

Federation to hold Feb. 24 community hockey event

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will sponsor a community hockey event at a Binghamton Black Bears game at the Visions Veter-



ans Memorial Arena, 1 Stuart St., Binghamton, on Saturday, February 24, at 7 pm. Tickets are at the discounted rate of \$10 per person with the Federation paying the rest of the fee. Tickets must

be purchased by Wednesday, February 14. Visit www.jfgb.org to make a reservation. Contact Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation, at 607-724-2332 for any seating requests, such as sitting with

another person(s).

"I hope the community will come out for the Black Bears game," said Hubal. "Hockey games are fast paced and a great way to spend a winter evening."

Federation to offer program by David Rittberg on "Conversations about the Day After"

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold the Zoom event "Conversations about the Day After" with David Rittberg, senior director at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, on Wednesday, January 31, at 7 pm. Rittberg will discuss life after the October 7 attack on Israel. He will speak about what is happening in southern Israel and how the war will affect Jewish communities and philanthropy in the United States. To register for the event, visit www.jfgb.org.

Rittberg noted why he feels it's important to share information about his recent trip to Israel. "Having the opportunity to travel to Israel during this time was an incredible privilege that carries with it a responsibility to share what I learned, saw and felt," he said in an e-mail interview. "In a world of polarization, binary thinking, misinformation and disinformation, first-hand accounts are powerful and important."

He added that this especially important for Jews living in the U.S. because "for many, our post-October 7 world has highlighted a powerful reality that we are all interconnected and reliant on one another."

His most recent trip was "'a fact-finding' and 'bearing witness' trip for Jewish foundation professionals," he noted. "Part of the responsibility of leading Jewish philanthropies is to understand what's happening to the Jewish people, in Israel and in the Diaspora. We were focused on learning that can affect our work in the U.S. and in Israel, in the near and long-term."

The purpose of the trip was to learn as much as possible about what had happened. "We explored so many overlapping and competing themes from the incredible spirit of the



David Rittberg
(Photo courtesy of Schusterman Family Philanthropies)



Israeli people and society, to the depths of horror and trauma on October 7," Rittberg said. "We learned about the emerging plans for the 'day after' and explored what it means to 'bear witness.' We met with a diversity of Israelis from a range of communities, many of whom are evacuees, survivors, soldiers, political and thought leaders. We visited the *kibbutzim* in the south, evacuee communities in the Dead Sea, a base in the Western Negev, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Rahat and more. We wanted to understand how broad swaths of Israelis were experiencing and coping with this moment."

Rittberg's trip is just one part of what the Schusterman Family Philanthropies does for the Jewish community. He noted that the organization "has worked in the Jewish

community for over three decades aiming to empower young adults to connect with Jewish values, deepen their understanding of Israel and contribute to a better world."

As for Rittberg personally, his work with Schusterman is an extension of an earlier part of this life. "I trace so much of my passion for working in the Jewish community and with Israel to my upbringing and experiences in Binghamton, and I am excited and honored to engage with the community later this month!" he added.

"David's father, Howard Rittberg, texted me to let me know that his son was touring Israel and the *kibbutzim* affected by the war," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "I wanted to know more about what he was learning and what his perspective is on the future of both Israel and Jews in the United States. I also think it's important for us to keep talking about what's happening in Israel. Join us for what is sure to be a fascinating and informative program."

JLI course "Advice for Life" to begin Jan. 29

Registration is currently being accepted for the Jewish Learning Institute's course "Advice for Life; The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Guidance for Leading a More Purposeful Life," which will run on six consecutive Mondays at 7 pm, beginning January 29. The class will be held in person at the Chabad Center and on Zoom. The

course fee, which includes the textbook, is \$79 per person, or \$150 per couple. For registration and additional information about the course, contact Ruth Shea at 607-797-0015 or rshea@chabadofbinghamton.com, or visit www.myJLI.com.

"Through thousands of typewritten letters, in person meetings and hundreds

of thousands of spoken public discourses, referred to as *farbrengens*, the Rebbe interacted with individuals of all walks of life, both from within and outside the Jewish community on matters of work, family, health, and well-being," said organizers of the course. "The course is a multi-media journey exploring the Rebbe's audacious ideas and practical

insights on matters related to work, family, health, adversity and personal growth."

"This is not your typical self-help course," warned Rivkah Slonim, course instructor. "The Rebbe had a way of upending convention and creating completely new paradigms. We are in for a real treat!"

Film Fest to hold virtual showing of "Our Almost Completely True Story" in February

By Reporter staff

The Greater Binghamton Jewish Film Fest will hold a virtual showing of "Our Almost Completely True Story" in February. The film is a romantic comedy of "love discovered in the golden years." A discussion of the film will be moderated by Richard Mattson on Sunday, February 4, at 6 pm. Mattson is an associate professor and director of the undergraduate program in psychology at Binghamton University. The link to the film will be sent to those who register by 5 pm on Thursday, February 1. People can register for the film and the discussion by visiting www.jfgb.org/film-fest. Donations are appreciated; the suggested donation is \$10.

"Our Almost Completely True Story" tells a fictional version of the real-life



Mariette Hartley and Morgan Fairchild in "Our Almost Completely True Story." (Photo courtesy of Silent Crow Arts)

romance of actress Mariette Hartley and voice actor Jerry Sroka; both star in the

tival and the winner of the Outstanding Achievement Award at the Indie Fest

film. It offers "over-the-top bits about the perils of online dating, wistful remembrances of the old days of Hollywood and awkward run-ins with exes." The film was the winner of the Audience Award, Best Feature Comedy, at the Sedona International Film Festival and the winner of the Outstanding Achievement Award at the Indie Fest

Film Awards.

Sammie Purcell, Reporter Newspapers, called it "a delightfully sincere romantic comedy about the trials and tribulations of love, dating, and romance past middle age." Herbert Paine, Broadway World, wrote, "Here's a film wrapped in moments of genuine hilarity – repartee, one-liners, and situations that shine and resonate with comic brilliance" and noted that it is "a brilliantly paced and cleverly written account of love discovered in the golden years [and] is in itself a pure work of gold."

"Our Almost Completely True Story" is a charming film," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, which sponsors the Film Fest. "This is the perfect movie for a cold winter night."

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Opinion

The Israel-Hamas War first-hand: personal accounts, part I

By Bill Simons

Life and death are more than an aggregation of statistics, particularly so in wartime. On both sides of the Israel-Hamas War, individual stories demand remembrance. No book, let alone a newspaper column, can capture the full canvas of lives impacted by war. With no claim to comprehensiveness or typicality, this entry attempts to do justice to Jewish lives impacted by the Israel-Hamas War.

