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

Welcome to Kesher

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DISABILITIES AWARENESS, ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION
SHABBAT SERVICE, SPEAKER AND DINNER
Friday, February 21, 6:45pm

“Our fight for disability rights—and why we’re not done yet.”
Special Guest Speaker: Judith Heumann

Judith Heumann is an international advocate for Disability Rights. Appointed by President Obama, Judy became the first U.S. Special Advisor for International Disability Rights. She has served as a disabilities advisor to the World Bank and as the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Judy has been featured in a TED Talk as well.

Judith contracted polio as a child and experienced discrimination when she was five years old and denied access to schooling, being labeled a ‘fire hazard.’ Judy holds an undergraduate degree from Long Island University and a Masters in Public Health from UC Berkle.

Judith will speak during our Shabbat Service and then participate in a Q & A at a dinner following services. Please contact Liotte Greenbaum, lgreenbaum@villagetemple.org to reserve a space at the dinner. $20 per person or visit https://villagetemple.org/make-a-payment/ to make your payment. All are welcome to attend the service beginning at 6:45 pm.
On January 18th the Torah portion read in synagogues around the world will be Shemot—the first chapters of the Book of Exodus—the foundation of Jewish “otherness”—the text that teaches us about vulnerability and persecution. It is the foundation upon which Judaism teaches the ethical imperative of inclusion and equality. This year, parashat Shemot will be read on the Shabbat honoring the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Indeed, in America, African Americans, from the moment they were brought as slaves to this land of opportunity, experienced the otherness, vulnerability, and persecution our ancestors experienced in Egypt. Dr. King became a beacon of light that still pierces the darkness of prejudice in our world.

On MLK weekend, 15 of our teens will travel to Georgia and Alabama to touch history and learn first-hand about the Civil Rights struggles in our country. I hope their visit to the Equal Justice Initiative’s Legacy Museum and Memorial for Peace and Justice will be engrained in their hearts and minds for years to come. I have no doubt our teens’ journey will be as transformative as the one adult members experienced last May.

On Friday, January 24 our congregation will gather for our annual MLK Shabbat featuring our children’s choir. In addition, we will hear from a few of our teens about their experience the previous weekend. I can think of no greater tribute to Dr. King’s memory than having youth be our teachers of justice and mercy.

On the adult trip last May, on our way to the Ebenezer Baptist Church where Dr. King sometimes preached, we made a brief stop at AIDS Quilt Project. At first glance, this visit seemed out of place. What does AIDS have to do with the Civil Rights struggles in America. Let us return to our Torah portion for that weekend for the explanation. Like African Americans, people with AIDS, especially at the time of the AIDS Quilt Project, were treated like other—considered outcasts and were objects
In 2018 I gave a speech on Kol Nidre about my mother’s father, Boris. My grandfather was a religious person, committed to both ritual and prayer, and due to financial problems during the depression, he had to give up his temple membership. The loss of a place to pray was a break that was not healed in his lifetime. He never gave up on religion. He just gave up on the organized part. Being a member of the Village Temple is being part of organized religion. Still, I like to think we are organized just enough to foster our spiritual home and educate the next generation.

It was particularly meaningful to hold the Mazkor with my grandfather’s name during services, and I even held it up during the speech.

This year when I entered the Great Hall at Cooper Union for erev Rosh Hashanah services, I was handed a prayer book with my grandfather’s name. While I knew that we match congregants with their prayer books, I was still taken back by the small gesture that means so much to our family. If you have a bookplate story to share, please let me or Sarah King, our co-president know, and we will post it in the next issue of Kesher.

Fred Basch, Co-President
fredbasch@nyc.rr.com
Sarah King Co-President
Sarahking123@gmail.com

A Letter From Rabbi Hirsch, continued from page 2

Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Shabbat

People with disabilities are too often the 21st century “other.” On February 21 our congregation will host our annual Disability Awareness and Inclusion Shabbat. This year, we are most fortunate to welcome Judith Heumann as our guest speaker. A full description of this Shabbat is on the cover.

Our Haggadah teaches, “in every generation we are to see ourselves as if we, ourselves, came out of Egypt.” In remembering our roots of otherness, in learning about ‘otherness’ in our society today, in challenging ourselves to pursue justice by embracing those who remain outcasts, we live the ethical code entrusted to our ancestors who fled slavery in Egypt.

Rabbi Deborah A. Hirsch
Rabbidhirsch@villagetemple.org
We are pleased to report that our search for a permanent rabbi is proceeding very well. Twenty-two rabbis from around the country have shown interest in The Village Temple. The search committee has interviewed several via Skype, and then brought three finalists in for in-person meetings. To our delight, the candidates have exceeded expectations. At this point we are parsing excellence.

By mid-January, we hope to bring the top candidates back for meetings with Rabbi Hirsch, Cantor Bach, religious school director Alex Tansky, executive director Sandy Albert, and the board of directors. In addition, representatives from the youth group, the ritual committee and other critical constituencies will be included in this process. Shortly after that, the committee will make a recommendation to the board. Our hope is to introduce our new rabbi to you before spring, with the actual transition taking place on July 1.

This search has deepened our understanding of the qualities that make an excellent rabbi, and given us even greater appreciation of the role’s complexity. Especially in a small shul like ours, the rabbi has to be a spiritual leader, teacher, confidante, and community builder for the congregation, as well as a thoughtful, organized manager of staff. We want someone who foremost cares deeply about The Village Temple but who is also plugged into the wider Jewish world.

