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“YEARS AND YEARS”: CANTOR’S CONCERT CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF BCC EXPERIENCE

BY LARRY NATHENSON

CANTOR JUVAL PORAT’S annual holiday concerts have become a BCC tradition over the past 12 years, showcasing his musical talents and often those of guest musicians. This year he offered a one-person show, entitled “Years and Years,” in which he sang ten songs and read the reflections of BCC congregants on their experiences of BCC during the past five decades. Accompanied by Max Berlin on piano, he skillfully wove together the music and the monologues to form a unique celebration of BCC’s 50 years of community and struggle, music and spoken word.

For several weeks before the concert date of December 5, 2021, Cantor Porat solicited contributions from congregants and interviewed community members. During the concert, he presented some 30 monologues, all anonymous. It was fun trying to guess who wrote some of them; only a few were obvious (teaching in Iowa City in the early 1970s was a dead giveaway, Tracy). Cantor Porat separated the reflections on each of the five decades of BCC’s history, bracketing each

with appropriate songs. For each decade, certain themes emerged that characterized the BCC experience in the context of larger LGBTQIA+, Jewish, and general societal trends.

Decade I (1972-1982) brought out themes of liberation and fear. Life in pre-AIDS LA was “one big party,” as one congregant described it, but bars and baths were dangerous places to meet other men and coming out could be dangerous for one’s career and family relationships. BCC offered a bridge between two worlds for those who were both “shul hopping and bar hopping.” But it still wasn’t easy for most newcomers to walk through the door of a “gay and lesbian shul” for the first time.

BCC’s institutional successes in its early years also played a role in the monologues for Decade I. One congregant attended a New York convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism) as an observer, to learn about the UAHC and to encourage mainstream synagogues to make room for gay and lesbian Jews



in their communities. The following year, BCC became a member of the UAHC. One newcomer who cautiously approached the door of the sanctuary on the evening of the ceremony was surprised to find it packed with local Jewish and political dignitaries.

Decade II (1982-1992) inevitably included the devastating experience of the AIDS epidemic, which as one congregant said, “caused seismic changes.” Another said it was “overwhelming” to watch friends die with no treatment available and that “some of the most creative people were leaving the planet.” But AIDS also evoked a new spiritual hunger. One congregant came to BCC for the first time and found familiar melodies and welcoming people; when he told the rabbi he hadn’t been in shul for 20 years, she said, “welcome home.”

Yet a majority of the narratives from the 1980s were not about AIDS. There were several women’s voices, including a deeply closeted kindergarten teacher who attended women’s discussion groups but said there was “no way” she could come out publicly and keep her job. A veteran of “Women of the Wall” (the group that defied the Orthodox ban on women reading from Torah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem) remembered being called “les-bit” and “Reformit” as if those were insults, but at BCC, women could read from Torah freely on a regular basis. Another congregant was a “preacher’s kid” from a conservative church who was raised to consider homosexuality a sin, but upon having a same-sex relationship in her forties, found that God didn’t seem to care.

The last contributor in Decade II cited the music of Debbie Friedman as instrumental in bridging the gap between gay/lesbian and Jewish worlds and restoring a sense of community. Cantor Porat concluded this part of the program with Debbie Friedman’s “Sing Unto God.”

The remembrances from Decade III (1992-2002) focused on congregants seeking personal growth and a deeper attachment to Judaism. An adult bar mitzvah at BCC helped one congregant “shed a feeling of incompleteness.” Another went to the mikvah to change her first, middle, and Hebrew names to integrate her Jewish and American identities and discard negative associations with her previous names. A third respondent sought comfort in Orthodoxy in a two-week program in Israel. After he came out to the rabbi, the rabbi told him “you’re missing out on God’s best.”

Decade III also brought the first inklings of marriage equality. One congregant described their “first wedding” at Plummer Park in 1995 as “not legal, but an affirmation of joy” in the face of tragedy. Another started a business in the wedding industry but couldn’t share in the joy of their straight



Above: Cantor Juval Porat on stage during “Years and Years”. Photo: Anna Boyles
Opposite: Cantor Juval Porat performing. Photo: Anna Boyles

clients.

In Decade IV (2002-2012), marriage equality became a reality, at least temporarily, in 2008 during the few months between the California Supreme Court ruling and the passage of Proposition 8. One congregant recalled going to West Hollywood as soon as marriage licenses became available, with couples who had been together 30 and 25 years in line ahead of and behind them. Another recalled asking his partner if he wanted to marry, only to receive the response, “how can we, we don’t even live together?” (Historical note: Domestic partnership was never equal to marriage because it required living together first, not just because of the label). Eventually, they did marry in one of three ceremonies performed by Rabbi Lisa Edwards on the last Sunday before Prop. 8 passed.

Memories from Decade IV also revealed BCC as an aging congregation. One member recalled that their mother and brother came to LA to visit for their 50th birthday. The mother fell ill and was hospitalized. Rabbi Edwards visited her frequently, much to her and the member’s delight. Another held what was planned as a small memorial for their mother,

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only to find the chapel crowded with BCC congregants who didn't know the member very well. That's the kind of community BCC is.

Decade V (2012-2022) brought the trans community into the picture for the first time, with one congregant being pleased to see a few other trans people in the sanctuary upon coming to BCC for the first time. Another embraced the trans-friendly interpretations in rabbinic literature, such as Adam as an initially androgynous person.

Toward the end of this decade, the pandemic began to enter into the consciousness of BCC congregants as they sought and found the healing power of community and prayer, even if only virtually through Zoom. As the losses mounted, one congregant recognized that the minyan requirement for saying Kaddish is not just a ritual law but also a way to avoid the isolation that often comes with such loss.

concert with "House of New Life," the original song he wrote for the dedication of BCC's current building in 2011 (with additional lyrics by Tamara Kline). There are a great many folks meriting thanks for their roles in making this concert happen, including Alejandro Speranza (sound engineer), Maggie Boyles (graphic design and marketing), Jessica Donath (marketing), Tim Goad (room setup), and Rabbi Jillian Cameron and the Executive Committee for entrusting Cantor Porat with this project. Special thanks for their financial support go to Steven Schmitt and Kyle Young, Margaret Targove, Eldon Teper, Les Zendle and Jerry Hanson, Marsha Epstein, and Brett Trueman. Rabbi Lisa Edwards helped edit the congregant narratives and provided feedback and counsel with Tracy Moore, Cantor Jennifer Bern-Vogel, Jeanelle LaMance, Estaire Press, and Jessica Donath.

