



**Dear members, friends and supporters,**

We are particularly pleased that we can begin to return to our synagogue for services after the past troubled weeks. Getting back to normal operation is still a long way off. Together we will take one step at a time.

**“How beautiful are your tents Jacob, your dwellings Israel!” (Numbers 24, 5)**

We say these verses when entering a synagogue or sing them at the beginning of our services. According to rabbinical interpretation, the “tents” refer to the teaching houses and our “homes”—our synagogues, the only places the people of Israel received permanent, indestructible blessings.

As places of mutual learning and prayer, they were the backbone of the Jewish people throughout the world and the centuries. And now we have had to learn during the past few months that synagogues have to close due to the fear of spreading the corona virus. Synagogues and community centers have become places of danger and not bastions of safety and strength?

In fact, many of our values have been put to the test in recent months. As a rabbi, I had to break new ground in many ways, completely unprepared and without being able to rely on many role models. In my training and in my previous work as a rabbi, the emphasis was always about creating closeness- closeness to texts, closeness to traditions - but above all closeness to people. A community consists of people with their very different characters, origins and life experiences. And the term congregation owes itself to the fact that we do things together; Celebrate services and festivals together, sing together, eat together, laugh together and sometimes, unfortunately, mourn together. This community is an important part of our Jewish identity and it supports us when we personally experience difficult moments. And suddenly being together must be avoided? How should our community work continue under these circumstances?

After the initial shock of no services, no Kinder Kehillah, no Shiurim, came the realization. It is not possible now but maybe there are other ways to reach people. One of these attempts was my daily (with the exception of Shabbat) Omer messages, which in the early days when everything seemed to be on hold and it was impossible to predict how everything would develop, dealt with questions of the time and how we measure it. How do we use this resource? What are our priorities at a time when everything seems to be heading toward a new normal? Gradually, old and new Jewish texts on topics such as identity, homeland, prayer or calendar events were added. I was surprised at how much people reacted to these daily texts—many wrote their thoughts, sent translations or forwarded them to other circles.

And then our congregational life continued on the Zoom internet platform. Since the beginning of April we have met every Friday evening to greet the Shabbat, light candles together, sing Shabbat songs, recite Kiddush and bless the Challot. We were guests in each other’s living rooms via the PC screen. For a long time I had wanted us to celebrate Shabbat together this way but it took a ban on religious worship which forced us to celebrate Shabbat at each other’s homes! Even though there were technical difficulties, the picture and audio quality was imperfect, we could at least see each other, talk to each other and exchange ideas personally. The Giyur classes continued every week on the Internet, actually helping to intensify our learning as compared to our regular sessions every other week. Our Kinder Kehillah met online every week and we were able to discover completely new opportunities for ourselves. The children were motivated and very willing to learn and didn’t miss our classes even though schools and kindergartens were closed. My thanks to the parents who made our meetings possible by providing their computers or cell phones.

To guide us through this period from Passover to Shavuot, I gave a Shiur every week. We discussed the four glasses of wine at Seder, the seventh day of Passover, the tradition of counting Omer, the customs of Lag BaOmer and of Shavuot. We held Zoom commemorations on Yom HaSchoah, Yom HaSikkaron, Israeli Independence Day, and Yom Jerushalayim.

On the 75th anniversary of Memorial Day, on May 9, a program was prepared by Faina Pelts, Volodymyr and Nadja Pesok, Aron Kaplan, Valery Friedmann and Valery Bogachyk. It was a very moving program with songs, poems and personal testimonials. On the occasion of this important historic holiday, our veterans, Maya Olvovskaya, Rimma Kopyrovskaya, Elena Dmitrieva and Arkady Zyriyanov received Certificates of Honor from the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

During our Zoom sessions, we were pleased that Jews from all over Germany, Switzerland and France joined our events. Actually, that was one of the most interesting experiences for me. While the space of our synagogue was not available for our meetings, internet technology opened up completely new spaces. Suddenly geographical distances no longer mattered. Our small community experienced itself as part of a larger Jewish world when guests came to visit us (even if they didn't have to leave their own four walls). The beautiful .“tents of Jacob and houses of Israel,” the community centers and the synagogues

continued to exist, now on the screen, and gave us support. Despite the imperative of social distance, we came closer to each other, in times of no contact, larger spaces opened up for us! I am grateful for this experience, and some of the new digital opportunities to meet will continue to be part of our community work.

