

# THE REPORTER

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## Film Fest to hold virtual showings

### Four short films

By Reporter staff

The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest will hold a virtual showing of four short films, "No Harm Done," "The Sacred Society," "Women of Virtue" and "The Father, The Son and The Rav." Rochel Chein, co-director of education at Chabad of Binghamton and a responder for Ask the Rabbi at Chabad.org, will moderate a Zoom discussion of the film on Sunday, December 7, at 7 pm. People will be able to register for links to the film and discussion at [www.jfgeb.org/film-fest-2025-26](http://www.jfgeb.org/film-fest-2025-26). Registration is due by Wednesday, December 3. The links will be sent out on Thursday, December 4. The films will be available for viewing from Thursday-Sunday, December 4-7.

The films illustrate different parts of the Jewish life cycle:

◆ "No Harm Done" focuses on how, a week after giving birth, Mila faces her son's circumcision, a tradition she never questioned, with uncertainty. The 18-minute film is in French with subtitles.

◆ "The Sacred Society" is a documentary about the work of the *chevra kadisha* (Jewish burial society) and includes interviews with the volunteers who clean, prepare and dress bodies for burial. The 12-minute film is in English.

◆ "Women of Virtue" tells the story of 9-year-old Etel, who is Orthodox, after she gets her first period. While she is glad that her mother now considers her a woman,



Yoel (Marc Allal) and his son (Jarod Tseror) in "The Father, The Son and The Rav." (Photo courtesy of Seven Arts Releasing)

she is unhappy when she learns that, in her community, women are considered impure when they have their period. The 29-minute film is in French with subtitles.

◆ "The Father, The Son and The Rav" is a comedy about Yoel, 30, an Orthodox Jew, who attends synagogue every Saturday with his 6-year-old son. When his son inadvertently disrupts the solemnity of Shabbat, it leads to a humorous and challenging interaction with the community's rabbi. The 16-minute film is in French with English subtitles.

"The Film Fest Committee is excited to present these four short films as a combined 'package,' each highlighting a different view into Jewish life," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, which sponsors the Film Fest. "We hope you will join us for what will be an interesting and meaningful conversation."

## Matching grant for The Reporter

By Reporter staff

The Reporter announced that it has received a \$5,000 matching grant courtesy of the David and Virginia Eisenberg Fund. Donations will be accepted now through December 2. Donations may be made several ways:

◆ Give online through The Reporter Group's website, [www.thereportergroup.org](http://www.thereportergroup.org).  
◆ Through Giving Tuesday e-mails that will be sent by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton. Anyone who does not receive Federation e-mails, but would like to be on the list, should e-mail [director@jfgeb.org](mailto:director@jfgeb.org) with "Federation e-mail list" in the subject line.

◆ Mail donations to The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850 with "matching grant" in the check's subject line.

"We are thrilled to once again receive a matching grant from the David and Virginia Eisenberg Fund," said Rabbi Rachel Esserman, executive editor of The Reporter Group. "They have been so generous over the years, and we deeply appreciate all they have done and continue to do."

Esserman added, "If you are thinking about making a donation to the paper, this is the perfect time to do it. Every penny counts in this economic climate. So many Jewish newspapers are either going under or turning into online publications only. Although The Reporter will be going monthly, I am pleased we are still able to produce a hard-copy newspaper for our readers. I know that I prefer to read offline. Plus, a hard copy is great for those of us who like to read the paper on Shabbat, but don't get on the computer that day. We try to be the one-stop shop for those interested in learning about Jewish events in our community."

Esserman also noted, "Over the past three years, The Reporter has received Syracuse Press Club awards and American Jewish Press Association Simon Rockower awards. That is pretty impressive for a small community newspaper."

Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation, was also pleased that The Reporter See "Grant" on page 4

### "The Matchmaker"

By Reporter staff

The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest will hold a virtual showing of the film "The Matchmaker." Matthew Johnson, professor of psychology and director of clinical training at Binghamton University, will moderate a Zoom discussion of the film on Sunday, December 28, at 7 pm. People will be able to register for links to the film and discussion at [www.jfgeb.org/film-fest-2025-26](http://www.jfgeb.org/film-fest-2025-26). Registration is due by Wednesday, December 24. The film will be available for viewing from Thursday-Sunday, December 25-28. The film is in Hebrew with English subtitles.

"The Matchmaker" tells the story of Arik, a teenage boy growing up in Haifa in 1968, who begins working for Yankele Bride, a matchmaker and Holocaust survivor. Mixing comedy and drama, the coming-of-age story follows not only his employment with Yankele, but what occurs after he falls in love with Tamara, who has just returned from the U.S. and wants to discuss women's rights, free love, and rock and roll.

The film received seven nominations for Israel's Ophir Awards in 2010, including Best Picture. Adir Miller won in the Best Actor category and Maya Dagan won in the



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

Best Actress category. Other awards include Audience Award for Best Feature Film at the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival and the Silver Plaque Award at the Chicago International Film Festival.

"The Matchmaker" is a unique story that gives the viewers a look at life in Israel during the 1960s," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, which sponsors the Film Fest. "Join us for a film that will both bring a smile to your face and warm your heart."

## Family Hanukkah party at Discovery Center on Dec. 14

By Reporter staff

A Family Hanukkah Party will be held on Sunday, December 14, at 1 pm, at the Discovery Center, located next to the Ross Park Zoo, 60 Morgan Rd., Binghamton. The event is co-sponsored by Hillel Academy, the Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton and the PJ Library. There will be crafts, singing, storytelling, kosher donuts and time to play in the museum. There is no charge to attend, but registration is required by Friday, December 12. Regis-

tration will be at [www.jfgeb.org](http://www.jfgeb.org).

"Young families are once again invited to celebrate Hanukkah at the Discovery Center," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "This event is a great way to explore your Jewish roots, meet other young families and have a great time at the local children's museum."

Hubal added, "I want to thank Tara Kaminsky, Maren Nasar and Rose Shapiro for taking the lead in organizing this year's event. It is sure to be a special afternoon full of friends and festivity."

## JCC Community Hanukkah Celebration on Dec. 15

The annual Community Hanukkah Celebration will take place at the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, on Monday, December 15, from 5:15-7 pm. The evening will begin with the Hanukkah torch walk and candle lighting. There will be a brief ceremony with music and recitations. The event will then move into the JCC's auditorium and feature performances by the JCC Early Childhood Center and Hillel Academy, as well as a showing of the annual

community Hanukkah video. Reservations are appreciated and can be made by calling the JCC office at 607-724-2417.

The torch walk will take place from 5:15-5:30 pm, followed by entertainment from 5:30-6 pm indoors, at which time the food buffet will open. From 6-7 pm, there will be activities featuring dreidels, gelt, crafts and games. Food tickets will be sold for \$8 per person, and \$6 for seniors and children, with a family maximum of \$28.

## Ithaca City Planning Board OKs new Cornell Grinspoon Hillel

By Reporter staff

The Ithaca City Planning Board has given final site plan approval to the proposed new Grinspoon Hillel building on the Cornell campus. This would be the first stand-

alone Hillel building on Cornell University campus. Construction is expected to be completed in 2027. The three-story building will include educational and cultural spaces, worship areas, classrooms, student lounges,

a café, a communal kitchen and staff offices. According to the Cornell Hillel Campaign website, [www.cornellhillelcampaign.org](http://www.cornellhillelcampaign.org), Hillel is attempting to raise \$54 million by June 30, 2026, to pay for the building.

A press release from Cornell Hillel noted, "This campaign to enhance the facilities available to the Jewish community at Cornell includes a leadership gift from See "Cornell" on page 4

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## Opinion

## L'dor v'dor, from generation to generation, at the JCC

By Susan Walker

The Jewish Community Center has been a safe harbor for our family since my husband Mark and I moved to Vestal just over 40 years ago. (I know, how did that happen.) Within the Center's walls, we have formed lasting friendships and an unbreakable bond to this community.

After years of moving for school and work, we were more than ready to put down roots – build a home, raise our daughter and become part of a community. Mark and I had family in Vestal and, as a child, I had always loved visiting – those trips often included gatherings and celebrations at the JCC. To me, Vestal felt like a magical place, far removed from the chaos of Long Island. Together, Mark and I chose to make it our home – a safe, welcoming community where we could raise our family and truly belong.

The day after we arrived, Mark began his post-school and residency career, while I walked our daughter Caren across the street to her first day of summer camp at the JCC. Looking back, I can honestly say that in all the years since, we've rarely gone a day without stopping by – even if just for a brief moment of connection amid the busyness of life.

As our family grew with the arrival of two more children, all three of our kids were fortunate enough to be raised in the nurturing environment of the JCC.

A true story: I once stood in the lobby with my 2-year-

old twins and said, "Either start early childcare – or I'm leaving my kids right here." The very next day, the program began. From there, our children's JCC journey unfolded: starting with preschool and camp, moving on to after-school activities from sports to art and ballet, taking part in the Center's teen group Jewish Center Youth, then on to basketball leagues and the Maccabi Games, and eventually even working at the Center in the office, as camp counselors and at the fitness gate.

Now, some 40 years later, we bring our grandchildren through the same doors: for preschool, camp, Hanukkah parties and Purim carnivals. They know they are following in their parents' footsteps and take pride in our family's deep connection to the JCC. The younger ones even tell their friends that their grandparents have two houses – one with a pool, gym and playground – and we happily let them believe it.

I have had the honor of serving multiple terms as president, and it's rare for either of us to miss a board meeting or event. Our dedication to advancing the JCC for future generations remains as strong as ever. This month, as we celebrate the start of our 100<sup>th</sup> year, we are working diligently to ensure that the vision of our founders continues to thrive for the next century.

Mike Wright, trustee of the David Eisenberg donor ad-

vised fund, has generously pledged to match all donations up to \$400,000. The campaign will extend over three fiscal years – 2025, 2026 and 2027 – giving donors the flexibility to spread their contributions should they choose to.

L'dor v'dor – from generation to generation – the JCC continues to be a cornerstone of our Jewish community, passing on our traditions, values and wisdom while helping to build lasting family legacies. We invite you to give generously to support this vital campaign.

In a world full of uncertainty, the JCC stands as a beacon of hope, safety and kindness. We take pride in being an open and welcoming space for everyone in our community, embracing diversity and inclusion while striving to serve as a positive example in our complex world.

Mark and I are proud to be co-chairmen of the centennial campaign. Thank you for being wonderful.

Mark and Susan Walker are the co-chairmen of the Jewish Community Center's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration campaign. The goal is to raise \$800,000. Donations may be made immediately or pledged over the campaign period through Sunday, October 31, 2027. The David Eisenberg Donor Advised Fund will match all contributions up to \$400,000. To donate, checks may be sent to the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850. For more information, contact the JCC at 607-724-2417.

## One Perspective from Israel

## A strange Yom Kippur on the Gaza border – part 2

JEREMY M. STAIMAN

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

The dawn of Yom Kippur day saw many soldiers heading off to *Shacharit*. Not Arky. He had responsibilities prior to his stint as *chazzan* for *Musaf*. He headed to the gate for a shift of *shmira* – guard duty – opening and closing the gate for vehicles entering and exiting the base. On a day when he was used to taking extra care not to violate any of the Shabbat-like restrictions, pushing the buttons to open and shut the gate was an uncomfortable experience. It took him back to his service in the Paratroops 14 years ago, when he was guarding in Hebron, when many a Shabbat was spent doing traffic control. Surreal.

His shift ended. He headed to the makeshift *shul*, and donned his *kittel* on top of his uniform. This wasn't always his *kittel*. It was his Saba's *kittel*, which was given to Arky when his grandfather passed away 13 years ago. Saba was a veteran of the World War II U.S. Army Air Force.

Seeing his grandsons, Avi and Arky, in the uniform of the IDF gave him *nachas* beyond words. For his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, the brothers gave him a paratrooper's beret adorned with Air Force wings, representing the forces they served in at the time. Saba affixed it on the wall next to his favorite recliner and it accompanied him every day until his death.

