

Keshet

THE NEWSLETTER



Parent Social, VT style.

Come as you are. Discover who you are.

April/May 2021 / 5781

Welcome to Keshet

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

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JUNE 16, 2021 • 7:00 PM

The VT Spring Fundraising Gala: A Pandemic Year in Retrospect

Join us on Zoom this evening when we will honor front-line health-care workers, teachers, and others in our temple community. You will get an up close and personal look into how this past pandemic year affected their professional and personal lives.

We hope you will join us in this important fundraising event for The Village Temple.

And yes, there WILL BE MUSIC!

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.



A LETTER FROM **RABBI FERSKO**



Spring is here! The city is alive. Summer is in sight. With more and more of the city vaccinated, optimism is creeping in. We at The Village Temple are also feeling encouraged. We are thrilled to share that the sanctuary is open! We invite you to come back to your house of worship, to pray with us, and to give yourself some much-needed spiritual nourishment. You may notice some changes to our building — we've invested in our physical space in ways you can see and ways you can't. We are also very happy to report that we are working hard towards reopening the Religious School in person in the fall. Nothing would make me happier than hearing the sounds of children in our building.

“We close our seder with the words “Next Year in Jerusalem.” It means that we aim for a better year next year, that we will take the risk of being hopeful, that we pray for a world redeemed.”

And yet, despite all the progress, we know that so many in our community are suffering. The rash of anti-Asian violence has been devastating. To all of the Asian

American members of our community, we stand with you. We pray for you and with you, we protest on your behalf, and we will not tolerate one moment more of this baseless hatred. If you are feeling vulnerable and need a space to process, or if you have action steps you recommend for The Village Temple, we want to know. So many members of our synagogue have faced challenges this year whether they be physical, emotional, or economic. The Village Temple is here for you in times of need. Please let us support you in any way we can.

For me, the phrase at the end of the Passover Seder has become a bit of a mantra. We close our seder with the words “Next Year in Jerusalem.” It means that we aim for a better year next year, that we will take the risk of being hopeful, that we pray for a world redeemed. That is my prayer for all of you, that your days become brighter, that your community becomes broader, and that the world becomes healthier.

*L'shalom,
Diana
rabbifersko@villagetemple.org*

THANK YOU TO OUR RECENT VT DONORS

Nancy Berliner

Charles Binder

Rebecca Freidricks

Bill Abrams & Julie Salamon

Lia Levenson & Evan Oppenheimer

Sandi Tamny

Andrew and Jill Wilkinson

A LETTER FROM THE CO-PRESIDENTS



Good Changes are Coming

Spring is in the air! Days are getting longer! Vaccinations are HERE! NYC is BACK!! Can you tell we are excited? It's finally starting to feel like normalcy is returning. And we hope you are all staying healthy and safe. Know that we cannot WAIT until we can all be together again, like we were, pre-pandemic. When we get back together be ready for some changes. We have updated the office, replaced our old chairs and most of the seating in the sanctuary. We have security upgrades on tap, so when you do come back and we share each other's company, we will also be safe and more comfortable.

Until then, we continue to stay connected in whatever way we can – whether through live streamed shabbat services, joining us in person in the sanctuary (with the appropriate Covid measures and capacity in place), in-person outdoor services, and tons of programming

in between. We are hopeful that we are turning the corner and are excited about what the future holds for our temple and for our city.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication – we couldn't do this without all of you, our wonderful clergy, staff, lay leaders, and our many incredible volunteers. Thank you, thank you, thank you. CHEERS!

Jill and Fred

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What I'm reading now: Suggestions from all ages in our congregation

From Marina Levin

The Overdue Life of Amy Byler by Kelly Harms

I needed something lighthearted, but still relatable to a mom in her (cough-cough) mid 40's. Great literary references within the book (the main character is a librarian/school teacher) and the writing flowed easily. Recommend as a beach and/or Hudson River read.

From Katherine Lipton

Becoming by Michelle Obama

It is a fascinating account of Michelle Obama's perspective and her life, as her husband, Barack Obama, travelled his road to becoming President of the United States. I also find her account of life in the White House fascinating. She clearly and openly did not love the fact that Obama was drawn to politics, and she struggled finding an outlet for her own intellect, ambition, drive, and beliefs. It is a very relatable account of their lives.

From Katie Sperling

I'm Gonna Say It Now: The Writings of Phil Ochs

Editor: David Cohen

I am not always reading a book. Wish I always had the time to! But I am right now so am happy to share!

I was introduced to the folk singer Phil Ochs when a NYC radio station did an hour-long show on his music/life in the early 1980s when I was in high school and a frequent listener. After telling my parents of my new discovery, it turned out my father had an album, and I listened to it obsessively for weeks. So many great songs! This book compiles all of Phil Ochs' published and unpublished writing OTHER than his songs.

