

# 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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February 17 to March 31, 2024

[jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org)

## Community-Wide Musical Havdalah

Late winter light will shine in the Jewish Berkshires



The Cantilena Chamber Choir, with director and conductor Andrea Goodman (front row center)

Josh Jacobson, Tzvi Avni, and Ken Lampl, whose piece was commissioned by Cantilena and is often performed by Boston Zamir Chorale.

This free event (with free Havdalah candle and spice sets while supplies last) is co-sponsored by Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Knesset Israel, Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Congregation Beth Israel, Temple Anshe Amunim, the Berkshire Minyan, Williams College Jewish Association, and Berkshire Hills Hadassah.

Additional funding is by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. Temple Anshe Amumin is at 26 Broad Street in Pittsfield. This event will be livestreamed – visit the calendar of events page at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org).

### About the Performers

**The Cantilena Chamber Choir**, now in its 16th season, is composed of 24 dedicated singers of the highest caliber. Its accolades include a multi-year

**MUSICAL HAVDALAH,**  
continued on page 4

PITTSFIELD – On Saturday, March 9 at 7:15 p.m., Temple Anshe Amunim will be our host as Berkshire Rabbis, local musicians, and the Cantilena Chamber Choir come together for an inspirational evening of music, spirit and schmoozing.

Under the direction of Choir Director Andrea Goodman, music will include sung portions of the Havdalah service by Sol Zim and music by Jewish composers Paul ben Ham, Yehezkiel Braun,

## Purim 5784

### Blue Like Me: Growing Up Jewish in India



Siona Benjamin is an Indian-American Jewish artist who will present a program about her life and work for Federation on March 14. Shown above is the first panel from her Esther Scroll, painted with gouache on parchment in 2009. For more on Siona, please see the BJV Interview on page 24.

## Betty Friedan: Magnificent Disrupter, with Rachel Shteir

On Monday, March 18 at 7 p.m., historian Rachel Shteir will talk about her new book *Betty Friedan: Magnificent Disrupter*. This biography of the pioneering feminist is part of the acclaimed Jewish Lives series published by Yale University Press and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle for biography.

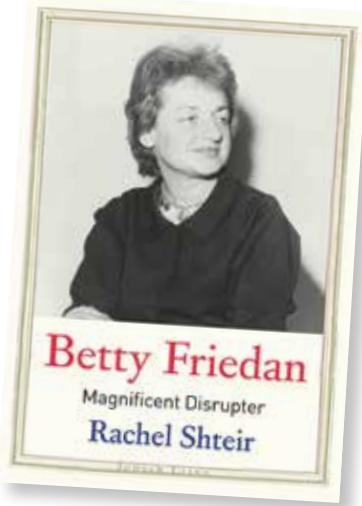
This presentation in recognition of Women's History Month will be presented via Zoom. Register for this free program at the calendar of events at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org). Part of "Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series in Collaboration with The Jewish Book Council."

The feminist writer and activist Betty Friedan (1921–2006), pathbreaking author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), was powerful and polarizing. In this biography, the first in more than 20 years, Rachel Shteir draws on Friedan's papers and on interviews with family, colleagues, and friends to create a nuanced portrait.

Friedan, born Bettye Naomi Goldstein, chafed at society's restrictions from a young age. As a journalist she covered racism, sexism, labor, class inequality, and anti-Semitism. As a wife and mother, she struggled to balance her work and homemaking. Her malaise as a housewife and her research into the feelings of other women resulted in *The Feminine Mystique*, which made her a celebrity.

Using her influence, Friedan cofounded the National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Women's Political Caucus, and the National Association to Repeal Abortion Laws. She fought for the Equal Rights Amendment, universal childcare, and workplace protections for mothers, but she disagreed with the women's liberation movement over "sexual politics." Her volatility and public conflicts fractured key relationships.

**BETTY FRIEDAN,**  
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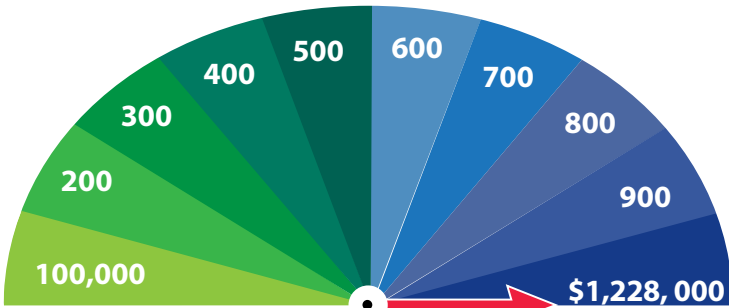
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## OUR CUP RUNNETH OVER!

Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' 2023 Annual Campaign exceeded goal!

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Check out this edition of the *Berkshire Jewish Voice* for a full report and honor roll of our generous and caring donors.



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OP-ED

RABBI REFLECTION

Shabbat: Still Keeping Us Connected, Grounded, and Whole

By Rabbi Jodie Gordon / Hevreh of Southern Berkshire



Rabbi Jodie Gordon

I've found myself thinking a lot about a man named Asher Ginsberg recently. Born in Kiev in the 19th century, Ginsberg was a prolific writer active in the revival of the Hebrew language, and a major voice in the stream of Zionist activity in pre-state Palestine that would be called "cultural Zionism." He argued that the Jewish homeland should be more than simply a nation of Jews. Rather, it should be a Jewish state, incorporating Jewish values. His political work was out in the open, especially in his work with a group that called themselves *Hovevei Zion* – lovers of Zion – but he often published under a pseudonym, calling himself *Ahad Ha'am* – which translates to "One of the People".

And the reason that I was thinking about Asher Ginsberg a lot recently, is because out of the pages and pages of ink he spilled in the course of his lifetime, there is one line that stands out, most quoted and most well-known:

"More than the Jewish people have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people."

I feel this in my bones, now more than ever. In the more than 100 days that have passed since October 7, Shabbat has been a balm and source of healing; a way of marking time and making it holy amidst the cruelties of these last months. More than any of the particularities about the ways in which we keep Shabbat, I have noticed that Shabbat is keeping us: keeping us connected, grounded, and whole.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel reminds us that Shabbat is not only a source of equilibrium, but of elevation. "It is one of life's highest rewards, a source of

and in high-definition. And we know that suffering knows no borders: perhaps like me, you have found that the human heart's ability to bear witness to the pain of others is elastic. For some of us, the suffering is personal, familial, and close to home. For many others, the suffering we are witnessing in Israel and Gaza is a reflection of our shared humanity.

And so, each Friday night when the sun sets, I find myself ever more grateful for the respite. For me, Shabbat is the opportunity to differentiate time. A mentor of mine in my early years as a Jewish professional always said, "Shabbat doesn't have to look a certain way; but it's got to look different than your average Tuesday." And so, in these days of real pain and struggle in our world, the invitation to step away from the news and to make Shabbat a "palace in time" (as Heschel would describe it) is that much more of a gift.

Our Jewish community is not a monolith: we bring our own unique experiences and perspectives to bear on this historical moment in Israel and for Jews around the world. And yet, despite the areas where our opinions and understandings of this moment do not align, Shabbat offers itself up like a banquet table overflowing with nourishment for our people. Shabbat becomes a place that we can inhabit together, sharing in the blessings of sacred time. Asher Ginsberg's wisdom rings clear for me: even across lines of political divide, Shabbat may well be the thing that keeps the Jewish people.

Each opportunity we have to look into the eyes of someone we love, each time we see our beloved community illuminated by the flames of Shabbat candles, each time we taste the sweetness of wine made sacred by words of blessing – each time we break bread with friends and family – we are reminded that we are kept and held by something greater than ourselves.

My hope for all of us in this new year ahead, is that Shabbat will continue to be a meeting place for us all – a time set aside for remembering all that connects us in our humanity, and in our difference.

**Rabbi Jodie Gordon** is a rabbi and director of education at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire. She is the co-host of the podcast OMFG: Jewish Wisdom for Unprecedented Times.



Asher Ginsberg, aka Ahad Ha'am

*Shabbat becomes a place that we can inhabit together, sharing in the blessings of sacred time.*

strength and inspiration to endure tribulation, to live nobly...The Sabbath is the inspirer, the other days the inspired" (A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 22). As a global Jewish people, in the Diaspora and in Israel, these have been days of deep tribulation. To remain human amidst the stories of suffering and loss is no small feat. We have seen the brutality that human beings are capable of live



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The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' Tikkun Olam Volunteer (TOV) Network connects community members of all ages with Mitzvah opportunities to make a difference in our community.



OP-ED

Unprecedented Demographic Report on Holocaust Survivors Indicates Approximately 245,000 Jewish Survivors Alive Globally

In January, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) released the Global Demographic Report on Jewish Holocaust Survivors, a demographic study on Jewish Holocaust survivors living around the world. The study reveals approximately 245,000 Holocaust survivors are still living across more than 90 countries.

Gideon Taylor, president of the Claims Conference, said, “The data we have amassed, not only tells us how many and where survivors are, it clearly indicates that most survivors are at a period of life where their need for care and services is growing.”

Since its founding in 1951, the Claims Conference has been dedicated to securing a measure of justice for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. As a result of ongoing negotiations with the German government, the Claims Conference has achieved and administers several compensation programs that provide direct payments to survivors globally, provides grants to over 300 social service agencies worldwide and ensures survivors receive much-needed services such as home care, food, medicine, transportation and socialization.

*The numbers in this report are interesting, but it is also important to look past the numbers to see the individuals they represent.*

The facilitation of these programs, funding and services has led to a global compilation of information on Jewish Holocaust survivors. This information, while not the only resource, served as a foundation of the Global Demographic Report on Jewish Holocaust Survivors. The report summarizes data on the demographic composition of Jewish Holocaust survivors worldwide, outlining country of birth as well as current country of residence, age, sex and what percentage of survivors are receiving various compensations and services.

Greg Schneider, executive vice president of the Claims Conference, said, “The numbers in this report are interesting, but it is also important to look past the numbers to see the individuals they represent. These are Jews who were born into a world that wanted to see them murdered. They endured the atrocities of the Holocaust in their youth and were forced to rebuild an entire life out of the ashes of the camps and ghettos that ended their families and communities. The data force us to accept the reality that Holocaust survivors won’t be with us forever; indeed, we have already lost most survivors.”

The Global Demographic Report on Jewish Holocaust Survivors identifies survivors living in more than 90 countries. Nearly half (49 percent) of all Jewish Holocaust survivors live in Israel, with an additional 18 percent in North America and 18 percent in Western Europe. At the time of publication, the median age of survivors is 86; ages range from 77 years to over 100, with birth-dates reaching back as far as 1912.

**Key Findings**

Claims Conference Global Demographic Report on Jewish Holocaust Survivors key findings include:

- There are an estimated 245,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors globally, living across more than 90 countries.
- Nearly half (49 percent) of all survivors reside in Israel; 18 percent reside in Western Europe and 18 percent reside in North America, with 16 percent of all survivors worldwide residing in the United States. Approximately 12 percent reside in countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU).
- In the United States, nearly 40 percent of survivors live in New York State, with 15% in California, 8% in Florida, 6% in Illinois, 6% in New Jersey, 5% in Massachusetts, 4% in Pennsylvania, 3% in Maryland, 2% in Ohio, and 1% in Michigan.

- The median age of Jewish Holocaust survivors is 86. The population of survivors at the time of this report ranges in age from 77 to over 100 years of age and are born between the years of 1912 and 1946.
- The majority of Jewish Holocaust survivors (95 percent) are “child survivors” who were born between 1928 and 1946.
- 20 percent of Jewish Holocaust survivors are over the age of 90. This is a period of life characterized by an increased need for care and services.
- The majority of Jewish Holocaust survivors are female (61 percent) as only 39 percent of the population are male.
- Nearly 40 percent of survivors receive monthly payments through Claims Conference programs negotiated with Germany, while the remaining population are eligible for one-time or annual payments.
- Forty percent of survivors are currently receiving or have received in the past year social welfare services provided by over 300 agencies that receive grants administered by the Claims Conference. Services include homecare, food, medicine, transportation socialization and other services specific to the individual needs of survivors.

To read the demographic report in its entirety, please visit: [Claimscon.org/demographics](https://claimscon.org/demographics).

About the Claims Conference

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference), a nonprofit organization with offices in New York, Israel, Germany and Austria, secures material compensation for Holocaust survivors around the world. Founded in 1951 by representatives of 23 major international Jewish organizations, the Claims Conference negotiates for and disburses funds to individuals and organizations and seeks the return of Jewish property stolen during the Holocaust. As a result of negotiations with the Claims Conference since 1952, the German government has paid more than \$90 billion in indemnification to individuals for suffering and losses resulting from persecution by the Nazis. In 2023, the Claims Conference distributed over \$560 million in compensation to over 200,000 survivors in 83 countries and allocated over \$750 million in grants to over 300 social service agencies worldwide that provide vital services for Holocaust survivors, such as home care, food and medicine. For 2024, the Claims Conference successfully negotiated approximately \$535 million in compensation for survivors globally and \$888 million for survivors’ home health care needs.


For more information, please visit: [www.claimscon.org](https://www.claimscon.org)

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JEWISH VOICE

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To have the *BJV* mailed to your home, please send a minimum donation of \$18.

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# Your Federation Presents

## Yearning to Breathe Free!

Live theater presented on Zoom by The Braid

On Thursday, March 28 at 7 p.m., we bring back The Braid with “Yearning to Breathe Free,” amusing and profound contemporary stories that will let you see America through fresh eyes. Experience the drama of leaving one’s country and settling in a new one. Please note this will be a 65-minute live theater production on Zoom presented by actors from the Go-To Jewish Story Company, The Braid, followed by a moderated Q&A session.



