A very happy and healthy New Year and ... a new decade to all! Hope you’ve enjoyed sharing the sights, sounds and foods (of course!) of the season with family and friends.

There are several upcoming programs to keep you engaged over the winter months. The forecast is for a warmer-than-usual winter. Here’s hoping the meteorologists are right!

On Jan. 9th, Dr. Randal Schnoor will speak to us on “The Changing Jewish Family in Toronto.” He is a respected sociologist whose research has focused on how families create Jewish identity and meaning.

On Jan. 24, our Green Shabbat program will offer a cooking demo, challah bake, discussion and potluck dinner. Our guest speaker is a holistic nutritionist who will teach us the benefits of going “green” in eating, and how it relates to Jewish values. With all the focus these days on plant-based foods, this is a very timely topic.

In our last survey, we noted that several of our members requested an occasional daytime program. Thus, we are pleased to offer a talk on February 4th at Borochov presented by Baycrest staff entitled “Lifestyle and Healthy Brain Aging: What You Can Do to Protect Your Brain Health,” one of their outreach workshops.

Tu B’Shevat will be marked once again on by a communal Jewish-Indigenous Seder; date is February 9th, but location and time are TBA at this moment. It is a beautiful intercultural event marked by the sharing of nature traditions.

This year, we are offering two Purim programs: the first is “Sex and Violence in the Megillah” which will take place at Quaker Friends House, a downtown location we are testing out for occasional use. The second is our annual Family Purim Festival to be held at Borochov in the Social Hall.

During January and February, we are again soliciting items for The Period Purse, organized by our Tikkun Olam Oraynu committee. We hope you can help provide supplies for this worthy program.

As you know we are now collecting funds to assist in the reunification of our Syrian family with their remaining sister and her family. It has been so gratifying to see all the donations coming in, a full donor list will appear in the next issue of this newsletter.

A theatre event has been added for May 4th: the Harold Green Theatre Company’s production of “The Great Divide,” an award-winning drama about the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire tragedy. Reserve your tickets now; see details on p. 14.

Check out all our events and articles on these pages, then watch for our weekly “Email Blast” and register. We look forward to seeing you soon at one or more events.

Sandi
Sandi Horwitz, Editor
There are many wonderful things about Oraynu that I appreciate and love. We have shared incredible moments, joyous celebrations, and much laughter. One event stands out to me as the very best — the height of excitement and fulfillment and the very best expression of who we are and what we stand for. That event? When we welcomed Lina, Tamer, and Nour alongside their family Thanaa and Amyn in November 2016. It’s hard to believe that more than three years have passed. The family, with lots of amazing volunteer support from Oraynu, have settled. Lina has recently completed a training program which will allow her to get a great job as a medical technician. Nour has acclimatized to life here and has a busy friend group. The other sisters (three were sponsored at the same time) all live in the same building so the kids can all grow up near each other. It has been incredible to see.

Now we are once again being called on to help. There is one sister who remained in Syria — her name is Wafaa. She has two teenage boys who are kind and brilliant. They fled Syria under impossible conditions and are now in Malaysia, where they are relatively safe but still not accepted and able to build a life. We’d like to reunite Wafaa and her family with the rest of her family here.

There are many worthy things to do with one’s money. And there is such a thing as donor fatigue — we know that and do not want to make Oraynunits feel squeezed. We also know that there are certain Jewish values that may prompt us to try to help where we can. Supporting this family who isn’t Jewish might just be the most Jewish thing we do this year!

Jewish teachings and culture value family and community. If we are able to help reunite this family that will be a terrific expression of how our culture dovetails with theirs, for Ismaili Muslims also care deeply about family and community.

The Torah tells us often to remember or love the stranger, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt. In terms of both geography and culture, we share a deep history with those from the Middle East and surrounding region who have been affected by persecution, exile, wandering. This Passover, wouldn’t it be amazing to tell the story of how this family, having been through an exodus of their own, is preparing to be all in one place for the first time in decades, in the promised land we call Canada?

The most important Jewish values we hold dear are Tikun Olam and Tzedakah. Tikun Olam means repairing the world. It is astonishing and heartbreaking what has happened to Syria, including its troves of art and artifacts. We can’t repair it but we can do our part to bring wholeness to this family. Tzedakah means both charity and justice. In giving money in this instance, we will be fostering justice.

