The summer at PSJC is ordinarily a quiet but productive time. Normally, with the closing ceremony of Hebrew School behind us, and Shabbat morning minyan decamped to the cooler climes of the social hall, summer at PSJC is the time for the staff to focus quietly, regroup, and plan for the fall. Like so many aspects of PSJC life this year, everything is different and everything is the same. Our busy schedule of Zoom activities and services will continue into the summer—for many, the summer won’t feel as absentent than the spring. June is still the month we begin to plan for the High Holy Days and a new season of Hebrew School, but this year the planning may be neither solitary nor quietly contemplative. The entire Jewish professional world in New York and around the world is mobilizing itself to reinvent how we pray and learn.

The past two and a half months have required a great deal of improvisation and adaptation as we transitioned from a community that was accustomed to meeting only in person to one where our connections could exist and be strengthened online. And we succeeded, thanks to the resourcefulness of our staff, the commitment of our members, and the resilience of our community.

With summer, however, comes an opportunity to plan and to think creatively and creatively about our core mission, even if it involves our pursing it in new ways at times. It will require focus and clarity about what is essential to our practice and our community, and at the same time, we will have opportunities to experiment and to broaden the range of how we express our Jewish lives. We don’t yet know exactly what will be possible in terms of in-person gatherings in the fall—the situation continues to evolve. This week, New York City entered Phase 1 of the re-activation of the economy, with construction sites, manufacturing, and some retail sites re-opening. At the same time, 43% of epidemiologists surveyed by the NY Times on June 8 indicated that they don’t expect to attend a religious service for at least twelve months. We do know the High Holy Days this year will not be "business as usual." Even if the City and the State determine that religious services are permitted, there will certainly be restrictions on how densely we can occupy our building—we will not pack the place to the rafters as we normally do on Kol Nidre and Neilah. Sadly, the communal singing that is so central to what we do on the holidays is now understood to be especially risky. And we know that, regardless of government regulations or recommendations, many in our community will not feel safe attending services in person. So, while we don’t know all the details, we can be pretty sure that, even under the most permissive regulations, the majority of our congregants participating in any given service will do so remotely.

Under normal circumstances, the High Holy Days take months of steady preparation. This year, conversations have begun early, with the Avodah Committee, with the Board, and with colleagues across the city. We will work with purpose and focus throughout the summer—to be successful we need a clear game plan. Because we know that remote participation will be such an essential part of our observation this year, we are committing ourselves now to creating the best online yontif experience we can.

We are also hoping to make use of the months of Tishrei for special programming, learning, and reflection. As Jon Spira-Savett wrote in The Times of Israel, “We could marshal [our] energy toward not a single annual happening but a two-month season, in ways that would not end but would actually generate the new year in our institutions.” We can leverage moments on the theme of the High Holy Days, including teshuvah—individual and collective renewal, reorienting, and repair.

Taking up this challenge will require creativity and ingenuity from across our community, and we hope many will want to participate in the planning and implementation. To kick off this effort, we will meet for a Zoom community meeting on the evening of June 24. Check www.virtualpsjc.org for details. This will be an opportunity to share initial ideas, ask questions, and collectively move toward a communal vision for the fall. Feel free to share ideas in advance by emailing Rabbi Carter.

We understand that many of us will approach the idea of largely remote High Holy Days with sadness, even grief. Being together in our beautiful space, singing, and hearing the shofar are, indeed, essential experiences of the month of Tishrei, and it will not be easy to give them up or replace them. While we will find creative ways of maintaining the spirit of our services, we know that familiarity—the idea that we do the same thing in the same way year after year—is also important to many. We do not want to pretend that there will be no loss.

At the same time, many of us who have attended Zoom shiva or memorial services in the past few months have been surprised to find how beautiful and meaningful these experiences can be in their own way. Rabbis, educators, and synagogue leaders across the spectrum are recognizing that the online format is an opportunity to test new ideas and interpretation. In the virtual space, we can break out into smaller groups and carry on simultaneous services with a variety of approaches in a way that our physical space does not easily allow.

