

THE REPORTER

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JCC held Annual Meeting

The Jewish Community Center held its Annual Meeting on June 5. “The evening was a meaningful celebration of the JCC’s mission and the strength of its vibrant community,” said event organizers. “The presence and support of so many distinguished guests and members contributed greatly to the event’s success, making it a truly memorable occasion.”

Susan Walker, outgoing president of the

JCC, presented several awards to volunteers who went above and beyond in helping the JCC provide quality services to the community at large and for caring enough to make a difference.

The JCC’s Tikkun Olam Award was given to Rabbi Rachel Esserman for 24 years of service to the community through her tenure on the staff of *The Reporter*. *Tikkun olam* is a core principle in Judaism, centered

on the idea that humankind is collectively responsible for healing and improving a broken world.

The Dr. G. Clifford and Florence B. Decker Foundation was presented with a JCC President’s Award for providing the Center with a major grant that enabled it to make the repairs necessary to fortify the facility and bring the building up to code.

Dan Brown, president of Dan Brown Construction, LLC, received the Bricks and Mortar Mensch Award (mensch is a Yiddish word referring to someone who embodies compassion, humility, reliability and moral strength) for helping the Center renovate the facility through a series of projects by donating his time and expertise.

The JCC’s Chai Award, which is given See “Meeting” on page 5



Sheryl Brumer (right), chief executive officer of the JCC, honored Susan Walker (left) for her service as JCC president.

JCC has new membership director: Kathy Kiekel

The Jewish Community Center announced it has a new membership director. Kathy Kiekel, who is currently the JCC’s facilities director, will serve in that position to help with membership retention and membership growth.

“Kathy has worked non-stop to put into place facilities and maintenance staff who are as dedicated as she is to providing our community with a safe, comfortable, well-maintained and clean Center,” said JCC staff. “With over 60,000 square feet of building space sitting on eight acres of land, this is no small task and her small team has gone above and beyond to ensure our 57-year-old building is lovingly cared for.”

The JCC has more than 60,000 people come through its facility annually, but only a small portion of the community who visit are members. “Kathy offered to try her hand at membership retention and membership growth,” JCC staff added. “As our new



During the Jewish Community Center’s Literacy Day 2025, Fairy Godmother Kathy Kiekel spoke with a princess attending the event. (Child’s name held on request)

membership and facilities director, Kathy is available to give tours to prospective members, answer any questions about the wide variety of programs offered here at the JCC, listen to members’ ideas about potential new programs or upgrades to existing programs, and go out and meet with community organizations, service groups, religious organizations and businesses to encourage JCC membership.”

When asked about the importance of membership to a non-profit like the JCC, Kiekel replied, “Membership is the heartbeat of the JCC. When you become a J

member, it signifies your commitment to an organization that was founded nearly 100 years ago on the idea that a community should be for everyone. As a JCC member, you are helping to support programs at the J that include the Early Childhood See “Kiekel” on page 7

JFS/Friendship Club held workshop



Jewish Family Service, in partnership with Visions Federal Credit Union and the JCC Friendship Club, presented a seminar titled “Recognizing Identity Theft and Scams (especially for older adults)” on June 18. Around 15 people attended.

Spotlight

Interfaith romance in American media: From “The Melting Pot” to “Nobody Wants This”

By Bill Simons

Depictions of interfaith romance, sex and marriage have long elicited Jewish commentary as evidenced by the Bible. The Book of Ruth is a story of inclusion. After the death of her Hebrew husband, the Moabite woman Ruth tells her mother-in-law Naomi, “[W]herever you go, I will go... your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” Conversely, the manipulative Philistine beauty Delilah robs the Hebrew judge Samson of his hair, strength and life. And the usually wise King Solomon, builder of the First Temple, loves many foreign women, leading to the division of Israel by his sons. In contrast, Esther employs her charms, with the encouragement of her kinsman Mordecai, to win the love of the Persian King Ahasuerus and to thwart evil Haman’s plan to annihilate the Jews.

In the centuries that followed, competing

themes of interfaith romance continued to resonate. In the stage musical and movie “Fiddler on Roof,” Tsarist Russia, on the cusp of the great Jewish migration to America, provides the setting. Dairyman Tevye, the protagonist, declares his daughter Chava dead when she marries a Russian Gentile, a not uncommon response in that time and place.

In American media, images of interfaith love continued to evolve. Embracing American exceptionalism and popularizing a metaphor, Israel Zangwill’s play “The Melting Pot” (1908) celebrates assimilation and intermarriage. Fleeing Russia to settle in New York City, the young Jewish musician David Quixano becomes engaged to the beautiful Vera Revendal. Not only is Vera a Gentile, but her father, a former Cossack commander, led the bloody Kishinev pogrom that killed David’s parents. However, David exclaims

that America provides emancipation from Old World hatreds: “There she lies, the great Melting Pot – listen!... how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame!”

The popular play “Abie’s Irish Rose” (1922), which is heavy on stereotypes, added humor to the tale of love and marriage between an Irish Catholic woman and a Jewish man, a trajectory followed in later decades by George Burns/Gracie Allen and Jerry Stiller/Anne Meara. The original film version of “The Jazz Singer” (1927) – the first movie with sound, albeit limited, to capture the public’s attention – dramatized powerful emotions. It presents the irreconcilable options of a young man torn between obligation to his dying father to chant the *Kol Nidre* on Yom Kippur and the love of his Gentile girlfriend, who expects his star-turn for the opening of a Broadway extravaganza.

During the second half of the 20th century, interfaith romance was central to several film dramas and comedies, notably “Marjorie Morningstar,” “The Heartbreak Kid,” “Dirty Dancing,” “Annie Hall” and “When Harry Met Sally.” “The Way We Were” added nascent feminism, leftist politics and the charisma of Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford to the mix.

The 1969 Philip Roth novel “Portnoy’s Complaint” and the 2024 Tyler Perry-directed film “The Six Triple Eights” are both set during World War II and feature romances between a young Jewish American male and his adolescent Gentile girlfriend. In the novel and the film, the young Jewish men share a common fate: a soldier’s death in wartime combat. However, the two mediums provide very different perspectives.

Alexander Portnoy, the novel’s erstwhile See “Romance” on page 8

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Opinion

One Perspective from Israel

Room on the *Kaddish* plate – part 1

JEREMY M. STAIMAN

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

If you're young, and never had to say the Jewish memorial prayer – known as *Kaddish* – for a loved one, I'll let you in on a secret.

It's no fun.