### From The Braid:

Coming to America from across the globe, we are one Jewish spirit. Experience a dozen true, contemporary Jewish stories performed by professional actors that explore leaving one’s home for a new nation.

Acclaimed memoirist and novelist André Aciman reveals the ironic pain of celebrating a Seder while he and his family are being forced out of their home in Egypt.

An American adoptee from China discovers surprising inspiration in a nearby bridge that connects her own story with that of her Jewish grandparents from the Balkans.

In a hilarious tale, two Chilean parents struggle to learn strange, new Jewish customs when their daughter marries an Ashkenazi American man.

And a Ukrainian woman feels the comfort of Jewish tradition as echoes of her family home still reverberate in her soul. Enjoy these plus many other stories of deep yearning and bold dreams.

For a link to this program, visit the calendar of events at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org).

## Alaska Jewish History Museum: A Home for Jewish History, Art, and Culture, in Alaska

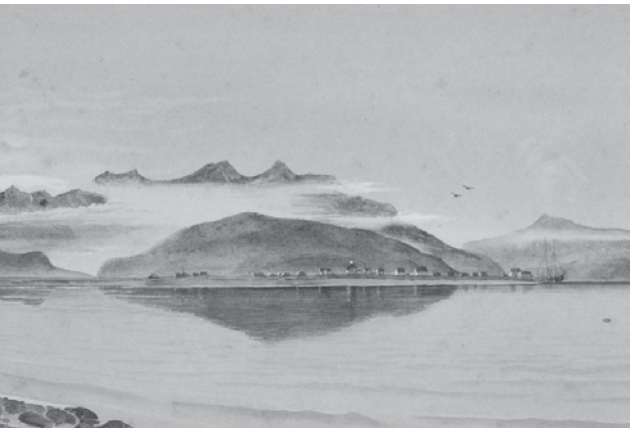
On Thursday, February 22 at 7 p.m., take a virtual trip to the Great White North with Leslie Fried, curator at the Alaska Jewish Museum in Anchorage. Visitors to the Alaska Jewish Museum are often surprised to find out there is a Jewish community in Alaska, and that its story goes back to the 1800’s. Fried will examine connections between history, art, and culture, that enabled the original Jewish settlers to travel to the Far North. Coming from towns with old, established cultures to flourish in a new land was an integral part of the Jewish identity and pioneer spirit.

This free Federation program will be presented via Zoom. Register via the calendar of events at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org).

Join curator Leslie Fried on a tour of the museum’s primary exhibits. She also introduces the museum’s new virtual exhibit, “From Purchase to Prosperity: The Jewish Founders of the Alaska Commercial Company and Their Contribution to the Acquisition of America’s Last Frontier.”

The history of the Alaska Commercial Company, or ACC, is the history of America’s Last Frontier: the state of Alaska. The company arrived as more than a fur trading enterprise following the departure of the Russians. In the absence of any US civil government, it built schools, wharves, warehouses, and roads. It administered justice, allocated dock space, tracked sea ice and daily weather conditions, and kept the peace. All the above was in addition to working with the Unangan and Yu’pik hunters; running nearly 40 steamers, barges, and paddle-wheel river vessels around Alaska and to San Francisco; and operating 86 company stores and trading posts.

The longevity of the ACC can be attributed partially to how the company’s Jewish founders - steeped in the tenets of Judaism: charity, education, and justice - embedded those values in the operations of the corporation. Early company correspondence from headquarters in San Francisco consistently directed local managers to provide for widows and children of their Alaska Native hunters and to extend charity to the elderly in the villages. Even when it was not profitable, they kept some



An early painting of America’s Last Frontier

outlying trading posts open to prevent famine in those Aleutian villages. The San Francisco founders were noted for their philanthropy; they ran ACC as a family business that included their customers as such.

Artist **Leslie Fried** has been the curator at the Alaska Jewish Museum (AJM) in Anchorage since 2011. She earned a Master of Library and Information Science, and a Graduate Certificate in Museum Studies from the University of Washington. She also holds a B.A. in Fine and Applied Art from the University of Oregon.

As curator, Fried has been instrumental in developing a mission and vision for AJM that emphasizes a multicultural approach. The day-to-day operations require her to wear many hats. She develops and designs exhibits; collects artifacts; and catalogs the collection, the archives, and the library materials. In addition, she writes narratives and labels, records oral histories, develops community programs, collaborates with other community organizations, and conducts museum tours.

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### MUSICAL HAVDALAH, continued from cover

Cultural Portfolio grant award from the Massachusetts Cultural Council for its annual Martin Luther King program and two Choral Arts New England Alfred Nash Patterson awards for innovative programming. Special guests have included actors Jonathan Epstein, Allyn Burrows, Annette Miller, Benjamin Luxon, Tina Packer, and author Geraldine Brooks, among others. Collaborations have been with Baltimore’s Urban Choral Arts Society, Cambridge Concentus, Aston Magna, Tanglewood, the Empire Brass, and six Berkshire public schools. It has appeared at Tanglewood, the Mahaiwe and Colonial Theaters, Hancock Shaker Village, The Mount, The Berkshire Museum, Hevreh, and WGBY in Springfield. This September the choir repeated May 2018’s critically acclaimed showing of Le Passion de Jeanne D’Arc with the original 1928 score for choir, organ and orchestra performed live at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center.

**Andrea Goodman** is the founder and director of the Cantilena Chamber Choir. She has been a visiting professor of conducting at the New England Conservatory of Music where she also directed the women’s choir. During the summer she serves as the director of the annual summer Saratoga Choral Festival. She has prepared choirs for the Philadelphia Orchestra under Charles Dutoit, and has previously served as director of the Concord Chorus (MA) and director of choirs at Skidmore College and New York University. Her guest appearances have included the Aspen Music Festival, the Festival de Musique Sacree in Fribourg, Switzerland, and the Festival of White Nights and the Singing World Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia. Dr. Goodman holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in Conducting.

### BETTY FRIEDAN, continued from cover

Shteir considers how Friedan’s Judaism was essential to her feminism, presenting a new Friedan for a new era. Publishers Weekly calls it “A lucid portrait of Friedan as a bold yet flawed advocate for women’s equality.”

**Rachel Shteir** is an award-winning essayist, writer, and critic, and is head of the Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism Program at the Theatre School at DePaul University. She is the author of Striptease: The Untold History of the Grlie Show, Gypsy: The Art of the Tease, and The Steal: A Cultural History of Shoplifting. She lives in Chicago, IL.



# ***Luminous: An Artist's Story as a Guide to Radical Creativity with Linda Frimer***



It was also there that Frimer first realized that nature and culture rose inseparable in creation, and that she had a responsibility to both. Throughout her book, Frimer strives to break down barriers between varying perspectives, while guiding the reader through a series of artistic exercises designed to

**Linda Dayan Frimer** was born in the wilderness town of Wells, BC. She has always been drawn to the light-filled grandeur of the forest and has spent her life working to express the innate unity in all of life's forms, to become, in the process, a champion of environmental and health issues, a cultural and community facilitator and teacher. Frimer was a co-founder of the Gesher Holocaust Project, helping survivors and their children release trauma through art, and her works of art have raised funds for various foundations. Frimer graduated from Emily Carr School of Art and Design and received an honorary doctorate from the University of the Fraser Valley in 2016.

Explains Carol Salus: “Femmage’ was the term Miriam Schapiro coined in the mid-1970s to identify



**Carol Salus, PhD**, recently retired after an accomplished career as a professor at Kent State University's School of Art. She has published on multiple artists including Picasso, Degas, R. B. Kitaj, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein and she has taught Art History and American Art and Architecture. Her work has been recognized by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



# MIDDLE SCHOOL MERIT SCHOLARSHIPS

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LOCAL NEWS

Temple Anshe Amunim  
2024 Winter Film Series

PITTSFIELD – The Winter 2024 Winter Film Series concludes Sunday, March 10 at 2 p.m. with an in-person screening of *The Devil’s Confession: The Lost Eichmann Tapes* (2023), a documentary by Yariv Mozer.

Temple Anshe Amunim is at 26 Broad Street. Refreshments will be available.

Tickets: \$10 for members of TAA, \$12 for non-members. For ticket information please visit [ansheamunim.org](http://ansheamunim.org). Registration and payment are required to attend. For more info, email [templeoffice@ansheamunim.org](mailto:templeoffice@ansheamunim.org) or call (413) 442-5910.

About The Devil’s Confession

Six decades after he was brought to Israel from Argentina by the Mossad and tried in a Jerusalem court, the war criminal Adolf Eichmann, in his own voice, finally exposes the truth about his role in the Holocaust. At his trial, Eichmann denied responsibility for killing millions of Jews, insisting he was a mere bureaucrat, a cog in the vast Nazi machinery. On tapes discovered long after they were recorded, Eichmann stunningly contradicts these claims, boasting that he was indeed the architect of the ‘Final Solution’, his only regret being that he had not killed all 10.3 million Jews of Europe.

*The Devil’s Confession: The Lost Eichmann Tapes* exposes Eichmann, in his own voice. These tapes, recorded in Buenos Aires in 1957 by Dutch journalist and Holocaust denier Willem Sassen, form the basis of this new feature documentary from Israel. The result is a film which not only sheds light on the hidden forces that concealed the recordings, altering the arc of history as we have understood it for more than 70 years, but also provides irrefutable proof against Holocaust denial and the pernicious antisemitic hatred from which it springs.

Celebrate Purim  
with Hevreh

GREAT BARRINGTON – This year, Hevreh of Southern Berkshire is celebrating Purim with a special Barbie-themed Purimspiel and children’s Purim Carnival.

On Saturday, March 23 at 4 p.m., join Hevreh for an abbreviated Megillah reading in the sanctuary with the Confirmation Class Purimspiel production of “The Barbie Megillah.” Purim treats and a reading of Megillat Esther will follow.

Bring a box of macaroni and cheese to use as a grogger during the service. The food will be collected and donated to the People’s Pantry. All are welcome.

On Sunday, March 24 from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., the Religious School at Hevreh will hold a Purim Carnival. All are welcome to the family-friendly carnival celebration of Purim. Join for games, a costume contest, and prizes!

For more information on Hevreh events and activities, visit [www.hevreh.org](http://www.hevreh.org).



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[noblesfarmstandandflowershop.com](http://noblesfarmstandandflowershop.com)

“What’s Your Story?”

An oral history and legacy  
interviewing workshop with  
Adam Phillips of FamilyLore  
at TAA

PITTSFIELD – Temple Anshe Amunim is offering a hands-on, in-person workshop that will prepare participants to conduct and facilitate family interviews, gather life stories, and create the unique and precious gift of their ‘Family Story’ for themselves and future generations.

The workshop will take place on Tuesday, March 5 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

*Adam Phillips is a recently retired radio journalist with 35 years of experience doing in-depth interviews. He has taught oral history and legacy interviewing workshops to professionals and amateurs alike. For more information about Adam, visit [audiobyadam.com](http://audiobyadam.com)*

Pre-registration ([ansheamunim.org/event/legacy-workshop](http://ansheamunim.org/event/legacy-workshop)) is required, and the cost is \$15 per person.

For more information, email: [templeoffice@ansheamunim.org](mailto:templeoffice@ansheamunim.org) or call (413) 442-5910.

Family Fun at KI

PITTSFIELD – As chilly Berkshire winter 2024 comes to a close, Kneset Israel hosts fun get-togethers for families.

Havdalah with Families Together

On Saturday, March 2 at 6:45 p.m., join other families for a heartwarming evening as Families Together marks the end of Shabbat and welcomes the new week. The celebration includes hot chocolate, a musical Havdalah, and a special craft. Around Havdalah there will be stories and activities for kids and adults. It will be an evening of warmth and togetherness. For more information and to register, go to [KnesetIsrael.org/RSVP](http://KnesetIsrael.org/RSVP)

Families Together is a community initiative at Kneset Israel for adults and their school-aged and younger kids. Families Together events are a mix of social, educational and experiential. All families together events are free and open to members and non-members alike!

Families Together is made possible through the generous support of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Tot Shabbat

On Saturday, March 2 at 10 a.m., Kneset Israel is thrilled to invite families to Tot Shabbat with Mike Duffy, a dedicated song leader and Jewish educator. This monthly event promises singing and a fun way to welcome Shabbat for children in grades K-1 and younger, along with their parents, grandparents, or guardians.

All are welcome to join, members and non-members alike! KI looks forward to celebrating Shabbat with you!

Kneset Israel is at 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.

Purim Unplugged with  
the Kneset Israel Band

PITTSFIELD – Purim is always good fun at Kneset Israel and this year will be no exception.



Purim with the Kneset Israel Band

Purim Unplugged

On Saturday, March 16 at 8:30 p.m., the Kneset Israel Band returns for its 15th annual Purim musical costume bash.

This year the band will be covering the music of the MTV unplugged series. In the style of *MTV Unplugged* the KI Band, with participation from Temple Anshe Amunim, will feature iconic hits from many artists in an acoustic “unplugged” style.

Through new arrangements and rewritten lyrics, the KI band will tell the story of Purim.

This incredible musical and community event will include snacks and beverages. Tickets can be purchased by going to [knesetisrael.org/rsvp](http://knesetisrael.org/rsvp). \$15 for adults and free for kids 12 and under. Come in costume, bring some friends, and be sure to wear your dancing shoes!

