

Berkshire JEWISH VOICE

A publication of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, serving the Berkshires and surrounding NY, CT and VT

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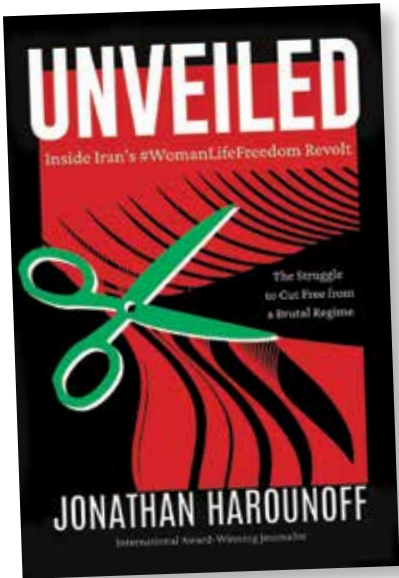
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Unveiled: Inside Iran's #WomanLifeFreedom Revolt, with Jonathan Harounoff



On Thursday, January 29 at 7 p.m., we welcome acclaimed British journalist Jonathan Harounoff, who now serves as Israel's international spokesperson to the United Nations. He will be in discussion about his book, *Unveiled: Inside Iran's #WomanLifeFreedom Revolt*, with Dr. Robyn Rosen, Professor of History and Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Marist University.

This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. Part of "Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series in collaboration with The Jewish Book Council."

In September 2022, 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Jina Amini was killed by Iran's morality police in Tehran for allegedly wearing her hijab too loosely. Outrage triggered nationwide protests. Women ripped off their headscarves, setting them afire. Others cut their hair in open

defiance. Key industries were brought to a standstill, and once-revered banners of the country's Supreme Leader were incinerated. It was the greatest challenge to the Islamic Republic of Iran in its 46-year history and came not from a foreign adversary, but from Iran's own freedom-seeking women. Women and girls, perhaps for the first time in the history of the modern Middle East, took center stage in a nationwide uprising, clamoring for a freer Iran and chanting the now-viral battle cry of: "Woman, Life, Freedom."

Award-winning British-Iranian journalist Jonathan Harounoff will demystify the context leading up to these historic protests inside Iran and abroad and examine the potential future ramifications. With much of the global spotlight focused on the Islamic Republic's dangerous foreign policy agenda, *Unveiled: Inside Iran's #WomanLifeFreedom Revolt* pays tribute to the people of Iran who have paid the ultimate price for freedom.

Amid War, Jewish Federation Giving Rose \$1 Billion in 2024

Jewish Federations of North America reported a record-breaking year of fundraising and investment in Jewish communities in 2024, as surging engagement in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks brought the total amount the system raises and distributes up to \$3 billion, about \$1 billion more than in a typical year, including \$683 million in Israeli Emergency Campaign funds.

"In this unique moment in Jewish history, we have seen both an incredible surge within our community on ways to engage Jewishly, alongside an amazing desire to strengthen the community through giving," said Jewish Federations of North America Chair Gary Torgow. "Federations stand alone in their ability to raise and invest these funds in our communities, and we are stepping up to meet the demands of the surge going forward, as well as confronting the challenges of security and antisemitism."

The continued surge in Jewish life was one of three major themes at this year's General Assembly, which was held November 16-18 in Washington, D.C.

The funds that 141 Federations across the system raised and distributed in 2024 included \$1.1 billion through the Annual Campaign, a 7.3% year-over-year increase. That's more than double the typical annual growth of 2-3%, and even stronger than the 4.7% increase that Jewish Federations saw during COVID.

2024 also saw \$683 million raised for the Israel Emergency Campaign (IEC), and \$248 million from other fundraising revenue. The remaining distributions to the community came from Donor Advised Funds and Endowments held by Federations.

"Many wondered whether the Israel Emergency Campaign would affect the Annual Campaign, but from the beginning, conversations across the system

suggested the opposite: that people were showing up not just for Israel, but for Jewish life, security, education, and belonging," said Jewish Federations President & CEO Eric D. Fingerhut.

Growth in the Annual Campaign wasn't limited to major markets; it happened across all four city sizes (Large, Large Intermediate, Intermediate, and Small), confirming the surge in philanthropy was

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Donate to Bondi Beach Terror Attack Emergency Relief

In response to the tragic terror attack at Bondi Beach, the Jewish Communal Appeal (JCA), in partnership with The Dor Foundation and Australian Jewish Funders (AJF), has launched an emergency

relief appeal to support those most affected. Funds will be distributed through JCA's trusted allocation process, in coordination with a multi-organization Crisis Management Team, to address urgent needs including mental health support, medical care, rehabilitation, crisis assistance, and emergency financial aid.

To support this critical effort, please visit tinyurl.com/BondiAustralia to give.



Jewish Federation
OF THE BERKSHIRES

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Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' 2025 Annual Campaign.

Together, we exceeded our \$1.3 million goal.

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Look for a full report on our impact and an honor roll recognizing our caring and committed donors in a future edition of the *Berkshire Jewish Voice*.



OP-ED

IN MY VIEW

Once Again, Moving From Strength to Strength

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

Last November's Jewish Federations of North America General Assembly was the first such confab of our umbrella organization I attended in nine years. The Jewish world has changed utterly since my participation from 2014 to 2016, and I couldn't help reflecting on the differences in focus and tone from both Federations' leadership and my fellow participants – changes I perceive as largely for the good in guiding Jewish Federations' urgent work in protecting and strengthening Jewish life in this country and abroad and in helping to rebuild Israel.

Milestones that reshaped the Jewish communal conversation since 2016 include two very different administrations in the White House, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Abraham Accords, Oct. 7 2023, the Gaza war against Hamas, the defanging of Iran and Hezbollah, and the worldwide spike in gutter, casual, and institutional antisemitism.

And how has the Federation system responded to these world-changing events? As encapsulated by CEO Eric Fingerhut at the closing plenary, "We have been through a war together over these past two years. A war with soldiers and guns in Israel and a war for hearts and minds here in North America...It is important for us to understand that what happened to us over the past two years is not a minor blip. Like the Hamas attack on Israel, we have experienced a planned and coordinated attack on Israel's standing in North America and on the Jewish community that supports Israel. It was fueled by billions of dollars of dark money from around the world...and was spread by the most powerful algorithms and communication tools ever invented. We went into this war in our communities with the army we had...but it was a formidable army."

After outlining the stakes, Fingerhut listed some of the sometimes-overlooked realities of the Jewish community's strengths. We live in the strongest and freest Jewish Diaspora in the 4,000-year history of the Jewish people. We are largely self-sufficient and not dependent on a single politician or political party for our safety, welfare, or livelihoods. The Federation system and its partners have an unmatched ability to direct funds where they are most needed in the Jewish world – and Jews are supporting Federation more generously than ever (see the related story on page 1). At home, Federation has built a security network with a presence in every Jewish community. Israel is a successful, innovative, and militarily powerful nation-state in the process of strengthening its position in the Middle East. Overall, the American Jewish community has been able to achieve its political objectives. And most importantly, we are poised to rebuild from a position of strength.

The consciousness expressed by Fingerhut pervaded the General Assembly – its theme, "Rebuild Israel." In years past, buzzwords and phrases might have been 'peoplehood,' 'meeting someone where they are,' 'Jewish journey,' and even 'tikkun olam.' This year, the word I heard repeated most was 'algorithm' – always with urgency, in full recognition of how social media platforms have amplified Jew hate and the even greater menace these algorithms might pose to Jews in

the future. Many of the breakout sessions centered around explaining how these poisonous algorithmic calculations operate, the effects they've had on public perceptions and discourse, and how people working in the Jewish world might combat their pernicious effects.

Throughout the GA, I was reminded of Samuel Johnson's observation that "when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." There seemed to be an awareness, expressed by former White House speechwriter and author Sarah Hurwitz, that "it's becoming increasingly clear that the kind of content-less 'bagel and lox Jewish mother joke' identity that many American Jews have just doesn't cut it anymore. When your Jewish identity is a big empty void with a few ethnic jokes rattling around in it, it will be filled by what is around you. And if what is around you is antisemitism, you will be helpless to fight back." And what was especially heartening was that sentiments of that sort were expressed most clearly and forcefully by younger speakers and participants, the cohort whose engagement in Jewish life and grasp of Jewish identity were fretted over at my last GA experiences a decade ago.

Throughout the GA, the blows the Jewish people have taken over the past two years were recognized and appropriately grieved over; but you could sense that they were also starting to be fixed into the broader scope of Jewish history, a process in its earliest amorphous stages. Again, we are moving from strength to strength – in November, "Jewish Federations of North America reported a record-breaking year of fundraising and investment in Jewish communities in 2024, as surging engagement in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks brought the total amount the system raises and distributes up to \$3 billion, about \$1 billion more than in a typical year, including \$683 million in Israeli Emergency Campaign funds."

The 2025 General Assembly did much to define what those strengths are and how they might be leveraged. Here are some impressions of the 2025 General Assembly.

Attending the General Assembly is always an opportunity to take the pulse of the global Jewish community: What's weighing on people's minds? Where are we focusing our collective time, energy, and resources? The 2025 GA was no exception. Former hostage Noa Argamani opened the gathering with a powerful reflection: "We all dreamed about this moment for more than two years. Now our hearts are whole again. And we can finally breathe again." In that ballroom, we all took a collective breath with her – and renewed our commitment to channel the same strength and determination shown by the former hostages into rebuilding Israel, embracing the renewed interest in Jewish life, securing our local institutions, and confronting the rise in antisemitism. The pulse of the global Jewish community is strong, and it was an honor to represent the Berkshire Jewish Community on that stage.

– **Arlene Schiff**, president of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires and member of Jewish Federations of North America Board of Trustees

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Day 1

"But today we breathe a sigh of relief..." The GA's opening moments were also the most emotional. Following a montage of hostages released from Gaza reuniting with loved ones, appearing onstage were Noa Argamani and the recently-released Evyatar David, Guy Gilboa-Dalal, and Avinatan Or. Noa recounted her experience in captivity, how she asked every day about her friend Avinatan. "For months I did not know if he was still kidnapped, or murdered," she remembered. "In captivity, I asked about him again and again and again. But there was no answer...and I was afraid to know the answer." She described the horror of seeing two of her fellow captives brutally murdered, and at her gratitude at being rescued by IDF soldiers, one of whom, her "hero" Arnon Zmora, was killed during the operation. Avinatan, who spent 738 days alone imprisoned in Hamas tunnels and had known freedom for scarcely one month. He described the strategies he used to survive in captivity, and the mantra he arrived at to keep himself human: "This too shall pass. Patience. Let it be." He said he didn't consider himself a hero – those were the soldiers of the IDF who put their lives on the line to rescue the hostages – and shared that "his next mission" will be to work with those warriors. "Because I did survive," he said, "I carry a responsibility. To talk about patience, about humanity, and about complexity. The responsibility to know good from evil, right from wrong, and to have moral clarity." We have, he concluded, "a responsibility for unity."

And one realized that the sight of Noa and Avinatan embracing, and hearing the words of Evyatar and Guy, were things we couldn't have imagined even a few weeks earlier. Their world changed so much in that short amount of time, and to see them with the fortitude to so soon share their stories was inspiring.

This was my second GA and my first as a volunteer and not a Jewish professional. I was struck by the talk and demonstration of unity. There is so much that divides our community right now and the theming of coming together and being stronger together was felt in every session I attended. The commitment to Israel and our collective future was a big theme for me. From the opening plenary with hostages to the Israeli music the work of Julie Platt and President Isaac Herzog's remarks demonstrated the importance of our Jewish state. And I was taken with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation Amber Awards and recognition of the next generation who will lead our future.

– **Amy Blumkin**, board of directors of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires



Gary Torgow, chair of Jewish Federations' board of trustees, emphatically voiced the importance of returning to the fundamentals of Jewish peoplehood, a message that had started to crystalize among Federation leadership at my last GA nine years ago. His words were forceful and direct, with an unmistakable undertone of religious conviction – "So where does our salvation come

GENERAL ASSEMBLY,
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OP-ED

RABBI REFLECTION

A Jew Must Keep Climbing

By Rabbi Levi Volovik / Chabad of the Berkshires



Rabbi Levi Volovik

We find ourselves at a time where world Jewry begins the new book of Exodus/*Shemot* in our weekly Torah portion.

Shemot begins with a new Pharaoh, crushing oppression, and an existential threat to the Jewish people. Yet it is precisely in this Torah portion, against the backdrop of fear and uncertainty, that the greatest light begins to emerge. Moses is born, and is chosen by G-d to lead the Jewish people out of exile.

The opening chapters of *Shemot* reveal a profound truth: Even when we cannot see G-d's plan, He is guiding every step.

