Federations Rally Around Pluralism at JFNA’s General Assembly 2017

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

This story was filed as an editor’s column and published on November 14, 2017.

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Leaders of North America’s Jewish federation movement kicked off their annual conference in Los Angeles last week with a rallying cry for pluralism.

Representatives from Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA), whose annual Philanthropy and Advocacy Conference kicks off in Los Angeles last week, are calling for greater inclusion in the Jewish community.

The conference kicked off with a keynote address from JFNA CEO David Harris, who spoke about the importance of pluralism in the Jewish community and the need for greater representation.

Hikes and Hives, Camaraderie and Camels

By Ava Cherry

Tu B’Shevat is Here

Time for a winter project exploring your family tree?

In this issue of the BJV, we report on Jewish genealogy and hear from experts in the Berkshires on getting started, local and online resources, challenges, and much more. For more on Jewish genealogy and the unusual German folk art family tree illustration shown above, please turn to page 24.

Remembering the Freedom Sunday March for Soviet Jewry on its 30th Anniversary

The Berkshires’ Jewish community conducted a spirited grassroots campaign on behalf of Soviet Jews in the years leading up to the historic Freedom Sunday March in 1987, one of the many activist forces working throughout the world that made that day possible. Our community followed through in the decade that followed by resettling more Jews from the former Soviet Union than any community its size in the United States.

Local camel jockey Ava Cherry (right)

Young Judaism

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Local camel jockey Ava Cherry (right)
In November, I had the privilege to join representatives from around North America, and the world, at the General Assembly of the Jewish Federation of North America in Los Angeles. The annual GA brings together North American Jews who share a commitment to making this world we live in a place where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, learn, and observe their faith.

The forum opened with a recap of JFNA’s emergency response to the natural disaster in Houston. We met residents of Houston, who shared their stories and experiences of surviving Hurricane Harvey. The storm flooded the area, destroying homes, businesses, and community centers. The response from JFNA and other Jewish organizations was immediate and effective, providing support to those affected.

We learned that in addition to the rapid response and support from JFNA, the State of Israel immediately donated $1 billion to jumpstart the rebuilding efforts of a community where homes, synagogues, day schools, and Jewish Community Centers were destroyed.

The GA’s opening session enlightened me as I learned about the educational and philanthropic programs that JFNA and our remarkable local Jewish Federation, the Berkshires support with your hours of volunteer time, skills, and financial contributions. The stories of our young adults who dedicate their careers to improving the lives of those in the Jewish communities they left behind, and to those who live in Israel.

In addition to serving in the IDF, they use their skills to start programs that redesign bomb shelters on university campuses, making them accessible to everyone no matter what their physical capability. They provide scholarships and assistance to Israeli-Ethiopian students who were underperforming academically. As a result of the Ethiopian National Project: SPACE Program (School Empowerment and Community Empowerment), these once-struggling students are now achieving higher matriculation exam scores that non-Ethiopian Israeli students.

I also learned how the funds we donate through the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires and JFNA create and run programs to improve daily life through startup social service programs. For me, juxtaposing this resolution with the conversations I heard between Israeli and Diaspora Jews demonstrated the importance of addressing the need to help one another to understand the diverse nature of global Jewish life.

We have to take the time to bridge the gap. We are not only connected by our Judaism, but responsible for one another regardless of where we reside, or what we believe. This kind of mutual support is the mission of the Jewish Federation of North America, representatives of all Jewish Federations voted to adopt a resolution addressing the need for Jewish diversity in Israel. This resolution is a direct response to the Israeli government’s suspension of its resolution to implement the Kotel Agreement reached with JAFI, the Religious Streams, Jewish Federations, the Rabbi of the Western Wall, and the Prime Minister’s Office. The Kotel Agreement would have ensured that the Kotel (Western Wall) remains a unifying symbol for Jews around the world, fulfilling the vision of “One Wall for One People.”

The resolution adopted by the GA also addresses the advancement of a conversion bill that would grant a formal and permanent monopoly on conversions in Israel to the Chief Rabbinate, one that could prevent hundreds of thousands of Israelis and other potential new immigrants from being considered part of the Jewish people. That, along with the suspension of the Kotel Agreement, may create divides between the North American Jewish community and Israel. Jewish Federations called upon the government of Israel to reverse its decision to freeze the implementation of the Kotel Agreement and to take action to ensure that these divisive steps be halted. This resolution was presented to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prior to his address to the GA.

For me, the discussions and conversations I heard between Israeli and Diaspora Jews demonstrated the importance of addressing the need to help one another to understand the diverse nature of global Jewish life. We are not only connected by our Judaism, but responsible for one another regardless of where we reside, or what we believe. This kind of mutual support is the mission of the Jewish Federation of North America. 

I learned about the importance of working together by hosting regular president and rabbi meetings, and by sponsoring guests like Anna Sobel, puppeteer (who visited CBI on December 11), would not be possible without the Federation’s support.

But the Federation’s support is not just financial. At a meeting of presidents at the biennial, many in attendance shared that seeing nearby congregations as competitors and wondered how they might better work together with those congregations. In the Berkshires, the Federation fosters opportunities for our congregations to work together by hosting regular president and rabbi meetings, and by sponsoring events such as Shabbat Across the Berkshires (and the upcoming community-wide Hardtalad celebration on February 10) that bring us together as one community.

I think we all benefit from the ties these initiatives create. We are able to see ourselves as part of one community and encourage us to problem-solve and work together, rather than as competitors.

The Federation enriches life in the Berkshires in too many ways to detail here.

Thank you so much for all that you do.

Elizabeth Miller
President, Congregation Beth Israel

North Adams

Shabbat Al Fresco Made Camp More Special

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires,

Thank you so much for providing me with a scholarship to allow me to attend Crane Lake Camp this summer. It was an amazing experience where I was able to make new friends and explore my Jewish identity. The Shabbats in the outdoor sanctuary and the Israeli dancing made the experience even more special.

Thank you so much.

Daniel Munch
Lenox

Past Camper (and New Counselor) Learned Her Purpose This Summer

Dear Jewish Federation,

Thank you so much for providing me with a financial support that allowed me to spend another summer at Eisner Camp. Through the Mochon program, I transitioned from being a camper to a counselor by practicing leadership skills and learning more about my Jewish identity and values. I really enjoyed being able to work in different areas in camp, such as the arts department, because I was able to teach campers many art projects. Also, I enjoyed creating these relationships with the campers. As a counselor, I learned that my purpose of being at camp was to give back to the community and help give kids the same camp experience I got as a camper. I hope to continue helping kids gain a connection to Eisner Camp next summer as a full time staff member.

Thank you again!

Sincerely,
Paulette Sirmack
Pittsfield

Letters to the Editor

All Benefit from the Ties Federation Initiatives Create

In December, I attended the Union for Reform Judaism Biennial. Having spent those days with a variety of leaders from numerous congregations of varying sizes and geographic areas, I walked away with an even greater appreciation for the work and support of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. Many small congregations struggle with finances and the ability to offer quality programs. While we, too, face those issues, the struggle is greatly lessened by the support we receive from both the Grinspoon Foundation and the Foundation. Describing our recent Jewish Cuisine event to someone, they asked, “But, how did you afford that?” We received a grant from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. Our ability to hire an education director and offer a variety of family education programs, including guest like Ami Sobel, puppeteer (who visited CBI on December 11), would not be possible without the Federation’s support.

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Rabbi Reflections

A Connection to the Divine and the Bounty of the Land of Israel

By Rabbi Joshua Breindel

I love being outdoors, even in winter. Although I never took to skiing (I know – it’s a shandah for someone living in the Berkshires), it’s wonderful to walk in Canoe Meadows and revel in the majesty of nature. I find it all the more fitting when I do this that Judaism has a deep and profound connection to nature. Many of our most important holidays are connected to the agricultural cycle in Israel. Sukkot, for example, is a festival that commemorates the harvest. January closes with another such holiday – Tu Bi-Shevat, the 15th day of the month of Shevat.

Tu Bi-Shevat is colloquially known as the New Year for the Trees (or, as I grew up hearing it called, Jewish Arbor Day). In many ways, it’s one of my favorite holidays. Not only does it draw our attention to the world around us, but it also demonstrates how Jewish rituals can grow and evolve in dynamic ways.

The earliest direct reference to Tu Bi-Shevat in Jewish literature is in the Mishnah in the first centuries of the first millennium. There are four New Years. On the First of Nisan is the New Year for Kings and Festivals. On the First of Elul is the New Year for the Tribe of Levi. On the First of Tishrei is the New Year for the [calendar] years... According to the School of Shammai, the First of Shevat is the New Year for Trees. The school of Hillel, however, place it on the fifteenth of that month.

In this text, Tu Bi-Shevat has everything to do with tithing fruit. But from a broader perspective, establishing this date helped to resolve an earlier ambiguity about the purpose? Our answer: On the 15th day of Shevat! All of this being said, the destruction of the Second Temple rendered tithes academic. Moreover, as the Jews went into diaspora following this tragedy, many of them felt distant from the Land of Israel. For centuries, there was little about this date to capture the Jewish imagination. In the Middle Ages, this changed. The Kabbalists invested Tu Bi-Shevat with a new spiritual richness. Drawing on the structure of a Passover sedar, they created new ways of experiencing the holiday. In my community, we hold an annual Tu Bi-Shevat seder based on their insights. We speak of the Four Worlds of Creation, eat different kinds of fruits and blend red and white grape juice in four different ratios as we appreciate our connection to the world around us.

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Guest Editorial


By David Harris, American Jewish Committee

On December 6, 1987, 30 years ago, more than 250,000 people gathered in Washington to call on the Kremlin to open the gates and let Soviet Jews emigrate. Freedom Sunday, as it came to be known, was the largest Jewish-organized gathering in American history.

The timing was not random. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was scheduled to meet with President Ronald Reagan in the White House the very next day. It was to be the Soviet leader’s first official visit to the U.S. since he assumed office in 1985, following the death of Konstantin Chernenko.

In 1987, the number of Jews allowed to leave the USSR gulag puttyiffly low. Many Soviet Jews continued to languish in the Gulag for their activism, while some refusenik families had been living in limbo behind the Iron Curtain for years, if not longer.

I had the privilege of serving as the national coordinator of Freedom Sunday. It was an indescribably exhilarating and inspiring experience, but there were challenges aplenty.

First, we had barely five weeks’ notice of Gorbachev’s arrival date to plan the event. The myriad details, big and small, made it a 24/7 job for the dedicated team in charge of assembling the pieces.

Second, the previous record attendance for a Jewish rally in Washington was 12-13,000 people. That was to support Israel in a defining time of war – June 1967.

What would our number look like against that unimpressive backdrop, especially in the dead of winter? Could a poor turnout actually damage the Soviet Jewry cause by signaling to the Kremlin a low level of interest and engagement in the issue?

And third, despite the impression of a united Soviet Jewry movement, there were deep fissures between the so-called, if misnamed, “establishment” and the “activists.” Having been detained twice by Soviet authorities, expelled from the country once, denied entry to the USSR because of my “past political history,” and involved in clandestinely sending thousands of Jewish books and other items to Soviet Jews, was I disqualified from being an “activist” because I was connected to an “establishment” organization, the American Jewish Committee? Would everyone put aside their perceived differences and stand together as one for this single day?

Much credit goes to Natan Sharansky, the legendary prisoner of conscience who spent nine years in the Soviet camps before being released in 1986, for setting the goal at 250,000 participants. Frankly, no one had a clue how we might manage this.