For some, Zoom yom kippur is a way to get the services in and get back to life. For others, the services give you the opportunity to be alone and reflect on the meaning of the holiday. For still others, it is the opportunity to connect with a larger community.

With summer, however, comes an opportunity to plan and to think creatively and creatively about our core mission, even if it involves our pursing it in new ways at times. It will require focus and clarity about what is essential to our practice and our community, and at the same time, we will have opportunities to experiment and to broaden the range of how we express our Jewish lives.

But that just isn’t so… Just as we have been learning to negotiate the idea of being in our homes—as we learn to maneuver with masks and greet people we want to hug from six feet away—we somehow figure out how to keep...
As a result, hope is so hard to come by these days. And yet hope is essential to our survival, to our growth. The question is: Where can we find that hope, especially when, as the Psalmists say: “The rivers rise and rage, the waters pound and roar, the floods spread and storm…” An answer, according to the Psalmist who penned this final psalm of Kabbalat Shabbat is, “Above the crash of the sea and its breakers, awesome is Adonai our God.” For me, awe is the key. Recognizing the awe of God’s world, stopping to appreciate the brave and powerful deeds of our fellows and acknowledge the remarkable connections between us (despite all of our differences, despite all of the required distance). This is my spark of hope. It is a moment to admire the beauty of this world of ours, looking out the window at a sky full of stars, seeing a view of the earth from space as American astronauts returned to the heavens, hearing birds singing louder than I’d noticed before... these offer me signs of hope that there is indeed order in the vastness of the world. Seeing people, especially young people stand up and speak out for racial justice, at times literally creating a human shield to protect a store or a police officer from harm. This assures me that we can indeed change this world for the better for the next generation is committed to doing so.

The image of the ocean—with its immeasurable depth and vastness—allowing me to exist as just a small drop within it, for me, a simultaneously healing and humbling image and one that fills me with hope.

Whenever I see the ocean, I know that it is vast, but I also know that somewhere, thousands of miles away, these waters that crash into me, are also connecting me to others, on the other side, who are touching that very same water—binding us together, reminding me of our connection—despite the distance. Oceans can feel very calm and yet they contain great power—continual tidal cycles can change the very contours of the land. What better image of hope can I have than the water’s ability to literally transform the land around it—with continued, integrated effort, by the natural force of the waves. I know that we too can bring that wave of connective power forward into our world. I know, because I have witnessed it—and found hope and inspiration from it, even for brief moments.

One of my deepest sources of hope over the years has been the community of the Park Slope Jewish Center and the interconnectedness of the members of this place. When we join together, I see what is possible. When I hear us singing together, I can feel the power we hold in our hands. And even if we remain physically apart, I know that we are still together, and those moments of seeing people schmoozing on zoom, or delivering food or art to one another, those moments of shaking candy at a computer camera to celebrate with a Bracha Mitzvah family, or learning together these days with a screen full of friends, both local and from across the country and the world, these are moments that bring a bit of hope when things feel hard. I hope and pray that this community can serve as a source of hope, a reminder of our connection, of the waves of power we contain when we work together, for you as well.

From Aileen Heiman, Director of Youth Education and Family Programming

Jewish tradition is filled with stories of dramatic shifts in education in response to changes in the surrounding world, much of our current Jewish practice itself comes from the necessity to reimagine Judaism in a time of exile. When PSJC Hebrew School had to move online in mid-March, Sarah Gribetz, interim Hebrew School principal, and I shared the priority of “contact over content.” Without missing a single session, our faculty and staff created opportunities for the students to gather via zoom each week; to see their friends and teachers and to establish a sense of normalcy and routine. While we focused on connection to community as the primary goal, that does not mean that the learning stopped.

Laura Baron, Hebrew School programming assistant, created an entirely new website for the Hebrew School and worked with Sarah to provide families with resources for navigating Jewish holidays in quarantine. From a live haircut and BBQ with the fifth grade on Lag BaOmer to bring challah as a spiritual practice with the sixth grade, our faculty also kept the learning going, thinking “outside of the Zoom Box.” We moved Hebrew into movement online, with students using their own surroundings to practice new vocabulary and to get up and move. Gesher teens continued to discuss current events through a Jewish lens, studying the Talmudic tale of the Oven of Akhnai and how it connects to a Zoom minyan.