From its inception on October 7, the war transformed the life of 48-year-old Chen Goldstein-Almog, a former social worker. In the Hamas attack on Kibbutz Kfar Aza, terrorists took Chen and her daughter Agam, 17, and sons Gal, 11, and Tal, 9, hostage. Initially unaccounted for, the dead bodies of Chen’s husband, Nadav, 48, a business executive and injured triathlon athlete, and eldest child, daughter Yam, 20, an off-duty Israel Defense Force sergeant, were subsequently found, pierced by bullets.

In the November 26 hostage exchange, Chen and her three surviving children were released. Hamas took more than 240 captives, and each hostage experience was different. Despite the brutality of the circumstances, Chen observed elements of humanity during her seven-week captivity. One captor expressed regret at the killings of her husband and daughter. At times, Chen and her children were allowed to participate in meal preparation. On occasion, guards engaged Chen in substantive conversations. When a guard warned her not to return to southern Israel because Hamas would return, according to *The New York Times*, Chen retorted, “Next time you come, don’t throw a grenade. Just knock on the door.” In a post-captivity photo, Chen appears numbed, pained and somewhere else in mind.

For Gal Abdush, 34, there was no returning to her home

in Kiryat Ekron, a small town in Central Israel. Before heading to the Supernova Sukkot Gathering (Nova), a music festival on the outskirts of Kibbutz Reim, with her husband Nagi, an ebullient Abdush swigged vodka cut with an energy drink. The couple entrusted their two young children to the care of Gal’s parents. Along with *kibbutzim*, towns and military outposts, the Nova rave was one of the targets of Hamas terrorists on October 7. More than 360 Israelis were slaughtered at Nova, and over 40 were taken hostage. Gal and Nagi numbered among the dead. Repeatedly raped and tortured before her murder, Gal’s body was desecrated in death: her face nearly incinerated, her legs splayed and her genitalia exposed.

Amichai Yisrael Yehoshua Oster, 24, a dual citizen of the U.S. and Israel, died a hero. Attired in his IDF uniform for a family photo, a handsome, black-haired, confident Amichai, his beard closely cropped, smiles at us. Born in the U.S., his parents, Howard, a physician, and Marcy, a journalist, moved the family from Cleveland to Israel when Amichai was a year old. Howard and Marcy believed *aliyah* would place their children in the main currents of Jewish life. The family settled in Karnei Shomron, a West Bank community. Coming of age, Amichai volunteered to work with the disabled. After finishing his mandatory IDF stint, Amichai decided upon another type of adventure, traveling throughout Asia and the U.S. Attending Sabbath services at Chabad in Salt Lake City on October 7, Amichai learned of Hamas’ terrorist attack. A reservist, his draft notice quickly followed. Amichai returned to the IDF, serving in the Fifth Brigade’s 7020th Battalion. In Northern Gaza on New Year’s Day 2024, he was killed in battle by an explosive device. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reports

an exchange between Amichai and his mother near the end of his life. Marcy, a former JTA editor and reporter, offered him the following apologia: “I told... (Amichai) that I felt responsible for the fact that he was fighting in a war, and he didn’t make the decision to come on *aliyah* – that we (his parents) made it for him.” Amichai responded, “[W]hat makes you think that if you never made *aliyah* that I would not have come here to fight for our country?”

David Leichman left the U.S. to make *aliyah*. In Kibbutz Gezer, he built housing and other infrastructure, grew crops, served in the IDF, raised three children with his wife Rabbi Miri Gold, promoted baseball, imparted pluralistic Jewish education as Pinat Shorashim’s executive director and established a budding ice cream empire. Carrying press credentials, I covered the Israel Baseball League in 2007, and David proved a generous and knowledge resource, introducing me to his then 17-year-old son Alon, the youngest player in the Israel Baseball League, and hosted an overnight visit to Gezer. Upon request, David provided the following account of Leichman family life since October 7: “[W]e were at a family wedding in the U.S. with our three adult children when we first learned the news. We returned home as soon as we could get flights and our older son joined his unit. He has been in the reserves ever since with a few brief visits home. Fortunately, Alon is off-season from his job as assistant pitching coach for the Cincinnati Reds, and he came home as soon as he could get a flight. He has been helping in different ways, including initiatives from the Israel Olympic Committee (he was on the Team Israel baseball team in the Tokyo Olympics).

“Our daughter-in-law went to the U.S. with her two See “Personal” on page 8

In My Own Words

For the good of the nation or the individual?

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

I’d already read and reviewed one non-fiction work about the Kindertransport – when more than 10,000 Jewish and non-Jewish minors were able to escape from areas controlled by Nazi Germany and receive shelter in England between November 1938 and September 1939* – so I paused for a moment before deciding whether I wanted to read another book on the same topic. What made me decide to ask for a copy of “The Kindertransport: What Really Happened” by Andra Hammel (Polity) is not just that it offers an easy-to-read discussion of the Kindertransport, which clearly shows how it worked, but discusses how myths about historical events can affect the decisions we make today. The discussion of historical myths is why I decided to write about the book in my page two column, rather than a book review. The questions it raises about the good of the nation vs. the good of the individual are – as the author notes at the end of the book – still important today.

Hammel explores the myth of the Kindertransport – a myth that says the British government did a wonderful thing by allowing these children to immigrate and provided for all their needs. While not denigrating what the government did (because its policies did save many innocent lives), the reality of the situation was not as simple as the myth suggests. First, the British government did *not* pay for the program: funds were raised from organizations and individuals. There was no government subsidy. Families were *not* accepted: the government was not interested in adults, but rather children who could be molded into acceptable British citizens. Plus, the children were generally expected to leave school quickly and take jobs that would allow them to pay their own way. The children’s applications were carefully reviewed and those with physical, developmental or psychological problems were not accepted.

Some children did well and Hammel tells of their lives during and after the war. Others never recovered from the

experience: their stories – including one person who died by suicide – were more difficult to read. Most parents and children did not expect the separation to be permanent. However, many parents died in the Holocaust. Those who did survive faced difficulties caused by a variety of reasons – language and cultural barriers, to name just two – especially with children who immigrated so young they were unable to remember their parents or the language they once spoke.

The part of the work that I continue to ponder – and which is still relevant today – is how we balance the needs of society vs. the needs of individual refugees. For example, before World War II, the British government worried about immigrants flooding the country and taking much needed jobs from British citizens. It wanted to know who benefitted from the money that was being spent. And, once the war began, there were worries about whether the older immigrants (including teenagers) could be trusted, since pretending to be anti-Nazi was an excellent way for a spy to enter the country. The needs of individual children were also often not considered during Kindertransport placements. Hammel explores the different circumstance in which the children found themselves – from individual families to larger groups – but, as one might expect, the situations ranged from satisfactory to unsatisfactory, with some children being abused by those they lived with and other host families coming to consider the children as true family.

