On Purim – Being an Upstander

by Rabbi Shawn Zevit

These days I am experiencing Purim as a daily show—larger than life characters operating on impulse and often masking shadowy motives. Still, in the midst of it all, a call to find strength through engaging in the hidden and revealed, in the masked and the exposed, the Jewish Purim arrives!

Purim means “to cast lots.” We read the well-crafted drama of the Purim story from the Hebrew Bible, Megillat (The Scroll of) Esther; celebrate with a festive meal/seudat Purim; give tzedakah directly to those in need- mattanot l’evyonim - not through third parties - and give mishloach manot- deliver festive goodies to friends. We are encouraged to connect deeply with the Purim story, dress up in masks and costumes, hiding as it were, just like Esther did until her Uncle Mordechai challenges and supports her to reveal her true Jewish identity.

Even the Talmud discusses the practice of drinking “spirits” on Purim to the extent we can no longer tell who is good and evil, and are less able to make these internal distinctions in order to reveal our true selves. Esther’s name is derived from the word for that which is hidden or “nistar.” We enter the story, inhabit the roles, claim our true heritage and identity, then celebrate and release our tightly wound self-image.

There is a traditional playfulness and frivolity that developed around Purim, often in troubled times. We try on masks of shadow and light, explore our own stories without being too defined by them and in the process, reveal more about our essential selves. We can each step for a moment into what a different persona or costume might express, celebrate and lampoon our own foibles and loosen the grip of self-judgment. We also give ourselves permission to inhabit, test out and satirize our communal, national or global circumstances- where what is hidden and unspoken gets satirized in a way that gives us perspective and empowerment over that which is and is not in our control.

Esther’s journey (like God who is not named and is the “hidden one” (continued on the next page)
Rabbi’s Letter

in this book) moves her from obscurity to secrecy to revealing her true self and taking a stand for her people at great risk. Her story can inspire us as we respond to many issues that we try to tackle for the sake of justice in all areas of life and for the wellbeing of our planet.

Thanks to modern Jewish feminist thought, Vashti, King Ahashverous’ wife, has been claimed as one of the champions of the story, as she risked and lost her own standing by saying “No to the King” as our own Rabbi Margot Stein sings in her co-written Purim song.

To me, this is actually in keeping with Esther’s own journey towards self-revelation and values-clarification. It is what we as Jews, partners and allies wrestle with as we do the dance of being safe enough to hide out and be loved for our patterns and viewpoints. We strive to grow and unmask our surface presentation. Together, we discover the deeper Divine potential locked in each of us.

Many of our inspiring b’nai mitzvah this year have reminded us that being an “upstander” is part of being an adult. This means stepping out of our comfort zone to defend ourselves, our families, our neighbors, immigrants or refugees, people who identify as LGBTQ, persons differently abled or our elderly, anyone under threat of losing healthcare coverage or gender or reproductive rights. It includes any group, including our own Jewish community, being targeted by our elected officials or fellow citizens with prejudicial intent.

I wonder what we will discover as we cast our lots (pur) together and unroll the scroll of our own stories and our people’s stories for all to hear once more Wednesday night, March 20 at 6:15 p.m. I’m also looking forward to celebrating with all of you at our multiple events this month at Mishkan and the many actions, marches for justice out of our membership in and work with POWER, New Sanctuary Movement, HIAS and more. Chag Purim sameah!

On Saturday evening, May 4th, our congregation will celebrate our 20th Year with Gabby Kaplan-Mayer who has has touched so many lives in so many ways:

Tot Shabbat, Shabbat School, Food for Thought, Celebrations! and the uproarious Madame Meshugenneh!

Let’s mark this milestone with gratitude and fun!

To Volunteer please contact co-chairs Jean Brody, jeanbrody@comcast.net or Lisagail Zeitlin at lisagail@lisagailsmiles.com

(continued from the previous page)
**Shoah Torah Service, Saturday, March 2**

Mishkan Shalom’s annual *Shabbat* service to honor our Holocaust *Torah*, and the Jews who *davened* with it before they perished, will take place **Saturday, March 2 at 10:00 a.m.**

The *Torah*, Mishkan’s first when the congregation was created in 1988, comes from Uherske Hradiste, a small city in the Czech Republic’s province of Moravia.

The dramatic story of its journey from Moravia to a dusty warehouse in Prague, then to London and finally to Mishkan Shalom, will be retold at this moving worship service. It’s one of 1,564 *Torahs* rescued from what is now the Czech Republic, restored and distributed by the Memorial Scrolls of London.

