

Kesher

THE NEWSLETTER

The Village Temple Welcomes our New Rabbi, Diana Fersko



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March-April 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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“Why did I become a rabbi? Because being a rabbi is the most challenging and fulfilling work I could ever pursue. Because Jewish ideas have animated western civilization and still do. Because Jews are a living remnant of an ancient people and I want to help sustain our people. Because we are genocide survivors and rejects from European shtetls and immigrants from all over the world. Because liberal Judaism strives to be egalitarian. Because Jews believe in making the world a better place through action. I became a rabbi because if I don’t help to guard Jewish ideas, why should anyone else? Because being able to transmit sacred, ancient, yet acutely relevant ideas is the greatest privilege of my life. That’s why I became a rabbi—because for me to be myself, I had to.”

Please see Rabbi Fersko’s full bio on page 3.



KESHER

The Newsletter of The Village Temple

Congregation B'nai Israel
of New York

INTERIM RABBI
Deborah A. Hirsch, D.Min
rabbidhirsch@villagetemple.org

CANTOR
Nancy Bach
cantorbach@villagetemple.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Sandy Albert
salbert@villagetemple.org

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
Alex Tansky, RJE
atansky@villagetemple.org

DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S CHOIR
Anita Hollander
anitahollander@hotmail.com

DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Liotte Greenbaum, RJE
lgreenbaum@villagetemple.org

CO-PRESIDENTS
Sarah King
sarahking123@gmail.com

Fred Basch
fredbasch@nyc.rr.com

EDITOR
Elyse Grusky
egrusky@gmail.com

PHOTOGRAPHER
Susan Rosenberg Jones

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.


THE VILLAGE TEMPLE
Congregation B'nai Israel of New York
33 East 12th Street
New York, NY 10003
212-674-2340
villagetemple.org

A LETTER FROM **RABBI HIRSCH**



I am aware that some of our members could not be at the special congregational meeting on Wednesday, February 5 to elect Rabbi Diana Fersko. Below are the remarks I shared that evening.

“On Sunday, February 2 the Kansas Chiefs made history as they defeated the San Francisco 49s in Super Bowl LIV. Fifty years had lapsed since the Chiefs captured that prized title. So why am I mentioning the Super Bowl at this special congregational meeting? 1970, 50 years ago, is the last time The Village Temple was able to have a rabbi warmly welcome their successor with a smooth transition of VT rabbinic leadership. Indeed, the past five decades have been fraught with drama and trauma. It is no surprise that congregants, more than a tad apprehensive, have questioned how Rabbi Fersko will learn everything she needs to be successful in her new position. How will she learn about High Holy Days let alone, temple customs? As a reminder, five weeks before my first High Holy Day Services, both Gerard Edery and our accompanist informed us they weren't able to be part of the services. We didn't miss a beat, and we

When at the temple for the second interview, when it was clear that Rabbi Fersko was the committee's top choice, she asked me for my blessing.

pulled on all possible resources and created a meaningful High Holy Day experience for all. I can assure you that in the weeks and months ahead, Rabbi Fersko and I will be working closely together to ensure a seamless transition. I will be preparing files on a variety of topics and performing a brain-dump during our face-to-face meetings. And, on July 1 or August 1, should Rabbi Fersko have a question, she will pick up the phone, or email me, and I will respond.

“I have had the pleasure to meet and speak with Rabbi Fersko and I have found her to be intelligent, caring, insightful and, for me, most importantly, a mensch. When at the temple for the second interview, when it was clear that Rabbi Fersko was the committee's top choice, she asked me for my blessing. Without hesitation and with fullness of heart, I support Rabbi Fersko's candidacy as The Village Temple's next settled rabbi. Embedded in Jewish tradition is the notion of *shalshelet hakabalab*—the passing on of tradition from one generation to the next. It is in that sacred tradition that I pass the spiritual torch to Rabbi Fersko.



“This week's Torah portion includes the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Reed Sea. They left as slaves and emerged from the sea, a people united in purpose and vision... a people consecrated to God. Tonight, marks a new beginning in the history of The Village Temple—a congregation that has come through times of struggle and now emerges whole — embracing one another and its new rabbinic leader.”

Let me add in this column the words that have sustained Jewish generations... *Chazak Chazak v'nitchazek—Be strong—continue to be strong and may you continue to strengthen one another. Mazal Tov* to all of us.