This is the essence of *Hashgacha Pratis* – Divine Providence, a teaching emphasized by the Baal Shem Tov that nothing is random. Every encounter, every challenge, every “coincidence,” is part of a higher plan leading us toward redemption.

When G-d first appears to Moses at the burning bush, Moses hides his face, unsure of his ability to lead. But G-d does not reveal the entire journey ahead – He simply shows Moses the next step: “Go to Pharaoh.”

Then another step and another.

As the commentators teach, G-d leads us one rung at a time.

Our job is not to understand the entire ladder – only to keep climbing.

This reminds me of a childhood story of the third Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, who climbed a tall ladder while his friends froze with fear. When asked how he succeeded, he explained: “They looked down at how high they had climbed. I looked up at how far I still had to go.”

Shemot teaches us the same lesson: A Jew looks upward – not downward. Our mission is the next mitzvah, the next act of courage, the next step toward bringing more holiness into the world.

And nowhere is this more powerfully illustrated than in the story I heard from my colleague Rabbi Moshe Bryski.

A man named Jack had lived through unimaginable pain. He lost two children in a tragic car accident and watched his life crumble in the years that followed. Grief swallowed him. He felt abandoned, empty, and without purpose. Finally, overwhelmed by despair, he made a heartbreaking decision: to end his life. But before doing so, he wanted to give his only surviving daughter one final night together – one last memory. He took her to a movie theater at the mall, planning that this would be their last outing.

But G-d had already prepared the next rung of his ladder.

As Jack walked through the mall, he suddenly heard music. There, near the empty fountain, a small group of yeshiva boys were dancing around a simple menorah. It was modest, hardly noticeable, yet filled with unmistakable Jewish warmth. One of the boys saw Jack and his daughter walking by and instinctively reached out, pulling them into the circle.

Jack resisted at first. But his daughter smiled for the first time in months, and he couldn't walk away. And so he stood there – broken, exhausted, holding his child, watching the flames flicker.

At that moment, something shifted. A reminder that even in the deepest darkness, a Jew still carries light.

Jack later said, “I went to the mall to end my life. I left the mall remembering I still had one.”

But the story doesn't end there.

Years later, Jack moved into a new neighborhood and by Divine Providence, his next-door neighbor was none other than Rabbi Moshe Bryski, the very yeshiva student who had unknowingly saved his life. Not yet aware of the connection, Rabbi Bryski invited Jack and his daughter for a Shabbat dinner. After the meal, they sat together looking through photo albums of the early days of the Chabad House. Suddenly Jack froze.

There, in one of the photos, was the young rabbi who had danced with him around the menorah on that fateful night.

Trembling, Jack pointed at the picture and said, “That was you...You were the one who saved me.”

A moment that seemed random, insignificant, almost invisible at the time was revealed years later to be part of a perfectly crafted Divine plan.

And this message resonates even more deeply as we ourselves come straight from celebrating Chanukah – eight nights of increasing light. We just finished placing candles in our windows to proclaim that even the smallest flame pushes back great darkness. The miracle of Chanukah is not only that the oil burned longer than nature allowed, it is that a few courageous Jews believed that their small step, their single flame, mattered.

When a Jew performs even one *mitzvah*, lights one candle, gives one coin of *tzedakah*, says one kind word – it doesn't end with that single action. It spreads outward, touching lives we may never meet, illuminating corners of the world we may never see. Like one flame lighting another, and then another, each mitzvah multiplies the light in creation.

G-d places the right moment, the right encounter, the right spark directly in front of us, often when we least expect it.

Our own community recently experienced a special *Shemot* moment – the opening of the new Chabad Jewish Center of the Berkshires. For more than twenty years, it was our burning bush: a glowing vision calling to us, urging us to keep climbing even when the path was long and the challenges many.

Standing together in our beautiful new Center, I felt the message of *Shemot* come alive:

Redemption begins the moment a Jew refuses to stop climbing. Redemption begins when we take the next step – even when we don't yet see the full picture. Redemption begins when we bring light into dark places.

Just like in Egypt, and just like in Jack's story, G-d places the right moment, the right encounter, the right spark directly in front of us, often when we least expect it.

Our task is simple: Keep climbing the ladder. Keep moving toward the next step G-d places before us.

Keep performing mitzvot because each one sends out ripples of light far beyond what we can imagine.

Rabbi Levi Volovik is co-director (with Sara Volovik) of Chabad of the Berkshires in Lenox.

MAZEL TOV!

The General Assembly

GRINSPOON AMBER AWARDS

Jeremy Burton, CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston (JCRC), on receiving one of the five inaugural Grinspoon Amber Awards at the Jewish Federations of North America's General Assembly in November. Winners are “outstanding professionals who have made exceptional contributions to the Jewish world and who, with leadership and dedication, have strengthened Jewish life in meaningful and enduring ways.” Burton (center in dark suit) was presented with the award by Winnie Sandler Grinspoon (far left), president of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Cindy Chazan and Jay Leipzig on the birth of their granddaughter, **Ruby Noa Leipzig**. Proud parents are **Eric and Amy Leipzig**.

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Your Federation Presents

GENERAL ASSEMBLY, continued from page 2



Gary Torgow, chair of Jewish Federations' board of trustees, spoke at the opening and closing plenaries

from? What has sustained the Jewish people through centuries of exile and persecution?" Torgow asked. "The answer never lies in politics or politicians, or power or the strength of a society, but in timeless messages transmitted from heaven. Judaism teaches us a foundational lesson in the words spoken to us collectively at the Sinai mountain when we were gifted with the Ten Commandments" and became "a free people *together*." It was the kind of rhetoric that, in my previous experiences at the GA, would have been the purview of a clerical speaker like Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l, not a lay leader. To my ears, Gary Torgow, as a Federation leader delivering high-profile speeches at the opening plenary and then later at the closing plenary, was asserting that religious identity and secular identity could no longer be bifurcated for Jewish people. Our enemies don't make distinctions and our survival may depend on us not doing so either. It was a message that suggested that the "do Jewish the way you do Jewish" approach will no longer work as a way forward, and that resonated for someone like me whose Jewish identity is rooted in faith and tradition, however imperfectly. Maybe it will for you, as well – I encourage you to watch Torgow's speeches, which you can access online at generalassembly.org.



At the last panel discussion of the opening plenary, Sarah Hurwitz ignited what was later described as a social media firestorm with her thoughts about the way that using Holocaust education as a form of antisemitism education was no longer working in an increasingly "post-literate" TikTok world. Her main idea was that the Holocaust is taught as a narrative of powerful oppressors victimizing the weak, and that young people bombarded with images (real and contrived) of a powerful Israeli army fighting against a seemingly weak population in Gaza find it confusing to discern who might be in the right during the current conflict. Her belief is that Jewish education for Jewish youth has to be improved because in the social media age, bad ideas and bad actors using algorithms are finding young people through their smart phones. Where at one time Americans got their news through mostly American sources with cultural and journalistic guardrails in place, social media is international, where narratives are amplified from around the globe, from places that do not necessarily care much for Jews. Hurwitz's message about solutions was nuanced – again, visit generalassembly.org for more – but her diagnosis of the problem was among the best analyses by any of the speakers I heard at the GA.

Day 2

The second day opened with what to me the most heartbreaking segment of the GA. It centered around a performance by the house musicians for this GA, The Tamari Project, a musical initiative in memory of Tamar Kedem Siman Tov, who was murdered on October 7 with her entire family: her husband Jonathan, twin six-year-old daughters, Shachar and Arbel, and two-year-old son, Omer. During the Gaza conflict of 2014, Tamar was part of the team that established



Free: Guy Gilboa-Dalal, Evyatar David, Noa Argamani, and Avinatan Or

Attending my first JFNA General Assembly was genuinely moving. I arrived not quite knowing what to expect, but I left feeling energized and deeply connected to the broader Jewish community in North America. The sessions at the very beginning and end of the conference stayed with me the most. Hearing four former Israeli hostages – Noa Argamani, Avinatan Or, Evyatar David, and Guy Gilboa-Dalal – bravely share their stories of captivity was an unforgettable experience. Sitting in a room with 2,000 others, I felt the entire audience absorb their strength, resilience, and determination to rebuild their lives and Israel's future. Another highlight for me was the chance to hear directly from Canadian filmmaker Barry Avrich about his documentary *The Road Between Us: The Ultimate Rescue*. I found it especially meaningful to listen to him describe what it took to stand up for his film when it faced the possibility of being pulled from the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). Hearing about the steps he took, the pressure he faced, and his commitment to making sure the story of the survival of the Tibon family on Oct. 7 was on the TIFF schedule made the film's eventual success – winning the Audience Choice Award for Documentary – even more powerful.

–Lisa Reznik, board of directors of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires

the music and art school Bikurim, and later became the principal of Israel's first youth village for young musicians. Located on the Gaza border, it was a magnet for talented musicians from across the country. Members of The Tamari Project are the graduates and colleagues of Tamar from Bikurim. Video from Tamar and Jonathan's wedding at Kibbutz Nachalat Oz played as The Tamari Project performed, honoring the memories of their friend and mentor and her family. Seeing images of the couple on their happiest day while knowing what fate had in store for them and their yet-to-be-conceived children just a few years later was a wrenching experience, and brought home another dimension to all that was lost on Oct. 7, 2023. The Tamari Project musicians embodied the GA's theme – "Rebuilding Israel" – and demonstrated how Israelis are channeling their trauma.



The morning plenary continued with a roundtable featuring Olivia Reingold, a young journalist doing great work for The Free Press showing how misleading images from Gaza drove an anti-Israel narrative. Her reporting last summer forced many news outlets to issue corrections, but also stimulated a barrage of hateful messages, and even death threats, on her social media. Her response? She started wearing a Star of David necklace for the first time in her life, with the attitude that "if you have a problem with Jews, then say it to my face. When I wear it in public on the New York subways, I want people to know they are in the presence of Jews and we're just like them, members of their community." She shared that her reporting leads her to believe that the Democratic Socialists of America represent a great challenge to the Jewish community. Nationwide in scope and growing, "they are highly, highly organized where gaming out city council races and school board races in suburbs and towns across America. This matters for Jews because, I think it's fair to say, that they have an eliminationist policy when it comes to Israel. At their convention over the summer they passed resolutions that said to be a member of the DSA and to earn their political endorsement, you need to be okay with Palestinian violence." The challenge, in Reingold's opinion, is for the Jewish community to come up with a way to be as politically motivated as this highly-motivated opponent – but that she doesn't see that coalescing as yet. "I feel like we have converted everyone who is open to our cause," she said. "We have a huge problem reaching new audiences of people who are approachable and persuadable." On the same panel, the Pastor Juan Rivera of the evangelical New Life Church in Youngstown, OH, shared the ways his Hispanic congregation supports Israel and the Jewish community. He shared the challenge he faces preaching from the pulpit against the confusing antisemitic messages that are amplified online. In his church, he said, "we built the house for the storm," and so his congregants wear the Star of David as an expression of allyship. "It's an opportunity to build courage and clarity around these issues," he asserted. For Pastor Rivera, after Oct. 7 2023, it was not enough to say 'we stand with you,' but rather we stand as you." Third panelist, publisher Zibby Owens, detailed the ways members of the publishing industry have worked to cancel pro-Israel authors – book contracts were canceled, literary agents dropped authors, writers were disinvited to conferences, and blacklists were circulated. Owens herself became a lightning rod for controversy when she withdrew her company's sponsorship of a literary festival whose organizers planned to give attendees free rein in expressing anti-Israel and even antisemitic sentiments from the podium. The last two years have been marked by cancellations and betrayals, she said, that are still ongoing. Her wish is for the Jewish community to better organize itself and its messaging. "Look, people are scared to speak out," she said. "As Jews, we've survived in the past by hiding. The instinct to speak out is not necessarily there. But if we don't speak out *now*, then *what*?" She concluded by asserting that organizations like Federations have a great opportunity to encourage their community members to speak up. Reingold, Rivera, and Owens all offered tangible ways to move forward – none were particularly optimistic about things dying down, it has to be said. Their overall message – we have to figure out how to fight back better.



The breakout session I found most valuable was "Countering Hate, Online and in the Press," in which panelists really broke down the realities of what goes on online. Imran Ahmed of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, explained the pernicious quality of the algorithms amplifying hate – for one, the hate does not come from organizations per say, but rather burble up from the internet interests of users around the world. Even if one engages with hateful messaging to object

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to it, that engagement further amplifies the hateful algorithm. The war we're fighting, he asserted, is not a culture war, but an information war. "We're not fighting an idea, we're fighting algorithms." Moreover, for social media outlets, amplifying antisemitism is "a business choice. They profit from engagement and hate drives engagement. Outrage and clicks outweigh the truth." We have to change the battlefield, asserted Ahmed, but the problems we are facing are new and we don't have solutions as of yet.

