

SHORESH

שורש

Congregation Etz Chayim
Community News

SEPTEMBER 2022

תשרי תשפ"ג | TISHREI 5783

Mahzor 101

Practising Mussar

The CJN Comeback

Shanah Tovah – Happy New Year

Elissa Abrams and Alex Singer, Claudia, Ben, and Hannah

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Diane and Richard Boroditsky and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Dina Frankel, Gail, Ron, and Marlee Cantor

Wishing a happy and healthy New Year to all our family and friends

Fayanne, Avrom, and Carli Charach

Wishing our family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Wendy, Alan, Laurie, and Jillian Daien

Wishing our family and friends a happy and healthy New Year

Darlene and Jerry Davis

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Ethel and Zvi Dil

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Ann, Max, and Elie Feierstein

Wishing your families a year of gezunt, health, and wellbeing

Norman Freedman and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Dina and Bruce Granove

May the coming year bring good health, strong connections, true peace, and safety to everyone.

Kim Hirt, Jerry Rubin, Bina, Rachel, and Alex

A sweet and happy New Year to all our family and friends

Lil Hirt

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Margaret Kasner and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Howard Kideckel

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Matthew and Nola, Ezra, Sonia, and Caleb, Yona and Eliran, Galya, and Gilon Lazar

Shana Tova U'Metukah

Estrid Mandel and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year



Photo: iStock.com/motimeiri

Happy New Year

Fay Reich

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Jane, Ronald, and Tiffany Reider, and Lucas Baird

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Lorraine Reiner

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Colette Rubin

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Sid and Joyce Rosenhek and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Marvin and Esther Samphir and family

Wishing family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Shayna and Merrill Shulman and family

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Tony Sorto and family

Wishing my friends a healthy and happy New Year

Avery and Nata Spigelman, children Adam, David, Jenny, and Deborah, and grandchildren Joshua, Connor, and Logan

Wishing our family and friends a healthy and happy New Year

Debbie and Don Stern and family

Wishing all our friends and congregation members a happy and healthy New Year

Women's League of Congregation Etz Chayim

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy New Year

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Casting Off to Begin Anew

Tashlich at Rosh Hashanah

Each year at Rosh Hashanah, Jews are bestowed anew the opportunity to heal their relationship with G-d. Jews atone for transgressions committed throughout the year past, asking for forgiveness, and returning to G-d.

Within many synagogue congregations, members are invited to take part in an ancient Jewish ritual called *Tashlich* on the first day of Rosh Hashanah (unless it falls on Shabbat, in which case the ritual is postponed). *Tashlich* means to cast off, in Hebrew. The *Tashlich* ceremony, which generally takes place at a body of water, involves a symbolic casting-off of sins into the water.



For Monica Neiman (MEd), Program and Engagement Director for Congregation Etz Chayim, last year's outdoor *Tashlich* service was the first official synagogue event she attended after being hired. A small group of people ("minyan size, maybe a little larger," says Monica) started off at the synagogue, then made their way down the street to the river, to do the short *Tashlich* service. Rabbi Kliel had a large bag of breadcrumbs which he distributed to participants for casting

their sins into the river, Monica says, mentioning that this was the first time she had met Cantor Tracy and Rabbi Kliel in person. Afterwards, everyone walked back to the synagogue where there was an outdoor evening *minyan* service on the patio.

"We're commanded with each of our holidays to celebrate these and other rituals with community; they're not meant to be alone, because then you have to ask that question, 'did it really happen?' And the experience is elevated when you mark moments with others because you have other people to witness it with you," continues Monica. She says there is also an element of accountability when we take part in this ritual with community.

"We don't need to know what skeletons are in each other's closets, but it's about knowing that everyone is imperfect and all of us are trying to work on different things within ourselves."

Rosh Hashanah—a Time to Take Stock

Several years ago, back home in Seattle, Monica and a friend began a special New Year's ritual at the secular new year, which she thinks fits well into her High Holidays practice, too.

"The high holidays are very much a time of reflection for me, thinking about things from the past year and looking forward to the future, reflecting on positive things that occurred, accomplishments, new relationships formed, and then also taking stock of the other side: bad things that happened, losses, relationships that soured, and letting those negative things go, not wanting to carry over that energy into the new year, also thinking, how can I do better in the year ahead, how can I make amends? *Tashlich* feels very appropriate for those things, that's what it's all about," she says.

We don't need to know what skeletons are in each other's closets, but it's about knowing that everyone is imperfect and all of us are trying to work on different things within ourselves.

Monica describes the friends' personal ritual of reflection, which goes back to her college days: Each friend would make three lists, recording all the positive things from the year past on one list. On the other side of that page, the friends recorded goals for the next year as well as hopes and wishes for the new year. On the third list, they included any negative things that they were hoping not to carry over into the next year.

"We would fold those up to put in our pocketbook, or something, so that we always had it to carry around."

She believes this ritual has a similar purpose as the *tashlich* ceremony: "casting off things we're not proud of and we want to do better; anything that is weighing us down so we can start the new year with a clean slate."

Monica immigrated to Winnipeg from Seattle, Washington in 2021, to be with her husband, Javier Gore. One year later, she is optimistic about the future.

"My hope for this year is to see more of the community turn out for events. Being new, I look at it as an opportunity to meet more of the people that are part of this community I've joined. I'm hoping for opportunities to continue meeting people in person in the year ahead," she says ■

Renewed Interest in Synagogue Youth Groups

USY and Geshet USY (Formerly Kadima) at Congregation Etz Chayim

A need was expressed recently within the Etz Chayim community: a call for extended local options for meaningful Jewish youth programming following the B'nai Mitzvah years. Hearing its members, Congregation Etz Chayim stepped up to the plate.