Still we were unable to reach a large number of our community members in this way. Some do not have a computer or are not familiar with this technology. Others do not want to use these forms of communication (and this is not just a question of age!).

No matter how much Zoom helps to keep in touch, nothing beats a personal encounter! It may not be possible to shake hands or hug each other for the time being, but we want to resume our services so that everyone can see each other personally, and we can continue our work. The rules for our services are very restrictive (at a distance of 2 meters and sitting with a face mask), there will also be no social meals afterwards, and we are all requested to observe the hygiene regulations. I myself am not sure whether this form of get-together conveys joy or horror, but we want to try it.

Over the past few weeks we have continually adapted to the current situation and tried to make the best of it. We will continue to do so and maybe we will emerge from these uncertain times with new found strength and conviction.

I look forward to seeing you again in the synagogue!

—Your Rabbi Ulrike Offenberg

### **Rabbinic word**

“You should count off seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall observe the Feast of Weeks for the Lord your God, offering your freewill contribution according as the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall rejoice before the Lord your God with your son and your daughter, your servants and the Levite who lives in your community, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow who live in your midst, at the place that the Lord your God will choose to establish His name. Bear in mind that you were slaves in Egypt, and take care to obey these laws.” (Deuteronomy 16: 9–12)

The seven weeks from Passover to Shavuot were a time for growing, ripening and harvesting. Shavuot is a harvest festival, namely from an agricultural point of view (wheat is harvested seven weeks after barley), but also in a spiritual sense. The liberation from slavery was followed on Sinai by the gift of the Torah, with which the people of Israel would become responsible to shape their future. If we look back at these last two months in which many certainties of our lives have been shaken by the corona virus, it is worth asking what this Harvest Time could mean to us today. Much of what had previously been considered an unchangeable truth has been overturned from day to day. Suddenly economic growth comes to a standstill. At home and for weeks our consumption was reduced to what we really needed to live. It suddenly became clear how much we could do without—with the exception of human relationships. The ban on visiting hospitals and senior citizen care facilities brought with it cruel hardships and made us realize how vital contacts, calls and closeness are. There were also some truths that we didn't want to see before, how essential the care and medical professions are and how underpaid these people are. We became painfully aware of the working conditions in the meat industry and others who work in our society but are essentially invisible and inaudible because they are often foreigners. If felt at times as if our children and their education were not as essential as re-opening hardware stores and shopping centers. What are the priorities here?

We are not yet through the crisis—like the Children of Israel, we are still wandering through the desert. What happened on Sinai so long ago is also relevant to us today. Long before the Israelites came to their Promised Land, they were given the Commandments, the laws and values which served them even in the middle of the desert as a guidepost with which they would find orientation in their lives. Designing and shaping the future doesn't start when you've arrived but develop on the way. In Hebrew, Shavuot is called Chag Matan Toratejnu, the festival of the Receiving of the Torah. Israel overwhelmingly agreed to accept the laws of Torah at Sinai. The Hasidic rabbi Menachem Mendel from Kotsk raised a question. Why don't we celebrate Shavuot as the Day of Acceptance rather than the Day of Receiving the Torah? He answers his own question with this explanation. Shavuot focuses on the act of revelation of the Law as the gift of the Torah. But the time to accept the Torah is at any time. We have been taught that each and every one of us should feel as if we stood at Sinai ourselves and received the Law. We understand that accepting Torah is personal and has to be renewed and reaffirmed by all generations and by every single person.

***Rabbi Ulrike Offenberg wishes you Chag Sameach, a happy Shavuot festival!***

### **Children Kehilla**

We would like to share with you the thoughts of our youngest members about Shavuot and the Ten Commandments. The children created their own ten commandments together with Rabbi Ulrike Offenberg in an online children's kehilla. Here are examples from Timur, Eva and Greta.

### **Timur's Ten Commandments:**

- Nobody should be neglected!
- Everyone is treated equally!
- All children should have a chance to go to school!
- Animals should not be mistreated nor should people!
- Schools should teach children about ecology!
- Every child can choose the subjects he wants to learn, he doesn't have to do the others.
- Do one good deed every day.
- Fighting is a crime.
- Prices should drop to € 11 every Wednesday and Sunday. For planting trees you get 5 €.
- Adults can take one day off per week.