I thought of my father’s side, and I thought, “If my family was prevented from leaving the USSR by political pressure, what would I do if my children were prevented from leaving the USSR by political pressure? What would I do if my children were prevented from leaving the USSR by political pressure? What would I do?”

The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate.

Despite the odds, if only the Jewish people stand together as one, we can make a difference and move history in the right direction.

The rest, as they say, is history. The gates began to open and Soviet Jews started to leave in large numbers. Eventually, more than a million Russian-speaking Jews settled in Israel. Reports trickled in of first, one bus or plane load from a given city or college campus, then an updated report of two, or three, or four, or five.

Unexpectedly, Germany became the fastest-growing Diaspora community in the world, with tens of thousands of new arrivals from the Soviet Union or – now, in one of my favorite settings of the FSU. Not only is this story important in and of itself, but it can also serve as a case study in what is possible, against all the odds, if only the Jewish people stand together. As we rise to meet the challenge of today and of tomorrow, the story of the Soviet Jewry movement reminds us that even the most formidable obstacles can be overcome with perseverance and determination.

In the end, more than 250,000 people participated, including, it should be noted, a sizable number of Holocaust survivors. The timing was not random. There was no shortage of prominent speakers, among them Vice President George H.W. Bush. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges, in the end, turned out to be trying to manage the large number of political and civic leaders, former Soviet Jewish prisoners and refuseniks, and other notable figures who wanted to speak – and, more often than not, ignored the strict time limit we put on each speech!

Media coverage was extensive. Perhaps most significantly, Voice of America broadcast the rally to Soviet listeners, which, we later learned, was a huge morale boost for Jews sitting by their radios.

As, and has been documented, when Reagan and Gorbachev met in the Oval Office the next day, the American leader cited the rally as an unmistakable expression of public opinion and urged his Soviet counterpart to heed the message.

Memories of Naomi Schwartz, Freedom Sunday Marcher

Naomi Schwartz

Explaining the roots of her activism on behalf of Soviet Jewry, Naomi Schwartz says, “I’m a first generation American on my father’s side, and I thought, ‘If my grandfather hadn’t left Russia, and my family was stuck there, who would be working for me?’”

Schwartz was initially enlisted by the local Hadassah chapter to write letters to one woman Russian refusenik. This one request led to writing to many more people trying to leave the former Soviet Union. It eventually led to recruiting other members of the community to help her as she worked to balance her activism with her career and family life. Schwartz organized the Pittsfield (later the Berkshire) Council for Soviet Jewry, and says that the cause was immediately popular, and supported by Jewish groups and dozens of grassroots organizations beyond the Berkshires.

The Council did things like contact the White House, State Department, and other agencies to bring pressure to release Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. The Berkshire Council for Soviet Jewry also sent medicine to Jewish refuseniks, arranged phone calls using overseas operators to bring people going to the USSR how to communicate with the people there, and arranged bar and bat mitzvah celebrations, wherein a local youngster would share his or her big day with a counterpart in Russia who was celebrating the same milestones by the Communist government. Schwartz also connected the Council with national organizations, which provided resources and strategic ideas to publicize the cause.

“Would have been the most popular person,” she says, “as I was always bombarding people with requests to write a letter, or make a phone call.” She remembers that at Jewish gatherings in the Berkshires, writing postcards to the US ambassador, or even speaking on behalf of Soviet Jewry, Naomi Schwartz

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires encourages you to affiliate.
The Process of Aging, with Maggie Bittman

On Monday, January 22 at 10:45 a.m., the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires presents “The Process of Aging” with therapist Maggie Bittman. This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield, is part of the Federation’s Connecting With Community series.

This program will provide an opportunity to be part of a group dialogue, created and facilitated by Bittman, who will explain her outlook and approach, emphasizing that aging begins at birth. She will discuss how all of us are confronted with four existential truths as we age – the search to find meaning and purpose; facing mortality; experiencing aloneness; and engaging free will.

Bittman will highlight how this is a lifelong process, and the ways people return to these existential truths at each stage of life with the added wisdom that comes with aging. Within this context, participants will discuss, share and offer support, as they explore these existential truths.

IF YOU GO
Sponsor: Jewish Federation of the Berkshires / Connecting With Community
Venue: Knesset Israel
Date & Time: Monday, January 22 at 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch (see page 11).


On Thursday, January 4 at 10:45 a.m., the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires welcomes Myrna Hammerling, director of Programming and Adult Education at Knesset Israel, whose topic will be “An Interactive Exploration About Prayer: What? Why? How?”

This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield is part of the Federation’s Connecting With Community series. Hammerling will begin “An Interactive Exploration About Prayer” with those who wish to share their questions about or reactions to praying, and will then explore approaches for the enrichment of one’s personal spiritual receptiveness. Hammerling says this will be both a personal and collective exploration process.

Myrna Hammerling has a master’s degree in Secondary Education, English, and Speech, and in Judaic Studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary. She has been president of the Knesset Israel board of directors, was the principal of the Knesset Israel Hebrew School for about 10 years, and engineered the joint afterschool Hebrew program with KI and Temple Anshe Amunim.

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For further information on all Jewish Federation of the Berkshires programs, please call Nancy Maurice Rogers, Program Director, at (413) 442-4360, ext. 15.
Your Federation Presents

GENERAL ASSEMBLY, continued from page 1

General Assembly concluded on November 14. As Mark Wilf, chair of the JFNA’s National Holocaust Survivor Initiative, said in introducing the 30th anniversary tribute, it represented “what we can accomplish when we unite.”

But its very success posed a dilemma to the Jewish fund-raising class. In the three decades since, organized Jewry has already, often for a similarly galvanizing cause around which to rally. With the unprecedented wealth of the Soviet and Ethiopian Jews, there are almost no imperiled Jewish communities left behind.

And Israel has been no help: As it has grown more prosperous, and more politically divisive among American Jews, the urgency of uniting around her, outside of wartime, has waned. A system built on fear, rescue, and crisis needs a new organizing principle.

Throughout this year’s GA, there were reminders of what the network of 148 local federations can do when they stick to what they do best: Raising class: In the three decades since, organized Jewry has built a series of breathing and feeding, and is now a regular presence in the Jewish community.

Connecting With Community

On Monday, January 8 at 10:45 a.m., join Linda Novick for “Chair Yoga: Easy Yoga for Flexibility, Mobility, and Peace of Mind.”

Chair Yoga: Easy Yoga for Flexibility, Mobility, and Peace of Mind

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In a crowded Jewish charitable marketplace and turning successful “unfulfilled promise of the Jewish homeland” and meeting the “unfulfilled promise of Israel being the home for all Jews — regardless of religious affiliation.”

“Can’t you build ... Jewish identity with crises and fear? It’s the wrong language.” — Rabbi Ed Feinstein

LINDA NOVICK

Chair Yoga: Easy Yoga for Flexibility, Mobility, and Peace of Mind, Pittsfield.

On Monday, January 8 at 10:45 a.m., join Linda Novick for “Chair Yoga: Easy Yoga for Flexibility, Mobility, and Peace of Mind.”

Linda Novick, MFA, is an author, teacher, artist, and professional level Kripalu Yoga teacher. She currently teaches yoga at Berkshire West Fitness Center and Kimball Farms, and all over the Common-wealth with the Massachusetts Housing Authority.

She explains that her approach to yoga encourages everyone to listen and love their bodies. Her yoga classes encourage gentle stretching, proper breathing, strength and balance. She attended Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and has a BFA in art education, and has taught art for over 50 years.

She’s been teaching yoga since 1997, and lately has been focusing on easy yoga for elders. She taught on staff at Kripalu Center for 7 years, and is now a regular present-er, offering programs that combine painting and yoga.

It was this last point — discussed under the rubric of “pluralism in balance” — that seemed to dominate this GA, or at least the public discussions. It proved an inspiring rallying cry and sure applause line.

But it is also an issue that the federation movement wishes would go away.

In a nutshell, America’s non-Orthodox Jewish majority wants Israel to be a more welcoming place for Reform, Conservative, and other non-Orthodox Jewish expres-sions. On Monday morning, the JFNA board issued an unusual resolution criticiz-ing Israel for freezing a deal on non-Orthodox prayer at the Western Wall and for its support for a bill that would give Orthodox authorities in Israel a monopoly on religious conversions to Judaism.

Both issues demonstrate to the non-Orthodox establishment that their rabbis and religious practices — strongly connected to Diaspora and Jerusalem (in his address when we’re increas-ingly drawn into controversial political issues”?

Pluralism isn’t the only issue: when a panel discussion Monday sought to heal internal communal wounds over the hussing Iran nuclear deal fight of a few years back. But it’s an issue that not only cre-ates antagonism between the Diaspora and Jerusalem (in his address Monday, Israeli Presi-dent Reuven Rivlin pleaded the delegates to have patience with Israel’s messy democracy, which gives religious parties an outsized say in religion and state issues) but one that divides Jews here as well.

Orthodox Jews are far less likely to care about the issue, and have made that known.

Federations are much more comfortable, and unifying, when they stick to what they do best: Raising class: In the three decades since, organized Jewry has built a series of breathing and feeding, and is now a regular presence in the Jewish community.

If you want to engage mil-lennials,” said Rachel Samekh, founder and CEO of Swipe Away Hunger, “you have to be curious about who we are.”

But it was another Los Angeles rabbi who captured the hope and anxiety of this year’s GA.

“Can’t you build ... Jewish identity with crises and fear?” said Rabbi Ed Feinstein of Valley Beth Shalom. “It’s the wrong language.”

Among many other things, this year’s GA was a search for that new language.

Andrew Silove-Carroll is edi-tor-in-chief of JTA.

Bowling Fun to Strike Out Illiteracy!

PITTSFIELD — On Sunday, February 4, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., the J ewish Federation of the Berkshires and its PJ Library program are teaming up with Berkshire Hills Hadassah for a fun afternoon of family-friendly bowling at Ren’s Bowl in Pittsfield. All ages are welcome! Enjoy two hours of bowling, shoe rentals, pizza, and soft drinks while striking out illiteracy. Please bring as many new or gently used children’s books as you can “spare” to be donated to Berk-shire United Way for distribution in its Berkshire Book Houses program. Cost is $8 per adult, and free for children 13 and under. Advance reg-istration is required by January 29. Contact Susan Frisch Lehmer at (413) 442-4300, ext. 14, or by emailing shlehrer@jewishberkshires.org. Ren’s Bowl is located at 495 Dalton Avenue in Pittsfield.

With each gift, we address so many causes that are important to our community: helping the hungry to find nutrition, education and elder care to supporting Berkshires organizations like PJ Library and Tagle Bereitk Israel.

Together we ensure that the fabric of our Jewish community remains vibrant and strong. And that’s smart.
A Childhood in the Netherlands and Living Through the Holocaust

On Thursday, January 18 at 10:45 a.m., Lily Harvitt will share her memories in “A Childhood in the Netherlands and Living Through the Holocaust.” This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield is part of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ Connecting With Community series.

Says Lily Harvitt: “I was born in 1937 in Amsterdam. My name was Lily Cox and we lived a pleasant normal life in Naarden, a small town about 30 miles from Amsterdam.

“In May 1940, the Germans invaded Holland. At first, life did not change that much. Then the Germans made more and more rules to separate the Jews from other Dutch citizens, and in 1942, all Jews were forced to move to ghettos in big cities, where it would be easier to catch them. Many Dutch people joined the resistance against the German occupation.