We can't wait to see and hear what Cantor Porat comes up with in the future!

Cantor Porat closed out the

Below: Cantor Juval Porat performing. Photo: Anna Boyles



EGYPT IS LOST

BY RABBI JILLIAN CAMERON



Drash delivered for Parashat Bo on 6 Shevat 5782 (January 7, 2022)

In the midst of the winter hiatus of new television, I fell back on an old faithful, a show I hadn't watched in years. It was a

crime procedural, a la Law and Order, the type of show I really can't get enough of. I love the structure, something bad happens, the detectives or special agents, who are rough around the edges but ultimately carry a deep sense of integrity, justice and fairness, do their sleuthing, and nine times out of ten, they are able to best the criminals and that which was out of balance, finds balance again. Justice and integrity prevail!

I love this predictability, despite the twists and turns of any particular hour-long episode, good succeeds over evil. I'm sure that there are many like me, who keep these shows churning out episodes and maintaining the creation of new ones. Many like me who crave that kind of moral predictability, who yearn to get lost in that world, where there is resolution to a situation, and usually a very satisfying resolution.

You don't have to have a degree in psychology to connect those dots, to explain why there are so many folks like me and maybe you, watching and rewatching.

Because however realistic they seem, however dark or scary or disturbing, they are a fantasy, an idealized world, one that we rarely actually live in.

After a particularly dramatic cliffhanger last week, the first seven plagues, in Parashat Vaera, we rejoin Moses and Aaron this week, toward the end of the ten plagues, the signs fashioned by God to prove to Pharaoh and Egypt all of God's power, to prove to the enslaved Israelites that the

time of redemption is near, after so many years of crying out to God seemingly in vain.

The terrible dance of Moses and Pharaoh continues, each "Let My People Go" followed by a resounding, haughty "No," each plague ratcheting up the pressure, wreaking more and more havoc on the people of Egypt, their resources, their health, even sanity.

Each time Pharaoh bows to the pressure only to have his heart hardened again, and cruelly revokes his permission for the Israelites to leave, freedom won and lost, now five, six, seven times and counting.

Although Pharaoh and Moses and God seemed locked in this stalemate of a dance, Pharaoh's courtiers, his advisors, leaders of their community aren't quite as resolute. This week we read,

Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, "How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let them go to worship Adonai their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?"

Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?

Amidst all of the drama our portion has to offer, the great one liners, the pride and hubris of this sacred standoff, and our own Passover memories intermingled with this, our famous story of freedom, that single question, offered by Pharaoh's courtiers, gives me pause.

Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?

Pharaoh's court has seen the destruction of eight plagues, the livestock, the crops, the livelihood of so many, gone, in an arrogant attempt to win, to maintain the status quo at any and all costs. Pharaoh is not yet ready to admit defeat, to bend to the will of Adonai, but those around him are scared for the future of their country and their people, scared of what might still be to come, scared that winning will be the biggest loss.

Ultimately their question arises, what are we fighting to save? Systemic enslavement of an entire people?

Loss after loss after loss crippling our entire way of being?

It feels eerily familiar, this rhetoric, this single-minded, unabating haughtiness, this fight to be right, this fight against change, the fight to perpetuate a cruel and broken system, the fight for only me, not we.

Our story of freedom, of liberation is ultimately told like those crime dramas I love to watch, the mostly black and white version of life, where there is clear good and clear bad and where the good defeats the bad just about every time.

But the gray, the nuance comes from an unlikely source in the form of these courtiers, and they ask this seemingly simple yet importantly complex question. They ask about the soul of Egypt, beyond the might or power, beyond the immediacy of this dance for dominance, beyond the present. They remind us in the midst of all we face now, what do we fight for? What do we stand for?

Beyond the fear surrounding daily life, the next variant, the economic concerns, who are we? Who can we be?

A lot has been lost in these past two years, to a plague, and now once again we find ourselves amid another ebb of this virus, as we step back once more, step away from each other again.

We have lost so many humans all over the globe, each and every community touched, a loss so profound we are unable to conceive of it, as we continue to put one foot in front of the other, as we continue to find hope, purpose and meaning in our days.

We feel the loss and breakdown in communication and connection across the leadership of our country, a divide and chasm that seems to grow more and more each day.

What I want or what you need?

What's good for me, or what's good for all of us?

We have shared loss.

But we are not yet lost.

Pharaoh's courtiers may have asked this important question, but ultimately that's all they did. Their words spoke louder than their actions. So let us learn from Pharaoh's courtiers and take it a step further. Let us not just ponder

the question, who we are, what is our soul? Let us follow with action and deed.

It is not enough to shine the light; we can also be the light.

We might miss the status quo of 2019 for a great many understandable reasons, but let us not just fight for that again, let us re-create the status quo we need, where living wages exist, where paid family leave exists, where we can all choose what happens to our bodies, where the stranger and the other are not feared or forgotten but factored in, where respect and justice exist, where equality and freedom reign, where integrity and morality aren't just on TV. Let us not fight against change, let us be the change.

Russian-American scientist and writer Isaac Asimov said, "The only constant is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be."

Pharaoh tried so hard to keep the world as it was.

Moses and God and all of us, see the world as it can be.

At the end of this week's Torah portion, the Exodus begins, the children of Israel, no longer slaves, swiftly depart from Egypt and head together toward their future, liberated, free. A sea change, worth the fight.

What world are we willing to fight for?

