The Rabbi's Column:

The Timeless and the Timely, the Mitzvah of the Hour

by Rabbi Dr. Julie Hilton Danan

January brought my rabbinic conference, OHALAH, in Colorado. It was truly a combination of the timeless and the timely. For the timeless, we learned Torah and had incredible sessions of music, prayer and meditation, and one evening my husband Avraham and I got to lead a Sephardic song along with our high holiday Cantor, Hazzan Abbe Lyons! There were sessions on how to do an interfaith tour of Israel and new ways to teach about the Holocaust.

When it comes to the timely, I was particularly inspired by a session from Rabbi Tirzah Firestone and Native American leader Dr. Rick Williams, who prayed and served together at Standing Rock, as well as a report from Rabbi Fred Gutman of North Carolina, who is a close associate of Reverend William Barber, leader of the "Moral Monday" movement and considered by many the heir to MLK.

When I returned to Pleasantville, the timely intervened again. I joined two members of our congregation, Leslie Mack and Evan Kingsley, who attended a seminar to learn how PCS can work with other faith communities to help resettle a refugee family in Westchester. So many people of faith want to do this work that the workshop sold out! A couple of days later I was inspired by attending an screening of the movie *Of Many* [http://www.ofmanyfilm.com/](http://www.ofmanyfilm.com/), which documents the work of a young Orthodox rabbi and an Imam at NYU who become close friends and bring many Jewish and Muslim students together, especially to do service for others.

Unfortunately, all of these good feelings and messages of interfaith cooperation were disrupted by our new Administration's sudden ban on refugees and immigrants from certain Muslim-majority countries. While enjoying the camaraderie of our annual PCS Progressive Dinner, we were all riveted by this dramatic story playing out in our country's airports, wondering what it bodes for the future of our nation and a world facing the greatest refugee crisis since WWII.

At my Yom Kippur morning sermon this fall, I focused on the refugee issue. I said that there were three main reasons that Jews are at the forefront of activism related to refugee resettlement:
First: Our Torah. In the Torah we are told not just once to love our neighbor, but 36 (twice Chai, life) times to love the ger, the "stranger," and to treat him/her fairly and with love, because we were strangers in the land of Egypt. This is the most repeated mitzvah in our Torah! It's why we had to suffer in Egypt, to develop a sensitivity to the suffering of others.

Second: Our Jewish History. Looking into our own family history, most of us have stories of refugees -- or those who didn't make it. My own Rebbe, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, got out of Europe a step ahead of the Nazi Holocaust, thanks to the intervention of a courageous U.S. Diplomat, Harry Bingham, who defied orders in order to save Jews. If that young refugee had not made it, the Jewish people would not be the same, and indeed I wouldn't be your rabbi today; in fact, modern Judaism would not be what it is today. But millions of others of our people found no refuge, and the moral weight of that failure to save them has guided our national attitude toward refugees coming to the U.S., at least until now.

Third: Simple Humanity. We can't become like Pharaoh and harden our hearts when we see the image of God in the photo of the drowned three-year-old refugee, Aylan Kurdi, on a beach in Turkey, or in the shocked impassive face of a little boy, Omran Daqneesh, who was pulled from the rubble of a bombing in Aleppo. Yet these who made our news are just two of thousands of wounded, dying and deprived children, children like our own. How can a human heart not be broken open to care?

Statistics show that refugees as a group are not a danger. On the contrary, they are people in danger. They are fleeing those dangerous places not to do us harm, but because they are in harm's way. As we know, refugees, people of great tenacity and courage, often become our most productive citizens. The recent abrupt government actions to limit and bar refugees, immigrants and even visitors have caused anguish, separated families, destroyed dreams and temporarily or permanently kept scientists and artists and even allies who served our government in wartime from our shores. Working to aid these vulnerable people fulfills the message of our Torah, the legacy of our history and our treasured values as Americans and human beings. Sadly, in past generations people didn't speak up for us in our hour of need. We were the scapegoats then, and we mustn't stand idly by when immigrants and refugees are scapegoated as the dangerous and alien other.