“My parents realized the danger and, through the Dutch underground, found a family willing to adopt me as part of their family. The family consisted of Dr. Jaap Mouljin, a dentist, his wife Wies Mouljin and their 2 children, Tammo (14), and Nel (11). Nel played the violin. I fell in love with the violin, and much later both Nel and I became violinists.

“The Mouljin family was incredibly brave: the whole family was put at great risk for saving a 5 year old girl; they did not even know. I still agonize about the question if I would have dared to do it. I like to tell my story because I want people to know that there were people like the Mouljins: people who took great risks to save others in a world filled with hatred. I would not be here to tell that story if not for them.”

IF YOU GO
Sponsor: Jewish Federation of the Berkshires / Connecting With Community
Venue: Knesset Israel
Date & Time: Thursday, January 18 at 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch (see page 11).

Film: Beneath the Helmet, with a Talk about the Sar El Program in Israel

On Thursday, January 11 at 10:45 a.m., the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires will screen Beneath the Helmet, a documentary that follows five young Israeli high school graduates drafted into the Israeli army. Also speaking will be Ethel Kramer of Housatonic, who will share her experiences as a participant in Sar El, a program that gives non-Israeli citizens the opportunity to volunteer on behalf of the Israel Defense Force. This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield is part of the Federation’s Connecting With Community series.

At age 18, away from their houses, family, and friends, young Israelis undergo a demanding journey. From the creators of the PBS-featured documentary film Israel Inside: How a Small Nation Makes a Big Difference, Beneath the Helmet illustrates how these young men and women are protecting not only their homes, but shared values of peace, equality, opportunity, democracy, religious tolerance, and women’s rights.

The 80-minute film will begin before lunch, and conclude after the kosher lunch is complete.

Ethel Kramer will explain the purpose of Volunteers For Israel (VFI) and Sar El, including who participates, Israeli’s, including the religious and handicapped, as well as non-Israelis both Jewish and non; details of the daily routine while in the program; and her personal impressions of participating.

IF YOU GO
Sponsor: Jewish Federation of the Berkshires / Connecting With Community
Venue: Knesset Israel
Date & Time: Thursday, January 11 at 10:45 a.m., with beginning of movie and talk followed by lunch (see page 11) at noon. The movie concludes with beginning of movie and talk followed by lunch (see page 11).

Cellblock Visions: Set Free in the Penitentiary, Part II

On Thursday, January 25 at 10:45 a.m., the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires welcomes back Phyllis Kornfeld, who will share more art and stories in “Cellblock Visions: Set Free in the Penitentiary, Part II” about her work creating art with people in prisons. If you missed Part I in November, you won’t want to miss this free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield, part of the Federation’s Connecting With Community series.

Phyllis Kornfeld is the author of Cellblock Visions: Prison Art in America, published by Princeton University Press. She has been working directly with incarcerated men and women around the country for 35 years—in all levels of security from county jail to death row—providing the transformative experience of creating beautiful art. Kornfeld worked with some individuals for as long as 10 years.

Her presentation will provide a glimpse at the powerful artwork, drawings, paintings, and objects, created primarily by people she has worked with. She will also share the prisoners’ candid insights about their lives, art, and imprisonment.

The Cellblock Visions Permanent Collection tours university galleries, and Kornfeld is the founder of several public projects whereby prison artists donate their artwork to benefit people in need. “The Envelope Project: Incarcerated Men and Women Making Art for a Cause” benefit sold hundreds of original pieces of envelope art from six institutions at the Outsider Art Fair in NYC.

IF YOU GO
Sponsor: Jewish Federation of the Berkshires / Connecting With Community
Venue: Knesset Israel
Date & Time: Thursday, January 25 at 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch (see page 11).

The Berkshires Jewish Voice extends a very special “thank you” for the generosity extended thus far by 185 households as of November 8, 2017 who have sent in their contributions for voluntary subscriptions to the paper in 2017. Thank you to our supporters!

Bernie and Beth Abramson
Suzanne Graver
Maurice and Judith Joseph
Rita Levin
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Name to be listed: _____________________________________________
(see page 11).

Date & Time: Thursday, January 25 at 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch
Venue: Knesset Israel

Please add Berkshire Jewish Voice in the memo)
“The Spirituality of Aging” – A Six-Session Course beginning February 1

Beginning on Thursday, February 1 at 10:45 a.m. and continuing every other Thursday through April 19 (except April 12), the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires is sponsoring “The Spirituality of Aging: A Conversation About Life and Death,” led by licensed clinical social worker and spiritual guide Wren Bernstein. This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road, in Pittsfield, part of the Federation’s Connecting With Community series.

What does it mean to embrace your elderhood and transform your expectations of aging? According to Wren Bernstein, this six-session course offers an opportunity to explore the unique spiritual and psychological gifts of the third major stage of life in a relaxed group setting. Each one-hour session will include a brief mindfulness practice, inspirational readings with contemplation and conversation, questions for introspection, and a facilitated group conversation. Topics include:

- aging consciously; retiring the inner critic; forgiveness; life review; facing mortality; and the mystery of transformation. While the course is designed as a series, it is not required to attend all six.
- Wren Bernstein, LICSW, has been a spiritual practitioner for 35 years and a clinical social worker for 25, working with clients both individually and in groups. As a lifelong seeker of truth and transcendence, she brings a spiritual and philosophical perspective to the psychological and social issues that confront us at various stages of life. Though she works with adults of all ages, she is most recently focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in the “third act” of life when meaning of life questions seem to demand more attention and priority and goals begin to shift. She believes in the power of contemplation, conversation, and community as essential to mental and spiritual health.

**IF YOU GO**

**Sponsor:** Jewish Federation of the Berkshires / Connecting With Community

**Venue:** Knesset Israel

**Date & Time:** Thursdays at 10:45 a.m.; February 1 & 15, March 1, 15 & 29, and April 19. Lunch (see page 11) follows at noon.

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**Berkshires History: “The Bondy Family,” with Roselle Chartock**

On Monday, February 5 at 10:45 a.m., Roselle Chartock will share the history of the Bondy family, innovative educators and refugees from Germany who founded the Windsor Mountain School in Lenox. This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield is part of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ Connecting With Community series.

Max and Gertrude Bondy, both from Czech-German Jewish families, created a unique co-educational boarding school in Germany in 1920. In 1934, they converted to Lutheranism. After being forced out of Germany by the Nazis and re-establishing their school in Vermont and then in Lenox, they never shared their Jewish background with their students. This talk will focus on why the Bondys kept silent and what were the responses of other family members to their Jewish heritage.

**IF YOU GO**

**Sponsor:** Jewish Federation of the Berkshires / Connecting With Community

**Venue:** Knesset Israel

**Date & Time:** Monday, February 5 at 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch (see page 11).

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**Connecting With Community**

Introducing the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at BCC

On Thursday, February 8 at 10:45 a.m., join Judith Monachina, director of the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College, who will introduce this new resource for those interested in compiling their life history. This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield is part of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ Connecting With Community series.

The Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at BCC, through its Oral History Alliance, serves as a resource to schools and organizations. The Center hosts a biannual Oral History Symposium, as well as community workshops on planning an Oral History Project: Technology and the Oral History Interview; and Legal and Ethical Issues in Oral History.

The Center is working on oral history projects with the local NAACP chapter, the Montery Library, the Housatonic Valley Regional High School (Canaan, CT), and other organizations. For more information, visit www.theoralhistorycenter.org. Director Judith Monachina will speak about the Center and discuss questions people may have about oral history or their own projects. If she does not have answers, she will find help to locate the information from within and outside of the Oral History Alliance.

Judith Monachina was a college career counselor in New York City and the Berkshires. For 12 years, she worked as a local journalist, and in 2007, received a Pulitzer journalism fellowship to do research in Milan on the experiences of Jews in Fascist Italy. While working on that project, she realized that oral history might be a more appropriate model for that work and began a transition to this work. Locally, she is also working on a documentary about paper making in Lee, which was seed funded by Housatonic Heritage and Mass Humanities.

**IF YOU GO**

**Sponsor:** Jewish Federation of the Berkshires / Connecting With Community

**Venue:** Knesset Israel

**Date & Time:** Thursday, February 8 at 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch (see page 11).
Current Affairs: Topics in Contemporary American and International Politics

On Monday, February 12 at 10:45 a.m., join Professor Steven J. Rubin for the first installment of “Current Affairs: Topics in Contemporary American and International Politics.” This course will meet once a month to discuss and explore current issues that influence our lives and society at large. This free program at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield is part of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ Connecting With Community series.

Topics will be chosen by Professor Rubin in consultation with the class and in view of the issue’s relevance. Members will be invited to participate in discussions, expressing their views and opinions in a supportive and informal atmosphere.

Steven J. Rubin is professor emeritus of international studies and former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Adelphi University, Garden City, NY. He is the author of numerous books and articles and frequently lectures both here and abroad on such topics as international anti-Semitism, Jewish history, popular culture, and literature. His radio play “Dem Bums: The Rise and demise of the Brooklyn Dodgers” was broadcast live on National Public Radio in December 2017 and can be currently heard online.

Tiffany K. Bassi, supervisor at Massachusetts Department of Children & Families, with Federation’s PJ Library coordinator Susan Frisch Lehrer

In time for the holidays, our PJ Library and the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires collected over 160 new pairs of children’s pajamas to help Berkshire kids keep warm this winter! We thank everyone for their generous donations to this important community program for the Berkshire Office of the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families. A special shout out to Anne Strick, and its Pine Cone Hill and Dash & Albert companies, for donating teen pajamas and robes.

A Day of Holocaust Education and Remembrance

On December 3, b’nai mitzvah students in the 7th and 8th grade, parents, and educators from across the Berkshire Jewish community shared a meaningful day of learning and remembrance at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City. The trip, sponsored by the Jewish Women’s Foundation and the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, included small group tours with discussion and testimonial by Holocaust survivor Sally Frishberg, whose family, 15 in all, evaded the Nazis by hiding in the tiny attic of a Polish farmer for more than three years. The Polish Catholic farmer risked his life and those of his family in order to save them. Her family’s harrowing story has been preserved in two documentaries, Voices from the Attic (1988) and Echoes from the Attic (2015).
whole day visiting Auschwitz. It is one thing to see all of these pictures through slide-shows, learning about the Holocaust in history class in school, but it’s another thing to walk out of the triangle entry-way, feet skipping on each of the train tracks, leaving unlike millions of people had the chance to.

I am a very emotional person and I cry a lot, but it's very rare that I bawl. At Auschwitz Birkenau, I bawled my eyes out. Hearing the weeps of the tears of people in my group and the screams of the dead. The sound of prayers echoing through the hallway and the sound of silence. We were not alone, our family was with us. At Auschwitz, something even rarer happened. We were dead silent. The only noise was our tour guide speaking every now and again, and the sound of our feet kicking rocks and shuffling along a rough dirt path. When we went back to the hotel that day, we were all exhausted. The Europe trip, although amazing, wasn't the highlight of my trip.

To my dismay, the part that I was absolutely terrified of, and part of the reason I was reluctant to go, ended up being my favorite part. The hike in the Negev. The hike was so empowering. It isn’t every day that you wake up at around three in the morning in a sleeping bag in the sand on the side of the highway, and then hike for hours on one of the tallest mountains in Israel. I have always loved rock climbing, so every day was amazing.

