

Kesher

THE NEWSLETTER



Come as you are. Discover who you are.

September-October 2020 / 5780-5781

Welcome
to Kesher

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

IN THIS ISSUE

A Letter from the Rabbi	2
Support The Village Temple	3
A Letter from the Co-Presidents.....	3
Teens at The Village Temple.....	4-5
Education News.....	6
Religious School Outdoor Open House	7

ימים נוראים "Days of Awe" HIGH HOLY DAYS SCHEDULE – 5781

All Services are remote unless otherwise noted.
Links for livestream and Zoom will be distributed
to members and ticket holders prior to Services

<i>High Holiday Prayer Book Pick-Up and meet Rabbi Fersko</i>	Wednesday, September 9 and Sunday, September 13 2:00-4:00 pm – In the lobby of The Village Temple Digital prayer books will also be available and will be sent via email link
<i>Erev Rosh Hashanah</i>	Friday, September 18 6:30 pm – Evening Service
<i>Rosh Hashanah, Day 1</i>	Saturday, September 19 10:00 am – Morning Service 1:00 pm – Family Service featuring Children's Choir 2:00 pm – Village Temple Schmooze on Zoom
<i>Rosh Hashanah, Day 2</i>	Sunday, September 20 9:30 am – Rabbi Fersko's Adult Education Class 11:00 am – <i>Tashlich</i> – in person, Hudson River & 10th Street 11:30 am – Religious School Picnic
<i>Kol Nidre</i>	Sunday, September 27 6:30 pm – Evening Service
<i>Yom Kippur</i>	Monday, September 28 10:00 am – Morning Service 1:00 pm – Family Service featuring Children's Choir 2:00 pm – Teen Experience on Zoom 2:00 pm – Lay-Led Adult Education on Zoom 3:00 pm – Lay-Led Adult Education on Zoom 4:00 pm – <i>Yizkor</i> , Afternoon <i>Torah</i> Service and <i>N'ilah</i> Services

Services led by Rabbi Diana Fersko and Cantor Nancy Bach

KESHER

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



Shalom!

I am writing this note in mid-August after six wonderful weeks of serving as your rabbi. What a time! I am on a mission to meet a member from every single Village Temple household before the High Holidays. I've taken walks in the neighborhood and you've come downstairs to spend a few minutes of *Shabbat* together. I've spent time on your rooftops for small gatherings. I've had dozens of Zoom meetings and made countless "*Shabbat Shalom*" phone calls. I've prayed with young children and played trivia with teens.

Despite it all, The Village Temple is strong and we are here for you. I am deeply moved by how this congregation has already rallied. Congregants write to me to tell me to check in on other congregants who need support. Our Religious School has pivoted to offer some extraordinary educational opportunities. We are working hard to bring our Soup Kitchen back in a new way, more appropriate for our times. Our weekly worship services have enjoyed high attendance and high energy. *Torah* study is filled with engaged learners. We are

Together with the staff and lay leadership, we are using every ounce of our creative, religious, administrative, and pedagogic sensibilities to ensure that The Village Temple will be here for you at the highest possible level. Together, we are finding our way forward.

I'm not sure if I'll reach my goal before the Holidays, but I know I will be close. I can say with certainty that in all of my encounters, I've found The Village Temple community to be filled with intelligent, committed, thoughtful, sophisticated New Yorkers. Thank you for welcoming me, for confiding in me, for asking me questions—those both existential and everyday. If we haven't connected yet, please reach out. I want to know you.

This is not how I imagined my first year with you. I wanted to sit on the floor with your children and teach them *Hinei Ma Tov* for the first time. I wanted to speak in a room filled with people and exploding with energy. Being a rabbi is also about in-between moments. It's about catching you on the way out of a meeting and asking about your loved ones—"how are your parents feeling?" and "how are your children doing?" Being a rabbi means hugging people tightly when they've experienced a loss and high fiving teens as they become *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah*. Like all of us, I've had to do a lot of resetting.



also making upgrades to our building—changes you can see and changes you can't. As you will see in this issue, we are working hard to ensure that the High Holidays are a spiritual, dynamic, and uplifting experience for all. Together

Continued on page 8

A LETTER FROM THE CO-PRESIDENTS



It's hard to believe we are in the dog days of summer right now, since, as of March, the days just keep blending together. It's either this day or that day, hard to keep track anymore, but here we are! We hope that with the stress and chaos of everything going on in the world right now, that you have had a chance to relax this summer, to whatever extent possible, with your family and friends (OK, maybe more friends than family, since we've all had A LOT, maybe even too much, family time lately) and have found some sense of peace and joy during these last couple of months.

