



## THE TENT

Congregation Beth Jacob's Monthly Newsletter  
February, 2022

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### CBJ Calendar of Upcoming Events:

February 2, 11 a.m: Conversations with Jewish Authors Adult Education Series: A Talk with Naomi Ragen, author of *An Observant Wife* (free, but pre-registration is required. See article for details.)

February 2, 4:30 pm: Introduction to Judaism Class (in-person and Zoom)

February 3, 6:30 pm: Health Crises and Jewish Leadership Series (#3 of 3)

February 4, 7:00 pm: Shabbat Service via Zoom

February 7, 8:30 am: Limud Torah Study Group with Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Silverman

February 9, 4:30 pm: Introduction to Judaism Class (in-person and Zoom)

February 11, 7:00 pm: Candy Shabbat Service in-person and via Zoom



This will be a Candy Shabbat co-led by the religious school students, who will teach us about the meaning of each of the prayers by relating it to a piece of candy! (Hungry for more? Come to our Shabbat service!)

February 14, 8:30 a.m.: Limud Torah Study Group with Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Silverman

February 16, 4:30 pm: Introduction to Judaism Class

February 16, 8:00 pm: Conversations with Jewish Authors Adult Education Series: Jonathan Boyarin, author of *Yeshiva Days* (free, but pre-registration is required. See article for details.)

February 18, 7:00 pm: Shabbat Service via Zoom

February 21, 8:30 a.m.: Limud Torah Study Group with Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Silverman

February 23, 4:30 pm: Introduction to Judaism Class

February 25, 7:00 pm: Shabbat Service via Zoom

February 28, Limud Torah Study Group with Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Silverman

[To see the complete CBJ Calendar on our website, click here.](#)

**See the “CBJ Weekly Update” for details and links to join these meetings.**

**In Case You Missed it...**  
**Rabbi Mills' Message on Shabbat**  
**January 7, 2022**



At our Shabbat service on January 7th, Rabbi Mills spoke to us about the Torah portion, Bo, and its recurrent theme of darkness. Three of the 10 plagues that were visited on the Egyptians relate to Darkness: in the 8th plague, locusts swarmed the land in such great numbers that they blocked out the sun; actual darkness covers the land in the 9th plague; and the tenth plague, the death of the first-born, shows us the worst kind of darkness of all: the insensitivity and callousness that the Egyptians showed toward death. Some Israelites also suffered from their own form of darkness -- the darkness of inertia -- their acceptance of slavery and their inability to find the courage to act to free themselves from bondage, as many wanted to return to Egypt.

There are many kinds of darkness. There can be a darkness of the spirit - a focus on our own self-interests and an inability to feel compassion or care about others. In modern times, as we face the second year of Covid, isolation, anxiety and depression represent another kind of darkness. At times such as these, we must resolve to open our eyes and our ears - to see, hear, recognize and act to combat intolerance, intolerance and cruelty that exist in our world. Darkness represents ignorance, deception and lies, whereas Light is a metaphor for knowledge, wisdom and truth. To achieve a better world, we need to find compassion for people who are less fortunate than we, work toward restoring respect for others who are different from ourselves, whether in race, ethnicity, religion or gender, reject deception and lies and restore the Rule of Law. This is how we can transform Darkness into Light.

**Israel's New Anthem of Hope For Overcoming the Covid Pandemic**

At this Shabbat service, Rabbi Mills shared an inspirational YouTube video in which some of Israel's top musical artists sing Zeh Katan Aleinu, a song of hope and resilience in response to the ongoing Covid pandemic.

The title of the song, "Katan Aleinu", translates as "It's no match for us," or "Don't worry, we've got this." Co-written by Static (Liraz Russo) and Yarden "Jordi" Peleg, "Katan Aleinu" has it all: upbeat, positive lyrics, patriotic themes, great vocals, and appearances by 40 of Israel's top musical stars. "We recruited the best Israeli artists that, really, I have no words, each one is a tzaddik (righteous person)," Static wrote. "They all came as volunteers with love, and full mobilization for one purpose: to do good." Proceeds from the project will be donated to hospitals, Corona wards and medical staff working on the front lines in the fight against COVID-19. The artists were not compensated for their participation.