Interestingly, a week or so after the GA, Elon Musk (as reported by the New York Post) "recently unveiled a feature that publicly displays key background information about an account, including the location on where it's based. The feature has already unmasked a sprawling ecosystem of accounts taking advantage of disasters and political unrest across the world, including inside the war-torn Gaza Strip." The new feature exposed how algorithms are being driven by dummy accounts from around the world – many in the Middle East and Pakistan – that exist to boost divisive messages about Israel and American politics. For me, that new information offered a glimmer of hope to counter Imran Ahmed's dire message.

Day 3

The last GA I attended fell days after the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president – not the outcome that was anticipated or preferred by the majority of participants at the conference, it is fair to say. And so GOP Senator Ted Cruz's warm reception at this GA seemed to be something of a bellwether of how political perceptions have changed since 2023. Cruz – like his Senate colleague John Fetterman, who appeared on day two of the GA – shared his full-throated support of Israel. And while the Texas Republican called out the antisemitism on the left, he was equally harsh toward the antisemitism that is increasingly out in the open on the far right, which he asserted is real and organic and not particularly driven by algorithms and online astroturfing.

While I could see that some in the audience did not applaud the senator or rise at the end of his speech, the overall reception Cruz received made me consider that people working in the Jewish world have realized that our allies are going to be found in the political center rather than the fringes, and that maybe we can heal political divisions within our own community by using attitudes expressed toward Israel and antisemitism not necessarily to inform our political values, but how we express them and how we might work together with people who don't share our views.

As the GA drew to a close, commentator Dan Senor left us on an optimistic note that provided a big picture view of the inflection point that Israel and North American Jewry are at two-plus years after Oct. 7, 2023. "The outcome of these past two years has been transformational for Israel, in the region, in the world, in a positive way." He expressed how amazing it was that Israel could now move forward knowing this "ring of fire," 7-front existential war it had been fighting throughout its existence was now, in large part, resolved with its enemies defeated. There is no comparison in history in which a country so completely turned around its fortunes in such a short time, a tribute to the IDF and Israeli intelligence.

Moreover, Israel is due for a period of growth as the country moves off wartime footing and starts to leverage the opportunities and investments

accrued during the last two years as it rebuilds. Even during wartime, the Israeli innovation economy never flagged. Israeli startups are at the forefront of developing military technologies based on lessons learned from the recent conflict and are innovating at breakneck speed.

Senor, however, acknowledged that Israeli society has been shattered by the experience, and has undergone a loss of confidence in its political leadership and even in the IDF. However, he asserted that no democracy in the world could have managed the internal and external stresses faced better than Israel. "If I had to bet on a country, it would be Israel," he said.

A positive to come out of the negative, he asserted, was that Israelis' ideas of Jewish peoplehood had changed – before this period, they may not have thought much about the challenges of the Diaspora, but that now "they are concerned for us and worry about us" in the way we worry about them. American Jews and Israel have never been so united as they are now – Israeli Jews have recognized the support they've received from the Diaspora and are grateful. American Jewry is also poised to grow stronger. Our young people, Senor asserted, have to be given opportunities to live in a Jewish bubble, if only part-time, and that should be the focus of America's Jewish community.

Federation plays an integral role in all the positive developments that Senor outlined on the stage of the General Assembly. Attending this year's conference was a fantastic opportunity to connect with Federation's work and the people doing it. After two long and hard years, it was energizing and inspiring to see the Jewish world moving from strength to strength, and I am grateful to be working in the Federation system.



Federation board member Lisa Reznik (left) and Senior Development Officer Rebekah Steinfeld (right) with a Ukrainian shaliach

The JFNA GA was an incredible opportunity to experience the vision and impact of Jewish Federations. I was struck by the resilience, strength, and passion of the Jewish people. One especially inspiring experience of impact for me personally was our briefing with representatives from the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). We met and heard from a young Ukrainian woman who works for a JDC program in Kiev. She spoke about the life changing efforts of the teen programming there.

I was filled with awe at all she has endured in her young life and pride in Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' support every year for JDC's vital work.

Rebekah Steinfeld, Senior Development Officer of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires

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Your Federation Presents

“Ben Shahn and the Art of Hebrew Calligraphy”

On Thursday, January 8 at 7 p.m., join us for the second of three standalone talks on Hebrew calligraphy presented by Professor Joanna Homrighausen of Jewish Art Education. She will look at the work of 20th-century Lithuanian-American Jewish artist Ben Shahn.



“Psalm 133,” a lithograph by Ben Shahn from the early 1960s.

This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. No knowledge of Hebrew language required.

Ben Shahn (1898-1969) rose to prominence as a leading proponent of Social Realism, a style that responded to the social, economic, and political conditions of the Great Depression. In both paintings and photographs he portrayed the hardships of poverty and protested the era’s social injustices. His Hebrew letters call for social justice and evoke the folk nostalgia of Ashkenazi Jewish viewers. His letters, found in artist books and prints and on synagogue walls, celebrate the movement of hand on paper.

The next session led by Professor Homrighausen will be “Hebrew Calligraphy and Letter Arts Today: Tattoos, Type, and Graffiti” on February 26.

Joanna Homrighausen writes and teaches at the intersection of sacred text, lettering arts, and scribal crafts. Having earned her PhD in Religion (Hebrew Bible) at Duke University, she teaches Religious Studies at the College of William & Mary, where she has taught the biblical Hebrew sequence, the history of ancient Israel, and first-year writing seminars.

Sesame: Global Recipes & Stories of an Ancient Seed with Rachel Simons

Celebrate Tu B’Shevat!

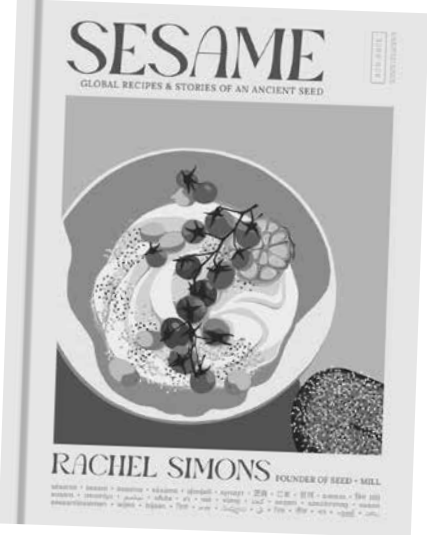
On Thursday, February 5 at 7 p.m., celebrate Tu B'Shevat, with Rachel Simons, the founder of popular tahini outfit Seed+Mill in New York’s historic Chelsea Market, for a discussion of her new cookbook *Sesame* which celebrates the evolution, history, and diversity of this classic ingredient.

This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. Part of “Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series in collaboration with The Jewish Book Council.”

Simons's cookbook offers a clear, approachable guide to the world of sesame, from halva, tahini, and sesame oil, to togarashi, gomasio, and furikake, with 80+ vegetarian-forward recipes. With its delicious nutty taste, nutritional density, and long shelf life, the sesame seed is a tiny ingredient with an enormous cultural impact and a deeply rich history.

Through vibrant photography, evocative storytelling, and contributions from a slate of noted chefs and food luminaries across the globe (including David Lebovitz, Molly Yeh, Nisha Vora, and Zoë François) *Sesame* is a loving culinary tribute to the sesame seed: how it has transformed dishes, how it has been translated by different culinary cultures, and how it has tied people and places together through generations.

Rachel Simons is the founder of Seed+Mill, the first store devoted to sesame products in the United States. Its high-quality tahini and halva are favorites of chefs and home cooks alike.



Anna Sokolow: A Jewish and Modern Dance Hero for our Times

On Thursday, January 22 at 7 p.m., join Samantha Geracht, artistic director of the Sokolow Theatre Dance Ensemble, to learn about Anna Sokolow, a modern dance pioneer and a Jewish voice for justice.

This program will be presented via Zoom. Register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

Anna Sokolow (1910-2000) was born in Hartford and began her training at the Neighborhood Playhouse with Martha Graham and Louis Horst. In the 1930s, she was a member of the Graham Dance Company and assisted Horst in his dance composition classes. During this period, in addition to her association with the WPA dance unit, she formed her own company and began choreographing and performing solo concerts and ensemble works.

Ms. Sokolow’s interest in humanity led her to create works of dramatic contemporary imagery showing both the lyric and stark aspects of the human experience. Her vast range of repertory includes drama, comedy, and lyricism with her commentaries on humanity and social justice threaded into each of her works. In a 1965 Dance Magazine article, she wrote that there were no “final solutions to today’s problems,” but that she “could simply provoke an audience into awareness.”

In 1939, Ms. Sokolow began a lifelong association with the dance and theater arts in Mexico. Her work for the Mexican Ministry of Fine Arts grew to become the National Academy of Dance there. In 1953, she was invited to Israel to work with Inbal Dance Company. Following that, she choreographed for the major

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Your Federation Presents



Anna Sokolow in Kaddish, 1945. Courtesy of the Sokolow Dance Foundation.

Sokolow's artistic story is intertwined with the American Jewish story of her time. Sokolow was a Jewish cultural icon, daughter of immigrants and social activist whose powerful theatrical choreography shaped American modern dance over the course of a 70-year choreographic career. She believed that dance could be more than entertainment and explored the pressing issues of her day. She spoke truth to power as early as the 1930s when she saw Hitler's political rise. Explore Sokolow's life and her choreographic creation of dramatic contemporary imagery showing both the lyric and stark aspects of the human experience, threading her commentaries on humanity and social justice throughout her work.

Samantha G racht, MFA (Artistic Director) performed with Anna Sokolow's *Players' Project* for eleven years and is a founding member of the Sokolow Theatre/Dance Ensemble.

dance companies in Israel including Batsheva, Kibbutz Dance Company, and Lyric Theatre. She visited Mexico and Israel frequently to teach and to choreograph. Sokolow also choreographed for the Broadway theater. Her credits include *Street Scene*, *Camino Real*, *Candide*, and the original *Hair*. In the late 1950s, Sokolow was the first modern dance choreographer to have her work (*Rooms*) presented on national television. This presentation will trace Sokolow's history and art from New York City's Lower East Side surrounded by the Socialist artistic movement flourishing at the time, through her development as a world-renowned modernist choreographer, to her lifelong ties to Israel with its own modern dance roots. Anna

We Are Black Jews: Ethiopian Jewry and the Journey to Equality in Israel, with Roni Fantanesh Malkai



On Thursday, January 15 at 10:45 a.m., we welcome Roni Fantanesh Malkai, who will talk about her book *We Are Black Jews: Ethiopian Jewry and the Journey to Equality in Israel*, a profound exploration of the Ethiopian Jewish community's historical journey, resilience, and struggle for equality in Israel. This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. Part of "Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series in collaboration with The Jewish Book Council." Blending personal narratives with historical accounts, Malkai vividly captures the struggle of Beta Israel to preserve their Jewish identity through centuries of exile and their arduous journey to the Promised Land, which Roni herself undertook on foot. Once in Israel, their challenges continued, as they faced prejudice, inequality, and marginalization. Yet, at its core, *We Are Black Jews* is a vision of faith and hope. By celebrating achievements amid adversity and sharing powerful stories of courage and perseverance, Malkai calls for a shift in how we view our communities – embracing a richer, more inclusive Jewish identity. Writes Isaac Herzog, president of the State of Israel: "*We Are Black Jews* is a subtle yet powerful work.... Evading the pitfalls of becoming a collection of gripes and grievances, it instead points with insight and perspective to the story of Ethiopian Jewry, highlights its beauty and power, and offers incisive and subtle analysis that avoids simple conclusions. Above all, it is a chronicle of a supremely human story, one that has a great deal to teach Israeli society, and indeed any human society, as well as any individual who wishes to look to life and its human stories to become wiser."

Roni Fantanesh Malkai was born in Ethiopia and immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia in 1980 as part of Beta Israel. She holds an MA in Public Policy and an LLB in Law. A journalist, speaker, and activist, she writes for Haaretz and other media, addressing race, equality, and social justice while advocating for social change.



Do The Right Thing

Live theater presented on Zoom by The Braid

On Thursday, February 12 at 7 p.m., The Braid – the Go-To Jewish Story Company – returns with an evening of funny, heart-warming, and unbelievable stories that reveal the moments we choose to do right...or choose to do wrong. To mitzvah or not to mitzvah, that is the question asked in *Do The Right Thing!* This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email two days before the program containing information about joining the meeting. For nearly two decades, The Braid has created a unique artform at the intersection of storytelling and theatre that dramatizes and shares the diverse stories of a diverse Jewish people. This will be a 65 minute live theater production presented by actors of The Braid, followed by a moderated Q&A session.



COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS APRIL 24

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires offers a number of scholarships for graduating seniors and college students based on merit and/or financial need.

