

Kesher

THE NEWSLETTER



Come as you are. Discover who you are.

November/December 2020 / 5781

Welcome to Kesher

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

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November and December are months that are usually associated with Thanksgiving and Chanukah and spending time with family and friends. It's also a time to remind ourselves to be thankful for all we have. However, this year many of us will be thankful to say goodbye to 2020 – the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has taken over our lives in so many unexpected ways. In addition to emotional “fatigue,” this pandemic also will have long-lasting economic effects, social, and educational challenges.

Despite it all, we have many reasons to be thankful. This issue of *Kesher* is devoted to sacred giving at The Village Temple, and we plan to highlight other acts of giving in future issues. As you read about the generosity of time, talent, and financial support that our congregants offer freely, we hope you will be inspired and moved to give more generously of yourselves to The Village Temple.

“Tzedakah and acts of kindness are the equivalent of all the *mitzvot* of the Torah.”

– Jerusalem *Talmud, Pe'ah* 1:1

“No one has ever become poor from giving.” – Anne Frank

“The value of a man resides in what he gives and not in what he is capable of receiving.”

– Albert Einstein

The Newsletter of The Village Temple

Congregation B'nai Israel
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 FERSKO



I have a riddle for you. There are two people with the exact same amount of income and the exact same amount of expenses. After finding a deserving organization, one person gives \$18.00 from the depth of her heart, crying as she makes her donation. The other person gives \$54.00, without feeling, and then rushes away. Which is better according to Judaism?

About 70% of people answer that the \$18.00 gifts – with feelings – is better. But Judaism does not agree. Instead, Judaism just says “thank you.” Giving is giving. No matter how big, how small, whether it’s a monetary gift or a gift of time, whether it is an inspired gift, or one given because of obligation, Judaism appreciates it all and, in fact, commands it.

Our tradition teaches that every Jew must either give or take *tzedakah* - and that is true of our very special community. Many of us give *tzedakah* and many of us need *tzedakah*. Some of us are able to cover our full membership dues and make generous donations above and beyond. Others in our community need that support.

After having been here for only four months I can say I am so very proud of us! Even, and especially, in the midst of this pandemic we are coming together in a big way. We understand the importance of *tzedakah*. In this edition of *Kesher* you will find our spirit of giving on full display. Giving of skills, resources, time, or funds – we say thank you to it all!

- For the volunteers who make the soup kitchen run, we say *today rabbah!*
- For the teens who give their time to inspire younger children, we say thank you!
- For the Board Members who step up and support us, we express our gratitude!
- For the *b'nai mitzvah* families who acknowledge their *simcha* with a gift to the synagogue, we honor you!
- For all the donors to our *Yom Kippur* Appeal, who help sustain the very good work of our community, we are so very grateful!

With much appreciation,

Rabbi Diana Fersko
rabbifersko@villagetemple.org

Tashlich *More photos on page 8*



A LETTER FROM THE CO-PRESIDENTS



We hope you are all settling back into Fall and have had an opportunity to join us outside for our in-person, social distanced, mask wearing services and festivities. We look forward to holding a few more before the weather turns too much colder and we appreciate all of those who continue to join us for services, religious school, *Torah* study, and our other important events at the Temple.

We dedicate this issue to all of you and the many ways you support The Village Temple and your community.

Speaking of appreciation, you probably have noticed the theme of this issue of *Kesher*. We are

delighted to take this opportunity to show our appreciation for all of you who contribute to our wonderful *shul* in some many ways – whether through your participation in our services and events, through your volunteerism, and certainly for your financial support. If your kids are choir members or have volunteered to help with our Soup Kitchen, we appreciate all you do to better our community.

We know you have choices, and the fact you choose to spend your time and resources on The Village Temple is not lost on us. We are grateful for you and your families.

We dedicate this issue to all of you and the many ways you support The Village Temple and your community. Please be sure to let us know if you'd like to volunteer for any of our committees, or help us in any other way.

Thank you for staying connected with us and we look forward to seeing you in person soon!

Fred and Jill

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The Soup Kitchen is Open! Volunteers needed.

For the last 25 years, almost every Saturday, rain or shine, The Village Temple Soup Kitchen has provided home

cooked meals to at least 100 to 150 people in need. It is a completely voluntary organization based on donations of time, money, and food by volunteers and other organizations. Unfortunately with COVID-19 we had to close, but we reopened on September 26. Presently, and different from before the pandemic, it is a Grab and Go operation. Four Temple volunteers come in at 10 AM and prepare sandwiches, pack bags with cookies, bread, fruits, and vegetables to take home. They are required to wear masks at all times and work at 6 feet distance from each other. The preparation is from 10 AM to 12 PM. The food then is given out by volunteers from New York Cares.

One of the sad consequences of the pandemic is a tremendous increase in joblessness, homelessness, and hunger. For us, this is a small way to contribute and care about each other.