The reason behind Hammel’s discussion is the large number of refugees from the Middle East who are attempting to find refuge in Britain and European countries. What matters most: the humanitarian needs of those fleeing their homelands or the needs of the country they seek to enter? The author notes that many more children applied to be part of the Kindertransport than were accepted. (There is

no way of knowing, but one may presume that many of those not accepted died during the war.) Governments and citizens need to decide what should be the first consideration: making certain that letting in immigrants does not negatively affect the country (for example, by making certain they have sponsors who will take responsibility for their upkeep), or saving as many lives as possible and worrying about the other questions – funding, housing, schooling, etc. – later?

The debate in recent years in the United States has been a volatile one and there seems to be little agreement about the best policy. As a Jew who sees how many lives could have been saved if nations had opened their doors to Jewish immigration before World War II, it’s hard to not to say, “Open them all!” Yet, I also understand that nations have a right to decide who enters their borders. It also breaks my heart to think that we can’t save everyone, but I do know that having open borders will not solve the real problem: what is happening in the refugees’ countries of origin. However, Judaism not only asks us to welcome the stranger numerous times in the biblical text, but the Talmud tells us we must continue a task, even if we can’t finish it.

As for “The Kindertransport,” Hammel does an excellent job showing the range of experiences – the good and the bad. The bottom line is that as imperfect as the program was, it did save lives and we should be grateful for that. But accepting the myth of its being the perfect humanitarian effort is not helpful because it prevents us from learning how we can do better in the future.

*To read The Reporter’s review of “The Kindertransport: Contesting Memory” by Jennifer Craig-Norton, visit www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-kindertransport-fiction-and-fact-by-rabbi-rachel-esserman?entry=342456.



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TC Sisterhood to hold annual book review on Jan. 28

Rabbi Rachel Esserman will discuss three books at the annual Temple Concord Sisterhood book talk on Sunday, January 28, at 11 am, at Temple Concord, 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton. This will be an in-person only event and will be held in the Kilmer Mansion. The snow date is Sunday, February 4. The community is invited to attend. Brunch will be served at no cost to Sisterhood members.

The books to be reviewed are "Kunstlers in Paradise" by Cathleen Schine, "Abomination" by Ashley Goldberg and "Loving Our Own Bones: Disability Wisdom and the Spiritual Subversiveness of Knowing Ourselves Whole" by Julia Watts Belser.

"I am once again looking forward to reading these books for what is one of my favorite events of the year," said Esserman. "It's always a pleasure to read and discuss interesting books and no better place to do this than with Sisterhood members."

"Kunstlers in Paradise" is about 93-year-old Mamie Kunstler, who escaped Vienna in 1939 when she was 11. Her family made its way to Los Angeles, where they joined a colony of distinguished Jewish musicians, writers and intellectuals also escaping Hitler. In 2020, Mamie is joined by her 20-something grandson, Julian, who wants to make good in Hollywood, but the pandemic shut down



Rabbi Rachel Esserman

the world. Mamie tells Julian of her early years and the famous people she knew, giving him a view of a very different world.

"Abomination," winner of the Debut Fiction Prize at the 72nd National Jewish Book Awards, is a novel that tells the story of two friends whose lives are changed by a scandal at their ultra-Orthodox day school. The two men go in very different directions, but are forced to look at their lives when they meet again.

In "Loving Our Own Bones: Disability Wisdom and the Spiritual Subversiveness of Knowing Ourselves Whole," Belser offers insights from biblical stories through the eyes of disabled, feminist, Black and queer thinkers.

Esserman, the executive editor and book reviewer for The Reporter Group, won three Syracuse Press Club awards and one Rockower award from the American Jewish Press Association in 2022. The previous year, she won two Syracuse Press Club awards and two Rockowers.

In addition to her work at *The Reporter*, she serves as the Jewish chaplain for 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. She also has had a book of poetry, "I Stand By The River," published by Keshet Press of Temple Concord. A Reconstructionist

rabbi who says her first love is teaching, she sees her position at *The Reporter* as an opportunity to educate the public about Judaism.

Esserman 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. She was also awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree from RRA for 25 years of service.

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to **Celia Klin** on the death of her mother,

Paulette Klin

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to the family of **Dr. Steven Rappaport**

Jonathan Grier to speak at BD Sisterhood Zoom meeting

The Sisterhood of Beth David Synagogue will host a Zoom presentation by Jonathan Grier on Wednesday, February 14, at 1 pm. Grier, who was born and raised in Binghamton, will speak about cybersecurity, focusing on how to spot the red flags of phishing and avoid them. Attendees will learn tips for securing data and their identity while browsing the internet, checking e-mails or conducting other activities online.

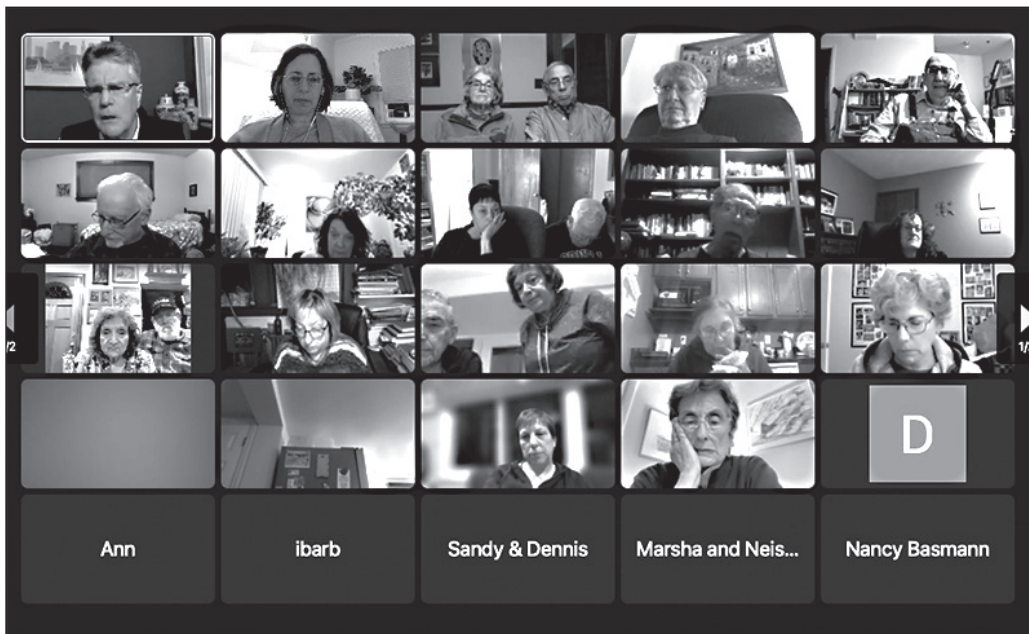
The Sisterhood meeting is open to all in the community. The Zoom link will be available to anyone on the Beth David Sisterhood e-mail list or who receives the weekly bulletins from Rabbi Zev Silber. Anyone who does not receive these e-mails should contact the Beth David Synagogue office at 607-7221793 or bethdavid@stny.rr.com. Messages are typically retrieved on Tuesdays during office hours.