Although not a part of the Negev hike, I loved hiking to the top of Masada to watch the sunrise. I love telling the hiking story to my friends. They assume it’s just like the Appalachian Mountains (a pretty flat hike, generally up and down hills but not up rocks) groups, one of my best friends gave me a hug, saying he’ll miss me because “I won’t live through it.” I knew he was joking, and that was the best part. When we went back to our kibbutzim after that, I saw him talking to someone on a bench close to outside my room. I saw him, ran, and jumped into his arms. Those five weeks (four in Israel) were times I don’t think I will ever forget, and still bring up constantly. I built new relationships, mended ones that had previously fallen apart, and forged new bonds that I will be forever thankful for.

Another fun story is that there are a lot of pictures taken by my friend and me on our camel, and her family sent me her holiday card because one of those camel pictures of us together was on it.

As I mentioned before, I am a minority in my town for being Jewish, and the saddest thing that I remember was leaving the airport after the trip, and not even ten minutes after pulling out of the terminal, we passed a cemetery that had a huge cross. That’s how I knew I was home, and had to go back to being the only Jew. I also grew up not being the richest kid on the block, and the scholarships provided by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires are the pure reason why I could go. Without them, I could not have grown the way I did.

Thank you to everyone who supports the Federation!
**What’s for Lunch?**

**JANUARY**

**Monday, 1** ............... Closed for New Year’s Day  
**Tuesday, 2** ............... Dairy leftovers, farmer’s loaf, Osem cakes, coffee, tea, and milk for coffee.  

**Monday, 8** ............... 10:45 a.m., Chair Yoga with Linda Novick. Lunch: Meat loaf**, lentil soup, broccoli, mashed potatoes, rye bread, applesauce, and tea.  
**Tuesday, 9** ............... Teriyaki chicken**, brown rice, Oriental vegetables, salad, rolls, pineappple, tea.  
**Thursday, 11** ............... 10:45 a.m., Screening of film Beneath the Helmet and talk with Ethel Kramer on Volunteers for Israel and Sar El. Lunch: Lasagna, minestone soup, beets, garlic bread, white chocolate chip macadamia cookies, coffee, tea, and milk for coffee.  
**Monday, 15** ............... Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day  
**Tuesday, 16** ............... Grilled cheese, tomato soup, salad, Italian beans, whole wheat bread, tropical fruit salad, coffee, tea, and milk for coffee.  
**Thursday, 18** ............... 10:45 a.m., “A Childhood in the Netherlands and Living Through the Holocaust” with Lilly Har- vitti. Lunch: Baked cod**, cream of celery soup, broccoli, baby carrots, multi-grain bread, ice cream with dulce de leche, coffee, tea, and milk for coffee.  
**Tuesday, 23** ............... Veal stew**, noodles, salad, Italian bread, brownies, and tea.  

**Tuesday, 29** ............... 10:45 a.m., “Flexibility Training” with Thea Basis. Lunch: Teriyaki chicken**, hot & sour soup, rice, mixed vegetables, bread TBA, pineapple, and tea.  
**Tuesday, 30** ............... Cholent**, baby carrots, salad, whole wheat bread, peaches, and tea.

**FEBRUARY**

**Monday, 5** ............... 10:45 a.m., “The Bondy Family, Their Unique School and Their Conflicting Responses to Judaism” with Dr. Roselle K. Chartock. Lunch: Meat loaf**, vegetable soup, peas, mashed potatoes, rye bread, pears and tea.  
**Tuesday, 6** ............... Roasted chicken**, mushroom barley soup, hash browned potatoes, mixed vegetables, potato bread, applesauce, and tea.  
**Thursday, 8** ............... 10:45 a.m., The Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College with Judith Monachina. Lunch: Macaroni and cheese, stewed tomatoes, green beans, muffins, fruit cocktail, coffee, tea, and milk for coffee.  
**Monday, 12** ............... 10:45 a.m., “Current Affairs” with Professor Emeritus, Steven J. Rubin. Lunch: Sweet & sour meatballs**, peas, noodles, salad, marble rye bread, mandarin oranges, and tea.  
**Tuesday, 13** ............... Meat leftovers TBA, Osem cake, and tea.  
**Monday, 19** ............... Closed for Presidents’ Day  
**Tuesday, 20** ............... Fish sticks, corn chowder, French fries, mixed vegetables, rolls, brownies, coffee, tea, and milk for coffee.
And it was in the middle of the night...

By Barbara Lafer

In 1969, my husband Fred was chairman of our local UJA drive. We decided to make our first visit to Israel. While there, we saw all the usual tourist sites, and absorbed the history we had become to claim as our own. Moreover, we were very impressed by all Israel had accomplished in only 21 years. As we were packing to go home our last day there, we received a phone call from UJA headquarters. The voice said, “Go to Lod (now Ben Gurion) airport at midnight.” “Why?” we asked. “Just go” was the reply.

So we went. When we arrived, we saw a bunch of other people milling around, obviously waiting for a plane to come in. There was a group of kibbutz teenagers, as well as other Israelis of all ages. After about 15 minutes, we heard the drone of a far-off plane, and soon the El Al plane landed. The crowd surged forward toward the aircraft. When the door opened, the first person out was an old woman with a babushka covering her head. She fell to her knees and kissed the ground. She was followed by boys in knickers, men in caps, old and young people who were pale, trembling, and bewildered. This was 1969. Jews were not allowed to leave the Soviet Union. These people had sneaked out and made their way to Italy, where El Al picked them up. The Israelis rushed forward, hugging and kissing their Russian relatives. The kibbutz teens each picked up a Russian child, swung them up on their shoulders, and danced the hora with them.

Oranges appeared and were given to the new arrivals, who were then ushered into an empty airplane hangar, and sworn in as citizens of the State of Israel. They were then given keys to an apartment and their new life.

I was overcome by this experience. I stood there and cried. I felt that this was the heart and soul of Israel, to be a haven and a home for Jews in need wherever they may be. This night, more than all the days that preceded it in Israel, became the foundation of my attachment and commitment, not only to Israel, but to the Jewish people.

Am Yisroel Chai!

Her first Israel encounter was “mitsuyan” – or something like that

By Elena Fischer

It was our first visit to Israel in the late 1970s/early 1980s. My husband and I went to visit my brother, who had moved there with his family a few years earlier. My brother had picked us up at the airport. As we were about to leave and turn onto a very busy Tel Aviv street, we had to stop for a red light. Of the many billboards facing us, one in particular caught my eye. It was a huge one with giant letters, and only one long word. I'm Israel, I told myself, and I'm going to practice reading Hebrew.

As I slowly started sounding out the letters, right to left, I couldn't believe the word I had so carefully sounded out: M-I-T-S-U-B-I-S-H-I

My first Hebrew word in Israel!

Your Israel Stories Wanted!

Help celebrate Israel at 70! Share your most memorable story of Israel to published as part of the “My Israel” series in the Berkshire Jewish Voice.

We’re looking for short, pithy anecdotes that convey something moving, strange, spiritual, funny – whatever – about how you experienced Israel (or even Israelis). Pictures are a big plus! Please send your memories to Albert Stern, BJV Editor, at astern@jewishberkshires.org.

Now Accepting Applications for Camp Scholarships

YOU CAN AFFORD JEWISH SUMMER CAMP

The Jewish Federation can Help!

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires is dedicated to making a Jewish summer camp experience affordable and accessible for every child.

Tuition assistance is available through:

- Jewish Federation of the Berkshires Camp Scholarship Fund
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- Jewish Women’s Foundation of Berkshire County

APPLICATION DEADLINE: JANUARY 16

Download an application at Jewishberkshires.org or pick one up at the Federation’s office, 156 South St., Pittsfield, MA

Additional funding is available:

- Harold Grinspoon Foundation (hgf.org): $1,000-$1,500 grants
- Some local congregations can provide funding
- All camps provide need-based financial assistance

For Tu B’Shevat, a sylvan memory

Adam Lehrer of Lenox says his first Israel memory is of “planting a tree.”

Here’s a picture of Adam (left) and his brother Kevin saying a prayer after planting trees in the JNF Forest, Jerusalem, 1983.
Berkshire Bikers Return to Israel to Support Worthy Causes

In July 2015, the BJV shared the story of Norman Lipoff and Brad and Lauren Sokol, who participate in the five-day Wheels of Love (WOL) bicycle ride held each autumn to support Jerusalem’s ALYN Hospital, Israel’s only pediatric and adolescent rehabilitation facility. Lipoff and the Sokols (along with their daughter Erica and son-in-law, Scott Carroll) returned to Israel this November, and were joined on the ride by fellow Berkshires second homeowners Ed Koplewitz of Otis and Harman Grossman of Great Barrington. (Bruce Braffman of Pittsfield chiropractor and diehard fitness enthusiast Stephen Tosk (profiled in the January 2016 BJV) returned to Israel for the second time this autumn to participate in “Israel on Two Wheels,” an arduous Galilee-to-Eilat ride sponsored by Friends of the IDF to raise awareness and funds on behalf of the Strides Program for wounded IDF soldiers. Wounded warriors, some of them amputees, join the ride for all or part of the tour, which covers 385 miles over six days, with climbs totaling more than 31,000 feet. Tosk reports that he rode with Roy Goldstein, who at 24 years of age is Israel’s national road champion. For more information and to support “Israel on Two Wheels,” visit www.idf. org/2017-cycling-tour-of-israel.

Yasher kochav to all who did the Berkshires proud by participating.

Berkshire Baby Box Seeks Participants for Mother’s Day Fundraiser

SOUTH EGREMONT—Award-winning nonprofit, Berkshire Baby Box, will debut its inaugural Mother’s Day weekend fundraiser Sweet Berkshire—a dessert auction and community event to be held on Mother’s Day weekend 2018. Berkshire community members are being sought to exhibit in Sweet Berkshire. Exhibitors will create a biographical display, bake a dessert to be auctioned off, and share a tribute and recipe for a keepsake cookbook. Space is limited to 45 exhibitors. The exhibit fee is $30 and the deadline to exhibit is February 1. Sweet Berkshire will be held on Saturday, May 12 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Country Club of Pittsfield.

Inspired by the successful program in Finland that began 80 years ago, Berkshire Baby Box was founded by Hevreh member Hinda Bodinger in early 2016 and, in its first year, distributed over 1,000 baby boxes to new families in the Berkshires. Berkshire Baby Box, which received a grant from the Jewish Women’s Foundation of the Berkshires, expects to give out another 1,000 boxes in its second year.

To receive further information or to exhibit at Sweet Berkshire, please visit www.berkshirebabybox.org.

FREE BOOKS & MUSIC for kids, 6 months – 8 years

PJ Library, a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, is made possible in the Berkshires through the generous support of

Spitz Tuchman Family Fund

SIGN YOUR CHILD OR GRANDCHILD UP TODAY! contact Susan Frisch Lehrer at (413) 442-4360, ext. 14 or visit jewishberkshires.org/pj-library
New Wintertime Discussion Group Explores the Meaning of Mussar

GREAT BARRINGTON – Beginning monthly, on Wednesday, January 10 from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Hevreh Religious School families will join together for their Third Annual Day of Service, honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Participants spend the morning in service to the community through hands-on projects both at Hevreh, and out in the community. Families will have the opportunity to participate in giving back together, and the day concludes with a special ceremony to honor Dr. King’s memory, and a pizza lunch.

“Yachad Day of Service in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.” participants will engage in community service. Hevreh is still seeking community projects or site that might be in need of assistance, please call the Hevreh office at (413) 528-6378.