Even for those who faithfully attend thrice-daily services, the pressure to show up on time (always a challenge, for some of us), and to be alert and on-call at the various stages of the prayers can be daunting.

It's a bit of a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, it's a special privilege to honor our loved ones, assisting in the elevation of their souls by reciting the *Kaddish*. At the same time, by the end of the traditional 11 months, it can be downright exhausting. My quick calculations come out to well over 2,000 recitations during that time.

That's a lot of tongue-twisting Aramaic!

Yitgadal v' yitkadash shemei rabbah...

During the period following my mother's passing a number of years ago, I had a number of "misses," including some due to mandatory isolation following COVID exposures. No attending synagogue. No *minyan*. No *Kaddish*. No worries.

My siblings had it covered. And I harbored not the slightest doubt that my mother well understood why I couldn't check off the *Kaddish* box those days.

The end of her *Kaddish* cycle marked a milestone for me. As my father had predeceased her a decade or so earlier, never again would I have to brave the prolonged rite. I breathed a sigh of relief that that part of my obligation to those who had passed had indeed passed.

I was wrong.

Not long after I concluded my mother's *Kaddish*, Marvin, a delightful individual and beloved business associate, left this earth. His death followed that of his darling wife by

only a scant few days. He went from her funeral almost straight to the hospital and never left.

Marvin had no sons to say *Kaddish* for him and I was honored to step in. I was happy to pay homage to my friend. And then I was done, for real.

Or so I thought.

My brother-in-law for 41 years, Skip, lost his battle with cancer last summer. And so I currently find myself over halfway through another series of *Kaddish* recitals.

It dawns on me that I'm probably still not done.

Yet how full can the *Kaddish* plate become? A bit more, it seems.

My Uncle Abe recently returned his soul to the Creator, after 92 years. He's actually my wife's uncle, but after decades of being one family, he was mine, too. A gifted architect, whose artistic fingerprints grace some of the world's most prestigious landmarks, he died a long and sad death recently.

Never married. No children. No one to say *Kaddish*.

So, of course we make room on the *Kaddish* plate for Uncle Abe, overlapping the *Kaddish* being offered for Skip for the next few months.

Now my *Kaddish* plate is overflowing – with room for no more.

As Yom Hashoah begins, my wife, Chana, finds herself in Prague, Czech Republic. She and her sister, Liz, are spending a week there, encountering and engaging with the place of their father's youth.

Harry Bush was a gregarious, fun and popular man, who had countless friends. He built a family, and a business, and was beloved in his adopted Seattle community. But Harry was also a man who was incessantly tortured by the demons of the Holocaust which had burrowed deep inside his soul. From the time of his liberation from a death march, until the day he drew his final breath close to three decades ago, Harry was a survivor who bore deep, raging wounds.

To live in his house was to wake to piercing screams in the dark of night. As a young, strapping teen who was arrested in Prague and sent to Terezin early in the war, he lived the horrors of some of Europe's most infamous hells, including Auschwitz. His body was eventually freed, but a part of his psyche remained caged behind barbed wire fences.

Those were the dueling sides of the Harry Bush I knew and loved. I never knew the Harry of his childhood – then known as Jindrich Busch. The happy, energetic young boy, one of two sons and two daughters, who lived a modest life in Czechoslovakia.

That was before they had to wear their yellow stars. Before the tempest of war, and the ominous sea of black and red flags robbed them of their youth, their pride and their very self.

But Harry's early life was also incomplete. He barely knew his father, whose name was, ironically, George Busch. George was, purportedly, a traveling art broker, whose journeys across Europe found him far from home most of the year. His profits seemed minimal, barely sustaining his dependents, and family lore was replete with fanciful speculation about what his life was really like and what became of him with the war.

Personally, I wondered if George was a government agent – perhaps the James Bond of his day – gallivanting across Europe, saving humanity under the guise of art dealing. I fantasized about him surviving the war. Perhaps even now, I thought, he sits on a beach in Panama, 130 years old or so, sipping a margarita and thinking of his family.

But reality returns my wondering, wandering mind back into my body and the harsh truth remains: almost certainly he met a gruesome end along with millions of his co-religionists, in the blood-drenched, vice-like grip of the Nazis.

As a family, we were resigned to the fact that we would never in this lifetime know the true details of George Busch's death.

Part two of this column will appear in a future issue of The Reporter.

In My Own Words

Tolerating differences except...

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

The e-mail conversation occurred after I sent a coworker the headline "Brooklyn Pride interfaith service canceled, allegedly over host synagogue's 'pro-Israel positions.'" She wrote back wondering whether cancel culture was a good thing. While we all know people whose opinions we find difficult or abhorrent (depending on your point of view), I am not a supporter of cancel culture. I don't think we all have to believe the same thing or accept the same ideas, which makes me an oddity in today's society.

This may also be partly because I have religious Christian friends who truly believe that Jesus is divine. Some also believe that you have to be Christian to get into heaven. (To my mind, that means hell will be a very interesting place, but I usually keep that thought to myself.) The idea of a human as God doesn't resonate with me, but I realize that it means a great deal to them and accept that we will simply never agree on religion. It helps that I feel they mean well since I know they care about my well-being on earth and after death.

I could list other instances when I am open to people who believe ideas to which I don't personally subscribe. As someone once said when talking about the paper, I definitely lean toward the left, although I see my politics as being based on my Jewish practice. After all, Judaism wants us to support social programs: we are supposed to help the poor, care for the sick and provide for those in need. However, I have friends whose politics lean toward the right and I accept that we will agree to disagree. I believe Judaism allows people the right to self-define their

gender. After all, the ancient rabbis listed more than two genders in the Mishnah. But I realize that not everyone agrees with this. My concern is less with what they think than with providing equal rights and equal opportunities for all. You can think what you want, but you can't discriminate or oppress others. That crosses a line.

But I confess to being bothered by those who make Jews/Israel a special case. Let's be clear: I support Israel's right to exist. (Why does no one ask that about any other nation, no matter what it's done?) I also oppose Benjamin Netanyahu's policies because I think they are bad for Israel. I am not alone in that: numerous Israelis feel he should be less worried about waging war and remaining in office, and more concerned about getting the captives returned. (And as anyone who knows history knows, it is impossible to completely annihilate a political group. Killing innocent people while trying to do that just creates more recruits, if not for them, then for other radical groups.)