Grier is a nationally recognized expert in cybersecurity, digital forensics and advanced technology. He is the founder and CEO of Grier Forensics, LLC, which produces advanced cyber technology for national security. Grier Forensics' technology is used by the United States Air Force,


the United States Marine Corps and other organizations to defend their data and networks. Grier has led R&D efforts for the U.S. Air Force Research Laboratory, the Department of Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA), the Department of Justice, MIT Lincoln Laboratory, the U.S. Marine Corps System Command and private clients. He has also provided training for the National Incident Response Team of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the Department of Defense Cyber Crime Center (DC3) and others.

He is the author or co-author of more than 12 papers on computer security and forensics, has seven patents awarded or pending, and is a speaker at conferences such as Black Hat and RSA. Grier has been named a Yeshiva University Distinguished Scholar and has lectured on the intersection of *halachah* with computer science and physics. He is a member of the QL+ Board of Directors and the Cybersecurity Advisory Board of Stillman College. SC Magazine has noted that Grier's work has "attracted national attention" and called Grier one "of the nation's leading experts on insider threats."

Film fest discussion held virtually



At left: More than 50 people signed up to view the Jewish Film Fest of Greater Binghamton film "The Narrow Bridge." More than 25 computers logged into the virtual discussion led by Dr. Terence M. Keane, Ph.D., director of the Behavioral Science Division of the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, on January 7. Shown are some of those who attended the discussion.

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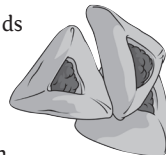


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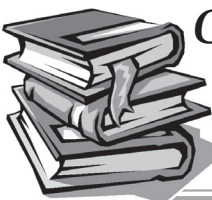


Jewish Family Service will once again be collecting funds to fulfill the Purim mitzvah of *matanot l'evyonim* (gifts for the poor). These donations will be distributed to more than 16 local Jewish families who are experiencing extreme financial difficulties. In order to assure a timely distribution of these gifts, please be sure your contribution reaches our offices by February 29, 2024.

Thank you for your support of your neighbors in need. Please mail or bring your donation to Jewish Family Service, 500 Clubhouse Road, Vestal, NY 13850. Contact Rose Shea, JFS Director, at 724-2332, ext. 339, with any questions.



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Off the Shelf

A Jewish impressionist painter

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

Something left me puzzled as I read the first chapters of “Camille Pissarro: The Audacity of Impressionism” by Anka Muhlstein (Other Press). The biography tells the story of Pissarro’s life in clear, easy-to-read prose and focuses on his relationship with his family and his work. That’s when it came to me: unlike most of the recent biographical works I’ve read, the focus is on the subject’s life. While the others did offer basic biographical details, their main focus was an analysis of the person’s work as it related to Judaism and Jewish culture.

Pissarro was born in the Caribbean in 1830 to two Jewish parents, but he received no formal Jewish education due to the scandal of his parent’s marriage. A complicated family history caused the problem: First, Isaac Petit married Esther Manzana Pomie. When Esther died, Isaac married her sister, Rachel. When Rachel was pregnant with her fourth child, Isaac died and the family sent Frederic Pissarro, Isaac’s nephew, to help with the family business. However, the family was not pleased when Frederic married his aunt (even though she was only his aunt by marriage). In fact, the synagogue in St. Thomas refused at first to recognize their marriage, leaving them alienated from the community.

Although the synagogue finally accepted their marriage, their four sons never attended the local Jewish school. While Camille professed to being an atheist, Muhlstein

makes it clear that the artist was well aware of his outsider status when he moved to France, both as someone born in the Caribbean and as a Jew. His Jewish heritage, though, had no influence on his painting. His only later connection to Judaism was his belief that Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jewish army officer accused of treason, had been framed and was not guilty.

The biography’s main focus is on Pissarro’s effort to become a painter. His parents had expected him to continue working for the family business, especially since his paintings rarely sold during the early years of his career. Although he was very focused on his work, Pissarro was a family man who gave financial support to his children, even when they were no longer living in his house, and a firm friend to the group of painters who later became known as the impressionists. While Muhlstein writes of Pissarro’s interest in light and color, that discussion takes place in the context of his developing relationships with other impressionists. Throughout the work, the author discusses the friendships that grew among these men and women, and how they supported each other, including painting together and sometimes painting each other.

Pissarro’s family life was not always easy, although Muhlstein notes that Pissarro was usually able to keep those problems from affecting his work. The artist was

close enough to his birth family that he wanted his mother’s permission to marry; this was even after he and his future wife, Julie, were living together and had numerous children. The two women could not bear to be in each other’s presence. Julie, who had been a servant in his mother’s household when Pissarro met her and she became pregnant, had received little education and disagreed with her husband about their children’s occupations. Pissarro encouraged all his children to become artists (and many were successful in their endeavors) and was willing to help them financially as they focused on their craft. Julie, on the other hand, felt the children should take paid work as soon as they were able and contribute to the family finances.

Pissarro’s desire to paint seemed to gave him strength, even as he aged and began to have health problems. The artist seemed a good soul: even when his friends espoused views with which he disagreed (including the Dreyfus affair) and made antisemitic statements, he did not break with them. Although he did at times take issue with the practices of Paul Durand-Ruel, the art dealer who bought and sold most of his work, he never completely broke with him.

Those looking to find a Jewish influence on impressionism will not find it here. However, anyone interested in the impressionist movement, and in Pissarro in particular, should find much of interest in Muhlstein’s biography of the artist.



Off the Shelf

The “why” of the Bible

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

People ask a variety of questions about the biblical text. Some focus on the stories, offering commentaries meant to teach religious lessons. Others look at the book from a scholarly point of view. They want to know who wrote particular sections or how the scribes brought together the disparate parts. Readers who love studying the biblical text often welcome these different approaches because they offer lessons that enhance the reading of the text, in addition to presenting different ways to think about Jewish history. Those interested in the history of the Bible should

be intrigued by Jacob L. Wright’s fascinating “Why the Bible Began: An Alternative History of Scripture and Its Origins” (Cambridge University Press). Wright, a professor of Hebrew Bible at Emory University, believes the Bible was not originally a religious document, but rather one that sought to bring together two defeated kingdoms – those of Israel and Judah – as a people with a common past, creating and molding their stories into a shared history of what were once two separate nations.