From Cantor Nancy Bach

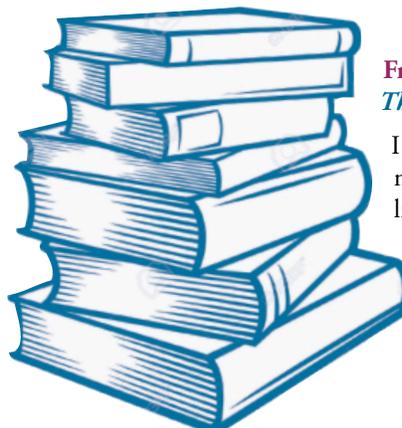
Murphy's Law by Rhys Bowen

While not a new release (it was initially published in 2001), I recently read this book and loved it. It's a fast and engaging read from page 1 for anyone who loves New York City and our shared history. A fabulous mix of the immigrant experience at the turn of the century, with an intriguing dose of romance and mystery.

From Izzie – 7th grade

I am Malala (younger version) by Malala Yousafzai

It is really inspiring to see this young girl fight for women's education equality, and it's a true story (autobiography), so it's scary to think what the education system would have been like without Malala.



From Juliette, 11 years old

The New Kid by Jerry Craft

I like it because it is a graphic novel and it really shows real life from the perspective of someone of color.

Shalom! EDUCATION NEWS



Shalom,

It is impossible to believe that mid-March marks a one-year anniversary of an unprecedented event in recent history and our generation. Due to a global Covid pandemic, each of us had to pause and reevaluate our priorities to come up

with an evolving plan that would sustain us. It did not come easy and without losses, illness, and struggle that challenged each of us. Hopefully, we as a community, will find that we are stronger because of these challenges.

Remote Religious School Learning and Gratitude

We kicked off our remote Religious School on Sunday, March 15, 2020 and I remember every minute of our shared experience that morning on Zoom. For an educator, it was one of the most rewarding experiences to be able to watch the faces of our students as they were clinging to their screens, sharing big smiles, and remotely connecting with their teachers and each other. It was clear that despite physical separation, each of them came to our virtual classroom not only to learn but most importantly to be together and interact—whether singing their favorite tunes, reciting prayers, or playing online games. I could feel the warmth, the friendships, and the power of



our community, even in a virtual space. After that first day of our remote learning and during the weeks that followed, so many parents had taken the time to write to me to express their gratitude

for our evolving remote Religious School program. Of course, it took a lot of fine-tuning and experimentation but we were able to provide our students and their families with what they needed most at that time – the sense of continuity and connection.

A lot has changed since then. We are now much more tech-savvy, we know how to engage our students in a meaningful virtual connection, how to provide them with interesting and new



content through fun online games, quizzes, and competitions. In terms of engagement, we have learned a lot about what works best in a virtual setting, but are still continuously enhancing our practices and ability to connect with our students and their families.

In-person Opportunities

And yet, when it comes to building connections and sustaining a community, nothing beats in-person

experiences. This year, while we still cannot gather in person in our building, we have had many opportunities to gather in person and each of these gatherings were amazing! Our Children's Choir members led by Anita Hollander made our community *Hanukkah* and *Purim* celebrations special opportunities to gather in front of the The VT and to rejoice with fellow congregants. Our outdoor and indoor *Shabbat* and *B'nai Mitzvah* services led by Rabbi Fersko and Cantor Bach create the sense of normalcy and continuation for everyone participating, whether in-person or online. A few weeks ago, just before *Purim*, Julia Levine, our Religious School teacher, along with Marina Levin, the Religious School Chair, and three wonderful teens joined me in a walk around the neighborhood and helped deliver *mishloach manot* – *Purim* giftbags containing masks, *hamentashen*, groggers, and holiday activities. What a delight it was for each of us to meet a few families in front of their building or in their lobbies, to reconnect with them and to share some *Purim* joy! I only wish we were able to visit all Religious School families that day, as we had so much fun that day!



Slowly but surely, we are now moving in the right direction and I know in the next weeks and months we will have more opportunities to gather, connect, and share the joy of belonging to this incredible Village Temple community.

L'shalom,

Alex Tansky

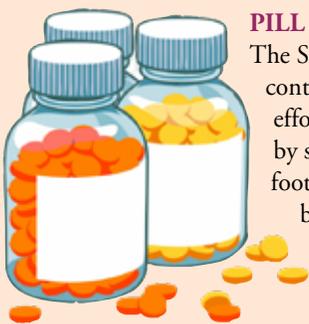
Director of Education

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Julia Levine, Marina Levin, Alex, and our children & teens deliver *mishloach manot* – Purim gift bags containing masks, *hamentashen*, groggers, and holiday activities – to some congregation families.