Now Arky was slipping Saba's *kittel* over a very real, very active Israel-Army uniform. Surreal. So surreal.

Considerably more cozy than their crowd the previous eve, Arky was number 12 to the minyan, which had reached *kriyat hatorah* by the time he finished his shift and arrived. It would not be long before it would be time for his *Musaf* debut.

Taking a breath, he stepped up to the *bima* and did his thing. His voice was strong. He tried to be conscious of the varying customs and incorporate multi-cultural tunes. He tried to be wary of the time, though by now the guys

knew him well enough to expect a lot of singing, dancing and jumping around. In fact, he probably sweats as much while leading a typical Shabbat *Musaf* as he does in his post-Shabbat CrossFit routine.

Cognizant of the need to keep consuming the *shuirim*, he refilled his small cup from time to time and took a swig. On Yom Kippur. On the *bima*. During *tefillah*. Surreal.

As they reached the storied *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer, the congregation became the unexpected beneficiaries of audio effects emanating from the Gaza side of the border.

*Mi yichyeh* – who shall live. Boom!!!

*Mi Yamut* – who shall die. Boom!!! Boom!!!!

Did we mention surreal?

When he prostrated for *Aleinu*, he had a sense of déjà vu. How many years had he stood by his father's side, See "Strange" on page 11

## In My Own Words

## The holiday season

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Years ago, a friend challenged her Facebook friends to post something daily for which they were grateful during the month of November. It was an interesting exercise and mine ranged from the personal to societal, including such things as modern medicine, electricity and running water. No one has suggested doing that again (at least, not on my friends' list), but November and December are the time of year when many people start to count their blessings before enjoying the holidays.

As of this writing, I have no plans for Thanksgiving and that's fine. That four-day weekend used to be hectic as I would take over activities for rabbis who were going out of town. For several years, I had a lunch with friends at the Spot Restaurant, but, since that closed, I've been OK with just relaxing at home. When my father was alive, my parents and I would go out for Chinese on the day (yes, I know that's supposed to be on Christmas, but this was our tradition), but that stopped after my father died the Tuesday before

Thanksgiving. The holiday has not felt the same since.

December can be a difficult month. The first Hanukkah of the pandemic was so distressing that, for the past few years, I've brightened my holiday by creating new traditions, including lighting a different menorah each night and lighting all of them the last day of the holiday. I also bought eight days' worth of presents for myself (something that *never* happened when I was kid), but when a Facebook memory reminded me of that this year, I decided that didn't suit my mood right now. For a variety of reasons, I'm not up to the quest of finding them (although I confess to many of those gifts being things like calendars I would have purchased anyway).

The most difficult part of this season is a holiday I've never celebrated: Christmas. That's because my little brother Larry, who had Down syndrome, loved Christmas and adored Santa Claus. (One year, he asked for Santa on his birthday cake in January, so, of course, that's the decoration we put in the cake.) The first December after he passed

away, I saw a large inflatable Santa Claus on my way into the office and burst into tears. That's one reason I go out with friends for Chinese on Christmas Eve: Larry used to come home overnight then (he lived in a group home) and it felt too sad not to have him with me.

As strange as it may sound, though, I've come to appreciate the Christmas holiday in a way I've never done before after seeing it through the eyes of the individuals who are part of my chaplaincy work. The joy of the season resonates with them in a way unlike any I've experienced before. There is pure joy on those faces when they see a Christmas tree or take part in a holiday party. Watching that makes the season easier for me because it reminds me of how Larry used to feel, although he was not always satisfied with the presents he received.

I've said during my chaplaincy work that everyone shares everyone else's holiday. That multiplies the joy. Even when I feel sad during the month of December, I remember that it is a time of light for all of us, each in our own way.



**Jewish Federation**  
of Greater Binghamton

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BINGHAMTON, NY

## OPINIONS

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

## LETTERS

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

## ADS

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

## DEADLINE

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

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www.thereporter.org

# TC/TI adult ed. program to feature “The Exciting Lives of Small-City Jews” on Dec. 7

The Adult Education Committee of Temple Concord and Temple Israel will hold a program and light brunch on Sunday, December 7, from 10 am-noon, at Temple Concord, 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton. Benjamin Kellman will introduce aspects of his Ph.D. dissertation in progress, “The Anxious Americanization of Small-City Jews: 1939-1979.” The community is invited to attend. There is a suggested donation of between \$5-20 per person. For more information and to RSVP, contact Temple Israel at 607-723-7461 or office@templeisraelvestal.org, or Temple Concord at 607-723-7355 by Monday, December 1, so enough refreshments can be prepared.



Benjamin Kellman  
(Photo courtesy of Benjamin Kellman)

Kellman will discuss answers to some of the following questions: How did two San Francisco Jews come to own most of the valuable property in Alaska, and how did Jewish women build an Alaskan community? How did Jewish fur traders manage the extremes of the Alaskan wilderness, and how did a Jew in Alaska help the Palmach (the Jewish paramilitary force in British Mandate Palestine) survive? How were southern small-city Jews’ experiences different from those of Jews elsewhere and different from those of southern non-Jews? What happened when a northern, progressive rabbi came south and advocated desegregation? How did Las Vegas Jews make their city into a tourist destination, and how did they attract Jews from around the country? How did a Las Vegas Jew come to supply the Israeli Air Force in 1948?

“Constituting small and highly visible minorities, small-city Jews recognized their dependency on the good graces of their non-Jewish neighbors in their social and economic interactions and behaved accordingly,” said organizers of the event. “Their self-conscious concern to balance an impeccable Americanness with an authentic Jewishness led to different experiences from those living in either of the two more-studied locales: large urban centers and small towns.”

Kellman will also offer a few vignettes of Binghamton’s Jewish history, including a story, along with newspaper clippings, that few of the current Binghamton Jewish community may know, even though they may have been alive when it happened. Kellman will also say a little bit

about Binghamton’s first resident rabbi, his “abnormally talented” son and other stories.

Kellman received his undergraduate degree in history from the State University of New York at New Paltz and his M.A in history from Binghamton University. He is currently working on his Ph.D. in history at Binghamton University. He was the 2024-25 recipient of the Rabbi Harold D. Hahn Memorial Fellowship at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, affording

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to Debra Daniels on the death of her mother,  
**Lottie Bennett**

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to Glen Thomas on the death of his father,  
**Gary S. Thomas**

## BD Shabbat luncheon on Dec. 13 on mushrooms and Judaism

Beth David Synagogue’s December luncheon will be held on Saturday, December 13, and feature Adam Carlin speaking on “From Blessing to Bias: An Exploration of Mushrooms in Judaism.” The community is invited to attend. Morning services will begin at 9:30 am, with the luncheon and program following the conclusion of services. The luncheon is free and open to the public.



Adam Carlin (Photo courtesy of Adam Carlin)

symbols of wonder and vehicles for antisemitic persecution, including how Nazi propaganda exploited them. He will also answer the questions about how Jewish communities developed rich traditions of mushroom foraging throughout the world and the scientific mycological research is taking place in Israel today. “These are just some of the fascinating issues that Carlin will address in his talk,” organizers said. “We are sure to come away from his talk knowing more about mushrooms than we had ever considered before. Come and join us for a captivating presentation, where you can get answers to all your questions about mushrooms and more!”

Carlin is the co-founder of the new Jewish Mycological Society. A branch of biology that focuses on the study of fungi, mycology is the subject of his forthcoming book “Dust and Ashes and Spores.”

“In my research for the book,” Carlin said, “I found a surprising and profound relationship between mushrooms and Jewish culture that spans millennia. I was amazed to discover their revered status in Talmudic texts, as well as their complex role in Jewish law and contemporary spiritual practice.”

Carlin received a B.F.A. from California College of the Arts and an M.F.A. in art and social practice from Portland State. He is an American/Israeli curator, educator, arts administrator and socially engaged artist living in Central New York. He is currently the executive director of Women of the Shoah, a non-profit that brings

The talk will look at how fungi have served as both

### DEADLINES

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

ISSUE	DEADLINE
December 12-25	December 3
December 26-January 2026	December 17
February	January 7
March	February 11

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

## BD Sisterhood and Men’s Club to hold Hanukkah party on Dec. 17

The Beth David’s Sisterhood and Men’s Club will hold a Hanukkah party on Wednesday, December 17, at 6 pm, in the Beth David social hall. A donation of \$15 will be requested from attendees at the door. The entire community is invited to attend. Reservations should be made by Friday, December 12, by contacting Stacey Silber at 607-727-9738, or silbercreations@gmail.com. Drop-ins will not be turned away.



Steve Gilbert (Photo by Denise Gilbert)

Steve Gilbert, professor emeritus of psychology at SUNY Oneonta and past president of Temple Israel, will provide musical entertainment during the party. He noted that he learned to play a soprano ukulele (the smallest size) at the age of 4 before graduating to the baritone ukulele, which he will be playing at the party.

for Sisterhood dues or for mitzvah cards. Anyone on Sisterhood’s e-mail list or who receives Rabbi Zev Silber’s weekly newsletter should receive a flyer designed by Rabbi David Serkin announcing the party. Anyone who wants to be added to either list should send their request and e-mail address to the Beth David Synagogue office at bethdavid@stny.rr.com.

Additionally, Merav Yarkoni, a Ph.D. neuroscientist and Israeli dance instructor from Tel-Aviv University, will teach Israeli folk dance and body movements to music while sitting.

“The community is invited to join the members and friends of Beth David Sisterhood and Men’s Club as they celebrate Hanukkah with lots of food, dreidels to play with (bring your own if you like), entertainment and, of course, the lighting of the Hanukkah menorah,” said organizers of the event. “We would like to thank the Eisenberg Foundation that will again be covering our major expenses.”

Organizers added, “Please let us know if you plan to attend, so we can be certain to have enough food for everyone. Being a Jewish event, there probably will be enough food for you even if you show up and forgot to RSVP, but please do. See you at the party.”

Donations for CHOW will be accepted, as will payment

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# Jewish Baseball Players

## Max Fried: 2025 Jewish Most Valuable Player

BILL SIMONS

A few weeks ago, a high school cheerleader encountered an uncomfortable situation. Bonding, the cheerleaders gathered in a circle to pray. It was a Christian prayer. The young woman, the only Jew on the squad, talked to her mother, herself a cheerleader back in the day, about the incident. The mother contacted the coach to explain that their family was Jewish. Contemporaneously, her brother became aware that there were no other Jewish players on the football team. He really likes football and his teammates, but seemed to be wondering if the sport was a Jewish activity. Brother and sister had both attended a Jewish elementary day school. To provide anonymity, I do not identify their names, hometown or relationship to me. These episodes and the many that preceded it during the generations of my life reinforce my resolve to continue to write about Jewish participation in sports.

Gentiles should recognize that Jews are present on the gridiron, diamond, hardcourt, rink, track, links, ring, mat, bars and net. And Jews, particularly our youth, should know that we are not strangers to sport. In fact, many of us have come to advocate for muscular Judaism. In that spirit, I present the following article, naming my choice for the Jewish Most Valuable Player of the 2025 baseball season. Having followed this practice for several years through my columns, I do not regard the designation as either whimsical or satiric. Hopefully, it will encourage aspiring Jewish athletes while countering stereotypes about Jews as people of the book, but not of the bat.

One of the best pitchers of this generation, New York Yankees southpaw Max Fried is the undisputed 2025 Jewish Most Valuable Player. Not since the Baltimore Orioles' Steve Stone won 25 games and the Cy Young Award in 1980 has a Jewish

hurler done more. Nicknamed Maximus for his dominance on the mound, Fried won 19 games, the most victories notched by any MLB pitcher in either league this past season. With only five defeats, he also paced qualifying pitchers with a .792 won-loss percentage. Tall and lean, the 6'4", 190 pounds, Fried yielded only 51 walks in a career high 195.1 innings while notching 189 strikeouts. Named to the All-Star Game roster for a third time, Fried declined due to concerns about managing his regular-season innings pitched. His 2.86 earned run average ranked fourth lowest in the American League. Fried received his fourth Gold Glove Award, given annually in the two leagues to the best defensive player at each position. (An excellent all-around athlete, Fried won a Silver Slugger Award during his time with the Atlanta Braves prior to the National League joining the American League in elimination of batting by pitchers.)