On Saturday, the service will be co-led by Rabbi Shawn Zevit. The week’s *parasha*, *Vayakhel* will be read from the *Shoah* scroll. Carol Towarnicky will deliver the *d’var torah*, and Ron Goldwyn will describe the history of the Jews of Uherske Hradiste, and update the international *Torah* rescue effort that continues to this day. All in attendance will join in reading the names of more than 200 martyred Jewish residents of Uherske Hradiste and say *kaddish* for them, perhaps the only time or place where these men, women and children are remembered.

For more information, go to Mishkan’s website, click on Spiritual Life, then click on [Uherske Hradiste](http://www.memorialscrolltrust.org/). Or visit the Memorial Scrolls Trust website, [http://www.memorialscrolltrust.org/](http://www.memorialscrolltrust.org/).

**Saturday Afternoon at the Movies**

**Saturday, March 2 - 1:45pm - 3:30pm - Yidl Mitn Fidl (1936)**

We hope you stay after services this *Shabbat* to enjoy this extraordinary movie.

Part of it was filmed in a town (Kazimierz Dolny) in the Polish shtetl that hadn’t changed much in several centuries, and locals served as extras. The rest of the movie is set in 20th Century Warsaw. We hope the film will paint a picture of the civilization many of our ancestors came from and be another reminder on this day of what was lost and saved in the *Shoah*. The movie stars Molly Picon alongside regulars from the Yiddish theater and film industry in Poland at the time.

Weather permitting, we’ll take a short walk around our own Roxborough shtetl in between the oneg and the movie showing in the Chapel.

The Library Committee chose the afternoon of March 2 because the Congregation’s annual *Shoah Torah Shabbat* Service takes place that morning. It all brings to life our One Book, Michael Wex’ *Born to Kvetch* which uses close examination of Yiddish to paint a sociological and psychological portrait of European Jews.
Dear Friends,

*Purim* is coming—a time of celebration and transformation. We put on masks and costumes to engage in sacred play and to explore the hidden contours of our lives. The holiday of *Purim*, urges us to wonder:

*Who am I?*
*How do I define myself?*
*How do I engage with this wild ride through life?*

We often define ourselves by what we do for work or by who we are related to or responsible for. These are all true indications of who we are, but *Purim* asks us to reach deeper, to uncover more layers and to notice the parts of ourselves that we are comfortable revealing and the parts of ourselves that we usually keep hidden. *Purim* invites us to be in a state of curiosity and becoming. To consider ourselves—“abstract” and still in formation.

*Purim* also challenges us to notice the masks we put on to appear acceptable to ourselves and others. It is a natural inclination to want to “show our best,” to reveal our strengths and our competences. As it is also a natural inclination to want to keep hidden our vulnerabilities, frailties and sense of inadequacy.

Revealing vulnerabilities, acknowledging fears or doubts, is courageous and honorable. Each time we allow ourselves to be revealed, we lessen the burdens that we are carrying and we help create the context for others to reveal themselves as well. Revealing ourselves makes it possible to come into deeper and fuller relationship with each other.

We are all complex beings doing our best to navigate this mysterious journey of life. Having a preconceived idea of perfection that must be reached for us to be “OK” is a disservice and a distraction to this adventure.

*Purim* calls us—to value and celebrate the wild paradoxes, richness, challenges and blessings that make up this life. Laugh and rejoice at this absurd and wild ride through time. Dance and play, joke and laugh. For in the words of the psalmist: *This is the moment we have -- let us rejoice and be glad.* (Psalm 118:24)

I look forward to celebrating Purim together on Wednesday night, March 20, as the earth turns us from winter to spring.

Much blessing to all.

*Shalom,*  
*Rabbi Yael*
Use your phone to show the cashier this flyer or hand in the coupon below.

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Trolley Car Station- 3940 Baltimore Ave
(215) 709-3320 – www.trolleycarstation.com
POWER: Working Towards Fair Funding for Education

by Rivka Jarosh

When I was principal of Mishkan Shalom’s congregational school, we taught students about how our schools are funded. We tried to show how getting money for schools from property taxes was unfair for poor people: districts with expensive homes had more money for schools than districts with homes that were not so expensive. State government was also supposed to compensate for some of that difference by giving money to poorer districts. Unfortunately, in Pennsylvania, there was no rhyme or reason as to how money was spent on education.