It’s not easy to summarize the more than 470 pages of text in “Why the Bible Began” because there is so much interesting material. The question that underlies Wright’s study is why the biblical text not only survived over the centuries when the writings of other cultures of ancient times disappeared, but how it remains relevant to numerous communities in contemporary times. He sees the text as focusing on defeat and conquest, which makes it different from other ancient texts, many of which we only know about through archeological discoveries. Those texts focus on the success of the leader of the country, particularly on how the leader vanquished neighboring cities or kingdoms. Wright also notes how few texts have been found that focus on ancient religious practices: those legends were passed down verbally, but even the few found don’t offer the specifics of religious practices the way the Bible does.

According to Wright, the authors of the works that later were gathered together as the Bible were professional scribes. They weren’t looking for their names to be known, but, rather, to transform their national narrative at a time their nation state no longer existed. They sought to have former subjects of their kingdom see themselves as a people, rather than as citizens of a particular country. But this development slowly occurred over time. The northern Kingdom of Israel was first destroyed and many of its scribes fled to the southern Kingdom of Judea. Their writings form many of the early sections of the Bible, in addition to those that condemn the institution of kingship. When the Kingdom of Judah was destroyed, the documents of the

scribes from both kingdoms became combined. However, in their writings, the southern scribes retained the idea that the kingdom of David was blessed and would return someday. Wright sees both these ideas – the condemnation of having any king other than God and the holiness of the Davidic dynasty – presented in the Bible as we know it.

The purpose of the Bible was to create a history for two disparate groups by acting as if they had a common ancestor, connecting Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as family, rather than seeing their stories as those of three unrelated people, as Wright believes they originally were. It portrayed this group of people as having existed before there were nations ruled by kings – meaning that they could also continue to exist when no kingdoms remained. This made their connection portable: they did not need to all live in the same place in order to remain part of this extended family.

According to Wright, while this people could no longer celebrate space (as in a physical kingdom), they could celebrate time, making Shabbat a key to their peoplehood. Wright believes that Shabbat was originally only celebrated once a month on the full moon. At that time, it was linked to the seasons and the harvest. However, after the defeat of Judah, it was reinvented as a weekly day of rest connected to the creation story: this moved its origin back in time and connected it to God’s work. Of greatest importance is that Shabbat was also portable: it could be observed anywhere. Peoplehood now focused on personal actions, for example, ritual practice and behavior, rather than on territory or political and military actions.

Wright also analyzes many of the stories found in the biblical text. In addition to showing how the patriarchs were not related, he writes of how many of the stories originally made no mention of God: the text makes sense without the religious context. However, offering a family history with a God who cares about them might have helped those who felt lost without citizenship in a kingdom. This common history – this family connection – created a sense of belonging. It was a lack of this connection that caused most ancient nations to disappear; once they were defeated, their national story – of conquering kings who were blessed by their gods – was no longer relevant to their lives. The tales of the Bible, however, focused on loss and defeat. This narrative managed to keep the group alive and connected through the centuries.

The author also discusses the Writings section of the Bible. Of particular interest are his thoughts on the book of Esther, which shows the success of the biblical endeavor. The evil Haman sees the Jews not as citizens of another kingdom, but as a people with their own specific customs (although what those customs are is never made clear in the book) who live in Shushan. These different customs are why they stand out and capture Haman’s attention. For Wright, Esther serves as the archetype of a new Jewish identity: she is the cunning Jew who uses her wits, rather than force, to save her people.

“Why the Bible Began” is an impressive and important work. Readers don’t have to agree with all of Wright’s ideas in order to find his work intriguing and challenging. The prose is easy for the non-scholar to read, although they may be overwhelmed at times by the sheer amount of material and theories offered. However, anyone interested in the history of the Bible will find themselves eagerly turning its pages.

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THE REPORTER
Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

NEWS IN BRIEF

From JNS.org

Rutgers reinstates Students for Justice in Palestine chapter, but on probation

The Rutgers University chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine has regained its status as a sanctioned campus group, though received punishment for what the school described as “protesting in nonpublic forums, causing disruption to classes and university functioning, which are violations of university policy.” One of many chapters that have

led pro-Hamas demonstrations across the country, it received an interim suspension due to multiple conduct complaints, which is a standard procedure at Rutgers. University spokesperson Megan Schumann Florance announced the findings of a review of SJP’s activities. “The conduct case involving the Students for Justice in Palestine chapter at Rutgers-New Brunswick has been resolved, and the interim suspension of organizational activity is over,” she said, noting that the group would receive a year’s probation and educational sanctions. Protest actions that led to the interim suspension included unapproved protests at the business school and library.

Bar & Bat Mitzvah Planning Guide

Mazel tov to these 2024 b’nai mitzvah

B’nai mitzvah	Parents	Date	Synagogue
Nora Golden	Sherry Golden and Ian Golden	April 13	Congregation Tikkun v’Or
Eli Warshof	Diana Baker and Jason Warshof	June 1	Congregation Tikkun v’Or
Aviya Schwartz	Kathy Lacson and Peter Schwartz	June 8	Congregation Tikkun v’Or
Gefen Centeno-Pearlman	Galit Pearlman and Talaya Centeno	June 29	Congregation Tikkun v’Or
Eli Green	Brett and Wendy Green	July 20	Temple Israel
Shira Green	Brett and Wendy Green	July 20	Temple Israel

Mazel tov to the 2023 b’nai mitzvah



Lee Forman
October 7, 2023
Temple Concord
Abbi and Brett Foreman
(Photo by Cathy Doane)



Shai Yarkoni
September 7, 2023
Temple Israel
Alon and Joy Yarkoni
(Photo courtesy of the Yarkoni family)



Thea Yarkoni
September 7, 2023
Temple Israel
Alon and Joy Yarkoni
(Photo courtesy of the Yarkoni family)



Aviva Kaminsky
June 3, 2023
Temple Israel
Alex and Tara Kaminsky
(Photo by Evan Whitney)



Eleanor Kellman
Beth David Synagogue
Benny and Rivkah
Ayelet Kellman
(Photo by Emily Goodlife)



Shmulik Slonim
October 15, 2023
Chabad Center
Hadasa and Levi
Slonim
(Photo by Ben Glick)

Bar/bat mitzvah planning timetable

- At birth:**
- When the child is born start saving! Only joking. But if you can, it’s not a bad idea to start a “bar/bat mitzvah club” savings account. If you don’t use it, put it toward college.
- 1-3 years ahead:**
- ✧ Set bar/bat mitzvah date
 - ✧ Set a budget
 - ✧ Reserve synagogue hall for kiddush
 - ✧ Reserve hall for additional receptions
 - ✧ Arrange for caterer/party planner and band/music for occasion (if desired)
 - ✧ Buy a loose-leaf binder with dividers, or start a filing system for keeping business cards, estimates, notes, lists, etc.

