

# THE REPORTER

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## Update on *The Reporter's* new schedule

**By Reporter staff**

In October, *The Reporter* officially announced that the printed issue of the paper will appear monthly beginning in 2026. That printed issue will be published and mailed the third week of each month, and be dated the upcoming month. (For instance, the February 2026 issue will appear in readers' mailboxes on or soon after Friday, January 16.)

*The Reporter* will also send a monthly e-blast, to those who have provided e-mail addresses, on the first Friday of each month starting in February. This will include links to any new articles about upcoming events that may be happening too late for a print edition. Those articles will appear on [www.thereportergroup.org](http://www.thereportergroup.org). The e-mails will also include links to articles of upcoming events or interest that may have appeared in print

and are already posted on the website.

The deadline for articles appearing on the website only will be the Monday before the first Friday of the month (for instance, Monday, February 2, for February's first Friday, February 6). They are listed below and will also appear on the paper's website.

Deadlines for the printed monthly issues of *The Reporter* will continue to be published on page 3 of the paper and were

sent to local organizations. They also are noted on the paper's website.

To receive a copy of the print and/or website only deadlines for the complete year, those interested can contact the paper at [Treporter@aol.com](mailto:Treporter@aol.com), with "deadlines requested" in the subject line.

Those interested in sponsoring a printed issue of the paper, or any of the monthly See "Updated" on page 4

## JFS holding Matching Gift Campaign

Jewish Family Service is holding a Matching Gift Campaign. An anonymous donor will match gifts up to \$2,000 in funds received before the end of February. The funds will be used to support members of the community at large (both Jewish and non-Jewish) in need of financial aid. To donate, bring or send a check to JFS, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850, or visit [www.jfjgb.org/local-global-community/jewish-family-service](http://www.jfjgb.org/local-global-community/jewish-family-service).

"We are so grateful for the generosity of our community that has always helped Jewish Family Service provide help for people with critical needs," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton. "Your gift to this match will go directly to members of the community that are

struggling to make ends meet."

"I'm just finishing my first year at Jewish Family Service and I have to say that I had no idea that our community is so incredibly generous," said Merryl Wallach, director of JFS. "Sadly, I'm also deeply concerned about the needs of our most vulnerable families. We all know that this has been a difficult year, but the number of people unable to pay their NYSEG bills, for their

medications, their housing costs and to feed their families is staggering. The safety net (when there is one) has giant holes that no one agency can possibly fill. Thanks to an anonymous donor, we have the ability to double any donations to JFS that come in until the end of February. Any money raised will go directly to those in need. I thank you in advance for your donation, large or small."

### L'dor v'dor

## JCC holding 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration campaign

The Jewish Community Center is holding a centennial anniversary celebration campaign to celebrate its centennial anniversary on August 15, 2027. The goal is to raise \$800,000. Donations may be made immediately or pledged over the campaign period through Sunday, October 31, 2027. The David Eisenberg Donor Advised Fund will match all contributions up to \$400,000. There are donor recognition opportunities available. To donate, checks may be sent to the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850. For more information, contact the JCC at 607-724-2417.



*The Jewish Community Center when it stood on the corner of Front and North Street in Binghamton. The Center was located there from 1927-67.*



*The Jewish Community Center's current building in Vestal.*

"L'dor v'dor—keep our JCC standing and embracing our community for the next 100 years," said Sue Walker, co-chairwoman of the campaign. "Give what you can so our children and their children will feel the love."

"I've been part of the Binghamton JCC for decades," said Rachel Priest, vice president of the JCC Board of Directors. "For me, it's always been a place of connection, inclusion and community. The JCC isn't just a building: it's where our community gathers, supports one another and grows together, from generation to generation."

Campaign goals including funding capital improvements to ensure the ongoing safety, efficiency and sustainability of the facility; creating a Building Fund Reserve to provide resources for emergency capital needs without diverting funds from programs and services; and growing the endowment to protect its future and ensure the long-term sustainability of its mission.

"Thanks to the leadership and vision of our founders in 1927 who dared to dream, we are privileged to have a Jewish Community Center that has stood at the heart of our community for nearly a century," said those working for the campaign. "For almost 100 years, the JCC has served as a

cornerstone of social, educational and cultural enrichment. Generations of children have grown up in the nurturing environment of the JCC, continuing to thrive both within and beyond our community. The Center's enduring commitment to inclusivity—welcoming *everyone*, regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or ability to pay—has strengthened the fabric of our

community and embodied the true meaning of belonging."

They added, "Today, in a rapidly changing world, where the definition of family is constantly evolving, the JCC remains a steadfast haven that embraces the true spirit of community. It is now our responsibility to preserve the traditions of our past, serve the current needs of our community,

and prepare for a vibrant future, ensuring that the legacy of our founders continues to inspire. We are deeply grateful to the David Eisenberg Donor Advised Fund, whose extraordinary generosity will match all contributions dollar for dollar up to \$400,000, doubling the impact of every gift received. Help us strengthen our JCC for the next 100 years."

## Film Fest to hold virtual showing of "The Matchmaker"

**By Reporter staff**

The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest will hold a virtual discussion of the film "The Matchmaker" on Sunday, December 28, at 7 pm. The links to view the film and join the discussion have already been sent to those who registered.

"The Matchmaker" tells the story of Arik, a teenage boy growing up in Haifa in 1968, who begins working for Yankele

Bride, a matchmaker and Holocaust survivor. Mixing comedy and drama, the coming-of-age story follows not only his employment with Yankele, but what occurs after he falls in love with Tamara, who has just returned from the U.S. and wants to discuss women's rights, free love and rock and roll.

*At right: Clara Epstein (Maya Dagan) and Yankele Bride (Adir Miller) in "The Matchmaker" (Photo courtesy of Menasha Films)*



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## Opinion

## From the Desk of the Federation Leadership

## "Showing up" for one another in good times and in bad

PRESIDENT SUZANNE HOLWITT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SHELLEY HUBAL

"It's when the winds blow the hardest that you need the deepest roots." – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Dear friends, the wind is blowing like a hurricane. We are seeing antisemitism spread rapidly and viciously all over the world. The Bondi Beach massacre is the latest example of violent hatred perpetrated against Jewish people.

We want to share our most heartfelt sympathies for the families and friends of those murdered and injured during the Hanukkah celebration in Sydney. May their memories be a blessing to all that knew and loved them, and may the lessons of Hanukkah – hope, resilience and light over

darkness – bring them and the rest of the collective Jewish community peace year-round.

Antisemitism is, at its roots, a conspiracy theory that blames the Jewish people for the world's problems. It is among the oldest forms of hate and prejudice on the planet, and according to the Anti-Defamation League, the United States saw an 893 percent increase in antisemitic incidents between 2015 and 2024.

It is now, during this rise in hatred, that we must rely on our Jewish roots that teach us to be compassionate and to create a community where we "show up" for one another

in good times and in bad. This is the core of the Jewish Federation and why we do the work we do. We know that together, along with our roots and traditions, we will have the fortitude to stand up to hate in all its forms and be able to sustain the community through any storm.

Sending our love and prayers to everyone in the Binghamton Jewish community and beyond for a safe and peaceful year to come.

*Shelley Hubal is the executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton and Suzanne Holwitt is Federation president.*

## One Perspective from Israel

## Three funerals and a wedding, part 2

JEREMY M. STAIMAN

*This article originally appeared in the Times of Israel and is being reprinted with permission.*

Funeral three: The following day we received word that Aryeh's father had passed. Aryeh is the reliable *ba'al koreh* and a *gabbai* in our *shul*. He is clearly someone who was raised right. And the nonagenarian who had raised him right had gone on to the next world.

It was the second day of Rosh Chodesh, so the eulogies were, yet once more, short and few. For many of us – despite arriving on time – who could not even enter the packed hall, it was clear that this was a very special man, whose devotion to his God and his family had borne the most beautiful fruits.

Another family of *kohanim*, his widow and five children were just a little further down the road from the funeral held the day prior, as other non-*kohanic* members of the

tribe acted as their agents to fill the grave of their loved one with earth of the Holy Land.

A couple of days later, Chana and I followed up with a *shiva* visit in Jerusalem. While every death is a tragedy to a family, there was clearly a feeling in the air that this *shiva* was a loving tribute to a patriarch who had lived a long, productive and exemplary life. Smiles and anecdotes were abundant. Warm stories were shared with relatives and friends.

I suspect that most of us hope that *shivas* held for us, after 120 years, will be like that: a celebration of a life well-led. I know that I do.

Things slow down, and the cars jerk to a sudden stop. The silence is deafening, and the air is thick with anticipation. After a dramatic pause, slowly, they begin to rise again.

—  
And a wedding: Of the wife and five children who filled the apartment for *shiva*, one son was absent during our visit. His daughter – one of the deceased's granddaughters – was getting married that evening, and he had rightfully left the house of mourning to prepare for his daughter's nuptials.

The free-flowing conversation in the *shiva* house continued until the door opened and the room fell still.

Without notice, the bride entered, regally flanked by her sisters and sister-in-law, who wore coordinated ocean-blue bridesmaids' dresses. The bride's lovely white gown radiated with the same intensity as her big smile, together projecting a light which dispelled – and expelled – any darkness of grief from the room. Her wedding would not be complete if she did not include her grandmother, even  
**See "Wedding" on page 6**

## In My Own Words

## Retirement

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

By the time this newspaper appears in people's mailboxes, I will have officially retired as executive editor of *The Reporter*. My last day was December 25. I still plan to write book reviews (I so overwrote for the last book centerfold that I already have one written for the February issue) and food columns when the inspiration strikes. I am keeping my very part-time chaplaincy work with those with developmental disabilities, work that is dear to my heart for personal reasons. I will also continue to be available as a rabbi on call when needed, something I have been doing since I moved back to this area.

I do have a bucket list: I want to read all the books on my bookcases (note the plural there) that I've bought and haven't had time to read. I decided a good way to start would be to read 30 books in 30 days from January 2-31. To make that more interesting (and keep me on track), I've made a bet with a friend: If I read the 30 books, she has to buy me dinner at the restaurant of my choice. If I don't, then I have to buy her dinner at the restaurant of her choice. She said she fully expects me to complete the task, but we both agree this is a win-win situation: I'm happy to have dinner with her anytime and am willing to pay for the privilege.

I'm also thinking of having a movie afternoon once a week – at least, movies I can watch on my computer with closed captioning. I used to be an avid moviegoer, but, as my hearing declined, it became too difficult. Even before my hearing became as bad as it is now, I realized that I was missing a great deal of the dialogue, which made the films' plots difficult to follow. The same is true for attending plays and musicals in the theater. I still miss both of those activities, but figure that, at least, I will be able to enjoy

some movies in this new format.

There are some serious reasons behind my desire to retire. I've never had a great deal of energy and what energy I do have seems to be decreasing each year. This past year has been filled with health issues – fortunately, not life and death ones – but it's clear I need to reduce the amount of stress in my life. Trying to run a newspaper group that publishes two community newspapers during a time when all newspapers are having financial difficulties has gotten to be too much.