One of the reasons this family fled was that the boys were reaching military age. They could not conceive of these young men having to kill their brethren in an unjust war. I cannot imagine facing the choice of having my children be conscripted into an evil army or fleeing for our lives.

I hope to be at the airport when this family arrives and, once again, experience the indescribable feeling of knowing that we made a huge difference. I hope you’ll join me in getting them here and welcoming them when they arrive.

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO REUNITE OUR SYRIAN FAMILY

As you read in Rabbi Denise’s Dec. 19th email, we are partnering with other GTA donors and organizations known to the family to assist in bringing their remaining sister and her family here to Toronto. The ultimate goal is $48,333, with $29,000 required by March to start the process.

Oraynu will issue tax receipts to all donors and collect all contributions in a special fund. We will then donate it to the Displaced Syrian Families Reunification Fund, part of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, as a lump sum just before the March deadline.

Within hours of that initial email, we had received over $7000, and at the time of this writing, we have received over $10,000! Please be as generous as you can. There is no higher expression of our Jewish and Humanistic values than to help others who are in need. We made a significant difference before. Let’s do it again!
UPCOMING EVENTS

THE CHANGING JEWISH FAMILY IN TORONTO

with Dr. Randal F. Schnoor, sociologist/author

For many Jews today: the family, in contrast to the synagogue, organizations, and the larger community has become the most important setting for creating identity and Jewish meaning. Dr. Schnoor’s recent book (co-authored with Alex Pomson) entitled Jewish Family: Identity and Self-Formation at Home (Indiana University Press, 2018) explores the power and magic of this family system, especially as it provides Jewish meaning through key moments in the life course. The book is the result of ten years of research focused on a small sample of diverse Jewish families in downtown Toronto who were interviewed several times over the course the decade.

Dr. Randal F. Schnoor (PhD 2003, McGill University), a sociologist, specializes in the qualitative study of contemporary Canadian Jewish life. He has been teaching Jewish Studies for more than a decade at the Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies at York University. He has examined Jewish identity, Jewish day schools, Hasidic Jews, gay Jews, Jewish poverty in Toronto, approaches to engaging interfaith families, South African Jews in Toronto, among others.

Non-members welcome: $15

Thursday, Jan. 9
7:30 pm
Borochov Cultural Centre
272 Codsell Ave. (Wilson Hts/Sheppard)

Tikkun Olam Oraynu presents
GREEN SHABBAT: COOK, EAT, LEARN

with special guest Karen Gilman
Part Cooking Class, Part Info Session, Part Community Celebration and Dinner!!

Come learn about this movement to incorporate more plant-based foods into your diet, what that has to do with Judaism and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), and what it can do for your health. This program is for everyone - singles, couples and families. Karen Gilman, a certified holistic nutritionist, will discuss the benefits of going green at meal-time, and will include a participatory cooking demo for adults and kids.

Find out:
• how to make vegetarian cooking easy and delicious (shopping, cooking, and more)
• choosing plant-based proteins
• raising a plant-based family, ensuring everyone’s nutritional needs are met (kids’ too!)

She’ll be cooking up a vegetarian chili with our help, and we will bring pot-luck sides, salads and desserts, yum!! This program will NOT be about guilting people about their meat consumption. Rather, it’s an exploration of how to go a little more green in a way that fits your lifestyle.

ADDED BONUS: Bake your own challah to take home! It IS Shabbat, after all!

RSVPs requested | Free for Oraynu members and school families; otherwise $20 pp. PLUS your potluck contribution, of course!!

Friday, Jan. 24
6:30 pm
Borochov Centre Social Hall (as above)

Unless otherwise indicated, kindly RSVP for ALL EVENTS:
416-385-3910 | roby@oraynu.org | via online event link
Non-members always welcome for a nominal fee
**Tuesday, Feb. 4**
10 am
Borochov Cultural Centre
272 Codsell Ave
(Wilson Hts/Sheppard)

Join us for a daytime program!

**BRAIN HEALTH WITH BAYCREST**
Baycrest is presenting their workshop: **Lifestyle and Healthy Brain Aging: What You Can Do to Protect Your Brain Health**
Come find out what you can do to promote brain health throughout your life, and what Baycrest’s cutting edge research is all about.

*Non-members welcome: $15*

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**Sunday, Feb. 9**

**JEWISH INDIGENOUS TU B’SHEVAT SEDER**
We will once again be partnering to bring an Indigenous/Jewish Tu B’shvat seder to the Oraynu and broader Jewish communities. Come enjoy the new year of the trees, including delicious food, beautiful music, and a chance to make a difference in the lives of Indigenous Canadians through advocacy. The Seder, developed by Rabbi Denise and Indigenous teacher Kim Wheatley, is now in its fifth year.

