



BAT YAM MATTERS

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RABBI FUCHS REFLECTS A Victim Reflects

What a shocking surprise it was to discover that one of the four hostages in the horrific event in Colleyville, Texas, was a former Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation student of mine, Jeff Cohen. I called Jeff, and we spoke for nearly 45 minutes.

He had always been a bright, serious, and critically thinking student who asked probing questions and made astute observations. Those qualities that I noticed in him as an adolescent were very apparent in the 57-year-old man with whom I spoke on the phone. We spoke about the Torah portion, the Holiness Code from Leviticus, chapter 19, that we studied together long ago. We observed how its ringing proclamation, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself;" (Leviticus 19:18) played out in Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker's action in "welcoming the stranger" into the synagogue and offering him a cup of tea. We talked about the sad conflict that sometimes exists between the Torah's ideals and the practical realities of the world in which we live. After Confirmation and high school graduation, Jeff studied at Carnegie Mellon University and became "an engineer like my dad." He had worked for NASA as a Systems Analyst. I recalled that he, his parents and his sisters rarely missed a Shabbat service when he was young and that, in addition, his parents availed themselves of almost every Adult Learning opportunity our synagogue, Temple Isaiah in Columbia, Maryland, offered.



"All those things we grew up with," he noted, "I still do. I can't count how many times over the years I have quoted you," he continued (making my day), "about the Jewish imperative to do what we can to make the world a better place, but as far as belief goes, I think of myself as an observant Reform Jewish Atheist." To clarify, he added that

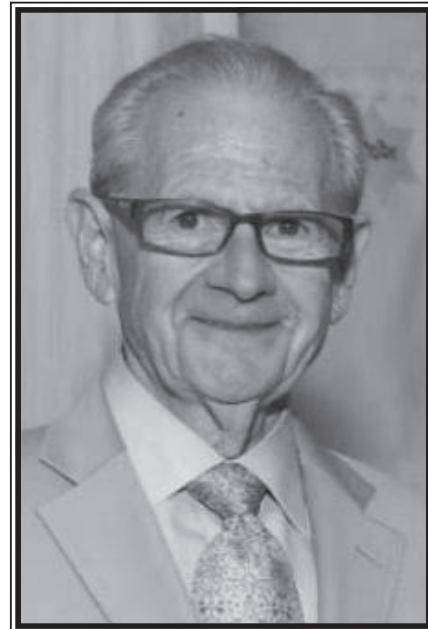
as a scientist he finds belief in God difficult, but that he finds meaning and comfort in the rhythms of Jewish life. Blow by blow, Jeff then recalled the horrific eleven hours of terror he endured. He pointed out emphatically, "We were not rescued, and we were not released. We escaped." Jeff surreptitiously dialed 911 when the gunmen turned away, so that the police would be alert to the situation. "Yes," he added, "there were moments when I feared things would end very badly." Then Jeff spoke of the climactic moment when the gunman ordered the hostages to kneel. "I gave him my most hardened glare and mouthed the word, 'No!'" Finally, he shared that when the gunman put down the weapon, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker threw a chair at him. The three hostages ran for their lives to the exit. "Now that it's over, "I asked him, "what are your takeaways?" He answered:

1. Active shooter training saved our lives.
2. The FBI did a great job of keeping the gunman talking. He was happy to talk.
3. The gunman really thought Jews have "all the power," and so the way to get the Al-Kaida operative out of prison was to take Jewish hostages.

As I hung up the phone, I reflected: After the Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh in October 2018, it seemed like the entire non-Jewish world rose up in horror. Three plus years later, after Poway, Jersey City and many other anti-semitic incidents, it seems, "not so much." Attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions have become expectations, not surprises. Already tight synagogue budgets are stretched to, and in some cases beyond, the breaking point by the amount we must spend on building security. We are at a difficult crossroads in Jewish life, and I admit I do not have the solution. But the one prescription I will offer is the last observation Jeff Cohen made to me when we spoke: "We must stand up and challenge anti-semitic stereotypes. When we don't challenge them, people latch onto them, and they proliferate!"

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By the time this issue of Bat Yam Matters arrives, we will be approaching two of our most exciting holidays— Purim and Passover. While both deal with incidents that had the possibility of eradicating our people, they end with a very different result. Both holidays provide examples of the pivotal role women play in our history. For Purim, it was the incredible courage of Esther to win over the King, who removed Haman and provided the resources for Jews to protect themselves. Miriam is the hero in the Passover story, saving the baby Moses, hiding his identity and enabling him not only to live, but to be raised with all the trappings of nobility and ultimately, guided by the Almighty, to bring the Jewish slaves (now freed) to the promised land.



