FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

Shalom everyone —

The world has changed! Due to COVID-19 and the physical distancing guidelines we now must follow, Oraynu has been offering all its programs online via Zoom. Our Adult seder was attended by 69 households—more than ever! Rabbi Eva’s excellent adult ed series, Shabbat programs and more events are all online for now. And … this edition of the newsletter is coming to all of you via email because we did not wish to add to the risk Oraynu staff, the print shop or YOU would have to incur with printed material.

We know it’s been tough for all in a myriad of ways (Robert and I have not been to Costco in weeks because the lines are too long!), but we are committed to providing you all with the best we can during this unprecedented time. The good news is: we are all getting expert at navigating meeting platforms, and a lot of folks are overcoming their tech phobias.

Full disclosure here: I am spending far too much time watching CNN, daily briefings from Trudeau and Ford, plus checking and posting on Facebook, attending webinars on a variety of topics, going for walks, playing Scrabble, etc. But this too shall pass, and hopefully we will all get through this crazy time and see each other in person again one of these days.

Rabbi Eva’s online adult education series has been well-attended and there are three more sessions, on April 30, May 14 and May 28. Come Zoom with us!

Rabbi Denise is offering two Friday evening Shabbat programs: on May 1st (for May Day) and also on May 29th (Shavuot), as well as a discussion and check-in on May 12th for Lag B’omer. On Sunday May 24th, she will also be a featured speaker for Don Heights Unitarian Congregation on “Staying Positive During a Pandemic: Lessons from Humanism, Judaism and Beyond.” Whether it’s online or at their building will be determined.

The Annual General Meeting is on June 11th. Hope you can attend—or tune in!

On June 17th, we are so pleased to welcome Dr. Kathy Siminovitch who will speak on “DNA, Identity and Jewishness.” With the proliferation and popularity of DNA tests to determine ancestry, can we actually pinpoint Jewish DNA? Join us and find out!

Enjoy this latest issue of our bi-monthly magazine. I often end with “Hope to see you all soon;” now I REALLY mean it!!

Sandi
Sandi Horwitz, Editor

IMPORTANT NOTE
ALL EVENTS WILL NOW BE ONLINE UNTIL PHYSICAL DISTANCING RULES ARE RELAXED.
WE ARE LISTING THEM AS “VIA ZOOM”, BUT SOME OF THE LISTINGS DO HAVE ALTERNATE LOCATIONS LISTED … JUST IN CASE!

Members and guests are welcome to submit articles, letters and photographs. Please email to horwitz@rogers.com/
Generally submissions should be no more than 700 words and should reflect a secular humanistic perspective. Please note that Oraynu reserves the right to decline or edit submissions in order to maintain the mutual respect our members enjoy and our reputation for fairness.
Letters and articles printed in this newsletter reflect the opinions of their writers and are not necessarily those of Oraynu Congregation.
Well, I think I speak for us all when I say: “oy vey!” No one really saw this coming, particularly the speed at which everything was suddenly up-ended. There are so many questions and unknowns. We miss our friends and family. We miss simple outings. We miss being able to get close to people without worrying about disinfecting. This is a hard time.

Last month we celebrated Passover, and told the story of our people moving from slavery to freedom. However, Jewish teaching suggests that the work isn’t over by the time we start singing Chad Gadya. In fact, we are supposed to spend the next several weeks in contemplation, even solemnity, as we consider how we will rededicate ourselves to justice and freedom for everyone.

This isn’t a circumstance of our choosing, but it is a circumstance that may allow us to do that work. Things are indeed changing. We are figuring out, and quickly, how to house the homeless, whether incarceration is truly necessary for many prisoners, how a universal basic income might work, how very much we depend on workers such as grocery store employees who fight for a fair minimum wage. We are realizing how much simple interactions with people in our community matter to us. We are reminded to never take for granted our education or health care systems. And we are witnessing an incredible coming together of society to take care of others. There is so much sacrifice. Why? Because we do value the lives of strangers, just like Jewish and Humanist teachings show us.

So here are some questions (questioning doesn’t end at Passover either):

- What do you hope to retain from this time? Whether it be a slower pace, more baking, the joy of online connections to those far away... what do you promise you’ll keep?
- What will you fight for during and after this time? Now that we have seen that there can be sweeping societal changes, what is important to stand up for or against? How can we start that now?
- Who are you? Often when we look at crises in history, we imagine how we would have acted. Well, this is one such historical crisis. Are you acting in a way you can be proud of? How will you tell the story of this time? What can you do now to ensure it’s a story you’ll want to tell?