I am looking forward to some things that may seem simple, but which will make life so much easier. For example, I can't wait to be able to go grocery shopping *whenever* I want, rather than having to schedule it around work. My back will be grateful when I don't have to sit at a computer all day. It will be easier to meet with friends who don't like to drive at night because we'll be able to meet for lunch. It will be fun to be able to visit friends who don't live close more often since I won't have to worry about being out of town when a paper is scheduled to go to the printer. One of those friends has talked about us taking short vacations to places within driving distance that we both want to visit. I'm also looking forward to day trips with a local friend who likes to drive.

If none of this sounds exciting to you, that's OK because it does to me. Over the years, I've learned to enjoy the small pleasures because often those were the only ones available. Years ago, a friend gave me a poster that said, "Blossom where you are planted." I've tried to do that. I've also taken to heart the rabbinic saying, "Who is rich? The one who is content with their lot." As much as

my basic nature tends to focus on the negative, I've used those sayings to appreciate what I do have in life, which is far more than many people in the world. I hope those mottos will continue to inspire me as I begin this new phase of my life.

Addendum: People sometimes act as if I alone magically make *The Reporter* appear. That is far from true. My wonderful staff over the years have been an enormous help and support. I would like to thank the current *Reporter* staff – Kathy Brown, Diana Sochor and Julie Weber – for all their hard work and making it far easier to do my job than it would be otherwise. Julie continues to work part-time for us, even though she moved to Massachusetts and has a full-time job. But we never have to worry about her work getting done: she is incredibly organized and does everything on time. Kathy started as our part-time bookkeeper, but pitched in several times when advertising representatives left. Finally, she took over the position – not an easy thing since this meant she was juggling two separate jobs – and managed to do both of them well. Her hard work means that the paper is in better financial shape than it might be otherwise. Diana and I have worked together since I started at the paper as copy editor in 2001. I could not have survived as executive editor without her support and hard work. Her devotion to the paper and to protecting me when I try to take on too much have made my life so much easier and so much more fun, especially since we share the same warped sense of humor. I've called her the little sister that I never had and plan to continue to bug her like any good big sister should do, even when I am no longer her boss.



**Jewish Federation**  
of Greater Binghamton

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4. Circulation 6. Editorial/News



## OPINIONS

The views expressed in editorials and opinion pieces are those of each author and not necessarily the views of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton.

## LETTERS

The Reporter welcomes letters on subjects of interest to the Jewish community. All letters must be signed and include a phone number; names may be withheld upon request.

## ADS

The Reporter does not necessarily endorse any advertised products and services. In addition, the paper is not responsible for the kashruth of any advertiser's product or establishment.

## DEADLINE

Regular deadline is noon, Wednesday, for the following week's newspaper (see deadline dates on page 3). All articles should be e-mailed to TRReporter@aol.com.

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# JLI course to discuss “Captivating Cases in Rabbinic Responsa” starting Jan. 19

For six consecutive Mondays, beginning January 19, Rivky Slonim will lead a Jewish Learning Institute course exploring the real-life questions that Jews asked their sages across history. “Captivating Cases in Rabbinic Responsa” will discuss 30 true stories to offer students a window into the Jewish past. The classes will run from 7-8:30 pm; refreshments will be offered. The course fee is \$99 (textbook included) or \$175 per couple (includes one book). Early bird registration (before Monday, January 5) will offer a discount of \$90 per person and \$165 for couples. To sign up, visit [www.myjli.com/learn/binghamton](http://www.myjli.com/learn/binghamton) or call Chabad at 607-797-0015. For answers to questions, e-mail [rshea@Jewishbu.com](mailto:rshea@Jewishbu.com).

“You can see the full spectrum of Jewish life imprinted

in the responsa literature,” Slonim said. “Community disputes, agonizing personal choices precipitated by perennial antisemitism and questions as simple as, ‘Is my chicken kosher?’ Additionally, this course provides an insight into how rabbis composed answers to new and novel questions.”

The course, developed by the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, seeks to offer students a glimpse into how Jews have lived across the ages and the values they have held. It also seeks to clear away the confusion surrounding Jewish law, showing the thought processes the sages used – and still use – to answer the questions they were asked.

“Captivating Cases in Rabbinic Responsa” is approved as continuing legal education in many states.

“Jewish law has been anything but static,” says Steven

F. Friedell, J.D., a professor of law at Rutgers University Law School. He says the course “provides insight into how rabbis have met challenges of a world beset by sometimes drastic changes in culture, science, politics, and economic circumstances” and shows how they “helped Jewish law retain its vital role in maintaining and strengthening the Jewish community.”

According to Suzanne Last Stone, J.D., professor of Jewish law and contemporary civilization at Yeshiva University, “Students will encounter fascinating examples of how the rabbinic authors of responsa, like their common-law counterparts, balanced rules and principles: the technical demands of the law with individual emotional need, societal change, and ethical concerns.”

Slonim invites all members of the Jewish community, and those beyond the community, to join. “The course was created with all in mind,” she says. “If you’ve never heard of rabbinic responsa before, or if you have been studying Talmud all of your life, you will find this course enriching.”

*The Rohr Jewish Learning Institute is the adult education arm of Chabad-Lubavitch. JLI’s classes and programs are offered at over 1,600 locations in more than 900 communities worldwide.*

## BD Jan. 10 luncheon talk on “Bitcoin and Jewish History”

Beth David Synagogue’s next luncheon will be held on Saturday, January 10, with Binghamton University’s Professor Michael Kelly as the featured speaker. Kelly’s talk is titled “Bitcoin and Jewish History: Preserving the Past and Beyond.” The community is invited to attend. Morning services will begin at 9:30 am, with the luncheon and program following the conclusion of services. The luncheon is free and open to the public.



Michael Kelly  
(Photo by Lior Libman)

“We may have heard of Bitcoin, but what exactly is it, and how does it work?” said luncheon organizers. “Professor Michael Kelly will explain everything you wanted to know about Bitcoin and what it has to do with the preservation of Jewish history and culture.”

An historian by training, Kelly received his doctorate in 2015 from the University of Leeds in England. In 2024-25, he was a senior fellow of the Bitcoin Policy Institute. He is the founder of the Bitcoin Club at Binghamton, co-runs coding and programming hackathons, and co-designs

hash rate-heating systems that recycle energy to preserve the past and promote social justice. An interdisciplinary scholar who specializes in historical theory and the history of the early medieval Mediterranean, he has authored numerous publications dealing with Jewish history.

Kelly is an advocate for the adoption of Bitcoin in higher education and the mathematization of theology. “Bitcoin is, by far, the largest computing network on the planet,” Kelly said. “And yet it is not controlled by any central source: there’s no Bitcoin foundation promoting it, no corporate board or shareholders directing it, and no government or institution controlling it. Bitcoin is for everyone, by everyone: it is a global, decentralized, immutable, timestamped, borderless and cryptographically secure data network.”

“If you are as intrigued as we are,” organizers added, “we think that Professor Kelly is the best person to help us understand how Bitcoin can do all this. Among the See “Bitcoin” on page 4

## TI/TC adult ed. program to feature “Great Jewish Stories”

The Temple Israel/Temple Concord Joint Adult Education Group will present a brunch program on Sunday, January 11, at 10 am, at Temple Concord, featuring “Great Jewish Short Stories” read live by Charles Berman, Andy Horowitz, Ben Kasper and Deb Williams, with Steve Gilbert serving as the MC. A voluntary contribution between \$5 and \$20 is welcome, and reservations are appreciated. To RSVP, contact Temple Concord at 607-723-7355 or Temple Israel at 607-723-7461.

Berman has been involved in local theater for many years and regularly performs with Southern Tier Actors Read. Most recently, he was seen as Tybalt and Friar Laurence in “Romeo and Juliet” at the Phelps Museum and Sir Harcourt

Courtly in “London Assurance” with the Summer Savoyards. He regularly writes and performs in comedy murder mysteries for the local musical act Peaches and Crime. He has performed short stories on numerous occasions for the Hungry Ear program at the Broome County Library and said that he is pleased to be participating in this event.

Horowitz is a graduate of Binghamton University and holds an M.B.A. from Syracuse University. He is the artistic director of Galumph Dance Company, lectures on entrepreneurship and offers choreographic workshops at schools and conservatories on a global stage. Horowitz is the co-winner of the Edinburgh Festival’s Critics Choice See “Stories” on page 6

## TC Brotherhood to offer luncheon talk on Jewish genealogy

The Temple Concord Brotherhood will hold a luncheon on Jewish genealogy on Sunday, February 1, at noon. Sharon Sherman, who is the head of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Central New York, will speak in the temple social hall. The cost of the luncheon

is \$10 per person. Reservations must be made by Wednesday, January 28, by calling the temple office at 607-723-7355.

In the event of a major snow storm, an alternative snow date will be announced in January.



### DEADLINES

*The following are deadlines for all articles and photos for upcoming printed issues of the monthly REPORTER.*

ISSUE	DEADLINE
February .....	January 7
March .....	February 11
April .....	March 11
May .....	April 6*

**All deadlines for the year can be found at [www.thereporter.org/contact-us/faqs](http://www.thereporter.org/contact-us/faqs) under “Q: What Are the Deadlines for the Paper?”**

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**THE REPORTER**

Thank you to

*The Reporter Editorial Committee for all your support over the years, and to the committee and friends for the retirement party and present. All were much appreciated. I just wish that Rob Neuberger, of blessed memory, a longtime committee member, was here to celebrate with us.*

Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Binghamton  Philharmonic

## Classic Style

Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026 at 3:30pm • Forum Theatre

Caroline Shaw: Entr’acte  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Violin Concerto No. 3  
with Hina Khuong-Huu, Violin  
Felix Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 4

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Off the Shelf

Miscellaneous fiction

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

◆ Rom-com

I am a ginormous fan of Jean Meltzer’s rom-coms. (Yes, I know some people don’t consider ginormous a real word, but it is listed as one in the Oxford Language and the Merriam-Webster dictionaries.) The fact that I’m using a fancy word, rather than just saying I’m a big fan, shows how much I really like her work. To put this in perspective, I almost never buy or read rom-coms outside of those I review for the paper, but I know I would buy Meltzer’s if I couldn’t get a review copy. Of course, you never know when an author’s streak of excellence might end. Fortunately “The Eight Heartbreaks of Hanukkah,” which is the author’s fifth book, does not disappoint.

“The Eight Heartbreaks of Hanukkah” contains one of Meltzer’s standard literary tropes: a heroine with a health issue. In this case, it’s Evelyn Schwartz, who suffers from violent migraines. That, however, does not stop her from being a successful television producer who is about to produce the most important work of her career: a live TV version of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” complete with large puppets and a major performing star. Evelyn only has eight days to pull this off, which is complicated by the fact that the star of the show will only attend the last few rehearsals. What she doesn’t need during this stressful time are emotional complications.

However, this is a rom-com and complications must occur or there would be no book. It turns out that Evelyn’s ex-husband, David Adler, is filling in for the studio’s doctor, who has a family emergency in India. Their marriage ended on a very sour note and the two have not seen each other since David moved out of their home. Since the show Evelyn is producing contains ghosts of the past, after Evelyn has an accident with the piano on sound stage, she is visited by eight nights of Hanukkah ghosts who force her to deal with the pain she’s buried and which has isolated her from those she loves.