Fried garnered big headlines even before the start of the 2025 campaign. He opted for free agency after establishing himself as one of the game's elite pitchers during eight seasons with the Braves. The Yankees won the Fried bidding war, giving the southpaw an eight-year \$218 million contract that set MLB records for lefty pitchers and Jewish ballplayers.

The acquisition price proved worth it. With a glacial blank stare, precision control painting the corners of the plate and a deep arsenal of pitches, Fried deconstructed opposition batting orders. Mixing up his cutter, sinker, curveball, four-seam fastball, changeup, sweeper and slider, Fried appeared nearly invincible during the first half of the 2025 season. By June 25, he sported an MLB high 10 wins against only two losses. Then, a blister presaged

a tough July and August. Media doubters questioned whether AL batters had caught onto the Fried repertoire, signaling an end to his early season idyll. Then, September brought redemption, with Fried tallying five victories, not losing a single game and registering a 1.89 ERA for the month.

Even a disappointing post-season – no decision in the Wild Card Series, defeat in the Division Series, early elimination of the Yankees – could dim the luster of Fried's debut season in New York.

Circumspect concerning religion and romance, Fried is a private person. When the Yankees formally introduced their new addition, however, Fried's mother, Carrie, and girlfriend, former collegiate volleyball star Reni Meyer-Whalley, took part in the ceremony. Both of Fried's special ladies received flower bouquets from the Yankee brass at the start of the press conference.

By parentage, identification and deed, Fried is Jewish. His idolization of Sandy Koufax reinforces that identification. A 15-years-old Fried traveled to Israel in 2009 as part of the U.S. junior baseball team that won a gold medal in the Maccabiah Games. Nonetheless, in contrast to dramatic Yom Kippur episodes featuring the refusal of Detroit Tigers slugger Hank Greenberg to take the field during the 1934 AL pennant race and Koufax declining to pitch the opening game of the 1965 World Series, Fried has never faced such a polarizing

public controversy over his religion. In 2019, Fried, while observing a Yom Kippur fast, took the mound for the Braves, during the NL Division Series. Of attention to his religion, Fried stated, "It's special because there aren't very many Jewish players in the majors. I'm happy about it..."

Unlike Alex Bregman and Dean Kremer, Fried did not don a Star of David in an MLB game during the Hamas-Israel War. Nor has Fried, unlike several other past and present Jewish major leaguers – including Kremer, Shawn Green, Jason Marquis, Ian Kinsler, Joc Pederson, Garrett Stubbs, Ryan Lavanway and Spencer Horwitz – yet played for Team Israel in the World Baseball Classic. But talking with the *New York Post*, Fried's Jewish consciousness came to the fore remembering his journey to the Dachau concentration camp: "Me growing up Jewish and understanding that I have a lot of family that were killed in the Holocaust... You go into the grounds... to experience it in person... see the gas chambers... brought a heaviness and a weight and more of an understanding."

By the end of the 2025 season, the 31-year-old Fried ratcheted his career total to 92 wins against only 41 losses for a remarkable .692 winning percentage. If Fried stays healthy and on track over the course of his contract, he has a good chance to surpass Ken Holtzman's Jewish pitcher record of 174 career victories.

### Grant . . . . . Continued from page 1

received the grant. "I think the paper is a valuable addition to our community," she said. "It not only lets me know what local organizations are doing, but helps keep us connected. Thank

you to the Eisenberg Fund for its gift. I know the generosity of our community will make this fourth Giving Tuesday mini-campaign a success."

### Cornell . . . . . Continued from page 1

Steven Grinspoon '83 and Winnie Sandler Grinspoon '83, who met at Cornell as undergraduates. In recognition of their gift, Cornell Hillel has been renamed The Steven K. and Winifred A. Grinspoon Hillel Center for Jewish Community at Cornell."

"The generosity of our donors allows us to create a permanent and welcoming space for the Jewish community at Cornell and a beautiful addition to the Cornell campus," said Rabbi Ari Weiss, CEO of Grinspoon

Hillel. "The new Hillel building will be a place for Jewish students to gather, celebrate and explore their identity, and connect with each other. Most importantly, it will be a home and a space where they belong. I would especially like to thank Steven and Winnie Grinspoon for their deep philanthropic support. In addition to being proud Cornellians, Steven and Winnie are visionary Jewish leaders who have promoted Jewish literacy, community, and peoplehood for years."

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# CHANUKAH Greetings

**Deadline: December 4 (December 12 issue)**

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**Style D - \$40**  
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*Wishing you a Happy Chanukah*  
light • peace • love

Your Name(s)

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*May the lights of Chanukah shine in your hearts forever*  
Your name(s)

**CHANUKAH Greetings**

**Deadline: December 4 (December 12 issue)**

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Greeting Style \_\_\_\_\_ Message \_\_\_\_\_

How you would like it signed \_\_\_\_\_

We accept  Visa  Mastercard  American Express  Discover

Print Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address, City, State, Zip (Registered billing address of card) \_\_\_\_\_

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**THE REPORTER**

**Style E - \$21**  
Actual Size: 1.52" x 1.975"

*Warm Chanukah wishes to you and your family!*

Your Name(s)

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Actual Size: 1.52" x 1.975"

**HAPPY CHANUKAH!**

YOUR NAME(S)



# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Judaism and trauma

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Religion can be a source of comfort for someone going through a traumatic experience. Religion can also be a source of pain for those who feel it doesn't provide adequate answers to their questions and struggles. These two statements articulate the themes underlying the essays found in "The Sacred Struggle: Jewish Responses to Trauma" edited by Rabbi Lindsey Danziger and Rabbi Benjamin David (Reform Judaism Publishing/CCAR Press). The writers featured show the struggles they went through in order to reconcile Judaism and the trauma they experienced, while outlining the different paths that often took.

In her introductory essay "Defining Trauma: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Changes Us," Betsy Stone, Ph.D., makes it clear that, after a traumatic experience, life does not return to the old normal, but, rather, people find themselves experiencing a new version of normal. She notes we store our memories of trauma in our limbic system, meaning that our bodies can react to trauma before our brains are able to interpret what is happening. She discusses post-traumatic growth, but notes that this cannot be guaranteed because trauma "changes the way our brains function." Her essay helps put the other essays into perspective as each writer struggles with making sense of the changes that occurred in their lives.

The work is divided into five sections. The first, "Jewish Textual Foundations for Understanding Trauma" offers commentary on how biblical, rabbinic, liturgical, musical and poetic writings can help people deal with trauma. The trauma of medical conditions is featured in "Trauma of Acute to Chronic Illness." "Trauma of Marginalization" includes discussions of addictions, transition, depression and racism. Recovery from acts of violence is explored in "Trauma from Personal and Communal Violence." "Trauma from Natural Disasters and Pandemics" offers lessons about reactions to hurricanes, wildfires, AIDS and COVID. Ethical misconduct, toxic communities and retirement are the topics under discussion in "Trauma and

Community." The last section focuses are on "Trauma and Family," with essays discussing divorce, infertility, suicide and mourning a child.

The essays are uniformly well done, although different ones will obviously resonate with readers depending on their life experiences or the skill of the author. Those that stood out include:

◆ Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman's discussion of the way liturgy can help those who have experienced a trauma in "Can Religion Bring Comfort? The Case for Liturgy." He notes that although God does not always answer our prayers, it's still important to pray, noting that the ancient rabbis "fashioned prayer not simply as statements of fact... but as expressions of hope" that are still meaningful today.

◆ Rabbi Wendy Zierler's look at how song can help us heal in "Again the Song Goes Out: October 7 Through the Lens of Classic Israeli Song." Her thoughts on the use of these songs to find comfort and meaning will make readers look forward to her upcoming book "Going Out with Knots: My Two Kaddish Years with Hebrew Poetry."

◆ Rabbi Debra R. Hachen's incredibly moving tribute to her husband, Peter, and his struggle with Alzheimer's disease, which also discusses the ways his disease affected her, in "Discovering Holiness: A Jewish Love Story in the Shadow of Alzheimer's." Her deep love for Peter is clearly expressed, as are her fears and doubts.

◆ Rabbi Joel Mosbacher's discussion of his reaction to the murder of his father in "From the Narrow Places: The Trauma of Gun Violence." He offers interesting thoughts on the Mourner's *Kaddish*: "And in those first months after his death, I read the words of the Mourner's *Kaddish* as if for the first time. I always knew that the prayer didn't speak of death, but when I read it after my father was killed, I came to realize that, for me, it was a kind of fake-it-until-you-make-it prayer." The prayer offered him the hope that someday he would once again be able to praise God.

◆ Rabbi Paul Kipnes, who writes about surviving a

wildfire in "The Still Small Voice: How Faith Helped Navigate California's Wildfires." Using verses from I Kings, he notes that we should not expect to find God while we are in the midst of a crisis. Instead, once the crisis is over, "we fight our way back to renewed faith. And there we found the still small voice." He sees that voice in the way the community helped each other and how others – friends, family and others – brought peace and comfort.

◆ Two discussions on illness – "Choosing Life and Finding Resilience in the Face of AIDS" by Rabbi Denise L. Eger and "Nachamu Ami, Comfort My People: Serving as a Hospital Chaplain During COVID" by Rabbi Leah Cohen Tenenbaum, D.Min, B.C.C., P.C.A.H.C. – show not only the toll illness takes on family and friends, but on chaplains trying to deal with trauma.

◆ Two essays on the tragic death of the authors' children – "The Crawl Space Between Grief and Gratitude: The Devastating Death of a Daughter" by Rabbi Susan Talve and "A Path to Healing Through Tradition: Jewish Mourning Rituals and Beliefs After the Death of My Child" by Rabbi Rex D. Perlmeter, L.S.W. – which are moving and challenging works about one of the worst things that can happen to a parent.

Due to the emotional nature of the essays, "The Sacred Struggle" is best read a little at a time so as not to feel overwhelmed by the grief many of these authors still feel. In the work's concluding essay, "Nechemta: Find Comfort," Danziger warns that readers are at risk of secondary trauma as a result of bearing witness to what the writers experienced. Those who have lived through particular trauma may also find themselves triggered by specific essays. Danziger does hope that readers – especially those who have experienced trauma – will find comfort and wisdom in these pages. The work certainly does give one a great deal to ponder, particularly the different ways the writers have learned to live with the experiences that have scarred their lives.

## Choosing your own life path

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

At first glance, it might seem as if the two novels in this review have almost nothing in common. After all, "Sisters of Fortune" by Esther Chehebar (Random House) features three sisters who belong to a contemporary Syrian-American Jewish community, while "Girls Girls Girls" by Shoshana von Blanckensee (G. P. Putnam's Sons) focuses on a young woman who left her Orthodox Jewish home to travel to San Francisco to live openly as a lesbian during the 1990s. However, the four women in these novels have one thing in common: they are each searching for a future that answers their needs, rather than just conforming to the expectations of their community.

The Brooklyn Syrian-American Jewish community featured in "Sisters of Fortune" is an insular one. As one sister describes it, "Sometimes it feels like this place is frozen in time, a time that only exists for us. It's a funny thing, predictability. To grow up knowing what was before you, the type of man you'd marry, the house you would raise your kids in, the kind of life you'd live. How and when, I guess that was the only part up to you." Their elders, the ones who moved from Syria to the United States to escape persecution, crave this quiet life. The same sister later notes that "the boundaries don't make them feel trapped; they make them feel safe."