Preparing for our remote High Holy Days services



And you know what this summer means? That's right, we have a new Rabbi! We are absolutely delighted to welcome Rabbi Diana Fersko to the Village Temple community! If you've had an opportunity to join our summer *Shabbat Zoom* services, you've experienced for yourself the spiritual insight and inspiration she provides through her thoughtful sermons. She and Cantor Bach are hard at work putting together what we know will be a fantastic High Holiday program—and, for those who've had it up to your eyeballs in Zoom meetings (who hasn't?), this will not be your run of the mill Zoom service, trust us! Lots of planning is in the works right now, so please (please!) be sure to renew your membership so you don't miss out! You can do it online [here \(https://villagetemple.org/make-a-payment/\)](https://villagetemple.org/make-a-payment/) or mail in a check with your renewal forms you should have received in an email.

And, if you have not had a chance to meet the Rabbi, please attend our combined "Meet the Rabbi" and "Religious School Outdoor Open House" on Sunday September 13. We are going to close the street and celebrate face-to-face and mask-to-mask. So, mark your calendars!

We know there's so much that's uncertain right now, in so many ways, but what is for certain is our cherished Temple community. We hope you continue your connection with The Village Temple to guide you through these challenging times. We are in this together, and together as a Temple, we will stay strong and resilient.

All the best,
Fred Basch
fredbasch@nyc.rr.com
Jill Wilkinson
Wilkinson9753@gmail.com

Every time you shop on Amazon, you can support The Village Temple!

All you need to do is make The Village Temple the charity you support with each purchase, at no cost to you. Amazon donates the money. The Amazon Smile popup should appear each time you log into your Amazon account, and you can add your name to the list of congregants who already are helping The Village Temple by just shopping.

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as of February 2020

TEENS AT THE VILLAGE TEMPLE



“What I did during my summer vacation”

Wondering how some of our teens spent their summer vacation? Their projects will make you proud to be part of the VT community that is helping to foster such amazing responses to the “summer of their pandemic.”

Rachel H

“My summer plans, which had been to work at a lab in Massachusetts for the second summer in a row, were swiftly uprooted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as only essential personnel were allowed on the campus, and even then, not consistently. Instead, I spent the majority of my summer working on a berry orchard, something quite foreign to a New Yorker like me. The farm is located in Ellsworth, Connecticut, and is just a couple paces up from the house where my great-grandfather ran a dairy farm. An immigrant from Russia, he had gotten a loan from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) to move from the Lower East Side to this small town in Connecticut where he could start his own farm. Working on the farm, I did something different each day, finding out only once I arrived whether I’d be picking blueberries and raspberries, riding a mower, planting, weeding, or painting. I’m grateful to have spent time outside, and it’s been so meaningful to have followed in my great-grandfather’s footsteps.”

Zoe O

“This summer, I participated in online classes called the Maimonides Scholar Program through the Tikvah Fund. It was a series of courses for Jewish students, primarily focused on religion, philosophy, and history. I learned a lot, and got to meet Jewish students from around the world. I am also working as a staff photographer for JGirls this summer, a national online magazine for Jewish teenage girls. Though not quite how I usually spend my summers, I’m glad I have access to so many online resources, which are not only interesting and educational but will look great as I prepare my college applications this fall.”

“I’m grateful to have spent time outside, and it’s been so meaningful to have followed in my great-grandfather’s footsteps.”



Mattie T

“Due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, my summer camp was canceled. My friends and I were so sad but decided to still try to go on some sort of trip—to try to do something fun during a depressing time. Our trip ended up being a 100-mile section of the NY/NJ Long Path and we hiked 12 out of the 35 tallest mountain in the Catskills mountain range. It took our group of 7 teenage boys and 2 guides 14 days to complete this hike. All in all, we were able to make amazing memories during this sad time.”

Emily F

“At the beginning of the summer, I was in a bit of a funk, because in years past, I had always spent my summer in Maine attending sleep away camp. The beginning of my summer break happened to coincide with the Black Lives Matter protests, and although I personally could not attend them, I began to read articles, have important (and sometimes uncomfortable) conversations, sign petitions, and promote Social Justice on my social media. I also started a card-making business, in which I donate all profits to the Okra Project, an organization that helps Black Trans people struggling with food insecurity. For the month of July, my family spent time up in the Catskills. We hiked, swam, canoed, rafted, ate, and just enjoyed being outside without needing to wear a mask. I also began reading *White Rage* by Carol Anderson, which has continued to open my eyes to the white supremacy that exists in America. Even though Black Lives Matter is no longer “trending,” it is important to continue to educate ourselves and fight for justice, as our work is far from over.”