Congregation Etz Chayim has plans to revive two local synagogue youth groups, USY (United Synagogue Youth, targeting grades 9-12) and Geshet USY (formerly Kadima) (grades 6-8). Both groups have a history in Winnipeg but have not had a local presence in decades. To be able to revive the youth groups, Congregation Etz Chayim had to renew its commitment to the parent organization, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), the major congregational organization of Conservative Judaism in North America).

"We are the only local synagogue now affiliated with the USCJ, and that provides us the opportunity to fill this gap in our community," says Avrom Charach, president of the board for Congregation Etz Chayim. Marc Schaeffer, chair of the Etz Chayim family committee, explains that the demand is greater than simply opportunities for Winnipeg Jewish youth to interact socially.

"On the committee, conversations started to centre around the desire to have more Jewish-focused experiences for young people," says Marc, citing Shabbat- and High-Holiday-service-focused programming as two of many possibilities: "If they weren't quite ready for the adult service, they could go to the youth program and learn the rhythm of the Shabbat service. Or, for High Holidays, experience a portion of the service, not just entertainment or babysitting. USY can answer some of those concerns."

Tools for Leading Successful Lives as Jews

Sabrina Bokser, vice president of the Etz Chayim board, is eager to provide local Jewish youth with an environment and tools to help them lead successful

lives as Jews. "The goal is not only to engage kids but also to offer Jewish programming that helps build community leadership skills in future members and helps them embrace the commitment to preserve Jewish life and values." While Etz Chayim has a history of offering youth-targeted programming like the chocolate seder, the Purim carnival, and Junior Congregation, "we noticed over the years that participants and interest had declined," Sabrina says.

"But when they were engaged by Rabbi Kliel or Cantor Tracy directly, in special services, we had many participants and great interest," she continues. It became clear that for programming to succeed in both attendance and impact, it was necessary to try something different.

"We talked about USY and its goals, missions, and values, what it could offer our community. We proposed a plan to the board, who thankfully supported the idea," she says.

The main reason for rejoining USCJ (committing to five years) is so the *shul* can later resurrect Geshet USY/USY chapters in Winnipeg, says Jonathan Buchwald, executive director of Congregation Etz Chayim. But the membership indeed comes with some fringe benefits.

"The organization has undergone changes and is much more in tune with helping to address the needs of member congregations," he says. This means Congregation Etz Chayim can access resources and supports for board development, strategic planning, and

Sabrina Bokser, Vice President of CEC board



Photo courtesy USCJ

other administrative needs. "In addition, with advances to online technology, we can provide a large array of free online resources to congregants, be they religious, educational, or social," he says.

Implementation planning for local USY and Geshet USY chapters will begin after the High Holidays, says Mark Schaeffer. The goal is to hire a youth director to work on launching the youth group chapters.

"We would like to see a strong chapter of USY grow with youth from across Winnipeg," says Avrom, "to keep youth interested and involved in a Jewish milieu. In the long term that will mean commitment to Jewish life in decades to come."

Sabrina agrees the decision was imperative for ensuring that Winnipeg has a thriving and active Jewish community into the future.

"We have to prepare our future leaders, and this is a great tool and a great environment, a great space to provide kids with that," she says.

"What they can learn through USY they can't learn through other groups: Jewish life, Jewish values, community," says Sabrina. ■

The Reinvention of The Canadian Jewish News (and One of the Guys Behind That)

Bryan Borzykowski wasn't going to let anything silence *The Canadian Jewish News* for long—not even a global pandemic. But a makeover wasn't out of the question. In fact, that may be just what saved the national media organization serving Canada's Jewish community.

Established in 1960, *The Canadian Jewish News* (CJN) operated as a weekly tabloid for 60 years. After some restructuring in 1971 and again in 2013, the not-for-profit news publication announced its closure early in 2020, devastated by Covid like many other businesses worldwide.

What remained undiminished, however, was Bryan's conviction: that "a thriving Jewish community needs a thriving Jewish press, to cover the issues Jewish people care about." He acknowledges that Winnipeg's *Jewish Post & News* successfully covers local Jewish news and issues. "But there's a bigger Jewish world out there, broader issues that affect people across Canada," he says. "So we need *The CJN*."

With Yoni Goldstein returning to the editor's seat and as CEO, and Bryan now president of the board, *The CJN* was resurrected from the ashes about eight months later as a digital-first media organization, having shed the skin of its former print self.

Digital Swerve

"One of the issues with the newspaper was that it was so resource intensive," says Bryan. "It felt like time to try something different. We wanted to run a leaner operation and digital is where people are at." So, the publication rebranded as a digital news site, with some other supporting media to broaden its reach. The *CJN* now hosts a selection of podcasts, like *Menschwarmers* (about Jews and sports), *Yehupetzville* with Ralph Benmergui (a search for Canadian Jewish identity) and *The CJN Daily*, hosted by Ellin Bessner. The *CJN* also publishes a quarterly print magazine as a perk for subscribers, with deeper coverage of Jewish news and issues. And the *CJN* has begun hosting events, like a

July live-streamed taping of one of the podcasts, *Shticks & Giggles* (about Jews and comedy) and an exclusive *CJN* Zoom interview with Canadian writer, historian, professor, and politician Michael Ignatieff.

"We have broadened out our base of content offerings and we are able to reach people in ways we haven't before, so that allows us to cover more ground."

Beyond Toronto and Montreal

Another change is geographic expansion, says Bryan. "We are trying to look beyond Toronto and Montreal for coverage. We're everywhere, and I think that allows us to deepen our coverage."