The same is not true for all those born in the United States, though. Nina Cohen, the oldest sister, who is considered a spinster at age 26, longs for a wider world. When Nina finds work that is not just a stop-gap before marriage, she comes to admire parts of her community, even as her job provides her with a type of satisfaction she's never known before. Lucy, the youngest sister, has no desire to escape the community: even though she is only in her last year of high school, she dreams of marrying early and starting a family. When she attracts an older man as a suitor, the question becomes whether he is serious enough about their connection to propose marriage.

However, the most interesting sister is Fortune, who is often overlooked because she always does the right thing. While her parents may worry about Nina and Lucy, they never worry about Fortune. She engaged to Saul Dweck, a member of the community who immediately feels comfortable in the Cohen home. While Fortune worries about her demanding mother-in-law, whose old-fashioned expectations Fortune wonders if she will be able to fulfil, being close to your husband's family is considered important in this community. However, Fortune begins to ponder whether she has ever actually made a decision based on her own needs and desires, rather than what the community thinks

she should do. As her wedding day approaches, Fortune worries that she will never know true happiness and love. Yet, if she breaks the engagement, the scandal will not only affect her life, but those of her sisters.

The narrative alternates between the viewpoints of the three sisters, but also includes sections from a book of instructions about *niddah*, the Jewish laws of ritual purity. All soon-to-be-married women are required to take the course because, in this Orthodox community, all married women are expected to separate from their husbands during their menstrual period and immerse in the *mikvah* (the ritual bath) afterward. These lessons show that, even though the novel takes place in contemporary times, Judaism still informs these women's daily lives.

"Sisters of Fortune" is perfect for book clubs since readers can debate the different choices the women make. Readers can also discuss the pros and cons of living in such an insular community. The author shows both sides of the community – the good and the problematic – but whether the closeness suits a person is an individual decision. However, readers will come to care for each of these sisters, hoping that their decisions will have positive results.

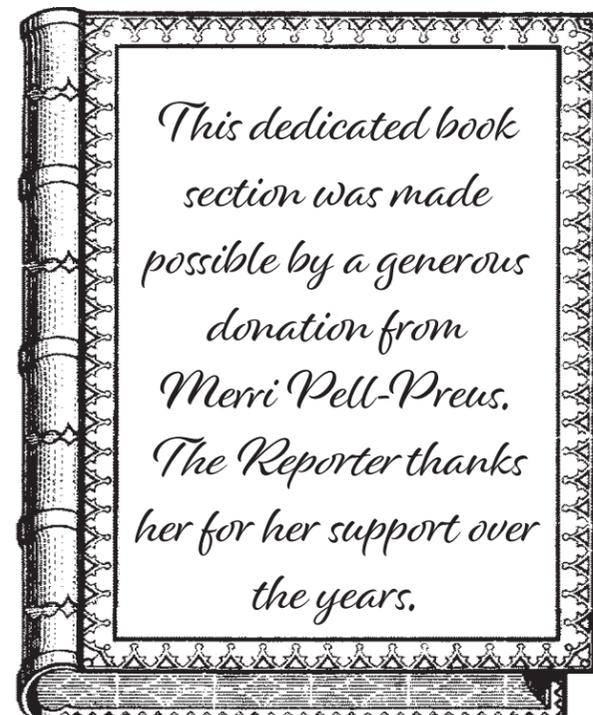
While some of the sisters in "Sisters of Fortune" are drawn to their community, in "Girls Girls Girls," it's clear that Hannah wants to leave home the minute high school is over. When her mother moved from being a Reform Jew to an Orthodox one in Hannah's childhood, Hannah found the new rules and regulations confining, rather than inspiring. Although she dislikes having to leave her sister, Rachel, and her grandmother, known as Bubbe, Hannah believes the family will be better off without her. Plus, Hannah has realized that she is a lesbian, having fallen in love with her friend Sam, who travels to San Francisco with her.

However, she and Sam had not thought through what it means for two young women with no job skills to move to an expensive city. Although they love the fact that women don't have to hide their sexuality, that doesn't help them with expenses. Then the girls discover a quick and easy way to make money: performing at a strip club. Sam takes easily to stripping, although Hannah feels uncomfortable. When she meets an older woman at the club, Hannah goes on paid dates with her, rather than stripping. Unfortunately, a wedge begins to grow between the two friends: Sam wishes Hannah would return to the club, rather than having paid sex with someone. Even worse, Sam also begins to make new friends, going out on her own, while Hannah still feels uncomfortable with parts of their new community and her own sexuality.

Without Sam, Hannah feels a bit aimless. She thinks

back to a former friend, April, to whom Hannah didn't say goodbye before leaving the East Coast. April, who lives with foster parents, was Hannah's best friend; the two were close until Sam came into their lives. At first, the three were friends, but then Sam wanted to spend time alone with Hannah, separating her from April. Hannah now wonders whom she is if Sam is not part of her life. Was April correct in saying that Sam controlled her? These questions become even more relevant when a family emergency tests Hannah's resolve.

"Girls Girls Girls" follows Hannah as she matures and grows in understanding. During most of the novel, she is very self-involved, which is understandable given her background. However, as she begins to see people beyond the narrow of focus of her desires and is able to concentrate on their needs, she becomes someone for whom readers will root. One can debate the choices Hannah and Sam make, which would make this of interest for some book clubs. The work also highlights the choices women with few skills still face today: what do you do when your body is your most valuable asset? That was a lesson worth pondering in the 1990s and one still worth considering today.





# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Jewish self-erasure

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Sarah Hurwitz, who was a speech writer for President Barak Obama and First Lady Michele Obama, was a secular, cultural Jew before she accidentally discovered the beauty of her heritage. She wrote about that in her first book, “Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life – in Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There),” which was a finalist for two National Jewish Book Awards and for the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature. When the book first came out, I decided against reviewing it. I don’t remember my specific reason, but it was probably something along the lines of “even I can’t read everything.” However, because she won those awards, I definitely wanted to read her new work, “As a Jew: Reclaiming Our Story from Those Who Blame, Shame, and Try to Erase Us” (HarperOne), which looks at how Jews have internalized antisemitism. She offers personal and political viewpoints about how this happened, focusing on the need for all Jews to be educated about their religion and the past.

Her discover of the beauty of Judaism came by accident: after a painful breakup, she was looking for a way to fill her time. When Hurwitz signed up for an “Introduction to Judaism” class, she didn’t expect it to change her life. In fact, she notes that she would have signed up for a cooking or art class if the e-mail she received had advertised those; she had definitely not been looking for religious direction. It’s clear that her previous Jewish education was definitely lacking: she had no idea that Judaism is supposed to inform not just our synagogue worship, but every part of our lives. The more Hurwitz studied, the more she realized that her Jewish identity had been molded by a Christian and Western culture that defined religion and identity very differently than did traditional Judaism.

This means that, rather than dividing Jews into separate groups, she’s come to identify with all Jews, even the ones with whom she disagrees. In practical terms, she no longer identifies herself in American religious terms. For example, she learns to discount the mind/body dichotomy prevalent in Western culture, noting that both are considered important

in the Torah. In fact, she seems intrigued by the numerous biblical rules about what the Israelites were allowed to eat and the type of clothing they were allowed to wear. What she realized is that Judaism does not fit in the category of religion as understood in Western culture, a culture by which she used to define herself. For example, she notes that this is “Judaism’s Western category problem: Jews do not fit into the primary categories – race, ethnicity, religion – that we often use to sort people today. Jews emerged long before these classifications, at a time when, as Rabbi Jay Michaelson notes, ‘nation, religion, tribe, and land were all imbricated together.’”

Several chapters focus on the author’s search to discover why Judaism has been condemned in the Christian/Western world. Hurwitz begins with the early Christians’ condemnation of Judaism and then discusses how the Enlightenment created an additional problem by asking Jews to become members of a particular nation state, which forced them to conform to the mores of the country. She sees three themes emerging throughout history, which she refers to as “the lies about Jewish power, depravity, and conspiracy.” The author wonders how such a small group of people, comparatively speaking, are thought to be so powerful, for example, forming a conspiracy composed of Jewish capitalists and communists who secretly rule the world.

Hurwitz sees Judaism as a positive experience, which means that, while there are important lessons to learn from the Holocaust, that event can’t be the basis of a meaningful Jewish identity. She does discuss Israel, noting its importance to the Jews, while also being willing to criticize the mistakes the country makes. What surprised her most when speaking on college campuses during the tour for her first book were the questions about antisemitism. Hurwitz doesn’t remember experiencing any during her time in school, but the students to whom she speaks find the world a scary place. Anyone or any group that is a Zionist or that supports Israel is shunned; for example, campus social justice groups refuse to partner events with college Hillels.

Underlying Western society’s thoughts about Judaism are what she calls the conversion demand. She writes,

“Convert and you will be saved. The cost seems worth it, until it doesn’t. And there is always a new conversion demand: become a Christian; become a German/Frenchman of the Mosaic persuasion; become an American on the street, one who just goes to a different church, and a Jew at home – and you will be saved. Until you aren’t.” After realizing this, Hurwitz acknowledges just how much she personally bought into this idea. In fact, she realizes how it easy it is to go along with these demands, but they never permanently work. Something will always happen that makes a Jew stand out as a Jew – stand out as different, stand out as someone who could/should be punished for the imaginary sins for which society condemns them.

Hurwitz is inspired by the way that our ancestors manage to survive. She doesn’t believe we should blame ourselves for persecution: that is blaming the innocent for the harm done against them. She also doesn’t believe that God is punishing Jews for their sins. Instead, she focuses on the positive, the way that Jews “realized that while they don’t control their haters, they do control themselves, and they leaned into riches of our traditions, striving to be better human beings and live worthier lives. I like how generation after generation, they continued to build themselves arks.” According to Hurwitz, there will always be storms: the trick is knowing how to build that ark.

“As a Jew” is written for a general audience. The author notes that she is not an academic: she is seeking readers interested in learning more Judaism in practical terms. Her work is not a book of Jewish law and customs, though, or a guide to the holidays. It’s a story of her coming to understand and appreciate her Jewish identity and the way she had to unlearn the lessons society imposed on her. Hurwitz does an excellent job doing both. She encourages readers to learn more about Judaism, to come to an understanding of the religion that is “beyond bagels and Jewish mother jokes.” For those interested in this endeavor, her book is a worthwhile starting point, but only a starting point, something with which she would probably agree. It would also serve to create interesting discussions in book clubs and classes for teenagers and adults.

## Haman in the Abrahamic religions

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Anyone who has attended a Purim service knows that Haman is a villain whose name must be blotted out by means of booing, hissing, stamping your feet or using a noisemaker when the biblical book of Esther is read. What becomes clear in Adam J. Silverstein’s 239-page exploration – that number doesn’t include the more than 100 pages of footnotes, bibliography and index – of Haman is that no one admires him, at least in Jewish, Christian and Muslim cultures. How Haman is portrayed and what that portrayal means to individual religious communities are just two things explored in his work “Haman: A Biography” (Princeton University Press). The author’s wide-ranging discussions – that include everything from the origin of the character to the differing methods used to denigrate Haman – can feel overwhelming at times, but the depth of his research is amazing.

Silverstein seeks to place Haman in historical, social and religious context. To do so, he writes about ancient Middle Eastern myths, the various versions of the Haman story in textual writings in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Quran and other lesser known versions of the story, in addition to religious commentaries of those works. Keeping track of these many different versions can be difficult, especially since the author refers to them by abbreviations after the first mention. (The work could have used an abbreviations listing for easy referral, although some were obvious enough that they weren’t a problem.) The author notes that the portrait of Haman that emerges “is complicated, confused, and even contradictory.” That’s a plus for Silverstein, because his real interest is discussing how religious cultures borrow from each other and adapt another groups’ customs to enrich their own.

What might strike readers as unusual is that the author believes that, at least in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, Haman could be considered a tragic villain. The order to bow to Haman did not originate with him; rather, it’s the king who commanded everyone should to bow to his advisor. Mordecai is breaking the king’s law, rather just disobeying Haman’s whim. Silverstein notes that in other sections of the Hebrew Bible, Jews have no difficulty bowing to others; later commentaries invented reasons for Mordecai’s refusal, ones not found in the biblical text. Silverstein also notes that nothing that Haman says about the Jews to the king is incorrect: the Jews were spread throughout the kingdom and had their own rules/laws. It’s not that the author sees Haman as admirable, but rather that he might not be as evil as portrayed.