Why is Israel a special case? Because people who disapprove of its policies sometimes take that as an excuse for open season on Jews. (Please note: not just Israelis, but all Jews.) A meme on Facebook did an excellent job explaining how this works: although Russia launched a war of aggression against Ukraine and has killed numerous civilians, and between 350,000-500,000 lives (depending on whose count you accept) were lost in Syria's wars over the past 10 years, no one is murdering those of Russian descent or Syrian descent. But as the recent attacks on American Jews testify, it's OK to shoot or firebomb Jews.

That fact that it has been acceptable to demonize Israel and say it doesn't have a right to exist bugs the hell out of me. After all, it is one of the few nations in the world that was voted into existence by the United Nations. If we want to be fair and say that the Israelis moved there recently (although there has been a Jewish presence in the land since biblical times), everyone who lives in North and South America who does not have Native American blood should leave these shores and go back to where they came from. Even those who note in their addresses that where they live is on "unceded territory" (meaning land taken from Native Americans) don't claim we all should move back to Europe, Asia or Africa.

(An additional note to those who cancelled the Brooklyn Pride interfaith service: I know it's called pink washing, but if you are a member of the LGBTQ community, you can live freely and openly in Israel, but risk death in other Middle Eastern countries. But any good Israel does seems to be conveniently ignored.)

As noted above, my lack of tolerance can be explained by the recent attacks on American and other Jews, which have crossed the line between having different opinions and discriminating or oppressing others. When Jewish organizations send updated security information, when doors that were once open are now locked for our safety, when we have to look over our shoulders wondering if we and our friends and families are safe, when we continually have to debate how best to protect ourselves, that's when my tolerance for differences ends.



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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.

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BD Sisterhood to plan for 2025-26 on July 9

The Beth David Sisterhood will hold a summer planning meeting on Wednesday, July 9, at 7 pm, at Beth David Synagogue. Topics of discussion will include possible programs and projects for the coming year, and filling committee vacancies.

Currently, Sisterhood is looking for a service vice president, a membership chairperson, a publicity chairperson, a meeting photographer, a photo liaison to *The Reporter* and a donor chairperson. Anyone who is interested in any

of these positions, or has program or project ideas for the coming year, is asked to attend the meeting, or get in touch in advance by sending an e-mail to the Beth David office at bethdavid@stny.rr.com or leaving a voice mail at 607-722-1793.

"Beth David Sisterhood is always looking for ways to better serve our synagogue and the local Jewish community," said meeting organizers. "One need not be a member of Beth David Sisterhood, Beth David Syn-

agogue or female to attend our meetings or participate in our programs."

Sisterhood welcomes ideas about fund-raisers, speakers, topics that might make an interesting program for a meeting, or any other project that would be appropriate for Sisterhood to take on. "Many opportunities are available if you would like to become more active in Beth David's Sisterhood," said organizers. "Please come to our planning meeting and share your ideas."

BD Sisterhood held closing meeting



The closing meeting of Beth David Sisterhood on June 11 featured a lecture/demonstration by Dan Miller about the saxophone. Eileen Miller introduced her husband Dan's talk. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)



At left, l-r: Eileen Miller, Dan Miller, Susan Hubal, Judy Silber, Nancy Basmann, Cathy Velenchik, Chaim Joy and Phil Goodman posed after the meeting. (Photo by Dora Polachek)



Dan Miller spoke about different types and sizes of saxophones. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)



Listening to the lecture/demonstration were (l-r) Nancy Basmann, Judy Silber, Susan Hubal, Dora Polachek, Eileen Miller and Phil Goodman. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)

OF NOTE

Bryan Kirschen

Bryan Kirschen has been selected to receive the 2025 Binghamton University Provost's Award for Faculty Excellence in Community-Engaged Scholarship. Kirschen is the chairman of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and an associate professor of Spanish and linguistics. He also takes part in the Translation Research and Instruction Program and teaches in the Judaic Studies Department. His work includes research on the Ladino language.



L-r: Judy Silber and Nancy Basmann socialized before the meeting. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to the family of
Claire Ladenheim

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to the family of
Stanley Pelter

DEADLINES

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

ISSUE	DEADLINE
July 11-24	July 2
July 25-August 7	July 16
August 8-21	July 30
August 22-September 11	August 13

All deadlines for the year can be found at www.thereporter.org/contact-us/faqs under "Q: What Are the Deadlines for the Paper?"

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THE REPORTER



Off the Shelf

Tribal to scribal Judaism

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

Religions change and develop across time. That is certainly true of Judaism, although it can be difficult to understand its earliest manifestations since they greatly differ from the religion practiced today. In his fascinating and complex “Israelite Religion: From Tribal Beginnings to Scribal Legacy” (Yale University Press), Karel van der Toorn discusses the history of Judaism from its origins as an Israelite religion in 1200 B.C.E. through the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. Readers should note that, while the work is not filled with academic jargon, it does begin with eight pages of abbreviations used in the text and concludes with more than 100 pages of footnotes. However, van der Toorn does an excellent job exploring the development of Judaism in a way that general readers should be able to understand.

The author writes about the five stages that occurred between the ancient Israelite religion and the beginnings of rabbinic Judaism: tribal religion, royal religion and local religion (which, while two separate types of practices, occurred during the same time period), diaspora religion and scribal religion. He sees the first period – tribal religion – as the most difficult for readers to comprehend because its beliefs are so different from those of contemporary times. Van der Toorn understands the ancient Israelite religion as simply a variation of all the ancient religions practiced at that time, which featured Gods (usually multiple Gods) and humans who existed in the same dimension, rather than different ones. However, the author notes that, for those living at the time, “the presence of gods seemed the most natural thing in the world. Within the general category of superhuman beings, there were gods and ancestors, both entitled to acts of worship and devotions, but also demons and ghosts, to be kept at bay by

spells and incantations. All of them were superhuman, rather than supernatural, for at that time people did not make the distinction between the natural and the supernatural.”

According to van der Toorn, the universe was believed to be divided into three parts: humans lived on the second floor with the upper floor (the heavens) being the home of the Gods and the basement containing the underworld (which was filled with the dead and ancestors). During that tribal period, a great deal of what is now thought of as Jewish religion did not exist. For example, the idea that the day began at sunset and ended at sunset the next day, and the development of the seven-day week (rather than just following daily and monthly cycles) only began in the post exile period.

The clans and tribes of those who later came to be considered Israelites covered a wide geographical area and included a variety of ethnic groups, rather than being members of an extended family as noted in the biblical text. Van der Toorn writes that these “various ethnic groups... eventually called themselves by the name Israel. The name originally belonged to the inhabitants of the central hill country... but was extended to the population of the entire Palestinian hill country plus part of the Transjordan. The three principal groups that would, over time, constitute the nation of Israel were native Canaanites, Arameans from the north, and an assorted mix of pastoral nomads from the south.” While each of these groups may have originally had its own god, they all came to eventually adopt YHWH as the God they worshipped.