With the innovation that comes with remote learning, there are still challenges. While we can help families enrich their Shabbat and holiday practices at home, nothing can replace the feeling of celebrating together in one space. Teaching tefillah (prayers), especially learning melodies and tools for leading a congregation, cannot be easily replicated in a Zoom classroom.

As we plan the coming school year we are developing a hybrid program for the fall, with innovative curricular approaches that will seek to meet some of the challenges we faced this spring, while also building on some of successes. This summer I will be participating in the Summer of NewCAJE and working with a national team of educators to develop tools for online and project-based learning and workshop lesson plans and curricula framework. I will be collaborating with the other synagogue educators in our community to explore how we can partner around dynamic High Holiday programming in the fall and teacher training throughout the year. From Zoom happy hours and coffee chats to our It’s Friday music class to a summer scavenger hunt, successful Jewish education has always begun with meeting our families where they are, which for right now, means at home.
Our People are Our Greatest Resource

I worked with the Business Division of Apple, Inc. nearly a decade ago, and “Our people are our greatest resource” is the first line of their human resources manual—and one I truly value. My greatest hope is for individuals to feel pride in the work they do, going above and beyond, not because they have to, but because they want to.

We are the best versions of ourselves when we feel motivated, valued, and inspired. PSJC is in a staffing transition right now, and I would like to take this opportunity to talk about OUR people, because they are, indeed, our greatest resource.

Following the temporary closure of the PSJC building, my wife, Emily, and I unexpectedly went from “Fugheddaboudit” to “Ayyuh,” exchanging our 400 sq. ft. studio in Windsor Terrace for more breathing room at our home in midcoastal Maine. I temporarily relocated the PSJC office there, leaving nothing imperative to our workflow— including Laura Baron—a wise decision that proved to support our daily operations most efficiently.

Laura and our Interim Hebrew School Director, Sarah Gribetz, quickly embarked on an exciting Virtual Hebrew School “ride” for three months. I witnessed that in countless hours that Laura and Sarah spent collaborating over Zoom to “knock it out of the park” for our Hebrew School students!

Hello!

In June, Tali Finkelstein joined the PSJC staff as our new Administrative Coordinator and Assistant to the Rabbi - a first for PSJC! Tali will be working part-time this summer and shifting to full time as Labor Day approaches. She is a long-time resident of the South Slope and currently lives in Windsor Terrace. Tali had an extensive career in product management in the publishing industry and is currently pursuing a career transition, as well as a Master of Public Administration degree from Baruch College/CUNY. She was born in Israel, is fluent in Hebrew, and spends time in Prospect Park with her family whenever possible. Tali’s email is tali@psjc.org. Feel free to give her a warm PSJC welcome and attach a photo or two!

Our people are our greatest resource.

We’re delighted to have Aileen back from her maternity leave (it feels as if she never left), and little Izzy is a joy to see at staff meetings. In fact, Izzy may have attended more Zoom meetings this spring than anyone in our community! We also look forward to seeing Patrick weekly—should you haven’t seen him on Zoom, Facebook, or Instagram lately, Patrick is sporting a stylish gray beard and a mantra of “no shave till Brooklyn!” Patrick and Sherrod work closely to ensure our building is maintained properly while closed. We still have pest control, fire and safety maintenance, and a schedule of other monthly or bi-monthly maintenance we are required to adhere to aside from our routine cleaning. Rabbi Carie continues to be our compass in innumerable ways as we navigate this ocean.

Our Board of Trustees has been working nonstop during this critical time, and our membership has been selfless, resilient, and compassionate. We are all PSJC.

Today is “Day 100.” Emily and I just renewed our mail forwarding here in Maine for a second time—an unexpected activity in our orbit. We miss Brooklyn and look forward to once again co-existing with our two cats in our little slice of Windsor Terrace. I wish everyone wellness, safety, and sanity as New York slowly navigates its reopening. We’re here for you.

Sending a Sweet New Year - NOT Virtual!

