

MEGILLAH

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RABBI'S NOTES



This morning I find myself remembering a really dumb book that passed through Mickey's and my hands many years ago. It was called something like **Men: An Owner's Manual**. Bad gender binary, bad hierarchical politics, bad all of it. But it was kind of funny at the time, and we read bits and pieces to each other with the appropriate eye-rolls. The one thing I remember is a chapter called something like "Men and Counting Behavior." It claimed that if a man and a woman see a waterfall, the woman will say, "How beautiful!" The man will say, "Well, if it's 50 feet high and there are a thousand gallons of water, the velocity must be so many cubic feet per second."

I guess I'm thinking a bit about counting behavior these days, with the new moon of Nisan making her appearance two days after the Spring equinox, the counting of the *omer* coming up in a couple weeks, and Mickey's first *yahrzeit* five days from today as I write. This past year I've done the appropriate traditional Jewish counting: seven days of *shiva* after Mickey's burial; 30 days to his *shloshim*; 11 months of *kaddish* (this not quite traditional following the death of a spouse, but I chose to observe the custom of 11 months as one would when mourning a parent); and now the *yahrzeit* a year after his death—following a little interior counting debate about whether to observe the Hebrew or Gregorian date.

Over the years I've taught this counting cadence countless times, facilitated it for many mourners, and now lived it myself this past year. It has left me with some thoughts about counting.

One of the priceless gifts of this past year for me has been talking to many other people whose spouses have died and receiving their hard-earned wisdom. How could I have lived all these years without realizing that so many friends, neighbors, people in our community are widowed? Every one of them reminded me that mourning is a deeply personal and idiosyncratic process. No two people mourn the same way. There is no right way and there is no right amount of time to grieve.

I made a decision to mourn deeply, not to shine myself on or shake myself into "recovery" before I was really recovered, whatever in the world that might mean. Somehow I intuited that, for all its excruciating painfulness, as a mourner I was entering into a profound period of my life. I would have given anything to skip it and just have Mickey back, but since that wasn't going to happen, I didn't want to shield myself from the experience of grief.

I found *shiva* very difficult. I was exhausted and overwhelmed. So many people! So much attention. I could barely sit up. People I love very much, some from far away, were here and wanted to connect, but there was very little me to connect with. I was mostly in the grave with Mickey. I do remember with gratitude some surprising and perceptive words that were said about Mickey. That helped me a lot. On the last day I remember Sandra leading the whole houseful of us out the front door, down the road a bit. That felt beautiful. I can't imagine NOT having sat *shiva*, even though little of it penetrated and a lot of it was taxing. Everything in the world felt formless and shapeless and overwhelming, but my dear community and beloved tradition offered some shape to things when I couldn't possibly have done it myself.

At the *shloshim*, some rabbi friends of mine organized a zoom *minyán*. Because I planned to continue saying *kaddish*, the *shloshim* wasn't a huge marker for me. But it was somewhere around that 30-day marker that I began to say of myself that I felt like I had just awakened in a hospital ICU with both my legs amputated. Some progress, I guess, from being in the grave myself.

I was saying *kaddish* every night with the sweet Nechama Minyon [sic], a zoom *minyan* organized by a rabbi after her mother died, which has continued for a couple years now. That little *minyan* was an important anchor for me and still is, though I don't go nearly as often these days. It is an hour a day to be a mourner. The first month or so I cried through every minute of the service. After a while I just mostly cried at the *kaddish*. At some point, even though I wasn't crying as much, I started hurting more, not less. I was still in the ICU with my legs amputated, and the anesthesia was wearing off.

The end of the *shloshim* corresponded with my going back to work. Oh my goodness, it was so hard to concentrate. I had to start listening to other people and caring about them. Other people had become widows! People's lives had gone on. I'm not the only one. Every day I would say to myself, "Just show up." All of you met me with the most exquisite kindness and care. That was amazing and a little embarrassing. And so necessary. I was carried gently by so many of you back into being your rabbi.

One day many months later, I noticed that I laughed at something! Another day I realized that I was thinking about something that didn't have to do with grief or Mickey or my inner state. One day I actually had an idea about something. These little markers came slowly. There was a lot of time in between each. When the 11-month marker came up, I was sometimes doing more than just showing up. Sometimes I had a little energy. Sometimes I was preoccupied by something besides my own sadness. Sometimes I even had fun.

