Elevating the Voices of Jewish Leaders of Color

Three programs will highlight Jewish diversity in the United States and overseas.

This winter, the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires presents a three-part series elevating voices of Jewish leaders of color in the United States, in Africa, and in Israel. These Jewish Federation of the Berkshires programs will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at jewishberkshires.org for links to the programs.

Faith, Power, and Privilege – with Yavilah McCoy

Thursday, January 14 at 6:45 p.m.

Yavilah McCoy, the founder of Ayecha and CEO of Dimensions, will discuss the practice of holding multiple identities within efforts to build greater equity and justice in our changing political and social climate. She will also address the challenges of diversity and inclusion in religious communities, as well as opportunities that these communities can engage in as part of their efforts to become deeper allies.

Yavilah McCoy and stronger advocates in working together toward social justice.

McCoy was born and raised in an Orthodox Jewish home in Brooklyn, NY. Her grandparents converted to Judaism, and she continues the traditions handed to her over three generations as part of her African American-Jewish family. Through Dimensions, McCoy services an international portfolio of clients in the areas of education, philanthropy, and social justice. As an anti-racism activist with an international platform, she provides training and consulting to numerous social justice projects that span multiple identities and communities.

McCoy also serves on the steering committee of the national Women's

A Time of Contraction and Expansion

Artist Nina Lipkowitz responded to pandemic-year anxieties with a rich and mysterious series of watercolors.

"Part of this COVID thing, part of what saved me, is that I can go and make art whenever I want,” says Great Barrington’s Nina Lipkowitz. "You know, other people might be saying, 'I can’t do this, I can’t do that…’ It’s really important for me to keep my creativity going.” She responded to the pandemic with a burst of creative energy, painting a new watercolor each day for months. For more on her story, please see page 10.

Welcome to the Berkshires!

Our cup runneth over!

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' 2020 Annual Campaign exceeded goal!

Thank you to all who participated!

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

Rabbi Shira Stern

Berkshire County and its Jewish community are changing in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, with an influx of new residents who have left densely-populated urban areas in search of a different way of living. While it is still too soon to speculate about how life in the Berkshires might change - especially since the pandemic mentality remains pervasive – it is clear that many of our new neighbors bring with them interesting resumes.

Among them is Rabbi Shira Stern, who, with her husband Rabbi Daniel Weber, hastened their planned retirements to Lenox after serving as longtime leaders of Temple Rodeph Torah in Marlboro, NJ. Rabbi Stern has been familiar with the Berkshires since childhood – her family would accompany her father, the violinist Isaac Stern, when he performed at Tanglewood during the summer months. And while she says her fingers are crossed that our region's rich cultural life will resume by next season, for now she and her husband are riding out the pandemic at home, along with their son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren, one a toddler and the other an infant.

Rabbi Stern spoke with the BJV just before Thanksgiving about her work as a chaplain and American Red Cross first- responder. America in a time of pandemic, and her hopes and goals for her new full-time life in the Berkshires. Please see page 8 for our interview.

Our cup runneth over!
The Wisdom of the Trees

By Rabbi Jodie Gordon

Hanging on the door to my office is a print of a poem called “Advice from a Tree” by Ilan Shamir, which was given to me by a congregant. It reads:

Dear Friend,
Stand Tall and Proud
Sink your roots deeply into the Earth
Reflect the light of a greater source
Think long term
Go out on a limb
Remember your place among all living beings
Embrace with joy the changing seasons
For each yields its own abundance
The Energy and Birth of Spring
The Growth and Contentment of Summer
The Wisdom to let go of leaves in the Fall
The Rest and Quiet Renewal of Winter
Feel the wind and the sun
And delight in their presence
Look up at the moon that shines down upon you
And the mystery of the stars at night
Seek nourishment from the good things in life
Simple pleasures
Earth, fresh air, light
Be content with your natural beauty
Drink plenty of water
Let your lirads sway and dance in the breezes
Be flexible
Remember your roots
Enjoy the view!

This month, as the chill of winter settles in, I can’t help but reach for that wisdom of the trees, which is also wisely embedded in our tradition. Who among us couldn’t benefit from standing a bit taller, letting our roots sink deeply into the earth? I can imagine many of us could stand to seek nourishment from the simple pleasures of earth, fresh air, light – and certainly from that reminder to drink plenty of water, for me a point well taken as I nurse my third cup of coffee of the day.