This plot summary makes the novel sound more serious than it is, though. Where Meltzer excels is creating laugh-out-loud funny moments, in addition to ones that will bring tears to readers’ eyes. At first, it seemed impossible to bring together two people as disparate as Evelyn and David, even though it’s clear they still love each other. However, Meltzer found a balance, one that offers a different kind of rom-com ending, but one that still satisfies.

◆ Motherhood

Having children can greatly change the dynamics of a family in both good and bad ways. That’s clear from Lihi Lapid’s “I Wanted to Be Wonderful” (Zibby Publishing), which tells the story of two mothers: one based on the author, who has a daughter with autism, and a second woman, known as the princess, who comes to discover that her fairy tale’s happily-ever-after-ending was only part of the story. The author’s chapters of the novel are told in the first person, while those of the princess and her prince are presented in the third person.

What is clear is that motherhood was not what either of these women expected. One of the biggest challenges was that both women decided that they wanted to stay home with their children rather than return to paid work after their maternity leave. They both felt that nothing they could do was as important as being with their children. Of course, this feeling changed over time as both realized that a life completely focused on their children couldn’t satisfy all their needs. What complicates matters are their unrealistic expectations about their spouses’ contributions. It was particularly poignant when the princess realized that she and her prince now lived such separate lives that they are no longer able “to see the needs of the other, or how hard the other one is trying.” That they both were coping alone and no longer finding pleasure in each other’s company was heartbreaking.

“I Wanted to Be Wonderful” is perfect for book clubs interested in novels about family life. It should also be read by anyone thinking of having children because it will help them understand the pitfalls that they could face and, hopefully, help them avoid them. Women who have

already started their families will find the lessons the novel teaches important, too, particularly about how women judge themselves and others unfairly in order to feel like they, too, are important and wonderful.

◆ Italy in World War II and today

Life is messy and we’re all just doing the best we can. That’s a difficult lesson to learn, especially for someone Jewish who lived through World War II. In “The Rebel Girls of Rome” by Jordyn Taylor (Harper), Lilah Tepper and her grandfather Ralph Mosseri are visiting Italy to learn more about a locket that may have belonged to Ralph’s sister, Bruna. Lilah, who is mourning the recent death of her mother, hopes the trip will help her learn what happened to her grandfather during the war, something he’s always refused to speak about it. Tommaso Reni, who found the locket and contacted Lilah, has learned the jewelry once belonged to his great-grandmother. He’s hoping the meeting will encourage his grandmother Carla to explain its history.

The novel also tells Bruna’s story, who, unknown to Ralph, escaped the Nazi round-up of Jewish families. She felt so guilty about having survived that she joined a resistance group. However, their actions are dangerous since the Nazis torture or kill any members of the resistance they discover. Bruna, though, feels being part of the resistance is the only way she can atone for what she sees as her sin of survival when most of her family died.

To say more would spoil the surprises to be found in “The Rebel Girls of Rome.” This is the rare novel about World War II that manages to make the present feel as important as the past. In her “Author’s Note,” Taylor explains which details are real and which came from her imagination. This talented author made both feel real and moving.

◆ #Me Too and more

One moment can change your life. That’s only one of the lessons that Hazel, a senior in high school, learns in “Hazel Says No” by Jessica Berger Gross (Hanover Square Press). The Blum family has recently moved from Brooklyn to a small college town in Maine where Hazel’s father, Gus, was offered a tenured job at a small university. The increase in pay allows Gus to pay off some of their debts and will help with college tuition for Hazel and her brother Wolf, who is in middle school. Gus’ wife Claire

is OK with the move because she hopes to start her own clothing line. While neither Hazel nor Wolf are thrilled, Hazel figures it’s only one year before she is off to college and on her own.

However, things change when the school principal asks Hazel to have sex with him, noting that every year he picks one student to do that. He also promises to help her get into the college of her choice, along with a threat of what will happen if she doesn’t. As the title suggests, Hazel says no and the repercussion are felt throughout her family and the community, many of whom side with the principal once it becomes publicly known that he’s been accused of soliciting sex from a student. In a town this small, it’s impossible for Hazel’s identity not to be revealed. The negative reactions included antisemitic ones, which are particularly disturbing for Hazel and her parents.

Life is also not easy for the other members of the family. Gus makes a mistake in his initial lecture at the college because he was so upset about Hazel he didn’t have time to prepare. That leads to worries he will lose his job. Claire can’t find inspiration to do anything but worry about Hazel. Wolf’s chance for friends and success at school are also affected by what happened to Hazel. Hazel goes into a spiral of self-hate and depression that is only stopped when she goes completely public about what happened to her during an event she attends at the college. What happens next completely overturns her life. However, Hazel then faces another dilemma: how much does she want that one moment to shape the rest of her life, even if accepting the offers that come her way could lead to unexpected success.

Reading the opening chapters of “Hazel Says No” felt like watching a train wreck: you can see what’s going to happen, but there’s no way to stop it. However, rather than being one-note about the #Me Too Movement, the author introduces a number of different dilemmas Hazel and her family face, something that would make this an excellent work for book clubs. Gross also managed to answer questions that rose in my mind while reading the novel, but to be more specific would spoil the plot surprises. While the book is aimed at adults, it would also be worthwhile reading for those in high school, although parents may want to discuss what occurs with their teens.



On the Jewish food scene

Rugelach ice cream

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

Among the many debates about food is one about whether ice cream is only a summer, warm-weather food or if it can be eaten year-round. While I confess that I love eating an ice cream cone while sitting on a bench outside one of my favorite ice cream parlors during the warmer weather, there is nothing wrong with eating ice cream in the winter – at least, if you are inside a warm building. In fact, some indoor ice cream parlors offer limited-time flavors for the winter season, including those for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Valentine’s Day. However, if you are lucky enough to live in a large city, you might also find Hanukkah and Passover flavors at your favorite parlor.

That’s why I had to learn more the minute I read that a New York City ice cream parlor was offering a rugelach-flavored ice cream. Many people consider rugelach a Jewish pastry and I have to concur. Most of my never-lived-in-a-large-city-with-a-decent-Jewish-population friends have no idea what rugelach is. If you explain it to them, they

come up with a similar cookie that has a different name, but which is not exactly the same.

Back to ice cream: According to the owners of Van Leeuwen’s Ice Cream, their rugelach ice cream is made by combining Breads Bakery’s chocolate rugelach with their sweet cream ice cream. If you want to watch the process, there is a 10-second video at [www.instagram.com/reel/DR40BmqgGQY/](http://www.instagram.com/reel/DR40BmqgGQY/) that shows the two being mixed together and which ends with someone holding an ice cream cone with two scoops of rugelach ice cream. Does that make me want some? Do you even have to ask?

I am not sure if the flavor will still be available by the time this column appears. But if you are in New York City and just happen to visit a Van Leeuwen’s Ice Cream location, why not stop in and try one? I don’t expect you to bring any back to Binghamton for me (not that I would complain if you did), but I’d love to know what you think.

Bitcoin..... Continued from page 3

questions that he will address include: How can Jewish communities maintain full control and custody of their historical and cultural data without relying on centralized institutions? What makes Bitcoin’s data structure stronger and more tamper-resistant than traditional archival methods? What ethical and communal issues are raised by the use of a global, borderless network in order to safeguard Jewish memory? In what ways can Bitcoin mining be used to heat homes, synagogues or community spaces while preserving digital archives?”

Organizers added, “Keeping Jewish history, culture and memory alive is of vital importance in today’s world. Join us for a fascinating talk where you will be able to have your questions answered about a brave new world where technology can offer opportunities for keeping Jewish history, culture and memory alive.”

Beth David’s luncheon speaker series takes place the second Saturday of the month after Shabbat morning services, and is open to the community. There is no charge for the luncheon. Since the monthly series’ continuation depends on the generosity of contributors, Beth David welcomes and appreciates donations to the Luncheon Fund in order to keep the program going. Donations can be made in honor of, or in memory of, someone, or to mark a special occasion. Those wishing an acknowledgment to

be sent to the person being honored, or to the family of someone being remembered, can indicate that, along with the necessary information. Donations can be sent to Beth David Synagogue, 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905, Attention: Luncheon Fund.

Updated..... Continued from page 1

e-blasts, can contact the paper at [Treporter@aol.com](mailto:Treporter@aol.com), with “Reporter sponsorship” in the subject line.

The deadlines for articles that will appear on the website only are as follows:

- Deadline – Date appearing online
- Monday, February 2 – Friday, February 6
- Monday, March 2 – Friday, March 6
- Monday, March 30 – Friday, April 3
- Monday, April 27 – Friday, May 1
- Monday, June 1 – Friday, June 5
- Monday, June 29 – Friday, July 3
- Monday, August 3 – Friday, August 7
- Monday, August 31 – Friday, September 4
- Monday, September 28 – October 2
- Monday, November 2 – Friday, November 6
- Monday, November 30 – Friday, December 4
- Monday, December 28 – Friday, January 1, 2027

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# TC Sisterhood to hold annual book talk on Jan. 25

By Babs Putzel

The annual Temple Concord Sisterhood sponsored book talk will feature Rabbi Rachel Esserman on Sunday, January 25, in the social hall at Temple Concord, 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton. An 11 am brunch will be served, followed by the book talk. A suggested donation of \$5 will cover the brunch. The program is open to the community. Reservation should be made by contacting Phyllis Kellenberger at phylkellen@gmail.com or 607-727-8305 by Wednesday, January 21.

Esserman, who will discuss three books, said, "I once again am looking forward to one of my favorite events of the year. It is always a pleasure to do this for Sisterhood."

She will be discussing three books:

- ◆ "Children of the Book: Memoir of Reading Together" by Iland Kurshan. The author writes about reading to her children and the way that can connect generations.
- ◆ "One of Them" by Kitty Zeldis. The novel deals with antisemitism on a college campus the years after

World War II.

◆ "Fagin the Thief," is by Allision Epstein. The novel looks at the Jewish villain from Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist" and offers a different view of his life.

Esserman, who is the executive editor of "The Reporter Group," will retire after almost years on December 25. She will continue to write book reviews and food columns for the paper.

Esserman has won numerous American Jewish Press Club Rockower Awards and Syracuse Press Club Awards for her opinion columns and book reviews.

In addition to her work at *The Reporter*, she serves as a chaplain for the Broome Developmental Disabilities Service Office. Her writing has been published in "The Women's Torah Commentary" and "The Women's Haftarah Commentary," both by Jewish Lights Publishing. Also she has had a book of poetry, "I Stand by The River,"



Rabbi Rachel Esserman

published by Keshet Press of Temple Concord.

A Reconstructionist rabbi who says her first love is teaching, Esserman sees her position at *The Reporter* as an opportunity to educate the public about Judaism. She also serves as a freelance rabbi for lifecycle events, hospital visits and chaplaincy, and has been a rabbi-on-call when needed by local Reform and Conservative synagogues.