Bryan says he has been connected to Jewish media since before he was even a journalism student. "The first Jewish paper I wrote for was the *Jewish Post*, and then I had a column in *The Canadian Jewish News* writing about university issues. I will never look at those articles again because I'm sure they're terrible," he laughs. Today, his involvement with the *CJN* feels rewarding. "It's connecting me more with my own Jewishness. Thinking about things differently, paying attention to things I hadn't been paying attention to in the past. It's been fulfilling in both my personal and professional life."

A longtime business journalist, Bryan began his career as a music journalist. His articles have been published in an array of publications including *The New York Times*, *CNN Money*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Business*, and *Maclean's*. He has appeared on CTV and SiriusXM Radio and has discussed business and investing on CJOB radio and CityNews. He has also worked with publishing companies like Forbes, Time Inc., Dow Jones Content Lab, and John Wiley & Sons.

Telling Stories

In 2018 Bryan founded ALLCAPS Content, a branded content firm that takes a journalism approach to content marketing. "Companies are having a harder time telling their stories in traditional news," he says. "But because of the Internet, with websites and newsletters,



Bryan Borzykowski

they can connect with their customers in a much more direct way than they ever did in the past," says Bryan.

"I saw an opportunity to help companies tell their own stories," continues Bryan, who studied journalism at Ryerson University. In recent years, it has become more challenging for businesses to tell their stories in traditional news, because the industry has shrunk, he says, citing fewer news outlets, dwindling page counts, and fewer journalists, all of which have resulted in fewer stories being told.

The business of custom-content creation—articles written in a journalistic style, but which classify as marketing—has grown over the past decade. And thanks to the Internet, Bryan says, he can help connect businesses with their customers in a much more direct way than ever before. "To do that, you need high-quality content," he says. "So, I'm bringing my experience to create journalism-style, high-quality content for companies—articles, podcasts, videos, white papers, all sorts of different things," says Bryan, who has three daughters with wife Lainie, early years coordinator at Gray Academy: Molly (14), Shae (11), and Romi (6).

Bryan believes the quality of custom content has to compare to what the public is already ingesting in consumer media. "You need to up your content game and we do that," he says.

Like *The Canadian Jewish News*, the world of media and how we consume it is continually evolving. And Bryan Borzykowski is just riding that wave. ■



The Canadian Jewish News



The Canadian Jewish News

The CJN Quarterly

Summer 2022



Etz Chayim Co-Stars Sweater-Up on Stage

While Hannah Schaeffer and Kevin McIntyre are both members of Congregation Etz Chayim, it was a theatre stage, not a *bimah*, that brought them together this past summer. Both were cast in the Rainbow Stage production of *The Hockey Sweater: A Musical*, Hannah as part of the youth cast and Kevin a member of the adult lineup. We pair Hannah and Kevin again in *Shoresh* with their thoughts on the musical, performing in general, big small-towns, and a few more delightful details spawned from their shared experience as part of the cast of the Winnipeg premier of *The Hockey Sweater*.

Childhood Dream Come True

It may have seemed too good to be true, but Hannah Schaeffer wasn't dreaming.

"Every day is an extraordinary, magical day. I pinch myself to doublecheck that this is happening, because it's so unbelievable," said Hannah about being cast in the Rainbow Stage production last summer. "It's unbelievable to me that something I've been in love with doing since I was a kid is a real job. Every day I go to work, it never feels like that. It just feels like happiness and my childhood dream coming true. Every show, I try to send out the joy and passion I feel on stage in hopes another '10-year-old Hannah' in the audience is watching and seeing how awesome this could be for them."

To explain, Hannah describes the first Rainbow Stage production she ever



Hannah Schaeffer (far left)

saw—*Beauty and the Beast*, at age 10: "From the sets to the costumes to the beautiful outdoor stage to the passion each of these actors brought on stage, I was absolutely blown away. My young Hannah self knew that performing in a Rainbow Stage production would be a dream come true." So when she was cast for *The Hockey Sweater*, it "felt like winning a million dollars," says the grade 10 Grant Park High School student.

Hannah was cast in two parts in the musical. She played Claudette Carrier, granddaughter to the adult protagonist, Roch Carrier. She also played Paulette Tremblay, the clumsy friend and hockey teammate of Roch as a child, during flashback scenes (comprising the majority of the production). As well, Hannah understudied the part of Ginette Beauchamps, another teammate.

Hannah says her castmates were like a second family. "Everyone in the cast is so loving and supportive of one another. We are all a team who've got each other's backs." And she was thrilled to be sharing the stage with another member of the Etz Chayim community, Kevin McIntyre. "I was so excited to hear a fellow member of Etz Chayim was also going to be a part of this amazing new musical," she says, adding that she had seen him perform once before, in the Rainbow Stage production of *Strike* (2019). "Being able to see Kevin, in fact, everyone in the adult cast thriving in this career path has definitely encouraged me to believe that this dream can be reality."

Hannah has performed in 18 community and educational theatre productions, including as Matilda in *Matilda Jr.* and as Roxie Hart in *Chicago*. She says she got her stage start in grade 3, when she was invited to join a community theatre production of *Peter Pan*. "This show was where I learned the magic of performing on stage and apparently told my mom, 'when I'm on stage I feel alive.'" Performing still makes her feel that way, she says, explaining further: "Performing on stage and interacting with the audience is where I feel happiest. The way we can tell a story and share inspiring messages through song, dance, acting, set, and costumes. And audience members can be there and feel happy and entertained and get a laugh or be blown away by the magic of theatre."



Hannah (second right)

While Hannah is realistic about her future (and her age), she leaves a little room to dream. "I am only 14 and three quarters so knowing what I want to do in my life isn't easy to say. But if this ends up being my career path I would be so happy."