[Click here to watch this YouTube video.](#)



## Exciting New Adult Education Programs! Conversations With Jewish Authors

Join with about 25 other Reform congregations for a monthly conversation with a Jewish author of a newly published book. You will find information about each monthly program in the Weekly Update, in The Pup Tent, and in the CBJ calendar of events on the CBJ website ([cbjplymouth.org](http://cbjplymouth.org).) **Please note that participation in these programs is free of charge, but advance registration is required. You may pre-register at the last minute (5 minutes before the program begins) if you wish.**

To see the complete schedule, click here.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Tx1u5CjP09H1o1o0xUZasj5BXPdVUfja98V\\_nFsbg8/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Tx1u5CjP09H1o1o0xUZasj5BXPdVUfja98V_nFsbg8/edit?usp=sharing)

### Upcoming Programs:

#### **A Conversation with Naomi Ragen, author of *An Observant Wife***

Wednesday, February 2, 2022, at 11:00 AM ET

Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84204329621?pwd=M1FwTTRFVDJaTXIrOVlnaWpJMGxYdz09>

Naomi Ragen is an award-winning novelist, journalist and playwright. Her first book, *Jephte's Daughter*, was listed among the one-hundred most important Jewish books of all time. Her bestselling novels include *Sotah*, *The Covenant*, *The Sisters Weiss*, and *Devil in Jerusalem*. An outspoken advocate for women's rights, and an active combatant against anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda, she has lived in Jerusalem since 1971. *An Observant Wife* is her thirteenth novel.

In this rich and compassionate new novel, Naomi Ragen continues the love story between newly observant California-girl Leah and ultra-Orthodox widower Yaakov from *An Unorthodox Match*. From the joy of their wedding day surrounded by supportive friends and family, Yaakov and Leah are soon plunged into the complex reality of their new lives together as Yaakov leaves his beloved yeshiva to work in the city, and Leah confronts the often-agonizing restrictions imposed by religious laws governing even the most intimate moments of their married lives. Adding to their difficulties is the hostility of some in the community who continue to view Leah as a dangerous interloper, questioning her sincerity and adherence to religious laws and spreading

## **A Talk with Professor Jonathan Boyarin, author of Yeshiva Days**

Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 8:00 PM ET

Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYkcOCgrz0qE93eeSEqGH70S-l3nTN02WrL>

Jonathan Boyarin is the Diann G. and Thomas A. Mann Professor of Modern Jewish Studies at Cornell University. His books include *Jewish Families*, *Mornings at the Stanton Street Shul: A Summer on the Lower East Side*, and *The Unconverted Self: Jews, Indians, and the Identity of Christian Europe*.

New York City's Lower East Side has witnessed a severe decline in its Jewish population in recent decades, yet every morning in the big room of the city's oldest yeshiva, students still gather to study the Talmud beneath the great arched windows facing out onto East Broadway. *Yeshiva Days* is Jonathan Boyarin's uniquely personal account of the year he spent as both student and observer at Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem, and a poignant chronicle of a side of Jewish life that outsiders rarely see. Boyarin explores the yeshiva's relationship with the neighborhood, the city, and Jewish and American culture more broadly, and brings vividly to life its routines, rituals, and rhythms. He describes the compelling and often colorful personalities he encounters each day, and introduces readers to the Rebbi, the moral and intellectual head of the yeshiva. Boyarin reflects on the meanings of "study for its own sake" in the intellectually vibrant world of traditional rabbinic learning, and records his fellow students' responses to his negotiation of the daily complexities of yeshiva life while he also conducts anthropological fieldwork. A richly mature work by a writer of uncommon insight, wit, and honesty, *Yeshiva Days* is the story of a place on the Lower East Side with its own distinctive heritage and character, a meditation on the enduring power of Jewish tradition and learning, and a record of a different way of engaging with time and otherness.

### **MEMBERSHIP NEWS**



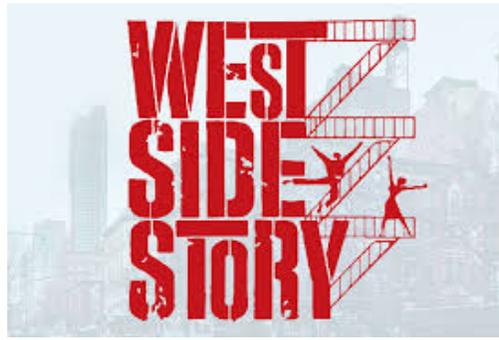
If you know of any new families in the Plymouth area who might be interested in joining CBJ, please ask them to contact our Membership Chair, Rose Litchman at [snobuntng@aol.com](mailto:snobuntng@aol.com)  
[Click here for a link to CBJ's Application Form.](#)

### **Brotherhood News**



Watch the Weekly Update for information about future Brotherhood events that are being planned, including a Discussion Group and a Movie Discussion Night, both to be conducted by Zoom.