The author discusses the various Greek versions of the book of Esther and how they influenced Jewish and Christian

cultures. For example, the Septuagint is not an accurate translation of the book of Esther, but rather a retelling of the story that includes additional elements. For example, it tells of Mordecai’s dreams, which affect the direction of the story, and the prayers Mordecai and Esther offered for their safety. (Neither are seen praying the Masoretic text.) This version also refers to Haman as a eunuch, but, since he still has children, Silverstein think that is more of a title for those serving the king. However, calling him a eunuch plays a large role in other versions of the text. These versions claim that Haman was part of a eunuch rebellion, which was foiled when Mordecai informed the palace of the eunuchs’ plot to assassinate the king. That is the reason behind Haman’s hatred of Mordecai: he is the one responsible for that failure.

There are numerous other differences between these versions. For example, the relationship between Mordecai and Esther has been described as uncle and niece, first cousins, a father and adopted daughter, and (the strangest one) a husband and wife. (Silverstein doesn’t note whether that version has Mordecai divorcing Esther before sending her to the king, but if he didn’t, that meant she would have been committing adultery. On the other hand, one of the *midrash* – rabbinic tales – that the author doesn’t mention relates that Esther never slept with the king.) There are also many differences in descriptions of Haman’s origins. Silverstein discusses different possible reasons for this, but there are too many to discuss in a short review. The same is true about the possible real-life identity of the king, assuming, of course, that the character is based on a real person.

The author believes that Christianity may have based its inclusion of the book of Esther in its Bible on a different version than the one found in the Jewish Bible, although he is unable to pinpoint which of the many versions he writes about that would have been. Haman is mentioned in six verses in the Quran, but it’s possible that the two characters are not related. That Haman lived in Egypt and worked for Pharaoh. His task was to build a tower (tying this to the story of the Tower of Babel), but Silverstein still manages to find threads connecting these very disparate accounts into the book of Esther. That includes finding Haman in ancient Middle Eastern tales of Marduk, something that scholars of those works might be able to argue about, but which are difficult for the casual reader to determine.

What might be of more interest to the casual reader are the ways that Haman has been used as an insult to condemn a person/group. The idea that Jews and Muslims may have considered Christians to be Haman seeking to destroy them – and Christians thinking the same about

those groups – should come as no surprise. However, the fact that different factions in all three religions have referred to members of different sects as Haman might be. For example, Silverstein writes, “Jews called oppressive functionaries ‘Haman’ because the Haman of the [Masoretic text] *Esther* was such, but they also used this label with reference to other Jews (Rabbinites, Hellenizers, or Conversos). Jews in Muslim lands referred to greedy tax-collectors as ‘Hamans,’ while the ‘Hamans’ living in Christendom could be far more destructive in their intentions.... and actions.”

While contemporary Jews can celebrate Purim with great flair, what was done in the past was more violent. That included hanging, burning or crucifying an effigy of Haman. Another custom was eating a portion of Haman’s body. While many in contemporary times refer to hamantashen as Haman’s hat or pocket, other traditions see the cookie as parts of Haman’s body, usually his ears. Silverstein ties this tradition to a Christian one: some European Christians ate both fungus or cookies they called Judas ears. He wonders if the Jewish population borrowed this idea. However, which custom came first is up for debate.

Readers looking for a definitive answer about whether the book of Esther is based on historical events won’t find it here. Silverstein explores archeological evidence, but notes that “new historical evidence has been used no less by those arguing for Haman’s historicity as by those arguing against it. It’s not merely that scholars with contrasting biases have sought to twist the evidence to suit their point of view, but that the evidence is so fragmentary that it is difficult to know how far to take it.” That leaves him believing the question about whether Haman existed is still open to debate.

Silverstein has produced an impressive, well-written, argumentative book that shows not only a far more complex version of Haman than one might expect, but also how one story can develop through time and be affected by different cultures. What came as a surprise was just how much material there was to discuss. Some parts were less interesting than others, but individual readers can argue about which sections they find the most intriguing. Ultimately, the author’s views of direct and indirect influence of these times and cultures are of less importance than showing just how difficult it can be to sift through these cultural influences. Silverstein seems correct in noting that these different cultural views of Haman are informed by “their fears, worries, frustrations, and hopes.” What seems clear is that readers will never look at Haman the same way again.



# Celebrating Jewish Literature



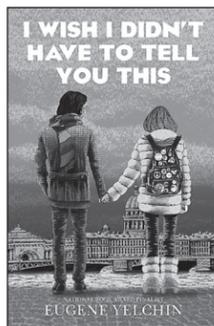
## Graphic works: a memoir, a biography and a medical novel

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

### ◆ “I Wish I Didn’t Have to Tell You This”

Life for Jews in the Soviet Union in the early 1980s was difficult and dangerous, particularly if one openly identified as Jewish. The world was not necessarily easier for those with artistic ambitions that were not sanctioned by the state. Unfortunately for Eugene Yelchin, he was both. His absorbing and heartrending memoir “I Wish I Didn’t Have to Tell You This” (Candlewick Press), recommended for those age 14 and up, uses words and pictures to present a vivid portrait of that time.

Yelchin lived in an apartment in Leningrad with his mother and grandmother, both of whom are acknowledgeable about the ways of Soviet life, which include staying away from anything controversial. His grandmother knows that the



Cover of “I Wish I Didn’t Have to Tell You This” (Used with the permission of Candlewick Press)

TV news she always watches does not accurately reflect the real world, but, if one reads between the lines, it can become clear what’s really happening. The women warn Yelchin that his choices will place him in danger, although he refuses to listen.

When the memoir opens, the author, who is an artist, is preparing a painting for an unauthorized exhibit being held in a friend’s apartment. His friend dresses as a religious Jew, something definitely not encouraged at the time and which will create problems. In the meantime, the artists who are exhibiting are hoping to meet Americans who managed to evade their Russian keepers and who will buy the works of art. That’s not what happens, but Yelchin meets an American exchange student, Libby, with whom he falls in love, even though their relationship is forbidden.

Although Libby’s Russian is limited, she manages to make her meaning clear, particularly when pointing out Yelchin’s weaknesses. All this does is make Yelchin admit there is only one way to survive in the Soviet Union: You need to be scared and to lie about life because to speak the truth is dangerous.

Because of various complications (to reveal more would spoil parts of the plot), Yelchin agrees to work as a set designer in Siberia. Problems occur and he finds himself drafted to fight in Afghanistan. However, his life takes another unexpected turn: one that finds him living in an asylum for those with mental illness. These sections, which are brilliantly done, are not for the faint of heart. Yelchin’s drawings make his experience feel more real than words alone would have. Even when his life once again changes, it’s clear that this experience will haunt him.

Yelchin won a Sydney Taylor Honor Award for the first volume of his memoir, “The Genius Under the Table,” but one does not have to have read that work to appreciate “I Wish I Didn’t Have to Tell You This.” The artwork is in shades of grey as befitting the topic. While there were a few occasions where it was difficult to tell which character was speaking, that was only a minor quibble. The memoir will leave readers impatiently awaiting for a hoped for third volume to learn what happened after the work’s conclusion.

### ◆ “Will Eisner; A Comics Biography”

Will Eisner was known as a master graphic artist, so much so that what have been called the most prestigious comics awards, the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards, were named after him. His work ranged from superheroes to literary graphic works such as his “A Contract with God and Other Stories of Dropsie Avenue.” It feels appropriate for his biography to take a graphic format: “Will Eisner: A Comics Biography” by Stephen Weiner and Dan Mazur (NBM Graphic Novels) tells the story of his life from his parents’ immigrant background through his death in 2005.

Eisner’s parents were poor and often had to leave their apartment during the night because they were unable to pay the rent. Sam Eisner, Will’s father, was a painter who came to the U.S. hoping for greater opportunities. While he did find work painting scenery for Yiddish plays, the work was sporadic. The authors clearly capture Will’s mother’s distress and frustration at their poverty and her husband’s refusal to let her help. Life didn’t get any easier for the family when the Great Depression hit. Even while attending school, Will began selling newspapers in order to bring in much needed funds. Once he finished high school, he immediately began to look for work. (He never officially graduated because he failed a course, but chose to work to support his family rather than attend summer school to make up the class.)

From the time he was young, Will loved adventure stories. He also loved drawing and hoped to find work as an illustrator, which was not easy to do. However, his career slowly built and, at one point, he had his own studio of artists and writers. His best known work from that time was a strip about a hero known as The Spirit, which appeared in a weekly comic section published in newspapers across the country. The impetus for his literary work was more personal: the death of his daughter. The authors show his influence on later comic works, but also how he was unable to relate to some counterculture comics.

“Will Eisner” is extremely well done. It highlights the changes in how comics were printed in the 1930s, making comic books as we now know them possible. The authors also show how the studio system of comics worked, something that resembled a factory line with its focus on increased production. They also don’t shy away from some of the more problematic issues found in Eisner’s work, particularly his treatment of a Black character that reflected the stereotypes of the time. The book is perfect for those looking to learn more about Eisner, readers who enjoy a



A page from “Will Eisner: A Comics Biography” by Stephen Weiner and Dan Mazur (Used with the permission of NBM Graphic Novels)

Jewish success story or for comic books fans eager to learn more about the history of their favorite genre.

### ◆ “A Tale of Two Surrogates”

Using comics to teach about medicine and health: that’s the purpose behind the Graphic Medicine series. At first, the series might not seem to have any Jewish content. However, “A Tale of Two Surrogates: A Graphic Narrative on Assisted Reproduction” by Elly Teman and Zsuzsa Berend with art by Andrea Scebbra (The Pennsylvania State University Press) portrays the difference between the surrogate process in the United States and Israel. Berend, a sociologist, and Teman, an anthropologist, used their two decades of research to offer composite characters, the Israeli Dana and the American Jenn, in order to discuss ethical and medical questions related to surrogacy.

The book had two focuses: descriptions of how the process works and a personal look at the feelings of the surrogates and their husbands. The story deliberately offers different viewpoints on everything from the different reactions of the surrogates’ extended family and the surrogates’ relationship to the intended parents after the birth. The work makes it clear that the surrogate mother – at least, in these cases – is implanted with a fertilized egg. Her DNA is not part of the equation.

What was of most interest are the differences in the laws between the two countries. In the United States, each state has its own law governing surrogacy. (Some are more surrogate friendly than others.) There is a contract between the potential surrogate mother and the intended parents, with the details being decided by the individuals involved; the state does not interfere as long as the contract is legal. In Israel, on the other hand, the government decides who can be a surrogate and Jewish law plays a major role in its decisions. Since having children is highly encouraged in Israeli society, the people taking part in the process are respected, but the process is greatly regimented with the potential surrogate undergoing not only physical tests, but psychological ones. A potential surrogate’s is also interviewed separately, making this a complex project.

The work also includes information about surrogacy in other countries, which lends a different light to the process. Many of these women become surrogates due to extreme poverty; they are paid to be a surrogate and plan to use the money to create a better life for the children they already have. The contrast between them and the two women featured in the main text is striking.

“A Tale of Two Surrogates” is well done and offers readers a great deal to ponder concerning the surrogacy process. On the whole, it offers a positive view of what occurs since Jenn and Dana feel they have done something extremely important: helping the intended parents create a family they might otherwise not have. However, the down sides – from medical problems to personal differences – are also noted. Anyone thinking of either becoming a surrogate or looking for a surrogate will find this work an excellent starting point. Others may find it an interesting glimpse into an often hidden part of contemporary life.