Now I'm coming up on Mickey's *yahrzeit* and I am thinking about counting behavior. In this past year I didn't heal on a schedule. If anything, I appreciated having these markers like a vague chart somewhere far above my head, a map to glance at as I moved through the much wilder, less predictable territory of my own grief. I'm still grieving. Maybe I always will be. Maybe it's not something I do; it's something I am.

I've found myself recoiling from the idea of "again," as in "now I can do what I used to do again." There is no "again." I will never "again" be who or how I was before Mickey's illness and death. There is no return to before. Life only moves forward. But life is not linear either. At least grief isn't. In my experience, it circles and loops back on itself and takes abrupt plunges and hurtles up and out and sideways. It has layers. Thick times and thin. Height, depth, texture, color.

So too with collective experience, with history. So too with Pesach, with counting the *omer*. The map over our heads says that we are moving from one place to another—from slavery to freedom to revelation, from Mitzrayim to Sinai to the Promised Land. And we do, in so many ways, but hardly ever in a straight line, counting from one station in a direct path to the next. The map of the holidays, like the map of grief, doesn't describe our lived experience of enslavement and release, but it tells us that these places exist, and that there can be movement between them.

The *omer*, which we begin counting on the second night of Pesach and continue for 49 days, maps the territory between our post-slavery arrival in the formless wilderness and the gift of Torah. It probably didn't happen in 49 days, not in history, and not in present society or in our own lives as we negotiate whatever wilderness we find ourselves in. It probably wasn't, and isn't, a straight line for any of us. But the map suggests the possibility of movement, of ongoing life, of change and growth. That's probably reason enough for any of us to want to count.

PASSOVER GATHERINGS

Second Night Seder, Thursday, April 6th, 6:00 PM in the shul

This year, we will celebrate the 18th **Women of Exodus Seder** at the shul. We will remember our foremothers who resisted pharaoh and led us out of Mitzrayim; we will follow the traditional seder/order, but will tell the story through the voices of the archetypal women of the Exodus. Since it will be the second night of Pesach, we will end by counting the mystical *omer*. Newcomers and veterans of all genders are invited. A vegetarian potluck will be shared. If you want to participate in the seder: represent one of the foremothers, make a main dish for the vegetarian potluck, bring one of the traditional seder foods, and/or serve the meal, help with set-up, and clean up, NOW is the time to contact Andrea Luna: (text: 707-972-4494 or email havaluna.18@gmail.com).



Community Seder, Friday, April 7th, 5:30 - 8:30 PM

Rabbi Holub will lead the seder, and there will be songs, stories, conversation, all the ritual foods, and a spirit of joy and renewal. All are welcome. If you are planning to come, please contact Mina Cohen at mcohen@mcn.org, or (707) 367-3390, SOON to help us with the planning. As is our practice, Mina will ask you to bring a part of the seder meal.

COUNTING THE OMER

Look for your annual *omer* calendar in your email before Pesach. If you don't receive one and would like to, please contact Margaret at mholub@mcn.org.

YOM HASHOAH SERVICE

We will gather on Monday, April 17th, from 7:00–8:00 PM at the shul, to reflect on the holocaust and remember those connected to our community who perished during the Nazi regime. Names will be read and prayers will be offered to uplift their memories and their souls.

SHABBAT MORNING SERVICES

A full Shabbat service is led by community members, with singing, chanting and silence, Torah teaching and reading, blessings for healing and peace, and time for mourners to say Kaddish. The teachers for April are listed below. We now have hybrid services, so come to the shul or Zoom from 10:30 AM until about 12:30 PM.

04/01/23	<i>Tzav</i>	Bob Evans
04/08/23	<i>Pesach</i>	Raven Deerwater
04/15/23	<i>Shmini</i>	Margaret Holub
04/22/23	<i>Tazria–Metzora</i>	Sandra Wortzel
04/29/23	<i>Achrei Mot–Kedoshim</i>	Annabell Guinan



If you have an interest in giving a Torah teaching during Shabbat services, or would like more information about what's involved, please contact Raven Deerwater at raven@taxpractitioner.com or (707) 937-1099.



We celebrate today as

Annabell Maria Guinan

Is called to the Torah as a Bar Mitzvah

Saturday, April 29, 2023

10:30 AM

Mendocino Coast Jewish Community

Please join us for a bagel brunch in the shul after the service.



ZOOM ADDRESS

We are using the Zoom address below for many MCJC events. You may or may not be asked to type in a password, which is *shalom*. Disregard the numeric passcode at the bottom of the invitation unless you're dialing in on a landline. If you have questions or problems, contact susan.tubbesing@gmail.com.