Perhaps, though, there is something particular about this timing that can sustain us through what many of us have anticipated as a “long hard winter,” now about to be lifted by our joyousṛisters pandemic, as we continue to isolate and distance ourselves from the people, the places, and the activities that normally sustain us.

This month, as the Hebrew calendar turns to the month of Shevat, we mark yet another new year: the New Year of the Trees, also known as Tu BiShevat. Here in the frosty Northeast, this holiday may sometimes elicit a cynical response – the birthday of the trees? While they are bare and weighted down with icicles rather than blossoms and blossoms? Certainly, were we able to celebrate across the ocean in the Land of Israel, this holiday would be marked with the brilliant flowering of pink almond blossoms, dotting the landscape with hopeful beauty.

Perhaps, like me, you have spent quite a bit of time over these past ten months with your thoughts turned inward. This winter’s spiritual challenge is that it comes on the heels of a difficult and unusual autumn, summer, and spring. Rabbi Hammer teaches: “These months fall during a time that the Sages describe as yemot hageshamim—or, the ‘days of rain,’ when the skies dim and thoughts turn inward.”

What is our place in the world, and how do we nurture and appreciate our surroundings? How are we willing to change to protect our natural landscape?

PJ Library Pajama Drive Collects More PJs Than Ever Before

Federation’s conference room was filled to overbrimming by the more than 400 pairs of pajamas destined to keep local children warm this winter, amidst a sea of bags holding more than 400 pairs of pajamas for local families during the holiday season. Thanks again to Carl Hardware for providing collection bins at their stores across Berkshire County and to everyone donating who made this effort a success.

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Legacy Giving
The Rita and Sol Toscher Memorial Fund has long contributed a generous annual gift to the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ annual campaign, as well as to other worthy institutions in the region. Administered by the Toschers’ nephew Mark Alimansky (along with his wife, Susan Erdossi) and niece Jeanne Hirshberg, the fund has recently been liquidated and its assets allocated to organizations that the Toschers supported.

The family elected to direct a significant portion of the fund to the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ Legacy Circle, a reflection of their confidence in Federation’s mission and its ongoing effectiveness in providing Jewish connection, delivering essential services, and building Jewish life in the region.

“Over the past 16 years, Jeanne and I have been proud to carry out Aunt Rita and Uncle Sol’s wishes,” writes Alimansky. “We hope these funds, and the spirit in which they were given, have made and will make a difference for the organizations and the people they serve. We have great confidence that the Jewish Federation will steward this legacy of our aunt and uncle for generations to come.”

About the Toschers, Alimansky writes:

Let me provide a little background about our aunt and uncle, Rita (Levine) Toscher (1915-1997) and Sol Toscher (1917-2004).

Rita was born in Pittsfield, the youngest of six daughters of Anna and Louis Levine (lifelong members of Knesset Israel). It was a close and observant family. All six sisters were encouraged to pursue their educations past high school and in the mid-1930s, Rita enrolled at the University of Alabama. She chose Alabama because its weather was more favorable to her as a polio victim.

There, through participation in Hillel, she met Sol Toscher, who had grown up in Denver. Explaining why he chose a school so far from home, Sol said it was the only school he could find where he could live on $5 a week during the Great Depression. After they married, they lived in Pittsfield next door to our grandparents. Rita joined the Berkshire Athenaeum as a librarian, eventually providing library services to patients at local area hospitals and becoming well-known in the community for her caring manner. After serving as an airman in World War II, Sol joined General Electric as a manufacturing process specialist.

They loved children, especially their nieces and nephews, who reciprocated that love. We all have many wonderful memories of our childhoods with them and our grandparents during the years after World War II. A lasting memory for Jeanne and me was of Sunday afternoons spent at their home. They were among the first to have television and those afternoons were spent watching sports and “Hopalong Cassidy.” Jeanne remembers that while growing up in non-Jewish Adams, her parents would occasionally drive her to Pittsfield to meet other Jewish kids and have a “Jewish social life.” These visits always included “fun” with Aunt Rita and Uncle Sol.