In 47 of the 50 other states in our country, they have a formula called a Fair Funding Formula where a state considers factors such as how much poverty there is in a district, how many special needs students there are, and other relevant considerations in order to determine funding for the district. In 2016, Governor Wolf was able to get a bipartisan bill passed to give Pennsylvania its Fair Funding Formula. Finally, there would be a plan to how to distribute money for education in a fair way.

This year I got more active in the group in POWER that is interested in funding for our school system. Since I had been a teacher in Philadelphia for many years, and understood how funding affected my school and my classroom, working with this task force has been a good fit for me. I learned that the Fair Funding Formula is only used for 6% of the money designated for education from the State. I learned that the Philadelphia Parking Authority is supposed to give money toward education and hasn’t yet done that. I also learned that the tax abatements that many builders were given interfere with how much money Philadelphia gets.

The taskforce for Education in POWER is made up of people interested in helping our children in Philadelphia and other places around the state get a better education. We believe that using the Fair Funding Formula to provide the money for schools would be the fairest way to distribute state money designated for education. If you are interested in joining us, please come on March 4 to the Power Office at 7:00 p.m. for the next meeting. What I most want is that you stay interested in the issue and join us when there are actions to promote a fairer system of funding for all of our state’s children.

Join a Village Shabbat!

F R I D A Y , M A R C H 1 5

Hosted by
Elissa Goldberg and Anndee Hochman (Mt. Airy)
Roderick MacNeil (Old City, on the Del. River)
Tsurah and Yosaif (Mt. Airy)
Stephanie Shell and Brian Doherty (Ardmore)

If you would like to host a spring Village Shabbat on May 31, please contact Marcy at marcy.boroff@gmail.com
Ever since she began preparing for her own service, Jessie experiences other kids’ b’nai mitzvah with a different, more attentive lens.

At a Reform service she attended, congregants read an English translation after every prayer, and the Torah chanting was surprisingly brief. Even at Mishkan, she says, “Some people like to do a different tune of a prayer than I’m doing. I watch to see how the different tunes are.”

With six weeks remaining until her own bat mitzvah, Jessie is learning a fourth aliyah, going over prayers and thinking about the strange middle section of her Torah portion, Shmini (Lev. 9:1-11:47). Prior to a detailed discussion of what foods and animals are and aren’t kosher, the parasha describes how Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu offer God “alien fire” and, as a consequence, are consumed by flames.

“I’m going to talk about the mystery at the ending,” Jessie says. “What the fire is, why they went through the rituals, why they got swallowed by the fire.”

Her tikkun olam project, still in the planning stages, is less mysterious; Jessie, a lover of animals—including her dogs Mississippi and Molly, and her fish, Peachy—hopes to volunteer at a shelter or animal rescue.

She always knew she’d have a bat mitzvah. Her family belonged to Mishkan when she was very young, then looked for a synagogue closer to home (they live in Bluebell, about 45 minutes away), but didn’t find one that felt right. After a brief hiatus, they rejoined Mishkan in 2013.

“At Hebrew School, [Hebrew School] is very fun, but you also learn a lot,” she says. “You don’t just learn how to speak Hebrew. You learn about the history, about Judaism, about Israel, everything. There are a lot of activities to go with each lesson. I liked learning about World War II. It was very sad, but also very interesting.”

At Wissahickon Middle School, where Jessie is in 7th grade, her favorite subjects are math—they’re currently working with scales—and art. She loves to create in her free time, too, throwing pottery bowls on the wheel in her mom’s basement, then firing them in the kiln. “A lot of them are decorative. Some, we use as pencil-holders,” she says.

Jessie sings in her school chorus; before bat mitzvah preparation gobbled her spare time, she used to act: in school plays, at the Music Training Center and—in one brief, indelible moment—as a maid with a single spoken line in a camp production of Annie.

What did she enjoy about acting? “I liked when I got a big part and memorized all my lines perfectly and nailed it completely. I felt happy after that.”

She hopes to feel something similar after her bat mitzvah—that, and a deeper sense of belonging. “I’ve learned a lot about what’s kosher and not kosher. I learned a lot of new Hebrew words. [Becoming a bat mitzvah] is like you’re becoming even more a part of the community.”
Mazel Tov
We offer a hearty mazel tov to Jessie Auerbach and her family, as she becomes bat mitzvah this month.