As the population of the area grew, the various clans and tribal groups combined or were conquered by other groups, which led to the period when the royal religion developed. One sign was that, in this era, God was no longer referred to as a warrior,

but rather as a king. The royal religion was a formal one with the king believed to have a mandate from God to reign. The king had a responsibility for several aspects of his kingdom: a temple where God was to be worshipped in the appropriate way, the administration of justice to his subjects and the requirement to wage war in order to protect his subjects when necessary. There was a formal priesthood with tasks of its own: providing for God so God would continue to protect the kingdom, and giving instructions to the king and the people concerning the appropriate way to behave.

While the royal religion focused on protecting the entire kingdom, thereby creating a national unity, local religions still concentrated on protecting families and extended kinship groups. Worship was less formal and usually practiced in homes, local sanctuaries (rather than the king’s temple) or at gravesites. The emphasis of this more personal religion was on the families’ ancestors and the family’s gods. The author notes that, while there were prophets during this time period, they usually only prophesied to small groups. A few had their words included in the biblical text, but they were the exception, not the rule.

The religion changed again after the fall of the northern Kingdom of Israel, which was followed by the conquest of the Kingdom of Judah. Some families from the northern kingdom emigrated to Judah and brought with them their stories and religious customs, some of which were later incorporated into the biblical text. The exile to Babylon after the conquest of Judah changed the religion in a different way: those who were exiled looked to preserve the customs and stories of their past. At the same time, new religious practices developed to accommodate their new circumstances. As time passed, those who were born in Judah passed away. Their descendants, though, still focused on the loss of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the idea that someday they would return. The Judeans came to see themselves as having a common ethnic identity: this identity also included the idea that they all worshipped the same God.

During the period of ethnic religion, the religion practiced became more similar to the one practiced in later periods. While not everyone returned to Palestine, those who did organized a common calendar with standard dates for celebrating holidays at the same time across the empire. There

was now only one main God; others, who were once thought to be additional gods, were now considered angels or other lesser beings. There is some question about whether the Judean exiles in Babylon celebrated a weekly Sabbath. The author notes that “it is highly questionable whether the average Judean in exile in Babylon actually observed the Sabbath. The available cuneiform documents contain no hint that people took a rest every seventh day... the doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath was a priestly innovation with, at least initially, little popular appeal. To the priestly elite it was important, though.”

During this period, God gained characteristics similar to those of the Persian emperor, meaning a universal God who ruled the whole world. The Judeans who returned to Palestine had three identities: they were Persian subjects, they were members of the ethnic Judean community and they were adherents to the cult of YHWH whose temple was in Jerusalem. Those who lived in the Egyptian and Babylonian diasporas felt a connection to those whom the author call Judean, rather than Jewish, although he feels neither term is completely correct. What tied them together – no matter where they lived – were the ties of language, race and religion.

The final period discussed – the scribal one – took place under the influences of Hellenistic and Roman culture. This time period was characterized by increased literacy. For example, this was when the text of the Bible as we know it was compiled. The nation now worshipped God as the God of their ancestors and Judaism became a way of life with rules to be followed. The increased dependence on holy books became a major facet of the religion. This also meant religious connections were no longer solely based on family or ethnicity. Now anyone would convert to Judaism, as long as they accepted the Jewish God and followed the rules as outlined in the new writings.

This short review cannot do justice to the depth and complexity of “Israelite Religion.” While van der Toorn’s prose is easy to read, he includes so much material in each sentence that it takes a great deal of concentration in order to follow his line of thought, although the effort is worth it due to the challenging and stimulating ideas he offers. Anyone interested in the history and development of Judaism will want to read this book.



Off the Shelf

Essays and poetry

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

Essays by I. B. Singer

Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote so many essays for the Yiddish press that many were published under pseudonyms. The third book of his essays to appear in English, “Isaac Bashevis Singer Writings on Yiddish and Yiddishkayt: A Spiritual Reappraisal, 1946–1955” edited and translated by David Stromberg (White Goat Press), is the third collection to be reviewed in *The Reporter*. “Old Truths and New Clichés,” the first to be published, focused on the essays from the 1960s and ‘70s. (To read that review, visit www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-oz-and-singer-discuss-writing-and-life?entry=415690.) The second, “Isaac Bashevis Singer Writings on Yiddish and Yiddishkayt: The War Years, 1939-1945,” offered writings from his early career, before his fiction became popular. (The review of that work can be found at www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/celebrating-jewish-literature-essays-about-the-disappearing-yiddish-culture?entry=460556.)

Stromberg introduces each essay with a short note placing it in context, which is helpful for those unfamiliar with either Singer or the Yiddish press. The main focus

of these writings is Singer’s desire to create a Yiddish culture in the United States, or rather, recreate a version of the Yiddish culture that had existed in Europe. His essays about Jewish discontent are timely for today: he believes this is caused by the fact that American Jews have no religious/social purpose. He also thinks that many American Jews don’t know how to identify with Judaism, nor do they understand the Jewish place in the world. Singer notes the questions these Jews ask themselves: “Why do people hate us? What role do we play? Are we a nation? A religion? A race? Internationalists? Can Palestine solve our problem? Or can socialism? Or both together? Or even not both together? You can ask and discuss without end.” The answers seem beyond their understanding.

Unfortunately, Singer’s solutions may not resonate with contemporary Jews, at least those who don’t believe that the Yiddish culture of Europe is something to be emulated. Singer sees that culture as offering a way for the Jewish people to remain connected, even for those who don’t believe in God. That’s partly because he feels the Jewish people need to aspire to a destiny. See “Essays” on page 8

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On the Jewish food scene

My love affair with bubbly drinks

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

I love carbonated drinks. When I was growing up, my parents pushed me to drink milk for health reasons. We never had soda in the house and, when we had dinner with relatives who made soda available, my parents would have to remind me to eat something, rather than just drink the soda. When I was in college, alcohol was the forbidden fruit for most students. Not for me, though. My parents always let us have a taste of their drinks and our synagogue offered Kiddush wine even for the younger generation. So, for me, soda was that forbidden fruit, although I was good and usually drank the milk the

dining service offered, rather than the soda.