Rita and Sol retired to Delray Beach, FL, and later joined a local synagogue there. They returned to Pittsfield regularly for many years to visit with lifelong friends in the Pittsfield Jewish community. Community was paramount to them.

They were able to continue their support of the organizations they cared about through The Rita and Sol Toscher Memorial Fund. Their instructions were that annual grants from this fund be made to Pittsfield organizations they had supported and which had supported them – the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Knesset Israel, the local YMCA, and the Berkshire Museum. Another grantee was Hillel International, which always held a special place in their hearts since that was where it all began.

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ Legacy Circle offers a meaningful way to sustain and grow the Jewish community in the Berkshires into the future. For more information on the Legacy Circle, please contact our development officer, Leslie Kozupsky, at lkozupsky@jewishberkshires.org or at (413) 442-4360, ext. 19.
March and has been a core part of many large-scale national movement, bringing an intersectional perspective to the ongoing work of racial justice and collective liberation. McCoy is a pioneer of the Jewish divers-ity and equity movement and is an advocate and mentor for the empowerment of a trans-global community of Jews of Color.

McCoy was an inaugural recipient of the Spielberg Foundation’s Joshua Venture Fellowship and directed the launch of the “Ruderman Synagogue Inclusion Project” for Combined Jewish Philanthropies and the Ruderman Family Foundation. She also directed the Bronfman Philanthropy’s Curriculum Initiative in Boston, where she provided educational consultancy to 600 prep schools across the nation.

McCoy was voted one of “116 Faith Leaders to Watch” by the Center for American Progress Faith Leaders Fellowship and directed the “Project” for Combined Jewish Philanthropies. McCoy was a recipient of the Spielberg Foundation’s Joshua Venture Grant and directed the “Project” for Combined Jewish Philanthropies. McCoy was a recipient of the Spielberg Foundation’s Joshua Venture Grant and directed the “Project” for Combined Jewish Philanthropies.”

Jews of Color, continued from page 1

On Thursday, February 4 from 6:45 to 7:45 p.m., Alejandra Czarny presents “Yiddish Songs and Stories for Today,” a concert featuring both traditional and modern Yiddish songs designed for plenty of audience participation.

This Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at jewishberkshires.org for a link to this program.

Dr. David Dulin will examine the lives, legal careers and Jewish legacies of those who have served or who currently serve as justices of the U.S. Supreme Court: Louis D. Brandeis, Benjamin Cardozo, Felix Frankfurter, Arthur J. Goldberg, Abe Fortas, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen G. Breyer, and Elena Kagan. Special attention will be given to the anti-Semitism encountered by some of the justices during their legal careers, and to the changing role of Jews within the American legal profession.

Dr. Dulin is the author, co-author, or editor of twelve books, including Religion and State in the American-Jewish Experience (co-authored with Jonathan D. Sarna) and The Presidents of the United States of Jewish Heritage.

She has recorded three CDs, the first two of which—“Songs About Stories” and “Under the White Stars”—include Yiddish songs and several original compositions. She has performed this repertoire regularly throughout Europe and the Americas in a number of festivals and concerts. More recently, in 2018, Czarny released her third CD, “Siendo Tiempo,” which is made up entirely of her own compositions. In her work, Czarny employs her extensive background as a music therapist by, for example, facilitating singing-therapy groups as well as teacher training programs.

She will share the background of the songs and a brief translation of them, to provide a wider approach of this musical experience. The repertoire includes ballads, protest songs, love songs, and more. Some of the lyrics will be provided to enhance participation.

“Yiddish Songs and Stories for Today”: A Live Performance by Alejandra Czarny

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Wildlife in Winter, with Zach Adams of Mass Audubon

How does wildlife in the hills surrounding us make it through the winter? Find out from Zach Adams of Mass Audubon, who will present two-hour-long programs this winter.

These Jewish Federation of the Berkshires programs will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at jewishberkshires.org for links to the programs.

On Monday, January 11 at 6:45 p.m., “Birds in Winter” explores the chilly life of the wintering birds of Berkshire County. Zach will discuss which birds spend their winters near us and how they find food and how they stay warm. You may be surprised by the incredible stories and species that brave New England’s cold and snow.