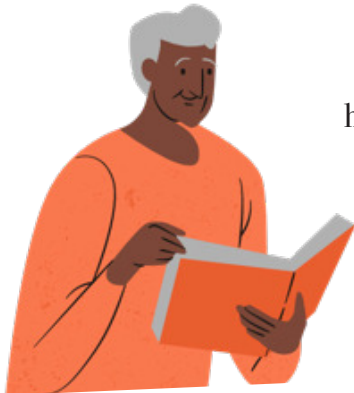
Reflecting on this week's Torah portion, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory shared, "A successful future is in no way tangible to the Israelites yet. It may be a dawning of new possibility, but they are still in the immediate moment in which plague and death hang in the air, the sea is still before them, and the political winds continue to shift with erratic danger. Even so, Moses has the vision to see that there will be Israelite children; that this story will someday be foundational narrative for a surviving and thriving People."

Let us share that vision,
let us fight for that vision,
let us claim the soul of our people,
for tomorrows brimming with hope.

Shabbat Shalom.

BCC's ROUNDTABLE ON AGING

BY JESSICA DONATH & RABBI JILLIAN CAMERON



“It’s NOT HOW OLD YOU ARE. It’s how you are old,” said French author Jules Renard (1864-1910.). At BCC, we want to know how our members are old or getting older and what we can do to support them and each other on this journey.

To this end, we began a series of conversations with members who represent a cross-section of the congregation. Some who are already older and in need of assistance, some who just retired in good health, some living alone, some partnered, some with children, some without - you get the idea. If you would like a seat at BCC’s Roundtable on Aging, please send an email to Jessica Donath at execvp@bcc-la.org.

Challenges around accessibility and comfort level with technology are only a couple of the themes that emerged during the first two meetings in December and January. During these initial sessions, other topics we touched on ranged from boundary setting when caring for a loved one, issues with mobility and driving, mourning the loss of peers, to advanced planning procedures.

Aging is obviously not a new phenomenon. Thankfully, it happens to most of us. But with 26 percent of BCC members over 70, we felt it necessary to create this opportunity to learn about the challenges (and hopes!) aging people might confront at BCC and in society in general and develop new approaches to aging together as a community.

We understand that some conversations around aging and dying are difficult. That’s why we created a safe space moderated by Rabbi Jillian Cameron for folks to exchange ideas and share their struggles, big and small. Ed-



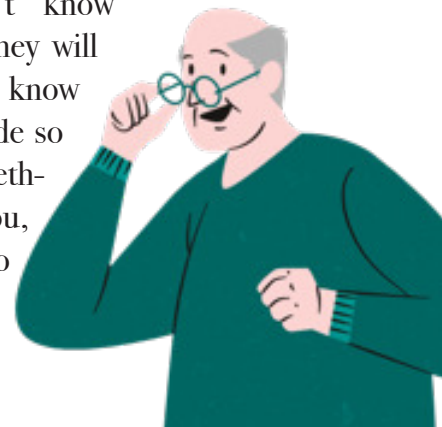
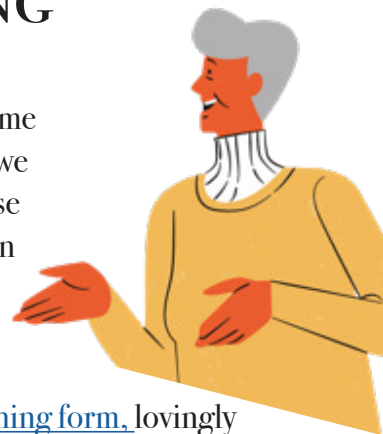
ucation is another aspect that came up in these conversations that we will keep in mind as we enter phase two of this project - the “what can we do about it” phase.

Education around resources we already have, like the [rabbi’s confidential pre-planning form](#), lovingly put together by Rabbi Jillian and Ray Eelsing, and the member-to-member outreach project Rabbi Emerita Lisa began during the pandemic (please be in touch with Rabbi Lisa at Lisa@bcc-la.org if you would like to receive a call from a fellow BCCer or make a call to check up on someone.) But also education about other resources and services ranging from financial advisors and tools to grocery delivery options to places to live.

As we gain a clearer picture of how members are old at BCC, we will discuss and think about how BCC can help all of us stay connected and feel supported now and in the future. As we come up with ideas and solutions, we are taking special care so that your needs as LGBTQIA persons are being considered. If we develop a list of retirement homes, for example, we want to make sure that they are affirming and welcoming to our community so that no one feels forced back into the closet.

We are keeping an open mind and our eyes on what other places are doing and know that we aren’t alone in this effort. Our sibling congregation CBST, for instance, is also engaged in ongoing conversations around [aging together](#).

Although we can’t know where this communal journey will take us at the moment, we know that it is important and made so much easier and better together. We are so grateful that you, young and old, allow BCC to be a part of your lives.



REMEMBERING BELOVED MEMBERS WHO HELPED MAKE BCC WHAT IT IS TODAY

BY BARBARA KROLL

Save the Dates:

Sunday, March 6, 2:30 to 3:45 pm

Sunday, April 3, 2:30 to 3:45 pm

AS BCC CELEBRATES ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY, we look back on our humble beginnings as a small cadre of gay and lesbian Jews seeking community in a world hostile to their very existence. Over the five decades since, BCC has grown into a thriving congregation that is a welcoming community for LGBTQIA+ Jews and their friends and allies and a respected member of the Union for Reform Judaism. As we celebrate what we have achieved, it is fitting that we pause to remember some of the congregants no longer in our midst who contributed to this growth and transformation.

The eminent scholar Rabbi Rachel Adler, who once served BCC as the self-described “oldest” rabbinic intern, noted: “I have always contended that the dead go on being members of BCC. It’s encoded in BCC’s ritual and its physical structure.” For example, in accordance with Jewish tradition, during our Yizkor service on Yom Kippur, we recite aloud the names of our deceased members, filling the sanctuary with our own silent memories as the number of names on the list grows from year to year. Another way that the dead remain with us is on our memorial board located inside the BCC sanctuary. The names of many deceased loved ones face directly toward the Aron HaKodesh (the ark with the Torahs), allowing those dearly departed to remain among us, praying with us as it were. Rabbi Adler observed this physical proximity while noting that memorial boards in many other synagogues are in corridors outside the sanctuary.