### **Eva's Ten Commandments:**

- You should love your family and be nice to all family members.
- Everyone should do a good deed every day.
- All children should be diligent at school and work hard.
- All people are treated equally. Nobody is excluded because everyone is special.
- Pay attention to all of your fellow human beings. Nobody just thinks about themselves.
- Every person should be provided with food, drink, clothing and a place to live with a roof.
- Only electric cars are driven to protect the environment. Plastic is avoided as much as possible.
- In addition to compulsory education, every person should have at least one hour of free time a day, for example to do sports.
- Every child should be able to own toys. Everyone should have books.
- Plants and animals are treated lovingly and with respect. Attention is paid to them.

### **Greta's Ten Commandments:**

- You should never infect a person.
- You shouldn't kill.
- You should always honor your parents.
- You should respect people.
- You shouldn't steal.
- You should keep the environment clean.
- You should love and respect God.
- You should never forget the Sabbath.
- Do not become jealous because someone has something better.
- Help poor people.

### **UPJ and ZWSt Sommer Machot**

The beloved summer camps of the UPJ Netzer and ZWSt have been unfortunately canceled due to the pandemic. UPJ Netzer will inform parents about alternative programs.



### **Mazel Tov**

We congratulate Dr. Rebekka Dohme Schleier, Amitai Schleier with Taavi Lua Schleier on the birth of their second son, Finias Tira Schleier. Mazel Tov to Bubbe Rachel Dohme, Opa Dr. Ferdinand Dohme and Uncles Max and Julian in Germany and Baba and Nana Schlair, Dr. Sheira Schlair-Crook and Shai Crook with Dani and Gil in America. May Finias Tira, (Pinchus Tira ben Rivka v 'Amitai) live in health, happiness and peace. The family would like to thank everyone for their calls, cards and gifts.

We welcome Rabbi Sergio Bergmann as the new president of the World Union of Progressive Judaism (WUPJ). We wish Rabbi Bergmann strength in his work and would be happy to welcome him to our Hamelin synagogue.

## Donations

We wish to thank our members and friends who generously donated this month to our synagogue, supporting our community life. We thank Dr. Tatjana Meschede, Mr. Mark Ovsievych, Mrs. Gibas and Mrs. Rachel Dohme.

After thanking Nani and Austin Beutel for their generous donation in our last community letter, these warm words came to us from them:



Nani and I thank you for the public recognition of our gift. It is a pleasure for us to do this in honor of the Hamelin community, for its foundation and maintenance, which you fought so bravely and persistently. It is really a living example for Reform Judaism in its contemporary format. May the present days of remembrance and celebration lead to better times. We wish you, your family and your members a safe and healthy time through these days of the global pandemic.

Best regards,  
Nani and Austin Beutel

## In Sympathy

We mourn with the Frid family on the death of our member, Mr. Issak Frid, s.A. who passed away on May 7th, 13th Iyar 5780. A private funeral was held.

## June Yahrzeits

Etya Scheinberg	June 1, 2011 / 28 Iyar 5771
Dr. Ilja Latkov	June 5, 1998 / 11 Sivan 5758
Matvey Slavinskiy	June 23, 1998 / 29 Sivan 5758
Abrash Boruchov	June 6, 2011 / 4 Sivan 5771
Elena Gorbacheva	June 4, 2012 / 14 Sivan 5772
Valentina Barulina	June 23, 2012 / 3 Tammuz 5772
Grigori Ziskand	June 6, 2013 / 17 Tammuz 5773
Mariya Tretyachenko	June 5, 2019 / 2 Sivan 5779
Polina Pelts	June 8, 2019 / 5 Sivan 5779



May the memory of our deceased be a blessing for us. Kaddish is spoken to with relatives during services. Yahrzeit candles are available in the office.

## Shalom

—Your Synagogue Board



## **Program for June 2020 • Sivan–Tammuz**

**Office hours: Monday–Friday: 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.**

Friday, June 12	5:30 p.m.	Friday night services
	8:00 p.m.	Mishnah Study Group Tractate Pirke Avot
Saturday, June 13	10:00 a.m.	Shacharith Shabbat
	12:30 p.m.	Children's Kehillah
Friday, June 26	5:30 p.m.	Friday night services
	8:00 p.m.	Mishnah Study Group Tractate Pirke Avot
Saturday, June 27	10:00 a.m.	Shacharith Shabbat
	12:30 p.m.	Children's Kehillah

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#### **Jewish Community of Hamelin**

Member of the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany, the World Union of Progressive Judaism, and the Central Council of Jews of Germany

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