Rather, at this hour we must each find the issue that we are most passionate about, and become actively engaged. We must turn to our timeless heritage of Shabbat and Torah to replenish and strengthen our souls for the work. We as Jews must speak for the vulnerable, stand up against prejudice and intolerance and never stop working for Tikkun Ha-Lev, healing of hearts, and Tikkun Olam, healing our world.

Below is a letter sent by Rabbi Julie to Muslim friends and colleagues in our area.

Dear Friends,

Salaam–Shalom!

Please let me take this opportunity just to reach out to all of you as my respected friends, colleagues, neighbors and fellow people of faith. My community, Pleasantville Community Synagogue, and I as rabbi are here to support your community at this difficult time in our nation's history.

On Sunday, January 29, many members of our synagogue rallied right here in Pleasantville along with many other local citizens to protest the executive orders that target Muslims. Members of my congregation carried
signs declaring they are also children of refugees, because many of us are. Also, members of our families and community demonstrated in New York City as well. We are not just protesting, but many of us are also working with groups like the AJC, HIAS and the Westchester Refugee Task Force, contacting our elected officials and doing whatever we can as citizens to fight these discriminatory actions.

My friends who are rabbis and Jewish leaders throughout the country are deeply committed to religious equality and tolerance, and thousands are active on these issues. You are not alone.

As Jews we know what it's like to be scapegoated and excluded in our hour of need. We will not let that happen to our neighbors today. We at Pleasantville Community Synagogue stand ready to do whatever else we can to support your communities, whether by making statements, holding joint events such as lectures or meals, or any other show of support that your community feels would be truly beneficial. I am happy to hear from you what you feel would help.

For one idea, I purchased a video of the film Of Many, which was screened recently at the Burns Film Center and would be delighted to show it to a group of Jews and Muslims, perhaps to the teens. And we can take to heart the directive of the Imam and the Rabbi in the film, to continue to work together side by side to better our communities.

With great respect,
Rabbi Julie Danan

To get involved in refugee support, you can visit the websites of HIAS (http://www.hias.org/) and the Westchester Refugee Task Force (https://www.facebook.com/groups/1089481224515790/).

HEBREW SCHOOL HAPPENINGS
by Galit Sperling, Principal

January was a month of preparation for our Hebrew School students. All of our students are preparing for their Shabbatonim coming up this winter and spring. A Shabbaton at PCS is the Friday evening or Saturday morning Shabbat service at which one class will
together lead the congregation in our prayers and songs along with Rabbi Julie. By learning these blessings and practicing on the bimah, our goal is to have our children not only feel comfortable with the Hebrew and melodies, but to truly gain confidence in themselves as participants and leaders in our spiritual community.

Our fifth grade students (Kitah Hey) are excited for the Hey Havdalah ceremony, coming up on Saturday evening, February 4. They have been practicing all parts of the service, created *bisamim* (spice) boxes and recycle projects, and writing Havdalah legends! Check out pictures of their Havdalah-plate making below, and check back in the March issue of this newsletter for pictures of this wonderful event.

In preparation for their upcoming B’nei Mitzvah, our seventh-grade (Kitah Zayin) students learned how to put on tefillin in their parent-child workshop with Rabbi Julie on Sunday, January 8; see pics below! Thank you to PCS congregants for assisting and inspiring our children, as well as to their parents for being a part of this special day!

**Upcoming Hebrew School Dates:**

**Friday evening, February 3:** Shabbat Dinner and Daled Shabbaton  
**Saturday evening, February 4:** Hey Havdalah Service  
**Sunday, February 5:** Seventh Grade (Zayin) Parent-Child Workshop with Rabbi Julie at the Jewish Board in Hawthorne  
**Sunday, February 19 - Sunday, February 26 (Presidents’ Week):** No Classes  
**Sunday, March 12:** PCS Purim Celebration
Students and their families making delicious challah!
Dreidels aren't the only things made out of clay! Here is Kitah Hey (fifth grade) making clay trays to hold the ritual objects to be used in their upcoming Havdalah ceremony.
Rabbi Julie and PCS members guide the B'nei Mitzvah students as they learn how to put on tefillin.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To the PCS Community,

I am always pleased to write to the community with good news. Since Rabbi
Julie began at PCS in August 2015, we have seen an increase in enthusiasm, increase in involvement and an overall increase in positive energy around PCS. Friday night services have been reimagined; along with the traditional Kabbalat Shabbat, there is a rotation of SNAP (Special Needs at Pleasantville) services, Tot Shabbats and Prime Time Shabbats, all with wonderful dinners or kiddushes. Attendance at these services has increased dramatically, and we can attribute these changes to Rabbi Julie's fresh ideas and unending energy and commitment.