On Thursday, January 21 at 6:45 p.m., “Bears in the Berkshires” explores the important role that the North American black bear plays in the ecosystems of New England. “Their incredible strength, senses, and curiosity are often the source of commotion in Berkshire County,” writes Zach. “Together, we will discuss the natural history of black bears, their role in the ecosystem, and how to maintain safe and positive human-bear interactions.”

Mass Audubon’s Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, located in Lenox, has been a site for conservation and education for over 90 years. With five additional wildlife sanctuaries, Mass Audubon protects almost 3,000 acres of land in Berkshire County alone.

Zach Adams has been studying birds since childhood, when he fell in love with the sounds of wood ducks and redwing blackbirds in the marshes. He holds a BS in Environmental Science from Juniata College and has worked as an educator and program leader since the age of 16. Zach has been a Teacher Naturalist for Mass Audubon’s Berkshire Sanctuaries since November 2018, and leads programs in birding, hiking, tracking, and canoeing. He is extremely passionate about ornithology and the opportunity to share his love for birds with everyone around him.

A ‘Jurassic Park-like’ Tu BiShevat Miracle

On Tuesday, January 26 at noon, join Dr. Elaine Solowey and David Lehrer of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies in Israel to learn about the miracle story of how Dr. Solowey was able to recreate the long-extinct native Judaean date palm.

When Israel is written about in the bible as “a land flowing with milk and honey,” the honey being referred to is the honey extracted from the native Judaean date. No one has known what that tasted like for thousands of years, until now!

The program is co-sponsored by Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County and the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies.
Your Federation Presents

These Little Lights of Ours

Federation sent active PJ Library families Chanukah gift packages (150 in all) containing gelt, games, blessings, recipes, and family activities. We also had a fun, interactive, and wacky Chanukah Live! program with the theatrical group mainstages over Zoom on December 6, 2020. Everyone was giggling, dancing, and singing along during a fun-filled morning. While we couldn’t be together in person, we still had a great time celebrating Chanukah! — Susan Frisch Lehrer, PJ Library Coordinator

Life Can Present Challenges

Sometimes, a little help along the way can make things easier.

Our community social worker, Jill Goldstein, LICSW, offers case management, information/referral and consultation to help Jewish community members find support and access to services to help with such needs as:

- Coping with life’s transitions
- Aging and caregiving issues
- Relationship difficulties
- Adjustment to new living situation
- Living with illness
- Grief and loss
- Depression or anxiety

If you are struggling with one of these or other issues, Jill can help you find community resources to assist you. Jill has a Master’s degree in social work (MSW) and is licensed as an independent clinical social worker (LICSW).

If you or someone you know needs a little help, give us a call:

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

All services are free and completely confidential.

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In September, the Library of Congress announced that Keren Grinspoon Israel (KGI, the Grinspoon Israel Foundation) was selected as a 2020 Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program Best Practice Honoree. KGI and its programs — Sifriyat Pijama (Hebrew for “Pajama Library”) and Maktabat al-Fanoos (Arabic for “Lantern Library”) — are the first in Israel to receive an honor from the Library of Congress, which each year recognizes outstanding organizations for innovation in promoting literacy worldwide.

KGI was granted the honor on the basis of a recommendation from Professor David S. Dickinson, Edith Margaret Cowan Chair of Vanderbilt University’s Department of Teaching and Learning. He noted that Sifriyat Pijama and Maktabat al-Fanoos “provide exactly the type of supports known to nourish early development (i.e., high-quality books and associated activities that help foster positive ties between the classroom and the home). The programs create ‘sustained support for a child to learn and use the vocabulary and concepts and apply to learning and life’” (i.e., high-quality books and associated activities that help foster positive ties between the classroom and the home). The programs create “sustained support for a child to learn and use the vocabulary and concepts and apply to learning and life.”

Founder Harold Grinspoon said, “We take great pride in our efforts to provide free books to the vast majority of young children in Israel in partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Education and fellow funders, and it is an honor for Keren Grinspoon Israel to be recognized for this work. Given the growing evidence that exposure to books from a young age plays such an important role in human development, we see our investment as an impactful way to support the State of Israel and its next generation.”