NEWS IN BRIEF

From JNS.org

Bar mitzvah boy forgoes party, treats 200 IDF soldiers to dinner

Amichai Jackson, a bar mitzvah boy from the Gush Etzion community of Elazar, decided that in lieu of a party to mark the milestone event his parents should use the money to treat Israeli soldiers to dinner. Amichai was slated to celebrate his bar mitzvah a month after the breakout of Israel’s war with Hamas in Gaza. He was called to the Torah and received his *aliyah*, but decided to push off his party to quieter times. “After deliberating, Amichai decided to do something meaningful for the soldiers. Instead of having a party with family members and friends, the caterers prepared a huge meal, including a hamburger bar with all the trimmings, for 200 very happy soldiers,” said his mother Ilana. Added Amichai: “I felt that it wasn’t appropriate to have a party now. When I saw the soldiers eating and enjoying themselves, that was 1,000 times more meaningful.” Gush Etzion Mayor and Yesha Council Chairman Shlomo Ne’eman said: “Dear Amichai, we were very moved by your decision to give the soldiers a sumptuous and festive meal instead of having your bar mitzvah party. The education you received from your parents exemplifies what it means to be Israeli. It is also a reflection of the patriotism of the next generation of youth growing up here in Gush Etzion.”

- 10-12 months ahead:**
- ✧ Begin bar/bat mitzvah lessons
 - ✧ Begin attending weekly Shabbat services
 - ✧ Arrange for photographer and/or video
 - ✧ Book hotel s and investigate transportation for out-of-town guests
- 6 months ahead:**
- ✧ Plan color scheme and/or theme
 - ✧ Arrange for florist and/or decorations’ coordinator
 - ✧ Make guest list
- 4-5 months ahead:**
- ✧ Order invitations, thank you notes, imprinted napkins and personalized party favors
 - ✧ Shop for clothing and shoes
 - ✧ Purchase tallit, tefillin, etc.
 - ✧ Choose a calligrapher, if desired
- 3 months ahead:**
- ✧ Plan Sunday brunch (if applicable)
 - ✧ Order printed yarmulkas, if desired
- 2 months ahead:**
- ✧ Meet with photographer
 - ✧ Meet with florist and/or decorations’ coordinator
 - ✧ Mail out-of-town invitations
- 6 weeks ahead:**
- ✧ Order tuxedos (if applicable)
 - ✧ Take care of clothing alterations
 - ✧ Order wine for kiddush
 - ✧ Mail in-town invitations
- 4 weeks ahead:**
- ✧ Prepare bar/bat mitzvah speech
 - ✧ Finalize hotel reservations and transportation
 - ✧ Meet with caterer(s)
 - ✧ Make up welcome gifts for out-of-town guests (if desired)
 - ✧ Arrange aliyot
 - ✧ Send honorary gift to synagogue
 - ✧ Meet with rabbi
 - ✧ Make up seating charts for reception
- 2 weeks ahead:**
- ✧ Give final count to caterer
 - ✧ Check with florist and/or decorations’ coordinator
 - ✧ Meet with rabbi
 - ✧ Order bar/bat mitzvah cake, etc. for Friday night oneg

- A few days ahead:**
- ✧ Have bar/bat mitzvah rehearsal and take bima photographs
 - ✧ Xerox copies of speeches, room and table layout, etc. and give them to a friend to hold or drop off at synagogue and reception hall, in case you forget to bring your copies that day.
- Special Day:
- ✧ Prepare to enjoy your simcha!

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Unity and security

CHANA SILBERSTEIN, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ROITMAN CHABAD CENTER AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Parashat Beshalach begins dramatically with the Exodus from Egypt. The Jewish people are led by God’s cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God tells them that Pharaoh will chase after them, but they will prevail. So it is: the Egyptians advance and force them up against the sea, but God splits the sea and they are able to cross safely. The pursuing Egyptians drown as the waters close back on them. Upon witnessing this miracle, the rescued slaves sing and rejoice; however, their joy is short-lived. The Jewish people continue to encounter hardships that require God’s intervention. In Marah, the water is bitter, so they cry out and Moses sweetens the water. Next, when their food supply is depleted, God rains down for them manna from heaven, the sustenance that will follow them during their sojourn in the desert.

Though they have seen so many blessings already, when they next find themselves in need of water, they continue to question and complain, wondering – is God with them or not? This time, Moses brings forth water for them from a rock. Still, they lack confidence about their future. The people of Amalek capitalize on their doubt, attacking from the rear, starting with the stragglers. Immediately, Moses jumps into action, assigning Joshua to lead the people in battle. Throughout the fighting, Moses sits on a rock atop a mountain, watching, his hands uplifted in prayer. But soon his arms tire and the battle starts to go badly. His brother Aaron supports one of his arms and Chur, the son of his sister Miriam, takes the other. When the people see the

hands of Moses uplifted again, they are encouraged, and they forge onward to victory. The *midrash* asks: Was this some sort of charm? Were Moses’ hands responsible for victory? It responds: When the people saw his hands lifted with faith and trust toward the heavens, they felt emboldened and encouraged by his stance, and they found their strength renewed. Yet there is another significance to this image. The Jews at war saw three siblings coming together as one. Though each led with a different approach – Moses, the stern arbiter of law; Miriam, fearless yet practical; Aharon, the soft-spoken peacemaker – they recognized this moment of crisis as a time for supporting one another in the battle for national survival. See “Unity” on page 7

Congregational Notes

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: titammy@stny.twcabc.com
Website: 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 (masks are required for unvaccinated participants).

On Saturday, January 27, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person (masks are required for unvaccinated participants). The Torah portion is Exodus 13:17-17:16 and the haftarah is Judges 4:4-5:31. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 6 pm.

On Saturday, February 3, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person (masks are required for unvaccinated participants). The Torah portion is Exodus 18:1-20:22 and the haftarah is Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 6:15 pm.

There will be an Executive Board meeting on Tuesday, February 6, at 7 pm. “Pray-Eat-Learn with Rabbi Friedman” will take place on Wednesday, February 7, at 8:30 am.

Penn-York Jewish Community

President-Treasurer-Secretary: Harvey Chernosky, 570-265-3869
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 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
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.