Stage of Life



Hannah (far left)

Kevin McIntyre has a bit of a soft spot for Rainbow Stage. "This was my twelfth show with Rainbow Stage, and I also directed a show in 2008 (*Forever Plaid*). I love that theatre and I'm proud it's where I got my start," says the Winnipeg actor, explaining that his first role as a professional actor was in the Rainbow Stage musical production of *Oliver*, in 1988. "I especially love that Rainbow Stage hires mostly Manitoba talent. The city is full of talented people," he says.



Kevin (in black)

Some of Kevin's other Rainbow Stage credits include *Strike!*, *Mamma Mia*, and *Big: The Musical*.

Kevin says that over the years, most of his theatre credits have been in musical theatre. "I started my career in musical theatre, so I tend to get cast mostly that way on stage," says the actor/singer. Other musical theatre credits include the Canadian Premiere of *Miss Saigon*, the Canadian national tour of *Les Misérables*, and *Forever Plaid*—in both Toronto and Vancouver. More recently, Kevin has scored some television and film roles in Winnipeg, including two Hallmark movies: *Snowkissed* and *Love Strikes Twice*—his wife, author-actor Henriette Ivanans, was also cast in the latter. Kevin also recently shot two episodes of a new TV series coming out on Crave called *Little Bird*.

"The city has become quite the hub for TV work," he says.

In *The Hockey Sweater*, Kevin was cast as the antagonist: Father Delisle. He says he had previously been unfamiliar with *The Hockey Sweater*, so "I was instantly intrigued. I did some research and realized what a beloved Canadian story it was. I loved that it was fairly new, and only produced twice in Canada (so far)."

There is a message behind *The Hockey Sweater* story, and it's one that resonates with Kevin. "The theme is that it's not important what you wear, rather what is in your head and heart," he says.

"As a Jew by choice, I can relate to this," he continues. "My acceptance into the Jewish communities, both in Los Angeles (where he lived from 1996 until 2019) and Winnipeg has been fantastic," he says.

"To feel so loved is a beautiful thing."

Being a part of something written by a Canadian had been on Kevin's bucket list, and he had also been interested in working with Carson Nattrass, director of *The Hockey Sweater*. So this Rainbow Stage production fit the bill and also hit a certain nostalgia chord in Kevin. "When the character of older Roch talks about their life being on the

skating rink, it always brings a bit of a tear to my eye," he says.

Kevin was very impressed by the actors cast in the musical. "The kids were amazing! I am always learning from people I work with, and to see this through the eyes of a kid was unbelievable. Their dedication to the production was awe inspiring," he continues. "The first time they saw the set, the excitement in their eyes..." he muses.

But he says he wasn't overly surprised when his synagogue and acting worlds collided; when he and Hannah Schaeffer (whom Kevin calls "fantastic") were co-cast in the production of *The Hockey Sweater*. "In Winnipeg, everyone collides eventually, so it was only a matter of time," says Kevin, adding, "I call Winnipeg the world's biggest small-town."

Kevin's creativity doesn't end with performance and neither does his work-life—he is also a professional portrait photographer in both Winnipeg and Los Angeles (he and Henriette live in Winnipeg, but he travels to LA regularly for photoshoots). In high school Kevin studied commercial art and photography, he explains. "In my early days in theatre in Toronto, I started photographing actor headshots on the side, and it became my fulltime job. I love singing and I love photography," he says, so I am grateful I can do both."

Kevin says performing and photography draw on similar skills. "Photography is very much like being in a show. I get to direct clients and riff with them. It makes photoshoots so much better when you have a good relationship with the subject," he says.

In the realms of creativity and artistic expression, Kevin still has at least one more talent up his sleeve: he plays the bagpipes. "I have played since I was a kid, so there is a lot of love and history in my bagpiping life," he says.

"To be able to express myself, whether singing, shooting pictures, or playing music is a gift." ■



Kevin McIntyre

The Tale of *The Hockey Sweater*

Originally written in French, *Le chandail de hockey* (*The Hockey Sweater*) is a short story by Canadian Roch Carrier (translated to English by Sheila Fischman), based on an actual encounter from his childhood in the small Appalachian town in southeastern Québec, Sainte-Justine. In the mid-1940s, Roch and his pals were loyal to both the Montreal Canadiens and its star, Maurice Richard. They all wore Montreal Canadiens' sweaters with Richard's number 9 on the back. When Roch's mom accidentally ordered him a Toronto Maple Leaf's sweater from Eaton's, Roch faced harassment from his friends and dismissal from his coach. Eventually, Roch was expelled from a hockey game (on account of his behaviour—not the sweater) by the priest-referee (Father Kevin) who banished the young hockey player to the Church.



How to Be a Mensch

Mussar as a Means to Spiritual Growth and Tikkun Olam

How might we understand the nature of our own souls? How could we elevate our souls, guide ourselves closer and closer to holiness, with an intention of *Tikkun Olam*, repair of the world? A *Mussar* practice might be one possible path.

Mussar is a Jewish practice of introspection, using a set of human virtues or inner-soul traits called *Middot* (singular *Middah*) to self-investigate. *Middah* means measure in Hebrew; the practitioner of *Mussar* examines each *Middah* within themselves, their soul, as a means toward awareness, insight, and spiritual growth. While there are hundreds of *Middot* one could develop through *Mussar*, examples include humility, anger, gratitude, trust, and honour. At birth, everyone has all possible *Middot* but is unique in the measure of each *Middah* within their soul. Too much or too little of any *Middah* within a person is thought to be harmful to their soul.