Tikkun Olam: The Village Temple Social Action Committee **Reducing our carbon footprint**



PILL BOTTLE RECYCLING

The Social Action Committee (SAC) is contributing to The Village Temple's efforts to be a responsible civic citizen by sharing ways to reduce our carbon footprint. Recycling empty pill bottles is one small step.

Due to the Covid pandemic, it is not possible for The VT to collect pill bottles in a barrel in the lobby, as we have done in pre-Covid days. However, you can still help in this effort by saving your empty pill bottles and sending them to a Cincinnati nonprofit.

Matthew 25: Ministries is an international relief organization, which was started in 1991 by Reverend Wendell Mettey after he made a trip to Nicaragua with doctors and nurses, carrying

supplies in a suitcase. Seeing so much poverty and devastation, Rev. Mettey promised himself to find a way to help the people of Nicaragua and others in need.

His system of recovering excess products which are deemed no longer useful by U.S. corporations and distributing them to people in desperate poverty has grown to sending more than 15 million pounds of products each year across the United States and to more than 60 countries worldwide.

Please send your EMPTY pill bottles, with paper identification removed to:

Matthew 25: Ministries
 11060 Kenwood Road
 Cincinnati, OH 445242

And thank you for your commitment to social action.

— Ede Rothaus

GIVING AT THE VILLAGE TEMPLE

Spotlight on Carole Sadler (as interviewed by Julie Salamon)

Q: Carole, you have been so generous to The Village Temple—both as a financial supporter and, just as important, as a lay leader. Could you tell Keshet what drew you to The VT community?

A: We joined the temple 11 years ago. Sadie attended Jewish pre-school and it was time for her to begin secular school and Hebrew school, so I wanted to find a temple. We attended a service and a Purim carnival at VT, met with the rabbi and Alex; and the rest, as they say, is history. We were always very welcomed by this community and immediately felt at home. I had not had that feeling in a synagogue since I was a small girl. And it was particularly important to me to find a comfortable place given the uniqueness of our family structure. I also felt that we could make a positive impact on the community, and do good within it, that it was an historically settled institution, but still quite intimate and in need of member support.

“...it was particularly important to me to find a comfortable place given the uniqueness of our family structure.”

At the time we joined I felt it was appropriate for us to make a long-term financial commitment. I worked with another board member to structure a 6-year giving plan through Sadie's bat mitzvah year, increasing our financial commitment leading up to the big event, with a larger gift in honor of that wonderful celebratory year. I saw that membership donations are crucial to sustaining our community. Here it really makes a difference, you're not “just another” financial contributor, you see how your money is put to good use. I'm a planner by nature, and so I liked the idea of setting out a goal for myself and working through it. By the end of that period, it had become a happy habit, and so we've continued to keep VT in our annual giving plans.

Q: You've been on The VT board of directors for about 10 years. You've devoted a tremendous amount of time to this volunteer position. What has been most gratifying about this role?

A: I've been on the board as long as we've been members. As I said, there was an immediate opening for me to work with the lay leaders to assist with legal work the temple needed done, which also gave me the opportunity to get to know many members quickly working on substantive matters for the synagogue. At that time there was an opportunity for newer members to take on some of the governance of the synagogue from others who had served for years and years...so it was good timing. Sadie was also attending religious school, which was another fun inroad for us to meet and gel with many members. I'm not a big “joiner”, so it has been very gratifying to me (and Sadie) to feel so connected to The Village Temple, attending services, events, and meetings.

Q: What was your religious upbringing? How is the VT similar and different?

A: I did not have a religious upbringing at all. My identification with Judaism was mostly cultural, through food and holidays. When



I was young and we lived in Queens, we attended a great shul where I went to Sunday school, and most of what I know of Jewish liturgy is from this time. We moved to the suburbs where we attended an enormous synagogue, and I never felt connected there, and that was pretty

much it. Cooking and holidays were always important to me and that is how I mostly maintained my connection to Judaism over the decades. I even made latkes on a 2-burner hot plate at my dorm in college prompting all the girls to emerge from their rooms in search of the origin of the wonderful smell!

Q: Your daughter Sadie has become a fixture in The VT High Holiday Services, as shofar blower par excellence. And she did a knockout job at her Bat Mitzvah ceremony. In addition to her Jewish identity, Sadie has a Chinese identity, which you've made an important part of her life. Could you talk a little about how you've fostered these dual identities and why you thought both were important?