Years passed and my medically restricted diets began. Interestingly enough, one of the things I turned out to be allergic to was milk. But, in addition to milk, I had to cut other drinks from my diet: not only wasn't I supposed to have the sugar in regular soda, but the chemicals in the diet versions. That's when I began to turn to flavored seltzer. Yes, I know it doesn't taste like soda. However, even though my brain knows that, its carbonation usually satisfies my desire for a treat. I'm not sure how that works, but I don't really care as long as it does.

Having grown up in Endwell, I wasn't aware that seltzer was considered a Jewish beverage. While some Jewish-themed websites offer a Jewish connection to everything, no matter how slight that connection, it does seem true that seltzer is associated with Jews. A recent article on the My Jewish Learning site (www.myjewishlearning.com/the-nosher/why-jews-love-seltzer) offers a history of the beverage: basically, Jewish immigrants found making seltzer an easy way to make money. The article also mentions how seltzer and other carbonated drinks served as a

See "Bubbly" on page 8

Meeting

Continued from page 1

to staff members who have dedicated 18 years of service to the JCC, went to Harry Cohen, a graduate of the JCC's preschool, who is presently serving as the Center's arts and culture director and as interim camp director.

The Harvey R. Singer Scholar/Athlete Memorial Award, set up by the Singer family in 1998 to honor the memory of Harvey Singer, is presented to a college-bound teen who has demonstrated excellence in athletics and scholarship together with the human qualities of caring and integrity embraced by Singer during his lifetime. This year's recipient

was Vestal High School senior Shayna Foreman.

John Rozzoni, director of the Tri-Cities Opera, was recognized for the opera's contribution to this year's Early Childhood Center's Literacy Day event. The opera was a sponsor for the event, participated in the vendors exhibit and brought its production of "The Ugly Duckling" to the stage at the JCC.

The evening concluded with a presentation honoring Walker for her service and dedication over the past six years as president of the JCC Board of Directors. Following the tribute, Justin Salkin, a partner at the law firm of Levene

Gouldin and Thompson, LLP, was officially sworn in as the new board president.

The slate of officers for the JCC Board of Directors was presented to the membership for a vote and passed unanimously: President Justin Salkin, Vice President Rachel Priest, Past Presidents Susan Walker and Carrie Wenban, Treasurer Jeff Platsky, Asst. Treasurer Jay Green, Federation Liaison Mark Walker and Recording Secretary Bonnie Brown. Other board members are Lisa Berk, Charles Gilinsky, Jeffery Loew, Glenn Alenik and Andrea Brown.



Sheryl Brumer, chief executive officer of the JCC, presented Harry Cohen, JCC arts and culture director and interim camp director, with the JCC's Chai Award.



President Susan Walker presented the Bricks the Mortar Mensch Award to Dan Brown.



L-r: Hannah Green presented the Harvey Singer Scholar/Athlete Memorial Award to Shayna Foreman.



Rabbi Rachel Esserman accepted the JCC's Tikkun Olam Award.



President Susan Walker (center) recognized ÜLee and John Rozzoni from the Tri-Cities Opera for the organization's contribution to the JCC's annual Literacy Day.



Melany Palmer (right) accepted a President's Award on behalf of the Decker Foundation from President Susan Walker (left).



L-r: Raychel Reilly, chief operating officer of the JCC; Rachel Priest, vice president; Justin Salkin, president; Sheryl Brumer, chief executive officer of the JCC; and Susan Walker, past president.

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Weekly Parasha

Korach, Numbers 16:1-18:32

Every human being is holy

RABBI MICAH FRIEDMAN, TEMPLE ISRAEL

While the book of Bamidbar is filled with stories when the Children of Israel rebel against the leadership of God and Moses, the story of the rebellion led by Korach stands out from the crowd. Most of the rebellions appear to be rooted either in the people's lack of ability to believe in God's miraculous power or in the people's post-traumatic romanticization of their experiences during their extended enslavement in Egypt. In *parashat Beha'alotcha*, the people grow tired of the miraculous manna and yearn for the meat, fish and vegetables they ate in Egypt. In *parashat Shelach Lecha*, the people sink into despair as they struggle to believe they could successfully conquer the land of Canaan. Only in the case of Korach do we encounter a leader who gathers a group of followers by preaching what appears to be a principled message: all of the people are holy.

We read in Numbers 16:3 the complaint that Korach brought to Moses and Aaron: "You have done too much! All the community are holy, all of them, and God is in their midst. Why, then, do you raise yourselves above God's congregation?"

This message is a sympathetic one. We might find it inspirational. Everyone is capable of having a personal

relationship with God and, therefore, we should have a society that reflects that fundamental equality. Korach purports to represent the entire children of Israel and to advocate for a new system that would reflect the fact that every human being is holy, created in God's image. At first, it seems like Korach's challenge is meant to lead the people of Israel toward a better, more ideal manifestation of the fundamental message of the Torah that all human beings are deserving of dignity.

However, if we pay close attention to a detail in the previous verse, we will be able to see Korach for what he truly was: a clever and cynical manipulator who wanted to claim the reigns of leadership for himself and his followers. In the previous two verses that begin *parashat Korach*, we see that the particular people whom Korach gathered with him to challenge Moses were not the common members of the Children of Israel, but the nobility and elite of the people. We read in verse 16:2, "they rose up against Moses, together with 250 Israelites, princes of the community, chosen in the assembly, well-known men." These details begin to reveal the real motivation of Korach's rebellion to the reader.

Reading this story carefully and picking up on this thread of Korach's elitism, the ancient rabbis taught vivid *midrashim*, which illustrate the cynicism of Korach's rebellion. In a *midrash* recorded in Midrash Tanchuma and brought by Rashi, Korach's cynicism is connected to the mitzvah that immediately precedes our *parasha*: the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. At the end of *parashat Shelach Lecha*, we receive the mitzvah for every member of Israel to wear four-cornered garments adorned with *tzitzit*. From this passage, Bamidbar 15:17-21, we see that each specific *tzitzit* should be tied with a single strand of finely dyed wool using *tchelet*, a royal blue-purple color. Explicitly, we are told that the *tzitzit* are meant to remind us of all of God's *mitzvot*, as well as our redemption from Egyptian enslavement. Implicitly, the royal color of *tchelet* communicates that every single member of the community of Israel should be reminded daily of the nobility of our collective mission: to serve as a holy nation.

In the *midrash*, Korach and his crew ridicule this mitzvah by dressing in *tallitot* that are entirely dyed in the royal color of *tchelet* and rhetorically asking Moses, "Is a See **"Human"** 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: office@templeisraelvestal.org
 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.

On Saturday, June 28, Shacharit services will be held at 9:45 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Numbers 16:1-18:32 and the haftarah is I Samuel 11:14-12:22. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:45 pm.