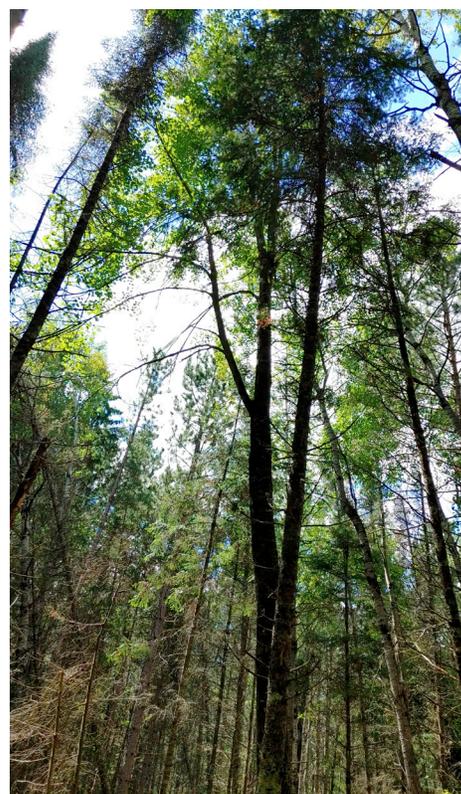
Mussar, also a Hebrew word, means correction or moral discipline. As such, *Mussar* might be understood as the process of ‘correcting’ the soul through self-examination, one *Middah* at a time. “It is a treasury of teachings and practices that help individuals understand their true nature as holy souls, then to break through the barriers that surround and obstruct the flow of inner holiness or light,” according to

The *Mussar* Institute (TMI), a centre for contemporary *Mussar* education and resources. When we become holy souls, we act with intention to heal the world—*Tikkun Olam*.

How to Be Human

The word *Mussar* is found repeatedly in the Torah. “The whole concept of *Mussar* as a way of learning about life—which in Proverbs, you would learn from your parents—is very old,” says Hadass Eviatar. “The idea of children learning from their parents how to be humans is not new,” however, efforts to establish a philosophy and practice of *Mussar* didn’t begin until about the tenth century, in Babylonia. Since then, communities of Jews have been practising systematic investigation of human nature; a more recent resurgence, in 19th century Lithuania, especially within Orthodox communities, gave rise to the contemporary *Mussar* movement. Over many decades, scholars have added their personal understandings to a rich and growing body of writings called *Mussar* literature.

Mussar is often studied and practised in a group or *va'ad*, facilitated by an instructor. The *va'ad* is frequently divided into pairs of participants, called *chavruta*. A *va'ad* gathering is an occasion to share insights gained and explore with others, deepening everyone’s *Mussar* experience. A *chavruta*



meeting is a further chance to extend and enrich participants’ experiences.

Mussar educators are often careful to point out that while *Mussar* is a practice of working on oneself, it is not self-help, nor therapy. “*Mussar* spotlights individual behaviors, their impacts and interdependence with one another, and the impact on family and community. *Mussar* views the perfection of our moral character as a formula to help heal the world,” says Lori Shapiro in “Can *Mussar* Help Us Repair the World?” (Los Angeles Jewish Journal, July 22, 2020).

A Season of Mussar 1

John Hample (MA, MEd) is a rabbinic candidate and professional adult educator of *Mussar*, certified as an advanced-level facilitator by The *Mussar* Institute (TMI), where he has studied, trained, and facilitated group learning. (He has also studied at the Institute for Jewish Spirituality and the Center for Contemporary *Mussar*). Drawing on teachings from all three *Mussar* institutes, John adapted TMI's proprietary Season of *Mussar* 1 course and implemented two 14-week pilot programs earlier this year at Congregation Etz Chayim, with support from Rabbi Kliel and Monica Neiman (MEd), CEC's Programming and Engagement Director.

"The *sine qua non* (essential component) of modern *Mussar* is the practice of *cheshbon ha nefesh*, 'accounting of the soul,' which Rabbi Kliel has encouraged, since before coming to Etz Chayim, as a cornerstone of High Holiday preparation," says John. He adds that Rabbi Kliel, who recently upgraded his own *Mussar* knowledge at TMI, also introduced *Mussar* to the Limmud Winnipeg learning community several years ago.

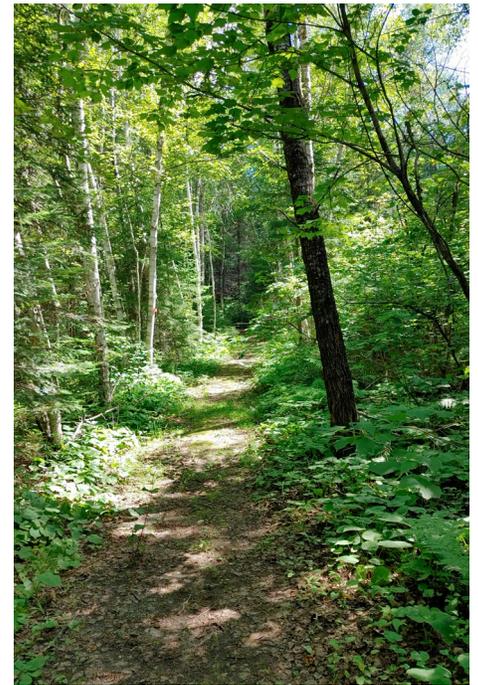
Participants of the Congregation Etz Chayim *Mussar* course explored several of the *Middot* through writings, contemplation, and discussion, both in the *va'ad* setting as well as with their *chavruta*. They were asked to keep daily journals for recording "'soul trait'-specific" experiences, insights, struggles, feelings, or awareness gained related to *Middah* exploration. Sessions also included guided contemplation, brief Torah-talks, and exploration of the distinction between 'ego-stories' and

'soul stories.' Insights from course participants are thoughtful, and useful for gaining a better understanding of what *Mussar* practice is, what practitioners could gain from adopting a *Mussar* practice and, more significantly, what each practitioner can offer to the world.