## Food and culture

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

“Food is far more than just sustenance.” That idea is the inspiration behind John M. Efron’s research in “All Consuming: Germans, Jews, and the Meaning of Meat” (Stanford University Press). Efron, Koret professor of Jewish history at the University of California, Berkeley, notes that “food is culture, and the evolution of culture has a history, and the history of food is fascinating, important, and intersects with many other aspects of culture.” He focuses on meat because Jewish dietary laws – in this case, what meat can be eaten and how that meat should be slaughtered – played a major role in the relationship between Christians and Jews in Germany over the centuries.

Efron believes that meat serves as a marker of Jewish practice. He notes that the biblical dietary laws center around the eating of meat, although no mention is made of the reason behind these rules: “The biblical prohibition is a direct order and nothing more. It does not explain why it is necessary for warm-blooded animals to chew their cud and have cloven hoofs. It simply has to have those features if Jews are to eat them.” The author includes a short discussion of the reasons why the pig stood out as the animal Jews can’t eat – rather than the camel, for example – explaining the connection of the pig to ancient Rome.\* However, his real interest lies in the discussion of meat in Germany from the Middle Ages to the present day.

In medieval Germany, comparing people to animals served as a way to define them and create a hierarchical society. Efron writes of how illustrated works published in German during that time used animals to represent outcast groups, including, but not limited to, Jews. For example, Jews were described as owls who live in darkness, which represented their refusal to accept the light of Jesus. Owls were also thought to be filthy creatures whose carnal desires caused them to be labeled sinners. Jews were also compared to goats: the beards of the goats were thought to resemble those of religious Jews and both were considered “obstreperous.” As for the Jewish relationship to pigs, it was less that Jews were compared to pigs than shown “suckling at the teats of sows, drinking their urine, eating their excrement, and even giving birth to piglets.” However, in these works, Jews were not shown eating the flesh of pigs.

As Germany moved from a rural to an urban setting, meat became even more important. Rather than the majority of meat coming from hunted game as it had in the past, domesticated animals became the main source. This meant an increase in the number of butchers needed to slaughter the animals and provide meat for purchase. While Germany had many secular rules that controlled what Christian and Jewish butchers could do, there was increased interest in Jewish methods of slaughter. This was partly because, even under emancipation (when Jews became citizens of Germany) and moving away from traditional observance, many still ate kosher meat. This limited their ability to mix with the Christian population, something that caused debate about whether Jews could be true members of German society if they could not or would not break bread with other Germans.

Efron includes detailed information about the rules and regulations of butchers that is too complex to discuss in a short review. However, it is worth noting the relationship between Jewish and Christian butchers. Since most Jewish butchers did not want to spend the time necessary to remove an animal’s sciatic nerve (which Jews were forbidden to eat due to an injury to Jacob in the biblical story found in Genesis 32:23-33), that meat was often sold to Christian



# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Mourning with the help of poetry

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Some reviews are more difficult to write than others, especially when there is a difference between my personal and professional opinions about the work. I am able to recognize when a book is excellent, but it just doesn't resonate with me. That's the case with "Going Out with Knots: My Two Kaddish Years with Hebrew Poetry" by Wendy I. Zierler (Jewish Publication Society). The work is a beautifully written look at how Zierler used poetry to help her come to terms with the deaths of both of her parents within a year, with the second mourning period arriving the same time at the COVID virus. I was looking forward to the book, which I thought would be inspiring.

## Adding women to the stories

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

As part of my chaplaincy work, I often read or tell Jewish stories. They're a great way to teach a lesson or get a point across without sounding pedantic. Many of them are also great fun and I have favorites that I tend to repeat. However, there are very few women in these tales and the ones who are are portrayed as ignorant, mean or overbearing. To correct this, the Jewish Women's Storytelling Collective has published a collection of stories titled "The Rooster Princess and Old Tales: Jewish Stories Re-populated with Spunky Heroines, Wise Women, Brave Crones, and Powerful Prophetesses" edited by Debra Gordon Zaslow with Gail Pasternack and Deborah Rosenberg (Monkfish Book Publishing Company).

The Jewish Women's Storytelling Collective is a group of *maggidot* (women storytellers) who have adapted older stories to feature women protagonists, in addition to creating new stories and offering personal tales to share. In her introduction, Zaslow notes that "the purpose of the anthology is not to eliminate the stories that highlight male characters, but to offer an alternative version that is equally inspiring to girls and women." The storytellers don't change the basic meaning of the tales and each adapted story features information about the original that inform them.

As with any collection, some stories appeal more than others, but every story has something to offer. Some of my favorites include:

◆ "The Thirty-Sixth Night of Chanukah" by Cassandra Sagan, which is a delightful, original tale that takes place in Chelm during a pandemic. The heroine, Zelda, very cleverly uses the argument about whether one should increase or decrease the number of candles lit each day to create order in her own home.

◆ Zaslow's "Holding Her Own," which offers a different ending than the tale on which it's based. In this case, the husband of a woman who wants to also observe *mitzvot* discovers the true worth of his wife and helps to make her religious practice possible.

◆ "The Shekhinah is in Exile," also by Zaslow, which is a lovely variation on one of my favorite stories. In the more traditional version, it is a boy who is inspired to play his flute as a way of praying to God. In this case, it's a girl who doesn't fit the mold, preferring to run wild in the forest and make music. When she plays her music in the synagogue, Zaslow writes a beautiful and moving description of the sound: "The music flowed out sweet and melodious, pouring forth with tears of the deepest sorrow and laughter of angels. The melody filled the room with the whispers of the ancestors, and the voices of the women, *kolay ha nashim*... it lifted all the prayers in all the hearts... strait up through the gates of heaven."

◆ Gail Paternack's "Esperanza and the Twelve Loaves of Challah," which is an adapted version of a tale about someone who secretly leaves loaves of challah in the synagogue's ark for God. What she doesn't realize that someone desperately poor finds them and believes God is feeding their family. What makes this story stand out is that Esperanza is a *converso* who emigrated from Spain so she could live openly as a Jew. Her desire to perform a *mitzvah* is the reason behind her actions.

◆ "They Will Call Me Naamah" by Batya Podos, which tells the story of Noah's wife and their time on the ark. There are *midrash* (rabbinic stories) that give her the name of Naamah, but few I've read portray the idea that perhaps God should have had more patience with humankind. Her story ends with hope for the future and tells of the need for resiliency.

Anyone interested in Jewish stories will want to add "The Rooster Princess and Old Tales" to their bookshelves. Those searching for stories to tell their families and children will be inspired by these works. The collection also proves that there is more than one way to tell a tale and that every tale can be adapted to fit the needs of its audience.

It will be for some readers, but the author's theology and interpretations of the poems didn't resonate with me.

To put this in context, one needs to know more about Zierler. In addition to being a professor of modern Jewish literature and feminist studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, she is also a practicing Orthodox Jew who accepts Orthodoxy's legalistic rules about what women can and can't do, although her frustrations with these limitations are clear. She also is very aware of the lack of women's voices in both leading services and in the liturgy. That's one reason why she deliberately used poetry written by women in her discussions about poetry with the minyan she attended during her period of mourning and afterward. However, during the time period about which she writes, she also became an ordained rabbi (please note that she uses the term rabbi, not rabba as do many Orthodox women who have been ordained) at Yeshivat Maharat. The theology she uses to analyze poetry, though, is clearly Orthodox in its belief about the way God is present in this world.

Zierler is clear that, while she discusses her journey during mourning – coping first with the death of her father and moving her ill mother closer to her, only to have her die before a year was over – her work is not a how-to work about Jewish mourning. Although it contains analysis of individual poems, it is also not a critical poetry anthology. Instead, the author offers a personal look at the poems she used as a way to cope with her grief. Zierler writes, "[This book] is at once theological and liturgical reflections, literary close readings of poetry, and feminist interpretations of personal and collective experience. Central strands include personal and persistent response to shock, tragedy, and bereavement; prayer; modern Hebrew literature; and faith, doubt, and hope."

The title of her book comes from a passage from the Mishnah that the author found distressing: it talks about knots being tied onto a son's arm to help him deal with the loss of his father. Each commentator she read added to her frustration: in the midst of mourning for her father, these works told her that a daughter's grief is not equal to that of a son. When her colleagues offered her alternative readings, including noting that those commentaries spoke in the language of their time, she began to search for ways to include women's voices in her mourning journey.

Although she didn't count as part of the prayer quorum in the minyans she attended, Zierler was a regular at services, even when members of the synagogue she attended that didn't quite understand why she was there. Before, during and after COVID, she remained part of her home minyan. She notes that when people asked her why she still attends morning services when she doesn't count in the prayer quorum, she says, "I had come to rely on the routine. That daily minyan attendance slowed down my *davening* and gave me more focus. That I felt responsible to my minyan buddy, Lisa, and to Mark and Laureen, the middle-aged developmentally disabled brother and sister,

## Food.....Continued from page 7

butchers to sell to their customers. The same was true for the meat of those animals that were not considered kosher enough or that were not correctly slaughtered. This helped make kosher meat affordable for those who wished to consume it.

Efron discusses how Christians and Jews shared some ideas about meat. For example, he notes that they both believed "that the characteristics of animals could be imparted to those who consumed them," even as they differed on exactly what that meant. The Jewish slaughtering methods were used to judge Jewish morality and ethics, something that grew as animal rights societies increased. These groups were against Jewish methods, believing it was more humane to stun animals before killing them, rather than killing them with a single stroke of a sharp knife across the throat. This idea continued even when non-Jewish sources agreed that animals suffered less under kosher slaughtering because the methods used to stun animals were often either unsuccessful or created more harm.

The restrictions on kosher slaughtering were, at first, part of the general restrictions on Christian and Jewish butchers, though. Efron notes that these restrictions were based on, to list just a few, "concerns about public hygiene, urban living conditions, increasing meat consumption, meat-related health scares, and party politics." However, that did change as the effort to restrict or stop kosher slaughter continued through contemporary times. The author includes a discussion of the role kosher slaughter played in Nazi Germany, noting that the Nazi ideal (at least according to Hitler) would be for everyone to become vegetarian. The chapter on the Nazis' belief in a world Jewish conspiracy shows how Jews were portrayed as evil and unhealthy, and more animal than human. However, even today, the ethics of kosher slaughter are being debated and the practice has

who came just about every morning, and waited until the end of *davening*, just to talk to Lisa and me." She notes that if she misses a morning, she receives texts and e-mails asking how she is. For Zierler, that shows that she counts in the most important way.

The poets featured in "Going Out with Knots" include Lea Goldberg, Avraham Halfi, Yehuda Amichai, Rachel Morpurgo, Ruhama Weiss and Rachel Bluwstein. Each poem is printed in the original Hebrew with an English translation by Zierler. She notes the biblical and rabbinic references in each poem, in addition to giving biographical information about the author. Her approach is a theological one: she is looking to find lessons about grief. That is the part of work that didn't resonate with me. Although I've read and enjoyed much of Amichai's poetry, even that section didn't work for me. What did surprise me were the four poems written by the author that appeared in the "Appendix" of the book. To me, these were the most moving poems offered. For example, when writing about Psalm 100 in "Mourning with Psalm 100," she notes that "there is too much party/ in this psalm./ Too much loud whooping/ By the whole wild world." That seems a perfect expression of grief. The three other poems also seem to express her feelings as well, if not better, than the poets about whom she writes.

There was one poem – "Day of Tiding" by Bluwstein – that shows the difference in the author and my approaches to theology. Bluwstein suffered from tuberculosis and was unable to live the pioneer life on a *kibbutz* she desired, instead being forced to spend her life indoors writing. The poem does not have a positive approach to illness, noting that this was not the life the author wanted to live. Zierler sees this reaction as "urging a form of self-hatred." While she might be correct that this thought comes from "a Zionist-purist rejection of all weakness, vulnerability, and marginality," that does not mean that those of us who are unhappy with the disabilities we face are practicing a form of self-hatred. Perhaps Zierler believes that illness is given by God and therefore we must learn to accept and understand the lesson or lessons God wants us to learn from those disabilities. However, my personal theology rejects the idea that illness is given by God for a specific reason. This is not to say that Zierler does a poor job analyzing the poem or that she is wrong. The fact her discussion elicited that type of reaction from me shows how powerful her work can be.