Her education includes a bachelor of arts degree in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania, and rabbinic ordination and a master of arts in Hebrew letters from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Wyncote, PA.

In 2023, she was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College for 25 years of service.

Sisterhood's co-chairwomen for the program are Kellenberger, Deb Daniels and Roz Antoun.

## BD hosted Hannukah party



Members and friends of Beth David Synagogue enjoyed a Hanukkah party on December 17. (Photo by Stacey Silber)



Above: Attendees at the Beth David Chanukah party were entertained by Steve Gilbert. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)



L-r: Cathy Velenchik, Judy Silber and Stacey Silber prepared the food for the Beth David Sisterhood and Men's Club Hanukkah party. (Photo by Chaim Joy)



At left: Neil Auerbach, Sima Auerbach, Suzanne Holwitt, Shelley Hubal, Susan Hubal and Gerry Hubal at the Chanukah party. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)



L-r: Toby Kohn, Maria Kutz, Bob Kutz and Rabbi David Serkin played dreidel at the party. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)

# Rachel,

The community is grateful for your years of commitment and dedication to *The Reporter*. Wishing you health, happiness and many blessings in your retirement.

Sincerely,  
The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton &  
The Reporter Editorial Committee



First person

Kaddish: "Remember me. Don't mourn me."

By Bill Simons

Nana Kahan gifted me with grounding. Copies of my diplomas and awards hung on a living room wall in her modest apartment. When I traveled, she put 36 cents, double chai, in the tzedakah collection box that hung to the right of her kitchen sink.

Nana read widely, including "Burr," "The Boys of Summer" and "Mr. Sammler's Planet" during her final year. We discussed antisemitism and intermarriage, amongst all manner of things. By sharing her past with me, I experienced family and American history that preceded my birth. Confronting marital and financial challenges, she modeled resilience and courage.

Afternoons, Nana managed a second-hand Hadassah thrift shop surrounded by a neighborhood in transition. At her shul, she was more likely to attend the rabbi's weekly discussion group than Shabbat services. As my odyssey took me away, she sent weekly letters. Nana disappointed me only once: she died - with her tzedakah collection box half-filled, a great-grandchild's afghan blanket in-progress and a book unfinished.

Nana tried to prepare me for her Kaddish. Since the birth of her youngest child, Nana avoided doctors. In June 1974, armed with two degrees and teaching experience, I confidently anticipated commencing a doctoral program in history at Carnegie-Mellon University that summer. Before departing, I had a long talk with Nana. In retrospect, she wanted to say a final good-bye. Nana confided that she had undergone several blood tests in recent months. Dismissing her tone, I blithely told Nana that she would live to be 100. Looking me in the eyes, she said, "Remember me. Don't mourn me."

In mid-July, a card arrived in Pittsburgh from Nana wishing me a happy 25th birthday. The handwriting was distorted. I called my parents. Nana had suffered a serious stroke and she had struggled to write the garbled words on the card, attempting to shield me from worry and interruption of studies. I immediately drove back to Greater



L-r: Bill, Isaac, Joe and Dan Simons.

Boston. Nana died on July 29, 1974.

With family and friends, we gathered at the house of Aunt Lucille and Uncle Ben for Nana's shiva. We waited for my Great-Uncle Max before reciting the Kaddish. Uncle Max was the most spiritual and religiously learned person I have ever encountered.

If not for the disruption to his religious studies from World War I, the Soviet Revolution, the Allied intervention and immigration from Russia, Max would have completed his rabbinic studies. In Lynn, MA, Max, his head always covered, prepared boys for their bar mitzvahs when not pumping gas at the Texaco service station his brothers and brothers-in-law purchased for him.

According to our tradition, God does not destroy the world because of 36 righteous ones whose identities are unknown. I believe, however, that I did know one of them. So, I coaxed Uncle Max into a quiet corner and asked, "What happens when a good person dies?" Sensitive to my emotions, Max, drawing close, hesitated before responding with slow, deliberative words, "Bill, our greatest sages tell us - we cannot know."

Uncle Max's wisdom emancipated me from a search for life's greatest mystery, its aftermath. My strong Jewish identity has not prioritized a quest for salvation. Life after birth, not after death, continues to provide focus. As Rabbi Sam Stahl observed, Judaism emphasizes deed over creed.

Over the years, I developed an aptitude for providing comfort at bedside vigils and times of mourning for family and friends.

My wife Nancy and I had a robust five-hour discussion with Dad on the last night of his life. A few hours later, he died in his own bed in his own apartment on the cusp

of Father's Day. Nancy and I returned, and I sat with him until I helped the attendant from Stanetsky-Hymanson funeral home carry him to the hearse. My sister Jo Ann and I resolved to proceed with the Father's Day gathering, featuring an ice cream truck, allowing children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to honor Dad's life.

My parents both lived into their mid-90s, and I appeared to thrive on a busy schedule. Then, in 2025, the Ides of March morphed from literary expression to personal experience. I had a heart attack, followed by double bypass surgery. A few months before, a canoe and kayak business featured me in their advertising. Now, connected to tubes and wires, I struggled, even with a walker, to navigate the length of a hospital hallway. I thought of family and friends, taken by time, whom I missed. And I recited the Shema: "Hear O' Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

The medical care and New York state health insurance were good. My brave and loving wife Nancy did more than words can express. Despite his own serious medical issues, Armand, my dear friend, came from Arizona to support Nancy and me when most needed. Akin to a younger brother, Rob, with whom I led a union for a generation, became the first man to present me with flowers. Matt M., once a student and now a close friend, pushed my wheelchair. Driving from Boston to Cooperstown, son Joe and grandson Isaac brought legacy into the hospital room. A few days later, daughter-in-law Lynette arrived with grandchildren Lily, Hannah, Dan and Eva.

I worked hard at rehab and came to understand that recovery was a marathon, not a sprint, requiring diet, exercise, medication and work/respite balance. At my weakest, I continued to write. By late May, I was able to return as co-director of The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture. Then, I taught courses for Chautauqua and the Center for Continuing Adult Learning. And I resumed my duties as a union officer. By mid-October, I had kayaked the Susquehanna River 26 times. When the cold came, I became a gym rat.

I reviewed beneficiary arrangements, worked on a will and, with Nancy, considered our final resting place. Accompanied by Joe, Isaac and Dan, Nancy and I visited the Simons family plot off Lowell Street in Peabody, MA. Nancy and I walked up to the interfaith section of the cemetery. Then, returning to the task of placing stones on the graves of the relatives who preceded us, I shared our family history through biography.

From a talmudic story, I find direction: "'Old man, why are you planting these tree seeds when you will not see or taste the fruits of your labor?'" The old man responded, 'I eat the fruit and take shelter from the trees of my grandfathers. So, I plant these trees for my grandchildren's survival.'"

Stories . . . . . Continued from page 3

Award and the Moers International Comedy Arts prize. He was the 2007 recipient of the Broome County Heart of the Arts award. He is also an artist-in-residence of Binghamton University's Department of Theatre.

Kasper taught at SUNY Broome for more than 30 years. He was on the board of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton and is a trustee at Temple Israel. He is on the committee that selects films for the annual Jewish film fest. Kasper also serves on the Editorial Committee of The Reporter.

Williams and her husband, Gil, have been selling used books online for more than 25 years. She is an amateur actor and enjoys directing Temple Concord's Purim spiel each year, as well as organizing the synagogue's November Artisan Marketplace. She is a member of Binghamton's Shakespeare Dramatic Club.

"Looking forward to seeing you on January 11!" said organizers of the event.

Moving any time soon? Whether you're moving across town or across the country, please let The Reporter know so you can stay up to date on community news! E-mail treporter@aol.com with "Reporter Address change" in the subject line, or call 607-724-2360, ext. 254, to let The Reporter know about your new address.

The Reporter is offering sponsorships! Celebrate your simcha with the community or honor your loved one. There are four levels: Bronze \$200, Silver \$400, Gold \$600 and Platinum \$1,000. To arrange for a sponsorship or for answers to questions, contact Rabbi Rachel Esserman at rachel@thereporter.org.

Wedding . . . . . Continued from page 2

if that meant traveling to the place where she sat, grieving her husband. The group of young ladies neared the chair in which their grandmother sat. They all embraced, sharing loving words.

The eyes in the room were suddenly brimming with a different mix this time. The salty tears of grief merged with tears of joy, as the beautiful spectacle unfolded.

One generation was saying good-bye. But at the very same moment, the next generation was sprouting anew, with the vibrant promise of life and love and fulfillment. Of being the next link in one family's chain of forging lives well lived.

It's been a wild ride. Some will return to try it again, but perhaps not just yet. Most are glad it's over. But everyone agrees that they are now a bit different than when they started.

The drive home from the shiva house was fairly uneventful. Until the final 10 minutes, that is. Little did we expect yet another unforgettable experience awaited us.

As we turned onto the roadway to our neighborhood, we saw that a busload of high school students had gotten off at one of the traffic circles. Dressed in blue and white, they also carried Israeli flags, seemingly for some sort of rally.

At the next circle, the scene repeated itself, and then we noticed cars parking along the shoulders, with people streaming to line the sides of the road. The further we got, the denser the crowds. Some carried homemade signs: "Welcome Home, Eitan!"

Eitan Mor, former hostage, had been released from the hospital, and was making his way via Beit Shemesh, through Gush Etzion, and then on to his home in Kiryat Arba. For the first time in two years, he would walk tall through his front door, where he would no longer dwell in a twisted world of torture, deprivation and darkness. He would no longer just survive. He was going home to live.

It would not be a short trek to his destination. But all along it, he would be greeted by cheering, singing Israelis of all sizes, shapes and colors. My wife hopped out to join the throngs of well-wishers. The roller coaster which began on October 7, 2023, had taken us to war and prayer and longing and desperation and hope and every stop on the emotional spectrum. This was one of those transcendent moments on this journey of life in Israel that you must grasp with all your might and treasure with all your soul.

Minutes later, the van carrying Eitan approached. The well-wishers flooded the road, surrounding the vehicle, singing, dancing and cheering. Eitan smiled broadly, waving and giving high-fives through his open window. He was back with his people.

In time, the sea of love enveloping Eitan's vehicle parted and the van continued on its way to greet the next group on his trek. His trek home. Home. Home.

The ride in the amusement park may be over, but the roller coaster of life rolls on - surprising us, testing us and transforming us. We hold fast and listen for the clackety-clack, praying for the strength to weather the lows, and grateful for the gift of every exhilarating rise.

Our Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planning Guide is coming soon! To advertise in this annual keepsake section, contact Kathy Brown at 607-724-2360, ext. 244 or advertising@thereporter.org. Issue Date: February. Ad Deadline: January 8. THE REPORTER. Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton.

# Federation hosted Hanukkah party



The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton co-hosted a Hanukkah party at the Discovery Center on December 14, which 102 community members attended.



At right: Elyza Eggleston stood next to a stack of mats she created during the Hanukkah party at the Discovery Center.



Above: Josh Hubal entertained the crowd at the Hanukkah party at the Discovery Center.