## The Original "West Side Story" was Jewish -- Would It Have Been a Better Musical?



It starts in an alley. An angsty Italian gang creeps onstage in a “stylized prologue showing the restlessness of the youths.” It’s New York City in the 1950s, and, as the plot progresses, warring ethnic groups articulate their frustrations via song and dance. Children die preventable deaths; everyone sings; the audience thinks soberly about prejudice and peace. I am referring to a musical called “GANG BANG! (working title).” It will, of course, eventually become one of the most popular musicals of all time, known by a much sleeker name. But for now, it’s merely a fuzzy sketch of an unwritten production about two gangs: one Gentile, and one Jewish.

Before Leonard Bernstein composed any music, before Jerome Robbins choreographed a step, before Arthur Laurents completed a single draft of a full book, before Stephen Sondheim would even join the team — before “West Side Story” was the production it became — this group of Jewish men initially conceived of a musical that meditated on religious intolerance, specifically centered around antisemitism. This “Jewish version” of “West Side Story” didn’t get very far: by the time the first draft of the musical was complete, the Jewish characters had become Puerto Rican. But evidence remains in the form of anecdotes, and, more materially, two treatments (scene-by-scene summaries of the action, including occasional suggestions for song, dance, character, or style choices).

These documents, created by Arthur Laurents and accessible at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, provide a peek at a version of this musical that might have been. In this pair of treatments, Italian Romeo and Jewish Juliet meet at a street festival. “It’s Easter and Passover,” Laurents writes; “holiday time when the boys are free and have too much free time.” As in the original Shakespeare, the teenagers do not initially recognize the threat presented by the other’s background, because religion, like family names and unlike race, is not always visually apparent. The innocence of the initial meeting ends when the lovers each learn the other belongs to an enemy clan.

Unlike Maria, who lives permanently in the eponymous West Side, Jewish Juliet has traveled to the Lower East Side to join family for Passover. The creators reportedly planned to make Juliet a Holocaust survivor. In the eyes of a young reader, who has only ever encountered Holocaust survivors as paragons of elderly wisdom, it is jarring to imagine one so young and naïve. This Juliet might be haunted by the atrocities of a genocidal war, but she remains somehow able to believe that, despite the sectarian violence afflicting her community, her romance will succeed.

The most conspicuously Jewish segment in the story is the Passover Seder, set early in the show’s final act. In the second draft — mercifully retitled “ROMEO” instead of “GANG BANG” — the holiday becomes the setting for a turbulent musical scene. Romeo, having killed Tybalt in a previous scene, is on the run; the action cuts between the Seder and Romeo’s flight from police. As the scene reaches a climax, biblical high drama undergirds the intensity of the onstage action: The Jewish family, unaware that their son has died, discusses the tenth plague — death of the first born. Romeo hides while the Capulets search for matzoh, an activity that is

“gay and joyous and done with much laughing and squealing.” As the jubilation reaches its peak, the police enter to announce Tybalt’s murder.

Perhaps the concept for the musical was, at this early stage, too embryonic; or perhaps the choice to make the musical religious meant it would inevitably invoke the melodrama of faith in a way that seemed sort of hokey. In either case, this scene seems destined for bathos. The premise is overwrought, obvious and clunky. In the subsequent scenes, the fighting escalates; both gangs seek vengeance, display prejudice. The gang members trade insults: “Dirty wop” is followed by “dirty kike.” When a character called Tante (Shakespeare’s nurse; mush this word around in your mouth enough and it becomes “Anita”) attempts to interfere with the lethal trajectory of fate, the Italian gang members “finally make a crack about Tante and her being Jewish.” By the end of the musical, as in Shakespeare’s original, both lovers lie dead. “The lights dim, the scenery disappears except for the pallet with the two lovers and, if we want to use Easter Sunday, we can have church bells,” Laurents muses. On second thought, he adds, “this might be a little bit too much.”

Would “West Side Story” have been a better musical if it had stuck with the Jewish plot? Certainly the musical’s Jewish creators, in writing about a Jewish community instead of a Puerto Rican one, could have crafted a more accurate, respectful depiction of the culture they sought to dramatize. Others have pointed out the ineptitude of their attempts to write authentically about a demographic they were not part of, and in fact knew barely anything about.

But there’s something about the attitude the early drafts take toward religion that, I suspect, may have fundamentally impeded the musical’s ability to land so compellingly with audiences. “Jewish ‘West Side Story’” suggests that religion of any kind makes its adherents inherently susceptible to prejudice. Juliet’s Jewish family members — who, perhaps due to the creators’ own backgrounds, are more focal than Romeo’s Italian kin — oppose ethnic mixing, and seem to subscribe to stereotypically essentializing ideas. At one point, the Capulets tell Juliet she must return home, “and anyway, that love is doomed — because Romeo is an Italian.” (Though, to be fair, they add “and a murderer,” which seems a more reasonable grievance.)