Purim Dinner and Megillah Reading

The fun continues on Saturday, March 23 at 6:30 p.m., with a family-friendly Purim dinner followed by a full megillah reading. Hear the story of Purim and be ready with groggers to “boo” Haman. Reserve your space at <https://www.knesetisrael.org/rsvp>. Costumes are encouraged.

Hevreh’s Rabbi Neil  
P.G. Hirsch Moving to  
Cincinnati’s Isaac M.  
Wise Temple

Rabbi Jodie Gordon to assume  
the Reform congregation’s  
pulpit in summer



Rabbi Neil P. G. Hirsch

GREAT BARRINGTON – This summer, Rabbi Neil Hirsch, rabbi at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire in Great Barrington, will become Senior Rabbi at the Isaac M. Wise Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio – the birthplace of the Jewish Reform Movement.

In a letter sent to congregants in December, Hevreh President Lisa Sloane said the news was bittersweet. “I hope you will join the Board in congratulating Rabbi Hirsch on this exciting opportunity for him, Liz, Lior, and Mikah. I hope you share our pride in Rabbi Hirsch’s accomplishments here at Hevreh, and know that this new posting is a wonderful opportunity for Rabbi Hirsch to take the skills and talents developed here to a new communal setting.”

Sloane said the Board is thrilled that Hevreh’s Rabbi and Education Director Jodie Gordon will become Senior Rabbi on July 1.

“Hevreh is in the enviable position of having two strong rabbis on the *bimah*. We are very lucky that Rabbi Gordon is interested and ready to take this next step with us,” Sloane said.

Rabbi Hirsch wrote about his departure from Hevreh in a letter to the Hevreh community: “It is not easy to leave Hevreh, my family’s spiritual home for the past nine years. Together, we have been through so much. The many Shabbat services, each year’s High Holy Days, so many Purim spiels, committee meetings, b’nai mitzvah, baby namings, weddings, and funerals – all of this speaks to the sacred trust you have given me. You have been my students, and I, yours. I have spent time with you at your homes, at hospital visits, in the classroom, around the board room, on bike rides, and on airplanes traveling together. It was in the Berkshires where Liz and I began our family. You have watched Lior and Mikah take their first steps in the back of the sanctuary. I deeply cherish the stories we have written together. I have always believed that Hevreh belongs to you—the congregation—and I am proud to count myself among you. It has been an honor to serve as your Rabbi.”

The Wise Temple is a vibrant 180-year-old congregation of 1,100 families that has been the heart of the Reform Movement and Cincinnati for generations.

“This is an opportunity for me to expand my rabbinate and grow professionally in the birthplace of Reform Judaism. Moreover, Cincinnati today offers a vibrant Jewish community and diverse cultural life. The Hirsch family is looking forward to making a home there,” Rabbi Hirsch said.

Rabbi Liz Hirsch, who served as rabbi for Pittsfield’s Temple Anshe Amunim for many years, is now serving as the executive director of Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ). She will continue to lead the WRJ from her family’s new home in Ohio.

For more information about Hevreh and the upcoming Rabbinic transition, visit [www.hevreh.org](http://www.hevreh.org) or call the office at (413) 528-6378.



LOCAL NEWS

## Purim Fun and More at CBI

NORTH ADAMS – As winter draws to a close, Congregation Beth Israel celebrates Purim and offers fun gatherings for the whole family.

### Purim Party! Live Music, Local Food

On Saturday, March 23 at 3 p.m., come one, come all to celebrate Purim together! Enjoy live music, great food, and a spirited re-enactment of the Purim story. Come in costume, be in community! Meet at Congregation Beth Israel – co-sponsored by CBI and NEFESH. RSVP online at [cbiberkshires.com/event/purim-2024](http://cbiberkshires.com/event/purim-2024).

### Game Night For All!

On Saturday, February 24 at 5:30 p.m., adults and children of all ages are welcome to join in CBI for a fun evening full of games and prizes! Please bring your favorite board games. Pizza and drinks will be provided; feel free to bring a salad or dessert to share. RSVP online by no later than Wednesday, February 21, at [cbiberkshires.com/event/game-night-2024](http://cbiberkshires.com/event/game-night-2024).

### Friday Evening Shabbat Zoom Gathering

On Friday, March 1 at 7:30 p.m., stay connected with CBI friends and neighbors, and meet new ones, as we gather together around the Zoom table to celebrate Shabbat, light candles, bless wine and challah, and schmooze. RSVP online at [cbiberkshires.com/event/first-friday-zoom-mar-2024](http://cbiberkshires.com/event/first-friday-zoom-mar-2024).

### Shabbat Services

*Kabbalat Shabbat Services on Friday, March 8 and March 22 at 7 p.m.* All are welcome to celebrate Shabbat with prayer, song, poetry, and heart. The CBI band and choir bring beautiful harmonies to Kabbalat Shabbat.

*Shabbat Morning Services continue on Saturday, February 24, March 2, March 16, and March 30 at 9:30 a.m.* Join CBI on Shabbat morning to hear some words of Torah (and some words about Torah) and bask in Shabbat's sweetness. Spiritual tools include traditional liturgy, contemporary poetry, chant, and song... as well as spectacular views from the sanctuary that connect with the natural world and with our Source.

RSVP for all services at [cbiberkshires.com/calendar-of-events](http://cbiberkshires.com/calendar-of-events).

## Chabad of the Berkshires Invites All to a Thrilling Purim Party: “Purim Under Construction”

PITTSFIELD – Chabad of the Berkshires is delighted to announce the upcoming Purim celebration on Sunday, March 24 at 5 p.m. This year's theme is “Purim Under Construction,” promising an evening

filled with joy, laughter, and community spirit. Says Chabad's co-director, Sara Volovik: “We extend a warm welcome to everyone in the Berkshire community to join us for this exciting event. Dressing up in construction attire or any Israel-related costume is encouraged as a symbol of unity and support for Israel. Let's celebrate Purim by expressing our excitement for the new Chabad center under construction in Lenox, as well as our support of Israel.”

She adds: “Prepare your taste buds for a mouthwatering experience! Our party will feature delectable Israeli-style cuisine that will transport you to the vibrant streets of Israel. Savor the flavors as we come together to celebrate Purim. In addition to the delightful food, we have arranged entertaining activities for all ages, something for everyone to enjoy.”

Please RSVP to ensure sufficient arrangements are made to accommodate all. For further information, please contact Sara Volovik at (413) 499-9899. For more information about Chabad of the Berkshires, visit [jewishberkshires.com](http://jewishberkshires.com).



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For full job description visit [jewishberkshires.org/news-announcements/development](http://jewishberkshires.org/news-announcements/development)

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COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

The Henry Simkin and Frances Simkin Schiller and Dr. Stanley and Fay Simkin Scholarship Fund

Annually awards one or two scholarships to graduating seniors who have demonstrated leadership and participation in the Berkshire Jewish community.

Deadline: April 22

Download an application at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org) or pick one up at the Federation's office 196 South Street, Pittsfield, MA



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ISRAEL/PARTNERS

# World ORT - Nurturing Hearts and Minds in Troubled Times

By Dr. Moshe Leiba / Chief Pedagogical and R&D Officer of World ORT Kadima Mada



World ORT Kadima Mada students in Kiryat Yam benefit from robotics classes before the war (Credit: World ORT)

These are dark days for all of us across Israel. Tragically, children have been terribly affected by the atrocities, displacement and learning loss of the past weeks. In response, in the earliest hours and days of the war, World ORT Kadima Mada – the operational arm in Israel of World ORT’s global Jewish education network – initiated efforts to provide urgent educational and psychological support. World ORT has provided dignity and hope to displaced people since the Holocaust. We had assumed that the type of work characterized by our support for Jewish refugees in DP camps between 1945 and 1948 was something relegated to the history books. But here we are, nearly 80 years later, continuing our mission with the same commitment and passion. Israel is currently a hotbed of NGOs and civic society organizations carrying out remarkable work across diverse areas. Our contribution is focused on two key areas. One of the most significant needs right now is to support the emotional and mental health of our nearly 10,000 students and teachers and their families, as well as others in communities across the country. Our comprehensive psychological support packages include running one-on-one and group sessions with psychologists trained in mental first-aid. We have been systematically mapping and evaluating the emotional needs of our beneficiaries, particularly in the mild-to-severe ranges and providing dedicated, tailored support to individuals. We’d like to start online classes for all our student diaspora, but for many children, their heads are just not in it right now. They are not ready for math or

English classes. It is one step at a time. All they can currently manage are educational distraction online programs – taking their minds off things for a short time while they are trying to process everything that has happened. Examples of this are seen most clearly with our students from the Kfar Silver Youth Village at Ashkelon, just a few kilometers from the Gaza border. Although the village was thankfully safely evacuated on the day of the attacks, tragically a significant number of students and teachers have lost family members and friends. Dozens of people with links to our organization have been killed or kidnapped by terrorists. A number of Kfar Silver graduates have been killed serving in the IDF. The bespoke work with counsellors or social workers can be a lifeline for teenagers grappling with these heartbreaking scenarios. Many have been taking part in therapeutic workshops in subjects including science, robotics, coding, and virtual reality. We have already reached almost 2,000 children, helping kids from grades one to eight in both the southern and northern peripheries of Israel. The daily sessions give them some semblance of normalcy – beacons of hope during this turbulent time. In parallel we are training teachers and instructors in effective online teaching methodology so that we can continue to provide education for the duration of the crisis, however long it might be. Distributing laptops and assisting educators in integrating their curricula into online activities ensures a comprehensive approach. We will not leave any student or teacher behind in this work. One of the most heart-warming aspects of this dreadful time is seeing our friends and colleagues in Israel, and across World ORT’s global network spanning more than 40 countries, offering to volunteer their time and resources to support us. We have been inspired by the commitment of Jewish students worldwide to reach out to their peers here, exemplifying World ORT’s values of co-operation and Tikkun Am – Jews investing in our own identity, culture, religion, rituals and state to ensure a meaningful Jewish future with young people who are able to engage in the world with pride and knowledge. This is a devastating moment in our history, but this compassion and kindness gives us hope that better times lie ahead – they have to, and we will work night and day to ensure they do. **Dr. Moshe Leiba** of World ORT Kadima Mada is responsible for all educational activity in Israel. This article originally appeared on his Times of Israel blog. **A portion of our Federation’s \$329,000 contribution to the Israel Crisis Fund is directed to World ORT.**

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MAZEL TOV!

**Hannah Schiff**, daughter of **Arlene and Gary Schiff**, who recently joined the staff of Congregation Beth Israel in Houston as the Director of Marketing and Communications. As the oldest Jewish congregation in Texas, Beth Israel is an active and vibrant Reform congregation with 1,600 member households and a rich history and legacy.

**Annette Miller** and Shakespeare & Company on their restaging of last summer’s hit play *Golda’s Balcony* in Boston from February 23 through March 10 at the Jackie Liebergott Black Box Theatre.

**Nathan Asher Promisel**, grandson of **Myra and Larry Promisel**, who celebrated his bar mitzvah in September. Parents are **Seth and Amy Promisel**.

**Joseph Weiner**, son of **Rabbi David and Judith Weiner**, being honored with the MA Association of School Superintendents’ Certificate of Excellence. The annual award is given to students who excel in both academics and community involvement.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin**, author of *Shanda*, who was selected for the Los Angeles-based American Jewish University’s new Public Fellows Program, which is designed to amplify the work of Jewish scholars and create a “part-time intellectual home for [an] amazing, diverse, eccentric band of wonderfully weird Jewish thinkers.”

**Professor Michael Hoberman** on his Tablet Magazine feature “Jews in the Wilderness,” about Muir Trail pioneer Theodore Seixas Solomons.

**Alex Lederman** on his essay, “Objectivity won’t solve root causes of Israel-Hamas war,” which appeared in The Forward.

**Elisa Spungen Bildner** and **Rob Bildner**, co-founders of the Foundation for Jewish Camp (and honorary publishers of this issue of the BJV), were honored with the Hedley S Dimock Award by the American Camp Association (ACA) on February 6. The ACA noted that the award “marks a pivotal moment in celebrating the Bildners’ dedication to the transformative power of camp experiences and their lasting impact on the broader community.”

**Noah Caleb Sacon Hochfelder** on his Hey Alma essay, “Don’t Call Me a Nice Jewish Boy.”

**Nina Lipkowitz**, whose “Other Worlds” exhibit of new sculpture and other work will be on view at the 510 Warren Street Gallery in Hudson, NY, throughout the month of March.

Nina Lipkowitz, *Other Worlds*



ISRAEL/PARTNERS

One Story

The Dual Role of a Survivor and a Leader in Building a Community

How Sefit Hashavia Tzuri strengthens her family and neighbors, inspiring those around her

Sefit Hashavia Tzuri, a beacon of resilience and community spirit, was living near Gaza on Kibbutz Mefalsim, which was established by her husband's family in 1948. Sefit's life, deeply rooted in the kibbutz, took a dramatic turn on October 7 as she, her husband Udi, and their daughters woke up to sirens and gunfire. Then they faced hours trapped in their shelter as chaos unfolded around them.

The terror of that day – marked by rocket fire, close encounters with terrorists, and tragic losses of friends and neighbors – was a stark reminder of the fragility of life. Sefit recalls the horror of driving past upturned cars and lifeless bodies, an image that will forever be ingrained in her memory. Yet, even amid this turmoil, her role as the VP of Israel Association of Community Centers (IACC), an organization in Israel similar in concept to JCCs in North America, has offered a unique perspective on the power of community in times of crisis.