There are some people who are going full throttle trying to make the most of this time. There are some who can barely get off the couch. Both are reasonable responses and are totally fine. And, I challenge you to use this time for some personal growth. If you tend to do a lot, if productivity is central to your identity, experiment with doing nothing. If you find you do very little and might want to boost your engagement with others (from a safe distance), try out a new way to help (sew some masks or leave food out for the hungry), or pick up a new hobby or skill, this might be a time to push yourself.

Our Jewish teachings are often summarized by the famous Hillel quote: If I am not for myself, who will be? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

If not now indeed.

I am sending so much love out to our beautiful community! Please connect with us over the next few weeks at one of our many events! If you need something, ask. If you want to talk, let me know. I’m here for you. We’ll get through this together.

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**Note from ORAYNU’S CHILDREN’S SCHOOL**

Since the closure of the school after March break, Principal Steve Shabes reports that some activities have occurred online including for Passover, Bnai Mitzvah rehearsals, a story-telling time and social interaction between students. Music teacher Carl Berger will be holding an online concert on May 3rd. We look forward to seeing everyone in the fall!
UPCOMING EVENTS

**Friday, May 1**
@8:30 pm
Via Zoom

**MAY DAY SHABBAT**
Join us for “watch party” for the Academy Award winning documentary *American Factory*. We will mark May Day with a consideration of contemporary global politics and the world of the worker. *(View it on Netflix; free trials are available if you are not already a subscriber.)*

Either start viewing the movie at 6:30pm (1hr. 50 min), or suit yourself as to timing, and then be sure to join us at 8:30pm for a very short Shabbat celebration and a discussion led by Rabbi Denise.

**SYNOPSIS:** In post-industrial Ohio, a Chinese billionaire opens a factory in an abandoned General Motors plant, hiring two thousand Americans. Early days of hope and optimism give way to setbacks as high-tech China clashes with working-class America.

**Tuesday, May 12**
@7:30 pm
Via Zoom

**LAG B’OMER “FIRESIDE” CHAT**
It is traditional to have a bonfire on Lag B’omer (the 33rd day of the period of the counting of the omer). Find out what this holiday is and come together for a community check in as Rabbi Denise sits by her fireplace!

**Sunday, May 24**
@ 4:00 pm
Via Zoom

**Join us for a service with Don Heights Unitarian featuring Rabbi Denise who will speak on:**

**STAYING POSITIVE DURING A PANDEMIC:** Lessons from Humanism, Judaism and Beyond

How do we meet challenges and how might tradition help or hurt our efforts? From where do we draw inspiration?

Unless otherwise indicated, kindly RSVP for ALL EVENTS:
416-385-3910 | roby@oraynu.org | via online event link
SHABBAT AND SHAVUOT
We’ll do an online Shabbat celebration and then talk about the holiday of Shavuot. And, come prepared to discuss a book you love — or to tell us about whatever it is you are reading now!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Open to Members Only
The Board invites you to join us to discuss the past year at Oraynu and hear about upcoming plans. As always, there will be Board reports, discussion and election of Officers for the 2020-21 year.

See Official AGM notice on p. 5

SHABBAT AND SHAVUOT

Thursday, June 11
7:30 pm
Via Zoom
Or, if possible, at: Borochov Centre 272 Codsell Ave.

Please join us for a fascinating presentation on DNA, IDENTITY and JEWISHNESS
By Dr. Kathy Siminovitch
DNA tests like ancestry.com claim to reveal our cultural ancestry and identity.
Is there Jewish DNA? It’s time for a scientific explanation.
This session with an internationally respected scholar will also explore the benefits and dangers of genetic science’s ability to shape our sense of identity.

Professor Siminovitch is a physician and a senior research scientist at the University of Toronto and Mt Sinai Hospital. A world leader in genomic medicine, Dr. Siminovitch studies genetics and cellular mechanisms of immunologic and genetic diseases. She was awarded a Canada Research Chair in Immunogenomics and currently serves as the Director of the Lunenfeld Clinical Genomics Centre and the Fred Litwin Family Center of Genetic Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital.