So, as a part of our 50th anniversary programming, a small committee of long-time members met to select individuals or couples who contributed to the foundation and growth of our temple or whose dedication to serving BCC is especially memorable. They are among our “BCC treasures.” Winnowing down the list of deceased members was by no means an easy task, but our committee ultimately determined that we would choose 12 pillars, a number resonant with the 12 tribes of Israel.

We will honor them through story sharing rather than a traditional Yizkor service. Six individuals or couples will be honored on each of the two Sunday afternoons we

have reserved. Both sessions will take place on Zoom and will be recorded and transcribed for our archives. Rabbi Emerita Lisa Edwards will moderate. Two or three individuals who knew the deceased will speak about their connections to that person or couple and remind us how they helped make BCC what it is today. The members to be honored are (in alphabetical order):

- SUSAN FRIEDMAN
- JERRY SMALL
- -PARDES AND LINDA MAHRU
- SHERRY SOKOLOFF
- VICKI GOLDISH AND VICKI DAKIL
- RALPH STEVENS
- BENN HOWARD AND ARNIE PINCUS
- SUE TERRY
- JERRY KRIEGER
- STU ZINN
- HARRIET PERL
- IRA ZUCKER
- FRED SHULDINER

To share memories of some of these esteemed congregants, we have reached out to former members and former clergy as well as current BCC members, recruiting those best able to share why we want to honor the lives of these 12.

Of course, while many of our older, long-term members knew one or more of these people personally, far more of today’s members never had the opportunity to meet these pillars of our community. We hope that by bringing some of their personalities and service to BCC alive through stories, our entire BCC family can learn more of our history and appreciate more of what has made BCC the special congregation it is today.

We hope you will mark the dates on your calendars and tune in for the Zoom sessions on March 6 and April 3. Everyone is welcome. If the sessions are well received, we may be able to plan additional memorial sessions later, honoring deceased members whom we could not include in these two sessions due to time constraints. Please note that this will not be a religious program, nor will any fundraising be involved. But of course, contributions in memory of any of these treasured congregants are always welcome!

A MANZANITA YAD

BY BONNIE S. KAPLAN

I once whittled a *yad* from a fallen twig
of the manzanita bush, only I didn't
think it *yad* at the time.

As with most whittling I did not know
where I was headed. One end of the sprig
was forked, evidence of branching,

and on the other I carved a single
claw, a talon really, which tipped it
into the magical, a sorcerer's stick.

Manzanita has a natural patina
as it grows in nature and needs little
polishing, yet I sat for many

hours burnishing with a stone,
adding my own wear and shine
to an already tough and ruddy grain.

Torah and Hebrew were the farthest
thing from my mind that day in the forest,
yet something sacred was afoot.

I thought my twig a bird's perch,
a decorative fetish, not a Jewish ritual
pointer. But that is so like Judaism,

to prepare you in ways dictated
by a mystery, whispering hold on,
you will need this one day.

Bonnie S. Kaplan
Originally published in *Sinister Wisdom*
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To explore more of Bonnie's work, visit
her website bonnieskaplan.com

WORLD CONGRESS OF GLBT JEWS TO MEET AT BCC THIS SPRING

BY JONATHAN FALK

FROM APRIL 29 TO MAY 1, [the World Congress of GLBT Jews: Keshet Ga'avah](#) will hold its annual board meeting in Los Angeles at BCC, and participate in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Beth Chayim Chadashim, the world's first LGBT-founded synagogue.

At BCC's Friday night services on April 29, World Congress president Gustavo Michanic from Buenos Aires will recognize BCC's 50 years of leadership in the LGBTQIA+ Jewish movement. And on Sunday, May 1, the annual board meeting will take place in-person in the BCC library, assuming in-person events are allowed at that time. BCC members are welcome to attend.

Additional weekend events tentatively planned include a walking tour and possibly a bus tour of historic Jewish Los Angeles, as well as a Havdalah on Saturday evening. Several World Congress board members will also be attending the [2022 ILGA World Conference](#), from May 2 – 6, 2022, in Long Beach.

BCC was a founding member of the World Congress in 1980, and participated even earlier, in 1975, in the meetings convened to combat the United Nations' "Zionism equals racism" resolution that ultimately led to the founding of the World Congress. The World Congress serves as an umbrella body providing a networking resource for LGBTQIA+ Jews from around the world to connect, engage, and support each other. It has member organizations around the globe, from Argentina to Europe to Australia, and strives to be the worldwide voice for LGBTQIA+ Jews.

Since its beginning, the World Congress has fought homophobia and sexism within the Jewish community, responded to anti-Semitism, and supported the growth of LGBTQIA+ Jewish groups and communities globally. Some member organizations are congregations like BCC, while others pursue primarily social, cultural, and political activities. The World Congress has sponsored international conferences of LGBT Jews in cities around the US, Canada, Europe, Israel, Latin America, and Australia, along with smaller regional

conferences. BCC hosted international conferences in 1978, 1982, and 2010, along with two western regional conferences during the 1990s.

Despite the current pandemic, the World Congress was able to host its 2020 European Regional Conference virtually, supporting and providing networking opportunities to LGBTQIA+ Jewish organizations throughout Europe; it supported the launch of Keshet Sefarad, an LGBTQI Jewish organization in Spain; and it co-hosted with Keshet an International Trans Day of Remembrance Memorial Service and Panel discussion.

The World Congress board of directors consists of one delegate from each member organization, including BCC, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in New York, Congregation Shaar Zahav in San Francisco, and many others. The purpose of the board meeting is to pass a budget, elect officers, and deal with the important issues of the day, from anti-Semitism to homophobia to demographic changes in the membership of our member organizations.

Several visiting board members are in need of housing in the vicinity of BCC; please contact me by emailing the [BCC office](#) if you are willing to take in a fully vaccinated out-of-town guest for a few days.

On a personal note, my involvement with the World Congress has allowed me to contribute to a worldwide movement and to help build bridges between various communities around the world. My involvement has also resulted in decades-long friendships and a feeling of camaraderie similar to what I feel at BCC but on a larger scale. Pretty much anywhere that there is a Jewish community in the world, I have met LGBTQ Jews and can connect with them for a get-together when traveling. In a certain way, I feel at home in Jerusalem or London or Buenos Aires, thanks to my World Congress involvement. I look forward to a return to some kind of travel activities post-Covid!