Rabbi Moshe Shmaryahu attended the Hanukkah party at the Discovery Center.



At right: Goldie Ohana and her daughter, Chaya Ohana, enjoyed the Hanukkah party.

## Federation year in review 2025

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton held or co-sponsored more than 20 in-person and virtual events during 2025. "This has been another robust year of programming," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "We're looking forward to more events that bring the community together in the next year."

◆ The Federation of Greater Binghamton sponsored a community hockey event at a Binghamton Black Bears game on January 18.

◆ The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest held a virtual showing of the film "Golden Voices." Andy Horowitz, founder and director of the Galumph dance troupe, moderated a Zoom discussion on January 26.

◆ The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest held a virtual showing of the film "Shoshana." Shay Rabineau, Ph.D., chairman of the Judaic Studies Department and director of the Center for Israel Studies at Binghamton University, moderated a Zoom discussion on February 9.

◆ The Federation sponsored a 3GNY Holocaust presentation at Susquehanna Valley High School on February 24.

◆ The Federation co-sponsored a March 15 *Havdalah* as part of the Temple Israel Artist in Residence Weekend featuring musician Zach Mayer.

◆ The Federation held the security training

"Navigating Conflict: The Power of De-Escalation," led by Mark Henderson, regional security advisor, Rochester, for the Secure Community Network, on March 27.

◆ The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest held an in-person showing of the film "Kidnapped: The Abduction of Edgardo Mortara" on March 30. Dora Polachek, Ph.D., associate professor of romance languages and literatures at Binghamton University, moderated a discussion of the film.

◆ The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest held a virtual showing of the documentary "Troll Storm." Richard (Dick) Lewis, an attorney at Hinman, Howard and Kattell, and immediate past president of the New York State Bar Association, moderated a Zoom discussion on April 6.

◆ The Federation sponsored a 3GNY Holocaust presentation at Binghamton West Middle School on April 29.

◆ The Federation held a Yom Hashoah program on April 22. The evening included a talk by Dr. Eileen Angelini, Ph.D., a Holocaust scholar and educator, called "Simple Acts of Human Kindness."

◆ The Federation sponsored a security meeting for representatives of local organizations on June 25 with Mark Henderson, regional security advisor, Rochester, for the Secure Community Network.

See "Year" on page 8



The Federation held the security training "Navigating Conflict: The Power of De-Escalation" led by Mark Henderson, regional security advisor, Rochester, for the Secure Community Network, on March 27.

### Bar/Bat photos needed

Can we have your mug? Kids mugging for the camera, that is. For *The Reporter's* annual Bar/Bat Mitzvah issue (coming in February), we need photos of all teens who became bar/bat mitzvah during the calendar year of 2025.

Please e-mail these photos with identification, including name, date and place of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. Please send them by Wednesday, January 7. Photos can be e-mailed, in TIF or JPG format, to TReporter@aol.com; please note in the subject line that a bar/bat photo for *The Reporter* is attached and include the necessary information in the message.

## Annual Campaign 2026

MAKE YOUR PLEDGE AND PAY NOW!

# you belong

We hope we can count on your generosity again in the year to come.

You can make your pledge 3 ways:

- 1) Visit the Federation website at [www.jfgb.org](http://www.jfgb.org) and click on "make a pledge."
- 2) E-mail Federation Executive Director Shelley Hubal at [director@jfgb.org](mailto:director@jfgb.org) with "pledge" in the subject line.
- 3) Fill out the form in this ad and mail it to the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850.

Mail this form to:

Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton,  
500 Clubhouse Rd.,  
Vestal, NY 13850

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Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Pledge: \_\_\_\_\_



# Despite war in Ukraine, a historic discovery at Babi Yar

By Steve Linde

(JNS) – On the 84<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the notorious Babi Yar massacre, the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center revealed the names of more than 1,000 newly identified victims, announced publicly for the first time at a ceremony at the site. In Jerusalem, BYHMC and March of the Living hosted a parallel memorial at the National Library of Israel, where the newly discovered names were also read out. Speakers included BYHMC Chairman Natan Sharansky, Ukraine’s Ambassador to Israel Yevgen Korniychuk and Yad Vashem Chairman Dani Dayan.



Natan Sharansky, BYHMC’s chairman, at the symbolic synagogue founded by the Memorial Center in Babyn Yar, in 2023. (Photo courtesy of BYHMC)

and its victims. “Let’s do everything we can in order to preserve the history and prevent such atrocities from happening again,” he said.

Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, researchers restored the identities of 1,031 people previously lost to history. The BYHMC database now contains nearly 30,000 names, enriched with details such as ages, relatives, professions and circumstances of death. Victims ranged from a 9-month-old baby to a 102-year-old woman, underscoring the indiscriminate nature of the massacre.

“Memory is a moral weapon against denial, oblivion and distortion,” said Sharansky. “Every name we succeed in restoring contributes to Holocaust commemoration and advances justice and dignity for its victims. Precisely in times of war, the obligation to defend the truth is doubled.”

Korniychuk thanked Sharansky, in his capacity as chairman of the supervisory board of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, for working together with the Ukrainian government to maintain the site, the memory of the massacre

forces and their collaborators shot 33,771 Jews at Babi Yar in just two days. Over the following two years, the ravine outside Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, became the largest mass grave in Europe, where some 100,000 people – including Jews, Roma and Ukrainian prisoners – were executed. The discoveries were made possible by unprecedented archival access during wartime, when BYHMC scanned more than seven million documents, creating the largest digital archive in Eastern Europe.

On September 29-30, 1941, Nazi

Among the newly discovered materials are applica-

tions to adopt children orphaned after their parents were murdered at Babi Yar, petitions by citizens seeking legal recognition of relatives’ deaths for inheritance, remarriage or financial support, and birth certificates from the 1920s and 1930s that helped identify children murdered alongside their parents.

One striking case is a 1946 legal file detailing the plea of Zindel Kravetsky, who sought recognition of the deaths of his wife and three children: Aron, 8, Zoya, 6, and Vova, 4, all murdered at Babi Yar. Another record documents Rakhil Meirovna Kravets, born in 1863, who fled Korosten to Kyiv at the outbreak of the war, only to be murdered in the ravine.

Since the Russia-Ukraine war began on February 24, 2022, more than 2,000 existing records have been updated and corrected, BYHMC said in a press release. More than 300,000 visitors have visited the Babyn Yar memorial since the Russian invasion began, while more 600 educational tours have been conducted, it added.

“Babyn Yar, the symbol of the ‘Holocaust by Bullets,’ tells the story of more than two million Jews shot and thrown into mass graves across Eastern Europe,” said March of the Living Israel CEO Revital Yakin Krakowsky. “We honor their memory and pray for an end to the war in Ukraine. We hope to march in Kyiv next year on the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre.”

## Year . . . . . Continued from page 7

- ◆ The Federation sponsored a Peace Vigil on July 15. Around 50 people attended the vigil.
- ◆ The Federation held a pre-Campaign dessert reception featuring basketball player Tamir Goodman on August 17. Goodman spoke about “Spiritual and Life Lessons from the Game of Basketball.”
- ◆ The Federation held a security training program featuring two training sessions, “Guardian: Identify. Protect. Respond.” and “Stop the Bleed,” on August 27. The program was led by Mark Henderson, regional security advisor, Rochester, for the Secure Community Network.
- ◆ The Federation and Hillel at Binghamton offered a L’Dor V’Dor Pen Pal Program, which matched Binghamton University students with seniors in the local Jewish community.
- ◆ The Federation held a memorial service at the Holocaust

- Memorial Monument in the Temple Israel Cemetery on September 28.
- ◆ The Federation held a 10/7 commemorative service on October 5. Dr. Yehezkel Caine, president of Herzog Medical Center in Jerusalem, spoke virtually about the work being done at Herzog’s Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma with survivors, soldiers and families.
- ◆ The Federation co-sponsored A Global Day of Jewish Learning event on November 9 with Beth David Synagogue, Temple Concord and Temple Israel. The theme of this year’s discussion was “70 Faces of Torah.”
- ◆ The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest held a virtual showing of the film “Running on Sand.” Dora E. Polachek, visiting associate professor of romance languages and literatures at Binghamton University, moderated a Zoom discussion of the film on November 23.

- ◆ The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest held a virtual showing of four short films, “No Harm Done,” “The Sacred Society,” “Women of Virtue” and “The Father, The Son and The Rav.” Rochel Chein, co-director of education at Chabad of Binghamton and a responder for Ask the Rabbi at Chabad.org, moderated a Zoom discussion of the film on December 7.
- ◆ A Family Hanukkah Party was held on December 14 at the Discovery Center. The event was co-sponsored by Hillel Academy, the Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton and the PJ Library.
- ◆ The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest will hold a virtual showing of the film “The Matchmaker.” Matthew Johnson, professor of psychology and director of clinical training at Binghamton University, will moderate a Zoom discussion of the film on Sunday, December 28.



The Federation held a 10/7 commemorative service on October 5. Dr. Yehezkel Caine, president of Herzog Medical Center in Jerusalem, spoke virtually about the work being done at Herzog’s Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma with survivors, soldiers and families.



L-r: Campaign Chairwoman Marilyn Bell; speaker Tamir Goodman; Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton; and Suzanne Holwitt, Federation president, at the pre-Campaign dessert reception on August 17.



The Federation held a memorial service at the Holocaust Memorial Monument in the Temple Israel Cemetery, on September 28.

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# Pew: Jews among U.S. adults most likely to remain in childhood faith

By JNS staff

(JNS)—Jews are among the religious groups in the United States most likely to retain their childhood faith, according to a Pew survey released recently. Among Americans who say they were raised Jewish, 76 percent continue to identify with the religion. That number is similar to the percentage of Hindus, Muslims and Protestants who remain in their childhood faith (82 percent, 77 percent and 70 percent respectively) and substantially higher than the retention rate among Catholics at 57 percent or Buddhists at 45 percent.

Jews also give different reasons than Catholics or Protestants for why they continue to observe their faith. According to the survey, respondents said they are more likely to cite tradition, a sense of community and Judaism's teachings on social and political issues and less likely to credit belief in the religions' teachings, spiritual needs or giving meaning to their lives than Christians.

"Among U.S. adults who were raised Jewish and still identify as Jewish by religion, 60 percent say liking the traditions is an extremely or very important reason they are Jewish, and 57 percent cite liking the sense of community," the survey authors write. "About half of Jews say they are Jewish because it's their family religion and/or because it's something they're familiar with."

Americans who say they are "atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular'" account for some 29 percent of the U.S. population, despite 86 percent of American adults reporting that they were raised in a particular faith.

Childhood religious experiences appear to be a key predictor of whether children retain their faith as adults. The survey found that 84 percent of adults who say they had a positive religious experience as a child report being in the same faith today, while 69 percent of those who say they had a negative experience are

no longer affiliated with any religion. Among adults who switch religions, including to no religion at all, 85 percent report doing so before the age of 30, with 46 percent switching during childhood.