As both a survivor and a community leader, Sefit has been instrumental in helping to restore normalcy in Israeli society. With her



Sefit Hashavia Tzuri

emergencies. Her insights, shaped by personal experience and professional expertise, shed light on the benefits of organized community work.

Sefit's reflections reveal a stark contrast between those communities with robust, organized frameworks and those without. In places like Kiriyat Shmona and Sderot, where community work was a regular practice before the war, the response to the emergency was swift and efficient. Residents felt cared for, with a remarkable 95 percent having been reached quickly. This stands in stark contrast to areas where communal efforts were lacking, leading to a sense of loss and disarray.

Says Sefit: "One of the things that gives me strength today is to see that for years, we have built within the society very clear approaches of how a community should function, both in times of emergency and regular times."

Through her work with the IACC, Sefit is now focused on replicating successful community models across the country. These models, though not new, have proven essential in the current crisis, emphasizing the need for a community to be more than an abstract concept. The absence of state intervention during the initial hours of the attack highlighted the importance of community-led initiatives. Volunteers and community members became the unsung heroes, stepping in where formal structures were absent. In Sefit's Kibbutz, the on-call volunteers were the only source of protection.


As Sefit navigates the challenging path of returning to Kibbutz Mefalsim, her resolve is clear. Despite the reluctance of her daughters to return, Sefit believes in the power of community to revive and sustain life in the areas affected by the attacks.

Her journey, marked by both loss and hope, underscores the vital role of community centers like the IACC in fostering resilience and unity in times of adversity.

**A portion of our Federation's \$329,000 contribution to the Israel Crisis Fund is directed to IACC through JFNA.**

One of the things that gives me strength today is to see that for years, we have built within the society very clear approaches of how a community should function, both in times of emergency and regular times.

knowledge and the support of Jewish Federations of North America, the IACC has been pivotal in building and maintaining strong communal bonds, typically in times of peace – and even more crucially now, during




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ISRAEL/PARTNERS

# Supported by Federation Partner JAFI, SparkIL Launches Emergency Loan Fund as Wartime Lifeline for Israeli Small Businesses

*Small businesses are experiencing a personnel shortage given the 360,000 army reserves called up, while tourism has been closed or has pivoted to tending to the needs of Israeli evacuees*



(JNS) – SparkIL, a peer-to-peer lending platform that enables individuals across the Jewish world to support the small business of their choice in Israel, in December announced the launch of a NIS 10 million (\$2.7 million) Emergency Loan Fund that

will provide businesses affected by the current war with much-needed assistance. For a loan as small as \$25, Americans now have a tangible, on-the-ground way to help Israel at its darkest hour.

The loan fund is offering up to NIS 100,000 (about \$27,000) in assistance per business at a time when economic conditions are creating an unprecedented strain on their operations. New estimates from the Israeli central bank forecast the war with Hamas to cost Israel roughly \$53 billion between now and 2025, while JPMorgan Chase & Co. predicts Israel's gross domestic product will shrink 11% this quarter on an annualized basis.

With the Israeli government offering an insufficient grant to small businesses affected by the war, the SparkIL Emergency Loan Fund is substantially increasing the assistance that is available to those businesses at this time.

Established in 2022 in partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Ogen Group, SparkIL is a first-of-its-kind platform that enables users to participate in crowdfunding interest-free loans which aim to make a real, measurable and continuing impact on underserved populations across Israel. The initiative also fosters meaningful relationships between lenders in the Diaspora and the small-business owners they are supporting in Israel at a time when it is more critical than ever.

Lenders begin the process by exploring various business opportunities that empower them to make an impact on Israeli society which speaks to their aspirations, passions, and values. After repayment of their loan, lenders can choose to reinvest their money into other worthy businesses—ensuring that their initial loan has ripple effects indefinitely—or to withdraw their funds from the platform.

“SparkIL helps put the mutual responsibility the Jewish people have for one another into action,” said Amira Ahronoviz, CEO and director general at the Jewish Agency. “The loans granted by SparkIL will help small businesses and nonprofit organizations in Israel survive this challenging period, and allow supporters around the world to connect with Israel in a meaningful and impactful way.”

**A portion of our Federation’s \$329,000 contribution to the Israel Crisis Fund is directed to JAFI.**

## JEWISH LITERARY VOICES



A Federation series in collaboration with the Jewish Book Council

Thursday, January 11, at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)  
**Most Fortunate Unfortunates: The Jewish Orphans’ Home of New Orleans** with author and attorney Marlene Trestman.

Thursday, February 8 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)  
**Teachers: The Ones I Can’t Forget** with TV news correspondent, bureau chief, journalist and author Martin Fletcher.

Thursday, February 29 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)  
**Luminous: An Artist’s Story as a Guide to Radical Creativity** with artist and author Linda Frimer.

Thursday, March 21 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)  
**Betty Friedan: Magnificent Disrupter** with author, scholar and dramaturg Rachel Shteir.

Thursday, April 11, at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)  
**Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust** with Vanderbilt University Associate Professor Ari Joskowicz.

Thursday, May 9 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)  
**Under Jerusalem: The Buried History of the World’s Most Contested City** with author and journalist Andrew Lawler.

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

Eisner offers a \$100 per week, per child discount to families whose children are enrolled in a Berkshire school district year-round. Families may also apply to Federation for an **additional \$100 per week** in financial assistance.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE: APRIL 30**

Download an application at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org) or email [federation@jewishberkshires.org](mailto:federation@jewishberkshires.org) to receive the link.

*Funding for this program is made possible by donors to Federation’s annual campaign. Donate Today!*



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ISRAEL/PARTNERS

OBITUARIES

# Healing with Hibuki

## JDC provides support to traumatized children and their parents



Hibuki – based on the Hebrew word “hibuk,” which means hug – was born during the Second Lebanon War to help address widespread trauma among children under rocket attack in Israel. Since its creation by JDC, Tel Aviv University, and the Israeli Ministry of Education, Hibuki has helped over 50,000 traumatized Israeli children in communities along Israel’s southern and northern borders.

The doll – in the shape of a dog with long arms that wrap around the child’s neck – helps children regain feelings of control and process what they have been through. By taking care of Hibuki, identifying with him, and playing with him, children find ways to express uncertainty and the complicated feelings they have about what they experienced. Conducted in a safe and protected space, the program also helps parents, educators, and caregivers learn how to enable children to project their emotions, fears, and needs onto Hibuki and then provide appropriate support.

The picture shows a social worker providing psychosocial support to a traumatized child from southern Israel at the Dead Sea Hotel for Internationally Displaced People. She is one of hundreds of social workers JDC has deployed since Oct. 7 to locations with displaced Israelis or in communities still under fire to help children process and heal.

JDC is using your donations to help treat thousands of traumatized children, to provide basic services to those families facing unemployment and financial distress, and to set up educational outlets to ensure normalcy and the continuation of schooling.

### Your Dollars at Work – JDC’s Impact

Immediately following the horrors of Oct. 7, 2023, Federation’s partner JDC deployed a range of emergency services to save lives and aid tens of thousands of vulnerable Israelis facing trauma and bereavement, displacement, and the loss of livelihoods and destruction of property. To date, that includes:

- Emergency aid and support services for 20,000+ displaced or frontline elderly and people with disabilities.
- Trauma therapy and educational programs for nearly 12,000 displaced and frontline children and youth.
- Cash assistance, debt relief, and access to benefits for 5,800 needy displaced or frontline residents and business owners.
- Mobile employment centers serving 2,000 displaced jobseekers.
- Online mental health and social services for 51,000+ evacuees, people with disabilities, and frontline residents and responders.
- Bolstered emergency services of 81 cities – home to millions of Israelis including new evacuee populations.

**A portion of our Federation’s \$329,000 contribution to the Israel Crisis Fund is directed to JDC.**

**Marcus Henry Jaffe, 102, prominent publisher, editor, forefront of the paperback industry boom**

WILLIAMSTOWN – Marcus Henry Jaffe, 102, died at home in the early morning hours of Sunday, December 31, 2023.

Born November 6, 1921, in Philadelphia, Marc was blessed with an idyllic childhood as the second of three boys born to Lily Bailey Jaffe, a teacher and social worker, and Dr. Samuel Jaffe, a general practitioner. Marc and his two brothers attended the progressive Oak Lane Country Day School run by Temple University in Philadelphia, after which he entered Harvard College at the age of 16, majoring in literature and history.

Marc took pride in the fact that his grandfather, who died at the age of 93, was the oldest Jewish farmer in the United States at that time.

In 1942, Marc joined the U.S. Marines as an officer candidate. After his training, he was shipped to the Pacific Theatre where he took part in the battles of Peleliu and Okinawa, leading Company G. He received a Bronze Star for his service on Okinawa. On his return to the States after the war, Jaffe spent time in Provincetown, MA, where he co-owned a fishing boat, was a scallop fisherman, and pursued writing before moving to New York in 1946.

Marc was a prominent figure in the post-World War II, New York publishing scene, especially during his tenure as Editorial Director at Bantam Books from July 1961 through the late 1970s.

He began his publishing career in New York City at Argosy Magazine, a popular men’s magazine of the late 40s. Looking for a position of more responsibility, he moved to New American Library where he was initially appointed as Western & Mystery editor. In that capacity he worked with writers including Gore Vidal, who wrote three detective stories under the pseudonym of Edgar Box, and Mickey Spillane.

During what he called “a great apprenticeship” over the next few years, he broadened his editorial reach to include important works such as *Five Great Dialogues of Plato*, a new translation of Dante’s *Inferno* by John Ciardi, and an important contribution to the study of American history, *A Documentary History of the US* by Richard Heffner. After a brief tenure as the editor of Dell First Editions, he served as an editor at the short-lived Racine Books, launched by Western Publishing and Lithographing. Though he never saw the book through to publication, he encouraged the world-famous psychiatrist Viktor Frankl to publish his most important work under a title suggested by Marc, *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

He moved on to Bantam Books where he became Editorial Director

in July 1961 and spent the next 19 years at the forefront of the paperback industry boom, called “the mass paperback revolution” beginning after World War II and lasting through the 1980s. Marc and Bantam President, Oscar Dystel, were responsible for publishing an extraordinarily diverse list, which brought them to the top of the paperback industry. During those years, Marc was personally responsible for a number of important commercial best sellers, led by William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist*, which became a world-wide, million-copy best seller. At the other end of the spectrum were many titles in the Bantam Modern Classics series, and the unique text and design work by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*. When asked what he considered his most important publishing contribution, he would offer his initiation and continuing support for Bantam’s series of foreign language dictionaries.

After Bantam, he became Vice President of Random House and Editorial Director of Ballantine Books, then founded Villard Books as part of Random House. After his tenure at Random House, he had his own imprint, Marc Jaffe Books, at Houghton Mifflin Company. He subsequently became a freelance editor and publishing consultant, founding Editorial Direction with his wife, Vivienne. He worked until the time of his death.

Marc leaves a loving family, his wife, Vivienne; their children, Eva (Peter) and Ben (Alex); two children from his marriage to Grace Cohen, Nina (Bob), and David (Rachel); grandchildren, Louis (Lyndsey), Jacob, Jono, Sonia and Micah, Anna and Grace; sister-in-law Ruth; niece Ariana (Michael); former sister-in-law Pat; nephews Daniel (Cathy), Josh (Kathy), and Toby (Andrea) and their families.

**Melinda Tanzman, 82, licensed psychologist, active in the local community**

STEPHENTOWN, NY – Melinda Tanzman, 82, died quietly on the winter solstice night, 2023, at Berkshire Place.