Join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7071836183?pwd=NzFaTkpjOXVYMDNnNnprOXlnZjVhQT09>

Meeting ID: 707 183 6183

Passcode: *shalom*

Numeric Passcode: 776001

KABBALAT SHABBAT

Kabbalat shabbat is April 21 at 6:00 PM at the home of Lisa Fredericksen in Fort Bragg. Please call her at (707) 972-0884 to RSVP and get directions. Following a Shabbat service, we will share a vegetarian potluck meal. Please contribute a food or beverage item.



In May our hosts are Scott and Tracie Green also in Fort Bragg. We are looking for a host for July and thereafter. If you do not wish to host in your home, you can do so at the shul. Please contact Mina at (707) 937-1319 or mcohen@mcn.org.

PAIGE NOTES



Chodesh tov! This past new moon brings us into the Hebrew month of Nisan, as we liberate ourselves from winter and from slavery! In the days leading up to Pesach, we may choose to engage in the spiritual cleansing rituals of *Bedikat Chametz* and *Biur Chametz*. *Bedikat Chametz* is the practice of searching our home for any leavened food that we will not eat during Passover. Traditionally, we do this the night before Pesach by candlelight so that our full focus is only on the few inches that our flame illuminates. We use a feather to sweep up the crumbs, traditionally the same feather we have used all year to glaze our Shabbos challah with an egg wash. We scoop it all into a wooden spoon so that we can offer it to a sacred fire for the *Biur Chametz* ritual. In Jerusalem the morning before Pesach, the streets are filled with tiny bonfires of everyone burning their chametz together—quite a sight!

An abundance of meaningful symbolism can be found in these rituals that lead us to eating matzah rather than chametz. Bread rises like an ego so the Pesach matzah diet can be an annual ego check. Bread also takes up more space, so matzah can represent practicing minimalism, releasing what in our lives and homes takes up too much room, both literally and metaphorically. Lastly, bread is soft to chew so choosing the harder crunch of matzah reminds us to not always hide from our shadows, but to be with and work through the harder parts of life.

As you engage with the *Bedikat Chametz* ritual, take a moment to discern what else you might release at this time. *Mitzrayim* doesn't mean only Egypt, but also literally the "narrow place," so may these rituals enable and empower us to expand from our own personal narrow places into liberating freedom!

from my ancestors to yours,
paige

ELDERS' CONVERSATION

The Elders meet every second and fourth Tuesday of the month, 3:00-4:30 PM on Zoom. In April, they will meet on the 11th and 25th. The conversation is always provocative and enjoyable. People of all ages are most welcome. Use the MCJC Zoom address on page 3, above. If you need more information, please contact Linda Jupiter (jupiter@mcn.org) or Joy Lancaster (ajoylancaster@gmail.com) and they will be happy to fill you in.



MY CUP RUNNETH OVER



Tune in on Zoom for a virtual cup of your favorite beverage every Wednesday at 10:30 AM. Check in with community members and chat about anything and everything from the weather to the state of the nation, or from creative uses of matzoh to planting gardens. We also talk about health and wealth, and share wisdom. Leslie Krongold is the host and welcomes your questions and comments any time at elkron@gmail.com. Use the Zoom address mentioned on page 3.

MCJC JUSTICE GROUP



The Justice Group meets on the fourth Thursday of the month, 5:30 to 7:30 PM on Zoom. This month we will meet on April 27th. Watch the announcements for information about the meeting. If you would like to be on the Justice Group mailing list or attend meetings, please contact Donna Medley at dmthebeez9@gmail.com.

Report on the Scholarship Fund

The MCJC Scholarship Fund was established for students of the Coastal Adult School ESL/Citizenship Class that is taught by Anne Thomas. Our first scholarship was given in 2017! Since then, there have been another 46 scholarship recipients, all of whom have become U.S. Citizens. Anne is continuing to teach the class this year and plans to do so again in the next school year. So far, five students in the current class have submitted citizenship applications, and eight more will likely follow suit.

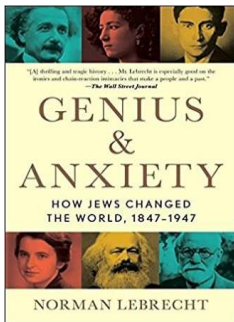
Once their applications are fully approved and they are waiting for their “final exam,” which is an interview by an officer of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, they receive the scholarship, which reimburses them for the application fee of \$725. To help lessen student anxiety about the INS interview, Anne expects an officer to come this year and speak with students in her class. The students can talk with the official about their concerns and ask any questions they may have.