*In friendship,
Rabbi Deborah A. Hirsch*

A LETTER FROM THE CO-PRESIDENTS



Dear Village Temple community:

It is with great excitement that we share that The Village Temple has hired Rabbi Diana Fersko as our permanent rabbi, to start on July 1, 2020. On February 5, you could feel the warmth in the air as >80 congregants were present for our special congregational meeting and unanimously voted to hire Rabbi Fersko. This was in addition to the 30 proxies that had also been received for congregants who could not attend the special meeting.

We are confident that Rabbi Fersko's experience, skills, and warmth will enable her to connect deeply with our congregation and help us build a bright future together. She is an accomplished professional with deep experience across all aspects of rabbinic leadership. She spent seven years at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue uptown, leading worship on *Shabbat* and High Holy Days, conducting all types of lifecycle events, providing pastoral care, overseeing adult and children's education, and designing outreach programs. She comes recommended with the highest level of praise from past colleagues and lay leaders.



We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our Rabbinic Search Committee, chairs Julie Salamon and Marlowe Greenberg, and members David Friedman, Emily Hacker, Gabrielle Haskell, Larry Klurfeld, Carole Sadler, Julie Safer, and Jamil Simon. They dedicated their time and efforts in a sacred task for our congregation. As you will recall, last year the Committee conducted a congregational

survey and organized a special town hall meeting, which helped to identify and prioritize essential rabbinic qualities in our candidate. We received over twenty qualified applications and the Committee conducted a thorough selection and interviewing process that resulted in recommending Rabbi Fersko to the Board as the Committee's top choice. We thank and acknowledge the Rabbinic Search Committee for their contribution.

As one of our dear congregants, Sandi Tamny, said, we feel that God has blessed us twice, first with Rabbi Hirsch and now with Rabbi Fersko. Rabbi Hirsch joined us in July 2016 as interim rabbi to help us overcome a traumatic departure and schism in the congregation. Rabbi Hirsch not only did that, but also a lot more: she healed us, strengthened us, and made us a well functioning organization, a community confident and ready to undertake the search for a permanent rabbi. It was exceptional to be allowed to retain an interim rabbi for four years and Rabbi Hirsch has had an outsized positive impact on our congregation. We are so lucky

that these two gifted rabbis will have a chance to meet often this spring to help with the significant transition.

We are planning a most joyful temple celebration to honor Rabbi Hirsch. As difficult as it will be to say goodbye to her and Carole in June, it will be from a place of love and respect, with the hope that our paths will cross again often and the certainty that reunions will always be happy ones.

With Rabbi Fersko we will embark on a great new journey together, one that is full of promise. We know there will be a lot of eagerness and we want to assure you that her number one priority during the summer months will be to get to know everyone in The Village Temple community.

With immense gratitude for our many blessings, we look forward to the upcoming months and joyous holidays and celebrations of Purim and Passover.

Chag sameah,
Sarah King and Fred Basch, Co-presidents
fredbasch@nyc.rr.com
Sarahking123@gmail.com

Short biography of Rabbi Diana Fersko

For seven years, Rabbi Fersko served as Assistant and then Associate Rabbi at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City, where she was a spiritual leader for thousands of New Yorkers.

Rabbi Fersko has worked closely with Jews of all ages. Through study, prayer, and preaching, Rabbi Fersko is dedicated to bringing Jews and their families closer to Judaism. She is an intrapreneur, having launched several complicated congregational initiatives. Most notably, she is known for her groundbreaking work with millennials, her high-level adult education classes, and her advocacy for girls and women across the globe. Rabbi Fersko has been with people from all backgrounds through good times and bad and she carries the stories of everyone she meets with her.

Rabbi Fersko was ordained by Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, where she also earned a Masters in Hebrew Literature. She received her BA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, graduating with the highest academic honors. She is the National Vice President of the Women's Rabbinic Network and a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, where she serves on the Development Committee. A prolific writer, Rabbi Fersko is a frequent contributor to the media, where she has been widely published. Rabbi Fersko currently resides on the Upper West Side, where she lives with her husband and two children.

TEENS AT THE VILLAGE TEMPLE



In January over Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, Rabbi Hirsch, Alex Tansky, and I chaperoned 15 of our VT teens on a Civil Rights Journey throughout Alabama and Georgia, walking in the footsteps of MLK and those who fought for freedom and equality. We



visited museums in Montgomery, Selma, and Birmingham, met with the Equal Justice Initiative, and saw memorials and tributes honoring those who stood up for freedom (such as Rosa Parks) and remembering so many who lost their lives, both in the fight for justice and, senselessly,

just because of the color of their skin.