This event is generously co-sponsored by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Yachad Day of Service in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

GREAT BARRINGTON – On Sunday, January 14 from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Hevreh Religious School families will join together for their Third Annual Day of Service, honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Participants spend the morning in service to the community through hands-on projects both at Hevreh, and out in the community. Families will have the opportunity to participate in giving back together, and the day concludes with a special ceremony to honor Dr. King’s memory, and a pizza lunch.

Hevreh welcomes non-religious school families who would like to help support the community. Please give the Hevreh office a call if you would like to volunteer for a morning of community service.

Hevreh is still seeking community projects appropriate for religious school age students from 6-16 and their families. If you have a community project or site that might be in need of assistance, please call the Hevreh office at (413) 528-6378.

This event is generously co-sponsored by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Reflect the Light at Community-wide Havdalah

PITTSFIELD – On Saturday, February 10 at 7 p.m., the Berkshires-Jewish community will gather for its annual midwinter havdalah celebration, hosted this year by Temple Anshe Amunim.

Join together to bid farewell to Shabbat with good company, and from two rabbis, and warm hot chocolate and other treats. Last year, more than 1400 people of the Berkshires Jewish community came together and were led by local spiritual leaders in an uplifting evening of prayer, song, and unity.

After the service, attendees will be feted with a dessert reception sponsored by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. Everyone is welcome at this free event.

Temple Anshe Amunim is located at 26 Broad Street in Pittsfield.

Explore the Shabbat Experience at Hevreh

GREAT BARRINGTON – On Friday, February 2 at 6:15 p.m., Hevreh of Southern Berkshire invites all to its Second Community Shabbat Experience.

This Shabbat is hosted by Hevreh’s 4th and 5th grade religious school families. The Shabbat celebration features a free, catered Shabbat dinner, Kabbalat Shabbat service and group singing. Hevreh’s Community Shabbat Experience offers everyone the chance to celebrate Shabbat around the dinner table in conversation and community.

The Community Shabbat Experience has been made possible by the generous support of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

RSVPs are kindly requested. Visit Hevreh.org for a link to the Community Shabbat Dinner RSVP form. If you have questions or need more information, call the Hevreh office at (413) 528-6378. Hevreh is located at 270 State Road, Great Barrington.

“Meet Me at the Intersection of Trans and Jewish Identity,” with Professor Joy Ladin

WILLIAMSTOWN – On Tuesday, January 16, Professor Joy Ladin will explore the intersections and collisions of trans and Jewish identity through her personal experience of becoming the first and still only openly transgender employee of an Orthodox Jewish institution. She will discuss her work on theorizing trans identities in relation to religious traditions.

At 4 p.m., Professor Ladin will be at the Williams College Jewish Religious Center reading from her memoir, Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders, and from two recently published poetry collections, The Future is Trying to Tell Us Something: New and Selected Poems and Fireworks in the Gnarey.

At 7 p.m. at Griffin Hall Room 3, Professor Ladin will deliver a lecture on her forthcoming book, The Soul of the Stranger: Reading God and Torah from a Transgender Perspective (Brandes University Press).

Joy Ladin’s work has been recognized with a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a Fulbright Scholarship, an American Council of Learned Societies Research Fellowship, and a Hadassah Brandeis Institute Research Fellowship, among other honors. A nationally recognized speaker on trans and Jewish identity, she was recently named to LGBTQ Nation’s Top 50 Transgender Americans list. She has held the Gottesman Chair in English at Yeshiva University since 2003, and taught for a year in Sarah Lawrence’s MFA Writing Program. Links to her poems and essays are available at joyladin.wordpress.com.

The 4 p.m. reading will take place at the Jewish Religious Center, 24 Stetson Court. The 7 p.m. lecture takes place at Griffin Hall, Room 3, which is at 844 Main Street.

Both events are free and open to the public.
Shabbat at Hevreh

LOCAL NEWS

GREAT HARRINGTON – Hevreh of Southern Berkshire will host special events to celebrate Shabbat Shira (the Sabbath of Song) this year with the Hevreh choir joining in the service led by choir from Zohar Lutheran Church in Pittsfield, under the direction of Amy Renak. Student cantor Shani Cohen will deliver a sermon in song on Friday, January 26 at 6:15 p.m.

Tot Shabbat

On Saturday, January 27 at 9 a.m., families with preschool children can start their Saturday with joyful Shabbat singing, movement, storytelling, and more! Rabbi Jodie Gordon, Rabbi Hirsch and Cantor Cohen (and their special pals, Shluffy the Sloth and Cantor Cohen) look forward to sharing Shabbat together, part of Hevreh’s Tot Shabbat series. As always, all are welcome – interfaith families, GLBTQ families, nursing moms, babies and siblings of all ages, grandparents and special people, new members, first timers, neighbors and friends. There is no need to RSVP – just come and enjoy.

Yachad Shabbat: “At the Heart of the Sea”

On Saturday, January 27 from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., join Hevreh Religious School families for a special musical Shabbat morning celebration featuring hands-on learning, prayer, adult and student break-out sessions, music, and learning. This year, Yachad Shabbat takes place on Shabbat Shira, and includes a special interactive Torah reading as all stand together at the heart of the Torah, and hear the Song of the Sea chanted.

You do not need to be a religious scholar to attend this special Shabbat celebration – Hevreh says this is a great opportunity for families considering religious school to explore Hevreh and see how interactive learning takes place in the religious school. This event is generously co-sponsored by the Harald Grinpoof Foundation.

If you have questions or need more information about Shabbat Shira events, call the Hevreh office at (413) 528-6378. Hevreh is located at 270 State Road, Great Barrington.

Rachel Korazim’s Israel at 70

New evening adult education series at Knesset Israel

PITTSFIELD – Knesset Israel invites community participation as it pilots a new evening adult education course, Israel at 70, a curriculum being developed by Dr. Rachel Korazim. Israel at 70 goes beyond happy birthday parties for Israel. It offers an opportunity for an in-depth conversation about Israel through the study of iconic Israeli texts.

“Torah at 70 does not talk about Israel,” says Myrna Hammerling, Director of Adult Education. “It listens. It listens to the authentic voices of Israeli writers who give poetic expressions to stories of revival, struggles for security and peace, societal shortcomings related to discrimination, and efforts to find a balance among contradictory aspirations. It is not the only way to tell the story, but it is an interesting one.” Participants will be invited into Israel’s discourse and learn its vocabulary. All texts will be presented and discussed in English.

Each unit of the course uses pieces of literature to illuminate one decade of Israel’s history. Classes will focus on one or two primary accomplishments of the State during that time and one or two challenges that developed over those years. Included will be multimedia presentations, songs, study of literature and discussions of history.

MAZEL TOV

Mazel Tov to…

Bart Raser and Marshall and Marian Raser, co-owners of Carr Hardware, who won the small business of the year award from Independent We Stand. Carr Hardware was one of 250 businesses nationwide considered for the award. The business pledged to donate the $5,000 cash prize to the Rotary Club’s efforts to build a new splash pad at Clapp Park in Pittsfield.

Florece Grande, whose book The Bitcher’s Daughter (reviewed and excerpted in the January/February 2017 BJV) received honorable mention for the 2017 Eric Hoffer Award in the memoir category. The award honors small press books of merit.

Calling All High School Seniors

College Scholarship Opportunity for Jewish Teens

Awards annually to a graduating senior who has demonstrated leadership in the Berkshire Jewish community, this scholarship is made possible through the generous support of the:

Henry Siskind and Frances Siskind Schiller and Dr. Stanley and Fay Siskind Scholarship Fund

Deadline: April 13

Download an application on Jewishberkshires.org or pick one up at the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires 196 South Street, Pittsfield, MA

MAZEL TOV

Rachel Seth Wax

Torah and Dharma – Exploring Connections between Judaism and Buddhism

PITTSFIELD – On Friday, January 19, join Knesset Israel at 7:30 p.m. for the monthly musical Shirei Shabbat service, followed by Rabbi Seth Wax discussing “Torah and Dharma—Exploring Connections between Judaism and Buddhism.”

The Butcher’s Daughter

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Helen Shapiro Maalen, 100, active in local and Jewish community

PITTSFIELD — Helen Shapiro Maalen of Stockbridge, passed away quietly on Wednesday, December 6, surrounded by her loving family. Born in North Adams on March 19, 1917, the daughter of Anne and Samuel Shapiro, she was preceded in death by all of her brothers and sisters: Rose, Stanley, Sheldon (Buddy), Allie, and Lillian.

Helen graduated from Dury High School and in 1938 from Smith College. She was married to the late Arthur Maalen.

She is survived by three daughters, Linda Finez (Michael) of Boston, Judith Cook (Lefrere) of Pittsfield, and Susan Korn (Robert) of Stockbridge, MA. The family suggests a charitable donation in Helen’s memory be made to either The Berkshire Botanical Garden or the Berkshire Literacy Network.

Nancy Carol Fink Nirenberg, 89, painter, designer, and volunteer

LENOX — Nancy Carol Fink Nirenberg passed away peacefully on September 27, 2017. The family includes her seven grandchildren: Lucy, Wendy, Ellen, and Patty (niños de nuestra vida), and her two daughters, Michelle and Sharon, who she loved dearly.

She was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Bill Nirenberg, and her three other grandchildren: Liz, Rachel, and Rachel’s fiancé, Billy.

Nancy was born in Millford, MA, the daughter of Herbert and Gertrude Silk, who, at the height of the Great Depression, moved the family to Washington Heights in Manhattan when Nancy was five.

The family followed her to New York when she was seven. She was an artist from an early age, particularly her sketching and watercolor. When she was a teenager, Helen loved and doted on her ten grandchildren and eighteen great-grandchildren.

She enjoyed keeping track of all their accomplishments and celebrated each milestone with love and joy.

For many years, Helen was an active community volunteer.

She was a member of Hadassah and Temple Anshe Annum, and was honored by the Jewish community as “Person of the Year.” She was a member of the Junior League and the Pittsfield Girls Club (Glady’s Allen Bragbin Community Center). She thoroughly believed in the concept of volunteerism and devoted her life to helping others.

Helen spent a formative month in Puget Sound and loved to tour the hip and trendy neighborhoods of Seattle and Portland. She loved going to the theatre and opera and loved to see her favorite comedian, Mark Normand. She was a regular at the Berkshire Community Center. She loved planting her garden and her time on the outdoors. She loved playing tennis, and was an avid golfer into her 80s and was among the few who had a hole in one.

She enjoyed keeping track of all those whose lives she touched. She led her life out loud and also in private service to those around her. A painter by education, a greeting card designer and museum curator by profession, her greatest joys came from time spent with her family and friends. Unbashfully social on the outside and determined not to let life’s humps and bruises slow her down, she was the unofficial mayor of her community (or room) she joined.

Born to Clarence and Ruth Fink, and raised in Pittsfield, MA, in December 1928, she graduated high school at Winchester Thurston, followed by Syracuse University, where she majored in Fashion Design and joined AEPHI Sorority.

She moved to New York, where her artistic ability and sense of humor propelled her into a career creating greeting cards with her own original character, Larry's Loves. The family suggests a charitable donation in Nancy’s memory be made to Larry's Loves, with a memorial service to follow in April 2018 at the Lenox Library (or the Berkshire Botanical Garden or the Berkshire Literacy Network).

Rhoda Barbara Pomerantz Linder, sister, mother, grandmother

PITTSFIELD — Rhoda Barbara Pomerantz Linder passed away peacefully on September 12, 2017 at home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. She was 100.