Founding executive director steps down

In other KGI news, the program’s founding executive director, Galina Vromen, stepped down from her role in December. (Vromen’s family has a second home in South County.) In a statement about her retirement, Vromen wrote: “I am full of gratitude to have worked with such wonderful staff and colleagues all these years. In partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Education, we have created programs that have touched the lives of more than 1.2 million children in Israel and their families with more than 23 million books.”

“Galina’s role in the success of Sifriyat Pijama and Maktabat al-Fanoos can’t be overstated,” said Harold Grinspoon. “She brought amazing commitment and passion to the task of building a strong culture of reading among Israeli parents and children, and leaves a legacy that we’ll be building on for years to come.”

Succeeding Vromen as executive director is Andrea Arbel, who worked for 18 years at the Jewish Agency. She was the director of the partner-ship unit responsible for seven international programs that include Partners2Gether and the Global School Twinning Network, which currently boasts 700 schools globally.

Says Arbel: “The beauty of the KGI model is that the Sifriyat Pijama and Maktabat al-Fanoos programs bring books directly to children, for them to take home and keep. Quarantines and shut-downs wreak havoc on schools’ curricula, but the love of reading and the conversations these books inspire is not limited to a school setting. Now more than ever, families need support in meeting their children’s intellectual and emotional needs. KGI allows kids and their caregivers to travel the world and discover their heritage from their favorite chair.”

About Keren Grinspoon Israel

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Major funding for KGI comes from the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. Funding for the Arabic language program is also provided by Price Philanthropies of San Diego. Maktabat al-Fanoos is the largest Arabic book-gifting program in the world and focuses on books that stress universal humanitarian values and children’s day-to-day dilemmas.

Dozens of Israeli books used in the Hebrew program have been translated to English, Spanish, Russian, and other languages for PJ Library, which now has programs in 29 countries to provide free Jewish-content children’s books to share Jewish culture, heritage, and values.

Shalom

BERKSHIRE JEWISH CONGREGATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

Berkshire Minyan
Lay-led egalitarian minyan held at Hevrach of Southern Berkshire, 270 State Rd., Great Barrington, MA (413) 229-3618, berkshireminyan.org

Berkshire Hills Hadassah
P.O. Box 187, Pittsfield, MA (413) 443-4386
Berkshirehillshadassah@gmail.com

B’nai Brith Lodge, No. 326
Chabad of the Berkshires
450 South St., Pittsfield, MA (413) 499-9899, jewisberkshires.com

Congregation Ahavath Sholom
Reconstructionist
North St., Great Barrington, MA (413) 528-4197, ahavathsholom.com

Congregation Beth Israel
Reform
53 Lois St., North Adams, MA (413) 663-5830, cbiweb.org

Hevrach of Southern Berkshire
Reform
270 State Rd., Great Barrington, MA (413) 528-6578, hevrach.org

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

Jewish Federation of the Berkshires
196 South St., Pittsfield, MA (413) 442-4360, jewisberkshires.org

Jewish War Veterans
Commander Robert Waldheim
(413) 822-4546, sellit4@aol.com

Knesset Israel
Conservative
16 Colt Rd., Pittsfield, MA (413) 445-4872, knessetisrael.org

Temple Anshe Amunim
Reform
26 Broad St., Pittsfield, MA (413) 442-5910, templeoflife@ansheamunim.org

LOCAL NEWS

U.S. Library of Congress Honors Grinspoon Literacy Programs in Israel

Founding Executive Director Galina Vromen steps down from her role at Sifriyat Pijama and Maktabat al-Fanoos

In September, the Library of Congress announced that Keren Grinspoon Israel (KGI, the Grinspoon Israel Foundation) was selected as a 2020 Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program Best Practice Honoree. KGI and its programs — Sifriyat Pijama (Hebrew for “Pajama Library”) and Maktabat al-Fanoos (Arabic for “Lantern Library”) — are the first in Israel to receive an honor from the Library of Congress, which each year recognizes outstanding organizations for innovation in promoting literacy worldwide.

KGI was granted the honor on the basis of a recommendation from Professor David S. Dickinson, Edith Margaret Cowan Chair of Vanderbilt University’s Department of Teaching and Learning. He noted that Sifriyat Pijama and Maktabat al-Fanoos “provide exactly the type of supports known to nourish early development (i.e., high-quality books and associated activities that help foster positive ties between the classroom and the home). The programs create “sustained support for a child to learn and use the vocabulary and concepts and apply to learning and life.”