It is difficult, given the identities of the creators, not to read a slightly personal element to the depiction of the Jewish families. It’s as though these men harbor a grudge against their own communities, resenting a pre-war generation’s retrograde attachment to demarcations they felt separated Jews from the rest of white America. The creators draft a fantasy of escaping from the confines of this upbringing, and then place that attempt within a plot that dramatizes the violent consequences of such escape. Tradition, in this framing, is bad, but flouting it is dangerous.

Unlike the tradition-bound families and insular gangs, the voices of morality in the musical have divested from their factions entirely. The romantic leads are purely in love and therefore able to see past hate: “The difference in religion,” notes Laurents in a description of what he has titled “BALCONY SCENE (FIRE ESCAPE),” “should not matter to either of them.” And the wise Doc, who functions as mediator between the two gangs, is described as having “no religion.” This choice seems to imply a moral superiority in abstaining from faith. The takeaway: Religious difference separates, and so to remove that rift, remove the religion.

That the “Jewish version” did not allow for a particularly capacious commentary on identity might also be symptomatic of the precarity of Jewish identity at the time. Jewish theater historian Warren Hoffman writes in his book “The Great White Way: Race and the Broadway Musical” that during the development of this musical, “The racial and ethnic landscape of the

United States, particularly the country's white landscape, was quickly changing as the team was writing."

As American anti-Black racism accelerated, Ashkenazi Jews and other previously non-white groups with European lineage were permitted an unprecedented entree into whiteness. Around this time, in other words, European Jews may have recently become too white to serve as prototypes of the racially oppressed. In replacing the Jews, then, "West Side Story" became an explosive allegory about race, with a more modern, appealingly liberal, and neatly universalizable message. The "West Side Story" that eventually met its audience tried to say something along the lines of: Do not eradicate difference; tolerate it, admire it, celebrate it. However shoddy its depiction of the populations it centered, what it tried to say about their differences evidently felt electric — at least to some audiences — at the time. For the purposes of creating a broadly appealing musical, the kind that met the success "West Side Story" did, the decision to remove the Jews was likely crucial.

By the next of Laurents' treatments, the Jewish gang has been quietly swapped out for a Puerto Rican one. Some of the names have begun to shift, too: Benvolio becomes Benny, Tybalt becomes Bernardo. Juliet is still Juliet, but Tante is Anita. The musical is creeping toward its final form. When the violence accelerates, Doc — now, interestingly, described as "possibly a Jew" — tries vainly to stop the coming rumble." Doc isn't white enough to be a gentile, meaning he is sympathetic to the experiences of prejudice the Puerto Rican characters face. But he is just white enough to garner acceptance from the white characters. When the musical centered around religion, Doc had none; now that it focuses on race, "none" is no longer a possibility. Jewishness, in its midcentury position of liminal whiteness, has become the ethnicity of mediation.

It's easy to feel that consequential choices like these in the story of the development of a hit are made with full awareness of their impact. That the creators had a canny intuition for the zeitgeist, and could sense that a message of racial tolerance would resonate with audiences better than one about religious difference. But according to Laurents' biography, the creators abandoned the Jewish plot simply because they realized someone else had already written it: "Abie's Irish Rose," a play from the 1920s, dealt similarly with Jewish-gentile intermarriage.

Paging through these drafts — some of them photocopies, some the actual paper Laurents typed into — in a silent reading room in Lincoln Center, I was overcome, more than anything else, by a sense of the documents' vitality. At the time these treatments were created, the musical was so far from complete it seemed to be visibly evolving between drafts, even within them. The pages are littered with little typos, misspellings, and punctuation errors. Often, Laurents types faster than he thinks — lacking a modern backspace bar, he revises his vision mid-sentence. In one addendum, Laurents broods, directionless, over the characters' names. "I think we should not try to get names reminiscent of the originals. I do not like Judy for Juliet anymore than I like Ricki for Romeo. I think both are too flip-sounding and lack poetic softness." He suggests "Ruth" or "Ruthanna" for the female lead, but worries that "they begin with 'R' — which is inverting for no apparent reason." This, he decides, could be dangerous, because "people might think there was a definite reason."