If event is LIVE at Don Heights Unitarian, there will be a non-member fee of $15.

CULTURAL/HUMANISTIC JUDAISM:
What? Why? How?

Join Rabbi Denise online for a refresher on how Oraynu does Jew- ish! And … spread the word to others who know who may be curious about what we can offer them.

Unless otherwise indicated, kindly RSVP for ALL EVENTS:
416-385-3910 | roby@oraynu.org | via online event link
Notice of Annual General Meeting

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN of the Annual General Meeting of Oraynu Community for Secular Humanistic Judaism (the “Corporation”) to be held at Borochov Cultural Centre, 272 Codsell Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, or online via Zoom if needed, on Thursday, the 11th day of June of the year 2020, at 7:30 pm, Toronto time, for the following purposes:

1. To approve the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on June 18, 2019
2. To receive reports from the Officers of the Corporation
3. To elect directors of the Corporation to hold office from July 1, 2020 until June 30, 2021 or until their successors are elected or appointed; and,
4. To consider such other business as may properly come before the meeting. Any additional agenda items must be submitted to the Secretary by May 31st.

DATED at Toronto, Ontario, this 26th day of April, 2020
Penny Parnes, Secretary

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR THESE DIFFICULT TIMES

HOPE  By Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, founder of Humanistic Judaism

I believe.
I believe in hope.
I believe in hope that chooses – that chooses self-respect above pity.
I believe in hope that dismisses – that dismisses the petty fears of petty people.
I believe in hope that feels – that feels distant pleasure as much as momentary pain.
I believe in hope that acts – that acts without the guarantee of success.
I believe in hope that kisses – that kisses the future with the transforming power of its will.

Hope is a choice,
ever found,
ever given,
always taken.

Some wait for hope to capture them.
They act as the prisoners of despair.
Others go searching for hope.
They find nothing but the reflection of their own anger.

Hope is an act of will,
affirming, in the presence of evil,
that good things will happen,
preferring in the face of failure, self-esteem to pity.

Optimists laugh, even in the dark
They know that
hope is a life-style –
not a guarantee.

Rabbi Wine is the author of Judaism Beyond God and Staying Sane in a Crazy World, among other publications.
Appreciation for our Online Events

We gratefully acknowledge donations in honour of Rabbi Denise, Roby Sadler, Sandi Horwitz and Jason Sadler for their leadership of the Passover seder from:

Content removed for privacy reasons

As well, we recognize the generosity of the following donors for other Zoom events:

Content removed for privacy reasons

Donations and Tributes

We gratefully acknowledge the following donations made recently to Oraynu.

Content removed for privacy reasons

Members and friends of Oraynu may also choose to honour a birth, marriage, birthday, special accomplishment or make a memorial tribute. See inside back cover for info.
A POEM SHARED BY RABBI EVA

Quest

By Eva Goldfinger ©1986

Oh
this abyss—
this bottomless pit
that yearns to be filled;
this thundering tornado
greedily sucking up
each perception,
each feeling,
each word, written or uttered.
--It should feel sated.

And
like an insatiable lover
the passion for more
burns within me
ever stronger,
achingly brighter.

Endless
realms of thoughts, ideas,
come—
fill me deeper,
faster,
time keeps ticking
jealously.
And I,
mere mortal
have but one
short life to learn!

Yet
once all is integrated—
my mind is expanded
only deepening the pit.
The hows
the whys
spiral madly
pursuing fulfillment,
exploding
in a flash of insight,
birthing myriad new questions.

RABBI DENISE’S BOOK RELEASED!

Rabbi Denise book “The A-Z of Intermarriage” is now available. It is published by the New Jewish Press (University of Toronto Press). She has been interviewed about the book by various media both here and in the U.S. Here’s what the promo blurb says:

Written by Rabbi Denise Handlarski, an intermarried rabbi, “The A–Z of Intermarriage” is part story, part strategy, and all heart, as well as a coming together of religious source material, cultural context, and personal narrative. Fun to read and full of helpful and practical tips and tools for couples and families, this book is the perfect “how-to” manual for living a happy and balanced intermarried life.

★★★★★Review from amazon.ca:
Practical, thoughtful and fun! This book contains so many great prompts for thought and discussion. Highly relatable, Handlarski accesses the topic of intermarriage in an open and honest way. The dictionary format makes it easy to find key words and creatively allows for thinking deeply about the ideas without being tied to a continuous narrative. In fact, you get something different from it each time you pick it up. The format allows you to delve deeper while at the same time making new connections, reconsidering and building on other sections.