The Henry Simkin and Frances Simkin Schiller and Dr. Stanley and Faye Simkin Scholarship
Awarded to a graduating senior who has demonstrated high academic achievement, leadership, and participation in our Jewish Community

Sandra Kronick Smith College Scholarship
Awarded to a graduating female senior or student attending college or vocational/technical school, who demonstrates financial need, is of good character and possesses a good work ethic.

Apply online at:
jewishberkshires.org/college-scholarships

Application information will be available in school guidance offices in February.



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LOCAL NEWS

Welcome to Yiddishland
Documentary to open 2026
Temple Anshe Amunim
Community Film Series



PITTSFIELD – Temple Anshe Amunim is excited to host the third annual TAA Community Film Series during the winter months of 2026. The film series will feature in-person screenings in TAA's social hall. The programs will be held on Sunday afternoons beginning at 2 p.m.

The films showcased in 2026 speak to issues which people of all backgrounds and experiences can relate: artistic expression, the bonds of friendship, and perseverance while overcoming career setbacks. Post-screening discussions will follow each film, led by filmmakers and/or experts in the subjects addressed by the film.

On Sunday, January 11 at 2 p.m., the TAA Community Film Series will host the first area screening of the acclaimed musical documentary *Welcome to Yiddishland*, about the global resurgence of the Yiddish language, driven by contemporary artists creating new work in the ancient language. The film travels across continents, meeting artists in places like Melbourne, Berlin, New York, and Haifa (where there is a revitalization of Yiddish culture.) Many of the artists featured did not grow up speaking Yiddish, but have embraced it as a source of identity, community and creative expression.

Discussion of the film and the history of the Yiddish language will be led by Sebastian Schulman, a literary translator of Yiddish, Russian, and Esperanto. His translations and other writings have appeared in *The Dirty Goat*, *Forward*, *Pakn Treger*, and elsewhere.

The second film program, *Joe Papp in Five Acts*, will be held on February 1 and the third film, *Shari and Lamb Chop*, will be held on March 1.

All tickets are \$10 and can be purchased in advance at: ansheamunim.org, or at the door. (Cash or check only at the door.) Refreshments will be available to purchase. Please contact Lisa Reznik, Film Committee Chair, with any questions: (413) 464-8933, or Temple Anshe Amunim at (413) 442-5910.

Color Your World Mussar,
with Rabbi Pam Wax

PITTSFIELD – 2026 is the year to begin (or continue) your Mussar practice!

Kneset Israel will welcome your participation in this monthly Monday evening class, whether you are new to the practice or a veteran. Attendance in person in Pittsfield is highly recommended for those who are local, with a Zoom option available for those who are not. An introductory session, providing a history and overview of Mussar, will take place on Monday, January 12 from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., with no commitment to join the ongoing class. Thereafter, the group will convene monthly from February through June (February 9, March 16, April 13, May 18, and June 15) with the possibility of extension through the summer, if there is interest. Meeting with a *chevruta* partner between sessions (in person or on Zoom) will be highly encouraged.

The course will be facilitated by Rabbi Pam Wax, Director of Adult Education and Programming at Kneset Israel, who has been studying and practicing Mussar for 25 years. She is the author of Mussar curriculums for both adults and teens through Chai Mitzvah, was the co-author (with Rabbi Marc Margolius) of the Mussar Torah commentary *Pitchei Ha-Levavot* distributed by The Institute for Jewish Spirituality 2015-16, and has taught Mussar in



dozens of venues for many different populations, most notably, a rabbi-cantor Mussar group that has been meeting monthly for 15 years.

Pre-register at www.knesetisrael.org/rsvp. \$72 for non-members of Kneset Israel or Anshe Amunim. Kneset Israel is at 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.

Congregation Ahavath
Sholom, Supported by
Hadar Institute,
Unveils Initiative to
Engage Berkshire
Jewish Community
Tu B'Shevat Seder on February 1
By Linda Geffin / CAS

GREAT BARRINGTON – The Hadar Institute is known for its commitment to empowering Jews to build and sustain vibrant, egalitarian communities rooted in Torah, *Avodah* (worship), and *Hesed* (loving-kindness). Hadar is providing support for Congregation Ahavath Sholom's "Caring Community" Committee initiative .

Guided by Rabbi Jennifer Rudin and congregant Susan Hicks, participants will immerse themselves studying texts and learning songs that emphasize the principles communal care, while strengthening connections within the congregation and beyond.

Congregation Ahavath Sholom will host its Second Annual Tu B'Shevat Seder on Sunday, February 1 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., inviting congregants and the wider community to experience the wonders of nature – even during the winter months. This special Seder will feature traditional tastings of fruits symbolizing the four spiritual worlds, along with four cups of wine or juice transitioning from deep red to white. Attendees will engage with kabbalistic readings and poetry that explore the enduring cycles and resilience of the natural world.

Each aspect of the ceremony is crafted to foster a deeper connection to both the spiritual significance and the physical abundance present, regardless of the season. Rabbi Rudin emphasizes the meaning behind the gathering, saying, "This Seder is about more than ritual. It's an opportunity for our community to unite, appreciate the richness of the natural world, and find joy and connection even in the quiet of winter."

All are welcome to join this celebration, which seamlessly weaves together Jewish tradition, the rhythms of nature, and the warmth of community. For additional details or to RSVP, please visit ahavathsholom.com.

On the horizon in May

Mark your calendars for an unforgettable evening – "Experience the Magic: Joey Weisenberg Live in Concert!" On Sunday, May 17, the renowned musician and founder and director of Hadar's Rising Song Institute, Joey Weisenberg, will enthrall the audience at Shakespeare & Company with a benefit concert for Congregation Ahavath Sholom. More info to come in future BJVs.

William Pitt

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Jeff Clifford

Shabbats with Song
and Mah Jongg at
Kneset Israel

PITTSFIELD – On Friday, January 23, join friends or make new ones at Kneset Israel for an energizing, musical Shirei Shabbat Friday evening service at 5:45 p.m., then stay for a delicious kosher Shabbat dinner at 6:45 p.m. Registration necessary for dinner. Adults \$25, under 18 free. Register at knesetisrael.org/rsvp

A Winter Afternoon with Mah-Jongg and Friends

Mah-Jongg enthusiasts unite! On Saturday, January 10, the game is on! Join friends and make new ones at Congregation Kneset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield, following Shabbat services and kiddush (at approximately 12:30 p.m.).

For further information, contact KI member Julia Kaplan, juliabkaplan@me.com. (Don't play Mah-Jongg? They'll teach you! Want to play a different game? Bring it!)

Shabbat, "Soul Spa"
Torah Study, and
Zoom Shabbat
Early winter at Congregation
Beth Israel

NORTH ADAMS – Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires offers ways to connect through services, study, and socializing.

Kabbalat Shabbat Services — Friday, January 9 & 23 and February 20 at 7 p.m.

All are welcome to celebrate Shabbat together with prayer, song, poetry, and heart. Some weeks the CBI choir and musicians will join Rabbi Rachel Barenblat in leading prayer. Expect music, poetry, Torah teaching, and an opportunity to ritually let go of the week and move together into sacred time.

Regular Shabbat Morning Services continue on the Saturdays of January 17 and February 7 & 14 at 9:30 a.m.

Hear some words of Torah (and some words about Torah) and bask in Shabbat's sweetness. This service will be led by Rabbi Pam Wax, and will include traditional liturgy, contemporary poetry, chant, Torah study, and song, as well as spectacular views from the sanctuary, which connect participants with the natural world and with our Source.

"Soul Spa" Torah Study: The Saturdays of January 3, 10, 17, & 24 and February 7, 14, 21, & 28 at 10 a.m. via Zoom

Join CBI for Shabbat morning Zoom Torah study every Saturday! Jointly led by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat (CBI) and by Rabbi David Markus (Congregation Shir Ami), participants will explore the weekly *parsha* through the lens of women's commentaries and midrash. Mourner's Kaddish will be recited at the end of each session. All sessions will also be archived on Shir Ami's website.

RSVP for all services and programs at cbj-erkshires.com/calendar-of-events. Some Shabbat

LOCAL NEWS,
continued on page 14

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Your Federation Presents

Shining Our Light Against the Darkness

Although our hearts were heavy, the Berkshire Jewish community came together on December 14 at NightWood to shine our light on the first night of Chanukah. "We stand in solidarity with the Jews of Australia and other Jewish communities around the world who are lighting candles tonight, continuing Jewish life and tradition, standing proud in the face of hate," said Federation's president, Arlene Schiff. "And we honor the upstander, Ahmed al Ahmed, the Muslim man who disarmed one of the gunmen and was shot twice. He could have hidden but did not, and Jews are alive because of his bravery."

Thank you to Massachusetts State Representative Leigh Davis for joining us and offering an unequivocal message of support. "It's times

like these we have to realize that antisemitism is on the rise, and it's not going away without us focusing on it and doing such things as creating a special commission on combating anti-Semitic behavior like we have done at the State House," she said. "This is a moment that we need to come together and recognize that, as a community, we are stronger together. And when we focus on the light, we can get past the fear."

Kudos to the Berkshire Jewish Musicians Collective, who played a hot set of Chanukah tunes on a frigid December evening. And thanks to The Mount in Lenox for once again being such gracious and accommodating hosts – visitors agreed that this year's NightWood was the most spectacular of all.



Your Federation Presents

PJ Library's Chanukah Party was Delightful

Tubing or not tubing – that is the question for January

By Paige Wright / Coordinator of PJ Library

On December 7, Federation families came together for a pre-Chanukah celebration at Dottie's Coffee Lounge in Pittsfield. We decorated donuts, dreidels, and menorahs. There was laughing, dancing, and even an impromptu song performance!

We hope to see you on Sunday, January 11 from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m., when we'll be at Bosquet Mountain in Pittsfield for a fun-filled afternoon of tubing in the snow! Are you a Jewish family or raising Jewish children? Do you love giving back to your community? Do you also love flying down a hill on a snow tube? If you answered yes to all of the above...January 11 will be your lucky day!

The event is called 'Tubes of *Tikkun Olam* Tubing,' and we will collect tubes of personal hygiene products to give to local children

in need. Please do what you can to help - bring tubes of personal hygiene products like toothpaste, soap, deodorant, etc. which will be dispersed by the local Department of Children & Families. There is a small fee for this event, \$15 for people 13+ who are tubing, and there is limited space, so pre-registration is required. We'll have hot chocolate and snacks!

Children must be supervised by a parent or guardian. Minimum height to tube: 42 inches.

Look for our emails or email me at pwright@jewishberkshires.org for more info. Register on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

We can't wait to see you on the slopes with tons of tubes!



Another Pajama Drive Success!

In time for the holidays, our PJ Library and Jewish Federation of the Berkshires collected more than 300 new pairs of pajama sets and bottoms to help Berkshire kids keep warm this winter! We thank everyone for their generous donations to this vital community program for the Berkshire Office of the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families.

We'd also like to give a special shout-out to Carr Hardware in Lenox and Great Barrington and Where'd You Get That!?! in Williamstown for providing donation bins at their locations.



ISRAEL TRAVEL & STUDY GRANTS FOR YOUTH

The Michael Nathaniel Shute Endowment Fund provides grants to Berkshire area youth for educational travel or study in Israel.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Awards are made within 45 days of receiving the application. Additional funding is available through the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Download an application at jewishberkshires.org or pick one up at the Federation's office 196 South Street, Pittsfield, MA



Jewish Federation
OF THE BERKSHIRES

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For calendar listings and events

JEWISH FAMILIES OF THE
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Tikkun Olam
TUBING

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Bousquet Mountain
\$15 per person age 13+
pre-registration required



Jewish Federation
OF THE BERKSHIRES



BOUSQUET
MOUNTAIN

JEWISH SUMMER CAMP

Choosing a Jewish Camp that is Right for Your Child

Ideas from Foundation for Jewish Camp

Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) has a singular mission – to grow, support, and strengthen the Jewish camp movement, so camps can deliver the best possible experience for their campers, staff, and families.

Study after study confirms that Jewish summer camp remains one of the most effective tools for changing lives – providing opportunities for individual growth, building community, and strengthening connections to Judaism, the Jewish people, and Israel.

Prior to the creation of Foundation for Jewish Camp by Elisa Spungen Bildner and Robert Bildner (members of our Berkshire Jewish community) in 1998, there was no organization dedicated solely to expanding the reach of Jewish camp and deepening its impact. Today, it remains the only nonprofit whose singular mission is to grow, support and strengthen the Jewish camp movement.

How should parents choose a camp?

Jewish camps each have their own personality and weave Jewish values, culture, and traditions into the fabric of camp in unique ways. Just like our kids, Jewish camps are a diverse group. In fact, FJC works with over 300+ traditional and specialty, day and overnight camps across North America that span all streams of belief, practice, and affiliation.