A Torah in Our Times class will be held on Tuesdays, July 1 and 8, at 4:30 pm.

On Friday, July 4, the office will be closed.

On Saturday, July 5, Shacharit services will be held at 9:45 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Numbers 19:1-22:1 and the haftarah is Judges 11:1-33. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:45 pm.

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.: Call ahead, text or e-mail to confirm dates.

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
 Rabbi Emeritus: Scott L. Glass
 Address: 402 North Tioga St. (the corner of Court and Tioga streets), Ithaca, NY 14850-4292
 Phone: 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: Calle Schueler
 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.

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.

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
 Presidents: Martha Armstrong and Mitch Grossman, 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 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.

Friday, June 27, light candles before..... 8:25 pm
 Shabbat ends Saturday, June 28 9:26 pm
 Friday, July 4, light candles before 8:24 pm
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 5 9:24 pm
 Friday, July 11, light candles before..... 8:21 pm
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 12 9:21 pm

Temple Concord

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism (this header block updates the current one.)
 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.

Friday, June 27: At 7:30 pm, Friday Shabbat services are in person, on Zoom and Facebook.com.

Saturdays, June 28 and July 5: At 9:15 am, Torah study is in person and on Zoom.

Friday, July 4: At 6 pm, Vegetarian/dairy potluck Shabbat dinner, including candle lighting, wine blessing and Kaddish in person only. To RSVP or sign up with a dish, contact the temple office at 607-723-7355 or templeconcordaa@gmail.com.

Wednesday, July 9: At 5:30 pm, evening prayers in person only. At 6 pm, adult education class in person and on Zoom.

Other events:

Saturday, June 28: At 6 pm, Community Board Game Night: Bring a favorite game to play or try out something new. Dinner will be provided. RSVP to the temple office so enough food will be ordered. There is a suggested donation \$5 per person or \$20 per family to cover the cost of refreshments.

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: Leo Searfoss
 Cemetery Committee: 315-696-5744
 Website: 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.

Jewish online resources

By Reporter staff

A variety of Jewish groups are offering educational and recreational online resources. Below is a sampling of those. *The Reporter* will publish additional listings as they become available.

- ◆ The Museum of Jewish Heritage will hold three virtual book talks this summer: *Stories Survive: "Life Must Go On"* on Wednesday, July 9, at 7 pm (<https://mjhnyc.org/events/life-must-go-on>); *"The Teacher of Auschwitz"* on Tuesday, July 15, at 7 pm (<https://mjhnyc.org/events/teacher-of-auschwitz>); and *Stories Survive: "From Generation to Generation"* on Tuesday, August 26, at 7 pm (<https://mjhnyc.org/events/generation-to-generation-2>). There is a suggested donation of \$10 for each event.
- ◆ My Jewish Learning will hold the five-part virtual class "Classic Yiddish Short Stories" with Prof. Josh Lambert on Wednesdays, July 2-30, at 6 pm. The cost to attend is \$75. No Yiddish language knowledge is needed; all material will be in English. Among the writers to be dis-

cussed with be Isaac Bashevis Singer, I.L. Peretz, Blume Lempel and Yosef Opatoshu. For more information or to register, visit <https://my-jewish-learning.teachable.com/p/classicyiddishshortstories>.

- ◆ The Blue Dove Foundation is offering "Wellness Resources for the Situation in Israel," which can be found at <https://thebluedovefoundation.org/our-message-to-the-blue-dove-community-on-the-situation-in-israel>.
- ◆ The Universal Yiddish Library, www.universalyiddishlibrary.org/en, is now available. It features more than 60,000 Yiddish book records from the Yiddish Book Center, the National Library of Israel, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and the New York Public Library. There is no charge to use the site.
- ◆ The Hey Alma website is accepting submissions for its second Jewish fiction contest. The winner will receive a \$250 honorarium and a piece of Hey Alma merch. Submissions will be open until Friday, July 25. Stories should be 3,000 words or less, and must be previously unpublished.

For complete information, visit www.heyalma.com/announcing-hey-almas-second-ever-jewish-fiction-contest.

- ◆ Roundtable will hold the virtual talk "The Funniest Moments in Jewish History" on Wednesday, July 16, from 1-2 pm. The cost to attend is \$44. Rob Kutner, Emmy-winning author of "The Jews: 5000 Years and Counting," will offer a humorous tour of Jewish history and the Jewish uses of humor. For more information or to register, visit <https://roundtable.org/live-courses/history/the-funniest-moments-in-jewish-history>.
- ◆ Yidstock 2025: The Festival of New Yiddish Music, sponsored by the Yiddish Book Center is offering livestream concert passes. The concerts take place from Thursday-Sunday, July 10-13. For a list of the concerts, the cost or to purchase a pass, visit www.brownpapertickets.com/event/6594996.
- ◆ Ritualwell will hold several classes this summer: "Writing Jewish, Writing Funny" on Tuesdays, July 8, 15, 22 and 29, from noon-1:30 pm (<https://ritualwell.org/event/writing-jewish-writing-funny/2025-07-08>); "Finding Shekhinah" on Wednesdays, July 9, 16, 23 and 30, from noon-1:30 pm (<https://ritualwell.org/event/finding-shekhinah/2025-07-09>); and "Deep Body Poetry" on Thursdays, July 10, 17, 24 and 31, from noon-1:30 pm (<https://ritualwell.org/event/deep-body-poetry/2025-07-10>). The cost to attend each class is \$180.
- ◆ The Blue Dove Foundation is offering the new resource "Reimagining Traditions to Promote LGBTQ+ Inclusion," which can be found at https://thebluedovefoundation.org/resource_category/lgbtqia.
- ◆ Kveller will offer "Calm-ish," a seven-part e-mail series written by clinical social worker and author Carla Naumburg, that will contain tips on how to ease anxiety. For more information or to register, visit www.kveller.com/get-calm-ish.
- ◆ Hey Alma will offer "Jewish Fiction Writing 101" with author Gabrielle Korn on Monday, July 14, from 7-8:30 pm. The cost to attend is \$18. For more information or to register, visit www.eventbrite.com/e/jewish-fiction-writing-101-with-author-gabrielle-korn-tickets-1412525364389.
- ◆ Roundtable will hold the two-part virtual class "Letters from the Diaspora: A Sephardic Family in the 20th Century" on Mondays, July 7-14, from 3-4 pm. The cost to attend is \$88. The course will follow the Levy family "across the span of a century and the reach of the globe, as they strove to remain a family while time, distance, and geo-political conflicts pulled them apart." For more information or to register, visit <https://roundtable.org/live-courses/history/ottoman-jewish-life-a-family-odyssey>.