Quality Control of Personhood

"*Mussar* seems to me to be a way of examining oneself in a systematic way, using a set of *Middot*—properties, qualities, values—against which one examines how one operates," says Shalom Coodin. "We might think of *Mussar* practice as 'quality control' of personhood. The *Middot* allow one to examine different attributes, such as humility or awe or gratitude. Once one examines the individual trait in one's makeup, the challenge is then to see the linkages with the other traits that compose the messiness that is one's personality."

Hadass describes that 'messiness' a bit differently. "The idea is that you take all the human characteristics and qualities and measures and you 'cut them up' into little bits and you look at them, which is how research is done, how people investigate," she says. "But it's important to realize that these (*Middot*) are not silos, they're all connected, and they all affect each other. The idea is to use these concepts to think about your own life, how you react to things and how you create everyday holiness. I think it's useful as long as it's clear that the soul isn't actually divided up into little bits and pieces like that."



The Etz Chayim Mussar Story

John continues to support his CEC "*Mussarniks*." As a stopgap attempt to "keep the *Mussarnik* motors running" during summer vacation and High Holiday season, John designed and delivered a series of independent, monthly workshops for interested participants from both pilot-program groups. Scheduling of A Season of *Mussar* 2 is under discussion for now (dependent on learner interest and instructor availability).

Mussar now has a great foothold in the Etz Chayim community, says Monica. This began with an initial, short *Mussar* workshop offered in 2020 by Rabbi Amy Eilberg (the first woman ordained as a Conservative rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America) through Beit Chayim, Etz Chayim's online learning centre. Over the summer, John participated in a TMI workshop on facilitating *Mussar* learning opportunities for teens. Congregation Etz Chayim has registered as the required host institution associated with future training and plans to infuse other *Mussar* learning opportunities into the community in the future, including something for teens as well as inter-generational and affinity-based learning groups.





Finding the Right Balance

Elana Schultz shares a helpful analogy which she learned during the course. “*Middah* is a measure and John would explain them like a soundboard, with levers up and down. For every *Middah*, you want to find the right balance. At any extreme, it is probably not a good place to be. We all have these characteristics within us, and it’s finding the place where everything can be in balance.” When a human soul is balanced, they are putting their best self out to the rest of the world.

Another useful way to understand *Mussar*, within a contemporary lexicon, might be as a type of Jewish mindfulness—ensuring that we act and speak with an awareness of what is going on around us.

“If you’re paying attention to these things, then you are going to have a more mindful life and ideally a better life. That’s my understanding,” says Hadass. “Bringing mindfulness of the qualities of your soul into your everyday life.” Through a *Mussar* practice, one can gain better understanding into human interactions and how situations, whether conflict or other potentially negative situations, can arise.

“It helps you get clarity on how certain things happen,” says Hadass. “A lot of people are on autopilot. Something happens and they are triggered; they react, and they have no idea why. So, it is helpful in getting a better view of what’s going on in your own mind.”

Elana, who still meets regularly with her *chavruta* partner, says a *Mussar* practice has made her more conscious of not jumping to conclusions about situations. “I need to not let my own thoughts and feelings about something be the centre of that conversation or interaction—let me be more generous about that. That’s something I could continue to work on and that will nurture better interactions and relationships,” she says.

Dina Granove says that after completing the course, she has been able to bring a *Mussar* awareness into her daily life. “There is much more to learn and understand to master the practice of truly internalizing *Mussar*. I do, however, think I am conscious of these *Middot* on a daily occurrence, when I catch myself engaging in un-*mentchlech* thoughts or behaviours. That has been a great benefit,” she says.

Privacy, Respect, and Anonymity

A crucial principle for *va'ad* practice of *Mussar* is an atmosphere of trust among group members. Participants may reveal deeply personal thoughts and experiences, so all dialogue must remain strictly confidential. “The rules of engagement, so to speak, involve privacy, respect, and anonymity,” says Shalom. “The first rule is you don’t talk about who and what is shared; one shouldn’t later share what was spoken even with the person who spoke it.” He muses that this could make an instructor’s role even more demanding.

“The challenge of a *Mussar* teacher seems a daunting task; to get individuals to share deeply personal thoughts and feelings while keeping it focused on understanding the individual and interactive *Middot* involved. It must feel like wrangling cats at times, and a challenge to stop it from slipping into therapy, which is not what *Mussar* is intended to be,” he says. Dina agrees with the challenging nature of the role of the *Mussar* instructor and says she appreciated John’s approach.

“John worked very hard to include and apply to all of us. I believe this was a lofty undertaking,” she says.

As the High Holidays draw near, we begin to consider the successes of our year past, as well as the challenges and our misdeeds, oversights, and hurtful actions or words. *Mussar* practice can be a valuable tool to have in one’s back pocket during this time of contemplation.

“It is about examining yourself ahead of time, and looking back at your past actions, relationships, and asking, ‘What do I need to repair? What do I need to change? Who do I need to go back to and ask for forgiveness? I think *Mussar* can help a little bit in bringing some clarity to that,” says Elana.

Indeed, at Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, we also have opportunity to renew our relationship with the world, to ask, what do we need to repair, or change, or regret, or atone for? And then, in the spirit of *Tikkun Olam*, do some of those things. Perhaps a *Mussar* practice could support that work. ■

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How to Get the Most Out of Your New Mahzor

You probably know that Congregation Etz Chayim purchased new *Mahzorim* in 2020 (supported by a gracious donation from the family of Louise (Z"l) and Harvey Tallman). And while we know you are often pleased to have new things—particularly if added features or technological updates mean said-things' unique qualities could potentially improve your life—let's get real: we're talking about a new prayer book. How much impact to your daily Jewish life could an updated liturgical text have? And where would you even look for improvements if you were looking?