-Jonathan Falk served as secretary of the World Congress for 25 years, from 1993 – 2018, with a short hiatus, and as BCC's delegate to the World Congress since 1990.



World Congress of GLBT Jews: Keshet Ga'avah Annual board meeting 2022 April 29 – May 1, 2022 Los Angeles



Schedule:

Fri. April 29: Shabbat dinner and service: World Congress honors BCC's 50th anniversary

Sat. April 30: Walking tour; Havdalah

Sun. May 1: Board meeting

Hosted by Beth Chayim Chadashim, Los Angeles

Contact: secretary@gbtjews.org for home hospitality

gbtjews.org

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME

We welcome you to contribute to this magazine! Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing. Have you recently attended an amazing (virtual) event or art exhibit? Did you read a book or watch a TV show that everyone should know about? Do you have an idea for a new column? Do you think your bubbe has the best rugelach recipe? Please be in touch, we can't wait to hear from you!

Please follow these submission guidelines:

- Articles should be more than 500 words, letters to the editor can be shorter
- Please do not write about officeholders, candidates, or general international, national, state, or local political issues.
- Be respectful of anyone you reference, directly or indirectly, by name or anonymously.
- Please do not advertise any product or service in an article or letter.
- Submissions should be sent by email to the editorial team at gvanim@bcc-la.org as a Word attachment, in the body of the email, or as a Google doc.
- Include your name and phone number.
- All submissions will be proofread and edited for length, clarity, style, and tone.
- Note: Late submissions may not be considered for publication.
- Deadlines will be published in the BCC Weekly News and Updates.

A MEDITATION ON PRAYER AND HEALING AFTER COLLEYVILLE

BY CANTOR JUVAL PORAT



A few weeks ago, numerous blue banners showing the building of Temple Beth Israel of Colleyville, Texas, with a hashtag saying #prayforbethisrael

superimposed on them, kept appearing on my social media wall. These banners were shared by many of my friends and colleagues, as we were all trying to take in and process in real time the unimaginable unfolding in front of our collective screens. As Rabbi Josh Feigelson suggests, since then many of us have had “questions of security and insecurity on our minds and hearts.” I and so many of us here tonight and in the Jewish community have been grappling with this sense of ache, of trauma, and the desperate need for healing.

I've been thinking about what #prayforbethisrael and prayers that “work” really mean to me. When we pray for healing - the names of those on our healing list are shared with all of us right now - some of us approach prayer as an appeal to a higher power to change someone's circumstances in their favor. Yet I believe

that prayer in its essence helps us call to mind the need for healing, for safety, for connection, for meaning, all around us and what we can do about it now - for the benefit of those we're praying for as well as ourselves. Prayer allows us to release that which is within us. It brings us together to take some of the burden off our shoulders. It encourages us to strengthen the connection to ourselves and to others, to keep the energy of life flowing between all of us who are connected in our humanity - and hopefully we take all those insights with us beyond our moments of prayer. That to me is a prayer that “works.”



As some of you know, Elana Arian, one of the most beloved composers of contemporary Jewish music, visited us this month for a concert. Please allow me to share her prayer for healing with you - a meditation really - that is inspired by the priestly blessing, as well as a loving kindness meditation that highlights three Hebrew words chanted communally to affirm our intention. Those words are “ken yehi ratzon” - may it be so.

And so, let us offer this prayer for healing for all those in need of healing. May it be so - ken yehi ratzon.

We begin with ourselves
We are all in need of love, we are all
deserving of wholeness
We are all deserving of life and
peace
We open up our hearts
And we offer ourselves this blessing:

C F C
May I/you/we be safe
May I/you/we be free
May I/you/we find space
F G
Space to just be

F/G G Am
Ken yehi ratzon x2
May I/you/we find my way back
home

Ken yehi ratzon x2
May I find my way back home

We call to mind
Someone who is good to us
Someone whose face brings us joy
Someone who knows us
Someone who really sees us, and
sees who we are
Someone who brings joy
Someone who understands us
Someone who makes us laugh,
even when we don't feel like
laughing

A force of good in your life
We open up our hearts
And we offer them this blessing

We call to mind, someone who is difficult
for us, someone who we don't understand
Someone who doesn't understand us
Someone who causes us pain
Someone who causes us confusion

We open up our hearts
And we try to offer them this blessing

C F C
May you be safe
May you be free
May you find space
F G
Space to just be

Ken yehi ratzon x2
May you find my your back home

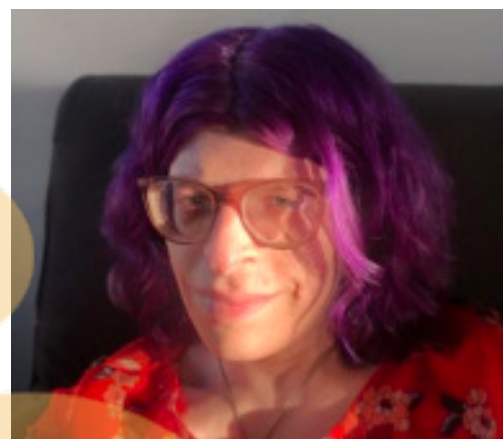
Ken yehi ratzon x2
May your find your way back home

We call to mind
All that is good here
All the gratitude we can feel when we sing
All the strength in our families
The love in our communities
All the good that we can do together
When we show up
When we say yes
When we extend our hand to one another
All the strength that we can build together
All the justice that we seek together
All the love that we can create together
When we feel the grace that surrounds us
Each and every one

We open up our hearts
And we offer ourselves this blessing

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ...

In this column, BCC members share things they do or love on a typical day in their lives. In this issue, Miriam Zimmerman, BCC board member, trans havurah chair, and software developer at Google takes us through her day.



7:00 - My alarm goes off. I turn it off, take my medicine (PrEP and two antidepressants), and say the modeh ani, the daily prayer thanking G-d for returning my soul to my body. It's a practice I started to try to find some daily gratitude during these difficult times. I then check my phone to catch up with friends and the news.