For additional resources, see previous issues of the reporter on its website, www.thereporter.org/jewish-online-resources.

Kiekel Continued from page 1

Education Center, Camp JCC, health and wellness programs in aquatics, fitness and athletics, plus a wide variety of educational, social and cultural programs."

Seniors might not be aware that their JCC membership may be available at no cost. "Here at the JCC, we proudly participate in SilverSneakers, Renew Active and FitOn Health programs," explained Kiekel. "As part of your Medicare benefits program, many health insurance providers offer a benefit that pays for your JCC membership. As a member, you can now use our pool, health clubs and fitness room, and take classes in water aerobics and those under the SilverSneakers Curriculum, all at no

out-of-pocket cost to you."

Members also receive discounted pricing in Early Childhood Education Center enrollment and Camp JCC, and for many educational, social and cultural programs offered by the JCC. "Please check out all that we have to offer," said Kiekel. "We are so much more than many people realize. We offer a variety of enrichment programs for our JCC children in areas that encourage athletic activity, the arts and social interactions with friends."

Kiekel added, "If you are already a member, thank you! Please share your experiences here at the JCC with family, friends and organizations you belong to, and encourage them to become members, as well. If you are not yet a member, please consider joining our growing J family by becoming an active participant in all that the JCC has to offer. Community starts here!"



A Universal Pre-Kindergarten class participated in Earth Day.



The Jewish Community Center's indoor pool is used throughout the year for swim lessons and open swim time for members.

Human Continued from page 6

tallit made entirely of tchelet obligated in the mitzvah of tzitzit?... If a plain tallit is exempted through a single strand of tchelet, then surely a tallit that is entirely dyed in this royal color should be exempt?" In essence, this midrash portrays Korach and his fellow rebels as men who are both already appointed to elite leadership based on their ancestral pedigree and wealthy enough to be capable of acquiring large amounts of precious materials. They come before Moses in extravagant garments that reflect an intentional misinterpretation of the mitzvah Moses recently conveyed from God. Then, they present themselves as populists, speaking up on behalf of the well-being of all while in reality they seek to seize power for themselves.

You may not find it difficult to call to mind people in our day and age who act in similar ways. Sadly, in every generation, there are people who claim to represent the interests of everyone, but who, through their actions, demonstrate that their true interests lie in seizing power for themselves. Ironically, although Korach accuses Moses of "raising yourself above God's congregation," this is precisely what Korach himself does through his dressing in a comically royal robe while launching his rebellion.

The irony of this story resonates with a statement by the foundational talmudic sage Shmuel who in Tractate Kiddushin of the Babylonian Talmud is reported as saying "One who invalidates their fellow, invalidates their own flaw." (Kiddushin 70b) With this statement, Shmuel points out an abiding psychological phenomena that it is incumbent upon each of us to attend to. When we point out a flaw or shortcoming in someone else, this is often because we, too, have a similar flaw or shortcoming in our own character. In the parasha, while Korach accuses Moses of lording himself over the people, Korach himself also flaunts his wealth and nobility revealing why he was not fit for leadership.

So, we must be wary of people like Korach who claim to represent the interests of all while actually being motivated primarily by their own pursuit of power. At the same time, as we maintain an open-eyed critical perspective on the motivations of political actors, we must turn a similar eye inwards towards our own character and ask ourselves, "How can I work to heal my own version of this shortcoming?"



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Focus needed on liberators of concentration camps, U.S. Holocaust envoy says

By Mike Wagenheim

(JNS) – As Holocaust survivors continue to dwindle 80 years after the Holocaust, so do the ranks of those who liberated the Nazi concentration camps in Europe. The latter group deserves more attention than it has received, Ellen

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digestive aid after typically heavy Jewish meals, at least, after Ashkenazic Jewish meals.

I think there is another reason for the connection, one that the article doesn't discuss: Jews who keep kosher need a beverage that doesn't contain dairy to drink during meat meals. (We only had kosher meat in the house when I was growing up, but didn't separate meat and milk at meal time.) Seltzer is a relatively cheap drink for those who want something with a little more oomph than water. It is healthier than sugary soda (especially in the days before diet drinks were readily available). While juice is an option, it might be more expensive and it also contains a decent amount of natural sugar.

On the one hand, it feels odd to think of seltzer as a Jewish drink since I have non-Jewish friends who always have seltzer in their homes. On the other hand, it's fun to lay claim to yet another popular phenomenon. That means it's unlikely I'll ever run out of ideas for a Jewish food column.

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beyond money or power, without which he believes there will be no Jewish future. Plus, Singer wants Jews to keep what he calls "their distinctive traits," the things that make them unique, rather than adopting American cultural ideas. One of those traits is that they have an excitable temperament, something Singer calls "a fire" that must be ignited.

While the essays are interesting, it's clear that Singer had no chance of recreating the Jewish European world he craved. Although some of his analysis of Jewish American life is correct, he didn't see that the United States wasn't a fertile ground for his ideas. While he hoped to transform American Jewish culture by having it reclaim the Yiddish language, much as the Israelis did Hebrew, there was simply not enough interest in what many people may have thought of as returning to the past, rather than creating a new type of future. Many may also have been glad to leave that Yiddish cultural heritage behind. This might be particularly true for women, who would be left home with the children while their husbands were frequenting the cafés and other Yiddish gathering places Singer envisioned.

I'm not sure why I found these essays less convincing than those in the two other works, but they simply did not resonate with me. However, admirers of Singer will definitely want to read them, as will those interested in his ideas on the development of Jewish American culture (some of which are worth emulating). Singer's ideas are worthy of discussion even if you don't agree with them.

Poetry by Marcia Falk

Readers of *The Reporter* may be familiar with Marcia Falk's ideas and writings about Jewish topics since she once taught at Binghamton University and spoke to local synagogue groups. The most recent review of her work, which offered a discussion of her "Night of Beginnings: A Passover Haggadah," appeared in a 2022 issue of the paper. (To read the review, visit www.thereportergroup.org/features/off-the-shelf-haggadot-practical-and-impractical.) Falk is also known for her prayer book "The Book of

Germain, the U.S. State Department's special envoy for Holocaust issues, told JNS in a recent interview.

"I've been reading and talking so much about the liberators. I think their stories aren't known as well as they should be," she said. "We don't know the experiences and the stories of those young guys, who walked into the concentration camps not knowing what they were going to find, and who were absolutely horrified and appalled and couldn't believe their eyes."