In line with previous surveys, Pew also found substantial differences in the religious lives of Republicans and Democrats. "Among U.S. adults who were raised in a religion, 73 percent of Republicans and independents who lean toward the Republican Party still identify with the religion in which they were raised, compared with 56 percent of Democrats and Democratic leaners," Pew writes. "Meanwhile, Democrats who were raised in a religion are more likely to be religious 'nones' today compared with Republicans who were raised in a religion."

The poll also found that among those who were not raised in a religion, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to identify with a faith as an adult.

# Bar-Ilan U. scientists show protein helps drive longevity

By JNS staff

(JNS) – Researchers at Bar-Ilan University have uncovered how the longevity-linked protein Sirt6 protects the body from age-related decline and disease. The findings were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The impact of Sirt6 – often described as a master regulator of aging – closely mirrors that of calorie restriction, a dietary regimen shown in animals to extend lifespan and boost the body's natural repair and healing mechanisms. Calorie restriction – eating fewer calories without malnutrition – boosts the body's production of hydrogen sulfide (H2S), a tiny gas molecule that supports wound healing, heart health and brain function.

The new study found that as people age, H2S levels naturally decline, eroding these protective benefits. It also found that Sirt6 mimics the effects of calorie

restriction, keeping the body's repair systems running smoothly by fine-tuning H2S production. But unlike calorie restriction, which broadly raises H2S levels, Sirt6 acts with precision – boosting production when needed while preventing harmful excess.

"Sirt6 protects against age-related diseases such as cancer, diabetes, frailty and inflammation, and helps maintain the body's natural balance as we grow older. It has one foot on the gas and the other on the brake – promoting hydrogen sulfide production when it's beneficial but keeping it under control to prevent harm," said professor Haim Cohen, director of the Sagol Healthy Human Longevity Center at Bar-Ilan University's Goodman Faculty of Life Sciences, who led the study, performed by doctoral student Noga Touitou.

This discovery underscores the importance of metabolic balance in healthy aging. While earlier research

largely centered on boosting H2S levels to promote longevity, the Bar-Ilan team found that Sirt6 ensures a precise equilibrium – producing enough of the molecule to protect cells and tissues without tipping into toxicity.

"Our findings uncover one of the body's natural strategies for preserving health during aging," said Cohen. "By revealing how Sirt6 maintains a precise balance in H2S production, we provide new insights into the molecular mechanisms of healthy aging and identify promising targets for interventions that slow age-related decline."

The study builds on Cohen's earlier work showing that Sirt6 extends mammalian lifespan and shields the body from multiple age-related diseases. This new research takes a step further, revealing how Sirt6 achieves these benefits by precisely regulating hydrogen sulfide, a key molecule in the biology of longevity.



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## Weekly Parasha

Vayigash, Genesis 44:18-47:27

# Do not be afraid

RABBI AARON SLONIM, DIRECTOR, CHABAD CENTER

In this week's *parasha*, after 22 years of painful separation from his son Joseph, Jacob learns that Joseph, who was alleged to have been dead, was indeed alive. Rashi, the foremost biblical expositor, taught that for the entire time the two were separated, Jacob suffered a unique course of bereavement. Not only did he lose a son, but he failed to experience the normal comfort brought on by passage of time. That solace, Rashi asserts, is granted by God only in the case of death, whereas Joseph was still alive.

This terribly painful era comes to an abrupt end when Jacob's sons tell him: "Joseph is alive, and he is ruler of all the land of Egypt." (45: 26) The Torah records, "Yaakov's heart stood still, for he could not believe them." After the brothers imparted a coded message from Joseph to their father, Jacob was convinced that Joseph was alive and resolved to go see him before his death. Jacob was, however, filled with trepidation at the thought of leaving the Holy Land of Canaan and began the perilous trip to Egypt in a state of distress.

On the way, God appeared to Jacob in a night vision, and in response to his deep fears told Jacob, "I am the Almighty, God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I will surely go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again." (45:3-4) While this vision included God's promise to Jacob that he would be laid to rest eternally in the Holy Land – as opposed to in Egypt – there is much more in this powerful and poignant promise.

Indeed, Jacob had heard from his father, Isaac, who had heard from his father, Abraham, that the children of Israel were destined to be strangers in a strange land, after which they would emerge as a nation and return to their homeland. However, he did not have knowledge of exactly when this was to occur or to which land his children were to be exiled. Thus, while overwhelmed with a desire to see Joseph, he was filled with worry that he might be taking his family in the wrong direction. After God's assurance, however, it was clear to Jacob that the entire saga of Jo-

seph's descent into Egypt and his subsequent ascendancy to viceroy of that country was for the express purpose of "pulling" Jacob and his household down to Egypt.

And yet, despite God's promise of eventual deliverance from Egypt, Jacob still takes very specific steps to ensure the spiritual safety of his household. Toward the end of this *parasha*, we are told that Jacob sent his son Judah ahead of him. Rashi explains that Jacob sent Judah to prepare a house of study from which would emanate Torah teachings.

We are now in a better position to understand a famous inference found in the very first verse of the next *parasha*, in which the Torah tells us that Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years. Seventeen is a significant number, our sages taught, because its *gematria*, numerical value, is equal to the Hebrew word *tov*, good, implying that this era of Jacob's life was especially good. We know Jacob did not want to descend to Egypt at all, how could his years there be characterized as good?

See "Afraid" on page 11

## Congregational Notes

### Temple Concord

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism  
 Rabbi: Leah Moser  
 Address: 9 Riverside Dr, Binghamton NY 13905  
 Office hours: Tues.-Fri., 10 am-2 pm  
 Phone: 607-723-7355  
 Office e-mail: TempleConcordBinghamton@gmail.com  
 Website: www.TempleConcord.com  
 Please contact Temple Concord for Zoom links.

Some services and programs are online only.

Fridays, December 26 and January 2: At 7:30 pm, Friday Shabbat services are in person, on Zoom and Facebook.

Saturdays, December 27 and January 3: At 9:15 am, Torah study is in person and on Zoom. An in-person only service will take place at 10:30 am.

December 31 and January 7: At 5:30 pm, evening prayers in person only. At 6 pm, adult education class in person and on Zoom.

The Religious School is on break until Saturday, January 3.

Upcoming events:

Sunday, January 4: From 10 am-2 pm, Sisterhood Rummage Sale. The rummage sale is held in the synagogue's basement. Shoppers are asked to use the Oak Street entrance.

Tuesday, January 6: At 10:30 am, Morning Book Club: "Marjorie Morningstar, A Novel" by Herman Wouk. The book club will be meeting on Zoom only at <https://bit.ly/3CXVd9b>, meeting ID 881 6469 4206 and passcode 653272. For more information, contact Merri Pell-Preus at 607-222-2875 or [merrypell.preus@gmail.com](mailto:merrypell.preus@gmail.com).

Tuesday, January 7: At 7 pm, Sisterhood meeting. Sisterhood meetings are in person (on the first Wednesday of the month) in the Temple Concord library. Contact Barb Thomas at 607-759-2573 with questions about the meetings. Anyone interested in joining the Sisterhood should contact Carol Herz at 607-222-7144.

### Beth David Synagogue

Affiliation: Orthodox Union  
 Rabbi: Zev Silber  
 Address: 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905  
 Phone: 607-722-1793, Rabbi's Office: 607-722-7514  
 Fax: 607-722-7121  
 Office hours: Tues. 10 am-1 pm; Thurs. 9 am-1 pm  
 Beth David e-mail address: [bethdavid@stny.rr.com](mailto:bethdavid@stny.rr.com)  
 Rabbi's e-mail: [rabbisilber@stny.rr.com](mailto:rabbisilber@stny.rr.com)  
 Website: [www.bethdavid.org](http://www.bethdavid.org)  
 Facebook: [www.facebook.com/bethdavidbinghamton](http://www.facebook.com/bethdavidbinghamton)  
 Classes: Rabbi Zev Silber will hold his weekly Talmud class every Tuesday evening after services.

### Congregation Tikkun v'Or

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism  
 Address: PO Box 3981, Ithaca, NY 14852; 2550 Triphammer Rd. (corner of Triphammer and Burdick Hill), Lansing, NY  
 Phone: 607-256-1471  
 Website: [www.tikkunvor.org](http://www.tikkunvor.org), E-mail: [info@tikkunvor.org](mailto:info@tikkunvor.org)  
 Presidents: Martha Armstrong and Mitch Grossman, [presidents\\_22@tikkunvor.org](mailto:presidents_22@tikkunvor.org)  
 Education Director/Admin. Coordinator: Naomi Wilensky  
 Bnai Mitzvah Coordinator: Michael Margolin  
 Services: All services currently on Zoom. E-mail [info@tikkunvor.org](mailto:info@tikkunvor.org) for the times and links. Contemplative morning services every Tuesday from 8:30-9:30 am. Saturday mornings, Gan Shabbat and other special services at least once a month. Call for the weekly schedule.  
 Jewish Learning Experiences (JLE) for second through seventh grade classes meet on Sunday mornings. Sixth and seventh grades also meet on Wednesday afternoons. Family programs for kindergarten and first grade held monthly. Adult Education: Offered regularly throughout the year. Check the website for details.

### Synagogues limit face-to-face gatherings

For specific information regarding services (including online services), meetings and classes at any of the area synagogues, contact them by phone or e-mail.

### Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive  
 Address: 72 South Broad St., Norwich, NY 13815  
 Phone: 607-334-2691  
 Purpose: To maintain a Jewish identity and meet the needs of the Jewish community in the area.

### Rohr Chabad Center

Affiliation: Chabad-Lubavitch  
 Rabbi Aaron and Rivkah Slonim, Directors  
 E-mail: [aslonim@binghamton.edu](mailto:aslonim@binghamton.edu)  
[rslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com](mailto:rslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com)  
 Address: 420 Murray Hill Rd., Vestal, NY 13850  
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 Rabbi Zalman and Rachel Chein, Education  
 E-mail: [zchein@Jewishbu.com](mailto:zchein@Jewishbu.com), [rchein@Jewishbu.com](mailto:rchein@Jewishbu.com)  
 Rabbi Levi and Hadasa Slonim, Downtown and Development  
 Chabad Downtown Center: 60 Henry St., Binghamton  
 E-mail: [lslonim@Jewishbu.com](mailto:lslonim@Jewishbu.com), [hslonim@Jewishbu.com](mailto:hslonim@Jewishbu.com)  
 Rabbi Yisroel and Goldie Ohana, Programming  
 E-mail: [yohana@Jewishbu.com](mailto:yohana@Jewishbu.com), [gohana@Jewishbu.com](mailto:gohana@Jewishbu.com)  
 Regular service times: Daily 7:30 am, Friday evening 6 pm, Shabbat morning 9:30 am, Maariv and Havdalah one hour after candle-lighting time, Sundays 9:30 am.  
 To join the mailing list, for up-to-date information on adult education offerings or to arrange for a private tutorial, for details concerning the Judaica shop and resource center, or for assistance through the Piaker Free Loan Society or Raff Maasim Tovim Foundation, call Chabad's office at 797-0015.

Chabad will be holding pre-Shabbat virtual programs. For more information, visit [www.JewishBU.com/S2020Partnership](http://www.JewishBU.com/S2020Partnership).