With so many choices out there, including dozens in New England, you'll be sure to find a camp out there that is right for your child – and FJC is here to help you find it! Use FJC's Find a Camp tool (jewish-camp.org/findacamp) to begin your search for the perfect summer experience. It makes it easy to discover camps you and your kids will love, based on information such as where you live, your child's grade, and the type of activities your child is seeking.

While most camps begin sessions for children entering 2nd or 3rd grade, there is no single "right" age to start. Some kids need more time, while others are ready at even younger ages. Parents can look for "Rookie Days" or "Taste of" programs that

allow families to explore a camp before committing. Every camp in FJC's network creates a safe environment where children can be themselves, have fun, disconnect from devices, and connect to their Jewish identity.

A recent study by Stanford University and BeWell found that summer camp is the top community space where Jewish teens feel comfortable being their true selves. Some 96 percent of overnight camper families reported that camp created an environment where their child felt proud to be Jewish, and 93 percent of families report that camp helped their child experience growth and try new things. Data shows camp motivates children to participate in other Jewish programming year-round.

The impact of Jewish camp is both immediate and lasting – campers return home connected to a community and friends that will last them a lifetime. And it doesn't stop there. Children with pivotal Jewish camp experiences are more likely to become adults who value their Jewish heritage and take on leadership roles in their communities.

What grant and scholarship opportunities are available to parents?

For Full-Time Berkshire Residents

Every year, camps distribute tens of millions of dollars in financial aid. If your family resides full-time in the Berkshires, your child can apply for an overnight camp or day camp scholarship from Jewish Federation of the Berkshires.

For more information and to apply, visit jewishberkshires.org/our-work/nurturing-a-jewish-future/camp

Overnight camp grant application deadline is January 16, 2026.

Day camp grant application deadline is April 30, 2026.

Additional assistance is available:

- The Harold Grinspoon Foundation: First-time campers can apply for 50% of the

cost of camp up to \$1,500. Returning campers can apply for 50% of the cost of camp up to \$1,000.

- Some area congregations provide tuition assistance.
- All camps provide need-based financial assistance. (If you will request more than 50% of the cost of camp from the Jewish Federation, we encourage you to also apply for financial aid from the camp.)

For Families That Are Not Full-Time Berkshire Residents

Every year, camps distribute tens of millions of dollars in financial aid. FJC's signature program, One Happy Camper® (OHC), provides incentive grants of up to \$1,500 to help camps attract new campers and increase camper enrollment. The program supports a child's first and sometimes second summer at Jewish camp. FJC has provided over 130,000 OHC need-blind grants since the program's inception.

Foundation for Jewish Camp and Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) recently announced a new FJC New England regional center, with additional financial support from The Krupp Foundation. The center will work to deepen support for Jewish day and overnight camps across the region; help camps deliver safe, joyful, and meaningful Jewish experiences for thousands of young people; and offer new scholarship opportunities for campers.

To apply for OHC grants, including the Small Communities Incentive Grants, parents should register their child at their chosen camp and then apply using FJC's online application. For certain residents whose primary address is in Western Massachusetts, FJC's OHC site will direct families to the Harold Grinspoon Foundation's Jewish Overnight Summer Camping Grant application, which provides similar funding. Visit onehappycamper.org to learn more about available grants.

Jewish Summer Camps In and Around the Berkshires

This a partial roundup of Jewish camps in the Berkshires and nearby New England. For information about enrollment deadlines for camp and financial aid, please visit the camps' websites.

Eisner Camp

Great Barrington / eisnercamp.org

URJ Eisner Camp is a Reform Jewish summer camp located on a wooded property in the Berkshires, offering a full sleep-away and day-camp experience with athletics, aquatics, arts, nature and Jewish-community programs.

Eisner welcomes campers entering grades 2–10 for the traditional overnight



camp program, and also runs a day-camp track for younger children (generally 4 years old to rising 2nd graders) for families living locally or spending summers in the Berkshires.

Campers at Eisner can participate in a wide variety of activities: athletics, aquatics (two heated pools, lake activities, waterfront), arts, outdoor adventure, nature – as well as creative electives (arts-village, theater, media, etc.) and elective "chugim" (activity periods) based on their interests.

The camp's philosophy emphasizes personal growth: building self-confidence, cooperation, creativity, resilience, and empathy through both group living and individualized attention.

As a Jewish camp, Eisner also weaves in Jewish education, community life, and spiritual experiences – helping campers deepen their Jewish identity, connect with peers from diverse Jewish backgrounds across the Northeast (and beyond), and experience traditions in a warm, inclusive environment.

JEWISH SUMMER CAMP,
continued on page 12

You Can Afford Jewish Summer Camp! Federation Can Help!



Jewish Overnight Camp

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires is dedicated to making a Jewish overnight camp experience affordable and accessible for every child by offering financial assistance.

Additional assistance is available through the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. Visit hgf.org for more information.

Apply online: tinyurl.com/JewishCamp2026
Application deadline: January 16, 2026



Jewish Day Camp

Jewish Federation and Eisner Day Camp have teamed up to make day camp affordable for every family!

\$200 a week in assistance is available: \$100 per week, per child, discount from Eisner Day Camp for children enrolled year-round in a Berkshire County school district. **PLUS** \$100 per week, per child, financial assistance from the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires.

Apply online: tinyurl.com/DayCamp2026
Application deadline: April 30, 2026



JEWISH SUMMER CAMP

JEWISH SUMMER CAMP,

continued from page 11

Summer 2026, overnight-camp sessions: Please check website for session dates.

Email: eisnercranelake@urj.org
Phone: For summer camp inquiries, call (413) 528-1652. Winter or administrative office contact, call (201) 722-0400.

URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy

Byfield, MA / 6pointsscitech.org

URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy is a co-ed, overnight summer camp for kids entering roughly grades 4–10 (with special units for rising 11th and 12th graders) that combines hands-on science and technology learning with a vibrant Jewish community and values-based environment.

Campers pick a “workshop” – for example robotics, biology, digital film production, coding, physics, or other STEM-oriented tracks – and spend several hours a day on project-based learning, then also take elective “chugim” and participate in outdoor recreation, sports, and community/social activities.

The camp is located on the campus of The Governor’s Academy in Byfield, MA (about 45 minutes north of Boston), giving campers access to dorms, modern labs, media/computer facilities, athletic fields, wooded trails, and other amenities that make for a safe, well-equipped overnight-camp experience.

In addition to STEM and recreation, Sci-Tech weaves in Jewish life, culture, and identity – campers explore what Judaism means to them and how Jewish heritage intersects with science, technology, and innovation, anchored by core values such as respect (*kavod*), connection (*kesher*), curiosity (*sakranut*), discovery (*taglit*), and patience (*savlanut*).

For older teens (rising 12th graders), Sci-Tech also offers a leadership program (the “Machon” program), giving them a chance to mentor younger campers, assist with workshops, build leadership and teaching skills, and deepen both their STEM skills and Jewish identity.

Summer 2026: Session 1: June 23 – July 5 * Session 2: July 7 – July 19 * Session 3: July 21 – August 2

Email: scitech@urj.org
Phone: (857) 246-8677



Camp Ramah in the Berkshires

Wingdale, NY / ramahberkshires.org

Camp Ramah in the Berkshires (CRB) is a co-ed overnight Jewish summer camp located on a scenic multi-acre site by Lake Ellis. As part of the broader network of National Ramah Commission camps associated with the Conservative movement, CRB aims to combine fun camp-life with meaningful Jewish learning, community, and values.

Camp life at CRB is infused with Jewish tradition: everyday includes Hebrew language, communal prayers/*tefillot*, Jewish learning, and connection to Israel. The camp observes kosher dietary laws, institutes Shabbat observance, and offers a welcoming space for campers from a broad range of Jewish backgrounds – including those with limited prior Jewish-school experience.

CRB serves campers roughly entering grades 3–11. Younger campers may attend shorter or introductory sessions, older campers may stay the full summer.

For children with learning or social challenges, special-needs programs (e.g. “Breira/B’Ramah”) help make the camp accessible to a wider range of campers.

Summer 2026: First Session: June 24 – July 19 * Second Session: July 21 – August 13 * Full Summer (entire season): June 24 – August 13 * Short Session “Ta’am 1” (1-week): July 20 – July 26 * Short Session “Ta’am 2” (2-week): July 27 – August 9.

Phone: (845) 832-6622
Email: info@ramahberkshires.org



Camp Ramah New England

Palmer, MA / campramahne.org

Camp Ramah New England (CRNE) is a co-ed overnight Jewish summer camp set on a beautiful wooded property in central Massachusetts. As part of the National Ramah Commission network associated with the Conservative movement, CRNE integrates joyful summer camp life with meaningful Jewish learning, community-building, and values.

Jewish tradition shapes the rhythm of each day: campers participate in Hebrew language exposure, spirited *tefillot*, experiential Jewish learning, and programming that deepens connection to Israel. The camp is fully kosher, observes Shabbat, and warmly welcomes campers from across the Jewish spectrum – regardless of prior day-school or synagogue involvement.

Campers at Ramah make life-long friends. Ramah friends are friends for life. Ramah friends will be there on the bar/bat mitzvah circuit; at college; as young adults entering the job market, and beyond. As they grow up, Ramah campers will discover a vast national network of Ramahniks to help and support them throughout their life.

CRNE serves campers entering grades 3–11. Younger campers have access to shorter introductory options, while older campers often attend longer or full-summer tracks. The nationally respected Tikvah Program provides inclusive camping and vocational training opportunities for children and young adults with developmental, intellectual, and social disabilities.

Summer 2026: First Session: June 23 – July 19 * Second Session: July 21 – August 16 * Full Summer: June 23 – August 16 * Short Session “Taste of Ramah”: July 7 – July 20

Phone: (413) 283-9771
Email: office@campramahne.org



Camp Halfmoon

Monterey / kimamahalfmoon.org

Camp Halfmoon believes summer should be nothing short of magical. Nestled in the heart of the Berkshires and fueled by the warmth of its Israeli-American spirit, it programs are designed to help every child flourish, build lifelong friendships, and feel confident being exactly who they are. The Day Camp offers a vibrant, structured, and joy-filled experience for campers who return home each evening – with days full of creativity, outdoor exploration, science fun, art, sports, cooking activities, and authentic camp energy.

For families ready to give their children an immersive and transformative camp experience, the Overnight Program opens the door to independence, deeper connections, and unforgettable summer memories. Campers live, laugh, play, and grow together – surrounded by outstanding counselors, supportive role models, and program leaders who are passionately committed to youth development. With lakefront adventures, team-building programs, theme nights, talent shows, nature hikes, camp traditions, and pure joyful chaos – our overnight camp builds character, resilience, and friendships that last for years.

Camp Halfmoon is the kind of place where kids arrive as individuals and leave feeling like part of a community — one that celebrates them, uplifts them, and reminds them how much they matter.

Summer 2026: Session 1: June 21 – July 12 * Session 2: July 15 – August 5* Session 3 (1-week): August 9 – August 16 * Mini-Sleepaway (1-week “Mini Sessions” for younger campers, 1st–4th grade): Session 1A: June 21 – June 26 and Session 1B: June 28 – July 3. Nine weeks of day camp beginning on June 22.

Phone: (413) 528-0940
E-Mail: halfmoon@campkimama.org



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JEWISH SUMMER CAMP

Great Jewish Books Summer Program
at the Yiddish Book Center

Amherst, MA / yiddishbookcenter.org/greatjewishbooks

At the Yiddish Book Center's Great Jewish Books Summer Program for rising high school juniors and seniors, participants will read selections from important works of modern Jewish literature and consider how they speak to the opportunities and challenges we face today. Under the guidance of college professors, they consider how the rich legacy of modern Jewish literature can inform us in the twenty-first century.

Although the program's focus is on reading, this is not school in any conventional sense: Great Jewish Books is a lively program full of social, cultural, and recreational opportunities – and no grades – for students who read for the love of reading and who are eager to discover the treasures of the Jewish canon.

Participants spend their days at the Yiddish Book Center, immersed in a lively world of Jewish culture, and live in dorms on the nearby campus of Hampshire College. New for 2026, students have the option to apply to a second add-on week focused on creative writing. This additional week is limited to 18 students, so faculty can offer close, hands-on guidance to every participant.

Summer 2026: July 19-24, with optional add-on July 24-31. Every admitted participant receives a scholarship for the full cost of tuition, room, board, books, and special events. Applications close March 9, 2026.

Email: greatjewishbooks@yiddishbookcenter.org



transformative, values-centered camping experience for children and teens. The camp blends traditional activities like sports, arts, aquatics, and adventure, with Jewish educational and cultural programs designed to help campers build confidence, community, and personal growth.

Campers typically engage in a wide range of activities while also participating in spiritual, social, and creative programming. The environment emphasizes inclusion, personal development, and community connection.