In addition to Friday night and Saturday services, we are thrilled to see Rabbi Julie in the building: teaching Hebrew school, holding office hours, meeting with committees, meeting with congregants and teaching adult education. Under her direction, an early childhood program has been established and expanded, providing many opportunities for members and non-members with pre-school-age children to get involved with PCS. Our vision committee has prioritized the expansion of teen programming and a youth group, and Rabbi Julie has worked tirelessly to accomplish this.

For a year and a half, Rabbi Julie has been a vital part of our community. Her two-year contract, which was approved by a congregational vote in June of 2015, contains the provision for an option to extend for one year. I am pleased to report that the PCS Board of Trustees has voted to exercise this option and extend Rabbi Julie's contract for an additional year, through June 30, 2018.

As required by her contract, a formal review of Rabbi Julie's performance is currently underway, providing the community with the opportunity to inform the Board of how Rabbi Julie has supported the congregation in her various roles. If you haven't yet been contacted, and you would like to provide comments as to her strengths and areas of opportunity, please feel free to contact me. All interviews are confidential.

I, along with the Board of Trustees, look forward to the future of PCS with Rabbi Julie as our spiritual leader.

- Amy Gutenplan

Guide-dog-in-training, Jules, being raised by PCS Administrator Marcy Gray, loves coming to work at PCS. Here she waits patiently for Rabbi Julie in her office.
Intimacy with God

I begin this essay with trepidation, as I am in a new place in my spiritual life and I know from the conversations I’ve had with other members that the subject of God is the most difficult topic to talk about. Indeed, for some of us, even the word "God" presents a monumental challenge. I recall a class led by Rabbi Julie where we talked about the various names of God mentioned in the Torah and discovered that we each had strong reactions to one name or another. With this in mind, I will simply write from a very personal point of view, hoping that what I describe, what I experience, strikes a chord with others.

In his book, *Jewish with Feeling*, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi describes God as a verb. God is not a noun, not a thing, a person or an abstraction, which is what nouns represent. God is not static, not definable, and certainly not something that has an end. Verbs, on the other hand, are movements, the flow of the language, and the way we connect in relationship. Verbs suggest a process, something ongoing that will take us on a journey. So to be intimate with God is to be in a state of flow, where we have a boundless sense of possibility, of creation. For me God is both the creator and the creation, the prime mover and the work that movement engenders. The way I know this is how I feel-when I meditate, when I pray, when I feel love and when I experience nature. These are all God markers.

Reb Zalman speaks of an "orgasm of the soul," the most blissful feeling we know as human beings. Doing the morning blessings he allows his whole self to know God: the "heart beating out the rhythm, (the) lungs playing the wind instruments, (the) vocal cords the strings, (the) limbs dancing, (the) brain conducting." There is a corresponding feeling in meditation where our breath
deepens and we experience something larger, even beyond ourselves. This is true intimacy, the same intimacy we feel when we are with the person we love. On this theme Leonard Cohen has written dozens of love songs to God, often using the words and the feeling he has for the woman, the beloved, to reach us in our innermost being.

What any true teacher knows is that intimacy is not singular, not simply the joyful or prayerful experience, but the indelible mixture of fear and awe, of satisfaction and disappointment, of love and anger. And this is how we feel towards God. If we look deeply inside of ourselves, we know that we are always carrying the contradictions, the blessings and the curses toward the beloved as the beloved and God bless and curse us. To me it is this full exchange, the entire range of human feeling that creates the strongest bond and the most truthful feeling.