A: When I was adopting a child, I knew I wanted the child to be raised in the Jewish faith, to fully bring them into my family. Since it was not a given based upon birth, I realized that I also needed to make a commitment to connecting to Judaism if I hoped for my child to feel part of it. So, I began my research, learning about conversion and baby naming, and figuring out how we would do this. I also wanted to honor my daughter's Chinese heritage. I found many intersections in Chinese culture and Jewish culture—eg, the importance of family, food, education. Sadie was converted right after she came home at 14 months, and I think one of the scariest things I've ever done was letting go of her for a split second before she could swim in the *mikvah*...she was a champ! Also, I designed a service program for her baby naming that the rabbi followed, which also took into account some Chinese rituals, such as distributing red eggs on the one month celebration of the birth of a baby. My whole family sat up 'til all hours of the morning cooking, dyeing, and painting red goose eggs to give out at Sadie's service and party! It was awesome! I love the idea that Judaism does not seek out converts, and that Sadie had to confirm that she wanted to be Jewish upon her *bat mitzvah*. I was so proud that she had found her own way to feeling and being Jewish, through her studies,

continued on page 7

save the date

APRIL

THURSDAY, APRIL 1:

3:30 PM: The VT Book Club; Discussion of *Antisemitism Here and Now* by Deborah Lipstadt

FRIDAY, APRIL 2:

5:00 PM: Passover Family *Shabbat Service* on Zoom with Rabbi Fersko and Student Cantor Kalix Jacobson

SATURDAY, APRIL 3:

10:00 AM: *Yizkor* on Zoom

THURSDAY, APRIL 8:

6:00 PM: *Yom Hashoah* program – Peggy Edelson talks about her family’s journey through the Holocaust

MAY

SUNDAY, MAY 2:

11:00 AM: Park Clean-up—Volunteers needed

FRIDAY, MAY 7:

6:00 PM: *Jazz Shabbat*—outside services (rain date May 14)

SUNDAY, MAY 16:

11:00 AM: Last Day of Religious School—outside celebration

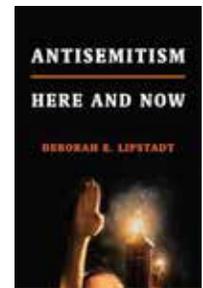
WEDNESDAY, MAY 26:

7:30 PM: Congregational meeting

DATE TBD:

Yom Ha’atzmaut – Israel Independence Day.

What’s next for the U.S. and Israel – Challenges and Opportunities in 2021. Join Rabbi Fersko in conversation with former congresswoman Shelby Moldinado who now serves as AIPAC’s Hispanic and Progressive Outreach Director. How does AIPAC view their relationship with the Biden administration? What are their goals for 2021? What are the hopes and challenges of engaging progressive Jewry in their mission?



Meet our B’nai Mitzvah:

April 10: **Max Held** – *Parashat Shemini*

May 1: **Sofia Susskind** – *Parashat Emor*

May 8: **Alexis Kagan** – *Parashat Behar/Bechutotai*

May 15: **Charles Cooper** – *Parashat Bemidbar*

May 22: **Emerson Geller** – *Parashat Nasso*

And our Adult Bar Mitzvah: April 24: **Arthur Rovine** – *Parashat Acharei Mot-K’doshim*

Mazal Tov to all!

Spotlight *continued from page 6*

our family, and particularly due to her feeling part of The VT community. Blowing the shofar and being known for that by our Congregation is just the cherry on top of the sundae.

Q: A big part of The VT ethos is a sense of community. How have you been able to maintain that feeling of connection this year, when we could not gather, and what is your biggest hope for The VT’s future?

A: Through this pandemic I have been particularly sustained by The VT community, both through my board work and through my weekly “sisterhood” calls with my closest friends from the temple.

We have made good progress as a synagogue through this strange period. We have welcomed a new Rabbi, done some renovations, and are poised for a strong reopening as the virus comes more and more under control. Working together on the board through this time has given me some sense of progress, when not much was otherwise happening. And, as for my “sisters”, these are people who over these 11 years have been at mitzvahs and funerals in my family, and who are part of the fabric of my life, whether we’re on Zoom or in the same room.

Thank you to Carole Sadler for your generous support!

The Downtown Center for Conversion Studies



The Village Temple is proud to announce that we are launching The Downtown Center for Conversion Studies. We offer classes for individuals and interfaith couples who are seeking conversion to Judaism. ***The class is open to members and non-members.*** Your studies will help you to discover more about holidays, lifecycle events, Jewish history, theology, and Jewish identity. This is a chance to explore difficult questions and to learn what you always

wanted to know about Jewish life with a group of thoughtful peers. We look forward to sharing your journey with you as you explore Judaism. Please help spread the word about this exciting new opportunity in our downtown community.

For more details, please contact Rabbi Diana Fersko at rabbifersko@villagetemple.org or call 212-674-2340 x1.



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