The process has made us all the more appreciative of Rabbi Hirsch, who has spent the last three and a-half years demonstrating what excellence looks like. We have all come to appreciate the larger Reform movement as well, which provides connection and guidance for progressive American Jews seeking ways to find relevance today in Jewish tradition, history, and culture. We’ve been grateful for the oversight of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the organization that manages the match between rabbis and congregations for Reform Jewish synagogues. Please contact us if you have questions about the process.

Marlowe Greenberg and Julie Salamon, co-chairs
Fred Basch and Sarah King, ex-officio
Carole Sadler
David Friedman
Jamil Simon
Larry Klurfeld
Emily Hacker
Julie Safer
Gabrielle Haskell

A HUGE THANK YOU TO OUR HIGH HOLY DAYS APPEAL DONORS

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Ester & Joe Siegel
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Matt Susskind & Katherine Kornblau
Nelly Szlachter
Amy Wolf & John Hatfield
Shalom,

I am a strong proponent of the idea that one learns by doing and I am not alone in this philosophy. Not only is there a strong movement across the Jewish educational world and the secular world to engage students through active experiences, but this idea is not new. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said, “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.” (Nichomachean Ethics). Our ancient rabbis, often at odds with the Greek philosophers, agreed with Aristotle on this one!

Our students are engaged in “learning by doing” as they explore lessons through active and project-based learning. I am so proud of each and every one of our faculty members.

Turn the ancient calendar ahead to the year 5780. Here we are at The Village Temple facing the smiling faces of our children. They are ready to learn about the heritage and beauty of our tradition. Are we ready to teach them? The answer is a resounding “YES”! Our faculty is always working hard to learn and incorporate new learning styles and methodologies into our classrooms to make them more accessible and interesting to our students. Peek into a classroom and you will see our students working in small groups, some on the floor, some at tables, some standing in a circle. No, our teachers have not lost control of their classes. Our students are engaged in “learning by doing” as they explore lessons through active and project-based learning. I am so proud of each and every one of our faculty members. What I have asked of them is a radical change from the traditional, frontal methods of transmitting Jewish knowledge. Our teachers now function as facilitators and guides for our students, encouraging them to make choices on which aspects of a topic they choose to explore and how that exploration shall proceed. “Learning by Doing” is not reserved for our Judaic studies classrooms alone. Our Hebrew classrooms adopt many of these learning techniques as well. I look forward to learning more innovative Hebrew methodologies at the Association for the Reform Jewish Educators Annual Gathering in Denver in January.

L’shalom,
Alex Tansky
Director of Education
atansky@villagetemple.org
If you walk into any Religious School classroom at The Village Temple, you will see teenagers helping out as teaching assistants. All these teens grew up at VT, became b’nai mitzvah here, and are now giving back to their community by working with younger students.

Our synagogue is a second home to many; a safe space and a happy place for teens to be with their friends. When the stress and pressure from secular life is overwhelming, teens find solace at The Village Temple because this community is their extended family.

Our high school seniors are now beginning to find out about their college acceptances. The juniors are taking the SATs and touring colleges all around the country. Sophomores and freshmen are studying and busy with extracurricular activities to prepare themselves for the future. Everyone is extremely over-programmed, over-scheduled, and anxious about their lives. Yet all of these teens find time to come to temple at least once a week to volunteer their time. They teach Hebrew letters and vowels in the classrooms. They participate in youth group events. They go to Shabbat services.

There are 15 teens going to Alabama on the Etgar 36 Civil Rights Journey over Martin Luther King Jr. weekend (a few of whom will be speaking about their experience at services on January 24).

Our newsletter is called Kesher, which means “connection.” Our religious school students clearly find a connection at The Village Temple, and they keep that connection throughout middle school, high school, and beyond. No matter why teens choose to be part of the temple, it is amazing to see them come back year after year, and know they are always welcome here.

Liotte Greenbaum, RJE
Director of Community Engagement
lgreenbaum@villagetemple.org

TEENS AT THE VILLAGE TEMPLE

**save the date**

**JANUARY**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 6:45 PM:**
Martin Luther King (MLK) Shabbat
The Children’s Choir will participate in services and our teens will speak about their experiences on the Etgar 36 Civil Rights Journey to Alabama and Georgia the preceding week.

**FEBRUARY**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 6:45 PM:**
Jazz Shabbat
Join Cantor Bach, Anita Hollander, and VT member Antoine Dyre along with our own Hila Kulik with her awesome Jazz combo for another romping, rousing Jazz Shabbat, as our musicians merge their gifts and talents with our clergy. We’ll have an extra musical Shabbat and snap and sway along to our liturgy set to the jazz standards our community has come to love, as well as to some new jazz arrangements by Hila Kulik.

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 6:45 PM:**
“Our fight for disability rights—and why we’re not done yet.” Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Shabbat
Our service will include a talk by Judith Heumann, an international disability civil rights activist, and will be followed by a dinner and Q & A. This promises to be a very enlightening evening. Please contact Liotte Greenbaum, lgreenbaum@villagetemple.org to reserve a space at the dinner—$20 per person. Or visit https://villagetemple.org/make-a-payment/ to make your payment. All are welcome to attend the service beginning at 6:45.
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<td>5:30-6:15 pm Bim Bam Shabbat</td>
<td>6:45 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Services featuring Choir &amp; VT Teen Speakers</td>
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RS = Religious School  C = Classes  S = Service  ♩ = Choir  E = Events  B = Board Meeting
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**THE VILLAGE TEMPLE**  
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