In fact, the differences you find in your new *Mahzor Lev Shalem* are an opportunity: the potential to transform your High Holiday service, making your experience more meaningful, enjoyable, even more viscerally familiar.

But first, let's backtrack. The prayer book we use throughout the High Holidays is different from the one Jews use most other days, for regular *minyan* and Shabbat services. On Rosh Hashanah, we tuck away our *siddurim* (sing. *siddur*), the daily prayer books and the *Chumashim* (sing. *Chumash*) from which we read Torah, and we bring out our *Mahzorim* (sing. *Mahzor*)—books

filled with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur liturgy.

The Usual Suspects

Let's continue with an understanding that the new *Mahzor* has all the features you would expect from a modern *Mahzor* in the 2020s, including:

- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur liturgical text in Hebrew
- English translation that reflects the Hebrew text as closely as possible, not only in word choice but also to parallel the poetic, often prayerful mood of the original text, and with close attention paid to the irrelevance of such things as gender (committing to exclusive gender neutrality and, when impossible, gender equality) and culture (aiming for cultural inclusivity and sensitivity to differences)
- Transliteration of Hebrew for parts of the service where congregation participation is encouraged
- Instructions, when necessary, to guide readers through the mechanics of the service—directions like rise or sit, bow or blow the shofar, things to do or not do on Shabbat, and so on
- Modern interpretation or commentary that complements liturgical text, to enlighten readers with details

of history, context, less-familiar vocabulary, elucidation of significant concepts; in your new *Mahzor*, this interpretation is always found in the right margin of a two-page spread.

But what else could there be in a *Mahzor*? And where is the opportunity for transforming your High Holiday service hiding?

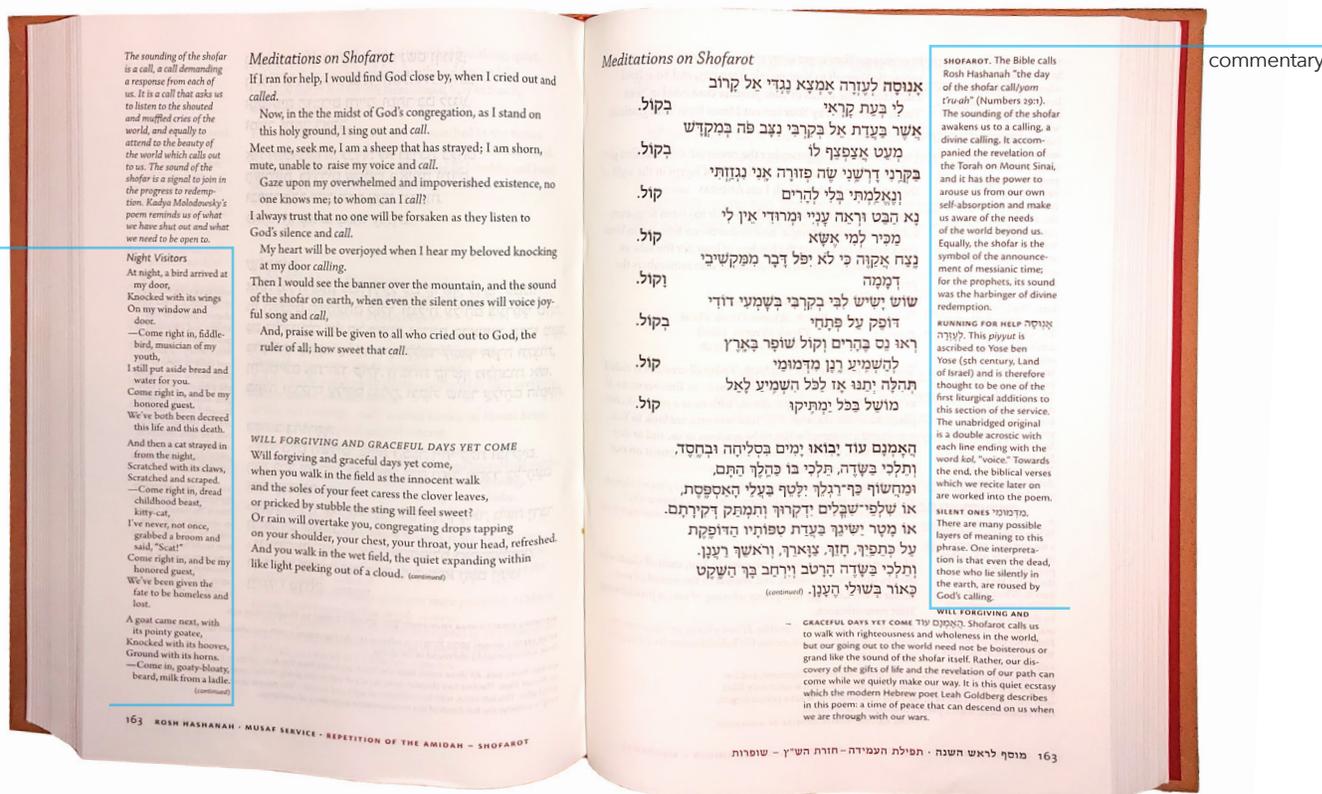
Kavanot Gold

It is in the left margins where the gold can be unearthed. The left margins of your new *Mahzor* are filled with *kavanot*, meditational readings pulled from other sources, and it is here that the potential to transform your service lies. Elana Schultz says these supplementary readings and meditations capture well the Etz Chayim mandate to "bring meaning to Jewish life."

"This *Mahzor* really encapsulates that," she says. "It's not just the liturgy and a translation we're familiar with because we've heard it, but we don't necessarily know what we're saying or why we're saying it. It's material to help us understand why we do it, stories that drive home the point of that prayer."