Temple Brith Sholom

Affiliation: Unaffiliated
Address: P.O. Box 572, 117 Madison St., Cortland, NY 13045
Phone: 607-756-7181
President: Nick Martelli
Cemetery Committee: 315-696-5744
Website: templebrithsholomcortland.org
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Temple-Brith-Sholom-114006981962930/
Service leaders: Lay leadership
Shabbat services: Either Friday evening at 7:30 pm or Saturday at 10 am from Rosh Hashanah to Shavuot. Holiday services are also held. 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,” while the Saturday morning siddur is “Gates of Prayer.” The community extends a warm welcome to the Jewish student population of SUNY Cortland, as well as the residents of local adult residences. Services and programs are held by Zoom on the first and second Fridays of the month.

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.

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
Rabbi’s e-mail: rabbisilber@stny.rr.com
Website: www.bethdavid.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/bethdavidbinghamton
Classes: Rabbi Zev Silber will hold his weekly Talmud class every Tuesday evening after services.

Rohr Chabad Center

Affiliation: Chabad-Lubavitch
Rabbi Aaron and Rivkah Slonim, Directors
E-mail: aslonim@binghamton.edu
rslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com
Address: 420 Murray Hill Rd., Vestal, NY 13850
Phone: 607-797-0015, Fax: 607-797-0095
Website: www.Chabadofbinghamton.com
Rabbi Zalman and Rochel Chein, Education
E-mail: zchein@Jewishbu.com, rchein@Jewishbu.com
Rabbi Levi and Hadasa Slonim, Downtown and Development
Chabad Downtown Center: 60 Henry St., Binghamton
E-mail: lslonim@Jewishbu.com, hslonim@Jewishbu.com
Rabbi Yisroel and Goldie Ohana, Programming
E-mail: yohana@Jewishbu.com, 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.

Temple Beth-El of Ithaca

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Rabbi: TBA
Rabbi Emeritus: Scott L. Glass
Address: 402 North Tioga St. (the corner of Court and Tioga streets), Ithaca, NY 14850-4292
Phone: 607-273-5775
E-mail: president@tbeithaca.org, secretary@tbeithaca.org
Website: www.tbeithaca.org
Presidents: Melanie Kalman and Alexis Siemon
Sisterhood President: Gail Zussman
Director of Education: TBA
Services: Friday 8 pm; Saturday 10 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 Sunday, 9 am-12:30 pm and Wednesday afternoons, 3:45-5:45 pm. The teen No’ar program meets twice per month (every other Sunday from 5-7 pm) and is designed with the flexibility to accommodate busy student schedules.
Adult Ed.: Numerous weekly courses, several semester-long courses and a variety of mini-courses and lectures are offered throughout the year. Call the temple office for more details.
For upcoming services and events on Zoom, visit www.tinyurl.com/HappeningAtTBE.

Friday, January 26, light candles before..... 4:52 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, January 27 5:55 pm
Friday, February 2, light candles before..... 5:01 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, February 3 6:04 pm
Friday, February 9, light candles before..... 5:10 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, February 10 6:12 pm

Temple Concord

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
Rabbi: TBA
Address: 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905
Office hours: Tues.-Fri., 10 am-2 pm
Phone: 607-723-7355
Fax: 607-723-0785
Office e-mail: TempleConcordbinghamton@gmail.com
Website: www.templeconcord.com
Regular service times: Fri., 7:30 pm; Sat., 10:35 am, when religious school is in session.
Hebrew school: Hebrew school meets at 4:15 pm and 5:15 pm on Tues. and Thurs. during the school year unless otherwise noted.

Some services and programs are online only. Friday, January 26: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat services with Eve Berman and Robin Hazen. Join via Zoom at https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/templeconcord/.

Saturday, January 27: At 9 am, Shabbat school; at 9:15 am, Torah study in person and on Zoom (http://bit.ly/3XDnvRE, meeting ID 825 1226 2831 and passcode 743892); and at 10:35 am, Shabbat family class service and lunch.

Sunday, January 28: At 11 am, Temple Concord Sisterhood’s Annual Book Talk with Rabbi Rachel Esserman. For more information, see the article on page 3.

Friday, February 2: At 7:30 pm, HIAS Shabbat service with Rabbi Rachel Esserman, Suzanne Holwitt, Robin Hazen and Phyllis Kellenberger. Join via Zoom at https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/templeconcord/.

Saturday, February 3: At 9 am, Shabbat school; at 9:15 am, Torah study in person and on Zoom (http://bit.ly/3XDnvRE, meeting ID 825 1226 2831 and passcode 743892); and at 10:35 am, Shabbat family service.

Sunday, February 4: From 10 am-2 pm, Sisterhood Rummage Sale held in Temple Concord’s basement at 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton. Buy one coat or outside jacket, get one free. Masks are optional, but are encouraged. See “TC” on page 7

Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive
Address: 72 South Broad St., Norwich, NY 13815
Phone: 334-2691
E-mail: fertigj@roadrunner.com
Contact: Guilia Greenberg, 373-5087
Purpose: To maintain a Jewish identity and meet the needs of the Jewish community in the area.
Adult Ed.: Shabbat study sessions are held on designated Saturday mornings at 10 am. Call ahead, text or e-mail to confirm dates.

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, E-mail: info@tikkunvor.org
Rabbi: Shifrah Tobacman, rabbishifrah@tikkunvor.org
Presidents: Sue Merkel and Laurie Willick, presidents_22@tikkunvor.org
Education Director/Administrative Coordinator: Naomi Wilensky
Bnai Mitzvah Coordinator: Michael Margolin
Services: All services currently on Zoom. E-mail 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.

Opera from the 1930s becomes graphic novel

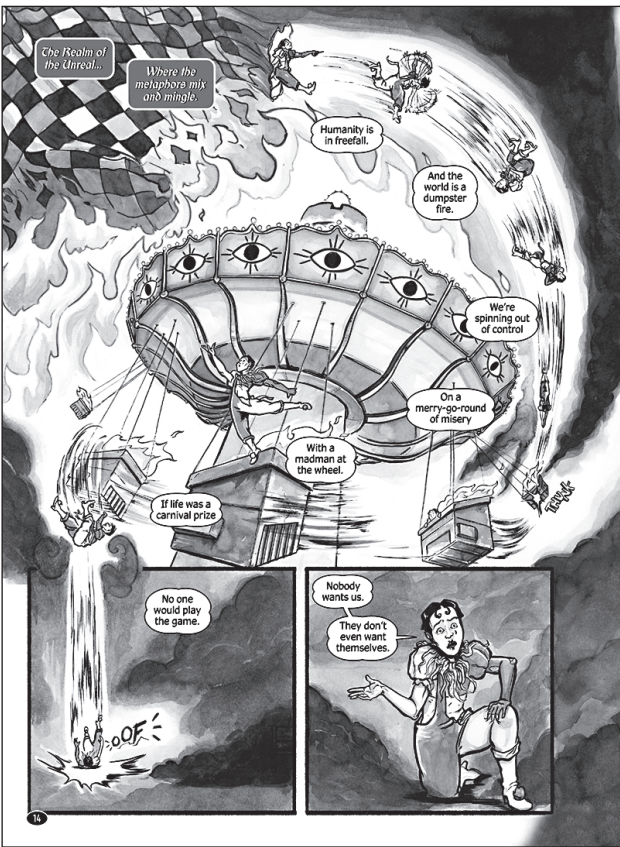
By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Art can flower under the strangest circumstances. Take, for example, “Der Kaiser von Atlantis” with music by Viktor Ullmann and a libretto by Peter Kien. The one-act opera was written in 1943 when Kien and Ullmann were prisoners in the Terezin concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. Neither lived to see the opera performed, but their work inspired the recently published graphic novel “Death Strikes: The Emperor of Atlantis” (Dark Horse/Berger) written by journalist Dave Maass and artist Patrick Lay.