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**Sunday, Feb. 23**
10:00am-12:15pm
Lipa Green Bldg.,
4th floor
4600 Bathurst St.

NEUBERGER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE VISIT
Every year our grade 6 School kids and their parents visit the Centre for a guided visit which includes viewing exhibits, seeing films and a visit with a Holocaust survivor, if available. **Open to all Oraynu members, ages 12+**.
No charge to attend, but voluntary donations are requested.
**RSVP by Feb. 10th to Steve Shabes at: stevenshabes@yahoo.com/**

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**Thursday, Mar. 5**
7:30 pm
Quaker Friends House
60 Lowther Avenue
(St. George/Bloor)

**PURIM EVENT - SEX AND VIOLENCE IN THE MEGILLAH**
We tend to think of Purim as a kids’ holiday, but the text it’s based on includes demeaning sexual content, egregious violence, and a story that should make us cringe, not carnival! Come learn about sex and violence in the Megillah and also how this very secular text gets religious-ized by some rabbis. And then, of course, we party!

*Non-members welcome: $15*

**Note: This is a new location we are trying out.**
We have heard from many of you that you want spaces that are more central and subway accessible. Please come so we can gather feedback on this space!

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**Sunday, Mar. 8**
10:00 am
Borochov Centre
Social Hall
272 Codsell Ave.

**FAMILY PURIM FESTIVAL**
Presentations ~ Music with Carl ~ Purim Shpiel
Hamentaschen ~ Costumes ~ Carnival Fun
Cupcake Decorating & Sale

**PURIM TZEDAKAH:** Collection of Kosher for Passover Food for National Council of Jewish Women’s Passover Food Drive for needy Jewish Families

*Guests welcome: Adults $8, Children $4, Family max. $20*

This program is part of Oraynu’s commitment to Family Education, funded in part by your donations.
**The Period Purse & Tikkun Olam Oraynu Project**

**Needs your help this January and February to make our spring purse packing event on March 29th a success.** Please drop off donations of the following items at Oraynu Children’s School (131 Fenn Ave. Toronto). Use the back entrance at the parking lot.

**Drop off on Sundays: Jan. 12, 19, 26, and Feb. 2, 9, 23**
- Ziploc bags
- New or used excellent condition purses, backpacks or totes (large only—must fit box of tampons & pack of pads + comforting items)
- Tampons, pads and new Menstrual Cups. Please do not send menstrual products from the dollar store
- New black socks and new underwear (size large or extra large)
- Wipes (baby wipes, moist towelettes)
- New face cloths and bars of soap
- Chocolate bars and granola bars
- New or used good condition, washed scarves, hats, and mittens

The Period Purse is a volunteer-run non-profit organization that strives to achieve menstrual equity by providing marginalized menstruators with access to free menstrual products, and to reduce the stigma surrounding periods through public education and advocacy. The organization launched in February 2017 with the goal of making one purse. Today, The Period Purse has handed out over 8,700 purses and over 7,800 refill period packs, each containing period products, comforting items and a motivational note. The Period Purse seeks to provide individuals experiencing homelessness with a much-needed emotional boost. **For more information, visit:** [https://www.theperiodpurse.com](https://www.theperiodpurse.com)

**Saturday, Mar. 21**
**11:00 am**
**Location: TBA**

**GLOBAL REFUGEE SHABBAT & RABBI’S BRUNCH**
As suggested by Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS), we are participating in “Global Refugee Shabbat” — a day when Jewish communities everywhere will hopefully turn their attention to refugee issues. Rabbi Denise will do a Shabbat morning service and speak about Jewish teachings on welcoming the stranger. We will be joined by our Syrian friends Thanaa, Amyn, Lina, Tamer and Nour who will contribute some Syrian food to our Rabbi’s Brunch.

**Non-members welcome: $15**

**Thursday nights,**
**7:00-9:30 pm**
**Borochov Cultural Centre**
**272 Codsell Ave.**

**Coming up in March:** The return of Rabbi Eva Goldfinger’s popular adult education series. The first session is March 26th.