--Peter Schaffer

From the PCS Bookworm... Eileen Jagoda

*Why Be Jewish?: A Testament*

by Edgar M. Bronfman

Although Edgar Bronfman was brought up in a traditional Jewish household in Montreal, Canada, he did not come into his love and appreciation of his Jewish heritage until he became an adult. Bronfman considers himself a secular Jew and has been all his life, and in this book, he takes on the challenge of formulating "secular tenets" of Judaism. He felt this...
Edgar Bronfman was the longtime CEO of Seagrams Company Ltd., which was founded by his father. He also served for over 20 years as the president of the World Jewish Congress and was the founding chairman of the Board of Governors of Hillel. This book was completed just weeks before his death in 2013.

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Nine Essential Things I've Learned about Life

by Harold S. Kushner

Rabbi Kushner chronicles in this book how religion has shaped his life. It is Rabbi Kushner's hope that this book helps people who need to choose between a cruel God or no God at all.

When he left rabbinical school, Rabbi Kushner served two years in the army at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. It was a great eye-opening experience for a New York boy far from home! But after years of intensive study of the classics, he had more questions than answers. Only through years of questioning, listening and learning did he come to an inner peace with God. He uses his religion for every-day thought. He does this by pointing out essential lessons from life experiences. Rabbi Kushner is particularly sensitive to the edict "be kind to yourself first."

Harold S. Kushner is rabbi laureate of Temple Israel in Natick, MA. He is best known as the author of "When Bad Things Happen to Good People." This is his 13th book.

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In our March issue, the PCS Bookworm, Eileen Jagoda, will review Rosa's Gold by Ray Kingfisher.
PCS Mishpacha (Family!)  
Shabbat Dinner and Service  
*Friday night, February 3*  
 6 pm: Shabbat dinner for all*  
 6:45 pm: Family-friendly service for all, led by Kitah Daled (Grade 4)  
 7:30 pm: Oneg Shabbat with dessert  

*To help offset the cost of the dinner, there is a suggested donation of $18/adult, $9/child, free/5 and under.*

Click [here](https://pcs-mishpachah-family-shabbat-dinner-26848.cheddarup.com) for easy on-line payment and to RSVP!

Or copy and paste:  
[https://pcs-mishpachah-family-shabbat-dinner-26848.cheddarup.com](https://pcs-mishpachah-family-shabbat-dinner-26848.cheddarup.com)

or email [mgray@shalompcs.com](mailto:mgray@shalompcs.com) or call (914) 769-2672.

Joyful Judaism!
Please join us for a very special Community celebration of Tu B'Shvat AND Shabbat Shira filled with joy and music, music, music!

Friday night,

February 10, 7:30 pm

Followed by a festive and delicious oneg

All are welcome.

Pleasantville Community Synagogue is a welcoming Jewish community with people of diverse traditions and backgrounds who want to share a
Growing Jewish Naturally!

"The Land of Milk and Honey"

For young families with kids 0 to 8

At a family home in Pleasantville*

Sunday, Feb. 12, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Led by writer, recipe developer, culinary instructor and personal chef, Suzy Scherr

Come learn with Rabbi Julie Danan why Israel is often referred to as the land of milk and honey, and
team up with Chef Suzy to prepare some delicious ricotta, taste test different types of honey and learn why protecting bees is so important to the environment.

**Free of charge!**

RSVP needed: youthdirector@shalompcs.com or call PCS office at 769-2672.

*15 children and their parents or guardians are the limit, so register ASAP!

*Address details will be given at registration.*

"Growing Jewish Naturally" is funded by a grant from UJA Federation

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PCS Tot Shabbat (Dinosaur!)

Service and Dinner

Friday night, Feb. 24

Our Tot Shabbat experience continues to grow, with musical accompaniment by Brian Gelfand. This month the theme is Dinosaur Shabbat! Rabbi Julie will read us the *Dinosaur on Shabbat* book, we'll sing the song, and there will be surprise toy visitors! Feel free to BYOD - Bring Your Own Dinosaur!
See you then!