### Temple Brith Sholom

Affiliation: Unaffiliated  
 Address: P.O. Box 572, 117 Madison St., Cortland, NY 13045  
 Phone: 607-756-7181  
 President: Mark Suben  
 Cemetery Committee: 315-696-5744  
 Website: [templebrithsholomcortland.org](http://templebrithsholomcortland.org)  
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Temple-Brith-Sholom-114006981962930/>  
 Service leaders: Lay leadership  
 Shabbat services: Services are usually on the third Friday of the month and led by a variety of leaders. Check the Facebook page or weekly e-mail for upcoming services. Contact the president to get on the e-mail list.  
 Religious School: Students are educated on an individual basis. Temple Brith Sholom is a small equalitarian congregation serving the greater Cortland community. Congregants span the gamut of observance and services are largely dependent on the service leader. The Friday night siddur is "Likrat Shabbat." The community extends a warm welcome to the Jewish student population of SUNY Cortland, as well as the residents of local adult residences. The Board of Trustees meets on the second Tuesday of the month.

Services and programs are held by Zoom usually on the third Friday of the month.

Friday, December 26, light candles before..... 4:19 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, December 27 ..... 5:21 pm  
 Friday, January 2, light candles before..... 4:25 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, January 3 ..... 5:26 pm  
 Friday, January 9, light candles before..... 4:32 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, January 10 ..... 5:33 pm  
 Friday, January 16, light candles before..... 4:40 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, January 17 ..... 5:41 pm  
 Friday, January 23, light candles before..... 4:48 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, January 24 ..... 5:50 pm  
 Friday, January 30, light candles before..... 4:57 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, January 31 ..... 5:59 pm

### Temple Israel

Orientation: Conservative  
 Rabbi: Micah Friedman  
 Address: 4737 Deerfield Pl., Vestal, NY 13850  
 Phone: 607-723-7461 and 607-231-3746  
 Office hours: Mon.-Thurs., 8:30 am-3:30 pm; Fri., 8 am-3 pm  
 E-mail: [office@templeisraelvestal.org](mailto:office@templeisraelvestal.org)  
 Website: [www.templeisraelvestal.org](http://www.templeisraelvestal.org)  
 Service schedule: Tues., 5:30 pm; Fri., 5:30 pm; Sat., 9:30 am

On Fridays and Tuesdays at 5:30 pm, services will be led by Rabbi Micah Friedman via Zoom and in-person.

On Saturday, December 27, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Genesis 44:18-47:27 and the haftarah is Ezekiel 37:15-28. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 5:30 pm.

On Saturday, January 3, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Genesis 47:28-50:26 and the haftarah is Kings 2:1-12. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 5:45 pm.

Upcoming events:

The temple office will be closed Wednesday-Friday, December 31-January 2.

The "Torah in our Times" class will meet on on Tuesday, January 6, at 4:30 pm. There will be no class on Tuesday, December 30.

There will be an Executive Board meeting on Tuesday, January 6, at 7 pm.

### Penn-York Jewish Community

Treasurer: Beth Herbst, 607-857-0976  
 B'nai B'rith: William H. Seigel Lodge  
 Purpose: To promote Jewish identity through religious, cultural, educational and social activities in the Southern Tier of New York and the Northern Tier of Pennsylvania, including Waverly, NY; Sayre, Athens and Towanda, PA, and surrounding communities.

### Temple Beth-El of Ithaca

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism  
 Rabbi: Caleb Brommer  
 Address: 402 North Tioga St. (the corner of Court and Tioga streets), Ithaca, NY 14850-4292  
 Phone: 607-273-5775  
 Website: [www.tbethaca.org](http://www.tbethaca.org)  
 Presidents: Jerry Dietz and Ariel Avgar  
 Director of Education and Engagement: Calle Schueler  
 Services: Friday 6:30 pm; Saturday 9:30 am, unless otherwise announced. Weekday morning minyan 7:30 am (9 am on Sundays and legal holidays).  
 Religious School/Education: September-May: Classes meet on Sundays from 9 am-noon and Wednesdays from 4-6 pm. Teen Midrasha meets Tuesdays from 6-8 pm.  
 Adult Ed.: Numerous weekly courses, several semester-long courses and a variety of lectures are offered throughout the year. Call the temple office or email [secretary@tbethaca.org](mailto:secretary@tbethaca.org) for more information.

### Temple Beth El of Oneonta

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism  
 Cantor: David Green  
 Address: 83 Chestnut St., Oneonta, NY 13820  
 Mailing address: P.O. Box 383, Oneonta, NY 13820  
 Phone: 607-432-5522  
 E-mail: [TBEOneonta@gmail.com](mailto:TBEOneonta@gmail.com)  
 Regular service times: Contact the temple for days of services and times.  
 Religious School/Education: Religious School, for grades kindergarten through bar/bat mitzvah, meets Sunday mornings. For the schedule of services, classes and events, contact the temple.

# Four thousand-year-old lamp wicks discovered in Israel

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Oil-lamp wicks dating back four millennia, making them among the oldest ever discovered, have been unearthed in an archaeological dig in central Israel, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced recently.

The ancient wicks were preserved inside clay lamps used for illumination in the Intermediate Bronze Age (c. 2500-2000 B.C.E.), according to the IAA. They were uncovered near the central Israeli city of Yehud just north of Ben-Gurion International Airport during an excavation ahead of the establishment of a new neighborhood in the city. The find was especially rare due to its location in the humid coastal plain; wicks are generally destroyed by use or decompose in the soil.

“This is a unique discovery that we did not expect could ever be found in the moist Mediterranean climate; these wicks are among the few of their era known to us in the world,” according to IAA researchers Naama Sukenik and Yonah Maor. “Although wicks were

a common product for lighting in the ancient world, the fact that they are made of organic fibers makes it difficult to discover them in an archaeological dig,” they added.

The lamps were found in ancient graves, as was common practice at the time, alongside other burial offerings, including various types of pottery, animal bones, metal weapons and jewelry, according to excavation directors Gilad Itach, Yossi Elisha and Yaniv Agmon.

“While these lamps must have been used to illuminate the underground, dark burial space during the burial ceremony itself, it seems that this was not their only function,” they said. “Just like today, thousands of years ago, the fire burning in a lamp symbolized the human soul. The common term we use today, ‘*ner neshama*,’ the flame of the soul, probably originated thousands of years ago.”

*This study was published in the IAA scientific journal Atiqot.*

## Jewish Community Center

### JCC Friendship Club

The Jewish Community Center Friendship Club held its December meeting on December 8. We sponsored a Hanukkah party at Castle Gardens nursing facility. Sylvia Diamond introduced herself and started by reading the story of the holiday with audience participation. Then Benny Kelman elaborated about the history and customs. Thanks to his young son, we were entertained by him balancing his kippah upside down on his head and standing on one leg while his father was telling the story of Hanukkah. After that, Steve Gilbert played Hanukkah music and ended by singing some old time songs and telling the story behind them. Refreshments were passed out during the music. Afterwards, some people stayed and Sylvia showed them driedels and explained what the letters on the side were. A good time was had by all.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, January 21, at 1:30 pm, at the JCC. Come join us for a friendly afternoon.

Sylvia Diamond

# Byzantine-era gold coins unearthed near Sea of Galilee

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Israeli archaeologists have uncovered a Byzantine-era treasure of nearly 100 gold coins and earrings near the Sea of Galilee, the University of Haifa announced recently. The hoard, unearthed in July during excavations at the ancient city of Hippos (Sussita) and dating to the sixth century C.E., was discovered when a metal detector operator with the dig picked up a signal near a large stone at the site.

As the stone shifted between two walls, the signal grew stronger and gold coins began to emerge one after another. “The device went crazy. I couldn’t believe it – gold coins started appearing one after another,” said Edie Lipsman, the metal detector operator.

The find includes 97 pure gold coins and dozens of fragments of gold earrings inlaid with pearls, semi-precious stones and glass, the university said. “This is one of the largest hoards from the Byzantine period discovered on dry land in Israel, and its uniqueness lies in the combination of jewelry and gold coins from the reigns of different



*The hoard of gold and jewelry dating to the sixth century, unearthed during archaeological excavations in the ancient city of Hippos near the Sea of Galilee. (Photo by Dr. Michael Eisenberg/University of Haifa)*

emperors,” said University of Haifa expedition co-director Michael Eisenberg. “In addition, remnants of fabric were found on some of the coins – a trace of the cloth pouch in which the hoard had been hidden.”

The coins date from the reign of Emperor Justin I (518-527 C.E.) to the early years of Emperor Heraclius (610-613 C.E.).

Founded by the Greek Seleucids on a hill about a mile east of the Sea of Galilee, the city of Hippos was a major Christian center and episcopal seat during the Byzantine period (330-636 C.E.), with at least seven active churches.

Fearing for their safety during the Arab conquest of 614 C.E., residents of many Christian cities, including Hippos, hid valuables in the hope of recovering them after the fighting. Although Hippos survived the Arab invasion, a devastating earthquake in 749 C.E. destroyed the city, which was subsequently abandoned.

“Gold is a noble metal, and when you find coins and jewelry nearly 1,400 years old that look new, it is a rare experience,” Eisenberg said.

# Assyrian inscription unearthed near Temple Mount

By JNS staff

(JNS) – An Assyrian inscription on a pottery sherd over a possible tax revolt from the First Temple period about 2,700 years ago has been uncovered near Jerusalem’s

## Afraid. . . . . Continued from page 10

However, Jacob had a vision and a promise from God and so it was that he perceived why and how living in Egypt could be good. In sending Judah to prepare the infrastructure for self-contained Jewish life and in his final words to his children it is clear that Jacob did not keep this vision to himself. He spared no effort in teaching his children that Egypt was a necessary, but temporary, stepping stone toward “going up and going home.” Jacob wanted his children and grandchildren and their children never to forget that their forefather had come to Egypt upon the command and explicit promise of God; that the descent was for the purpose of ascent; and that they were radically different than the members of the broader Egyptian society. Only with this perspective could Jacob and his descendants live in Egypt. It was not a place for them to settle down and get comfortable. On the contrary, their experience there would be – of necessity – one of strangeness, difficulty and even pain. But he knew and saw the good in it. For it was there that they were meant to grow in ways that they never could, had they remained in the Holy Land.

For much of our long and tumultuous history, the Jews, as a people, have been separated from our land. The Jewish experience has by and large been an Egypt experience: exile in various forms and permutations. However, there is always the promise of God to Jacob: do not be afraid. There is a great destiny, God promises, and it is precisely in your journey – as strangers in a strange land – that you will achieve true splendor. Those words include assurance that wherever the children of Jacob find themselves, God is with us, and that at the appointed time He will bring us up. We must, however, never lose sight of the paradoxical nature of our journey. Even as Jacob lives in Egypt he lives for Israel – in both its physical and spiritual dimensions – and so it is with his children of all time. And we must do our share to nourish and bolster the infrastructure set up by Yehudah, lest we or our children forget where we came from and where we are going. We are certainly in this world and have much to accomplish here but we are not of this world. As Jews, our destiny is to illuminate and transform, defy and ultimately transcend.