Anais K

“This summer, I got to travel despite the difficult circumstances due to COVID-19. I went to Paris, and got to have a lot of fun because the French were no longer in lockdown. I spent time with my mom’s family, which was awesome. I visited my friend in Montauk, which was really cool because I hadn’t been to a beach in ages. I then proceeded to go to Wyoming. I hiked every day, and it’s really wonderful to get out of NY. During my vacation I used my social media (Instagram) to speak out about Black Lives Matter (BLM), women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, and more. Earlier in the summer, I also got to participate in BLM rallies to fight for justice for Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Overall, I enjoyed my summer very much, and have been positive despite the pandemic.”

“I also started a card-making business, in which I donate all profits to the Okra Project, an organization that helps Black Trans people struggling with food insecurity.”



Meet our B'nai Mitzvah:

September 12: Bar Mitzvah of **Gray Gordon**
(parents Heather & Seth), Parashat Nitzavim

October 17: Bat Mitzvah of **Ella Cohen**
(parents Lilian & Jacob), Parashat Bereshit

October 24: Bar Mitzvah of **Jacob Palmer**
(parents Yami & Jason), Parashat Noach



Reinventing Our Religious School Program During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Shalom,

I hope everyone has enjoyed the summer and is healthy and safe.

Back in June, in the previous issue of *Kesher*, I shared with the community our experience of reinventing our beloved Religious School program just a few days after we concluded our joyous in-person *Purim* festivities. Together with our faculty members, we had to approach our practice from scratch and create a new virtual learning experience. Our goal was to impart a sense of community and belonging while maintaining physical separation during the pandemic. No one was prepared or equipped for such a dramatic change almost overnight, but we did it! Since mid-March through the end of the school year this past June, our students were engaged, connected, and educated by our devoted team of teachers and educators. We continued to celebrate holidays and *Shabbat*, sing, pray, practice Hebrew, and meaningfully interact with each other through the Zoom videoconferencing platform. Moreover, our virtual program had been such a successful experiment that we were able to continue our activities through June by creating a weekly virtual mini-camp for students in grades 1-4. This entire experience taught us how important it was to remain present in our children's and families lives, especially during these challenging and trying times. For me and for every faculty member it was a blessing to remain connected with our learners and to be able to continue our sacred task of imparting millennia-old Jewish traditions, values, and a sense of belonging.

As the pandemic continues, we are in the process of preparing for a school year like no other. The difficult nature of this time underlines the importance of ensuring the strong grounding our children need in Jewish life. A deep sense of history, a call to *tikkun olam*, to repair our world, and a sense of mission, belonging, and hope are just some of the Jewish traditions that we seek to impart at our Religious School. It has never been more necessary than during these trying times.

Religious School Plan for Starting This Fall

That said, I'd like to offer an update on the year to come. With our recent experiences in mind, we are planning for several scenarios in the new school year that will educate and engage our students, and also meet our high expectations for excellence. This includes all Religious School programs, as well as several opportunities for youth and family engagement. We are optimistic about this coming year, and excited to be thinking of new ways to extend our sacred community far beyond our physical walls. So what is our plan?

Within the guidelines from the state and local authorities and the CDC recommendations for gatherings and events, we will reopen our Religious School program in October... our goal is to maintain flexibility.

Within the guidelines from the state and local authorities and the CDC recommendations for gatherings and events, we will reopen our Religious School program in October—be it in person,

virtually, or a hybrid program. Our plan is to maintain flexibility. No matter what, your teachers, *madrichim*, and clergy will be ready and awaiting your return. Our calendar is set and we look forward to your family being a part of it all!

As always, health and safety will remain our top priority. When more information is available to us we will confirm our fall reopening plans and schedules and communicate them with you.

We look forward to continuing to build our community and live Jewishly as we grow and learn together.

L'shalom,
Alex Tansky
Director of Education
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Religious School Outdoor Open House and Meet Rabbi Fersko

Sunday, September 13 • 1:00-2:00 pm

Our combined “Meet the Rabbi” and “Religious School Outdoor Open House” takes place on Sunday, September 13.

We are going to close the street in front of The Village Temple and celebrate face-to-face and mask-to-mask.

Please join us!



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

with the staff and lay leadership, we are using every ounce of our creative, religious, administrative, and pedagogic sensibilities to ensure that The Village Temple will be here for you at the highest possible level. Together, we are finding our way forward.

As we enter into this High Holy Days season, I wish you my most sincere gratitude and prayers for the new year. May 5781 bring you good health. May God bless you with joy, with prosperity, and with community. May your life be guided by the knowledge that Judaism has been here always and will be here always for you—in times of triumph and in times of trauma. May you go from strength to strength and may you be strengthened. *Shana Tovah!*

Rabbi Diana Fersko
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Shabbat walk



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