Born in Pittsfield to Ann and Herbert Pomerantz, she graduated from Pittsfield High School in 1962 and North Adams State Teachers College.

Rhoda was survived by her daughters Hilary Griffith (Brian), and Jocelyn Fink (Aaron Fannin); grandchildren Addi and Billy; brother Philip Pomerantz; nieces Deb and Sarah Pomerantz, Molly Almeda and Miriam Pomerantz; and nephews David Pomerantz (Maribeth) and Adam Pomerantz. She was preceded in death by her parents, Ann and Herbert, her aunt Rae Kronick, and her beloved husband of 75 years, Billy.

Norma Siegel, 74, passed away at home surrounded by her loving family on Wednesday, November 22 following an 8-year battle with cancer.

Mrs. Siegel grew up in Millford, MA, the daughter of Ruth and David Rubenstein. She attended the University of Massachusetts and Boston University, where she pursued a degree in social work. She taught in the Pittsfield school system for 4 years and enjoyed being a member of the early parent teacher organization. She also was employed as a saleswoman for Stein’s and Filene’s.

Mrs. Siegel was survived by her husband Robert, son, Joe Siegel of Stockbridge, MA, daughter Donna Siegel of Lake Worth, FL; brothers, Sharye Greenfeld of Millford, MA, and Elaine Streger of Boynton Beach, brother, Harold Rubenstein of Chelmsford, MA, along with many nieces and nephews.

Norma and Robert enjoyed more than 50 years of marriage and traveled extensively. Norma liked going to the theatre, as well as music, movies, dancing, crossword puzzles, and dining out.

Funeral services were held on November 27 at Beth Israel Memorial Chapel in Boynton Beach. A funeral was held at Beth Light Memorial Gardens. Donations can be made to the American Cancer Society and Boys Town USA.

OBITUARIES, continued on page 17
OBITUARIES

John Michaels Schwebel, 75, educator for 30 years
PALMETTO HAY, FL – John Michaels Schwebel, 75, passed away on Saturday, November 25.

Born in New York City on October 22, 1942, he graduated from Hackley School and the College of New Jersey. There he received both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education. Married to his loving wife Zelda Schwebel, children, Andrew and James (Lisa) Schwebel; grandchildren, Jessica, Alexa and Jacob Schwebel; and sisters Laura Schwebel Landski and Anne Schwebel Diamond.

John was a founding member of Bet Shira Congregation. He was an avid horseback rider and loved the Miami Hurricanes.

Funeral services were held on Monday, November 27 at Lakeside Memorial Park.

Ralph Kaufman, 99, larger-than-life personality
SILVER SPRING, MD – Ralph Kaufman, 99, died in his home in Silver Spring, MD on Tuesday, November 21, surrounded by his family and his devoted aide.

Born July 6, 1918 in Pittsfield, MA, Ralph was a larger-than-life personality throughout his life, the eldest son of Joseph Kaufman and Esther Gitelman. Ralph received both bachelors and master’s degrees in Education. Each summer, he returned to the Washington, D.C. area, where he developed a lasting appreciation for the country and made lifelong friends. He was excited to return a last time with his extended family in 2013 to celebrate his 95th birthday.

After retirement, Ralph and Dorothy became snowbirds, moving part-time to Light House Point, FL and later to the Washington, D.C. area, where Ralph continued to form new friendships well into his 90s. Throughout his life, Ralph delighted in finding a “Pittsfield connection” with the countless people he befriended. Each summer, he returned to the Berkshires to spend time with his extended family, including his late sister Elinor da Fleishman Schwebel for 52 years, and his late brother H. Robert Halper.

Rhoda Silverman Amron, loved teaching children to read
PITTSFIELD – Rhoda Silverman Amron died Monday morning, December 18. She leaves her children, Alex Berlin and Allia Berlin, as well as the extended Berlin and Mizikovskaya families. A graveside funeral was held at Kneseet Israel Cemetery on December 20, followed by a meal of consolation at Knesset Israel.

Joan Samuels Kaiser, teacher, principal, friend
BECKET – Joan Samuels Kaiser, formerly of Boynton Beach, FL and Becket, died peacefully on Wednesday, December 13, surrounded by the love of her family.

Doughty of Sylvia Weitzer Samuel Firestone and Nathan Roberts Samuel; daughter of Sylvia Weitzer Samuel Firestone and Nathan Roberts Samuel; daughter of Sylvia Weitzer Samuel Firestone and Nathan Roberts Samuel. She was preceded in death by her husband, Kenneth Greenspan Kaiser, daughter, Cheryl Kaiser (Michael Carroll); son, Neal Kaiser (Jacqueline Shanahan); grandchil-

dren, Mattea, Jasper, and Levi Kaiser and Siena Kaiser Car- roll; step-sisters, Elaine Roseman (Jonathan) and Maxine Goldberg (Samuell); sisters-in-law, Sara Brecher and Karen Klevan (David), as well as cherished nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends. She was predeceased by her brothers, Edward Samuels (Jeanne) and Harold Samuels (Beverly); two siblings, Jane Gitlin, brothers-in-law Donn Brechenser and Alan “Bus” Gitlin, as-in-laws Jessie and Harold Kaiser.

A former teacher and principal, Joan was a friend and inspiration to all, and lived her life with optimism, generosity, and wisdom. She found joy in nature, family, education, and her communities. Despite the many health setbacks Joan faced in her life, she reminded everyone that life is all about being accepted and loved unconditionally. Life is good, she would say, and it’s up to each individual to make life GREAT!

Services were held at the Ascher-Zimmerman Funeral Home in Springfield, MA on Saturday, December 17 with burial in Sons of Israel Cemetery. Contributions can be made in Joan’s memory to the Steinway Music House of the Berkshires (http://www.steinway.org/), or to the American Jewish Committee’s 25th Anniversary of Sons of Israel Cemetery (http://www.shakespeare.org/) of Sons of Israel Cemetery.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

• Help at the Federation Lunch Program. Assist setting tables, welcoming attendees and light meal preparation as needed. Mon., Tues. or Thurs., 10:00 a.m. – noon.

• Bake Hamantashen in the K.L. kitchen on Sundays, 9:30 – noon and Tuesdays, 5:30 – 8 p.m. Beginning on Sunday, Jan. 7 and continuing into February. Contact Cindy Hellitzer at ch_hellitzer2012@gmail.com to volunteer.

• Decorate Purim Gift Bags. All children are invited to pick up and decorate gift bags at home and return to the Federation offices by Friday, Feb. 16.

• Pack Purim Care Packages on Tuesday, Feb. 28, 10:00 a.m. at the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires office.

• Deliver Purim Care Packages to Seniors in assisted living facilities, hospitals, and homebound at your leisure between Feb. 21 - 27.

• Welcome Shabbat by Lighting candles and Reciting Blessings on a Friday afternoon (once a month) with residents at area nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Provide a simple service based on your own experience.

• Visit homebound Seniors and Residents of senior living facilities before Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

Nothing gave Rhoda more joy than teaching children how to read. This is an organization whose work she surely would have supported. Contributions in her name can be made to: http://bit.ly/carrya-shiners.org/ get-involved/donate.

Eya Mizikovskaya, leaves children and extended family
PITTSFIELD – Eya Mizikovskaya died Monday morning, December 18. She leaves her children, Alex Berlin and Allia Berlin, as well as the extended Berlin and Mizikovskaya families.

For more information, please visit www.shakespeare.org/}

Rhoda Silverman Amron, loved teaching children to read
PITTSFIELD – Rhoda Silverman Amron died Monday morning, December 18. She leaves her son and daughter-in-law, Ken and Ruth Frommer. The funeral service and burial were held at Star of David Memorial Chapel, West Babylon, NY on December 19.

Leni is survived by her husband of 66 years, Paul Aronson; their children Lisa Newman, (Danny Sanderson) of Stockbridge, Steffi Aron- son Karp (Eric H. Karp) of Waban, MA, Michael Aronson (Rebecca) of Amherst, and Nancy Aronson of Arlington, MA, sister Helene Rosenberg of Chicago, IL, grandchildren Joshua, Dan, and Adam Karp, Jeremy, Allegra, and Sage Aronson, Jeffrey and Lauren Sanderson, and Jill Sanderson, and great-grandchildren, Henry, Leah, and Reid. She was preceded in death by her brother H. Robert Halper.

Writing will be missed. Her joy and energy was exceeded only by her insight and intellect and her ability to dissolve into laughter, contagiously, often at an embarrassing moment.

Graveside services were held on December 7 at the Stockbridge cemetery.

Gifts can be made to the Stanton Home (http://stantonhome.org/donate/), or to the American Jewish Committee’s 25th Anniversary of Sons of Israel Cemetery (http://www.shakespeare.org/).

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Tu B’Shevat, the New Year of Trees, is almost here, and with it comes a feast of dried fruits and nuts like those grown in Israel. A typical holiday menu will feature figs, dates, apricots, and almonds, and a Tu B’Shevat seder will include wines ranging from white to dark red.

One item I have not seen, but which my mother spoke of fondly, was the carob bean pod, what she called “boks’er” in Yiddish. As a child, I thought that only Jews ate “boks’er.” (I also thought that only Jews ate brisket, but that’s another story.) Much later I learned that carob also goes by the names locust bean and St. John’s Bread, the latter name stemming from the Christian belief that St. John the Baptist subsisted on the pods in the wilderness. (Of course, back in the day, John was a Member of the Tribe.) The Yiddish boks’er is a corruption of the German bocks'horn, or ram’s horn. Readily available in Israel (harav in Hebrew) by simply picking neighborhood trees found throughout the country, the hard-as-leather pods my mom remembered were a treat from the Holy Land for kids and, I imagine, a boon for dentists, as they resemble the ram’s horn not only in shape, they are hard as a rock.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the carob bean has been used as food for thousands of years, and for much of that time it has been considered a poor man’s food. During World War II, the people of Malta commonly reported eating dried carob pods as a supplement to their food rations. While the carob may have been used as a source of nutrition for the poor, it also proved valuable to the well-off. Its seeds are so consistent in size and weight that they were the original gauge of the carat—size and weight that they were proved valuable to the well-off. Its seeds are so consistent in size and weight that they were the original gauge of the carat—size and weight that they were proved valuable to the well-off.

The carob bean is native to Israel, tree and its curved, brown seed pods are a circle maker? This real man was a first century BCE sage who is credited with a miracle. The winter rains failed to come to the Land of Israel, so Honi drew a circle in the dust and stepped inside it (so there you have it. A circle maker draws circles.) He told God that he would remain in side the circle until God would provide rain. When a drizzle started, Honi wasn’t satisfied. He insisted on more rain, so God sent a deluge. Honi then demanded a calmer down- pour, which God then sent, thereby bringing an end to the drought. Next time you’re in Israel, take a drive up to the Galilee. Just a few minutes from Rosh Pina is Har HaGlit, where you can visit Honi’s tomb. And while there you can pick your own carob beans from the trees that grow nearby.

The carob tree is known for its exceedingly long life; Italy boasts one well over 200 years, and many others in the Mediterranean are over 100 years old. This longevity, and the length of time before fruiting, gave birth to what is arguably one of the most famous legends in Jewish literature. Here is a version of the story as told by Peninnah Schram:

One day, Honi the Circle Maker was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked the man, “How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?” The man replied, “Seven years.”

Honi then asked the man, “And do you think you will live another seventy years and eat the fruit of this tree?”