Zierler notes that her purpose in writing "Going Out with Knots" is to prove that poems can "offer solace in the wake of personal and communal pain," and "that poetry can heal, divert and entertain, mobilize and galvanize." It's clear that they've done so for the author. Readers may find solace in taking this journey with her. Others, who have an interest in Hebrew poetry, may enjoy exploring the different authors' voices offered. What is clear, even for those who disagree with Zierler, is that poetry can have a powerful effect on its readers.

been banned in some countries.

Efron includes a chapter on Jewish cookbooks that illustrates the transformation of Jews from Jews in Germany (a separate group unconnected to the rest of society) to German Jews (Germans of a particular religion). Since German Jews were considered Germans, rather than Jews, outside their homes, these cookbooks gave them ways to be Jews in their homes. Germany was the first country to produce Jewish-themed cookbooks and Efron notes that a great number of the recipes focus on meat. The importance of kosher meat is also discussed in terms of what occurred after World War II ended; the author offers details about how concentration camp survivors were looking to consume kosher meat in displaced persons' camps. Meat there was a symbol of life returning to sanity; eating kosher meat also allowed them to resume Jewish practices that had been banned once the Nazis came to power.

"All Consuming" is an impressive, scholarly work that uses meat to discuss Jewish culture and the Jewish place in the German Christian world. The work features a great amount of detail, but, since Efron keeps scholarly jargon to a minimum, the work is understandable even by the non-specialist. Anyone interested in food studies will definitely want to add this work to their shelves. Those curious about the development of Jewish life in Germany will also find much of interest.

\* Those wanting in learning more about the relationships between Jews and pigs may find "Forbidden: A 3,000-Year History of Jews and Pigs" by Jordan D. Rosenblum (<https://www.thereporter.org/features/cjl-jews-and-pigs-over-the-ages-481284>) and "Evolution of a Taboo: Pigs and People in the Ancient Near East" by Max D. Price (<https://www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-a-taboo-like-no-other-by-rabbi-rachel-esserman>) of interest.

# BD Sisterhood held paid-up member dinner

Beth David Sisterhood treated its paid-up members to a pasta dinner, which was followed by some games of Bingo. Prizes were awarded to the lucky Bingo winners. Spouses and friends of the members of Beth David Sisterhood were also in attendance.



Beth David Sisterhood President Cathy Velenchik conducted the business meeting as attendees looked on. (Photos by Nancy Basmann)



At left: Susan Hubal, Eileen Miller, Chaim Joy, Josh Witter, Gina Santiago and Eliyana Adler helped themselves to the pasta dinner, which was prepared by Stacey and Judy Silber.



Chaim Joy, Harold Kohn and Toby Kohn (at back table, far left) and Rabbi Moshe Shmaryahu, Eileen Miller, Susan Hubal, Eliyana Adler and Josh Witter played Bingo after partaking of dinner at the paid-up Sisterhood membership dinner.



Stacey Silber and Toby Kohn served themselves at the Beth David Sisterhood paid-up membership dinner.



Toby Kohn, Harold Kohn, Rona Shehan (in front) and Susan Hubal, Eliyana Adler and Eileen Miller (in back) played Bingo after the dinner.

## HANUKKAH GIFTS

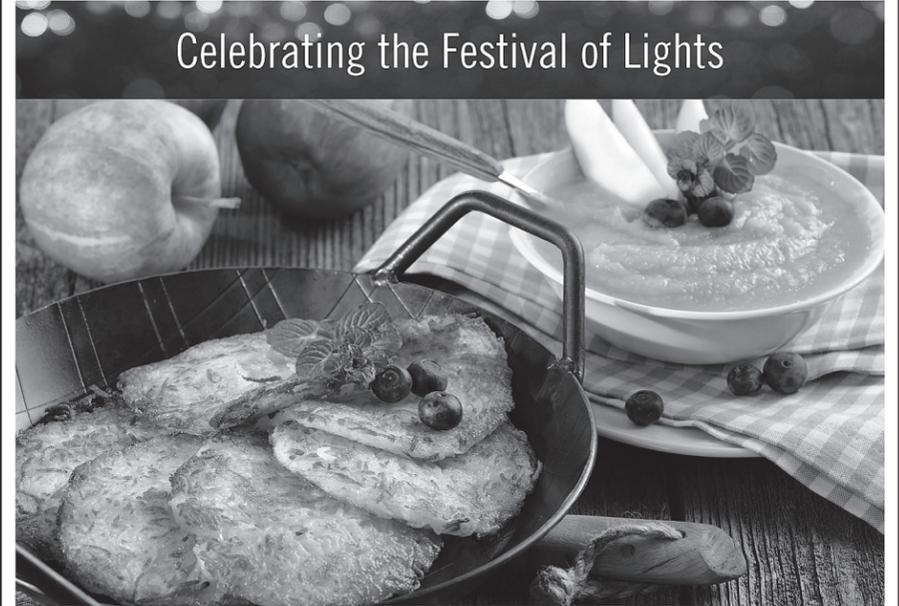
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## Weekly Parasha

Vayetze, Genesis 28:10-32:3

# Living like a well

RABBI JARED ANSTANDIG, JLIC DIRECTOR AT BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

Our ancestors seemed to have a special connection to wells. Rebecca meets Abraham's servant and becomes engaged to Isaac at a well. (See Genesis 24) In this week's *parasha*, Jacob falls in love with Rachel at a well. (Genesis 29) And in just a few weeks, Moses will meet his future wife, Tziporah, at a well. (Exodus 2) Evidently, the well plays a central role in our foundational stories. Why? What message lies beneath the surface?

In a work about the laws of engagement and marriage, Rabbi Asher Weiss notes that the well represents a certain model of living life. In ancient times, he observes, there were three primary ways of obtaining water: from a pit, from a spring or from a well. A pit is

entirely human-made: you dig it and fill it with water yourself. It represents complete self-reliance and human effort. A spring, on the other hand, is divine: it flows on its own, without any human involvement, symbolizing total dependence on God.

The well, however, is a blend of both. It must be dug by human hands, but its contents come from natural ground water. The well, therefore, reflects the ideal balance between human effort and divine assistance. We don't rely exclusively on our own might, like with a pit. But we also don't rely exclusively on God, like a spring. Rather, we do both, working hard and relying on God.

While these verses speak of the foundational moments in Jewish history in particular, this three-way distinction is also true in our lives in general. It's convenient to rely on springs, hoping and expecting that everything will flow fine with God's guidance. It's also reassuring to live as if life were a pit, where one can control all outcomes. But the Torah tells us to live like a well: to do the hard work, while remembering that everything we achieve is ultimately given and sustained by God.

May we be successful in finding this balance in our lives, just like our ancestors. May we draw our water from the well, doing the hard work necessary to succeed, while maintaining a humble trust in God.

## BD.....Continued from page 3

together Holocaust education and the arts, and co-director of A Contemporary Jewish Museum, which "establishes innovative and experimental Jewish museums in off-the-beaten-path Jewish communities." Carlin was previously the owner of Talkrot Gourmet Mushroom Farm in Tully, NY.

Beth David's luncheon speaker series takes place the sec-

ond Saturday of the month after Shabbat morning services, and is open to the community. There is no charge for the luncheon. Since the monthly series' continuation depends on the generosity of contributors, Beth David welcomes donations to the Luncheon Fund in order to keep the program going. Donations can be made in honor of, or in memory of,

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

## 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, November 29, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Genesis 28:10-32:3 and the haftarah is Hosea 12:13-14:10. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 5:30 pm.

On Saturday, December 6, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Genesis 32:4-36:43 and the haftarah is Obadiah 1:1-21. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 5:30 pm.

Upcoming events:

There will be an Executive Board meeting on Tuesday, December 2, at 7 pm.

Hebrew school will meet on Wednesday, December 3, from 4-6 pm.

The TI/TC Adult Ed. will hold a program at Temple Concord on Sunday, December 7, at 10 am. For more information, see the article on page 3.

### 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.

### Congregation Tikun 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### Rohr Chabad Center

Affiliation: Chabad-Lubavitch  
Rabbi Aaron and Rivkah Slonim, Directors  
E-mail: aslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com  
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 Brith Sholom

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

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

Friday, November 28, light candles before ..... 4:15 pm  
Shabbat ends Saturday, November 29 ..... 5:15 pm  
Friday, December 5, light candles before ..... 4:13 pm  
Shabbat ends Saturday, December 6 ..... 5:14 pm  
Friday, December 12, light candles before ..... 4:14 pm  
Shabbat ends Saturday, December 13 ..... 5:14 pm

### Temple Concord

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

Some services and programs are online only.

Fridays, November 28 and December 5: At 7:30 pm, Friday Shabbat services are in person, on Zoom and Facebook.

Saturdays, November 29 and December 6: At 9:15 am, Torah study is in person and on Zoom. An in-person only service will take place at 10:30 am.

Wednesdays, December 3 and 10: At 5:30 pm, evening prayers in person only. At 6 pm, adult education class in person and on Zoom.

Upcoming events:

Tuesday, December 2: At 10:30 am, Tuesday Morning Book Club with Rabbi Rachel Esserman leading the discussion about "Your Presence is Mandatory: A Novel" by Sasha Vasilyuk. For more information, contact Merri Pell-Preus at 607-222-2875 or merrypell.preus@gmail.com. To join via Zoom, visit https://bit.ly/3CXVd9b, meeting ID 881 6469 4206 and passcode 653272.

### Temple Beth-El of Ithaca

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

### 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.

### 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.



# 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 Grandparents Network will hold a virtual "Learning Fest 2026" on Tuesday, January 27, from 3-6:30 pm. Registration must be made by Monday, January 19. The keynote speaker Dr. Becky Kennedy will discuss "What Parents Want Grandparents to Know About Raising Kids Today." For more information or to register, visit <https://jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org/learningfest>.
- ◆ Roundtable will hold the virtual course "Forgotten Holocaust Fiction" on Wednesdays, December 3-17, from 4-5 pm. The cost to attend is \$132. Professor Anna Katsnelson will discuss "The Oppermans (1933) by Lion Feuchtwanger and "Scrap of Time"(1987) by Ida Fink. For more information or to register, visit <https://roundtable.org/live-courses/literature/forgotten-holocaust-fiction>.
- ◆ The Yiddish Book Center will hold the virtual course

"Speak the World! A Tour of Global Jewish Languages" on Tuesdays, January 13, 20 and 27, and February 3, from 7-8:30 pm. The course will explore the more than 20 distinctively Jewish vernaculars with scholars, activists and artists who are using them today. For more information or to register, visit <https://support.yiddishbookcenter.org/site/Ticketing?view=Tickets&id=11502>.

◆ The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute will hold the hybrid talk "'The Lesbian Feminists Are the Bridge': Anglo-American Feminists and the Rise of Lesbian Activism in Israel (1971-1987)" with Dotan Brom on Monday, December 8, at 12:30 pm. For more information or to register, visit <https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/91234567890>.

◆ The Maas Center will hold the virtual program "Illuminating Our Story: The Meaning of Chanukah" on Sunday, December 7, from 8-9:30 pm. The cost to attend is \$18. The program will offer the opportunity to "explore the ancient and modern tales of Chanukah while reconnecting with its blessings and rituals." For more

information or to register, visit [www.eventbrite.com/e/illuminating-our-story-the-meaning-of-chanukah-registration-1936863293249](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/illuminating-our-story-the-meaning-of-chanukah-registration-1936863293249).

◆ Uri L'Tzedek will hold the virtual talk "Workers Rights and Paying On Time" with Rabbi Mike Moskowitz on Thursday, December 11, at 4 pm. The cost to attend is \$18. The talk will be a text based analysis of the biblical obligations to pay works in a timely fashion and explore the ethical and mystical implications of the obligation. For more information or to register, visit <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91234567890>.