Students receive a lot of support from their tutors during the school semester. This support continues during the summer months and especially as their interview is getting closer. In fact, Anne would like to have some more tutors working with students this year. If you would consider becoming a tutor, please feel free to contact one of our tutors, Karen Rakofsky, at nerak@mcn.com, and she will share her experiences with you. If you would like to be a tutor, contact Anne Thomas at athomas@mcn.org.



The Scholarship Program is an enduring program of the Justice Group and it continues to be supportive, encouraging, and empowering. For some students it is the main reason they are going through with the rigorous process of becoming a U.S. citizen. If you would like to support this program or have any questions, feel free to contact Jeannette Rasker at: jrasker1@gmail.com.

BOOK GROUP



We will Zoom at 2:00 PM on Monday, April 17th, to discuss ***Genius and Anxiety: How Jews Changed the World, 1847-1947*** by Norman Lebrecht. In a 100-year period, a handful of men and women changed the way we see the world. Many are well known—Marx, Freud, Proust, Einstein, Kafka—but others have vanished from our collective memory. Without Karl Landsteiner, for instance, there would be no blood transfusions or major surgery. Without Paul Ehrlich, no chemotherapy. Without Siegfried Marcus, no motorcar. Without Rosalind Franklin, genetic science would look very different. These visionaries all had Jewish origins.

Starting with the death of Mendelssohn and the birth of political anti-Semitism, author Lebrecht takes us through the highways and byways of Jewish experience: how Sarah Bernhardt invented the idea of fame; how contraception was conceived out of a Talmudic question; and the horrors of two world wars and a Holocaust. In a political climate where anti-Semitism is resurgent and revisionism goes unchallenged, this history is the counterpoint to fake news and false assumptions as well as a celebration of Jewish genius. Books are available at Gallery Bookshop. For a Zoom invitation to the next meeting, contact Mina Cohen at mcohen@mcn.org.

MCJC BOARD MEETING

The MCJC board meets monthly. In April the meeting will take place on Wednesday, the 19th, at 5:30 PM on Zoom. If you wish to attend part of the meeting, please contact board member Susan Tubbesing at (707) 962-0565, or susan.tubbesing@gmail.com, and she will give you the address.



NEWSLETTER VOLUNTEERS

The recent plea for help with *Megillah* mailing generated a wonderful cadre of volunteers ready to perform this important mitzvah. The editorial staff is deeply grateful. There can never be too many willing stampers and labelers! If you did not respond and are feeling left out, contact Sarah at 962-0565 or sarah.nathe@gmail.com

MEGILLAH SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Mendocino *Megillah* is published monthly as an emailed PDF and an online version. The online *Megillah* is posted on the newsletter page of the MCJC website: www.mcjc.org/newsletter. Any information on changes in email address or in email notifications should be sent to Sarah Nathe at sarah.nathe@gmail.com. If you choose not to be a contributing member of MCJC, we request a \$36 annual fee for the *Megillah*.

GOOD WILL COME TO THOSE WHO ARE GENEROUS

Thanks to all who have responded to the annual appeal letter. We appreciate your support for the many programs MCJC offers throughout the year. When you make a donation in memory or honor of someone, an acknowledgment card will be sent to the individual or family if you include their name and mailing address with your message. Please mail your donations to MCJC, Box 291, Little River, CA 95456, or use PayPal on the MCJC website.



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Fran Danoff in honor of Harriet Bye and Donna Montag.

Adina Merenlender & Kerry Heise in memory of Bibi Montag, and, as always, to help MCJC stay strong.

Reba Braff-Simon in honor of Fran Schwartz.

Theresa Glasner Morales to the Bikkur Cholim Fund in memory of Bibi Montag.

In love and sympathy for Donna & George Montag for the loss of their granddaughter, Bibi, from Jude and the Dragonfly Wellness Center.

Bob Evans in memory of Bibi Montag.

Theresa Glasner Morales in honor of Mickey Chalfin's first yahrzeit and with great love to Rabbi Margaret on this day, in deep sympathy.

dobby sommer in memory of cousin Ellen Sommer.

Elizabeth Sabin in honor of Ali Sabin.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The *Mendocino Megillah* is published monthly, except for August. The deadline for article submission is the 20th of the month before publication. The editor will include all appropriate material, space permitting, with the exception of copyrighted material lacking the permission of the author. Divergent opinions are welcome.

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