7:30 - I get out of bed and get washed up.



8:15 - I start some water boiling for tea, and pull breakfast together. I have granola, yogurt, and raspberries. The water boils, and I pour it over my tea bag - earl grey is my favorite morning tea, and that's what I'm having.

9:00 - I head over to my desk and sign in to my work computer. I've been fortunate enough to be able to work from home since March 2020. I start by checking emails and doing some code reviews. (Every change to the code that we write has to be approved by (at least) one other software engineer, and it's an essential part of ensuring that our software is reliable.)

9:45 - I check on membership applications for an anonymous mental health support mailing list that I help run at work, and let a half-dozen or so new members in.



10:00 - I fill out a form in our team's chat room to let my colleagues know highlights and lowlights from the past day—for example, things I'm stuck on, or accomplishments I want to share. Then, I get myself a second cup of tea.



10:15 - I respond to some comments on my most recent design document. For major projects, we first write documents explaining our general approach to the project and get sign-off from relevant stakeholders, before we spend significant time writing code for the project.

11:30 - We have our weekly team meeting, where we go into more detail about what we've done in the past week and learn about any updates with the team. Our manager has been working to hire a new manager for the team since he's been stretching himself too thin, so we get an update on that search process—it turns out that we'll be hiring internally, and a manager of our sibling team will take over our team as well, assuming that gets approved.



12:00 PM - Lunch break! I make myself a salad (with tofu, mixed greens, cucumber, bell pepper, green onions, and nuts), and have it with balsamic vinaigrette and a side of buttered toast.





12:45 - I log back onto my computer and start working on some code. I'm working on an improvement for the code our team maintains, to fix a pattern that's led to a couple of security vulnerabilities in the past.

2:30 - I'm stuck on a bug with my code, so I take a walk around the neighborhood to get some fresh air and clear my head.

2:50 - I return from the walk refreshed and ready to take another look at the code. The behavior of my code still doesn't quite make sense, so I ask a colleague for their thoughts. We IM back and forth a little bit and are able to figure out the issue.

3:30 - I have a meeting with a newer hire that I've been mentoring as they adjust to the company, and think about their identity. We talk a bit about gender and I offer some reassurances before we move into work. I tell them about my experience starting here and give them some advice on how to deal with the volume of information that comes at you when you first start.



4:15 - My mentorship meeting finishes. It ran a bit over today, but that's okay - I really value giving mentees all the time they need. I go back to coding and implement the fix I discussed with my coworker earlier. Then I write some tests to make sure that the code keeps working after I'm done with it.



4:55 - I write a brief summary of what I've done that day, so I can refer to it tomorrow when I'm talking about my accomplishments. Then it's time to start making dinner! I pull out my ingredients and start chopping vegetables for a curried chickpea dish with roasted vegetables and cucumber raita.

6:00 - Dinner is ready! I eat and check on the news.

6:45 - I wash the dishes - a never-ending chore if ever there was one!



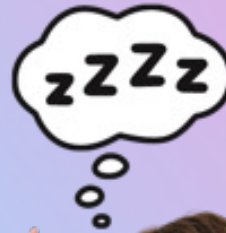
7:15 - I open my laptop and pull up the most recent episode of Star Trek: Discovery. It's a series I've quite been enjoying.



8:00 - I chat with my friends online for a bit - technology is so wonderful, it lets me keep up with friends from all over the country.



9:30 - I start to wind down for bed. First, I have to do some physical therapy. Thankfully, it's fairly passive, so I practice some Hebrew on Duolingo while I'm at it.



10:00 - I wash up and get ready for bed.

10:30 - I go to sleep



POCKETS

BY MARY AVIYAH FARKAS

Has anyone noticed that women's pockets are shrinking, and have almost disappeared? It used to be that the expression "put your hands in your pockets" had meaning for both genders. Both boys and girls could find soft comfort, refuge, in that extra layer of cloth nestled between skin and outer fabric.

I knew that feeling when I was young. I'd put my hands in my pockets and suddenly everything was better. The depth and warmth of the pocket provided security, a place to snuggle cold hands on a frosty day. A place to put shy hands, hands that couldn't express inner feelings, because my mouth couldn't express inner feelings. I had no tools for cogent expression. My hands were able to hide, become invisible, because I was invisible.

Later they became a place to put my hands while striding the world in confidence. A part of my learned toughness. I could walk down Manhattan streets humming or singing, hands in pockets, happy to feel the cement under my feet, see the sky and feel the rush of air as I hurried along, sure of my mission.

And they held things. The found bottle cap just right for inserting black-top sidewalk tar for that later game of Skeelzies. The piece of string which for sure will come in handy...someday. The coins to buy penny pretzels and Italian lemon ices. My pink Spalding ball for our game of stickball. And, after a near rape, my rabbit's foot and small pocket knife. That little knife gave me mental strength. I knew I'd be able to fend off the blue suited man white penis outside his pants who came at me and were it not for my eight year old legs' warp speed climbing six flights of stairs would have had his way.

Today pockets are either non-existent or have shrunk to such size that barely fingers can explore their contents. A full hand, even to above the wrist, no longer fully fits. It is women's pockets which have suddenly become too dainty for use. For comfort. For practicality. Men's pockets are deep and many.

Their pants pockets are deep as well as wide. Can safely hold a large cell phone not peeking out,

about to fall, as with women's pockets. The cell phone in men's front pocket can nuzzle deep inside, near the upper thigh. Safe from falling, no discomfort when sitting.

Men's jackets have inside pockets. The fabric behind one

or both breasts con-

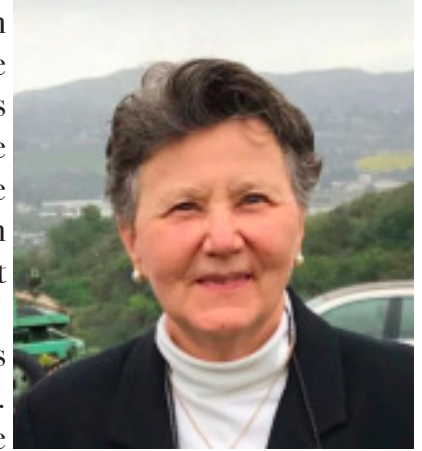
tains a pocket. At least one deep enough for an envelope, one's airline ticket or passport, certainly a wallet. Often safe and protected by a cloth clasp and button. Practical. A place where folded paper things will not wrinkle. And these inside pockets are in addition to the two wide, deep pockets on the outside, to carry the comb, some pocket change, lip balm, cell phone, something essential.