Temple Mount, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced on October 22.

The tiny fragment, about 2.5 cm (1 inch) in size, was uncovered six months ago during an excavation in the archaeological garden adjacent to the Western Wall, the state-run archaeological body said. It is the first such inscription in the Akkadian language ever found in the city from the First Temple period (8<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E.).

“I was sifting through the dirt and suddenly noticed a sherd with a strange decoration,” recounted Moriah Cohen, who works at the “Archaeological Experience” in Emek Tzurim and was carrying out a wet-sifting process as part of the excavation. “For me personally, the thought that after 2,700 years, I am the first person to actually touch this pottery with my hands is a very exciting thought. This is a once-in-a-lifetime find.”

The unique piece was discovered in dirt that had been swept to the edge of the city’s central drainage canal dating from the Second Temple period about 2,000 years ago, the IAA said.

“The inscription provides direct evidence of official correspondence between the Assyrian Empire and the Kingdom of Judah,” said Ayala Zilberstein, excavation director for the Israel Antiquities Authority. “The discovery strengthens our understanding of the depth of the Assyrian presence in Jerusalem, and the extent of its influence on and involvement in the conduct of the affairs of the Judean kingdom.”

Analysis of the inscription – which specifies a due date: the first of the Hebrew month of Av, in a calendar shared between Mesopotamia and Judah – reinforces the hypothesis that the sealed document deals with a delay in paying a tax or another obligation, the IAA said. At the time, items of this type served as a means of communication between the envoys of the Assyrian government and the rulers of Judah, conveying official instructions and tax demands.

A possible scenario now under investigation: a deliberate tax revolt, such as the Bible describes regarding King Hezekiah rebelling against the Assyrian King Sennacherib. See “Assyrian” on page 12

## Quick Reference Guide to Planned Giving

Use this planned giving quick reference guide to help determine the best strategy for achieving your philanthropic and financial goals.

For further information or assistance, please contact Shelley Hubal at 724-2332 or director@jfgb.org

If Your Goal is to:	Then You Can:	Your Benefits May Include:
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Defer a gift until after your death	Put a bequest in your will (gifts of cash or a share or the residue of your estate)	Exemption from federal estate tax on donations
Receive guaranteed fixed income that is partially tax-free	Create a charitable gift annuity	Current and future savings on income taxes plus fixed stable payments
Avoid the two-fold taxation on IRA or other employee benefit plans	Name a charity as the beneficiary of the remainder of the retirement assets after your lifetime	Tax relief to your family on inherited assets
Make a large gift with little cost to you	Contribute a life insurance policy you no longer need or purchase a new one and designate a charity as the owner	Current and possible future income tax deductions
Reduce taxable income from IRA Required Minimum Distributions	Make a qualified charitable donation directly from your IRA (after age 70½)	Reducing taxable income
	An income tax deduction and immediate	



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# Israeli start-up tackles drink spiking and more

By Sharon Altshul

(JNS) – In bars, clubs and college campuses across the world, a hidden threat lingers at the bottom of the glass. Drug-facilitated assaults remain an underreported but persistent danger – and an Israeli startup believes it has found the answer.

WiSP, founded in 2022, has developed a small, reusable device paired with an app that instantly scans drinks for the presence of drugs and alcohol. Its founders call it “cybersecurity for consumption.”

“We test everything after it’s in us. Why not before?” CEO and co-founder Liat Kaplan asked rhetorically in a recent interview with JNS. “WiSP began with drink spiking detection, but our vision is broader. We want to empower people to make safer choices and to take control of their wellness.”

WiSP was launched by Liat Kaplan, chemical analyst Aviv Kaplan and electro-optical specialist Dr. David Avraham. At its core is Raman spectroscopy, a proven forensic technique that identifies substances by their molecular “fingerprints.”

Unlike single-use strips that are slow and limited, WiSP’s system works in seconds, providing reliable results without altering the drink. The current prototype is the size of a small console with a handheld wand (2x8x10 inches). A pocket-sized version – small enough to slip into a handbag or jacket – is already in development. The device connects to the WiSP app, which

delivers real-time alerts, safety insights, and educational tools.

Kaplan calls it a platform, not just a product. “Our vision goes beyond drink spiking detection. We want to empower people to make safer choices and take control of their wellness,” he said.

The urgency behind WiSP’s first use case is obvious. In the United States, drug spiking is a recurring threat in nightlife and college Greek life communities. During a pilot program at several universities, students welcomed the technology.

“For the last several weeks, we’ve brought our WiSP with us everywhere,” said Elise Purcell, an undergraduate at Washington University in St. Louis. “It became part of our normal night out. Once people noticed it, they wanted to learn more. Everyone felt safer knowing it was there.”

More than 80 percent of participants said the device improved their sense of safety – proof that WiSP is addressing a very real problem.

WiSP’s founders say drink spiking is only the beginning. The company is already working on add-ons for measuring alcohol and sugar content, and has longer-term plans to detect fentanyl, allergens and bacteria such as E. coli.

“WiSP is a platform for actionable wellness,” Kaplan explained. “It’s not just



WiSP CEO and co-founder Liat Kaplan. (Courtesy photo sent via JNS)

about avoiding danger; it’s about understanding what you put in your body, tracking trends and reaching personal goals.” Future features could help users monitor nutrition, manage workout regimens and receive personalized wellness insights.

WiSP’s go-to-market strategy is ambitious: partnerships with fraternities and sororities, collaborations with city governments and integration into public-safety initiatives. Kaplan confirmed that the company is in discussions with U.S. senators and municipal leaders to bring WiSP into broader safety campaigns.

The first international pilot took place in Nottingham, England, where the city incorporated WiSP into its nightlife safety program. “As a city committed to creating a vibrant and welcoming nightlife, Nottingham is always exploring innovative ways to enhance the experience for everyone,” said Rich Lane, head of Operations and Business Crime. “Partnering with WiSP reflects our commitment to confidence and well-being. By embracing solutions like WiSP, we empower individuals to take control of their safety and reinforce Nottingham’s status as a modern, inclusive city.”

For investors, WiSP represents both a social good and a commercial opportunity. “Investing in a start-up is always a nuanced



WiSP has developed a small, reusable device paired with an app that instantly scans drinks for drugs and alcohol content. (Courtesy photo sent via JNS)

process,” said venture capitalist Rich Moran, an early backer. “I have full confidence in WiSP as a force in tech and nightlife safety. Drink spiking is just the beginning. WiSP is poised to become a category leader that empowers individuals and changes how we think about personal safety.”

Commercial release is expected in 2026, with WiSP positioning itself at the intersection of safety, science and lifestyle. With growing awareness of personal security, particularly among students and young adults, the timing may be ideal. If successful, WiSP won’t just track users’ steps or heartbeats. It could mark the start of a new frontier, where technology actively protects them from the hidden dangers in what they consume.

# Israel’s swifts take three different routes to Africa

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – A new University of Haifa study published in the Journal of Ornithology has documented, for the first time, the full migration routes of Common Swifts, Pallid Swifts and Alpine Swifts that nest in Israel – showing that the seemingly similar species followed dramatically different paths, schedules and distances on their journeys to Africa.

The research team, led by Professor Nir Sapir, along with doctoral students Itai Bloch and Daniel Bloch, and Dr. Christoph Meier of the Swiss Ornithological Institute, tracked the birds by using miniature light-level geolocators attached during the 2017–2020 nesting seasons in Ramat Gan, Mount Sodom and Haifa.

When the birds returned a year later, the devices revealed the full annual migration

cycle of 10 Common Swifts, 10 Pallid Swifts and five Alpine Swifts.

Swifts, which spend nearly their entire lives in the air – eating, sleeping and even mating while flying – have long intrigued scientists. While some European routes were previously mapped, migration from the eastern Mediterranean remained largely unknown. They typically stay in Israel for about 100 days, arriving in February and leaving in early August, after their nestlings have fledged, to return to Africa.

The study found that Common Swifts traveled the farthest – about 15,000 kilometers per year – and spent around 60 percent of the year in sub-Saharan Africa.

Pallid Swifts migrated intermediate distances of roughly 10,000 kilometers and showed a previously undocumented



A swift flies over Mount Hermon in Israel. (Photo by Amir Ben Dov)

pattern: crossing the Sahel from west to east in winter and lingering up to two months along the Red Sea during spring migration.

Alpine Swifts migrated the least, only about 5,700 kilometers annually, spending about 73 percent of the year in Israel and wintering in a limited region

of the Nile Valley.

The findings revealed notable differences in migration speed and timing. Common Swifts returned more quickly in spring, Pallid Swifts slowed down due to their Red Sea stopover, and Alpine Swifts maintained a direct and consistent route without long breaks.

“These diverse patterns underscore the remarkable ecological flexibility and unique adaptations of each species to its environment and climatic conditions,” the researchers concluded.

“They also show how environmental changes may affect each species differently. The ability to track individual birds across their full annual cycle provides critical insight into the links between environmental conditions, climate and bird migration,” they added.

# Israeli-led discovery redefines how dinosaurs took flight

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – New research is challenging long-held assumptions about how flight evolved in dinosaurs and birds, according to a study published recently in Communications Biology. Yosef Kiat of Tel Aviv University’s School of Zoology and the

Steinhardt Museum of Natural History led an international team that examined 160-million-year-old fossils and found that some feathered dinosaurs had lost the ability to fly – suggesting the path to flight was more complex than scientists believed.

The research focused on nine excep-

tionally preserved fossils of Anchiornis, a feathered dinosaur species from eastern China. The fossils showed white wing feathers with black tips, details that proved crucial to the discovery. Kiat used his expertise in modern bird feather patterns to analyze the specimens and identified irregular molting, similar to that seen in flightless birds such as ostriches and penguins.

“Feather molting seems like a small technical detail – but when examined in fossils, it can change everything we thought about the origins of flight,” said Kiat.

Birds that fly molt gradually to maintain wing symmetry, while flightless birds molt irregularly. By tracking new feather growth and deviations in the black spot pattern,

researchers concluded Anchiornis molted irregularly, meaning it could not fly.

The discovery adds Anchiornis to a growing list of feathered but flightless dinosaurs, showing that some species may have developed early flight abilities and later lost them as conditions changed.

“This is a rare and especially exciting finding,” said Kiat. “The preserved coloration of the feathers gave us a unique opportunity to identify a functional trait of these ancient creatures, not only their skeletal structure.”

The study, conducted with scientists from China and the United States, highlights the complexity and diversity of wing evolution among dinosaurs and early birds.

## Assyrian. . . . . Continued from page 11

“The discovery of the Assyrian inscription from the First Temple period in the very heart of Jerusalem is impressive evidence of the city’s status as the capital of the Kingdom of Judah some 2,700 years ago, and of the depth of its ties with the Assyrian Empire

just as described in the Bible,” said Israeli Heritage Minister Rabbi Amichai Eliyahu. “This rare discovery illustrates, once again, our deep roots in Jerusalem, which is the spiritual and national center of the Jewish people.”

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At right: An Anchiornis fossil dating back 160 million years (Photo courtesy of Tel Aviv University)