**MARKINGS OF JEWISH LIFE CYCLES: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION**
Whether this will be your first time, or you have been coming for years, join Rabbi Eva for these exciting and mind-expanding sessions on the varying origins and evolution of Jewish beliefs about the meaning and marking of the cycles of life, from conception to death. Discover the evolving practices and the similarities and differences between religious and humanistic rites and rituals.

**March 26:** Jewish Birth and Death Rituals: From Superstition to Science

**April 30:** Bar/Bat Mitzvot and Conversions: Torah Optional Commitment to Judaism

**May 28:** Courtship and Marriage: From Property to Love Subjects

**Plus Sunday morning, April 19, 10:00-12:30 pm:**
Jewish Life from Birth to Death: Humanistic and Religious Markings/Celebrations

**Location: Oraynu Children’s School @St. Andrew’s JHS, 131 Fenn Ave.**

**Non-members welcome: $20 per session**
Why won’t the Toronto Board of Rabbis welcome me?

By RABBI DENISE HANDLARSKI

I am a Toronto rabbi who was recently rejected by the Toronto Board of Rabbis (TBR). I’d love to tell you why but, despite multiple attempts, they won’t tell me. It’s clear, though, that it’s for one of the following reasons: I identify as – and lead Jews who identify as – secular; I am intermarried and officiate a lot of intermarriage ceremonies and I am part of, and was ordained by, the Secular Humanistic Jewish movement.

I meet their stated requirements. According to the group’s website, the Toronto Board of Rabbis is “Ontario’s oldest and only multi-denominational rabbinic organization. Its members lead synagogues, educate in schools, comfort the ill in hospitals, and guide the Jewish community in happy and challenging times.” But clearly, there is something unstated going on.

Most of the rabbis on the TBR are likely unaware that I applied, let alone was rejected. A small group made the determination – and also determined that they would keep the reasons for their decision secret. So while this is partly about me being excluded, it’s also about a dynamic I think is dangerous and toxic within Judaism much more broadly. Certain leaders seem so intent on “Jewish continuity,” that they are turning an awful lot of people away and reducing Judaism to a narrow set of practices.

Hanukkah is around the corner, and during this historical holiday it is interesting to look back. Yes, Antiochus was suggesting that Jews Hellenize. There were external threats. But the Maccabees, heroic as they were in defending their right to practise their religion, were also religious zealots. If you were the kind of Jew who wanted to secularize, who was open to the literature, sport, and education that came with Hellenization, they’d have killed you. (Ironically, the Maccabees would have violently opposed the modern Maccabee games.)

Today we similarly face external threats, with a rise in anti-Semitic expression. But rather than banding together, our communities are rife with in-fighting. Far too many Jews and their rabbis are intent on a kind of zealotry that demands everyone pray, practise, and participate according to a strict set of guidelines.

The truth is that me being kept out of the TBR is a loss for me and my community in terms of collegial support and recognition. But it is equally a loss for the Toronto Jewish community and their rabbis. We represent a half-century of serving Jews in an innovative way that makes sense and offers meaning for our modern world. We have what to offer.

The good news? Jews like me are used to having doors slammed in our faces. We are good at finding a window to our fullness. The bad news? A lot of those gatekeeping rabbis will find they are defending a door few wish to enter. Jewish community – and, yes, Jewish continuity – will be harmed in the process.
Just a few days ago, the school community celebrated Chanukah. At Chanukah, we encourage the light as a symbol of joy and freedom. We light the chanukiah to celebrate the triumph of freedom over the despotic Hellenistic Greek king, Antiochus IV, whose desire to Hellenize us was reinforced by his ban of Jewish traditional practices. We speak of our pride at resisting a force that persecuted us and tried to overcome our culture with its own. We are happy that we fought to remain who we wanted to be. Now, we celebrate Chanukah as members of contemporary Canadian society, as people who have many freedoms. The school is pleased to provide our students with the opportunity to speak their minds, to use our freedom to voice our support for ethical and responsible social action.

One such opportunity where our students will be encouraged to speak their minds freely, will be a Grade 6 and 7 Bnai Mitzvah program in February led by climate justice activist, Aliénor Rougeot. You may remember Ali from many recent newscasts as she is the organizer of the youth climate strikes in the GTA, a non-partisan movement of youth demonstrating to demand action on the climate crisis. After Ali teaches our students more about the climate crisis, they will learn and practice advocacy skills in a letter writing workshop. They will be exercising their freedom to speak up in support of action to stop climate change, continuing a longstanding "tradition" of Jewish social activism in support of tikkun olam (repairing/bettering our world).

