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By MARCY OSTER

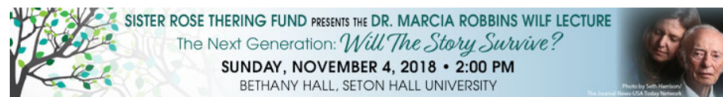
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Author spends year celebrating Jewish holidays

By DEBRA RUBIN

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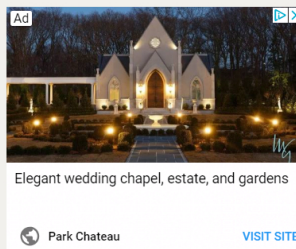
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Abigail Pogrebin

Judaism doesn't just ask you to show up. It promises other people will meet you there."

That is the essential insight author Abigail Pogrebin gained into the Jewish religion during a year she spent immersing herself in celebrating its holidays and traditions.



"Part of being on the Jewish clock means that everybody is on the same timetable," she said during a phone interview with NJNJ from her Manhattan home. "That means you are doing things in community most of the time, and that is powerful to be together whether we are celebrating or suffering. It is a wonderful thing to see you have extended family that goes beyond your own."

Pogrebin is author of "My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jew" (Fig Tree Books, 2017), in which she explored her "genuine desire to understand why Judaism demands so much from us in terms of ritual, prayer, fasting, and eating."

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On Nov. 13, Pogrebin will speak about her Jewish journey at the Barbara Kagan Littman Book and Author series sponsored by the Women's Philanthropy of the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey.

For those who are observant, Pogrebin noted, following all the rituals and requirements is done without question. However, for those like herself, who did not grow up with these practices, there is a curiosity about why these traditions have endured for centuries.

"They must have been a meaningful, powerful additive to people's lives to

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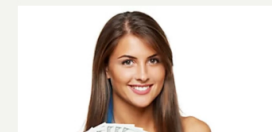
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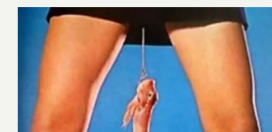
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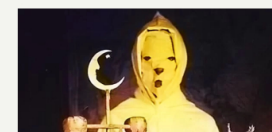
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stand the test of time and the forces of persecution,” she said.



Pogrebin chose to follow every holiday, including fast days, to “the letter of the law, but not Orthodoxy,” a description that she acknowledged confused some people, although the idea was “utterly clear” in her own mind.

Regarding Shabbat, Pogrebin wrote about the challenges posed by “stopping or pausing,” such as not going online, answering emails, shopping, or driving.

“It was hard, especially when you’re married to someone who was not stopping with me,” admitted Pogrebin, although her

family had participated in home-based holiday rituals, and they regularly attended Shabbat services at Central Synagogue in Manhattan.

The last chapter of her book deals with Pogrebin coming home to her synagogue “to find out after this powerful year where my Sabbath is now.”

Writing the book “has given me a complete sense of where Shabbat fits in and why our tradition requires us to take a break from the hamster wheel of our average work week,” said Pogrebin.

“I think Judaism is saying that God, in all his hard work in creating the world and humanity, also demanded that not just we stop being productive for a day, but also we make other people stop work and have a day of rest.”

Ultimately, Pogrebin said she learned that Judaism continues “to challenge me in the sense that I always know I could be doing more and am aware of how much I still don’t know, but also that I feel much more connected to what I’ve inherited, and that Judaism does give you back so much more if you invest the time and effort.”

If you go!

Who: Author Abigail Pogrebin

What: “My Jewish Year: 18 Holidays, One Wondering Jews”

When: 6:30 p.m., Nov. 13

Where: The Barn, East Brunswick

Cost: \$36

Registration: RSVP by Nov. 3 to jewishheartnj.org/jewishyear or 732-588-1800

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