◆ Tikvah Ideas is holding the online nine-part series "The Wisdom of Jewish Literature" with Professor Ruth R. Wisse. She will discuss "the masterpieces of modern Jewish literature." For more information or to register, visit <https://ideas.tikvah.org/courses/the-wisdom-of-jewish-literature>.

◆ Roundtable will hold the virtual course "The Generations of Tevye: Reading the Stories of Sholem Aleichem" on Thursdays, December 11-January 15, from 11 am-noon. The cost to attend is \$176. "Scholar Saul Noam Zaritt discusses the original stories and several of its adaptations from the 1930s to today." For more information or to register, visit <https://roundtable.org/live-courses/literature/the-generations-of-tevye-reading-the-stories-of-sholem-aleichem>.

◆ Ritualwell and the Institute of Jewish Spirituality will hold the virtual course "The Hidden Light of Hanukkah: A Journey in Poetry and Presence" on Tuesdays, December 2, 9 and 16, from 1-2:30 pm. The cost to attend is \$154. The program will use mindfulness, poetry and generative writing to deepen attendees connection to the holiday. For more information or to register, visit <https://ritualwell.org/event/the-hidden-light-of-hanukkah-a-journey-in-poetry-presence/2025-12-16>.

◆ The Jewish Women's Archives will hold the virtual program "Women's Anger As a Creative Force: A Writing Workshop for and by Jewish Women of Color" on Thursday, December 4, at 8 pm. Marcella White Campbell, writer, educator and director of JWA's Pomegranate Writing Fellowship for Jewish Women of Color, will discuss how to use anger as a creative force. For more information or to register, visit <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/s31gwYZ/WomensAngerDec2025>.

◆ The Noshers will hold the virtual class "The Noshers' Latke Master Class" on Monday, December 8, from 7-8 pm. The cost to attend is \$21.05. Shannon Sarna, founding editor of The Noshers and author of "Modern Jewish Baker" and "Modern Jewish Comfort Food," will teach the class. For more information or to register, visit [www.eventbrite.com/e/the-noshers-latke-master-class-tickets-1969403328370](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-noshers-latke-master-class-tickets-1969403328370). See "Online" on page 12

## Strange..... Continued from page 2

serving as his right-hand man (and sometimes left-hand man), assisting him as he rose from his bowing in *shul*? And now it was Arky who was flanked by two able-bodied soldiers, who lifted him back to his feet.

Things were moving along more smoothly than he had expected. Even the Sephardim were getting into the lively, very-Ashkenazi tunes. They were in the *Avodah* section when he felt a tap on the shoulder.

"We need to grab six men for an unexpected, urgent mission. You're losing your minyan. Finish up now."

He skipped the rest of the *Avodah* and rushed through the end of the *Amidah*. His already-unconventional *tefillah* had just leapt to a new plane of strangeness. They finished up the rest of the *davening* as best they could. Despite the truncated finish, their brotherhood and the spirit of the prayers were elevating and unforgettable.

In the afternoon there was another call. This time Arky was among the group summoned. The nutritional reserve from the *shurim* alone would not be enough. The five of them quickly began to eat.

Minutes later, as they prepared to head out the door, the order came down: "The mission was canceled." There was not much more they could do than roll their eyes.

The time for *Neilah* rolled around and it was led in true Sephardi tradition. The atmosphere of their *Selichot* is

just as reverent as their Ashkenazi brethren (if not more), but less encumbered with dread, and more upbeat, both in content and musical composition. Though Ashkenazim often poke fun at the fact that Sephardim begin reciting *Selichot* at the beginning of Elul, the joke is on them. Sephardim actually enjoy the *Selichot* process, reciting the same comforting paragraphs daily. *Neilah* is a culmination of 40 days of uniting in uplifting prayer and the fervor of this final recitation is awe-inspiring.

*Neilah* in Ashkenazi communities ends with a *tekia gedolah*. Depending on the lungs and stamina of the blower, that usually goes for 15-30 seconds, sometimes longer. Yemenites have a similar tradition, but end instead with the sound of the *teruah*.

The staccato blasts echoed off the walls, going on and on, electrifying the air in the makeshift *shul* for a good half minute.

Yom Kippur was done. A very strange day, indeed. It was time to eat.

Or not. Food for the break-fast meal had not yet arrived at the base.

Four hours later, their dinner arrived. What can one say? Strange things happen in the army, but if you're ready for anything, it's all good. And that's exactly the story of this Yom Kippur. It was surreal. It was unpredictable. And it was utterly unforgettable.



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# Israeli breakthrough: a new treatment for blood cancer

By JNS Staff

(JNS)—Doctors at Rabin Medical Center in Petach Tikvah have begun treating blood cancer patients with Israel’s first fully “homegrown” CAR-T therapy, marking what the hospital calls a major medical breakthrough.

The treatment was developed and manufactured at the Samuelli Integrative Cancer Pioneering Institute, part of the Davidoff Cancer Center, which recently completed in-house production of genetically engineered CAR-T cells for multiple myeloma patients whose disease has stopped responding to standard therapies. The first three patients received the therapy with no unusual complications and were discharged as planned, according to a press release issued on November 19.

CAR-T therapy is considered one of the most advanced tools in modern oncology. Physicians extract a patient’s T-cells and genetically engineer them to recognize and kill cancer cells. At Davidoff, scientists are using retroviral vector technology developed at the Max Delbrück Center in Berlin to equip the cells with cancer-targeting receptors before returning them to the body.

Israel diagnoses roughly 550 new cases of multiple myeloma each year. While treatment options have expanded in recent years,



Dr. Alessio Nahmad, director of Biology Research at Samuelli Integrative Cancer Pioneering Institute, and Dr. Michal Besser, CTO at the Samuelli Institute. (Photo by Shlomi Yosef)

a significant number of patients eventually face drug resistance. Hospital experts say the new therapy offers realistic hope for those with the toughest prognoses.

The Samuelli Institute, established in 2023 and led by Avner Paz-Tsuk, operates under international standards for advanced therapy manufacturing. The initiative is integrated with the Hemato-Oncology Division directed by Prof. Pia Raanani. The CAR-T program is headed by Prof. Michal Besser, while the clinical study is led by Prof. Moshe Yeshurun in collaboration with myeloma specialist Dr. Iuliana Vaxman and

Prof. Salomon Stemmer, deputy head of the Davidoff Center.

“The early results show a very positive response,” Vaxman said, calling the development “significant news” for patients with limited options.

Davidoff Center director Prof. Gal Markel said the achievement demonstrates Israel’s capacity to develop and deliver advanced cancer therapies under one roof. He added that researchers expect to expand the technology to treat solid tumors, including lung and liver cancers, and ultimately autoimmune diseases.

# Israeli kibbutz listed among U.N.’s “52 Best Tourism Villages”

By JNS staff

(JNS) – Just days after Kibbutz Neot Smadar was added to the U.N. Tourism 2025 list of “52 Best Tourism Villages” in the world, the kibbutz’s tourism director told Hebrew-language outlet Ynet on October 20 that the small community in Israel’s south could not handle the flood of booking requests.

“In the guest rooms they told me, ‘Enough, we’re collapsing, we can’t keep up,’” said Adva Meir-Weil. “Suddenly there were so many inquiries,” the director added.

The kibbutz, located in the southern Arava, was “very surprised” to be included in the U.N. list, Meir-Weil continued, “but on the other hand we worked four years [to achieve] this. When we received the announcement in September we were thrilled and glad,” she related.

In the letter, the U.N. agency praised the kibbutz for its cultural and natural richness, and its commitment to sustainability “in all three dimensions: ecological, social and economic,” according to Ynet.

The list of new villages was announced on October 17 in a ceremony held in Huzhou City, China. The small towns were selected from more than 270 applications from 65 U.N. Tourism Member States, according to the international

body’s website.

Following the recognition, Israel’s tourism ministry and the Southern Arava Regional Council issued a joint statement, saying that Neot Semadar “serves as a unique model of a cooperative ecological community and offers an exceptional tourist experience that includes an Art Center – built over 15 years by community members – an organic boutique winery, an inn featuring local produce, desert guest rooms, artist workshops, stargazing alongside the Weizmann Institute’s survey telescope, and guided tours through breathtaking desert landscapes,” per Ynet.

The kibbutz welcomed “this important international recognition and hope it will serve as a springboard for the continued development of tourism in the Arava and in Israel as a whole.”

Neot Semadar was founded in 1989 and is home to some 250 residents.

## Lives. . . . . Continued from page 3

him a month of research in its collection. He recently returned from a research trip to Anchorage, AK, where he perused the archive of the Alaska Jewish Museum, spoke with longtime Jewish residents and supplemented the cost by teaching soccer tricks to Alaskan soccer clubs. Since moving with his family to Binghamton from Monsey in 2015 to work with Meor Upstate, he has been active in the Binghamton Jewish community, including sitting on the boards of Beth David Synagogue and the Jewish Federa-

tion of Greater Binghamton, and serving as *mashgiach* for the Jewish Community Center and the Kosher Korner at Binghamton University.

“The entire community is welcome to attend what promises to be an informative and most-interesting program,” said organizers of the event. The TC/TI Adult Ed. Committee acknowledges a gift from The Community Foundation for South Central New York – The David and Virginia Eisenberg Fund that helped to underwrite this program.

## Online. . . . . Continued from page 9

◆ Roundtable will hold the virtual course “The Ancient Jewish Diaspora: Egypt, Syria, Italy, and Beyond” on Thursday, December 4-18, from 10-11 am. The cost to attend is \$132. The class will look at the “ancient Jewish diaspora and about how Jews once interacted with their surroundings and neighbors in Egypt, Syria and Italy.” For more information or to register, visit <https://roundtable.org/live-courses/history/the-ancient-jewish-diaspora-egypt-syria-italy-and-beyond>.

◆ The Yiddish Book Center will hold the virtual book launch “Yiddish: A Global Culture: Bold Stories, Boundless Creativity,” with David Mazower in conversation with Lisa Newman, on Thursday, December 4, at 7 pm. Mazower will talk about the newly released catalog of the Yiddish Book Center’s permanent exhibition. For more information or to register, visit [https://support.yiddishbookcenter.org/site/Ticketing?view=Tickets&id=11442&s\\_src=Event&s\\_subsrc=booklaunch](https://support.yiddishbookcenter.org/site/Ticketing?view=Tickets&id=11442&s_src=Event&s_subsrc=booklaunch).

◆ The Institute for Jewish Spirituality will hold the virtual book talk “Seeing into the Life of Things” with author Rodger Kamenetz in conversation with Rabbi Josh Feigelson on Wednesday, December 3, from 8- 9pm. For more information or to register, visit <https://secure.qgiv.com/form/booktalksfy26/event/ijsbooktalkwithrodgerkamenetz>.

◆ The New York Jewish Week will hold the virtual program “Behind the Laughter: David Margolick Shines a Light on the Rise and Fall of Sid Caesar” on Wednesday, December 3, at 6 pm. Margolick will discuss his new book, “When Caesar Was King: How Sid Caesar Reinvented American Comedy,” with Andrew Silow-Carroll. For more information or to register, visit <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf-HQeD9uchrr9G8oGDRJE20RVcRf8AE-o5oe3iMw1nUnUuWVZA/viewform>.

◆ The Jewish Grandparents Network is holding a “Hanukkah Book Giveaway 2025” featuring eight different book bundle prizes, each containing two books. Those interested must enter by noon on Friday, December 5, to be part of the drawing. Books will be mailed on Monday, December 8. For more information or to enter, visit [https://secure.lglforms.com/form\\_engine/s/piz-V2PPaYyi0sqA1rbp3w](https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/piz-V2PPaYyi0sqA1rbp3w).

◆ The 2026 YIVO-Bard Winter Program on Ashkenazi Civilization will take place online via Zoom from January 6-23. The program look into the literature, history and culture of East European Jewry. To learn more about the program and related events, visit <https://yivo.org/Winter-Program>.

For additional resources, see previous issues of The Reporter on its website, [www.thereporter.org/jewish-online-resources](http://www.thereporter.org/jewish-online-resources).

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