Another opportunity will occur in the Grade 6 class in January. The students will begin their study of the Holocaust from the point of view of valuing diversity and knowing when to resist tyranny, and learning about how important it is to protect freedom for all — to stand up against anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, and indeed, all attempts to subordinate individual rights.

Looking back at our Chanukah Festival, as we lit the lights on the school chanukiah, they not only brought us warmth and joy at the time of the holiday, but also reinforced our theme of freedom and the gratitude we feel to have agency over our lives.

Before lighting the candles, our multi-talented, deeply dedicated Grade 5-6 teacher, Risa Morris, retold The Story of Chanukah in a fun ‘call and answer’ fashion emphasizing our theme of freedom. Our phenomenal music teacher, Carl Berger, gave us the freedom to create our own wonky verses to The Dreidel Song. Who knew that a dreidel could be made out of "grass" and turn into “glass”? Etti’s Grade 7s, with the help of Carl’s drumming beat, performed our annual Chanukah Rap, to remind us that in 165 BCE there was little option left but to fight in an armed conflict: “Who’s for freedom? Follow me!”

Later, as our teens and grads lit the candles, I reflected on how, to me, all of them are shining lights at Chanukah and throughout the year. Many of our teens shine most brightly as they help us with our tasks at the school. And at Chanukah, nine of our “bright-light” teen volunteers and grads joined us to light the Chanukiah for the entire school.

As we looked at the candle light and were reminded that our community lives in an atmosphere of freedom, we were also reminded that not everyone on the planet shares in our good fortune. For some, poverty and domestic violence oppresses them. As has become our tradition, our Grade 7s reached out to the women and children at Nellie’s, a place of shelter, education and advocacy. They collected generous donations of toiletries from our families and members and packed them in beautiful gift bags with handwritten greeting cards for the clients at the shelter. Thank you to Rayna Morris for organizing, Risa Morris for purchasing supplies and Rae Brager for delivering the gift bags to Nellie’s.

Finally, Jennie Morris, our teen assistant in the Grade 1-2 class who is also the Youth Board Representative for the Society for Humanistic Judaism, reminded us about teen conclave in the spring. We look forward to sending a group of our teens to Farmington Hills, Michigan for conclave, an international gathering of humanistic Jewish teens on March 27. Together with their Youth Leader, Dani Israel McCoy, the Oraynu teens will focus on this year’s theme of Culture: Exploring Jewish Identity.

The staff and I look forward to a winter break affording some time and freedom to renew and replenish our creative energies. And, of course, after that we look forward to seeing you on our first day of the winter term, January 12th! A Happy Chanukah and New Year to all!

Steve
MARKING ORAYNU’S 50th ANNIVERSARY

By SANDI HORWITZ

On Saturday November 2nd, current members, founding members of the Secular Jewish Association (Oraynu’s predecessor), past members, school graduates and friends of Oraynu came together at Havergal College to mark this amazing milestone. And, what an wonderful evening it was as over 130 people gathered to share memories and celebrate.

The planning committee was headed up by Louise Sherman, and key players were Evie Goldstein and Risa Morris, who co-ordinated with Havergal on all the arrangements, Jim Sadler (assisted by Les Kelman) who gathered all the archival info, scanned all kinds of materials, collated data from multiple sources and prepared the slide show, plus Eva Goldfinger, Sandi and Robert Horwitz, Nanette Levine and of course Roby Sadler (who was fielding phone calls about attendance up to three hours prior to the event!). Special mention to David Morris for the fantastic poster boards he created on various aspects of Oraynu through the years (provided by Jim and Les) that attracted viewers throughout the evening. Thanks, as well, to Mark Frankel who acted as roving photographer and captured all the fun and camaraderie of the event.

Guests were greeted by the sounds of Mickey Lewin and his Ultimate Sound Trio who entertained us with a variety of music. Rabbi Eva Goldfinger officially welcomed everyone and talked about Oraynu’s beginnings as the Secular Jewish Organization (SJA), and the changes we have gone through over the years. Then there was a huge celebratory hora that went on for about 10 minutes.