5:30 pm: Doors open for a **30-minute Tot Shabbat Dinosaur service** for little ones up to age 8 with their families

6 pm: **Pizza dinner**

*Donations to help offset the cost of the dinner are always welcome!*

E-mail [rabbishalompcs.com](mailto:rabbishalompcs.com) or call (914) 769-2672.

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**Joyful Judaism!**

Visit [www.ShalomPCS.com](http://www.ShalomPCS.com)
(914) 769-2672, [info@shalompCS.com](mailto:info@shalompCS.com)
219 Bedford Road, Pleasantville, NY

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**Please join us at PCS for a very special weekend program with**

**Danny Siegel**

**March 3-5, 2017**

*One of the world's greatest experts and lecturers on philanthropy and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world)*
Friday, March 3

*Friday night, EARLY 6:30 pm service followed by a PRIME-TIME catered dinner, 7:30 pm:*

"The Mitzvahs of the Rich and Famous"
What can Bruce Springsteen, Steven Spielberg, David Copperfield, Ben & Jerry, and the late Paul Newman and Liz Taylor teach us about the mitzvah of fixing the world that we don't know?

Saturday, March 4

*Saturday morning service, 10 am, Kiddush lunch at noon followed by discussion at 12:30 pm:*
Shabbat after Shul
"Authentic Jewish Values for Ourselves, Our Families and Our Communities"
Discovering values we often do not think of as Jewish from unusual Jewish texts we were never taught, such as: So You Fell Asleep During Services - Do You Still Count For a Minyan?

Sunday, March 5

*Hebrew School Assembly, 10 am:*
"There's No Such Thing as a Small Mitzvah"
How children, even very young kids, can impact the lives of others in BIG ways

*Bat and Bar Mitzvah parents and students, 10:30-11:30 am:*
The Revolution: How Bat and Bar Mitzvah people (and their parents) have changed millions of lives for the better And how you, too, can do the same.

All are welcome to this very special program.
RSVPs are a must for the dinner.
To help offset the cost of the dinner suggested donations are $18/adult.
Any donations gladly accepted.
Click here to donate on-line, or go to https://pcs-special-guest-for-the-weekend.cheddarup.com.

For more information or to RSVP, contact Marcy Gray in the PCS office, mgray@shalompcs.com, (914) 769-2672.

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Pleasantville Community Synagogue is a welcoming Jewish community with people of diverse traditions and backgrounds who want to share a joyous spiritual and cultural home.
Rekindling Shabbat at PCS

IN FEBRUARY...

On Friday, February 3, please join us for a Mishpachah (Family) Shabbat dinner and service. The evening begins with dinner at 6 pm, followed by a family-friendly Kabbalat Shabbat service led by our fourth graders (Kitah Daled) at 6:45 pm. Finally, at 7:30 pm, there will be a dessert Oneg Shabbat. For more information, click here.

On Saturday, February 4, please join us for Shabbat morning services at 10 am, followed by a Kiddush lunch.
at noon. Then, on Saturday evening at 6 pm, our fifth graders (Kitah Hey) will hold a Havdalah service at 6 pm. All are welcome!

On Friday, February 10, we will celebrate Tu B'Shvat and Shabbat Shira (Sabbath of Song) with a very musical Kabbalat Shabbat service beginning at 7:30 pm. This will be followed by a very festive Oneg Shabbat. For more information, click here.

On Saturday, February 11, our seventh graders (Kitah Zayin B'nei Mitzvah class) lead services beginning at 10 am. This will be followed by a Kiddush lunch at noon.

On Friday, February 17, Kabbalat Shabbat services will begin at 7:30 pm, followed by a Oneg Shabbat.

On Saturday, February 18, services will begin at 10 am, followed by a Kiddush lunch at noon. Rabbi Julie's class will not be meeting that day.

On Friday evening, February 24, there will be a very special Dinosaur Tot Shabbat for the little ones up to age 8! The 30-minute service will begin at 5:30 pm, and will be followed by a pizza dinner at 6 pm. For more information, click here.

On Saturday, February 25, please join us for Shabbat morning services at 10 am, followed by a Kiddush lunch at noon.