Our deepest thanks go to Gabrielle Machinist who has found time in her busy schedule to take over the direction of the soup kitchen, and to Dean Chavooshian, who still helps after 18 years of volunteering and directing It.



Please consider volunteering and sign up by [clicking on this link](#). For more information, email soupkitchen@villagetemple.org.

We need you!

Nelly Szlachter
nszlachter@gmail.com

VILLAGE TEMPLE DONOR SPOTLIGHT: Jamil Simon



Jamil Simon

While classes and services can't take place within The Village Temple building during the pandemic, things are bustling inside. Thanks to the generosity of long-time member Jamil Simon, much needed renovations are taking place to make our physical space even more welcoming when you return to the building. This is the latest example of Jamil's generosity toward The Village Temple. As a trustee and treasurer, he gives his time and talent; in addition, he has been a

significant donor for years, contributing both to operating expenses and special needs when they arise. He replaced an old upright with the Baldwin piano in the sanctuary and funded and produced the *Tuning Our Soul* prayerbook. He contributed to the purchase of our new High Holy Day *machzorim* and supported the purchase and restoration of our lovely smaller *Torah*. *Kesher* asked Jamil why he decided to make this contribution now.

“I have been a member of The Village Temple for 20 years. The Temple and our Temple community are foundations of my life. I chose to give now for many reasons. First, I was impressed immediately on meeting Rabbi Fersko, and have long appreciated our Executive Director Sandy Albert and her conscientious efforts, accomplished work, and good cheer. I felt that they deserved a refreshed environment to work in, and I wanted to provide them and our able Educator Alex Tansky with a bright, comfortable, and attractive place where they could do their best work. Moreover, the Temple being closed because of the pandemic allowed the work to be done with minimal disruption to daily activities.

In doing the work, I applied my design and construction backgrounds to reorganize a dark, crowded space, design and specify attractive, affordable furnishings, and open things up with light and color.

As a child, I learned from my parents and grandparents and in synagogue the importance of giving as an opportunity to share with others and do good.

Others recognized the importance of the project. Fellow members Carole Swedlow and David Caceres helped obtain flooring and Blueberry bulletin boards at cost, and donated installation services. Office furniture suppliers provided showroom and refurbished Gunlocke, Steelcase, and Herman Miller seating and furnishings as donations or at deep discount. Our President Fred Basch gave terrific color suggestions. Our maintenance and all-around talent Santiago was always on hand. And Sandy Albert helped with every choice. It was a real team effort!

I consider myself fortunate to enjoy a happy and interesting Jewish life. As a child, I learned from my parents and grandparents and in synagogue the importance of giving as an opportunity to share with others and do good. My mother told me to “Give and Give Generously!” Giving to our Temple supports our community and furthers the Temple's work in maintaining and advancing our Jewish faith. Indeed, our Temple is a place to be cherished. I am inspired by the many others who have contributed over the years to making our Temple life special. The offices are one of our gateways of connection to congregants and potential members. And doing it now readies us even more to welcome the “DOORS OPEN” time that will come as the pandemic passes. I hope the offices will be used and enjoyed by many and in good health for years to come!”



Rabbi's Office

Classroom



Office equipment area

TEENS AND RELIGIOUS SCHOOL



Charity and Volunteerism Top The Village Temple Religious School Goals from Pre-K to High School



The Village Temple Religious School curriculum is designed to address important concepts and powerful ideas that help our learners embrace their Jewish heritage. This will help build a lifelong commitment to their Jewish identity. The idea of *tzedakah* has always been at the top of our priority goals for each grade level, from pre-K through high school. Every year, on the first day of school, our learners begin their journey in Religious

School from creating their class *tzedakah* Box. They grow more and more proud every week as they commit to contributing some change to the class *tzedakah* fund. On the last day of school, they count their collections and as a group decide where to donate their *tzedakah*. In the past, our students have made donations to animal rescue shelters, children's hospitals, Israel National Fund, Israeli paramedics, and many other charities of their choice.

As our Religious School students grow older, they learn about other ways they can volunteer their skills and time to make a significant impact not only in their community but in the world around them. In the past, we have participated in many local park clean-ups, we have flown kites for charities, we have volunteered at the Hebrew Union College and at The VT's own soup kitchen.

As part of their *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* preparation, students commit to excellent *mitzvah* projects that make their rite of passage even more meaningful. Following their *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah*, many of our students return to Religious School as *Madrichim* – student teachers. They become an essential part of our program by assisting our teachers, and most importantly by becoming role models to our younger students. Below are just a few of so many examples of what our teens do to give back their time, skills, and passion of ongoing commitment to the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*.