A little later on, Rabbi Emerita Karen Levy told an amusing “fable” she had written that alluded to how the SJA came to be and its transition to Oraynu, then paying tribute to the founders. Sheila and Jerry Bain spoke on behalf of that group and made the first cut into a special anniversary cake. The founding cohort (20+ of them) then gathered for a terrific group photo. Having been a member now for 33 years, I knew many of them and it was wonderful to see so many in attendance. Hopefully they are proud of what they created, especially seeing its success 50 years later. They really gave a huge “gift” to those of us who followed by setting up the secular, cultural, humanistic group that evolved into Oraynu because it helped so many of us who would still be “wandering” or even lapsed to find a comfortable Jewish “home.”

Following this, Rabbi Denise Handlarski spoke about our commitment to social justice and tikkun olam, and then introduced Jenny Isaacs, an Oraynu school grad herself and past teacher at our School. Jenny is Executive Director of Heart to Heart, an organization that brings together Israeli Jewish and Palestinian teens to Ontario for a three-week camping experience meant to foster understanding and cooperation between the two groups -- skills which they then take back to Israel. Denise gave Jenny a cheque for $500 on behalf of Oraynu to honour Heart to Heart’s important work. We were also happy to welcome our Syrian family Lina and Tamer, and her sister Thanaa and Amyn, their anchor family, to the event.

Throughout the evening, everyone enjoyed a delicious assortment of hors d’oeuvres and yummy desserts. Board President Mark Brender closed the evening with a short speech thanking everyone for coming and remarking how we are now looking ahead to Oraynu’s next 50 years! Yasher koach, everyone!
PHOTOS FROM OUR 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Special thanks to Mark Frankel for all the photos
**Remembering Oraynu Member Rod McLeod**

**By RABBI KAREN LEVY**

Roderick James McLeod (1933-2019) was a devoted husband, father, and friend. He was fascinated by history, especially that of England and Scotland. A proud member of the Clan McLeod Society, he and Sue, his beloved wife of 42 years, enjoyed attending many clan gatherings. But far and above the call of heritage, Rod McLeod was a secularist, a humanist, and a universalist, to the depth of his being. He was a dedicated and life-long Unitarian, and an Oraynu member for the last 20 years, joining Sue at all the Oraynu events they could attend, especially the numerous major speaking events they sponsored, such as Steve Paikin and Jesse Wente. Rod loved learning. He and Sue and were committed to attending educational conferences in both the Unitarian and Humanistic Judaism movements, for as long as his health allowed. Not only did Rod attend, he very often helped make sure that every event was properly taped, by doing the job himself.

Rod was an avid reader of newspapers, an explorer of knowledge, and a seeker of truth and fact-based analysis. A skeptic, he had a keen nose for anything that did not pass his smell test for rational thinking and evidence. Perhaps it was his skepticism that gave him such a wonderfully dry wit and sense of irony. I treasured the political cartoons and clippings he would often bring me. Remembering that I read the Globe, he kindly made a point of bringing me material from the Post. Rod’s rationalism was enriched by his creativity. A graphic artist, he loved art of all kinds. His other great passion was music, both classical and jazz. On jazz cruises with Sue, they heard some of Canada’s greats while traveling around the world.

To honour Rod’s memory, Sue has invited Guido Basso to play at a memorial ceremony that will take place on Sunday January 11 at 2 pm, coordinated by Oraynu and First Unitarian Congregation, which will host the service. The address is 175 St Clair Ave West. Please join me then to pay tribute to Rod McLeod. He was truly one of kind.

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**Meet our New Members**

Oraynu welcomes our new school family:

Content removed for privacy reasons

*May the warmth of our community encircle you and your loved ones.*

**Nizkor - Let Us Remember**

We acknowledge the following memorial anniversaries (yahrtzeits), to be marked by our members:

Content removed for privacy reasons

Members are encouraged to add the names of family members to this list. Please take a moment to email the information for inclusion (date, name and relationship) to Roby Sadler at: roby@oraynu.org/
**THE BOOK CORNER**

Book Corner is a place to suggest books Oraynuiks may enjoy. Send them to Rabbi Denise for inclusion in the next Shofar: rabbidenise@oraynu.org

This issue’s suggestion and review comes from one of our newest members, Del Atwood, who lives in Nova Scotia:

**Becoming Eve: My Journey From Ultra Orthodox Rabbi To Transgender Woman**  
By ABBY CHAVA STEIN  

Autobiography is a tough mission. The author might be confronted with accusations of engaging in a vanity project. Or one’s life may prove uninteresting to a nit-picking readership—undoubtedly damaging to the ego to see one’s life story end up in the discount bin at Chapters after only a few weeks on the shelf.