You are all familiar with the stories, so why do I take time in my article to repeat them once again? I believe it is important, because it reminds us that faith and bravery against horrid odds have permitted us to survive for over 3000 years. While dispersed over many locations, Jews have managed to create vibrant societies imbued with their traditions. They have made significant contributions in the fields of science, art and culture. They have survived despite the onslaughts and destructions of their communities, and ultimately, they led millions to emigrate to the new Medina - America - to start over again. Hitler's focus and that of Nazi Germany was to eliminate the Jewish people, and six million of our brethren were killed. Hitler and his minions were defeated, and 1948 saw another dream realized with the birth (or rather re-birth) of Israel and an in-gathering of the survivors of our people from Europe. Israel's presence was challenged from its first day, and while successful from a military perspective, lives every day in a defense posture.

The end of World War II created a mindset that anti-semitism was eradicated for most of the next eight decades. Unfortunately, we were deluding ourselves, as we have seen a significant rise in anti-semitic attacks both physical and in the press, and even the open and increasingly wide use of the Nazi flag. It is especially disturbing that the younger generation know so little of the struggles Jews have experienced. Joshua Davidson, the senior rabbi at Congregation Emanuel-El in NYC, cited a poll conducted in 2020 by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims that surveyed millennials and Generation Z's. It showed more than 60 percent of these young people were unaware that six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and nearly half could not name a single concentration camp. Worse still, more than 10 percent believe Jews actually caused the Holocaust.

To me, this is a wake-up call. Although Jews may feel safe, the rise in anti-semitic events is a warning light that we must get involved to fight prejudice everywhere. We do not have the leisure to sit back and say, "I did my part; now let others step forward." I am proud to serve as your President with a congregation that began 31 years ago to provide a strong Jewish presence. I hope you agree this is important, and I urge you to step forward and become active to make that eternal light shine brightly.

Alan Lessack, President

allessack@sbcglobal.net

773-251-8862

CANTOR'S MESSAGE

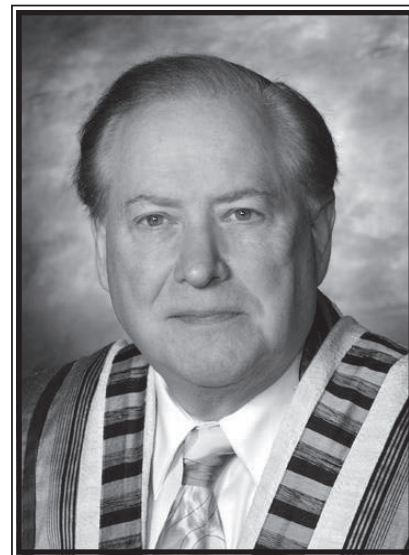
Purim "comes just once a year to cheer you with its singing." So goes the text of the popular Purim song, "Ani Purim" (I Am Purim). As you may know, Purim falls on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Adar. This year being a leap year in our lunar calendar, there are TWO months of Adar – Adar I and Adar II. When this occurs, Purim comes in the second month of Adar – or Adar II, which coincides with March 17th and 18th this year.

"When the Hebrew month of Adar enters, we have a lot of joy" (Mishnah Taanith 4:1). We are also admonished in Megillat Esther to "enjoy light and gladness, happiness and honor" (Esther 8:16). As the story goes, Haman wanted to exterminate all the Jews, but his diabolical plan was thwarted by Queen Esther and her parental guardian, Mordechai. Obviously, this is the reason for our great celebration.

Curiously, the name of God is never mentioned in the entire Book of Esther. Truth be told, we're not even sure that this story took place. But the message for us today is clear. If we are threatened as a Jewish People, we must react ourselves and not wait for God to intercede.

As incidents of anti-semitism increase in our time, we must not sit idly by. We must be proactive -- just as Queen Esther and Mordechai met "head on" their threat to exist as a happy, productive and peaceful people. This is the message of Purim for us today. May it be a jolly holiday for all!

Cantor Murray E. Simon





BAT YAM'S ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

Dear Bat Yam members,

It has been so wonderful watching our Bat Yam friends return to the island, sharing stories of our time apart and making plans for the season together. We are a very special Jewish community and being able to come together again has been a real blessing. As you all know, we are committed to keeping our dues affordable so that no one of Jewish faith is unable to join our community due to costs. In fact, Bat Yam Temple of the Island's membership dues are the lowest temple dues in Southwest Florida, making up only approximately 50% of our operating budget. Like all other congregations, we have always supplemented our dues with member contributions, plus fundraising from our annual Honey from the Heart program or our Fund Drives.