The man answered, “Perhaps not. However, when I was born into this world, I found many carob trees bearing by my father and grandfather. Just as they planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children and grandchildren so they will be able to eat the fruit of these trees.”

A little off the carob track, who was this Honi? And what is a circle maker? This real man was a first century BCE sage who is credited with a miracle. The winter rains...

Carob is a healthy alternative to chocolate, as it has lots of healthful nutrients and no stimulants such as caffeine or theobromine to give you the jitters. However, the bean has long been denigrated as an inferior chocolate wanna-be, nothing more than a poseur. This delicious cake is the lowly bokser and is so moist it doesn’t require frosting, but including it doubles the pleasure.

Ingredients:
2 c. unleached all-purpose flour
2 c. sugar
2 t. baking soda
1 c. hot coffee

For icing:
2 sticks unsalted butter at room temperature
4 c. confectioner’s sugar
2 t. orange extract (or extract)

Directions:
For cake:
Preheat oven to 350°.
Grease and flour two 8-inch round cake pans.

Pour batter into prepared pans.

For icing:
In bowl of mixer, beat butter until creamy.
Gradually add confectioners’ sugar with mixer set to slow speed so that it won’t fly all over the kitchen.
Add extract and milk.
Increase speed to whip icing to a nice, fluffy texture.
As we move into the secular new year, I find myself hear-
kening back to the Jewish one. I have always felt lucky to
have two new years – two des-
ignated times to do chesh-
esh (accounting of the soul) and, with them, two opportu-
nities to resolve to get it right. Falling roughly three
months after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Rippur, the new year
provides an excellent and timely opportunity to check
in on those Rosh Hashanah resolutions and, inevitably,
recalibrate for my second chance. This past year, howev-
er, I did some of that recalibra-
tion early – before and, in fact, because of Rosh Hashanah.

For nearly a decade, I have had the privilege of learning (chanting) Torah on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Rippur. When I first started doing it, I did not know the Torah trope, the cantillation marks that tell you how to chant any given word. Not knowing them, I relied on cassette tapes (re-
word. Not knowing them, I
the cantillation marks that tell
you how to chant from the Torah, you've already internal-
ized them. And it struck me
that this is true not only in the “Tree of Life” but in life itself.

What I have neglected to men-
tion in all of this is that there is also a High Holy Day
trope which means, if I want to be truly “authentic”, I’ll have to learn that one next. Fortunately, I’ve got most of 2018 to figure that out before 5779. Happy New Year!

[Editor’s Note: The trope pro-
gram referenced in this story is
sold by Kinnor Software.]
For 50 years, Bard College at Simon’s Rock has brought the benefits of a liberal arts college education to younger students. Our core philosophy is that many high school students are more than ready, now, to take on meaningful, serious academic challenges. This guiding principle has earned us a 99% academic rating from the Princeton Review, and 78% of our students go on to graduate study.

With the addition of Bard Academy at Simon’s Rock, we welcome 9th and 10th graders to our beautiful Berkshire campus. Here they pursue an intensive two-year high school curriculum (taught by college faculty) specially designed to prepare them to enter college at Simon’s Rock after the second year.
BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

TREES, continued from page 20

annual Christmas tree production in the top 5 states: Oregon 6,900,000 trees; North Carolina 1,900,000 trees; Michigan 1,500,000 trees; Pennsylvania 1,200,000 trees; and Wisconsin 1,000,000 trees. About 12,500,000 trees (I’m noticing that you get yourself even more worked up if you type out all the zeroes) harvested each year from just the five states listed so that people have something on which to hang lights and tinsel for a few weeks each winter. This is not even to mention the stunning bit of news that came out in 2015, captured in this headline: “Earth has EIGHT times more trees than first thought: Scientists discover there are 422 for every person on the planet.”

And yet Albert Storrs’ kitchen counter each morning is strewn with bowls of soggy Cheerios and yogurt mush that nobody cleans up even after he has asked, repeated-ly, that his family use paper bowls so he can just throw the messes in the garbage and be done with it. “I know how much you care about the trees,” I plead, “but don’t I count for something, too? Paper bowls – one, maybe two a day is all you’d use. Please. For me.”

But no. Because trees.

Tu B’Shevat sameach.

Sandisfield Group Seeking Support for Jewish History Book

SANDISFIELD – A committee working on a book entitled Soil and Shul in the Berkshires: The Untold Story of Sandisfield’s Jewish Farm Colony, has announced a fund raising campaign to support the project. The Sandisfield Arts Center is serving as Fiscal Sponsor. The book is expected to be about 250 pages, including chapters on social, economic and religious life and rare photos. It will serve both as a resource for scholars, as well as delightful and entertaining reading for anyone connected to or interested in the Jewish experience in the Berkshires. Publication is scheduled for summer, 2018.

Principal author and local historian, Lorraine German, said, “The legacy of the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who came here by way of New York over a century ago is very compelling. These Jews formed the largest ethnic group to settle in Sandisfield in the 20th century. It is past time that their fascinating story be told and preserved.”

The committee is seeking financial support to ensure a high quality book at a very affordable price to reach many homes, schools, libraries and Jewish cultural organizations in western Massachusetts. Contributions are tax deductible and may be directed to: Jewish History Book, Sandisfield Arts Center, P.O. Box 31, Sandisfield, MA 01255. For more information, contact Ronald Bernard at Ronbernard@aol.com or call (413) 269-0012.

A vista in the Berkshire hills. Note the number of trees.

Educational Opportunities

GREAT BARRINGTON
RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL

The Steiner School prepares students to be leaders and courageous, collaborative, curious, compassionate and motivated problem solvers by integrating rigorous academics with a rich array of movement, music and art. Learn better.

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Attend our Open House, January 18, or call to schedule a visit.

Berkshire Country Day School

Preschool through Grade 9: Now Enrolling
413.637.0755 x116 admissions@berkshirecountryday.org
55 Interlaken Rd (Route 183), Stockbridge, MA
berkshirecountryday.org
Calendar – Ongoing Events
Around the Community

**Knesset Israel 16 Colト Road, Pittsfield**

**ONGOING MINDS**
Sunday 8:45 a.m. and 7 p.m.
Tuesday 7 a.m. and 5:45 p.m.
Saturday 9:30 a.m. and evenings approximately 30 minutes before sunset

**CANDLE-LIGHTING**
January 5 .......................... 4:17 p.m.
January 12 ......................... 4:24 p.m.
January 19 ......................... 4:32 p.m.
January 26 ........................ 4:41 p.m.
February 2 .......................... 4:50 p.m.
February 9 ......................... 5:00 p.m.
February 16 ...................... 5:09 p.m.

You may request that the Berkshire Jewish Voice be mailed to your home. Just email us at federation@jewishberkshires.org for information.

**As my parents planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who come after me. – Talmud**

Thank you to those individuals who contribute their gift to the Legacy Circle that ensure that the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires thrives long into the future. May your name be a Blessing, and may the example you set inspire others to create their own Jewish Legacy.

Lee & Sydelle Blatt
Cipora Brown
Barbara Cohen
Mark Cohen*
Mimi Cohen
C. Jeffrey & Judith Cook
Gerry & Lynn Dunn
Jonathan & Sara Denmark
Sheila K. Donah
Melva Eidelman
Monte England, in memory of
Minnie B. & Isabel England
Dr. Armond V. Feigenbaum*
Dr. Donald S. Feigenbaum*
Steven Feiner
Diana & Stanley Feld
Stuart M. Fischman
Lynn & William Foggl
Elaine Friedman
Eiran Gazit
Jeffrey Goldwasser &
Joonqul Wolfinson
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Adelle S. Schiff
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Stephen & Deborah Schreier
Martin Silver
Sylvia Silverberg, in memory of
Jerome Silverberg
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Greenfield Simmons
Mark & Elisa Snowie
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**Anonymous**
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Robert Berend
Shelley Berend
Eloise Berke
Lawrence Berke

**Berkshire Jewish Voice**
•
jewishberkshires.org
January 1 to February 18, 2018

**Volovik at (413) 499-5999 or visit www.jewishberkshires.org.**

Can benefit and volunteers: Rabbi Levi Berkshires. Information for families who program to serve senior citizens in the “Smile on Seniors,” or “S.O.S.,” volunteer Chabad of the Berkshires

Volunteers: Tuesday from 10 to 11:30 a.m. – Torah Portion of the Week study group at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield. Facilitator Myrna Hammerling guides the group through the triennial cycle, year-round in the KI Library. Newcomers always welcome. Patiently with our students of diverse ages, backgrounds, and perspectives who search together to deepen understanding of our foundational text. Free. Information: (413) 445-4872, ext. 16.

**Tuesdays at 10:45 – “The Book of Deuteronomy” at Knesset Israel. Please check with Kl Library for dates in September and October. Classes taught by Rabbi David Weiner who is guiding an in-depth exploration of a revolutionary book of the Torah that continues to shape Jewish thought and practice to this day. Texts are in English.**

**Tuesdays at 6:15 p.m. at Temple Anshe Amunin – “Reading Hebrew Through the Siddur,” with Esther Benari-Altmann. This course will improve fluency in reading Hebrew. Special emphasis will be given to words and prayers from the Siddur. Knowledge of and comfort with Hebrew letters (and vowels) is required. Open to all members of the community, free for TAA members, $50 fee for non-members. Registration, full information: (413) 442-5910, extension 12, or eba@ansheamunim.org.**

**Wednesdays, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. – Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, 270 State Road, Great Barrington, offers “an hour of morning stillness” with Nina Lipkowitz, a certified Kripalu Yoga Teacher. Donation of $10 is asked for non-members. Information: (413) 528-6378.**

**Wednesdays at Knesset Israel – “Enhanced Prayer Class for Adults,” 10:10-11:30 a.m. at 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield, KI library. What are we saying when we read prayers at a service? How does the siddur language connect to our lives today? How can I build my Hebrew reading fluency and practice my reading skills? How can I be more comfortable with the language and process of prayer? Facilitated by Myrna Hammerling. Newcomers always welcome. Information: (413) 445-4872, ext. 16.**

**Wednesdays at 7 p.m. – learn Hebrew for free with Temple Anshe Amunim through Read Hebrew America. Tens of thousands of Jewish adults gather in hundreds of locations across North America for Hebrew lessons for beginners to learn to read Hebrew. An ideal way to learn how to follow services, to be more involved in your children’s Jewish education, or simply enhance your own ties to Judaism. For more information, contact Esther Benari-Altmann at (413) 442-5910, extension 12 or eba@ansheamunim.org.**

**Thursdays (fourth of each month) – Hadassah Book Club. For times, locations of meetings, and further information about the books. Roz Kolody at (413) 243-2077 or razziyik@gmail.com.**

**Fridays, last of month, times vary with candle-lighting – Chabad of the Berkshires’ “Friday Night Live,” traditional Kabbalat Shabbat service. Information: (413) 499-5999 or visit www.jewishberkshires.org**

**Fridays, at 9 a.m. – Meditation with Rabbi Rachel Barenblat in the Congregation Beth Israel sanctuary, 53 Lois Street, North Adams, overlooking the Berkshire mountains. Silence, chanting, and meditation designed to help prepare for Shabbat. All welcomed. Information: (413) 663-5830 and www.cwb.org.**

**Fridays, once a month at 5:30 p.m. (followed by a family style Shabbat dinner at 6:30 p.m.) – Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield. Shabbat Shalom (“Songs of Shabbat”). Unique service combines melodies from Carlebach, Debbie Friedman, and Camp Ramah to create a ruach (“spirited”) family friendly experience. Cost for dinner $18 per adult, $15 teens, $50 family maximum. Dinner reservations are due by the Monday before services. Full information: (413) 445-4872, ext. 10.**