Additionally, there is the outside breast pocket. This may be the only one for men which is impractical. It used to hold the long forgotten handkerchief.

I keep a half score of the "old fashioned" pants, those without stretch fabric, with narrow waist, pleats below the belt loops, full hips and narrow bottoms. And with deep, wrist high, pockets. I keep these out of fashion wonders to wear while kicking around my house. In truth, I keep them to remind me of REAL pockets. And how wonderful it feels to thrust my hand into that magic layer of fabric between my skin and the world.

[Skeelzies: A popular game played in my childhood neighborhood. We'd draw a large square on the sidewalk, with chalk, and we'd shoot our weighted bottle caps from number to number, being careful to avoid the middle "evil" 13th square, surrounded on all sides by "evil S's".]

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BOOKS AND BAGELS

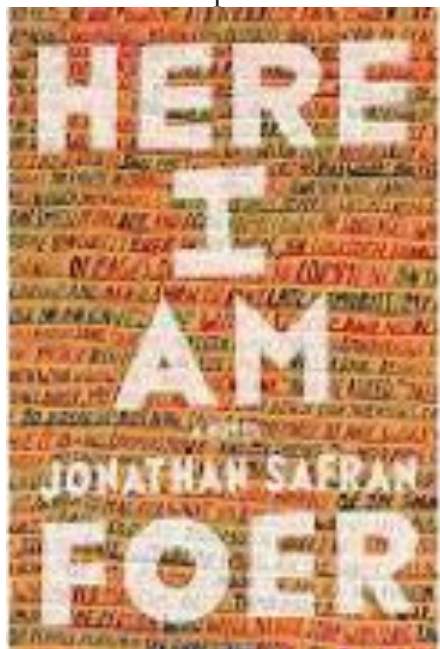
BOOK REVIEW

BY LARRY NATHENSON

Here I Am

by Jonathan Safran Foer

Jonathan Safran Foer's third and most recent novel is one of those books you either love or hate. At nearly 600 pages, it tackles a broad spectrum of issues from marital infidelity and



intergenerational obligations to the differing perceptions of American and Israeli Jews about what Judaism requires in the 21st century. The main characters are hard to like and become less sympathetic as the story progresses. Yet they manage to pull the reader in as they try to navigate among their conflicting duties as spouses, parents, and adult children, as American Jews when Israel is threatened, and as individuals trying

to find their place in an increasingly confusing world.

Jacob and Julia Bloch face a series of nearly simultaneous crises that would test the patience of any of us – their marriage is falling apart as their infidelities come to light, their eldest son is accused of writing something inappropriate at school on the eve of his bar mitzvah, the family's Holocaust survivor patriarch is dying, Jacob's Israeli cousins come to visit, and a disastrous earthquake in the Middle East triggers a war between Israel and its neighbors. Their family dysfunction is reminiscent of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Genesis, who also face conflicting duties to other family members and God and the nascent Jewish people. The book's title, "Here I Am," or "Hineni" in Hebrew, is Abraham's response when God calls him to sacrifice his son Isaac; he is simply present to God and doesn't raise the conflict with his parental duty to protect his son. Sam, the bar mitzvah boy, wishes his parents



had responded "here we are" when called to the rabbi's office about his alleged inappropriate language, simply being present for him rather than arguing about whether to give him the benefit of the doubt.

As the story proceeds, the agony of the Blochs' mental and emotional conflicts becomes too much for them, and often the reader, to bear. Who can grapple simultaneously with a disintegrating marriage and the urge to help save an imperiled Jewish homeland in which one has never resided? To Jacob, the emotional and psychological distance between him and his Israeli cousin Tamir feels wider than the ocean that separates their homes. How can Jacob wallow in his failings as a husband and father while Tamir is stranded in America by the closure of Israeli airspace, unable to rejoin his family and defend his country? Watching the news of the war from afar, the cousins argue over their respective personal obligations to their families and their historic duties to the Jewish people and its endangered homeland. They cannot simply say "here I am" to each other or the Jewish people in their hour of need.

The author's quirky style, familiar to readers of his earlier novel *Everything is Illuminated*, can often impede the reader's appreciation of the protagonists' plight. At once irreverent and poignant, hilarious and sad, the novel careens from crisis to crisis without resolving much. Foer's obsession with adolescent male (hetero) sexuality, mostly expressed through Jacob rather than his teenage son, can also be off-putting at times. Yet it takes considerable literary talent to merge all of these varied emotions and conflicts into a coherent story that addresses important themes in American Jewish life today. If you can plow through it, this novel is worth the effort.

BCC's Books and Bagels discussion group has met continuously since January 1995. The group met monthly in members' homes for a bagel brunch and discussion, although now we are meeting by Zoom until further notice. We read a variety of books: fiction and non-fiction, American and Israeli, historical and contemporary. The only requirement is some Jewish content (LGBT content is a plus, but not required). The group is open to BCC members and non-members, and you are welcome to join us for a particular book that may interest you. RSVP is required. For upcoming books, see the BCC Weekly News and Updates or check the [website calendar](#). To register for the Zoom link, contact Larry Nathenson at larrynath@aol.com.

BCC QUESTIONNAIRE:

CANTOR JUVAL PORAT

Asking a set of questions to learn new things about old friends was a popular pastime in 19th century Europe. At 14, future French novelist Marcel Proust became one of the first to fill out a questionnaire in his friend Antoinette Faure's book Confessions; An Album to Record Thoughts, Feelings, & co. In modern times, Inside the Actor's Studio host James Lipton created a set of questions as a fun and not-too-serious way of getting to know his guests better. Vanity Fair published a Proust-inspired questionnaire on the last page of the magazine for more than 20 years that became one of its most successful and popular columns. Since its heyday, [Karl Marx](#), [Terry Gross](#), [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#), and [David Bowie](#) have all participated in a version of the classic question-and-answer parlor game. At G'vanim Magazine, we are pleased to introduce the BCC Questionnaire!