Maass first discovered the opera more than 20 years ago. “In the late ‘90s, the music label Decca started re-recording music suppressed by the Nazis as part of an ‘Entartete Music’ series, and this included Peter Kien and Viktor Ullmann’s ‘Der Kaiser von Atlantis,’” he said in an e-mail interview. “They hired Art Spiegelman (‘Maus’) to design the cover and that’s what caught my eye as I was wandering around a Best Buy 20 years ago. I was a teenage mallrat, listening to punk and metal, and I was just discovering that there were whole other genres of music – including avant garde classical – that were just as rebellious.”

The opera’s plot focuses on an Atlantis that never sank, but rather became a technologically advanced dictatorship. Emperor Overall, who is so isolated he never sees another human, declares all-out war on the world, but Death, who is a character in the opera, has had enough and goes on strike. That means that, even though the fighting doesn’t stop, no one can die. Two humans – a soldier and a worker who were once enemies – work together to overthrow the emperor and change the world.

These unusual elements made Maass believe the opera could be easily adapted to other formats. “When I first read and listened to the opera, I was struck by how un-opera-like it felt,” he noted. “It’s so political, so contemporary, so darkly comedic, so filled with elements



Above, left and right: A page from the graphic novel “Death Strikes: The Emperor of Atlantis” (Used with permission from Dark Horse/Berger and Superfan Promotions LLC)

from genre fiction that it begged for an interpretation in another popular medium. As it turns out, Kien was both a writer and an illustrator, and that might explain why it works so well as a graphic novel. For the art, we drew



as much as possible from Kien’s own illustrations that survived the Holocaust and from the architecture and artifacts that we photographed while visiting Terezin. We also borrowed a few of Kien’s other poems to fill out some of the gaps in the libretto.”

The transition to the graphic format was a relatively smooth one. “We actually didn’t change that much, although we did expand it quite a lot,” he said. “The structure and narrative flow is all intact, but we did deepen the characters significantly, giving them backstories and stronger arcs, and of course we updated the language for contemporary audiences. But whenever we added anything to the story, we always made sure it enhanced the existing themes, especially the interplay of life and death during wartime and the ways technology can be misused by authoritarian regimes.”

Maass believes that the opera’s story is as relevant today as it was when it was written. ““Der Kaiser von Atlantis” serves as a warning against devaluing life and trivializing death,” he noted. “It asks us to consider what we would do instead of war if killing wasn’t possible. And it reminds us to question the motives and methods of those who would lead us into violence. Ultimately, Kien and Ullmann wrote a satire that has universal truths about authoritarianism and war, and so readers will interpret it differently depending on where they are and what’s happening in the world. But at the very least, I hope people come away with a greater appreciation of the defiant power of art and its potential to outlive us all.”

The writer did say that he doesn’t see “Death Strikes” as an addition to Holocaust literature. Rather he and Lay wanted “to give a second life to a creative narrative work that stands on its own outside of place and time. I hope folks will find beauty and joy and laughter in this book, dark as it is, and the inspiration to keep dreaming even in the bleakest of times.”

TC Religious School learned about Israel

At right: Temple Concord Religious School students have been learning about Israel. Their studies included hands-on activities, such as learning to make shakshuka. (Names withheld on request)



Unity.....Continued from page 6

These are powerful images as we navigate our present-day challenges. Like the Israelites leaving the inferno of Egypt, our people emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust and, with God’s blessing, prevailed to build a home in Israel that might serve as a “light to the nations.”

Yet over the past year, anger and disgruntlement over the discussions regarding Israel’s judicial reform threatened to tear us apart as a people, both in Israel and abroad.

Plagued by doubt – about our identity as a Jewish people, about the nature of the society we want to create in Israel and about whether the enterprise is one we feel connected to – we mirrored the ancient Israelites who wondered whether things might not have been better in Egypt after all. We lived through a season of protests and counter-protests that sounded like the petulant complaints of the Jews in the desert:

“Half the country has lost its mind.”

“They (it is always the other side) are trying to kill us all.”

The horrifying news and images that assailed us on October 7 were like the attack of Amalek – a cowardly flank attack of teenagers at a music festival, of families gathering at home on a holiday.

Our response, our only way forward, resounds from the pages of the Torah as well: a call to look upward, to seek out our core beliefs and our timeless values as our brothers and sisters fight for their lives.

At the same time, it provides the powerful reminder that we can only seek truth – and survival – while standing together in unity, as one family holding hands, transcending our differences and reactive rivalry to recall our essential oneness.

When we are confident that what unites us is greater than what divides us and, when we recognize that we can each contribute to a higher vision that encompasses us all,

we are assured that our hopes of peace for our people and our land will come to be.

As goes Israel, so goes the rest of the world. We are entering an election cycle in which we are replaying a scene we have seen before, but this time, with the volume turned up to a deafening blast. We are fortunate to live in a democracy: a country where we may maintain our connection to our roots while subsuming ourselves to something larger – one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all. It is time to dial back the volume on the disgruntlement, instead giving more voice to gratitude for our opportunities as Americans to grow and evolve together. It is time to carve out a new unity even as we acknowledge our differences.

Let us pray that together, we move forward into our next election cycle in a spirit of respectful dialogue and a recalling of shared values.

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Tuesday, February 6: At 10:30 am, Tuesday Morning Book Club in the Library or on Zoom, “Nine Tenth of the Law: A Novel” by Claudia Hagadus Long. The author will attend the meeting on Zoom. For more information, e-mail merrypell.preus@gmail.com. To join via Zoom, visit <https://bit.ly/3CXVd9b>, meeting ID 881 6469 4206 and passcode 653272.

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