Rarer are those memoirs that tackle a teaching objective—transforming one’s life experiences into a lesson or guide for those who might follow in the same paths.

Falling squarely in that last category is *Becoming Eve: My Journey From Ultra Orthodox Rabbi To Transgender Woman*.

It is a riveting history. The author, courageous trans activist Abby Chava Stein, was born as a boy into Hasidic royalty in the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish enclave of Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Seemingly destined for rabbinic heights because of her family’s lineage, she came to recognize her female gender at a young age.

Thus began a childhood and adolescence of study, inquiry, pushing back against the expectations of others, which led eventually into personal rebellion in pursuit of identity and freedom, that seems now to have achieved fulfillment in adulthood—as much as life can be seen as fulfilling nowadays.

I don’t think it’s a good thing for a reviewer to give away too much, as spoilers will ruin the experience for the earnest and probing reader.

What I can reveal is that this is a memoir that offers clarity in the theocratic surge we encounter alarmingly today in the public square. It shines a light on the dangers inherent in elevating culture and tradition into unyielding doctrine and dogma.

And it forces us to confront our own implicit biases that we all harbour to the sometimes invisible detriment of those who are marginalised because of community expectations and standards.

Abby Stein’s journey is not entirely a happy one (indeed, much of it is profoundly sorrowful) although the conclusion seems positive. I found some of the personal accounts of the physical and psychological trauma she endured—often at the hands of her own family—especially distressing.

But the message of the book remains positive, in that it offers a philosophy of liberation, growth and intersection. I would sum up that philosophy this way.

We need to look past received wisdom in search of the truth. Personal identity cannot be controlled by others, particularly those in parochial authority.

Finally, a solid anthropology will always be based on evidence and logic. This seems to me to be an important point interspersed throughout the work: that the slippery-slope argument, rolled out so often in opposition to changes that seek to advance human freedom and development, is authentically illogical. "If we allow this, it will be a quick progression toward doom"—or so the pitch goes.

Abby Stein helps readers understand that the source of this argument is the irrational fear that any alteration of established norms must be seen as an existential threat to the community.

But the fear is unfounded, and the incline-to-oblivion argument is inherently illogical as it ignores the human capacity to negotiate, accommodate and work toward finding intersections of understanding and community.

This is a landmark work.

(Ed. Note: Thank you, Del, for this important and perceptive review.)
Gr. 1-2 teacher Rabbi Bill’s Canadian moose menorah became “rescued Judaica” as he found it in a shop in rural Georgia, USA.

Oraynu teens performing the “Chanukah Rap”

50th photos by Louise Sherman
Chanukah pics by Larry Kline and Andy Pasternak
Tu B’Shevat (literally the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat, this year it’s on Feb. 9th) has a long history. Some scholars believe that in its most ancient form, the holiday celebrated the Near Eastern goddess Asherah (or Astarte or Ishtar), whose symbol was a tree, was a popular fertility deity and consort of the Canaanite God El. During the Temple period (until 70 CE), farmers of fruit were taxed in the form of tithes. Tu B’Shevat was likely a tax collection day for fruit, when the tax year would begin and end. Tu B’Shevat became the “new year for trees.” After the destruction of the Temple (70 CE), when tithing was no longer possible, little is known of how the day was recognized.

During the era of Jewish mysticism (16th C.), Tu B’Shevat re-emerged as a more popular and meaningful festival, first among Sephardi Jews. Mystical significance was attributed to the rebirth of the natural world in spring, and the Tu B’Shevat seder, ingesting symbolic foods around a festive meal, was created. The festival gained popularity and spread throughout the Sephardi world and eventually became part of Ashkenazi custom as well.

Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Tu B’Shevat also has come to be associated with planting trees in Israel. Most recently, as awareness of the environment has become a more pressing concern for many people, Tu B’Shevat has become a day on which we recognize our ethical obligations to care for the planet and its inhabitants. The idea of a new year for trees and recognizing our connection to the earth is a popular Tu B’Shevat theme today.
WHAT WE BELIEVE...

♦ A Jew is someone who identifies with the history, culture, and fate of the Jewish people.
♦ Judaism encompasses the civilization created by the Jewish people. It includes art and music, folk culture, and the treasured masterpieces of our great writers and thinkers, from the Bible to the present.
♦ We have the power and responsibility to shape our own lives independent of supernatural authority.
♦ Our ethics and morality serve human needs. We participate in tikkun olam (building a better world) for all people.
♦ We strive to express our Jewishness in a manner consistent with our beliefs.
♦ We stand in solidarity with the State of Israel and with Jewish communities in Toronto and around the world.
♦ The freedom and dignity of the Jewish people must go hand in hand with the freedom and dignity of all people.
♦ We warmly welcome into our community all those who share our values and who are connected to the Jewish people, whether by birth, adopted identity or by family relationship.

