneg* followed by *Shabbat* services via Zoom starting at 6:30 PM

SATURDAYS, MAY 9, 16, 23, 30, 10:00 AM:
Torah Study via Zoom with Rabbi Hirsch

SATURDAYS, MAY 9, 16, 23, 30, 10:00 AM:
Torah Study via Zoom with Rabbi Hirsch

ONE-TIME EVENT

THURSDAY, MAY 28, 6:30 PM:
Shavuot Torah study via Zoom

FRIDAY, MAY 29, 10:00 AM:
Shavuot Yizkor service



Special Sunday Music Events

SUNDAY, MAY 3, 3-3:45 PM:

Afternoon concert via Zoom with
Anita Hollander – cabaret music

SUNDAY, MAY 10, 3-3:45 PM:

Hila Kulik – live jazz concert from Israel

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 3-3:45 PM:

Hila Kulik – live jazz concert via Zoom
from Israel



SUNDAY, MAY 31, 3:00 PM:

Zoom concert and celebration honoring Rabbi Hirsch

In this changing environment of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, please understand the need for all of us to be flexible; we will update you via our weekly eblasts if there are any date or time changes for May events.

June calendar events will come at a later date via eblast.