We met with Ms. Joanne Bland, who marched across the Edmund Pettus bridge from Selma to Montgomery alongside MLK and John Lewis, and we sang with Pastor Calvin Woods who worked closely with MLK and was the last person to see him alive in Birmingham. We even heard part of the eulogy he gave for his friend. We ended the weekend at Ebenezer Baptist Church, with an incredible choir and service that was both uplifting and joyous, but also called on all of us to stand up for equality and human rights for ALL people. Throughout the weekend, the teens posted pictures and their reflections on the VT Instagram account (@thevillagetemple). Here are a few of their thoughts:

“ This morning the teen Alabama trip visited downtown Montgomery along the Civil Heritage Trail. We learned about the Freedom Riders and their fight for racial equality at the old Greyhound Bus Station. Off to a good start!” —*Summer*

“ We went to the Peace and Justice National Memorial and Legacy Museum. It’s good to have these places that remember those who were unfairly lynched or killed. “The opposite of poverty is not wealth. The opposite of poverty is justice.” (Bryan Stevenson) —*Mattie*



Above: Pastor Calvin Woods, the last person to see Dr. King alive, leading our group in chant and song, and telling about his experience in Birmingham during the civil rights movement.



Above: The Edmund Pettus bridge connecting Selma to Montgomery, where MLK, John Lewis and some 600 civil rights advocates marched for freedom on March 7, 1965. They were met by state and local lawmen who attacked them with billy clubs and tear gas and drove them back into Selma. Two more marches followed and less than five months after the last march of 25,000 people, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Left: Joanne Bland with Anais King, Emma Basch, and Summer King.



Above: Alabama Police confront the Selma Marchers (*Federal Bureau of Investigation Photograph*)

“ This morning in Selma, Alabama, we met Joanne Bland, who was 11 when she marched across The Edmund Pettus Bridge on the Freedom March from Selma to Montgomery. We also visited the church and stood on the exact ground from which they left for Turnaround Tuesday. Hearing the stories and firsthand account of someone who not only participated but also was beaten during the fight for freedom was extremely interesting and moving. Afterwards, we walked in the footsteps of MLK Jr across the Edmond Pettus bridge and had a brief *Shabbat* service at a memorial for those who died in their fight for freedom.” —*Emily*

“ Bishop Calvin Woods joined us at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. He led us in song and shared stories of his close friend, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., including a tribute he gave at the memorial service. It was inspiring to realize that those who lead the civil rights movement were more than just names, they were real people, who worked together in courage none of us could imagine.” —*Emma*



Shalom! EDUCATION NEWS



Shalom!

This past January I participated in two incredible experiences that left a lasting impression and made me think differently about many things. These experiences took place about 1,500 miles apart and had nothing in common in terms of their setting or their content.

They were both entirely immersive and executed in a top-notch fashion that promoted a long-term impact on my perceptions and identity.

On January 16, 2020 I was honored to join Rabbi Deborah Hirsch, Liotte Greenbaum, and 15 Village Temple teenagers for a civil rights journey to Atlanta, GA and Birmingham, Montgomery and Selma, AL. It was a powerful and emotional trip for all who attended.



Etgar 36 Civil Rights Journey

We went with a company called Etgar 36. *Etgar* means “challenge” in Hebrew and the trip itself was challenging. We were forced to look at our country’s shameful past regarding slavery, and at the racism that still exists today. Everywhere we went, people were telling our group about how they are the generation that is going to change things and end racism and bigotry.

Everyone felt empowered and we were left with a challenge to take active steps and prove that we are the generation that ends racism and achieves equal justice for all. Upon our return, some of our teens shared their reflections at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Friday night service at The Village Temple and spoke beautifully about their takeaways and ideas for future steps inspired by their experience.

Association of Reform Jewish Educators Annual Gathering

Ten days later on January 26, 2020, I joined my professional colleagues and friends at the annual gathering of Reform Jewish Educators in Denver, Colorado. The theme of this year’s gathering

Everyone felt empowered and we were left with a challenge to take active steps and prove that we are the generation that ends racism and achieves equal justice for all.

was ‘A Summit on Excellence.’ Throughout the gathering, we explored the topic of excellence, and each educator chose a track that would be most applicable to their work. The individualized tracks enabled educators to engage in a conversation and deep learning on what excellence means beyond the buzz word.