The book is available through Amazon and Indigo, or it can be ordered directly from the publisher (currently at a discount) at: https://utorontopress.com/ca/the-a-x2013-z-of-intermarriage-2
RULES FOR STAYING SAFE DURING THE PANDEMIC

1. Basically, you can’t leave the house for any reason, but if you have to, then you can.
2. Masks are useless, but maybe you have to wear one, it can save you, it is useless, but maybe it is mandatory as well.
3. Stores are closed, except those that are open.
4. You should not go to hospitals unless you have to go there. Same applies to doctors, you should only go there in case of emergency, provided you are not too sick.
5. This virus is deadly but still not too scary, except that sometimes it actually leads to a global disaster.
6. Gloves won’t help, but they can still help.
7. Everyone needs to stay HOME, but it’s important to GO OUT.
8. There is no shortage of groceries in the supermarket, but there are many things missing when you go there in the evening, but not in the morning. Sometimes.
9. The virus has no effect on children except those it affects.
10. Animals are not affected, but there is still a cat that tested positive in Belgium in February when no one had been tested, plus a few tigers here and there...
11. You will have many symptoms when you are sick, but you can also get sick without symptoms, have symptoms without being sick, or be contagious without having symptoms. Oh, my God.
12. In order not to get sick, you have to eat well and exercise, but eat whatever you have on hand and it’s better not to go out, well, but no...
13. It’s better to get some fresh air, but you get looked at very wrong when you get some fresh air, and most importantly, you don’t go to parks or walk. But don’t sit down, except that you can do that now if you are old, but not for too long or if you are pregnant (but not too old).
14. You can’t go to retirement homes, but you have to take care of the elderly and bring food and medication.
15. If you are sick, you can’t go out, but you can go to the pharmacy.
16. You can get restaurant food delivered to the house, which may have been prepared by people who didn’t wear masks or gloves. But you have to have your groceries decontaminated outside for 3 hours. Pizza too?
17. Every disturbing article or disturbing interview starts with “I don’t want to trigger panic, but...”
18. You can’t see your older mother or grandmother, but you can take a taxi and meet an older taxi driver.
19. You can walk around with a friend but not with your family if they don’t live under the same roof.
20. You are safe if you maintain the appropriate social distance, but you can’t go out with friends or strangers at the safe social distance.
21. The virus remains active on different surfaces for two hours, no, four, no, six, no, we didn’t say hours, maybe days? But it takes a damp environment. Oh no, not necessarily.
22. The virus stays in the air - well no, or yes, maybe, especially in a closed room, in one hour a sick person can infect ten, so if it falls, all our children were already infected at school before it was closed. But remember, if you stay at the recommended social distance, however in certain circumstances you should maintain a greater distance, which, studies show, the virus can travel further, maybe.
23. We count the number of deaths but we don’t know how many people are infected as we have only tested so far those who were “almost dead” to find out if that’s what they will die of...
24. We have no treatment, except that there may be one that apparently is not dangerous unless you take too much (which is the case with all medications).
25. We should stay locked up until the virus disappears, but it will only disappear if we achieve collective immunity when it circulates... but we must no longer be locked up for that.

Dems the rules!

Thanks to Roby Sadler; this has been circulating on the internet, on Facebook and by emails, with no attribution.
Shavuot from a Humanistic Perspective

Shavuot (May 29th on the calendar this year) is a minor, ancient pilgrimage festival that marked the harvest of barley. Shavuot literally means "weeks," so named because the festival is exactly seven weeks (plus one day) from the second night of Passover. It is also called Festival of First Fruits, Hag Habikkurim, Pentecost, and the Feast of Weeks. This feast, one of three pilgrimage festivals, marked the end of the barley and beginning of the wheat harvest. On this festival in Temple times, according to the book of Leviticus, two loaves (shetei halehem) were "waved before the Lord." These had to be offered only from the best new wheat, from produce grown that year in Israel. Shavuot was associated with the bringing of the bikkurim, "the first ripe fruits," to the Temple of Jerusalem.