Soldiers who liberated camps took part in the Trump administration's Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration at the U.S. Capitol on April 23. Germain told JNS that she was moved to see the veterans, who carried the flags of their army units and the camps they liberated, walking into Emancipation Hall in the Capitol.

"It just gets to me – this rolling litany of names," she said of the list of Holocaust victims presented at the ceremony. "Here are our heroes from the U.S. Army, juxtaposed with these names that just bring up a feeling of horror and sadness. Looking at the soldiers who are carrying those insignias, the banners of the units – they were so young, and that's who was fighting over there, and that's who was liberating Europe, liberating the camps, liberating the survivors."

Germain traveled to Germany and Austria to take part in the 80th anniversary commemorations of U.S. troops liberating the Dachau and Gusen camps. The envoy met

with government officials, Jewish community members and counterparts in Europe to discuss a range of issues, including Holocaust commemoration and education, and "how that connects with countering Holocaust distortion and denial." Holocaust denial is "a really pernicious form of antisemitism," Germain told JNS.

Survivor care and restitution were also on the agenda, including "discussions about the need to continue to push for restitution and compensation and acknowledgement of the great wrong that was done," Germain said.

The U.S. envoy noted that the city of Amsterdam recently issued a formal apology for the role it played in deporting Jews during the Holocaust. Mayor Femke Halsema also announced a fund worth roughly \$28.5 million to support Jewish life and the visibility of Judaism in Holland's capital. It seems especially relevant following the violent assault last November on visiting Maccabi Tel Aviv soccer fans, coupled with a record number of antisemitic incidents in the country in 2024.

"There's still a lot of soul-searching to be done, and it's admirable that the city of Amsterdam just took this step and put this out," Germain told JNS.

The U.S. State Department published a series of short videos of employees whose families survived the Holocaust, describing how the experience inspired them to pursue careers in public service.

Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Holiday," which offers contemporary variations on traditional prayers. Her latest work is a book of personal poems "The Sky Will Overtake You" (Scarlet Tanager Books).

Only a few of the poems have explicit Jewish themes, although there is a Jewish sensibility to all of Falk's writing. "Shivah: Grief's House" uses simple images to capture the experience of sitting *shivah*, while noting how difficult that time is to the mourner because "you cannot help but remember." The poem "Morning" shows the beauty that comes after learning to love your life and the accompanying desire to praise God – the God in whom Falk no longer believes – for that ability. "Rosh Hashanah" uses the idea of the holiday as the birthday of the world by noting the phrase's metaphorical aspects since "the world knows nothing of this invention" and "just keeps moving about itself." In the poem "That Which Flows," the author notes how the world continues its flows, which cannot be changed; nor does the world seem to be waiting "for the Messiah to come."

The majority of the poems focus on the need to enjoy the world that surrounds us, even as Falk also notes the difficulties of aging. There is a muse in "The Muse Finally Speaks" who recommends that rather than waiting for her, readers should focus on the way the world continues with or without us. One poem, "What Do You Hear," challenges us to listen to the sounds around us – everything from a bird call to traffic. Falk focuses on her childhood in "At Six" after looking at a "photo that fades into your fingers." There are life lessons offered from a garden in "Don't Trust Gardeners" and on how things change with age (and not for the better) in "My Hair." The beauty and inspiring moments the world gives us are also featured in "First I Saw Him" and "The Book and the Dog."

The poems in "The Sky Will Overtake You" are quiet, simple ones that suggest readers should stop and appreciate the quiet experiences that make life meaningful, but which we often ignore. They also remind us of the impossibility of imposing our limitations on the natural world. Those who have enjoyed Falk's other works may find much of interest in her more personal look at life, nature and aging.

Romance Continued from page 1

protagonist, recalls the hero of his youth, cousin Heshie, a ruggedly handsome, Newark javelin champion. His engagement to the Polish Alice Dembosky, a beautiful baton-throwing majorette, led Heshie's father to meet Alice secretly, scaring her away with the lie that Heshie was dying of a rare blood disorder, prohibiting intimacy. To exit the tale, Roth records, "When Heshie was killed in the war, the only thing people could think to say to my Aunt Clara and my Uncle Hymie, to somehow mitigate the horror... was, 'At least he didn't leave you with a shikse wife. At least he didn't leave you with goyische children.'"

In contrast, there is a sweetness to the wartime romance of Jewish Abram David and African American Lena Derriecott. In early 1940s metropolitan Philadelphia, playful friendship is a portent of deeper emotions. Lena's adventures in the rumble seat of Abram's car are prelude. Tender

kisses and professions of love precede Lena's acceptance of a promise ring from Abram as he enlists in the Army Air Corps to fight Hitler. Tragically, Abram is killed when enemy fire downs his plane. A soldier on the ground finds an envelope addressed to Lena in Abram's back pocket. That letter long remains undelivered.

Grieving for Abram, Lena joins the war against Hitler as part of the all Black, all woman 6888th battalion tasked with ensuring that 17 million undelivered letters find their proper destination. As part of that process, Abram's letter reaches Lena, but she does not open the blood-stained envelope until she stands at his grave, marked by the Star of David, in a soldier's cemetery overseas. Weeping, Lena reads Abram's words that tell her that if he doesn't make it home, she should live long enough and laugh enough for both of them. Adding to the poignancy of Lena and Abram's romance is the revelation that it was historically grounded, subject to cinematic embellishments. In the epilogue, the real Lena, an indomitable 100 in 2024, appears and speaks directly to viewers, affirming the story.

Although the 1972-73 TV comedy "Bridget Loves Bernie" garnered good ratings, it was cancelled after one season, apparently due to pressure by American Jews apprehensive about rising rates of intermarriage. With the popularity of "Seinfeld," "Mad About You" and similar TV comedy series in the 1990s, interfaith romantic relationships grew ever more prevalent in media, but were more often referenced as an incidental circumstance rather than as a major focus of plot.

"Nobody Wants This," a contemporary streaming comedy series, has brought Judaism and conflict back to the core of interfaith romance. A young, handsome rabbi and a nubile, attractive Gentile podcast host both find the other sexually irresistible to the disgust of the rabbi's mother, who denigrates the "shiksa." A ratings hit, "Nobody Wants This" is simultaneously offensive and hilarious.

Turning from the fictive to the sociological, Pew Research data reports that 72 percent of present-day non-Orthodox American Jews marry Gentiles. For the survival of American Judaism, clearly serious family and synagogue discussions are needed concerning child raising and temple protocols.

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