Many of you know about my passion for informal Jewish education. My vision for meaningful and engaging hands-on learning is reflected in how we run The Village Temple Religious School and how we make Jewish learning accessible, relevant and fun. We strive to create a Religious School experience that makes learners develop a sense of belonging while participating in learning activities that leave a lasting impact and enrich their identity with powerful Jewish ideas and values.

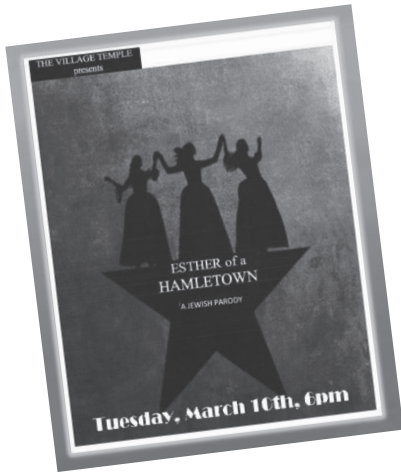
It is no surprise, then, that I selected Immersive Experiences as the track I wanted to concentrate on. Over the course of three days, we engaged in powerful conversations and deep learning on what we should do as Jewish educational leaders to make learning experiences even more influential and impactful while maintaining their enjoyable and fun characteristics. As a result, I left the gathering inspired to bring exciting and creative innovations to our already successful Religious School program and to create even more engaging and meaningful experiences to impact the formation of Jewish identity in our students.

When I reflect back on the Civil Rights Journey and on the Annual Gathering I can clearly identify the power of an immersive experience to educate, inspire, and empower the participant. I look forward to designing and implementing many new ideas and creating even more powerful learning at The Village Temple in partnership with Clergy, staff and Religious School faculty.

Lshalom,

*Alex Tansky
Director of Education
atansky@villagetemple.org*

save the date



MARCH

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 11:00 AM-1:00 PM:

Purim Carnival

Come in your best costume to our religious school carnival. With games, activities, snacks, and a prize for best costumes there will be fun for all. \$25 suggested donation per family.



TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 6:00 PM:

Purim services, *Megillah* reading and *Purimspiel*

This is a well-loved Village Temple tradition. This year *Purim* will be celebrated through the Broadway hit “Hamilton.” Come join the celebration as our children’s choir and staff perform the *shpiel*, *Esther of a Hamletown*, written by Anita Hollander.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 6:00 PM:

Cooking Class

This is the first of two classes for all religious school parents AND students with one of our own religious school parents and caterer Marina Levin.



APRIL

FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 6:45 PM:

Shabbat Hagadol: Special Speaker, Choir

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 6:00 PM:

Yom Hashoah Speaker/Program and services

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 6:00-7:30 PM:

Cooking Class: “*Easy Meal Prep*”

This is the second of Marina Levin’s classes for religious school parents and students.

FRIDAY, MAY 29, 6:45 PM:

Special *Shabbat* service at Hebrew Union College for Rabbi Deborah A. Hirsch on ending her tenure at The Village Temple

Carry It Forward Campaign Announced



Rabbi Hirsch has made a forever imprint on the heart and soul of our congregation. We can never possibly thank her enough for her wisdom and guidance through this most positive and meaningful period of change. Under her leadership we have become a dynamic community powered by good will and love.

As we welcome Rabbi Diana Fersko with delight as the permanent rabbi of our congregation, we are eager to build on the transformation that has taken place during Rabbi Deborah Hirsch’s four years as interim leader of The Village Temple. To that end, The Village Temple is establishing its ***Carry It Forward Campaign***, dedicated to honoring Rabbi Hirsch’s legacy by creating a strong financial foundation for our future.

Please mark your calendars for a special *Shabbat* service on Friday, May 29 to celebrate Rabbi Hirsch, to take place at Hebrew Union College at 1 West 4th Street so there will be room for everyone.

You will be hearing more about how you can contribute to the ***Carry it Forward Campaign*** in future emails. Hope you will join us!

Julie Salamon • Marlowe Greenberg • Julie Safer

World Zionist Congress Elections: Vote By March 11

YOUR VOTE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!

“The World Zionist Congress is the single best opportunity for American Jews to have its voice heard on critical issues facing Israel and the Jewish People” (Rabbi Vernon Kurtz, President of the American Zionist Movement)

Historically, American Reform Jews (the ARZA slate) won more than 50 seats of the American delegation, surpassing all other denominations and capturing 56/145 eligible seats at the Congress.