Summer 2026: Session 1: June 28 – July 12 (K'tanim/Grades 2-24) / July 24 (most units) * Session 2 – July 26 – August 9 (K'tanim) / August 16 (most units)

Phone: (413) 232-4257



ADDITIONAL JEWISH SUMMER CAMPS IN NEW ENGLAND

Camp	Location	Website
Camp Avoda	Middleboro, MA	campavoda.org
Camp Bauercrest	Amesbury, MA	bauercrest.org
Camp Chomeish of New England	Moodus, CT	campchomeish.com
Camp JORI	Wakefield, RI	campjori.com
Camp Kinderland	Tolland, MA	campkinderland.org
Camp Laurelwood	Madison, CT	camplaurelwood.org
Camp Pembroke	Pembroke, MA	camppembroke.org
Camp Tel Noar	Hampstead, NH	camptelnoar.org
Camp Tevya	Brookline, NH	camptevya.org
Camp Yavneh	Northwood, NH	campyavneh.org
Camp YJ	Amherst, NH	campyj.org
Genesis at Brandeis University	Waltham, MA	brandeis.edu/precollege/programs/genesis
Tzeirei Hatmimim	Suffield, CT	tzeireihatmimim.com



Education/Summer Camp



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by visiting
BerkshireCountryDay.org

LOCAL NEWS

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services dates may be subject to change, so please RSVP or check the calendar for updates.

First Friday Shabbat Zoom Gathering: The Fridays of January 2 and February 6 at 7:30 p.m. Gather around the Virtual Shabbat Table to share community and conversation online in celebration of the Jewish traditions of Shabbat, light the candles, and bless the wine and challah. Stay connected with CBI friends and neighbors, meet new ones, and enjoy the joys of fellowship and comfort of camaraderie. The Zoom link will be sent to those who RSVP via CBI's website.

CBI Book Club with Author Elizabeth Graver (Kantika)

On Thursday, January 8 at 7:30 p.m., join Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires via Zoom for a discussion with Elizabeth Graver, author of the highly acclaimed novel *Kantika* ("song" in Ladino), inspired by the life story of her maternal grandmother Rebecca Cohen, daughter of the Sephardic elite of early twentieth-century Istanbul, whose shapeshifting journey took her to Cuba, Spain, and New York. New York Times reviewer Ayten Tartici writes, "In Graver's vision, migration is never simply a one-way street. *Kantika* is a meticulous endeavor to preserve the memories of a family, an elegy and a celebration both."

Come talk about *Kantika* with Elizabeth and her mother, Suzanne Levy Graver, who leads CBI's book club and whose childhood is part of this story. Register via Zoom at bit.ly/Kantika2026.

Anti-Semitism Revisited – a Zoom book group

For six Tuesday evenings, January 6 through February 10 from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., join Rabbi Pam Wax, Director of Adult Education and Programming at Congregation Kneset Israel, to discuss one chapter of the book *Anti-Semitism Revisited* by Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur each week. Read the Introduction ("Jews are Just Too Much") and Chapter 1 ("Anti-Semitism is a Family Quarrel") prior to our first session (each chapter is short and accessible).

Called a "superstar rabbi" by The Forward, Rabbi Horvilleur was the inspiration for the successful French series *Le Sens des choses*, now streaming as *Reformed* on HBO Max. Pre-register at knesetisrael.org/rsvp.

Mitzvah Meal and Torah Improv – Family Programs at CBI

BENNINGTON / NORTH ADAMS – Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires will host two compelling family programs this January.

Mitzvah Meal at Second Congregational Church – Sunday, January 4 from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. With food insecurity on the rise, the mitzvah of feeding the hungry is increasingly urgent. Come help cook a community meal at Second Congregational Church in Bennington, VT! Grateful Hearts will provide the main course and will provide a salad and dessert. Please RSVP at cbiberkshires.com/event/mitzvah-meal-2026 if your family plans to attend; for more information, please contact learning@cbiberkshires.com.

Bible Players Torah Improv & Comedy at CBI – Monday, January 5 at 4:30 p.m. The Bible Players are a Torah Comedy team that teaches Jewish Values through theater and improv to infuse comedy and laughs into tales from the Torah and beyond. Come see them in action at CBI as they bring their unique and interactive show to all ages. Children, parents, and adults of any age are welcome to attend. Please RSVP in advance at cbiberkshires.com/event/tbp.



Create a Jewish Legacy Campaign

Please remember the Jewish Community in your will.



Wine and Cheese Tu BiShvat at CBI

NORTH ADAMS – On Sunday, February 1 at 7:30 p.m., join Rabbi Rachel Barenblat and the Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires community for a special wine-and-cheese tasting aligned with the four seasons, the Four Worlds of Jewish mysticism, and the journey through the spiritual year that is central to Tu BiShvat, the New Year of the Trees!

Bless and taste four wines (or juices) and cheeses alongside the customary tree fruits and nuts to celebrate the sap rising outside and the spiritual energies of spring's renewal rising within us. \$18 admission fee covers wines / juice, cheeses, tree fruits, and an immersive seder experience to delight both the taste buds and the soul. RSVP <https://cbiberkshires.com/event/tbs-2026/>

Israeli Dancing at Kneset Israel



PITTSFIELD – Kneset Israel invites all to attend a new weekly Israeli dance group on most Thursdays from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. beginning on January 15.

Israeli folk dance reflects the melting pot of influences that define Israel's heritage. From traditional Eastern European Hora to Yemenite, Debka, and beyond, each dance tells a story of cultural fusion and celebration. Today, you'll find elements of Hasidic, Persian, Latin, Indian, and various other styles woven into the fabric of Israeli dance.

Above all, Israeli folk dancing is about joy, community, and connection. Don't fret if you're not a polished dancer – what matters most is the smile on your face and the rhythm in your heart. Come join us and experience the magic of Israeli music and movement!

Beginners welcome. No partners needed. Sessions will be led by KI member Ellen Weitzler, who has been involved with international dancing her entire life. For more information or to join the email list, contact ewitzler@gmail.com. A small suggested donation of \$2 per session will cover the cost of music and snacks. Kneset Israel is located at 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.

Massachusetts Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism Releases Final Report and Recommendations

Commission charts course to combat antisemitism “The Massachusetts Way”

BOSTON – On November 23, 2025, the Massachusetts Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism held its final meeting at the Massachusetts State House, where it voted unanimously to approve its Final Report of Findings and Recommendations, and submit the report to the Legislature.

The Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism is the first statutorily created commission on combating antisemitism in the United States. It was passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Maura Healey during the summer of 2024 to address the alarming rise of antisemitic incidents and hate crimes occurring across the Commonwealth. Dara Kaufman, executive director of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, participated as a member of the Commission.

Over the course of the Commission's 16 public meetings, it heard more than 50 hours of testimony from over 200 speakers that, along with Massachusetts- and U.S.-specific data, informed the final report. The final report's findings and recommendations chart a course for combating

antisemitism “the Massachusetts Way,” by supplying a set of best practices rooted in the Commission's strong belief that fighting and preventing antisemitism must combine strong civil rights protections, civic education, and moral responsibility. Major themes of the recommendations throughout the report's multiple sections include:

- Promoting education and awareness of antisemitism and of Jewish heritage, history and contributions to the Commonwealth and the United States.
- Strengthening protections against discrimination and harassment.
- Highlighting best practices for institutional responses to antisemitic incidents and ideology.
- Enhancing safety and security of Jewish residents, institutions, and places of worship.
- Fostering allyship between religious, cultural and ethnic communities to combat hate.
- Bolstering bias or hate motivated incident reporting and data collection mechanisms.

“Massachusetts has a long-standing history of pushing back on forms of hate and injustice towards vulnerable groups. The Jewish residents across our Commonwealth deserve the exact same support we have shown other groups and the time to take action is now,” shared Senator John Velis, co-chair (along with Representative Simon Cataldo) of the Special Commission during his remarks on the Senate floor regarding the amendment to create the Commission. “It is our world's oldest hatred, one that has persisted in countless forms for over 2000 years dating back to biblical times. Tragically, antisemitism continues to not only exist to this day, it is being increasingly ‘normalized’ in American society and we must speak out against it and educate others about what it looks like and the harm that it causes.”

While the Special Commission's recommendations are not legally binding, they provide guidance to public officials and community organizations on ways to prevent and respond to antisemitic incidents in a wide range of areas including K-12 education, higher education, public safety and law enforcement, workplace and healthcare environments, and more.

The recommendations addressed the following concerns.

K-12 Education

The K-12 recommendations highlight ways that antisemitic incidents can be prevented through education and notes best ways schools can respond when these incidents do occur. They include anti-bias training, Holocaust and genocide education, development of model curricula, and a bias reporting program.

Higher Education

Antisemitism is a serious, systematic concern on college campuses throughout the Commonwealth that has left Jewish students and faculty feeling unwelcome or unsafe. However, many higher education institutions in Massachusetts, including the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Brandeis University, and many others, have set strong examples on ways to address antisemitism in this setting. The Commission's recommendations encourage Massachusetts colleges and universities to improve reporting methods for antisemitic incidents, coordination with law enforcement, adopting clear codes of conduct, and appointing or designate a Title VI Coordinator and/or office responsible for overseeing the institution's compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Public Safety and Law Enforcement

Throughout the Commission's 16 public meetings, residents frequently shared concerns for the safety and well-being of Jewish residents. The report's recommendations urge state and local public safety



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LOCAL NEWS

officials to report all instances of hate crimes through the Hate Crimes Report Portal and the National Incident-Based Reporting System; to partner with community organizations to foster trust, awareness, and preparedness with marginalized or targeted communities; and provide trainings to all law enforcement personnel.

Workplace and Healthcare Settings

Antisemitism in the workplace threatens not only employer and employee well-being, but also threatens the Commonwealth's ability to attract and retain talented individuals. The Commission's recommendations encourage the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination to clarify information regarding employment discrimination and employers to incorporate education on antisemitism into DEI trainings and support and recognize Employee Resources Groups or Affinity groups, including those focused on Jewish identity.

The Commission's final report is available at malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/646/Documents.

Said District Attorney Timothy Shugrue of Berkshire County: "During my three years in office, Berkshire County has experienced a growing number of hate-based incidents, many of which are antisemitic in nature. The recommendations in this report will aide my office in better understanding the trends of antisemitism in both the Commonwealth and across the United States. The recommendations put forward will also provide much needed support for my office and law enforcement through the research and sharing of best practices to address antisemitism in our communities."



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OBITUARIES

Michael Stoll, 99, member of the Bielski brigade, spoke five languages fluently, adored his family
LENOX – Michael Stoll passed away on November 13, 2025 just a few months shy of his 100th birthday. Born in Poland in the small village of Lida, now part of Belarus, Michael eventually emigrated to the United States following a harrowing and miraculous escape during the Holocaust. Stoll was seventeen years of age when on September 18, 1943, he hacked out the bars of a window on a train box car with an axe his sister smuggled on board. Michael then shimmied along the edge of the moving train at night, broke the lock on the door and eleven Jews jumped leaving behind another 40-50 Jews in the box car who were never heard from again. Michael, his father, and sister, along with eight other persons, wandered through the woods and fields for 6 months before meeting and joining up with the famous Bielski brigade, a Jewish regiment of partisans fighting to save Jews against Nazi Germany. Miracle number two was meeting his mother and younger sister in one of the Bielski camps. Michael's heroic exploits are now legendary and have been well documented in numerous books, documentaries (*Four Winters, Jerusalem in the Woods*), the USC Shoah Foundation and in the film *Defiance*. Michael spoke five languages fluently and became a translator in the U.S. Army soon after arriving

in the U.S. Eventually, he became an artisan craftsman building a successful business, marrying and raising a family. An avid skier, he spent the first ten years of his retirement skiing for a month in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah. Michael spent many years as president of the Lida Holocaust Memorial Foundation – an organization devoted to preserving the memories of all those Jews who were killed during the war. In 1973, Stoll traveled to Israel with a group of Bielski partisans and met with Golda Meir, who paid tribute to their efforts to save Jews during one of the worst periods known in Jewish history. In 1994, he, his sister Bella and other surviving Bielski partisans traveled with their families to receive hero medals from the Belarus government acknowledging the 50th anniversary of the end of the war. Stoll was predeceased by his wife of 40 years, Etta Stoll. He leaves behind his son Andy (Ronda), daughter Nancy (Rich), grandchildren Ian (Mary) and Suzanne, and numerous nephews and nieces and their children. He was without question, the most lovable family patriarch a family could wish for.