Especially in a time when it is so hard to be anything but virtual, how wonderful to be able to send an actual gift for the holidays! This 8-ounce jar of delicious kosher honey arrives in time for Rosh Hashanah, decorated with a colorful label, and includes a personalized card reading “L’Shana Tova - Wishing you a Healthy and Happy New Year.” This card also lets the recipients know that a donation has been made in their honor to the Park Slope Jewish Center. What a lovely way to celebrate the holiday and support PSJC as well. Order your honey at: https://www.honeyfromtheheart.org/PSJ/

Creativity in the Time of Corona

How do you manage a hands-on fused glass art class when we are all restricted to our respective homes? PSJC member and artist Aura Shahaf Woelfle found a way! The six people who signed up for the class (I was lucky enough to be one of them) received a small carton at their front doors containing everything they needed for the project: a clear glass “canvas” assorted sizes and shapes of colored glass and glue to keep it all together; after the class, Aura collected the artwork and leftover colored glass and glue to keep it all together, after the class, Aura collected the artwork and leftover colored glass and glue to keep it all together; after the class, Aura collected the artwork and leftover colored glass and glue to keep it all together; after the class, Aura collected the artwork and leftover colored glass and glue to keep it all together. The class itself took place on Zoom, with Rabbi Carie first teaching about Shavuot and the giving of the ten commandments, stressing the imagery and atmosphere, with fire, clouds around Mount Sinai, shofars blowing and general excitement and chaos. Aura walked us through the technical aspects and helped us to use our imaginations to interpret the scene in our glass art-work. And of course, throughout the Zoom class we all chatted and exchanged ideas. The results of the class are shown below. If you have any questions, you can email Aura at auraphoto@optonline.net.
Jonathan Posner Looks Back

At PSJC we have been fortunate over the years to have had many exceptional Rabbinic Interns, and this year’s intern, Jonathan Posner, is a prime example. During his tenure, Jonathan connected with so many of us in so many ways and jumped right into finding new ways to continue in the Zoomiverse when we could no longer meet in person. Ways in which Jonathan contributed included leading services, *leyning* and chanting Megillah; teaching *Parashat Hashavuah* and a series on Exodus and Diaspora and one on Halacha; teaching Hebrew School to 6th graders and filling in when Allen was on leave with Tefillah and *Geshem* programming; doing Zoom cooking demonstrations (barbecue!); and inaugurating the Zoom Bread Circle. I recently asked Jonathan to reflect back on his experience at PSJC and share some of his impressions.

**Why did you want to come to PSJC?** The biggest attraction was to come to a synagogue with a reputation for having a diverse range of how people experienced the Jewish World. It is unusual to find so much diversity of outlook and practice about how to “do” Judaism. It also seemed that there was very little artefact, that people were showing me their “real” selves, which was a gift. I have also enjoyed the curious combination of cosmopolitan and small town feel that characterizes the community. PSJC met and exceeded my expectations, and it was clear from the first day that this is where I should be.

**What was difficult about your internship?** Rabbi Carter and I are different people with different approaches, and I learned a lot about what it meant to share a space in the context of ritual leadership and training. It was an honor that so many people wanted to join classes but hard to teach to so many – I worked a lot on how to teach complicated concepts in a large class, especially on Shabbat when we couldn’t write and use media. I also worked on listening, on making sure that people felt listened to and heard, both in class and one on one. This was a particular challenge at *Kiddush*, where it was rare to have a moment to myself!

**What was the most fun part of being at PSJC?** Teaching and leading classes and generally learning with the PSJC community. I have been part of thoughtful erudite communities before, but the diversity of the Park Slope community, coupled with the excitement that they had for learning was so rare, and made for an exciting teaching experience. I was not just teaching one type of Jew, and I learned from everyone – such a blessing.

**What was the most fun part of being at PSJC?** The community’s enthusiasm for singing and prayer. I was first impressed with this on Roah Hashanah when the whole room sang and clapped on beat together – I felt the whole room shake and it was profoundly moving. It is rare for synagogues to be at their best on the High Holy Days, so this was particularly surprising, and a really cool way to start an internship.