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Shabbat Treats: Services Optional!

Shabbat at PCS is a time to nourish your soul. Whether or not you come for the "main course" (Shabbat services), you are invited to join us weekly for spiritual "appetizers" and "dessert."

Appetizers: Jewish Meditation
Want a sweet and simple way to add some contemplation to your life? Join our Jewish meditation group every Shabbat (Saturday) morning at PCS at 9:15 am. We begin with a niggun (melody) or chant, then a short spiritual teaching and silent meditation, followed by sharing. You can stay for services or go on your way, refreshed! (When there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, meditation starts at 9 am and concludes at 9:25 am).

Dessert: "The Teachings of Reb Zalman" with Rabbi Julie
After services (whether you attended or not), join us at noon for a yummy Kiddush lunch and schmoozing, followed from about 12:30 pm to 1:15 pm by an experiential, interactive class on the teachings of Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, Rabbi Julie's teacher of blessed memory. Reb Zalman was a world religious figure and the founder of the Jewish Renewal Movement, a dynamic movement of spiritual Renaissance in the Jewish world. If you are interested, you may wish to purchase the book, Jewish with Feeling: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Practice, by Rabbi
CONTRIBUTIONS

We appreciate the thoughtfulness of those who support the Pleasantville Community Synagogue by remembering and honoring their friends and loved ones through their generous contributions.

For information on making donations to PCS, including online donations, please click here.

General Fund/Fair Share
Anne and Jeffrey Resnick
Dara Meyers-Kingsley and Evan Kingsley
Erica Murkofsky and Michael Rhodes
Hedi and Ed Sperling, in commemoration of the yahrzeit of Ed's beloved mother, Margaret Sperling
Barbara Altman Bruno and Joe Bruno

SNAP (Special Needs at Pleasantville) Fund
Hedi and Ed Sperling
Teddi and Murray Stahl
Barbara and Don Stern

Shabbat Dinners and Kiddush Fund
Felice Gritz, in honor of her grandson, Benny Rakower, on the occasion of his becoming a Bar Mitzvah
Rhea Wolfthal, in memory of her beloved husband, Phil, on the occasion of his yahrzeit

Ed Sperling Fund
David Terzouli, recent Bar Mitzvah, in gratitude for "all [Ed's] love and support"
Rhea Wolfthal, in memory of her beloved uncle, Louis Etkin, and her beloved mother, Syd Gitelson

And special thanks to Marlo Klein for putting together yet another SUCCESSFUL AND FUN Progressive Dinner! Yasher ko'ach, Marlo!

FEBRUARY Yahrzeits

Kenneth Wolf, father of Michael Wolf
Lillian Levine, wife of Richard Levine
Louis Etkin, uncle of Rhea Wolfthal
Estelle Herman, mother of Diana Benattar
Aaron Netburn, father of Malcolm Netburn
Joel Serebin, father of Ben Serebin
Celia Lubelsky, mother of Janice Sandbank
Syd Gitelson, mother of Rhea Wolfthal
Marion Gaines, mother of Jonathan Church
Leslie Ogrin, father of Mara Cohen

February 1
February 1
February 2
February 3
February 4
February 4
February 5
February 8
February 8
February 8
To All PCS Members:
If you or another member suffer personal tragedy or loss or are otherwise in need of help, please immediately contact Rabbi Julie at (914) 769-2672 or Rabbi@ShalomPCS.com, or to our Caring (Chesed) Committee Chair, Susan Friedman at (917) 846-3038, or SFriedman@ShalomPCS.com.

The PCS Yahrzeit Memorial Board is a beautiful and symbolic place to honor your loved ones while helping to support your synagogue. The anniversary of their passing will be commemorated with a light by their name plate. You will find the appropriate form for purchasing a memorial name plate by clicking here.

Pleasantville Community Synagogue Mission Statement

Pleasantville Community Synagogue is a welcoming Jewish community connecting people of diverse traditions and backgrounds who want to share a joyous spiritual and cultural home.

PCS officers and trustees:

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Secretary: Laurie Hirsch Schulz
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For the full PCS calendar for February 2017, please click here.