Born July 12, 1941, in Jersey City, NJ, to Amanda (nee Ludwig) and George Sellick, the oldest of four daughters, Melinda grew up in Brooklyn, NY, where she and her father closely followed the Dodgers. Melinda was a natural athlete, playing basketball at school and stickball in her neighborhood. She could reliably hit a ball past three manhole covers – the measure of distance on the street. She was an early reader and loved the Brooklyn Public Library, where she received her first library card before age six. Melinda studied piano and trained quite seriously through high school, even

OBITUARIES,  
continued on page 17

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# Jewish Federation of the Berkshires – Distribution of Resources in 2023

## \$1,594,405

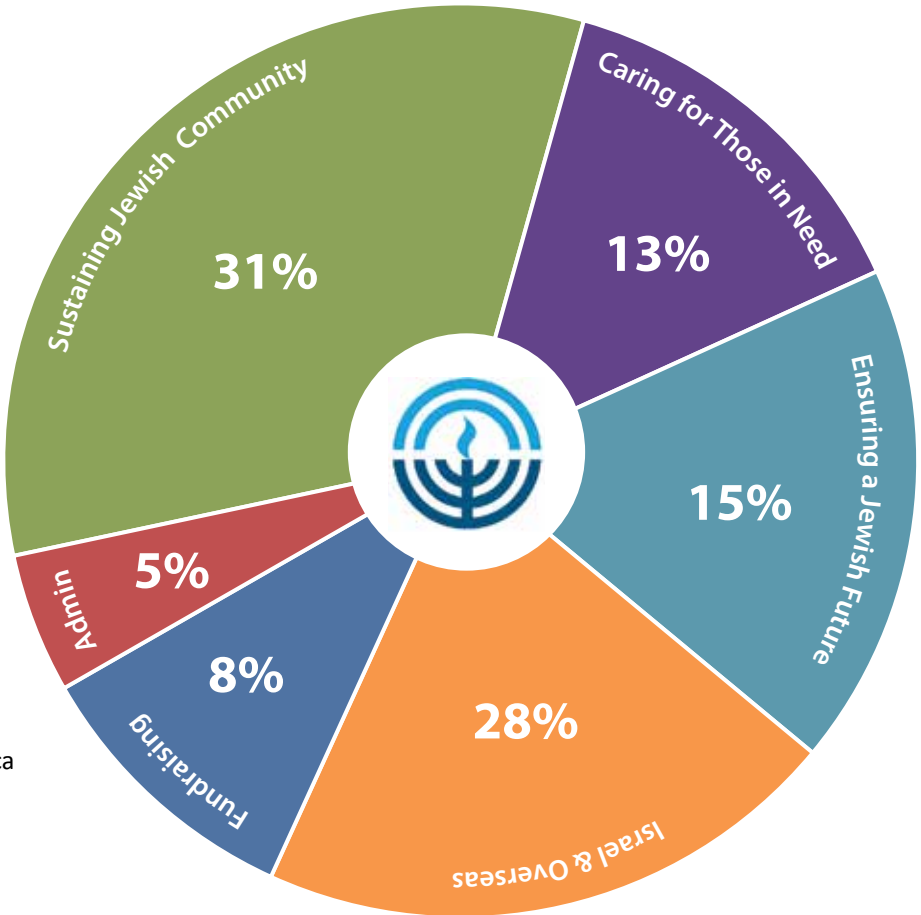
Includes distribution of annual campaign, earned income, Israel crisis funds, and endowments as of Dec. 31, 2023

### Sustaining Jewish Community

- Security Grants & Training
- Berkshire Jewish Voice
- General Programming
- Jewish Community Day
- Shabbat Across the Berkshires
- Chanukah at the Mount
- Community Havdalah
- Community Seder
- Middle East Update
- Connecting with Community program
- Knosh & Knowledge program
- Community Relations & Advocacy
- Holocaust Remembrance Event
- Jewishberkshires.org and E-news
- Program Grants for Local Congregations
- Jewish Federations of North America

### Fundraising

- Annual Campaign
- Development
- Communications & Marketing
- Legacy Circle Program
- Major Donors Program



### Israel & Overseas

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ISRAEL CRISIS FUND                          | Haifa Women's Crisis Shelter                  |
| Jewish Agency for Israel                    | Israel Association for Child Protection (ELI) |
| Joint Distribution Committee                | Meir Panim                                    |
| World ORT                                   | Neve Michael Children's Village               |
| Partnership2Gether- Afula Gilboa            | Yad L'Kashish                                 |
| Mishkan Ein Harod & Clark Art Collaboration | iRep Religious Pluralism Grants               |
| Ethiopian National Project                  |   |

### Caring for Those in Need

- Food & Emergency Assistance
- Hebrew Free Loans
- Community Social Worker
- Meals on Wheels
- Older Adult Kosher Lunches
- Older Adult Holiday Care Packages
- Tikkun Olam Volunteer Opportunities
- Ahavath Sholem Cemetery
- Essential Needs Collections
- JFS of Western MA - Berkshire Resettlement

### Ensuring a Jewish Future

- PJ Library Books & Resources
- Family Programming
- Family Volunteer Opportunities
- Jewish Education Grants to TAA, KI, CBI, and Hevreh.
- ADL World of Difference Program
- Israel Travel/Study Scholarships
- Jewish Camp Scholarships
- Public School Advocacy
- Taglit Birthright
- UMASS Hillel
- Williams Jewish Religious Center

## Building Community | Strengthening Identity | Caring for those in Need

### Across the Berkshires

- Kosher Hot Meals & Care Visits**  
Provided more than **3,400 nutritious meals, 520 holiday care packages, and visits** for hundreds of older adults.
- Social Services**  
Provided case management and counseling, through a Jewish lens, by a licensed social worker to more than **100 community members**.
- Emergency & Specific Assistance**  
Provided **83 holiday food cards, emergency grants, and interest-free loans** to provide a **safety net** for community members.
- Jewish Education**  
Provided a high-quality Jewish education for **121 children and young adults** through Jewish education grants to TAA, KI, CBI and Hevreh's religious schools.
- Family Programming**  
Supported programming for over **325 parents, grandparents, and youth**, strengthening their connections to the Jewish community and helping them build supportive relationships with Jewish peers.
- PJ Library & PJ Our Way**  
Distributed more than **1,740 Jewish children's books** to **146 children**, nurturing their Jewish identity and helping their families embrace Jewish values and traditions.

- Camp, Israel, and Campus Life**  
Funded transformative Jewish camp and Israel experiences for **40 local youth** and enhanced Jewish life for over **2,500 college students** at UMASS Amherst and Williams College.
- Community Programming**  
Engaged more than **7,000 participants** in celebrating Jewish life and connecting as a community through more than **137 cultural, educational, and holiday programs**.
- Berkshire Jewish Voice**  
Primary resource for **over 5,000 readers**, engaging our community in Jewish life and broadening our spiritual, political, and cultural understanding.
- Community Relations & Advocacy**  
Provided **a proactive voice and advocacy** combating anti-Semitism in our community and supporting anti-bias training for over **2,300 students and educators** in Berkshire County schools.
- Tikkun Olam Volunteer (TOV) Network**  
Engaged over **150 volunteers** in more than **1,500 hours of service** to the Berkshire Jewish Community.

### In Israel & Overseas

- Our Israel Emergency Campaign** has provided **vital relief for millions of Israelis from every faith and background. Initial funding has focused on these critical areas:**
  - Lifeline Services:** Federation funding has helped provide lifesaving services, including food assistance, clothing, housing for evacuees, financial aid, medical care, spiritual care, classes for evacuated children, and support to the healthcare system.
  - Medical & Trauma Relief:** Federation funding has supported medical equipment, dedicated hotlines, training for thousands of caregivers and responders, and ongoing support to emergency teams. We help provide direct care to more than a million people, including first responders, lone soldiers, families, and caregivers coping with the loss, injury, or abduction of their relatives and friends.
  - Economic Relief & Recovery:** Israelis are struggling financially. Federation is helping fund economic relief efforts, investing in frontline communities, and providing loans to businesses to help ensure a resilient and stable economy.
- In addition, through our annual campaign, we provided direct support in Israel** to after-school programs for **at-risk students**, shelter for **battered women**, a supportive home for **abandoned youth**, counseling for sexually **abused women**, food security for **low-income individuals and youth**, and assistance for the **frail and elderly**.

*This is just a sampling of how, together, we made a difference in the lives of others this year.*



The 2023 Annual Campaign raised \$1,228,290

The Israel Emergency Campaign Raised an additional \$329,000

Thank you for helping ensure a vibrant and secure  
Berkshire Jewish community!

*“It is not what one says, but rather what one does that makes all the difference in the world” – Pirkei Avot 1:17*

Thank you to our 1,118 donors and many community volunteers who helped make the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ 2023 campaign a resounding success! Together, we bring dignity and care to the vulnerable, engage the next generation, and create meaningful and vibrant Jewish life across the Berkshires and beyond.



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Antisemitism in Schools & Academia

With Rabbi Ron Fish, ADL Northeast Division Director of Antisemitism Advocacy and Education

Sunday, March 17 at 12:45 pm

at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire

270 State Road, Great Barrington, MA

This program is geared towards students, parents, caregivers, and grandparents concerned about antisemitism in **middle school through college**. We will explore the current climate in schools and on campuses and discuss how to respond.

Vegetarian Pizza Lunch Provided.

REGISTER AT: [tinyurl.com/ADLSchools](https://tinyurl.com/ADLSchools)

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With Rabbi Ron Fish, ADL Northeast Division Director of Antisemitism Advocacy and Education

Sunday, March 17 at 4:00 pm

at Knesset Israel

16 Colt Road, Pittsfield, MA

Learn how antisemitism is impacting communities locally, regionally, and nationally and how we can respond. Presentation followed by Q & A.

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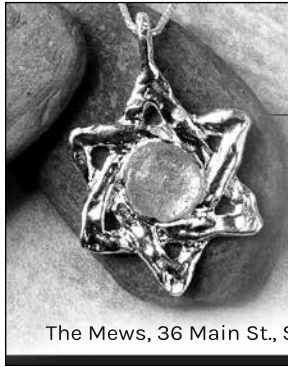
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# OBITUARIES

## OBITUARIES,

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considering a career in classical music. She graduated from St. Savior High School and enrolled in Hunter College in NYC at age 16.

Melinda married Dr. Irving Tanzman in 1960, and they had four children. Melinda completed her bachelor's degree in psychology at MCLA. She continued her studies in psychology, earning a masters Ph.D. from SUNY Albany in 1979. Melinda served on the faculty of the Educational Psychology department at SUNY Albany, teaching graduate classes and mentoring generations of school psychologists at the Child Research and Study Center. She provided consultation services on behalf of families and school districts throughout the Albany area. As the consulting psychologist at the Schenectady Head Start program, Melinda developed their early literacy program, counseled and supported families, and conducted significant longitudinal research on the impact of early literacy on later school performance.

She maintained a small private practice and was licensed as a psychologist in both NY and MA. Active in her local community, Melinda served on the Board of Trustees of Pine Cobble School for many years. As Board Chair in the mid-1990s, she helped facilitate the trade that resulted in Pine Cobble's acquisition of the Cluett Estate and the gifting of the former Pine Cobble school building to the town of Williamstown to house the library and historical museum.

In 1980, Melinda married the love of her life, Burton Shapiro. They created a wonderful, blended family with six children: Andrew, Loren, Beth, George, David, and Jayson. Melinda and Burt enjoyed tennis, classical concerts, and regularly traveled to southwestern Florida for as much time as their busy careers allowed. They built a lovely home in Stephentown, NY to split the distance of their regular commutes to work in Albany and North Adams, respectively.

Melinda was pre-deceased by her younger sister, Valerie Bell, and beloved son, David Tanzman. She is survived by her husband, Burt Shapiro; their children and spouses, Beth (Craig), George (Phelia), and Jayson (Jen) Tanzman, and Andrew (Christine) and Loren (Jeanie) Shapiro; sisters Mary Weigand, Jeanmarie Trosko, and Selma Shapiro; brother Stuart Shapiro; seven grandchildren, Kaitlin Levesque, Leah, Rachel and Ben Tanzman, Max, Nina, and Casey Shapiro; and two great-grandchildren Alexis Taylor and Sam Shapiro.

A graveside service was held on Tuesday, December 26, at Beth Israel Cemetery, Clarksburg, MA.

Donations in her honor may be made to the Pine Cobble School, 163 Gale Road, Williamstown, MA 01267.

## Barbara Ann Gold, 92, incredible joie de vivre, many interests

LENOX – Barbara Ann Gold (nee Port), 92, of New York City, passed away peacefully on Tuesday, December 26, 2023, with her family by her side.

Bobbie, as she was known to family and friends, was born November 24, 1931, to parents Max and Diana Port in Bronx, NY, and moved to Woodmere, NY, when she was 9. She graduated from Woodmere High School and attended Wheaton College and Adelphi University.

She met her beloved husband, Arthur A. Gold, MD, at camp in the Berkshires and lived happily with him on Long Island, NYC, and Lenox. She had incredible joie de vivre, loved music, theater, ballet, museums, books, movies, travel, canoeing, kayaking, and spending time with family and friends.

Bobbie is survived by her children, Joseph (Claudia), Andrew (Donna), Patti (David), and Diana (Christopher); grandchildren Suzanne (Allison), Hannah, Eli, Julia, and Eric; and

great-granddaughter Arlo.

**Robert (Bob) Alan Korostoff, 95, entrepreneur, known for his warmth and humor**

LENOX – Robert (Bob) Alan Korostoff, 95, died peacefully surrounded by his loving family on Monday, December 25, 2023.

Born in NY on November 13, 1928, to the late Abraham and Esther Korostoff, Bob graduated from Far Rockaway High School in 1946 and obtained his bachelor's degree in Business at CCNY. It was delight at first sight when Bob met Judith Glatzer on a blind date under the clock at the Astor Hotel, and they married in 1956 on Long Island.

Bob was an entrepreneur and a confident salesman. He founded Lloyd's of New York Messenger Service in the early 1960s. Along with his partner, Bob grew the business to six offices, employed over 300 messengers, and hand-delivered packages for the top law, accounting, advertising, and architectural firms of the day. Bob sold the business in 1989, after which he and Judie moved from Long Island to an enjoyable retirement in the Berkshires.

Known for his warmth and humor, Bob loved banter and jokes but was also very much at ease offering words of genuine comfort. Energized by activity outdoors, Bob enjoyed chopping wood, hiking, running, and, later, walking, with his dogs. He practiced yoga into his nineties. Watching a Yankees game with a dog on his lap and a stash of cookies was one of Bob's greatest pleasures. Bob loved sharing a meal with family and friends; he loved food, especially Judie's cooking.

Judie will remember Bob for his most beautiful blue eyes, bluer than anyone could imagine, his generous "I love yous," and his warm smile.

In addition to his wife Judie of Lenox, Bob is survived by his children, Jon of Philadelphia, David of NYC, and Julie of Needham, MA; two granddaughters, Olivia and Sophia; brother- and sister-in-law Marty and Susan Fischer; and cherished nieces and nephews. Bob was predeceased by his brother Norman and sister-in-law, Edythe.

In keeping with Bob's wishes, all services will be private. Donations may be made to the Berkshire Humane Society, 214 Barker Road, Pittsfield, MA 01201, [berkshirehumane.org](http://berkshirehumane.org).