**What do you think you will take away from this experience and use?** So much! I am still processing a lot of what I learned. I expect to draw on this experience for a long time. I always came to PSJC prepared to be surprised with some new thing that blew my mind. Asking people to dig deeper into Torah text, and then going there with them, opened a lot of doors. I could not have asked for a better 4th year internship experience – I felt at home at PSJC and I want to make sure everyone there knows how grateful I am for the experience.

-Jonathan Posner, Interviewed by Elizabeth Schnur

More Creativity in the Time of Corona: *B’nai Mitzvah*

Spring typically is prime time for bar and bat mitzvahs and this year was no exception – a dozen b’nai mitzvah were scheduled in April - June 2020 at PSJC. And then the Coronavirus hit, and everything changed: quarantine was put into effect and we could no longer come together in the synagogue building to celebrate this important event in the lives of our children. Families were faced with huge challenge: they’d had the dates on their calendars for years and students had worked on their Torah and Haftorah readings and divrei Torah for a year or more leading up to the dates. Not to mention all the planning for the *Kiddush* celebration and parties and family travel plans...Now what?

PSJC families responded to this challenge in a variety of different ways. Some embraced Zoom and went forward from the empty synagogue or from home, some completely postponed, some postponed but still did part of their parashah, and others came up with creative hybrid ways to mark this milestone. We spoke with four families about their experiences.

Sylvie and her Parents

Phoebe Spickler also went forward with her scheduled bar mitzvah, but she Zoomed from home. Phoebe strongly wanted to do her bar mitzvah and feel a part of the whole PSJC community, and she was delighted to find that she was able to accomplish that on Zoom. Her family enjoyed having various community members lead parts of the service and appreciated that they were able to include members of their extended family in virtual aliyyot – including family members in Massachusetts and Alaska who otherwise could not have been a part. Their advice for other families Zooming from home is to have one phone for the “bimah” (with a mic that can be muted) and another (without sound) to be able to see the Zoom participants. They also note that pets can be a challenge – cats seem to think Tzitzit are toys and dogs want to be part of what everyone else is doing (sitting on the couch, participating)! Phoebe was very happy to have a Zoom bat mitzvah and felt it was a much better option for her than postponing or doing a small family celebration without the larger community.
It was very difficult to give up something the whole family had been looking forward to for two years, but Pazia Goldstein decided to postpone because she and her family could not imagine the Zoom experience replacing the “real thing.” However, Pazia chanted her Haftarah during the Shabbat service on the scheduled date and many of her extended family “attended” on Zoom. For Pazia it ended up feeling special. The most fun part was being able to talk with family and friends at the virtual kiddush, as well as when Pazia’s uncle dropped off flowers, bagels and lox and did a hora on the sidewalk outside! Although her actual bat mitzvah was postponed, it was a meaningful day for her when they opened the floor for toasts and comments and it was, “wonderful to hear things about family…to see wonderful, supportive family and friends.” In addition to connecting with friends and family in a meaningful way, Zoe also felt that it was important to help the broader community as part of her bat mitzvah commitment. She started an ongoing GoFundMe campaign that seeks to help both local restaurants and needy people by purchasing meals from the restaurants (Della, Giovanni’s, Thai Farm Kitchen, Le Paddock and Klark’s Kitchen) and delivering them to CHIPS for distribution; so far she and her mother have delivered over 250 meals and raised $5,200; any one interested may donate at: https://www.gofundme.com/f/mitzvah-meals

Although in the words of one teen, it definitely “sucked” not to be able to do things as usual, and along the way there may have been “a lot of crying,” these families all are models of how to confront a challenging situation with creativity and grace, and in doing so create something of great value. In communicating with the teens and their family too, we were struck by how all were focused on the bat mitzvah service itself, the importance of family, friends, and community, and on making the day meaningful. There was virtually no discussion of missing out on the party. That said, we have no doubt that when life returns to normal there will be some “epic, awesome” parties as well!