In rabbinic times a radical transformation of the festival took place. The festival became the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. In the traditional liturgy Shavuot is “zeman mattan toratenu” ("the time of the giving of our Torah"). The ancient agricultural feasts were recreated into festivals marking the anniversary of significant legendary events in the life of the people.

Unlike Passover and Sukkot, Shavuot has just a few special rituals. In the synagogue, it is customary to read the Book of Ruth and some congregations decorate the synagogue with plants and flowers. Also, dairy products, such as blintzes, are traditionally eaten. In modern times Shavuot has become a day for religious school graduations and confirmation ceremonies. For Humanistic Jews, Shavuot is a wonderful day for picnics with fresh loaves of challah and is also a time to honor educational achievement, such as graduation from Sunday School. Oraynu’s Bnai Mitzvah is always held close to the holiday; it had been scheduled for May 30th, however, due to Covid-19, it is now re-scheduled for Oct. 3rd.

Humanistic Blessing for Bread

B’rukh-im ha-motzi-im
Lekh-em min ha-aretz

Blessed are those who bring forth bread from the earth.

SOME ZOOM HUMOUR

Thanks to Michelle Wolfson who posted this on our Facebook page, apropos of this year’s Zoom Seder. This piece has been circulating widely on the internet, without any attribution.

The Torah Speaks of Four Kinds of People Who Use Zoom:


The Wise Person says: “I’ll handle the admin feature controls and chat rooms, and forward the cloud recording transcript after the call.”

The Wicked Person says: “Since I have unlimited duration, I scheduled the meeting for six hours—as it says in the Haggadah, whoever prolongs the telling of the story, is praiseworthy.”

The Simple Person says: “Hello? Am I on? I can hear you but I can’t see you.” [Jerusalem Talmud reads here: “I can see you, but I can’t hear you.”]

The One Who Does Not Know How to Mute says: “How should I know where you put the keys? I’m stuck on this stupid Zoom call.”

To the Wise Person you should offer all of the Zoom Pro optional add-on plans.

To the Wicked Person you should say: “Had you been in charge, we would still be in Egypt.”

To the Simple Person you should say: “Try the call-in number instead.”

To the One Who Does Not Know How to Mute you should say: “Why should this night be different from all other nights?”
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 tikun olam (building a better world) for all people.
♦ 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

Note: All events online until further notice

Thursday, April 30 at 7:00 pm ADULT ED WITH RABBI EVA
Session 2: Jewish Birth and Death Rituals—From Superstition to Science (p. 3)

Friday, May 1 at 6:30 (if viewing) or 8:30 pm
MAY DAY MOVIE NITE ("American Factory") & SHABBAT (p. 3)

Tuesday, May 12 at 7:30 pm LAG B’OMER "FIRESIDE" CHAT (p. 3)

Thursday, May 14 at 7:00 pm ADULT ED WITH RABBI EVA
Session 3: Bar/Bat Mitzvot and Conversions: Torah-Optional Commitment to Judaism (p. 3)

Sunday, May 16 at 4:00 pm STAYING POSITIVE DURING A PANDEMIC: LESSONS FROM HUMANISM, JUDAISM AND BEYOND (p. 3)

Thursday, May 28 at 7 pm ADULT ED WITH RABBI EVA
Session 4: Courtship and Marriage: From Property to Love Subjects (p. 3)

Friday, May 29 at 7:30 pm SHABBAT AND SHAVUOT (p. 4)

Thursday, June 11 at 7:30 pm ORAYNU’S AGM AND COMMUNITY CHECK-IN (p. 4)
Location (if possible): Borochov Centre, 272 Codessl Ave.

Wednesday, June 17 at 7:30 pm DNA, IDENTITY AND JEWISHNESS (p. 4)
Location (if possible): Don Heights Unitarian Congregation. 18 Wynford Drive

Tuesday, June 30 at 7: 30 pm CULTURAL/HUMANISTIC JUDAISM: WHAT? WHY? HOW? (p. 4)

LAST WORD: Topics for Dinner Table or Car Talks

Want to inject a little more Judaism into the life of your family? These are suggestions from Rabbi Denise for a topic of conversation you can have at your next dinner party, around your family table, or in the car on the way to Sunday school. Each issue of The Shofar will present a new topic.

Here is this issue’s suggestion:
Talk to your family (online or by phone if you don’t live with them) about how the famous Hillel quote fits with our current Covid-19 time:

*If I am not for myself, who will be? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?*