ARZA’s presence has resulted in **millions of dollars channeled to Reform and pluralistic institutions in Israel.**

How does one vote? Registration and voting opened on January 2 and will close on March 11. To register, visit azm.org/elections. Click on Register and Vote. The fee to register and vote is \$7.50, which covers the administrative costs of running the election

“**PARTICIPATING IN THE WZC ELECTIONS** IS THE ONLY WAY NORTH AMERICAN JEWS CAN WEIGH IN DEMOCRATICALLY ABOUT ISSUES IN ISRAEL.”

(anyone ages 18-25 and under pays \$5.00). Vote the ARZA slate! You do not need to be a member of a congregation to vote—you just need to self-identify as Jewish.

Let us make our Reform Jewish voices heard and our vote counted. Please VOTE!

If you have any questions, contact [Rabbi Hirsch](#).

MARCH 2020/5780

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 RS 9:00 am-1:00 pm Religious School RS 9:30-10:45 am Parparim	2	3 RS 3:45-5:45 pm Religious School 6:00-7:00 pm Children's Choir	4 RS 3:45-6:00 pm Religious School	5	6	7 E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen
8 RS 9:00 am-1:00 pm Religious School RS 9:30-10:45 am Purim Carnival	9	10 Purim RS 3:45-5:45 pm Religious School S 6:00-7:00 pm Purimspiel and Services	11 RS 3:45-6:00 pm Religious School RS 6:00-7:00 pm Madrich	12	13 S 5:30- 6:15 pm Bim Bam Shabbat S 6:45 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Services	14 E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen
15 RS 9:00-11:00 am Pre-K/ Kindergarten RS 9:00 am-1:00 pm Religious School	16	17 RS 3:45-5:45 pm Religious School 6:00-7:00 pm Children's Choir B 6:30-8:00 pm Board Meeting	18 RS 3:45-6:00 pm Religious School	19 RS 6:30-8:00 pm Religious School C 6:00-7:30 pm Cooking Class	20 S 6:45 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Services	21 E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen VT Morocco Trip Leaves
22 No Religious School	23	24 No Religious School 6:00-7:00 pm Children's Choir	25 No Religious School	26	27 S 6:45 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Services	28 E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen
29 RS 9:00-11:00 am Pre-K/ Kindergarten RS 9:00 am-1:00 pm Religious School	30	31 RS 3:45-5:45 pm Religious School 6:00-7:00 pm Children's Choir	1	2	3	4

RS = Religious School C = Classes S = Service
 = Choir E = Events B = Board Meeting

APRIL 2020/5780

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
			RS 3:45-6:00 pm Religious School RS 6:00-7:00 pm <i>Madrich</i>		S 6:45 pm <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Services Featuring Choir & Special Speaker	E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen S 10:00 am-12:00 pm <i>Bar Mitzvah</i> Maxwell Dugger-Ades
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
RS 9:00 am-1:00 pm Religious School RS 9:30-10:45 am <i>Parparim</i> RS 11:00 am-2:00 pm Model <i>Seder</i>		<i>No Religious School</i> 🎵 6:00-7:00 pm Children's Choir	First Night Of Passover <i>No Religious School</i>		S 6:45 pm <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Services	E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
<i>No Religious School</i>		<i>No Religious School</i>	S 8:00-9:00 am <i>Yizkor</i> Service <i>No Religious School</i>		S 6:45 pm <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Services	E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
<i>No Religious School</i>		RS 3:45-5:45 pm Religious School E 6:00-7:30 pm <i>Yom Hashoah</i> Speaker/Program	RS 3:45-6:00 pm Religious School RS 6:00-7:00 pm <i>Madrich</i>	C 6:00-7:30 pm Cooking Class "Easy Meal Prep" RS 6:00-7:30 pm Religious School	S 5:30-6:15 pm <i>Bim Bam Shabbat</i> S 6:45 pm <i>Kabbalat Shabbat</i> Services 3rd, 4th, & 5th Grade Dinner & 5th Grade <i>Shul-in</i>	E 9:00-11:00 am Soup Kitchen
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
RS 9:00 am-1:00 pm Religious School RS 9:00-11:00 am Pre-K & Kindergarten		RS 3:45-5:45 pm Religious School B 6:30-8:00 pm Board Meeting	RS 3:45-6:00 pm Religious School			

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