-Zoe Alperin also postponed, and instead had what her mom coined a “Not Mitzvah.” Zoe feels that there is not the same energy on Zoom and looks forward to a time she can have the bat mitzvah in a physical place with family and friends. However, she still wanted to mark the day, so the family came up with the Not Mitzvah plan, which included a Zoom Havdalah service with family and friends. After the service Zoe gave a talk about being a teenager in this difficult time, and the aspects of Judaism that helped her get through it. The most fun for her was when they opened the floor for toasts and comments and it was, “wonderful to hear things about family…to see wonderful, supportive family and friends.”

-Zoe

Photos from “Back to the Middle Ages” Class

- PAI Shares Wisdom During the Pandemic

The Positive Aging Initiative (PAI)’s mission is to build community among PSJC’s seniors (ages 50+) to provide support and prevent isolation, and at no time was this more necessary than during the pandemic. Our newest program, Shared Wisdom, a series of informal classes by PSJC members in people’s homes, was kicked off in January by Matthew Septimus, whose Photography class was so popular that four more sessions were added. In February David Rosen gave a talk on Jewish child soldiers during World War II. With the lockdown of NYC, PAI took to Zoom, streaming our annual Medicare information session as well as PAI Book Club meetings. Daniel Soyer gave a virtual workshop on Jews in New York Politics from 1654 on; Angela Weisl showcased the relevance of the Middle Ages to current times; and Roberta Moskowitz demonstrated how to make necessary household items during quarantine. June brings us more wisdom from the Middle Ages via Angela Weisl, and a look at Particle Physics with Ellen Briefel. Also to come are art workshops, a talk on Israeli Music, and much more.

- Marjorie Rothenberg & Jan Orzeck, Co-Chairs PAI

Memorial in the Time of Corona

The Membership Committee has had a busy spring, meeting several times over Zoom in recent weeks. It is good to see everyone’s faces. We miss yours! Our focus has been on engagement with our members both new, established, and even erstwhile.

Last fall we initiated welcome baskets for new members. These beautifully constructed baskets were hand delivered by Dina Nadler-Serber with a challah and greetings from the Board of Trustees. Now we are focused on additional ways to welcome our newest members. While we cannot meet in person right now, there are plans for remote events, and we are gathering ideas for when we can be together again.

We are also increasing PSJC’s social media presence. We have plans for online polls, challenges, and themed photos. Be sure to like PSJC on Facebook (we are at www.facebook.com/parkslopejewishcenter) and follow us on Instagram (@psjcbrooklyn). Use hashtags #psjcbrooklyn, #VirtualPSJC, #parkslopejewishcenter. You can help spread the word by liking and sharing our posts.

Be on the lookout for information about upcoming member events, including a PSJC Trivia challenge on Kahoot.it in July organized by Ruth Kaufman and Laura Baron. We always welcome your ideas and have room on our committee for additional members. Contact us at membership@psjc.org.

-Zule Weintraub, 1st Vice President, Co-chair Membership

-Pazia
By now everyone hopefully has found their way to the Virtual PSJC Website, www.virtualpsjc.org, which is the place to go to for information about everything that is going on in the community. The site is linked to our old site, and you use the same Member’s Login as on the old site. Piper and her staff have been working hard to make the new site work as seamlessly as possible for our membership so that we can Zoom into religious services, classes, social events and more.

The range of offerings available through the website since we began Zooming has been astonishing, including (but not limited to):

- Weekly Friday evening Kabbalat Shabbat Services, with Lev Tahor (the all-sung service) on the first erev Shabbat of the month
- Weekly Wednesday morning, Thursday evening, Saturday morning and Havdalah services.
- Weekly Yoga classes
- Connection to the Israeli Film Festival
- A bread-making circle
- Torah and Talmud study groups
- Book Groups
- Classes in photography, glass fusing and both Jewish and Medieval history
- Teen Lounge
- An Improv Show
- Hebrew conversation (Pitput)
- Cooking classes
- “It’s Friday” with Abe

Check the Events/Listing tab on the new website to find out what is coming up in our virtual space!

Piper also has been working with members of the Communications Committee to completely redo our website so that it is easier to use, more transparent, more attractive, and better reflects our community. Piper and the committee are also working to improve signage in the synagogue building, so that when we return, or soon thereafter, our signs will be more informative and have a professional and uniform look.