**Norman J. Schwalbe, 92, local elementary school educator, program director at JCC**

PITTSFIELD – Norman J. Schwalbe, 92, died on Monday, January 1, at Mt. Greylock Extended Care.

Norman was born in New York City on October 29, 1931, a son of Leonard and Florence (Rheinos) Schwalbe. He attended schools in NYC, graduating from New York University with a bachelor of science degree in Education in 1961. He received his master's degree in Education from the former North Adams State College (MCLA). He was nominated and inducted into Who's Who in American University and Colleges.

He served as program director of the Jewish Community Center in Pittsfield from 1961 to 1963. Norman was a Korean War veteran in the US Army and played various sports while in the service.

Norman began his teaching career in 1970 in the Pittsfield public school system, teaching students in many of the Pittsfield elementary schools. He retired in 1994 after 24 years of teaching. While teaching, Norman was also employed at the former England Brothers as an assistant manager and at Sears, both in Allendale.

Norman married the former Irene Mindlin, who predeceased him on July

## OBITUARIES,

*continued on page 19*

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# Connecting with Community

## Nourish Your Body, Mind, and Soul!

### Meals-on-Wheels & Meals to Go – Advance Reservation Required

Kosher lunch will be prepared on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. *Meals to go* will be ready by noon for pickup at the Kneset Israel kitchen door, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield. All meals-on-wheels will be delivered by Federation volunteers in the early afternoon.

**Please call (413) 442-2200 no later than 9 a.m. to reserve your meal for pickup and to arrange delivery if standing instructions are not in place.** All are welcome to reserve meals for pick-up, although delivery may be limited in certain circumstances.

The menus listed below are planned, but may be modified depending on availability of ingredients. When making a reservation, please inform us if a person in your party has a food allergy. Adults 60 and over: \$3 suggested donation. Adults under 60: \$7 per person.

**Volunteers are Vital!** Volunteer drivers who can deliver meals-on-wheels are always appreciated. Please call Molly Meador at (413) 442-4360, ext. 14. The Federation’s kosher hot lunch program is offered in collaboration with Elder Services of Berkshire County.



## What’s for Lunch?

Gluten Free Main Entrée \*\* and Dairy Free Main Entrée #

*Kosher lunch will be prepared on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.*

### FEBRUARY

**MONDAY, 19** ..... Closed for Presidents’ Day.

**TUESDAY, 20** ..... Baked ziti, broccoli, mine-strone soup, roll, and cookies.

**THURSDAY, 22** ..... Turkey white bean chili\*\*, rice, salad, whole wheat bread, and applesauce.

**MONDAY, 26** ..... Roasted vegetable pizza, salad, split pea soup, and chocolate pudding.

**TUESDAY, 27** ..... Turkey, sun-dried tomato, and spinach frittata\*\*, hash browns, pinto bean soup, pumpernickel bread, and parve cookies.

**THURSDAY, 29** ..... Sesame ginger chicken\*\*, brown rice noodles, Oriental blend vegetables, salad, farmer’s loaf, and pineapple.

### MARCH

**MONDAY, 4** ..... Meatloaf\*\*, peas and carrots, mashed potatoes, salad, rye bread, and peaches.

**TUESDAY, 5** ..... Pasta primavera, mushroom soup, salad, whole wheat bread, and brownies.

**THURSDAY, 7** ..... Roasted cod with tomato relish\*\*, Brussels sprouts, celery rice soup, hearty white bread, and fruit cocktail.

**MONDAY, 11** ..... Open faced turkey sandwich#, corn, lentil soup, rye bread, and pears.

**TUESDAY, 12** ..... Tuna pasta bake, meadow blend vegetables, tomato soup, whole wheat bread, and chocolate pudding.

**THURSDAY, 14** ..... Corned beef and cabbage casserole\*\*, chicken consommé, salad, sour-dough bread, and orange tea biscuits.

**MONDAY, 18** ..... Potato knish, roasted cauliflower, carrot red lentil soup, oat bread, and butterscotch pudding.

**TUESDAY, 19** ..... Moroccan vegetable stew\*\*, herbed couscous, salad, naan bread, and baklava.

**THURSDAY, 21** ..... Stuffed cabbage casserole#, baby carrots, chicken noodle soup, challah, and pineapple.

**MONDAY, 25** ..... Cheese blintzes, California blend vegetables, zucchini rice soup, farmer’s loaf, and applesauce.

**TUESDAY, 28** ..... Herb roasted turkey tenders and vegetables\*\*, couscous, salad, pumpernickel bread, and parve cookies.

**THURSDAY, 28** ..... Fish stew\*\*, green beans almondine, rice, salad, hearty white bread, and Mandarin oranges.

### APRIL

**MONDAY, 1** ..... Meatloaf\*\*, peas and carrots, mashed potatoes, salad, rye bread, and fruit cocktail.

**TUESDAY, 2** ..... Pierogies with mushrooms and onions, Brussels sprouts, vegetable soup, multi-grain bread, and cherry pie.

**THURSDAY, 4** ..... Gochujang chicken with stir fry vegetables\*\*, brown rice, salad, Chinese noodles, and pineapple.

**MONDAY, 8** ..... Spaghetti with meat sauce#, roasted cauliflower, turkey celery rice soup, garlic bread, and peaches.

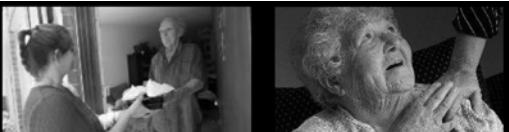
**TUESDAY, 9** ..... Spinach quiche, balsamic glazed carrots, butternut squash soup, roll, and chocolate chip cookies.

**THURSDAY 11** ..... Honey mustard salmon\*\*, noodle kugel, broccoli, salad, challah, and apple dumpling.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The suggested donation is completely voluntary. Seniors who cannot pay a voluntary donation will continue to receive a meal, no questions asked. We appreciate your understanding.

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Kneset Israel –  
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### ONGOING MINYANS

Saturday, ..... 9:30 a.m.  
Sunday, ..... 8:45 a.m.  
Tuesday, ..... 7 p.m. Zoom only  
Thursday, ..... 7 p.m., Zoom only  
Friday, ..... 5:45 p.m.

### CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

Friday, February 23 ..... 5:17 p.m.  
Friday, March 1 ..... 5:25 p.m.  
Friday, March 8 ..... 5:34 p.m.  
Friday, March 15 ..... 6:42 p.m.  
Friday, March 22 ..... 6:50 p.m.  
Friday, March 29 ..... 6:58 p.m.

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OBITUARIES

**OBITUARIES,**  
*continued from page 17*

12, 2015. He is survived by his son Hal Schwalbe and his wife Liane of Pittsfield, and several nieces and nephews. In addition to his wife, he was predeceased by two sisters, Shirley Leisner and Doris Katzka.

Graveside services took place on Thursday, January 4, at Ahavath Sholem Cemetery, Pittsfield, with Rabbi David Weiner, spiritual leader of Knesset Israel, officiating.

**Lois Swawite, 86, wife, mother, grandmother, friend**

RICHMOND – Lois Swawite, 86, passed away on Monday, December 4, 2023.

Born in 1937, Lois was the beloved wife of David. She was a dear mother, grandmother, and friend.

Memorial donations may be made to the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, or to The Albany Institute of History & Art.

**Robert R. “Bugsy” Siegel, 92, avid reader, enjoyed movies, telling jokes**

BOYNTON BEACH, FL – Robert R. “Bugsy” Siegel, 92, passed away on Monday, January 1, following a brief hospitalization. He was the husband of the late Norma (Rubenstein) Siegel. They had been married for over 50 years.

Born July 28, 1931, in Pittsfield, the son of Joseph

and Pauline (Newman) Siegel, Robert attended Drake University in Des Moines, IA. He served his country as a member of the United States Army, stationed in Korea in 1953. He was employed by General Electric and later owned and operated his own furniture business for 12 years. He had been a self-employed real estate appraiser for the last 23 years of his life.

Robert was an avid reader. His favorite author was Robert Ludlum. He also enjoyed watching movies, telling jokes, eating Italian food, and cheering on the New York Yankees.

He leaves his children, Joseph Siegel of Smithfield, RI, and Donna Siegel of Lake Worth, FL; brother Leon of Boynton Beach; sister-in-law Elaine Streger; brother-in-law Harold Rubenstein; and many nieces and nephews.

A funeral was held on Sunday, January 7, at Beth Israel Memorial Chapel, Boynton Beach. A service with military honors followed at Eternal Light Memorial Gardens, Boynton Beach. Donations may be made to Boys Town of South Florida and St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital.

**Evelyn Garbowit, 99, dedicated volunteer, ardent fitness enthusiast**

PITTSFIELD – Evelyn Garbowit, 99, died Monday, January 1, at her home on Ivy Lane, a

street that she named when the builder whom she knew developed the neighborhood in the 1950s. Evelyn passed away peacefully in the care of her extraordinary aide, Janet Pryce, who provided loving support and companionship during the final years of her life.

Born in New York City in 1924, to Samuel Feldstein and Pauline Margulies Feldstein Kobritz, her family settled in Pittsfield.

In 1953, Evelyn married George Garbowit, also of Pittsfield. They were together until his death in 1990.

Evelyn was a dedicated volunteer in the Pittsfield community as well as the local Jewish community. She volunteered for many years at Hancock Shaker Village, Berkshire Medical Center, the blood bank, and Head Start. She also volunteered at the hospital in Jupiter, FL, when she spent winters there. She was a life-long supporter and volunteer for Hadassah, for which she received a service award that she cherished.

Evelyn was known for being an ardent fitness enthusiast and loved long-distance walking, often conversing with people she met along the way. She loved nothing more than enjoying the company and conversation of loved ones and family.

Evelyn is survived by her three sons, Stephen (Rona) of Hamden, CT, Daniel (Wendy

Mantel) of Ossining, NY, and David, MD, of Livingston, NJ; five grandchildren whom she adored, Aviva, Ilana, Benjamin, Gabriel, and Luisa; four great-grandchildren, Zachary, Emily, Evan, and Lia. She was predeceased by her siblings, Roslyn Feldstein Alexander and Victor Feldstein.

A graveside service took place on Friday, January 5, at Knesset Israel Cemetery.

Donations can be made to Hadassah ([hadassah.org/donate](http://hadassah.org/donate)).

**Susanne Ackerman, 83, beloved mother, grandmother, and friend**

PITTSFIELD – Susanne Ackerman, 83, passed away on Saturday, January 20. She was a beloved mother, grandmother, and friend.

Born August 18, 1940 in New York City, daughter of the late Ruth (Feinman) and Martin Ackerman, she lived at different stages of her life in the states of New York (Brooklyn, Manhattan, Long Beach), New Jersey, and Massachusetts. Susanne was extremely bright. She finished high school early, was well-liked, beautiful, witty, sarcastic, funny, sharp, complex, and always dressed beautifully with her bold flare. She was always up on the news, and later in life a Massachusetts sports fan.

Susanne worked some

years as a teacher, secretary, and then a stockbroker. She was an avid novel reader, enjoyed the Sunday New York Times crosswords and Scrabble, and listening to classics like Barbara Streisand and Frank Sinatra. Many people have said they remember her as being unfiltered, always supportive, honest, non-judgmental, vibrant, witty, always put-together, and a big personality. Cousins described her as being like a big sister and the one they could really open up to. She will be missed deeply and dearly but never forgotten.

Susanne is survived by her daughter Jennifer Casher Lehman; son-in-law John Lehman; and three very beloved grandchildren Jack, Luke and Tyler, the lights of her life.

A kiddush and remembrance was held on Wednesday, January 24 at Central Synagogue in New York City.

Donations may be made to Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, 270 State Road, Great Barrington, MA 01230 or Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, 196 South Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201.



# BERKSHIRE JEWISH CONGREGATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

### Welcome to the Jewish Berkshires

Everyone is welcome to attend services and events at any of the organizations listed here.

Please call the organizations directly to confirm service times or to inquire about membership.

Learn more about our Jewish community and find great events on the community calendar at:

**JEWISHBERKSHIRES.ORG**

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**Congregation Ahavath Sholom Reconstructionist**  
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(413) 528-4197, [ahavathsholom.com](http://ahavathsholom.com)

**Congregation Beth Israel Reform**  
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(413) 663-5830, [cbiberkshires.com](http://cbiberkshires.com)

**Hevreh of Southern Berkshire Reform**  
270 State Rd., Great Barrington, MA (413) 528-6378, [hevreh.org](http://hevreh.org)

**Israel Philatelist Society**  
c/o Dr. Ed Helitzer,  
(413) 447-7622

**Jewish Federation of the Berkshires**  
196 South St., Pittsfield, MA  
(413) 442-4360, [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org)

**Jewish War Veterans**  
Commander Robert Waldheim  
(413) 822-4546, [sellit4@aol.com](mailto:sellit4@aol.com)

**Knesset Israel Conservative**  
16 Colt Rd., Pittsfield, MA  
(413) 445-4872, [knessetisrael.org](http://knessetisrael.org)

**Temple Anshe Amunim Reform**  
26 Broad St., Pittsfield, MA  
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BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES FROM ISRAEL

A Seed Was Planted

By Roy Kozupsky

In the aftermath of Oct. 7, Roy Kozupsky of Stockbridge donated to aid organizations addressing the crisis in Israel, yet he felt “the act of giving money left me somewhat unfulfilled and pondering how I might do more. A seed was planted.”