Rhonda Frisch-Cooper, 74, kindergarten teacher extraordinaire, superb cook
WEARE, NH – Rhonda Frisch-Cooper, 74, passed away on Friday, November 14, 2025. Known for her enormous heart, Rhonda adored her husband,

Tom Cooper. Married for 36 years before his passing in 2020, she loved spending time with Tom whether in their Weare home, in Greece with his sister Anita Cooper Tsamakis, in New York City with his sister Camille Sutro Cooper and her husband Dr. Kenneth Rossner, in her hometown of Marblehead, MA with family, or in Florida during the winter. Rhonda also had a deep bond with her parents Shirley and Harold Frisch before their passing, her younger sister Cynthia Frisch, and perhaps most profoundly, her twin sister Susan Frisch Lehrer. Describing each other as “wombmates,” their extraordinary connection often mystified others. Food was definitely a favorite way to share her love, and she was a superb cook. She was devoted to friends from her childhood, her work, her synagogue, and her Weare neighborhood. But perhaps one of the most beautiful expressions of her love was for children. Often referred to as a “kindergarten teacher extraordinaire,” Rhonda absolutely loved teaching. During her forty-year teaching career, she became a connoisseur of children's books with a home library so extensive that it often served as a resource for other teachers. Along with the family mentioned, Rhonda will be missed by many including her sister Susan's family – Harvey, Adam, and Kevin Lehrer, and Tom's nieces Elizabeth and Elli Tsamakis. A funeral service was held

on Wednesday, November 19 at Stanetsky-Hymanson Memorial Chapel, Salem, MA. Donations may be sent to Berkshire Hills Hadassah, P.O. Box 187, Pittsfield, MA 01202 or to Rhonda's synagogue, Temple Beth Jacob, P.O. Box 568, Concord, NH 03302. **Renee (Mindell) and Gordon Swirsky, longtime Pittsfield residents and business owners**
CANTON, MA – Renee (Mindell) and Gordon Swirsky of Orchard Cove, previously of Boynton Beach, FL and Pittsfield, passed away. Daughter of the late Clara and Jules Mindell, Renee died on Saturday, November 8, 2025 and Gordon, son of the late Sonia and Benjamin Swirsky, died on Wednesday, November 12, 73 hours after his beloved wife. Renee and Gordon would have celebrated their 71st anniversary on November 14. Renee lit up every room with her magnetic personality and was a friend to everyone she met even once. She loved to dance, sing, play golf, gamble, laugh, and party. Gordy was an entrepreneur who started his own business, The Photo Shop in Pittsfield, at age 17 and served that community with distinction for many years before his retirement. He was extremely thoughtful and creative, and he treated everyone with grace and respect. They are survived by their son Mark Swirsky; daughter Debbie (David) Wolf; grandchildren Jesse (Jen), Joshua

(Samantha), Daniel (Mimi), Jamie, and Alanna (Herschel); and ten great-grandchildren who called them “GG” and “Popeye.” They were predeceased by Renee's sister and brother-in-law, Nona and Marvin Rosen. Of course, of greatest importance to both was their family, who loved them dearly. They will be greatly missed. Remembrances can be made to Hebrew Senior Life, c/o Orchard Cove, 1 Del Pond Drive, Canton, MA 02021. (Please include Orchard Cove Enrichment Fund in memo line.) The family is truly grateful for the outstanding care provided by their staff. **Ellen Lebowitz Garrison, mother, daughter, sister**
CLEARWATER, FL - Ellen Lebowitz Garrison passed away peacefully on Saturday, October 25, 2025, with her daughters, Jessica and Sarah, by her side. Ellen grew up in North Adams and was a loved classmate of the Drury Class of 1973. In addition to her daughters, she is survived by her mother, Sonia Lebowitz and brothers, David and Andrew Lebowitz. A shiva was held locally at the Freight Yard Pub in North Adams, on November 30. **Susan Orenstein, 77, talented fiber artist, voracious reader, believed strongly in social justice**
LENOX – Susan Orenstein, 77, passed away peacefully at home on Friday, November 21, 2025.

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OBITUARIES

Born in Boston to Emil and Ruth Wahler (Gonick), Susan grew up in the Dorchester area where she graduated from Jeremiah E. Burke High School.

Following her education, Susan began her career as a bookkeeper in New York City, where fate would introduce her to the love of her life, David Orenstein. Their meeting in the bustling city led to a beautiful marriage that spanned 56 years, filled with love, partnership, and devotion.

After years of part-time residence in the Berkshires, David and Susan fell in love with the area and made Lenox their full-time home in 1995. Susan especially treasured the cultural richness of her adopted hometown, and was a devoted patron of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, attending countless performances at Tanglewood over the years.

A voracious reader with an insatiable curiosity, Susan enjoyed immersing herself in a wide range of stories. She was also a talented fiber artist whose creativity and care were woven into every piece she made. Family and friends treasured the beautiful hats and sweaters she lovingly knitted for them, gifts that wrapped them in both warmth and her affection.

Perhaps most importantly, Susan was deeply invested in ensuring that her children and grandchildren had the best opportunities in life for education, travel, and growth. She believed strongly in social justice and raised her family to serve and to respect the lives of others, values that will continue through the generations she nurtured with such love and intention.

Susan is survived by her loving husband David; children Joseph Orenstein and wife Meggan, Sonia Barile and husband David; sister-in-law, Babette Orenstein; four cherished grandchildren, Matthew and Frank Orenstein, Emma and Grace Barile; and the many dogs who brought immeasurable joy to her life.

Susan was laid to rest at Ahavath Sholom Cemetery, Great Barrington. Donations may be made to HospiceCare in the Berkshires, 877 South Street, Suite 1W, Pittsfield,

MA 01201 or Chabad of the Berkshires, 17 West Street, Lenox, MA 01240.

Rita (Rudich) Kaplan, 87, active in Jewish community, longtime volunteer

PITTSFIELD – Rita (Rudich) Kaplan, 87, died peacefully late Saturday night, November 29, 2025, surrounded by her family.

Born in New York City on February 21, 1938, to Shirley (Davis) Rudich and Harry Rudich, Rita grew up in the Bronx and graduated from William Howard Taft High School in 1954, at age 16. Immediately after graduating, Rita began working as a secretary on Madison Avenue.

On Memorial Day Weekend, 1959, Rita met her future husband, Dan Kaplan, at the Laurels, in the Catskills. Rita and Dan married on February 28, 1960, and moved six times in their first six years of marriage – zigzagging across the country from Pittsfield and Virginia to California and Illinois. They always took pride in sharing that astonishing fact with family and friends. They returned to Pittsfield in 1966 with their baby daughter, Tina, and settled in a home on Anita Drive. In the next few years, Rita and Dan welcomed two more children, Michael and Lauren.

In Pittsfield, Rita immersed herself in the community. She joined the Sisterhood at Kneset Israel and became a dedicated member of Berkshire Hills Hadassah. She remained a leader in these organizations for 50 years, holding board positions and chairing numerous committees and programs. Rita will be remembered as someone who was always willing to take on any project, large or small. She wasn't easily overwhelmed. Along with her husband, Dan, Rita was also a loyal and long-time volunteer at Tanglewood, the Berkshire Theatre Festival, and the Colonial Theatre.

In 1974, Rita took a part-time secretarial position for Soil Conservation Service, part of the USDA. Rita's colleagues and managers immediately saw how competent she was, taking on greater responsibility with ease – first supporting the Berkshire

Conservation District, where again, she brought new ideas and created new programming. She was eventually appointed Executive Director of the Berkshire Conservation District, a position newly created for her. To her work community she was a sharp, witty, energetic, talented, highly-valued contributor; while personally, she got a kick out of the irony that a city girl from the Bronx spent her days working with farmers, whom she adored and held in high regard. After nearly two decades, Rita was eager to take on a new challenge in a different field. She became a benefits administrator with Peter Smith & Associates, readily learning the ropes, once again quickly advancing and becoming recognized as a highly and immensely capable can-do colleague.

Outside work, Rita loved to travel and cook. Her greatest joy was her family and she loved bringing everyone together. Rita reveled in hosting get-togethers large and small, and excelled in making everyone feel welcome, setting a high bar for family gatherings. Whether Rita was cooking up a storm or opening her home for Jewish holidays, her focus was always on the connections and warmth that came from family. She had a gift for nurturing unique and special relationships, especially with her three children and six grandchildren. Honest, unfiltered, and always present whenever she was needed, Rita set a wonderful example for what it means to “show up.”

Rita and Dan resided on Anita Drive until 2020, when they moved to Kimball Farms. They were married for 65 years until Dan's death seven weeks before Rita on October 12.

Rita is survived by daughter, Tina Rubin of Agawam, MA, her children Max and Samantha, and their father, Lawrence; son, Michael Kaplan of Taipei, Taiwan, wife Carrie Tenebrini, and sons Jack and Eli; and Lauren Kaplan of Sudbury, MA, husband Russell Green, and children Noah and Rebecca; and brother, Bernie Rudich and his family of Houston, TX.

A funeral was held Monday, December 1 at Congregation Kneset Israel. Donations can be made to Congregation Kneset Israel, 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield, MA 01201 or Berkshire Hills Hadassah.

Ruth Anopolsky Kalokow Silberman, 106, world traveler, loved learning, canasta queen supreme

GREAT BARRINGTON – Ruth Anopolsky Kalokow Silberman, 106, passed away on Friday, December 5, 2025.

Born July 20, 1919, she was the devoted daughter of

Esther and Saul and beloved sister of Daryl Weiner.

Ruth's years in Florida were some of her most cherished memories. She was a world traveler, loved learning and meeting new people, was the canasta queen supreme, and loved life.

Reading and writing poetry was a favorite pastime for Ruth. She wrote poetry for every occasion, as well as a children's poetry book for her grandchildren. Ruth also had a lifelong devotion to nutrition and wrote a book called *The Power of Nutrition*.

She was always ahead of the times with her thinking, a true lover of life. Ruth was definitely one of a kind.

Ruth was the most cherished mother of Sandra (William) Walley; doting grandmother of Amanda (David) Serafini and Matthew (Kristin) Walley; and great-grandmother of Jack Serafini and Margaux and Marin Walley.

Jewish Care Services

Berkshire Jewish Communal Safety Net

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires has provided a safety net for our Jewish community for nearly 85 years. During these uncertain times, we would like to remind you of the services available to help if unexpected challenges arise.

- ♥ **Kosher Meals and Meals on Wheels:** Meals are available for delivery (for qualified individuals) or pickup for older adults aged 60 and above.
- ♥ **Community Social Worker:** Jill Goldstein, MSW, LICSW is available to assist community members in navigating local care services, accessing transitional assistance, and providing ongoing case management.
- ♥ **Hebrew Free Loans:** The Federation offers interest-free loans to help with unexpected expenses and other needs.
- ♥ **Specific Assistance Grants:** Federation offers one-time emergency financial assistance for community members struggling with essential needs and can facilitate additional services to get a person back in a more sustainable situation.

To inquire about assistance, please contact
Jill Goldstein, MSW, LICSW
(413) 442-4360, ext.17 or j.goldstein@jfswm.org



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Kosher Meals to Go—Meals on Wheels

ALL ARE WELCOME: Kosher lunch will be prepared on Mondays, Tuesdays (starting October 21), and Thursdays. Meals to go will be ready by noon for pickup at the Knesset Israel kitchen door, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield. All meals-on-wheels will be delivered by Federation volunteers in the early afternoon. Suggested donation of \$3 for adults over age 60; \$7 for all others

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED BY 9 A.M. THE DAY BEFORE THE LUNCH: Call Federation's kitchen at (413) 442-2200 the day before to reserve a meal for pick-up or to arrange delivery.

What's for Lunch?

(GF) Gluten-Free entree • (DF) Dairy-Free entree

JANUARY

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1

Closed for New Year's Day

MONDAY, JANUARY 5

Noon, Lunch...Meatloaf (GF)(DF), garlic mashed potatoes, baby carrots, salad, multi-grain bread, and brownie.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6

Noon, Lunch...Spinach pie, roasted potatoes, zucchini and yellow squash, lemon orzo soup, pita bread, and snicker-doodle cookie.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

Noon, Lunch...Southwestern vegetarian stuffed pepper (GF), sweet potato wedges, corn, salad, white bread, and tropical fruit salad.

MONDAY, JANUARY 12

Noon, Lunch...Mushroom and pepper frittata (GF), potatoes au gratin, cauliflower, tomato soup, whole wheat bread, and tapioca pudding.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

Noon, Lunch...Beef chili (GF)(DF), white rice, broccoli, salad, corn bread, and pineapple.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15

Noon, Lunch...Pasta primavera, spinach, stewed tomatoes, salad, dinner roll, and fruit crisp.

MONDAY, JANUARY 19

Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

Noon, Lunch...Teriyaki salmon (GF)(DF), Asian vegetables, white rice, salad, Chinese noodles, and Mandarin oranges.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

Noon, Lunch...Ratatouille (GF)(DF), quinoa, herbed chickpeas, cream of asparagus soup, sourdough bread, and banana pudding.