**Saturdays at 8:45 a.m. – Hevreh, 270 State Road in Great Barrington. Every Shabbat morning, gather in Rabbi Neil Hirsh’s study and dive into the less-often read books of the Bible. All are welcome to begin the day with coffee while studying and relaxing on Shabbat. Sessions will be between 45 and 60 minutes. Please be in touch with Rabbi Hirsh for further information: nhirsh@hevreh.org.**

**Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. – “Torah Plus: Exploring Jewish Text and Culture.” Join Rabbi Josh Breindel for a conversation based on the texts of the Jewish people and reflection on what it means to be Jewish. All texts are offered in English. Temple Anshe Amunim, 28 Broad Street, Pittsfield. Free. Open to the public. Information: (413) 442-5910 or templeoffice@ansheamunim.org.**

**Saturdays at 9 a.m. – “Walking with mitzvot,” with Judith Weiner. Classes following the schedule of the Knesset Israel Hebrew School. Judith Weiner leads an exploration of the purpose, development and form of mitzvot. This curriculum, developed by the American Jewish University of Los Angeles, introduces participants to some of the most compelling thinkers of the contemporary Conservative movement and guides them towards greater understanding of the role of mitzvot in their lives.**

**Saturday afternoons – “Exodus Inspirations,” with Rabbi David Weiner. Please check with the KI website for times (which coincide with evening services) and dates. Our people’s central story – our journey from slavery to freedom, from Mitzrayim to the Promised Land – sparks innumerable conversations in every generation. Join in study of passages of Tanhuma Shemot, a creative 5th century commentary on the Book of Exodus, and enjoy the ensuing discussions.**

**Hevreh, 270 State Road in Great Barrington. Every Shabbat morning, gather in Rabbi Neil Hirsh’s study and dive into the less-often read books of the Bible. All are welcome to begin the day with coffee while studying and relaxing on Shabbat. Sessions will be between 45 and 60 minutes. Please be in touch with Rabbi Hirsh for further information: nhirsh@hevreh.org.**

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GENEALOGY, continued from page 24

The information shared in this article above only scratches the surface of the resources available to a knowledgeable, persistent, and creative researcher, and only hints at the types of revelations pursuing one's roots may uncover. So here is a personal testimonial on how genealogical research can work.

I have visited in my office to be interviewed for this article, she provided me with a quick example of how easy it can be – if you are persistent in filling out legible forms. I decided that these places being mentioned by name in my family home while I was growing up – I had only learned about them from an Israeli cousin, our own family genealogist and historian, who reconnected them from an Israeli cousin, our own family

The recordkeeping in the United States can also be hard to navigate. Before 1906, the year naturalization became standardized by the Federal government. Before that, different types of courts across the nation followed their own procedures. Sifting through this kind of archival material can be incredibly challenging. Weiner says, which one might think. I still find that I manually review microfilm, send to government offices, libraries and archives for documents, and interview relatives.

Finally, there are the differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish history. Researcher Jeffrey S. Malka, who is both Ashkenazi and half Sephardic, shared some of the following differences on JewishGen.org:

**Countries:** "Sephardic lived in countries around the Mediterranean, the Ottoman Empire, which welcomed them after the expulsion from Spain, and in the Americas, particularly South America. Ashkenazi researchers would be more interested in early Hispanic materials. Inquisition records in both Spain and in the Americas, are similiar for Kozangrodek and Luninyets, I am finding their relations all over its pages. I grapple with inscrutable details that may cast some dim light upon fragments of my family’s experience, even as they brightly illuminate vast swaths of the historical landscape. There is much of the story that was kept from me through omission or prevarication, and even more of the story that has always been out there but that I (to my shame and regret) never found out for myself. But all of it, I am now beginning to understand, shaped my own life in profound ways. Suddenly, many outrageous things make perfect sense – stories for another time, perhaps.

**Naming Customs:** While Ashkenazic names are of relatively recent origin, many, though not all, Sephardic names go back many centuries and sometimes a millennium or more. As a result, Sephardic last names may have more meaning in the distant past, though now primarily among contemporaries in the more recent past. It is dictum in Ashkenazic research, writes Malka. “This is partly because there is far less name variation in more recent times [which is not true of Sephar-

dic names].” He points out: "The most popular difference is that [the Sephardic tradition of naming children after their grandparent’s name is] alive to honor the grandparent whereas Ashkenazim avoid naming children after living relatives."

A Personal Story

By Albert Stern • BJV Editor

Harry Denenberg is sitting in the center of the front row. Most photographs of him that I am familiar with show a wan old man, physically and emotionally drained; but here he is in his mid-sixties looking somewhat hale and remarkably like my mother, a resemblance I never perceived in other pictures.

The photo was taken in Israel in 1945, and his mission at that time, as recorded in the Yukor book, must explain some of the unhappiness etched his face. "Gathered in 1943, in the very fervor of the Second World War, a Relief Committee was again organized…To great misfortune, Jewish Luninyetser and Kozhanhorodok no longer remained, only survivors who were spread across Russia, Poland and various camps." The committee was then working to find those survivors, and bring them to Israel. No one in our family who stayed in Eastern Europe was among them.

As I continue to pore over the Yukor book for Kozangrodek and Luninyets, I am finding my relations all over its pages. I grapple with ineradicable details that may cast some dim light upon fragments of my family’s experience, even as they brightly illuminate vast swaths of the historical landscape. There is much of the story that was kept from me through omission or prevarication, and even more of the story that has always been out there but that I (to my shame and regret) never found out for myself. But all of it, I am now beginning to understand, shaped my own life in profound ways. Suddenly, many outrageous things make perfect sense – stories for another time, perhaps.
Tracing Our Roots

Genealogical resources and information are ever more available, even as confronting the past remains a challenge.

For Keren Weiner, the ultimate importance of genealogical knowledge is that it lets an individual understand his or her heritage in history.

Weiner, formerly the office manager at Temple Ahavah in Pittsfield, recently started her own full-time genealogy service in the Berkshires. “Getting connected to a timeline can be revelatory,” she says. “It can help us better understand the way a person looks at life and family. Most of us get busy making a living and raising our own families, and can lose our place in the continuum. ‘Preserving the stories of the past and capturing documents that fill in our back stories lets us draw threads of experience through our own lives and preserve them for future generations.’

By some estimations, genealogy is the second most popular hobby in the United States after gardening and, according to ABC News, is the subject of the second most visited category of websites after those that – how to put it – people stop writing letters and are devoted to images depicting the many ways that our family trees have been augmented since time immemorial. DNA testing, the digitization of historical records, television programs dating back to Alex Haley’s “Roots” and most of all, the Internet have all fueled interest in the topic.

“In general, there is more material out there than people think. Even from the Holocaust era and World War II, not as much was lost as one might think,” — Jonathon Podolsky, Western Massachusetts Jewish Genealogical Society

Genealogy is now a big business, with the Israeli company MyHeritage (and its competitors)跻身 among the biggest players. MyHeritage, a sister company to which users enrol for free and then pay for premium features, boasts more than 80 million members worldwide. JewishGen.org is the premier site for Jewish genealogy, a trove of resources with millions of records from around the world and five special interest groups (SIG) engaged in a range of genealogical projects.

Jewish genealogy, like those of all other ethnicities, has its peculiarities with, of course, the unique historical tragedy of the Holocaust that one must inevitably confront. Jews may not be able to access the kind of oral history that other families may pass down, not only because of the family members lost, but also because of the reticence of many survivors and their relations regarding the Shoah.

“We’re the Holocaust, the 1906 pogroms, or any kind of war zone,” says Weiner. “people came away with a need not to talk.” Children of trauma victims, she explains, may have learned to share their parents’ habit of silence. Nevertheless, the stories may have been recorded in detail after the liberation of Europe by the Red Cross or other entities. "A person can only keep in mind what is being embarked upon Jewish genealogical research is, according to Jonathon Podolsky, vice president of the Western Massachusetts Jewish Genealogical Society, that “in general, there is more material out there than people think. Even from the Holocaust era and World War II, not as much was lost as one might think.”

Also promising is the vast amount of information that is being rediscovered, reclaimed, and re-catalogued by professional and amateur historians as part of a de facto tikkun olam project on behalf of those that has been killed or has been ongoing since the end of the World War II. Armed with better preservation tools and impelled by the awareness that the survivors’ generation will soon be gone, researchers are working to repair the world by assembling evidence of the Jewish world that was destroyed.

Getting Started

“We need to start with their fifities, sixties, or seventies before they are ready to take on this kind of project,” says Keren Weiner, “before they are ready to feel appropriate compassion for the people and stories they will be researching.” Weiner observes that the impulse penetrated down to more people in their forties. “The sooner one gets started, the more access one is likely to have to the family elders, and their memories and documents.

Typically, clients come to Weiner with very little information, maybe three to six facts that can be quite amorphous. For Jews and Gentiles alike, she says, having information beyond birth and death dates, emigration, possible membership in Zionist organizations, and so forth. He says that genealogical/historical projects are now underway that are making available professional directories and other searching-modernly mundane historical documents that may provide exciting details to a researcher. Weiner also notes that since the advent of widespread, inexpensive telephone connections since the 1990s, paper trails of information have become harder to come by. People stopped writing letters and started talking on the phone, sharing conversations that disappeared into the ether as soon as both parties hung up. Therefore, he stresses, it is important to get as much down in writing (or audio recording) as possible, starting with the oldest family members.

Kogan is an immigrant to the United States from the former Soviet Union whose parents made aliyah to Israel. Thirty years ago, he asked his parents to create a family tree, and also requested that his mother write down her family stories and mail them to him in Boston. Kogan said he would read these letters with his family on Shabbat, and eventually his son translated the correspondence from Russian. The 95 pages of family stories are now part of an almost 400 page family book.

When people see others in their family doing this, he says, “it is very helpful.” Kogan can now identify his own forbears back to the 1750s, others from the mid-19th century, and has also reunited with ancestors presumed lost in the Holocaust. Kogan stresses the value of collecting photographs, and identifying as many people in them as possible. Even if a person cannot be identified, a page on JewishGen.org exists where people share photographs, giving thousands of researchers the opportunity to view the images and make connections. In 2014, Kogan organized a Bessarabia SIG for JewishGen.org, for which he also translates documents, conducts cemetery photo-graphing and indexing, and participates in many other projects.

Presumably, the most important piece of any genealogist’s methodology, Kogan says, “is to get connected.”

Last October, Jonathon Podolsky revived the Western Massachusetts Jewish Genealogical Society, a group he originally started in 2002 and which is a chapter of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies.

Those interested in getting started in a genealogical research project who may prefer a more personal connection may want to check out the Society’s February 4 event at the Springfield JCC, “Finding Your Roots – Jewish Style,” which will take place from 1:30 – 4:00 p.m. Attendees will be able to consult experienced researchers for 20 minute-appointments, work with a strategist to plan next steps, get translation help with names in various foreign languages in 30 minute appointments, or learn more about DNA testing and its interpretation. See Resources on page 23.)

Jewish Genealogy Basics

Many of the genealogical records available now were collected after the fall of the Soviet Union by the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) — i.e., the Mormon Church — which maintains one of the largest collections of information. Even before the Iron Curtain fell, Keren Weiner’s sister Miriam Weiner, a pioneering Jewish genealogist, in 1989 traveled to Eastern Europe and dis...