An attorney who has both lived in Israel and visited many times over the last 40 years, Roy asked his wife Leslie (formerly Federation’s development officer), whether she would be okay with his volunteering in Israel. “I explained to her that it was painful for me to be a bystander to these unfolding events,” he writes. “There are times in life where you can talk all you want about the ills of the world until the sun sets, but at the end of the day sometimes one must act firsthand. Fortunately, Leslie replied, ‘You should go.’”

He applied for a role with Sar-El, a program that gives volunteers “an opportunity to live and work besides Israeli soldiers and gain an insider view of Israel.” On December 28, Roy flew to Israel and found he had been assigned to the Hatzetim air force base in the Negev. Here are some edited excerpts from four essays that Roy wrote about his experiences volunteering as a civilian with the IDF that were shared with professional colleagues, friends, and family. Roy’s reflections have been published in their entirety on his Medium page and will be linked to in the online version of this story on the Berkshire Jewish Voice Highlights page on Federation’s website, jewishberkshires.org.

Upon arriving, we were reminded that we are indeed in a war zone. So, of course, the first thing they alerted us to is where the bombs shelters are if air raid sirens should go off. Nonchalantly, they mentioned that you have only 60 seconds to get into a shelter.

At the base we (about 100 or so volunteers) were assigned to a large warehouse-established for logistical supplies and food distribution. Our job was to pack a large box (about 3’x 3’) with food for the soldiers on the front lines – breakfast, lunch and some snacks – for 2 soldiers for 2 days.

We worked 7 hours a day and every movement was choreographed on a long assembly line. All in all, I estimate that one box contains over 24 different items – staples like coffee, tea, sugar, chips, freeze dried high-protein soup, cans of tuna and

the troops is a lot or little in the scheme of things. But the soldiers (and their commander) we met have assured us that our work is important, and they are indeed grateful for our contribution.

So why did the 30 percent of the group who were not Jewish come to Israel to help? Maybe like me they see the war in epic historical terms that will likely impact all of us outside the boundaries of the Middle East. They recognized that hatred can metastasize quickly, even in democratic countries, when societies are complacent. But let me share this – at our last group dinner together, every Jew in the room and all the IDF soldiers stood up, applauded, and thanked every non-Jewish volunteer who chose to come from far-away places to help Israel. The applause, which lasted a good 5 minutes, was tear jerking and thunderous. We all bonded working together over the past 5 days, and, in a dirty large tent, our souls were now glued together.

Israel does have friends. And it’s a two-way street – we helped the country and in doing so, we helped our souls.

[After serving for 5 days in the desert, Roy transferred to Tel Hashomer military base outside Ramat Gan]

In Tel Hashomer, our group was tasked with helping process, clean, and then redeploy for distribution to the front lines an enormous number of pants, parkas, and sleeping bags for the young men and women fighting on the front lines.

Probably overlooked by many who have not served in the armed forces and been in actual conflict is the fact that clothes and sleeping bags get filthy. It was winter in Israel and even in the south there were occasional downpours creating muddy territory where fighting is taking place.

The complexity of cleaning these items is unfathomable, especially when one considers the number of reservists who have come back to Israel to be deployed to the front lines in the north and south. Thousands of dirty garments and sleeping bags arrive each evening from around the country, which then go right into enormous washing machines and then into large dryers. They are refolded, bound (and in the case of sleeping bags – with a handwritten note of thanks to the troops) and then taken back to the front lines! In our last two days, we processed about 3,000 pants, 1,000 parkas, and another 600 bags.

Interestingly, many of these parkas had not been used since their initial purchase in 2001! And this is where volunteers come in. Usually, the army would do this job, but now everyone is serving in other military capacities and there is little excess capacity in the system to do such seemingly menial tasks. This is what it takes to wage a war. The logistics are mind-boggling. Everyone in our group feels privileged to help in some way. All efforts count, even helping clean dirty sleeping bags – and when I say dirty, I mean filthy. If, after a day’s work in the laundry, I had to go through passport control at any airport, I am quite sure they would have turned me straight around due to some environmental concern.

The events in Israel in 2023, culminating in the massacre on October 7th, will forever impact how Jews in America think. One might say no big deal as our thoughts and ideas are always evolving and indeed, our sages say that is something to aspire to. But I am talking about one’s moral and political compass – how we go about navigating and thinking through our emotions, rationalizations and decisions when dealing with epic issues in life. My sense is that the year 2023 in Israel was and continues to be a worldwide transformative event. I suspect our individual compasses will need some recalibration, as well.

My sense is that the year 2023 in Israel was and continues to be a worldwide transformative event. I suspect our individual compasses will need some recalibration, as well.

olives, chocolate – requiring 100 focused people working together. The mood on the packing line was indeed jovial at times and the time can pass quite quickly especially if, like me, you are surrounded by a group of Australian volunteers. It takes about 35 people behind the lines in some support capacity to support each Israeli trooper on the front lines. Think about the math of that for a moment! Once finished, these boxes are sealed and stacked, they have to be hauled away to another distribution center to be combined with the actual meals, and then shipped to the front.

On the base you actually get little news of the war or the outside world unless you decide to go online in the evening during some free time to get a pulse of the news. One night, for instance, we did not know of all the rocket attacks in Tel Aviv and I only learned of the event from a text from my daughter, Rachel. I had been told to be prepared for many sleepless nights as an air force base is loud at all times during the night. We slept in big tents about 20 miles south of the base, literally in the middle of the desert, where it gets cold at night. So many reservists have been called up for this war that the base itself is overflowing and cannot accommodate all of the young men and women who have joined combat units.

All night long, the fighter jets took off and landed – the noise is thunderous. I won’t say it was as bad as other volunteers’ snoring, but the cacophony was enough to deprive one of a good night’s sleep – which, I soon learned, could only be achieved by using the newest Apple ear buds-full throttle on the noise cancellation setting, with listening to the Grateful Dead in the background. Food was good, but I had no chance of remaining a vegetarian.

Nationalities include South Africa, Australia, Poland, France, Germany, UK, New Zealand. I estimate that up to 30% were NOT Jewish, just very aligned with Israel and its values. All come from very diverse backgrounds and cultures, but there are some common denominators. Those who were Jewish are Zionists. All volunteers believe not only in Israel as a country that needs safe borders – they believe that the Jewish Diaspora can’t exist without a strong Israel. There is no question in their minds as to the color of evil. It has no shades of gray. And maybe most importantly all have family histories, like my own, replete with ancestors (parents and grandparents) who endured painful lives just because they were Jewish. Everyone here knows how apathetic and even hostile the world was to our ancestors.

They simply wanted to contribute to the State of Israel in some way. We really don’t know if the 10,728 boxes of food that we put together and packed for



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BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES FROM ISRAEL

An Experience of Spiritual Whiplash

By Rabbi David Weiner



Rabbi Weiner captured the scene at Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet) headquarters in Jerusalem

In mid-December, I traveled on a three-day Rabbinical Assembly mission to Israel with about twenty North American colleagues. The goal of the trip was to support Israeli Masorti (Conservative) rabbis and their communities by showing up from overseas, listening to their stories, and offering our compassionate presence. The journey was an experience of spiritual whiplash – unfathomable stories of violence, loss, and trauma alternated with inspiring accounts of taking care of others in a time of need. I was repeatedly overwhelmed by the suffering, then amazed by speakers’ reservoirs of strength. Though the trip was physically and emotionally exhausting, I am glad I was there, personally and to represent Knesset Israel, the Jewish community of the Berkshires, and Conservative rabbis from North America.

The nature of the attacks on October 7 and their aftermath brought about a crisis of trust for Israelis. Betrayed by their neighbors, abandoned by the army, organizing for mutual support despite government intransigence, and virtually isolated on the world stage, many no longer believe that anyone can be trusted. The undertone was heartbreaking: Are you really my colleague, my ally, my friend? Do you actually care? Can I trust you to hold the story of what has happened to me, to us? Do you have my back, or will you also betray me? The visit was like an extended shiva call, where just dropping in with a warm hug brought a bit of healing and hope.

Tuesday was an especially difficult day. It began with a visit to Kfar Aza, one of the kibbutzim in the Gaza Envelope destroyed by Hamas terrorists on October 7. Walking on the lanes of Kfar Aza, able to see the fences dividing Israel from Gaza – both the one that was knocked down during the attack and the new one that has been built - and plumes of smoke over Gaza City, we learned how Hamas invaders not only murdered and kidnapped and raped and terrorized, but how they did so with precise planning, intending to trigger every aspect of inherited Jewish trauma. The morning I spent in Kfar Aza was devastating, more intense for me than visiting sites of Nazi atrocities in Europe or racial violence in the American South.

The afternoon brought narratives of hope, volunteerism, and resilience. Neve Hanna, a youth village in Kiryat Gat, provides a refuge for children with difficult home lives. There we spoke with the rabbi and several counselors, 18- and 19-year-old Israelis who had opted to serve as role models during a year of service after high school. We learned how the work had changed during the war and how the center had gone above and beyond to serve its children and their families. At an enormous Refreshment Center built from scratch by volunteers for troops on break from the war, its leader (a professor from Bar Ilan University), proudly gave us a tour. There were outdoor kitchens, dining areas, and several tent dormitories lovingly filled with bunk beds, home mattresses, and donated linens – all a palpable expression of *hesed*, of caring and love for soldiers tasked with risking their lives to make southern Israel a place that is safe to live in.

Later, at a synagogue that has been repurposed as a school – because its bomb shelter is large enough to accommodate a large number of children – we heard harrowing testimony from a member who coordinates the city department of mental health, a rabbi who has officiated at several funerals for those murdered on October 7. Other congregants wanted to speak with American rabbis about the pressures they face, their loved ones in the IDF, and their worries and fears for the future. It was complicated to listen – so much raw pain and grief, anger so close to the surface, and yet so much courage and perseverance.

Throughout the day, I was sitting on the bus with an Israeli colleague, Rabbi Gustavo from our sister synagogue in Ra’anana. When I made it clear that I had come to Israel to listen to him, he shared stories of supporting the family

of a hostage who grew up in his town; how he cares for his congregation and its 80 soldiers on active duty; the ways he has come to serve several nonprofit and volunteer relief groups; how his synagogue coordinates youth outreach for 700 internally displaced people temporarily living in a hotel; what it was like to travel on behalf of the Israeli government to speak on its behalf in Europe; and what he believes American Jews and their rabbis should be doing.

I was too exhausted from jetlag Tuesday night. I fell into bed in Jerusalem and slept soundly until my alarm rang, six hours later.

By 6 a.m. Wednesday, though, I was crossing the bridge near the Jaffa Gate at sunrise, on my way to the families section of the Kotel. There we lay tefillin and prayed the morning service. A verse from Psalm 30 jumped out at me – *Tears may linger for the night, but joy comes with the dawn*. There had been a lot of tears the day before. I could hardly take in what I was seeing and hearing. And still the new morning dawning over the holy city gave me a fresh reserve of strength. It would be another hard day, as we learned about the sexual violence of October 7, delivered socks and underwear donated by our congregations for soldiers on the northern front, and visited with families of hostages, the retired diplomats who are helping advocate for their loved ones, and a survivor of the music festival. But for the moment, at a time of unfathomable pain, we were able to breathe the air of Jerusalem, express gratitude for a new day, and celebrate our capacity to care for each other. *Baruch hanotein laya’eif koach* – Praised be the One who gives strength to the weary.

Rabbi David Weiner is the spiritual leader of Knesset Israel in Pittsfield.

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CULTURE & ARTS

TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE

Portugal – Hidden Treasures in a Country with a Rich Jewish History

By Carol Goodman Kaufman / Special to the BJV



My good friend Rhonda and I recently had the opportunity to tag along with our spouses as they embarked on a lecture tour through Spain and Portugal. While there, we took the opportunity to visit Jewish sites and learn about our people's history in both countries.

Although there's little physical evidence today of Jewish presence in Portugal, it turns out that it was a very rich one. Legend maintains that the first Jews came to Portugal during the time of King Solomon. But we have documented evidence that for 500 years, until the middle of the 13th century, the Jews there enjoyed peaceful and quite prosperous lives under

Moorish rule. Many famous Jews lived in Portugal during this period, serving the government as royal treasurers, tax collectors, advisors, and physicians to the kings. The cartographer Abraham Zacuto designed the charts that supported Portuguese navigators, and Abraham de Beja was himself a Jewish explorer sent by the king to find and bring back treasures.

The Jews were also successful in business. Perhaps the most well-known is statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator, and financier Isaac Abravanel, a member of one the most influential Jewish families in Portugal, so famous that streets in Israel carry his name. (I actually lived on *Rehov Abravanel* in Jerusalem!)

All that changed with the *Reconquista*, the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Next door in Spain, the rulers Ferdinand and Isabella had expelled, forcibly baptized, or murdered the Jews who refused baptism. Of the original 300,000 Jews in Spain, over two-thirds converted to Catholicism.

Conversion, of course, didn't cause the royals and the Church to stop harassing them. In fact, they called these converts *marrano*, or swine. Then, in 1478 the Church established the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition for the alleged purpose of "educating" the *conversos*. In reality they conducted trials of those they suspected of heresy. The process often involved incarceration and torture.

Things continued to get worse in Spain. The year 1492 didn't just see Columbus sail the ocean blue. On March 31st – Tisha B'av, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem – Ferdinand and Isabella issued their infamous Alhambra Decree. That edict forced all practicing Jews to flee the country.