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

Noon, Lunch...Sloppy Joe pasta (DF), broccoli, roasted carrots, coleslaw, multi-grain bread, and applesauce.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

Noon, Lunch...Artichoke, sundried tomato, and roasted red pepper frittata (GF), hash brown potatoes, stewed tomatoes, salad, croissant, and rice pudding.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

Noon, Lunch...Turkey and stuffing casserole (DF), green beans, corn, butternut squash soup, roll, and pear or cranberry compote.

FEBRUARY

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2

Noon, Lunch...Meatloaf (GF)(DF), garlic mashed potatoes, mixed 4 blend vegetables, cabbage soup, hearty white bread, and applesauce.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

Noon, Lunch...Potato knish, Brussels sprouts, meadow blend vegetables, borscht, multi-grain bread, and brownie.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5

Noon, Lunch...Hot dog (GF)(DF), sauerkraut, baked beans, tater tots, pea soup, hot dog roll, and fruit cocktail.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Noon, Lunch...Baked ziti, California blend vegetables, garlic spinach, minestrone soup, Italian bread, and sugar cookie.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

Noon, Lunch...Salmon loaf (GF)(DF), green beans, rice with peas, cream of asparagus soup, whole wheat bread, and apricots.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12

Pizza bagel, broccoli, baby carrots, shredded iceberg salad, and vanilla pudding.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Closed for Presidents' Day

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Noon, Lunch...Chicken cacciatore (GF)(DF), egg noodles, Italian green beans, vegetable soup, white bread, and tropical fruit salad.

Knesset Israel – 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield



ONGOING MINYANS

Saturday, 9:30 a.m.

Sunday, 8:45 a.m.

Friday, 5:45 p.m.

CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

Friday, January 2 4:13 p.m.

Friday, January 9 4:20 p.m.

Friday, January 16 4:28 p.m.

Friday, January 23 4:37 p.m.

Friday, January 30 4:46 p.m.

Friday, February 6 4:55 p.m.

JEWISH FEDERATION GIVING, continued from page 1

system-wide, touching every kind of Federation, and every part of the continent.

Total giving (including annual campaign and emergency) increased by a stunning 83% in the past year. For comparison, total giving grew just 3.3% over the previous three years combined, reflecting the scale of the IEC, and the unmatched ability of the Federation system to mobilize and deliver.

Unrestricted giving remains the financial backbone of the Federation system. In 2024, it totaled \$887 million, accounting for more than 80% of all non-emergency funds raised. These flexible dollars are what allows Federations to respond quickly and strategically to evolving needs as they arise.

The total number of donors – 364,074 – demonstrate an opportunity for growth, opportunity, and flourishing Jewish communities. The IEC brought 80,000 new donors to the Federation system, representing about 40% of all IEC donors. Most IEC donors also gave to the Annual Campaign, demonstrating that people didn't substitute one for the other—they stepped up for both.

"Our community's extraordinary willingness to show up and give in order to confront our greatest challenges is deeply inspiring and should give us all a sense of hope that the Jewish future is bright," said national campaign chair David Heller.

Recovering from an illness or injury? Cooking becoming difficult?



KOSHER MEALS ON WHEELS:

Meals are available for delivery to qualified individuals to help extend their home independence and health. There is no income requirement, just a simple assessment through Elder Services will get your meal deliveries started, if you qualify.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Jill Goldstein at (413) 442-4360, Ext 17, j.goldstein@jfswm.org.

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

Meals-on-wheels drivers are always appreciated. Contact Heidi Katz, (413) 442-4360, ext. 10, federation@jewishberkshires.org to inquire.

Meals and programs are made possible by the generous support of our community. The kosher lunch and meals on wheels program is in collaboration with Elder Services of Berkshire county.

Thank you volunteers
Ellen Rosenblatt
and the BJV delivery
team, Dave Halley,
Colin Ovitsky,
Megan Dopson and
Roman Rozenblyum.

CULTURE & ARTS

Six Grinspoon Sculptures Installed at Shakespeare & Company



PHOTO BY KATIE MCKELLOCK

Sculptor Harold Grinspoon watches as DINOSAUR is unloaded from a flatbed to its new home on the Shakespeare and Company campus in late November. The sites were chosen by the artist, and the works will remain on loan at the property until November 2030.

These sculptures reach up to 30 feet in height, using materials ranging from segments of live oak branches, acrylic rods, stainless-steel poles, and reflective spheres, while adapting resources such as boat paint and varnish and roofing torches for charring to protect the wood-based sculptures.

Shakespeare & Company's Artistic Director Allyn Burrows said the installation creates a new attraction on the property that visitors can enjoy year-round. "We're delighted to have the works of the eminent Harold Grinspoon grace our grounds," he said. "These pieces, landing on our property in advance of the darker season, will enliven the landscape and will surely be the source of animated conversation."

Grinspoon, now 96, has garnered national attention as a renowned sculptor, having produced more than 170 sculptures in 11 years. He's exhibited or loaned more than 75 sculptures to prominent locales across the United States.



Dr. Steve Recommends...

A column about Jewish books

By Dr. Steven Rubin / Special to the BJV

Dear readers, as we are in the midst of a Berkshire winter, now is a fine time to snuggle up with a blanket and catch up on your reading. This month I am recommending two very different but intriguing books: a memoir by a well-known New York rabbi, and a work of historical fiction by one of our own Berkshire writers.



The recently published (November 2025), *Heart of a Stranger* by Rabbi Angela Buchdahl reads as both personal history and biblical exegesis. Rabbi Buchdahl, whose mother was Korean and father Jewish American, is the first Asian-American rabbi and has been the senior rabbi at New York's prestigious Central Synagogue for the past two decades. *Heart of a Stranger* is a memoir: Buchdahl relates the circumstances and challenges of growing up in a mixed-race family, her initial interest in music and Judaism, her formative stays in Israel, and her ordination both as a cantor and subsequently as a rabbi. In doing so, however, Rabbi Buchdahl also explores the more universal themes of faith, belonging, alienation, and the essence of Jewish belief, which she defines simply as "welcome the stranger." Personal history is mixed with relevant citations from the Bible, Talmud, ancient Jewish sages, and well-known scholars. It is a wonderfully insightful book, both enjoyable and edifying – and, for those of us concerned with faith in an ever-increasing hostile world, a valuable read.

Barbara Viniar has been a familiar face to Berkshire residents for some time – as the former president of Berkshire Community College and as past president of Temple Anshe Amunim in Pittsfield. *Little Bird* (August 2025), however, is her first foray into the realm of fiction. The novel is loosely based on the story on Viniar's grandmother Feige who emigrates to America from Eastern Europe around the turn of the century. Along the way she acquires a skill and a job, learns the language, divorces her rather unsavory husband, and eventually comes to represent an independent "woman of valor," to quote, as Viniar does, the Book of Proverbs. Readers will appreciate the story of Feige/Fanny as she makes her way in the new world, as well as Viniar's very readable prose, which makes ample use of Yiddish dialogue, words and phrases, lending a further layer of verisimilitude to the novel. [The story] "may not be factual," Viniar stated in a recent interview, "but I'd like to think it were true."



As always, please let me know what you are reading, as well as your thoughts on my recommendations. I can be reached at: sjr@adelphi.edu.

JEWISH LITERARY VOICES



A Federation series in collaboration with the Jewish Book Council

- Thursday, December 11 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Matching Minds with Sondheim: The Puzzles and Games of the Broadway Legend with author and game designer Barry Joseph.
- Thursday, January 15 at 10:45 a.m. (virtual)
We Are Black Jews: Ethiopian Jewry and the Journey to Equality in Israel with journalist and activist Roni Fantanesh Malkai.
- Thursday, January 29 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Unveiled: Inside Iran's #WomanLifeFreedom Revolt with journalist and Israeli UN spokesperson Jonathan Harounoff.
- Thursday, February 5 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Sesame: Global Recipes & Stories of an Ancient Seed with chef Rachel Simons.
- Thursday, February 19 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
The Einstein of Sex: Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld: Visionary of Weimar Germany with journalist Daniel Brook.
- Thursday, March 19 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Radical Sisters: Shirley Temple Black, Rose Kushner, Evelyn Lauder and the Dawn of The Breast Cancer Movement with founder of A 2nd Act and author Judith Pearson





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CULTURE & ARTS

TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE

The Secret Garden

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

Even though the long, hot summer has passed, I'm still pondering the successes and failures of my garden – and already thinking about next summer. Alas, this year was one for the books – and not in a good one called Guinness. Despite adopting the Israeli invention of drip irrigation to counter the season's persistent drought, I was only able to coax four zucchini out of two plants. Now, as anybody who has ever cultivated this squash knows, the average home garden usually yields so many zucchini that we joke about dumping our extras on a neighbor's porch and running away. My experience has given me renewed respect for farmers everywhere, and particularly those who cultivate in desert areas.

Ironically, the same heat that made my zucchini wither and die also enabled a good crop of tomatoes and eggplant. Unfortunately, as a result of gardening, I've discovered that I can no longer tolerate the hard, flavorless supermarket variety of tomatoes. I've resigned myself to the long wait for next summer.

But what made this past summer gardening season most unusual was the secret garden.

Secret garden? As in the wonderful book by Frances Hodgson Burnett? No, I mean the patch of amazing surprises that cropped up in the back corner of my yard. And it was all thanks to garbage.

Let me explain. We bring all our vegetative garbage to the compost bin. Ours has a little door at the bottom, through which we must scrape out the loam that has resulted from months of decomposition. The bin proved difficult to use, requiring us (that is, Joel) to get down on the ground and poke at the soil through the tiny opening. Dismissing that process as ridiculous, Joel picked the bin up and set it down a few feet away. He then shoveled the pile of earth into a wheelbarrow and wheeled it to the regular, not secret, vegetable garden, where he deposited it.



He obviously didn't get everything scooped up because this year we discovered an amazing treasure in the area surrounding the bin: Under a cover of lush green foliage – and hanging from one tree branch – we found ten butternut squashes, ranging in weight from five to nine pounds each.

We also harvested close to three hundred tomatoes representing red, yellow, orange, and chocolate cherry varieties.

And because the weather continued to be warm, we reaped the vegetable rewards through October.

Puzzle #1: I placed the compost bin in a corner of the yard behind a stand of evergreens because I didn't really want to look at it – or at the swarms of fruit flies congregating near it. But situated where it was, no sun could reach it. So, how did the tomato and squash seeds in the compost bin manage to survive months of harsh New England winter cold? Was the heat generated in the decomposition process enough to help the seeds not only survive, but thrive?

Puzzle #2: Like the compost bin, this auxiliary garden is hidden behind the evergreens, so no sun reaches it. Adding to the conundrum, I didn't water back there, so, how did the veggies grow? Was the rich composted soil enough?

As readers of this column know, I like to experiment. I've chronicled my 25-year-long attempt to grow an etrog tree. In a glass of water on my kitchen windowsill, I've grown celery from roots. So, it occurred to me that perhaps I could grow tomatoes in the house, not simply to start ahead of planting season. After all, we have a sunroom with a southeastern exposure. (That's where the etrog sits.) So, I scooped the seeds from three yellow cherry tomatoes (the most delicious variety) and planted them in organic potting soil. Within a week they sprouted. Of course, I should have done this in August so that we would have a continuous supply of the yummy little treats. At this point we probably won't get a crop until February. But if this experiment succeeds, I will have a new routine to our cycle.



So, why bother to get seedlings from the nursery? I think I may just roll the dice and rely on my garbage to give us a fabulous bounty of scrumptious veggies.

Next project: Getting zucchini and eggplant to grow from the kitchen garbage. Along with their tomato cousins, we could have a wonderful ratatouille.



Butternut Squash Soup

- INGREDIENTS:
- 2 c. thinly sliced leeks (rinse these thoroughly, as leeks tend to hide lots of dirt in their folds)

1 c. thinly sliced celery

4 T. butter

2 lbs. butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

1 bay leaf

4 c. pareve broth (I like the "chicken" flavor)

Toasted pumpkin seeds

- DIRECTIONS:
- In a large saucepan, sauté the leeks and celery in the butter.

When the veggies are tender, add the squash, bay leaf, and the stock.

Cover and simmer 40 minutes.

Remove the bay leaf.

Puree and reheat.

Sprinkle the toasted seeds on top of each serving.



Carol Goodman Kaufman, has just published her second mystery book, *Crak, Bam, Dead: Mah Jong Mayhem* (Next Chapter Press). The collection of cozy mystery short stories features food writer/ aspiring investigative reporter Kiki Coben and her Mah Jong group as they follow clues from a "Black Widow" murder at sea to a suspicious death at a senior home charity event. Armed with a curious mind and her formidable group of friends, Kiki is ready to prove that the only thing you need to catch a killer is persistence – and maybe just a little bit of luck.

Crak, Bam, Dead is available in stores and online.

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