Not all artistic choices, however successfully implemented, are deliberate. Sometimes, people simply want to make something new. After all, these drafts are unpolished and intimate, intended for internal circulation among the creators. At one point, Laurents writes, playfully: "The indication of musical numbers is, in places, the roughest of the above. I would like suggestions from the musical genius dept. on this as soon as possible."

These documents provide only a glimpse of an early version of what would become a fixture of the musical theater canon. Just some Jewish artists jotting down passing thoughts that would shape, eventually, into one of the most successful and culturally indelible musicals in American history.

Author: Eliya Smith, an editorial fellow at the Forward.



## **SISTERHOOD NEWS**

Upcoming events are a wine tasting with a talk by Rabbi Mills on What Makes a Wine Kosher; a program about Rosh Chodesh; and a program from the Mikvah in Newton. We are going to do our best to do hybrid events whenever possible.

### **An Appeal for New Leadership!**

As many of you already know, Suzanne Goldberg, our tireless leader for many years, will be spending the winter months in Florida. Although her plans are indefinite at this point and she may return to Massachusetts in mid-May, Suzanne may ultimately decide to make Florida her permanent home. She has asked Sisterhood members to please step up and take over the responsibility for conducting one or more of Sisterhood's programs, with help from Cindy Teles and Rose Litchman, and, of course, from Rabbi Mills.



Congregation Beth Jacob gratefully acknowledges receipt of the following donations:

#### **General Fund:**

Arnold Sollar - in honor of Rabbi Silverman

#### **Yahrzeit Fund:**

- Harry Shamir & Barbara Aharoni - in memory of Harry's first wife, Rina Shamir
- Arnold & Lois Weiss - in memory of Rhoda Burstein and William Smick
- Ronnie Hirschhorn - in memory of her father, Bernard Riback, and Dan's mother, Mae Hirschhorn



**The Following Yahrzeits Will be Observed This Month:**

*(A memorial candle should be lit on the preceding evening.)*

**February, 2022**

- 1 Richard Pecorella
- 1 Ida Penn
- 1 Morris Resnick
- 1 Arthur Rosenblum
- 3 Jeanne Gurwitch
- 7 Robert Arons
- 7 Hyman Sherman
- 16 Renee Katz
- 17 Betty Balton
- 17 Samuel Goldberg
- 18 Joseph Bolotin
- 18 Joseph L. Harris
- 18 Morris Melniker
- 19 Roberta Lipetz
- 22 Madelyn Siegel
- 25 Jerome Gottman
- 25 Sally Sarke
- 27 Albert Roth
- 28 John Padlusky

*May their memories be for a blessing and live forever in the hearts of all who knew and loved them.*

## Recipe for Traditional Mandelbrot



(makes 48)

### Ingredients

2 cups all purpose flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
About 1 cup slivered almonds  
2 large eggs  
1/2 cup sugar  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 teaspoon almond extract  
1/2 cup grapeseed or other neutral oil  
1/2 cup sugar mixed with 1 teaspoon cinnamon for finishing

### Directions

1. Set rack in middle level of the oven and preheat to 350°F.
2. In a bowl, combine flour, baking powder, and salt; stir well to mix.
3. In another bowl, whisk eggs by hand until well mixed. Add sugar and whisk until smooth. Whisk in extract and oil.
4. Fold flour mixture into egg mixture until all flour is absorbed. Fold in almonds.
5. On a lightly floured surface, press dough together. Divide dough in half and roll each half into a log the length of your pan (14 to 18 inches).
6. Place each log on the pan and flatten slightly.
7. Bake until well-risen and firm, about 25-30 minutes.
8. Cool the logs on the pans and racks.
9. Reset racks in upper and lower thirds of the oven.
10. Using a sharp serrated knife, slice baked logs diagonally about every 1/2 inch.
11. Place cinnamon-sugar mixture in a shallow dish and turn the cut cookies in it.
12. Return biscotti to the pans, cut side down, and bake until dry and crisp, up to 20 minutes longer.

Store cooled cookies between sheets of parchment or wax paper in a tin or plastic container with a tight-fitting container.

**Editor's Note:** "The Tent" (formerly named The Pup Tent) is a monthly publication that provides a condensed summary of CBJ news, including the monthly Calendar, upcoming Yahrzeit dates, and acknowledgments of donations that have been received. The "CBJ Weekly Update" is our weekly email newsletter that includes full details about upcoming events, as well as information about the weekly Torah reading portion and helpful links to various resources. **To subscribe to the CBJ Weekly Update, please contact me at [judith.sherman@gmail.com](mailto:judith.sherman@gmail.com).** Thank you! Judith Sherman, Editor, "The Tent" and "CBJ Weekly Update"