And that's how almost 100,000 Jews came to Portugal. Unfortunately, the move didn't work out too well for our Sephardi cousins because in 1496, the new Portuguese King Manoel I married Isabella, daughter of – you guessed it – the notorious Ferdinand and Isabella.

As a condition of marriage imposed by the Spanish monarchs, Manoel had to order the newly arrived Jews to become Catholic or leave the country – without their children. Many of those forcibly converted, the so-called New Christians, continued to practice the faith of their ancestors in secret. Why would they risk discovery? Scholars believe that because most of the Jews who fled Spain had already expressed their commitment to their faith by refusing to undergo baptism.

As an interesting side note, today's Jews in Portugal do not call them-

selves *Sephardi*. After all, Spain threw them out. Why would they want to keep the name, the Hebrew word for Spain being *Spharad*? No, they call themselves Portuguese Jews.

But even before the "holy" office came to town in 1536, signs of bad things to come appeared. Three days before Easter 1506, a full three decades before the Inquisition was officially established in Portugal, Dominican friars incited their congregants into a frenzy. The ensuing riot resulted in the slaughter of up to four thousand New Christians suspected of secretly practicing Judaism. The massacre began in the square right in front of the church. Those souls not murdered were deported.

But never forgotten. In the early 2000s, our guide Patricia's husband Joseph was the impetus behind the construction of the Memorial to the Victims of the 1506 Massacre. Located in the square right where the killing began, right in front of the St. Dominic Church, it was installed as part of the 500th anniversary of the pogrom. A bronze Star of David is embedded on the flat surface of a round travertine stone. The plaque reads, "In memory of the thousands of Jews who were victimized by intolerance and religious fanaticism, killed in the massacre that started on 19 April 1506, on this square." A verse from the Book of Job is etched into the base. "O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place."

Over the next 250 years, the Church and its inquisitors decimated what had once been a vibrant community and important component of Portuguese culture, scattering the remnants to ports across Europe, Asia, Africa, and as far as South America.

In the meantime, in 1755 a massive earthquake caused a tsunami that wiped out the lower parts of the city, including the Alfama, the Jewish neighborhood along the Tagus River. Little of the ghetto endures, but we did manage to see a few tiny reminders of our history by passing under the *Arco de Rosario* into the Judiaria, a warren of narrow, twisting passageways. A few windows near the top of one building are all that remain of the quarter's synagogue. And inside a gift shop stands the sole surviving segment of the ghetto wall. While we sauntered along the alleys, we encountered a group of students seeking Jewish sites as part of a scavenger hunt. There wasn't much beyond historical plaques to find.

Although the last public auto de fé took place in Portugal in 1765, the Inquisition itself was only abolished in 1821. The government officially permitted

Jews back into the country in 1800. Among the returnees were some wealthy Jewish families from Morocco and Gibraltar.

Flash forward to the mid-20th century. Although Portugal had betrayed the Jews back in the 15th and 16th centuries, when World War II came around, the country declared itself neutral and open its doors to the those fleeing the Nazis. But the government imposed one condition on the refugees: They must start a business so as not to be a burden on the state. Patricia brought us to a lush green park at which the Portuguese Jews welcomed their coreligionists and provided them with assistance to tide them over until they could support themselves.

The Jews ended up not just contributing to the economy but also to the nation's culture, including its culinary heritage. We sampled *bolas de Berlim*, decadent cream-filled pastries, at one of the ubiquitous neighborhood coffee houses.

The story goes that the Davidsohn family, fleeing northern Germany arrived in Lisbon before the outbreak of the war. Knowing that they needed to start a business quickly, their daughter Ruth convinced them to prepare and sell cakes to Germans living in the country. Their *bolas* evolved from the traditional German jam-filled doughnut to what is now the popular custard-filled ball.

According to the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish population of the entire country stands at only 3,100 today, but like that old joke about the desert island, two synagogues as well as a Chabad operate in the city. In 1871, fifty years after the end of the Inquisition, the government gave permission to the Jews to build the first synagogue since the late 15th century. Because Portuguese law prohibited a synagogue to either face the street or display Jewish symbols on its exterior, Lisbon's Synagogue Shaaré Tikvah, a Roman and Byzantine beauty, is hidden on a side street behind a fence and wall.

While the 15th century Jews in Portugal were refugees fleeing the Spanish Inquisition, the vast majority of the Jewish population today descend from Eastern European refugees. They are served by the Reform Sinagoga Ohel Jacob, built by Ashkenazi Jews in 1934.



The Memorial to the Victims of the 1506 Massacre



Lisbon's Synagogue Shaaré Tikvah



The Avner Cohen Chabad House in Lisbon



Arroz Doce (Portuguese Rice Pudding)

It shouldn't be too surprising that much of Portuguese cuisine was influenced by the Muslim Moors, since the two peoples lived side-by-side for centuries and shared similar food constraints. When they conquered the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century, the Moors brought rice from Asia. That grain became a staple in Portuguese cuisine. The arrival of cane sugar in the 13th century replaced molasses to make the pudding that is a favorite dessert among the Portuguese until today.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2¼ cups water  
½ teaspoon salt  
Peel of one lemon  
1 cup arborio rice
- 2 cups whole milk, heated  
1 cinnamon stick  
Ground cinnamon, for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

- Place the water, salt, and lemon rind into a medium pan and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and allow the water to simmer, covered, for 15 minutes. Remove the lemon peel from the water with a slotted spoon and discard. Add the rice to the water and bring it back up to a boil. Then reduce it to a simmer and allow the rice to absorb all of the water, about 10 minutes. Make sure to check that it doesn't burn.
- Next, slowly add the hot milk, about a half cup at a time, to the rice mixture. After each addition, allow the liquid to absorb before adding the next batch of milk. Stir frequently and keep the heat low, so as not to burn the rice. This should take about 25 to 30 minutes.
- Remove the cinnamon stick and pour the rice into individual dessert bowls. Sprinkle the top with cinnamon.
- Chill the rice for several hours before serving.

Under the name Carolinda Goodman, **Carol Goodman Kaufman** has just published her third picture book for young children. Detective Bears and Friends introduces readers to the whimsical names that various animal groups are called. In addition to her work for children, Kaufman also writes under her "real" name about food history (including for the Berkshire Jewish Voice). Her first novel, The First Murder, is set in the Berkshires. It will be released April 2 by TouchPoint Press.



CULTURE & ARTS

A Poet and We Bet You Didn't Know It  
Verse by Harold Grinspoon

Killing

Do you think you ever go there?  
I doubt it.  
I work my way down to a tunnel.  
Squeezing my body  
Over broken Israeli equipment.  
And there lay ahead – the tunnel.  
The tunnel was amazing. Well-engineered.  
I started to walk away  
    putting space between me and the group.  
Lonely, step by step. In silence and in fear.  
And in anguish.  
I moved by myself.  
This elaborate tunnel, built to kill Jews.  
I began to panic. Turn around, I must.  
Thoughts racing through my head.  
Do you know where I was?  
Gaza border. Hamas-dug tunnel.  
Death was awaiting, before discovery.



Harold Grinspoon is founder of the philanthropic foundation based in Longmeadow, MA, that bears his name, as well as the founder of PJ Library. These poems appear in the collection Harold Grinspoon's Creative World: Poetry I. Harold is also an accomplished sculptor whose works have a been on view at The Mount's "Sculpture Now" installation – shown here is "Family Reunion" (2017). He and his wife, Diane Troderman, have a home in the Berkshires.

A Body in Motion

My mind flashes back  
To where I spent my life.  
Yes, it's true,  
I grew up just being,  
With no real sense of feelings –  
Just a body in motion,  
From one thing to another.  
Just a body in motion.  
So why now do I ask these questions  
    about being mindful?  
Is it not a bit late?  
Time has run out on me?  
Perhaps you have a chance to look back  
    over your shoulder  
And see how you spent your life.  
Does that bring tears to your eyes?  
Hold on. Not so quick.

Begin your story in a place steeped in history.  
wedding | bar mitzvah | birthday | anniversary



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CULTURE & ARTS

Blue Like Me: Growing Up Jewish in India

On Thursday, March 14 at 7 p.m., meet Siona Benjamin, a painter originally from Mumbai now living in the US. Her works reflect her background of being brought up Jewish in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim India. She combines the imagery of her past with the role she plays in multicultural America today, making a mosaic inspired by both Indian miniature paintings and Sephardic icons.

This presentation in recognition of Women's History Month will be presented via Zoom. Register for this free program at the calendar of events at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org).

Siona Benjamin has always been driven to reflect upon the cultural boundary zones in which she has lived. Her intent for her viewers is to re-evaluate their notions and concepts about identity and race, hoping to peel back layers of misconceptions that may result in racism, hate and war. Over the years, she developed varied blue-skinned characters as self-portraits in assuming multiple roles and forms. She employs them as social and cultural agents in raising provocative issues about identity in a trans-cultural world.

For more on Siona's painting and other works and commissions, visit her website at [artsiona.com](http://artsiona.com). The images for this story were kindly provided by the artist.

The BJV had the chance to catch up with Siona Benjamin in January – our conversation was edited for length and clarity.



Siona Benjamin with a mural commissioned by Central Reform Congregation in St. Louis

*there. Now I think Jews generally are more conscious of the diversity.*

Israel always had Yemenite Jews and Jews of color and Moroccan Jews and all different kinds of Jews. They didn't *come from* anywhere. It's actually the Ashkenazi Jews that came in from Europe. People ask me, how come there are Jews in India? And I say, well, how come there are Jews in Poland? Because for us, Middle Eastern Jews come from Asia – Abraham came from the land of Ur, which is in Iraq, not in Eastern Europe. Ashkenazi Jews have lived in a bubble here for a long time. My family immigrated from India and they were there during the formation of Israel. I think America is very privileged and so can afford to have that viewpoint of having “embraced” the Jewish diversity in Israel and other parts of the world – something that was there already and always has been.

Ashkenazi people who came to Israel earlier on, unfortunately, imposed their Ashkenazi-ness a little bit too much on Jews of color. There has been a lot of pain and anger because of that. But I think things have changed now completely and everybody's accepting of everybody, which is the way it always should have been. We are all mixed with identities of where we came from, and there's no such thing as a pure Jew or a pure culture, a pure religion, or whatever.

**So how does that understanding inform your art – how you create it, how you present it, and how you want your audiences to understand and receive your work?**

That was a thing with me all along – it was just a question of being persistent and making sure that people understood that message. I knew from the very beginning that my Jewishness coming from India or Iraq or Iran or that part of the world was just as Jewish as “your” Jewishness. I also was sure that I was gentle and focused on the storytelling. Then people caught on. People are having me do all kinds of commissions and paintings and talks and lectures, to a point where it has become sort of “my time,” where I can talk about a celebration of Jewish diversity. When people who don't understand Jewishness, like right now with the antisemitic rhetoric that we are getting, where people say, ‘Oh, all Jews are white, are oppressors’ – we can stand up and say, ‘No, we're not an apartheid state, because more than 60 or 70 percent of Israelis are Jews of color. So what are you talking about?’

**Let me ask you about your perspective on the Book of Esther. I love your megillah and your painting of Vashti was very powerful. [Readers can view this image at [artsiona.com](http://artsiona.com).] It touched on a feminist idea of Vashti, who seems like a minor character, but in whom some women see something meaningful to them.**

The commission was from this very big Judaica gallery on Fifth Avenue in New York. I started studying with Rabbi Burton Visotzky from JTS, who still is my teacher, and he helped me through the whole process of making that Megillah, helping me understand the different scenes and how I might change the words into illustrations. Actually, the Eastern European person commissioning project told me he wanted me to paint it in an Indian or Persian miniature style. He didn't want it in the European style, because the first sentence of the story of Esther, what does it say? King Ahasuerus ruled from India to Ethiopia. Where is the whole story of Esther set? It's an Iranian Jewish story about this Iranian king, his minister Mordechai, and Mordechai's niece, Esther, who saves the Jewish people in that part of the world – again, not in Poland.

Even though [the patron] was Eastern European and Ashkenazi, he said, ‘I want Esther to be blue like the characters in your work.’ My work is feminist, and I do like characters which are the other, which are different, which are left out – not with hurt or with anger or whatever. It's just what it is. In my version, Vashti becomes the sister of Esther and helps her. Midrash can help you change the interpretation. When these things are highlighted and emphasized and celebrated, I hope these mythologies can help us heal instead of cause more fracture.

The BJV Interview: Siona Benjamin

**When I read your resume, I was struck by how grounded you are in two worlds, Western culture and India. How did you integrate those two Jewish identities?**

I'm a Jew from India, but I'm *Jewish*. It wasn't that alien or that different. It's not like I'm Hindu or Muslim. My family left to come to America – my mother's mother immigrated with my uncle Mordechai, who was brought here by HIAS to Cleveland, Ohio. She died in Cleveland. My father's mother died in Beersheba, Israel. So, we're a diasporic people. It's not like [Indian Jews] are on some other planet. We are integrated into Western culture. To begin with, the British were in India, and I was raised all through middle school in a convent school – a very good English education. And then I went to a Zoroastrian high school. India is very multicultural and presented that very multicultural view to me from the very beginning. My father worked for a shipping company, and all these European captains would come to our house. My parents had Pat Boone and Engelbert Humperdinck records – I grew up with the sound of that music, songs I knew by heart.

**The reason I asked that question was because I grew up in an Ashkenazi Jewish culture and while my view of Jewishness expanded after I lived in Israel and saw more of the Sephardic culture, it still stayed stuck in an Ashkenazi silo. Even my Israeli relatives, who came in the 1920s, were stuck**

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