And while Elana doesn't suggest you ignore the traditional liturgy, she does

kavanot
meditational
readings



think a *shul*-goer could experience a full, meaningful service by ingesting the additional readings alone, "not touch any of the liturgy the cantor may be reciting. I can read this, and I'm assuming it's here because it has the flavour of that piece of the prayer," she says. An example, is Kadya Molodowsky's poem, "Night Visitors, on page 163, included to elicit si"milar sentiment, mood, and ambiance to the Meditations on Shofarot that appear on the same page (see illustration p. 14).

Before Etz Chayim purchased the new *Mahzors*, Elana says she would often read some of the English translated text because she didn't always understand all the Hebrew. "But it didn't do it for me most of the time," she says. With the new *Mahzor*, that's different, she says. "I've been impressed every time I've sat down with it."

Different Path to the Same Message

She notes that while she can at times be drawn into a service via auditory memory, she likes the extended options the *kavanot* offer.

"I like some of the tunes, and I can just be pulled along (in a service) and inspired in that way, but I'll get the message or be more driven to act or think about what I'm supposed to be thinking about from other messages in here."

"I've never really been into prayer," she continues, "but I'm into Jewish. There's a lot of amazing teachings in Judaism. So I can sit and read all the stuff on the side, and learn about things behind these prayers or why we say them or how they are for other people, which can be more valuable to me than just saying the prayer," she says.

The new *Mahzor* widens the net a little, making the service a bit more accessible to more people, fostering new connections to individual experiences.

"If you're not used to coming into synagogue, if you didn't grow up with this, there's other things in this book that you might find interesting apart from what's going on, on the *bimah*," Elana says. ■

ETZ CHAYIM PEOPLE

Member News and Life-Cycle Events

SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS

JUNE

Robert Diamond, Jordan Hochman, Israel Ludwig, Reby Schacter, Frank Shiffman

JULY

Ivor Berman, Arthur Chapman, Terri Lee Farber, Steven Feldgaier, Issie Frost, Kim Hirt, Sharon Maltz, Rita Margolis, Gerald Pritchard, Norma Schacter, Elaine Swirsky

AUGUST

Elissa Abrams, John Farber, Agnes Funk, Bernie Gunn, Linda Gunn, Phyllis Himelstein, Barbara Hirt, Roslyn Rosenberg, Norman Schwartzman, Rachel Steindel

SEPTEMBER

Brent Apter, Javier Bokser, Chuck Frohlich, Serky Goldberg, Fay Hoch, Robert Pudavick, Marvin Samphir, Howard Schwartz, Ronald Silver

OCTOBER

Shira Cohen, Gerry Faintuch, Lil Frohlich, Fay Reich

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

JUNE

Gail and Ron Cantor (25); Persio Cherman Chuster and Katia Dos Anjoy (15); Donna and Mark Cohen (50); Sandra and Howard Collerman (55); Maxine and Robert Diamond (45); Kimberley Hirt and Jerry Rubin (35); Lorraine and Wes Palatnick (45); Norma and Gene Schacter (70); Sandra and Hart Shapiro (55); Ilana Simon and Ari Marantz (35); Gwen Satran and Eugene Baron (5); Nikki Spigelman and Howard Putter (35)

JULY

Fayanne and Avrom Charach (30); Linda and Sydney Cohen (55); Ethel and Zvi Dil (55); Betty and Samuel Searle (65)

AUGUST

Elizabeth and Michael Boroditsky (25); Brenda and Frank Dahle (40); Darlene and Jerry Davis (50); Jacqueline and Michael Meyers (35); Elaine and Bert Schaffer (50); Sheila and Norman Schwartzman (40); Rachel and Maury Steindel (15); Elaine and Neil Swirsky (50)

SEPTEMBER

Hadass Eviatar and David Hoult (30); Regina and Frank Shiffman (30); Debbie and Donald Stern (40)

OCTOBER

Karen and Richard Gall (20)

IN MEMORIAM

Ruth Charach	Betty Greenfeld
Sara Hochman	Miriam Maltz
David Perlov	David Petrie
Myrna Singer	Doris Steiman

MAZEL TOVS

Ilana Abrams and Steven Hyman on the Bar Mitzvah of son **Adam** on June 11, 2021

Reeva Abrams on the Bar Mitzvah of grandson **Adam**

Cynthia Aizenberg and Javier Gurfinkiel on the Bat Mitzvah of daughter **Aileen** on May 22, 2021

Laila Aronas and Daniel Schweresensky on their daughter **Kayla's** Bat Mitzvah on August 28

Sabrina and Javier Bokser on their daughter **Naomi's** Bat Mitzvah on September 10

Donna and Mark Cohen on their grandson **Asher's** Bar Mitzvah on July 4

Cynthia Fidel and Uriel Jelin on their daughter **Sofia's** Bat Mitzvah on August 27

Sharon and Jonathan Goldenberg on their son **Jonah's** Bar Mitzvah on May 21

Claudia and Walter Griner on their son **Kevin's** Bar Mitzvah on June 18

Ardith Henoach on her daughter **Matanelle Bitton's** Bat Mitzvah on September 5

Lindsay and Steven Offman on their son **Ethan's** Bar Mitzvah on October 8

Jack Offman on his grandson **Ethan's** Bar Mitzvah

Melanie and Michael Richters on their daughter **Channah's** Bat Mitzvah on August 13

Kelly Robinson and Josh Eskin on their daughter **Juliet's** Bat Mitzvah on September 3

Elaine and Bert Schaffer on their grandson **Jonah's** Bar Mitzvah

Paulina and Juan Schweresensky on their granddaughter **Kayla's** Bat Mitzvah

Lisa Selchen on her son **Zachary's** Bar Mitzvah on October 22

Colette and Darryl Segal on their grandson **Zachary's** Bar Mitzvah



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