Condolences
We send condolences to Erika Aaron and Mark Fliegelman on the loss of Erika’s mother Geraldine Aaron. May Geraldine’s memories be for a blessing and may Erika, Mark and their family be comforted among all who mourn.

Love and Support
This month we send our ongoing love, support, and prayers for healing to Mishkan members Orly Zeewy, Steve Jones, Mindy Maslin, Lisa Auerbach, Gene Bishop, Gena Lopata, Ray Kaplan, Erica Eisenberg, Jane Lipton, Adam Tuttle, Claire Needelman, Robin Berenholz, Bernice Bricklin, Mark Goodman, Denise Kulp, Robin Leidner, George Kaplan-Meyer, Nathan Horwitz, Lior Feldman and Natalie Gorvine.

We also send ongoing love, support, and prayers for healing to all those Mishkan members in need of healing but who seek to remain private.

We are keeping Carol Dombroski (mother of Brian Dombroski), Natalie Caplin (mother of Wendy Caplin), Eleazar Shimon Hakohen ben Shoshana v’Ahron Yosai (father of Rabbi Shawn Zevit), Sarah Rivka bat Elizabeth (mother of Rabbi Shawn Zevit), Sarah Bradley (mother of David Bradley), Debra Singer (sister of Karen Singer), Patrick Windle (brother of Susan Windle), Sal Berenholz (father of Robin Berenholz), Jackie Berman-Gorvine (daughter-in-law of Natalie & Harold Gorvine), Edgar Galson (father of Wendy Galson and father-in-law of Susan Windle), and Julie Post and Joseph Post (sister and father of Nancy Post) and in our prayers as well. May they all experience a refuah sheleimah (full healing).

Please notify us if you want a name added to, or removed from, our “Ongoing love, support, and prayers of healing” list.

Are you receiving Acts of Caring via email?
Acts of Caring now goes out to all Mishkan members. It is our communication central for sharing life cycle events and community needs for help. If you are not receiving Acts of Caring, please check your spam, or if you have gmail, your solicitations folder (Acts of Caring is distributed by Constant Contact). If you unsubscribe from Ma Hadash, intentionally or accidentally, you will also be unsubscribed from Acts of Caring. Please contact the office for clarification.

Acts of Caring
Acts of Caring lets the Mishkan Shalom community learn about significant events in the lives of our members. In this way, we can reach out to one another in times of grief, illness, and joy. To reach us simply email: actsofcaring@mishkan.org.

HINENI--HERE I AM
If you could use a little help because of illness, or joy (new baby!) or you know of a Mishkan member too shy to ask, please email actsofcaring@mishkan.org and we will reach out. Hineni offers concrete support to members in need of short term help, including meals, visits, transportation, etc. If you would like some help, but do not wish a public solicitation, please contact the rabbis, or actsofcaring@mishkan.org and we will speak with you privately and seek to arrange help. Our Hineni coordinators are Lisa Mervis and Chris Taranta.

Got Nachas? Sharing your good news is a marvelous way to connect our community! Please don’t be shy - send all lifecycle events you would like to be posted to our email address: actsofcaring@mishkan.org.
Please join us every Saturday for Torah Study from 9:00 a.m. – 9:55 a.m.

**Saturday, March 2, 10:00 a.m. – Shoah Torah Shabbat**, with Rabbi Shawn, Ron Goldwyn, Carol Towarnicky, **Hey, Vav and Zayin classes**

**Thursday, March 7, 7:00 p.m. – Rosh Hodesh celebration**

**Friday, March 8, 7:30 p.m. – Kabbalat Shabbat**, with Rabbi Shawn

**Saturday, March 9, 10:00 a.m. – A Way In Mindfulness Service**, with Rabbi Yael

**Saturday, March 16, 10:00 a.m. – A Way In Mindfulness Service**, with Rabbi Yael

**Friday, March 22, 7:30 p.m. – Kabbalat Shabbat**, with Rabbis Rayzel Raphael, Tirzah Firestone, and Rabbi Shawn

**Saturday, March 23, 10:00 a.m. – Shabbat Service**, with Rabbi Shawn

**Saturday, March 30, 10:00 a.m. – Shabbat Service**, with Rabbi Yael. Jessie Auerbach will be called to the Torah as a Bat Mitzvah

**FOR ALL SHABBAT AND WEEKEND PROGRAMMING**

**VISIT THE [WEBSITE CALENDAR](#)**