Jordyn: *"I'm a TA because I want to continue to be a part of and give back to the community that fostered my own growth when I was in Hebrew school. I love working with the students, as I get to help them achieve their goals and watch them form lasting connections with their classmates."*

Ella: *"After my bat mitzvah, I decided to become a TA at The Village Temple as a way for me to maintain my connection to both my religion and my community there. It is important to me to take those four hours each week to reflect on my Jewish culture and possibly learn something new about Judaism that I had not known before. I also enjoy helping other kids prepare for their b'nai mitzvah because it is a way for me to give back to the community that has given me so much already."*

Josh: *"I am a TA at The Village Temple, as I enjoy helping other students progress through Hebrew School in a similar way to my 5-year progression. Often when Jewish teenagers have their b'nai mitzvah they tend to leave their Jewish community, but The Village Temple does an amazing job of keeping teens involved in The Village Temple community through the TA system. After being supported by The Village Temple in the five years leading up to my bar mitzvah, it is now my turn to help be a part of that process for others."*

Brian: *"For my mitzvah project, I volunteered at a non-profit organization called "Back on My Feet." Back on My Feet is a program that helps people living in homeless shelters work their way back towards living independently, whether it be through helping them find a job, battle addictions, or many more things through running. In my eyes, being Jewish is more than just celebrating the holidays, but about giving back to the community in a way that is meaningful to you. It's extremely important to help your city in whatever way possible, and with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting everyone, help is needed more than ever. That is why a service project is such an important thing for us all to participate in."*

Max: *"I go to the soup kitchen because it gives me the opportunity to provide a vital service to the people in need in the community I live in. Attending the soup kitchen also provides me with the opportunity to connect with new people who share the same appreciation in helping create a better community."*

Our Religious School students and teens in action (pre-pandemic photos):



Meet our November / December *B'nai Mitzvah*:

Bar Mitzvah of **Sam Gordon**, November 14, Parshat Chayei Sara

Bar Mitzvah of **Solomon Radmin**, November 21, Parshat Toldot

Bat Mitzvah of **Rachel Tabb**, December 5, Parshat Vayishlach

Bat Mitzvah of **Olivia Lewis**, December 12, Parshat Vayeshev

Bat Mitzvah of **Parker Milianta**, December 19, Parshat Miketz

YOM KIPPUR APPEAL DONORS

Bill Abrams & Julie Salamon

Nelly Szlachter

Jerry Arbittier & Lisa Klinghoffer

Harriet Zimmer

Ellen Banner

Steve Blader & Rob Swanson

Fred & Sue Basch

Alizah & Lee Brozgold

Alan Brown & Barbara Gerolimatos

Joseph Eisinger & Styra Avins

Emily Hacker & Anne Keating

Renee Feinberg

Liz Horwitz & David Glovin

Judith Levy

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Bill Rosenblatt & Elyse Grusky

Arthur Rovine

Judy Steinman

Katherine Lipton & Alex Lipman

Matt Susskind & Katherine Kornblau

Amy Wolf & John Hatfield

Sheldon Basch

Don Kent & Ellen Goosenberg

Rachel Glube & David Friedman

Ede Rothaus

Sari Scheer & Sam Kopel

Ilsa Klinghoffer & Paul Dworin

Eric Seiler & Darcy Bradbury

Brad Seiler & Abigail Murray

Theodore & Barbara Horwitz

Evan Oppenheimer & Lia Levenson

Carol Swedlow & David Caceres

Joyce Rothenberg

This list is in formation; we are still accepting Yom Kippur donations.

WE CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH!

save the date

NOVEMBER

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13

5:30 PM: Pre *Oneg*

6:00 PM: Outdoor service

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21

1:00 PM: *Shabbat* walk

Come down to your stoop, lobby, or sidewalk to say hello and wish each other a *Shabbat Shalom!*

If you are interested in participating, please email [Liotte Greenbaum](mailto:Liotte.Greenbaum) to sign up. Masks and distancing will be enforced for everyone's safety.

WEDNESDAYS, NOVEMBER 4, 11, 18:

6:00-6:45 PM: Hebrew Reading and Modern Conversational Crash Course with Alex Tansky

Learn to decode Hebrew and practice basic vocabulary that will enable you to master simple conversations in Hebrew – on a bus, in a café, or at the Temple. Open to all! Students will be provided all handouts and learning materials. Please email [Alex Tansky](mailto:Alex.Tansky) to sign up.

DECEMBER

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 6:45 PM:

1:00 PM: A choir *Hanukkah* concert, in front of VT

WEDNESDAYS, DECEMBER 2, 9, 16:

6:00-7:00 PM: Blessings 101 with Cantor Bach

In these three participatory classes on Zoom, we will dive into the meaning of *b'rachot* (blessings) that we say each week. We will learn how Hebrew blessings are structured and will read and chant *Shabbat b'rachot*, as well as the *Sh'hechyanu* and other blessings/liturgies as time permits. Come ready to learn, re-learn or to brush up on what you already know, alongside your friends and fellow VT members.



For additional VT programs, please check weekly eblast, or if you prefer, Facebook or Instagram, to stay up to date.

Simchat Torah *continued from page 2*



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