ORAYNU TRIBUTE DONATIONS/CARDS

Members and friends can choose to honour a person or an event (memorial, birth, birthday, bar/bat mitzvah, marriage, anniversary, achievement, etc.) by making a tax-receiptable donation of $18 or more to Oraynu. An Oraynu Tribute Card will be sent to the person or family of the honouree and the donation will be also recognized in The Shofar.

To arrange this, please contact Roby at: 416-385-3910 | roby@oraynu.org

PASTORAL AND EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Jewish Guidance is a service that many of our members expect from their congregational leaders. Oraynu provides part-time services of:

- Steve Shabes for guidance about Jewish education for children and youth
- Rabbi Eva Goldfinger, for guidance regarding life cycle transitions and conversion
- Rabbi Eva Goldfinger and Rabbi Denise Handlarski for pastoral guidance regarding intermarriage, Jewish practices, adult education and ethics

Guidance is offered, but not counseling or tutoring, which can be provided on a fee-for-service basis. For referral to the appropriate person, contact Roby at: 416-385-3910 or roby@oraynu.org/

THE SHOFAR is a bi-monthly publication of Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism.

EDITOR: SANDI HORWITZ

Oraynu Congregation is part of a worldwide movement, affiliated with Society for Humanistic Judaism and the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism.

Oraynu Children’s School gratefully acknowledges funding support from:
UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, Jan. 9 at 7:30 pm  
THE CHANGING JEWISH FAMILY  
(More info: p. 3)
Location: Borochov Cultural Centre, 272 Codsell (Wilson Hts/Sheppard)

Friday, Jan. 24 at 6:30 pm  
GREEN SHABBAT AND POTLUCK DINNER  
(p. 3)
Location: Borochov Cultural Centre, 272 Codsell (Wilson Hts/Sheppard)

Tuesday, Feb. 4 at 10:00 am  
BRAIN HEALTH WITH BAYCREST  
(p. 4)
Location: Borochov Cultural Centre, 272 Codsell (Wilson Hts/Sheppard)

Thursday, Feb. 9  
JEWISH-INDIGENOUS TU B’SHVAT SEDER  
(p. 4)
Location and Time: TBA

Sunday, Feb. 23 at 10:00 am  
HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE VISIT  
(p. 4)
Location: Lipa Green Building, 4th Floor, 4600 Bathurst St. (Sherman Campus)

Thursday, March 5 at 7:30 pm  
PURIM EVENT: SEX & VIOLENCE IN THE MEGILLAH  
(p. 4)
Location: Quaker Friends House, 60 Lowther Ave. (St. George/Bloor)

Sunday, Mar. 8 at 10:00 am  
FAMILY PURIM FESTIVAL  
(p. 4)
Location: Borochov Centre Social Hall, 272 Codsell (Wilson Hts/Sheppard)

Saturday, Mar. 21 at 11 am  
GLOBAL REFUGEE SHABBAT & RABBI’S BRUNCH  
(p. 5)
Location: TBA

Thursday, Mar. 26 at 7:00 pm  
ADULT EDUCATION with Rabbi Eva Goldfinger  
(p. 5)
Location: Borochov Cultural Centre, 272 Codsell (Wilson Hts/Sheppard)

ADVANCE NOTICE: RESERVE YOUR TICKETS NOW

Monday, May 4 at 8 pm  
THEATRE NIGHT: “THE GREAT DIVIDE”  
(p. 14)
Location: Greenwin Theatre, Meridian Arts Centre, 5040 Yonge Street, North York

LAST WORD: Topics for Dinner Table or Car Talks

Inject a little more Judaism into the life of your family. Here’s a suggestion from Rabbi Denise for a topic of conversation for your next dinner party, around your family table, or in the car on the way to Sunday school.

This time, we invite you to discuss: “Ayfo oree - where is my light?”

In this song whose words come from the founder of Humanistic Judaism Rabbi Sherwin Wine, we assert that “my light is in me, and in you.” At this darkest time of year, how can we spread light? What will you do to make the world a little brighter?