1. What is your idea of Perfect Happiness?

Many ideas come to mind (and none of them are ever "perfect") - when the needs for safety, playfulness, meaning, intimacy and connection are all met, it's where the likelihood for happiness is the greatest for me. This can be laughing hard with a best friend, traveling to new places, spending a day or two on a song in a studio with a producer, cuddling with a pet, enjoying a most phenomenal dish with loved ones or moving one's body to one's favorite music. I'm feeling happy just listing all those things, as it reminds me that happiness is often an accessible option we forget to consider in our daily lives.

2. What is your greatest fear?

Personally, one of my greatest fears is homelessness - both in the spiritual as well as in the physical, "unhoused" realm.

3. What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

I guess that would be when the needs for safety, playfulness, meaning, intimacy and connection are not met. This could happen at an unstructured and unproductive meeting, in places where there's a lack of empathy or compassion, or places of fear of communicating one's own boundaries and desires.

4. Where would you most like to live?

I'd give the same answer that I give when I ask where I feel most at home: I do love Berlin, the city I lived in most recently before moving to Los Angeles. And I do love being the Cantor of and of service to BCC. A place where BCC would exist in a city like Berlin (a city designed with the pedestrian in mind, public transportation infrastructure, and with geographically and financially accessible offerings) would be a place I'd most like to live in!

5. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

"Deplore" is a strong word, I find! I don't wish to deplore anything about me - perhaps I can think of a trait that doesn't serve me most of the time - that would be self-doubt and the need for assurance. That's two traits, but who's counting?

6. What is the trait you most deplore in others?

A binary outlook on the world.

7. What is the quality you most like in a person?

Empathy

8. What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

Overachievers and multitaskers - all symptoms of hustle culture to me.

9. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I'd change my insecurities around my body perhaps.

10. Which living person do you most admire?

I don't think I have one living person I most admire. Especially during the times we all go through collectively, with so many things hanging in uncertainty, I'm filled with awe and admiration towards anyone in my life that is pushing through, showing up, remaining calm and hopeful, practicing kindness in the most anxiety-inducing moments, being of service to others and sharing their creativity with the world. There are a few of those in my life and in BCC's community, which I very much admire.

11. On what occasion do you lie?

I try to be as honest and clear as possible in my communication with anyone I interact with. I think, in an occasion where the truth would be hurtful to the person the truth is shared with, I'd perhaps express my reluctance to share the truth if the situation allows. Though I thankfully never had to be in such a situation, if my life or the lives of others would be put at risk by the truth, I'd lie.

12. Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Probably "Oh my God"? I'd probably need to record myself to be able to answer this question more reliably. Probably the word "probably"!

13. Which talent would you most like to have?

I'm pretty grateful for the gifts I've been given and the fact

that we all have our diverse gifts to bring to the table. Along those lines there's no added talent I'd like to have. I do however admire those whose passions, talents and gifts are different than mine and I love how we can all work together with our individual talents.

14. What do you consider your greatest achievement?

My two biological sons I helped conceive and my ongoing relationship with them and their parents.

15. What is your most treasured possession?

Anything that sparks joy is part of my treasured possessions and overall I'm a "less is more" kind of guy who tries not to get too attached to material things. Recently, I guess, the mp3 files for my next album, which I hope to release later this year, shared between me and my producers, are my most treasured possessions!

16. What is your greatest extravagance?

I do love my projector at home and all the streaming delights it enables me to watch on the big screen. And to travel across the ocean to attend a concert with a first row seat.

17. What is your favorite TV show?

We do live in the Golden Age of television and there's so much fantastic content out there, it's hard to choose just one most favorite show! Most recently though it'll have to be Search Party, followed by Midnight Mass, followed by After Life.

18. What is your favorite sound?

The sound of my dog Tikvah yawning.

19. Which book do you wish you had written?

Conversations with God by Neale Donald Walsch

20. Who is your hero of fiction or Torah?

Yuval!

21. Which historical figure would you most like to meet?

So many! I'd love to meet (or maybe just attend a lecture, or participate in a workshop) with Maimonides, Ludwig van Beethoven, Leah Goldberg, Astrid Lindgren and Marshall Rosenberg to name a few.

22. Who are your heroes in real life?

My mother, my older brother, my rabbinic clergy partners past and present, many members of the BCC community and various organizations (JewishVeg, BINA, HIAS, the Center for Non Violent Communication, SeaLegacy, Institute for Jewish Spirituality and more!)

23. What are your favorite names?

Yam, Shir, Julius and Leo!

24. What is your favorite age?

Age is nothing but a number to me! My favorite number would be... Can I sit this one out?

25. What is your favorite childhood memory?

At the end of each day, my mother would sit by my bedside and we'd share about our day's experience and debrief.

26. What turns you on (creatively, spiritually or emotionally)?

Music, books, movies, visual art, theater, poetry, leading a community in song, in prayer and in worship.

27. What turns you off?

Resentment, passive aggressiveness, impatience, incompetence and ignorance.

28. What is your favorite curse word?

Uff... hang out with me for a while and you'll find out!

29. What is your favorite language?

Hebgermish (that's Hebrew+German+English) - I do speak that language with some of my favorite people!

30. What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

I would like to be a counselor of sorts some time in the future.

31. Who would you like to see on a new banknote?

The little prince, or maybe Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, or Mary Oliver

32. Which invention do you admire most?

The Internet

33. What is the first thing you do in the morning?

Get dressed, say "modeh ani" (if I remember) and walk my dog!

34. What is the last thing you do before going to bed?

Turn off the lights!

35. How would you like to die?

Painlessly and with a content heart.

36. If you were to die and come back as a person, an animal or a thing, who or what would it be?

No preference as what I'd reincarnate really, but I do hope that it would be a life filled with adventure, meaning and blessings!