For the past three years, in lieu of the Annual Fund Drive, a small contingent of extraordinarily dedicated individuals created the Cantor's Concert. The effort to create last year's concert was compounded exponentially by the advent of COVID, and still the volunteers rose to the occasion. Unfortunately, with the latest Omicron COVID spreading throughout the country, we do not have the manpower this year to create the Cantor's Concert. As a result, we must once again resort to the Annual Fund Drive to help balance Bat Yam's budget and keep our dues low. Bat Yam needs your help to ensure that we preserve, maintain, and grow Bat Yam. We provide: religious services (Shabbat, High Holidays), educational programs (Hebrew education, bible study, adult education, Shared Scholar programs), Social Action Support (including food and paper drives, reading to local school children, Immigrant Justice, and Social Justice), interfaith exchanges (pulpit exchanges, working together with the interfaith community to support caregivers of dementia patients), holiday celebrations (Passover, Purim, Chanukah, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Tashlich, and Bnai Mitzvah, among others), Tzedakah and support to our community in times of need. These are just some of our offerings.

Please donate by mailing your check to Bat Yam Temple of the Islands, PO Box 84, Sanibel, FL 33957, or by going to batyam.org and clicking on the Donate button. Help keep Bat Yam financially strong so we can continue to be the Jewish voice and presence on Sanibel, Captiva and the surrounding Southwest Florida community. We appreciate all your support.

Alan Lessack, President

allessack@sbcglobal.net

773-251-8862

PURIM FESTIVAL 2022!

Bat Yam Temple of the Islands has assembled an all-star cast, featuring Pastor John Danner as Mordecai, to retell the biblical story of Esther and to celebrate the Festival of Purim. This will take place on Friday March 18 at 7 PM at 2050 Periwinkle Way. Cantor Murray Simon, accompanied by Toby Simon on the piano, will enhance the festivities with Purim songs. Everyone is invited to bring their groggers (noisemakers) to drown out the name of Haman as the story unfolds.

Our cast:

Esther — Tanya Hochschild

Vashti — Sally Sacks

Ahasueras — Sheila Sklar

Haman — Allan Sacks

Bigthan - Ed Greenberg

Teresh — Nancy Greenberg

Mordecai — Pastor John Danner

Hatach (narrator) Rabbi Stephen Fuchs





THE BAT YAM -SANIBEL CONGREGATIONAL UCC CONNECTION

Rabbi Stephen Fuchs

As I write these thoughts, I am basking in the glow of our just-concluded Pulpit Exchange Weekend with Dr. John Danner and Sanibel Congregational UCC. As many of you are aware, “our Pastor” Dr. John Danner is retiring on April 24, so this past weekend will be the last pulpit exchange I will share with him. It has been a very special relationship and I know all of us at Bat Yam will miss him. The good news is we have two more events to share. He will participate in both our Purim celebrations and our Passover Seder.

After his sermon on February 4, I presented him with Shofar as a memento. The sound of the Shofar is “a spiritual alarm clock,” awakening us and urging us to be the best people we can be. That is exactly what John Danner has done for his congregation, for Bat Yam and for all of Sanibel. He has touched our minds and our hearts. He has inspired us to be the best version of ourselves that we can be, and we will miss him immensely.

LETTER FROM PASTOR DEB KUNKEL

Congregation Bat Yam has always enjoyed a warm relationship with Pastor Deb Kunkel, associate pastor of the Sanibel UCC Church. We received the following letter from Pastor Deb following her retirement in December of 2021.

To my friends of Bat Yam. Greg and I so appreciate your participation in the celebration of my ministry at SCUCC. The relationship between the two congregations has been a special part of my ministry here. Your warm welcome of Greg into your Shabbat services and congregation’s life has been a gift for both of us. We will treasure the Luc Century etched vase as a wonderful reminder of the time spent with all of you.

God’s grace,
Deb Kunkel

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*Note: Any recent contributions not yet listed will
be in the next issue of Bat Yam Matters.*

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WISHING QUICK RECOVERY

Judy Adler in honor of Elissa
Karasin-Samet. May she have a
quick & full recovery from surgery
Sandy Teger & Dave Waks in
honor of Elissa Karasin-Samet for
a quick & full recovery

IN MEMORY OF DON FISHER

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Wishing much happiness in
your new home!

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BAT YAM TEMPLE OF THE ISLANDS

PO BOX 84 • SANIBEL, FL 33957

batyamsanibel@gmail.com

www.batyam.com

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**Deceased*

BAT YAM MATTERS

Co-editors: Tanya Hochschild and Sally Sacks