Founder Harold Grinspoon said, “We take great pride in our efforts to provide free books to the vast majority of young children in Israel in partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Education and fellow funders, and it is an honor for Keren Grinspoon Israel to be recognized for this work. Given the growing evidence that exposure to books from a young age plays such an important role in human development, we see our investment as an impactful way to support the State of Israel and its next generation.”

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Says Arbel: “The beauty of the KGI model is that the Sifriyat Pijama and Maktabat al-Fanoos programs bring books directly to children, for them to take home and keep. Quarantines and shut-downs wreak havoc on schools’ curricula, but the love of reading and the conversations these books inspire is not limited to a school setting. Now more than ever, families need support in meeting their children’s intellectual and emotional needs. KGI allows kids and their caregivers to travel the world and discover their heritage from their favorite chair.”

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When we start to emerge, I’m hoping that [we’ll remember] all of those good works — I’ll just call them mitzvot… Don’t call a mitzvah a good deed, because it’s not. It’s not a good deed: it’s a commandment.

I was always fascinated by the ritual and the history of Judaism and it was very hard to make sure that whatever I could learn, I did. I was one of those kids who loved going to Hebrew school, and then when I was 12, my parents said, ‘You know you’re a girl, you don’t have to do this anymore.’ And I said, ‘Fine’! Then I’m going to quit if I can’t become a bar mitzvah.” They said, ‘Fine.’ And I spent the next six years trying to get back in.

I majored in Religious Studies at Brown University and studied with Professor Jacob Neusner, who at one point said to me, ‘You’d be a rabbi if you just go on to rabbinic school, because you have something to teach.’ And I did. I went straight from graduation to Israel. I should have had a year off. I should have had a chance to think. I still would have gone back, but by the time I finished five years later, I had been in school for a very long time, and then she would call people she knew would be alone and isolated. And I have learned a great deal from her.

BJV: How did you decide that the rabbinate would be your direction in life, particularly in a time when there was not a clear career path for women?

Rabbi Stern: My experience was that [my family] would travel to Israel every year. There was a promise my father [violinist Isaac Stern] made to my mother who had made Aliyah — because marrying him meant leaving Israel — that we would return each year. We did return at least once a year, twice a year for decades, so Israel was always a focal point in our lives. Giving back to the community was also a focal point in our lives, whether or not it was helping someone professionally or helping someone find housing or getting a good meal or just to be surrounded by a family.

BJV: You have held leadership roles in many rabbinic and social action organizations. You have written extensively on the ritual and the history of Judaism. And I tried very hard to make sure that whatever I do, I learned something from those injured and the survivors.

When I really understood why I was applying to rabbinic school — they didn’t understand — I wrote them a letter and explained that I learned how to be a rabbin from both of them. I certainly learned how to be a chaplain from my mother, who was the first person who would go to visit people who were homeless or who were ill in the hospital. It was her commitment to making sure no one feels like they’ve been isolated and alone. She was good to her word until she couldn’t leave the house anymore, and my family was very much in the limelight. It didn’t really allow for private mourning the way one normally does — although there is no “normal” for mourning. We each find our own path.

Helping other people mourn helped me in my own process of mourning. I went to, you know, all three of the temporary and permanent Morgues to support family members if they were coming, unfortunately, to identify remains or if there was DNA to match. It was all-encompassing.

BJV: Tell me a bit about your involvement with the American Red Cross and its SAIR team.

Rabbi Stern: I had a colleague who said to me, in June of 2001, that I really should join the Red Cross — they’d train me to be a Red Cross disaster chaplain. SAIR refers to ‘spiritual air incident response,’ meaning that if an airplane full of people were to crash, you would be called to serve and support those individuals and the survivors.

[Grief] is not linear. It’s not a progression. It’s different things that overwhelm you at different times.

[It was all-encompassing.]

BNJ: Now that you and your husband are full-timers here, what would you like out of the Jewish Berkshires?

Rabbi Stern: I’ve actually been very surprised with the gravitational pull of Jewish responses to the pandemic, especially for holidays, for Shabbat, but also for spiritual uplift. You expect that in the first few days after something terrible has happened. But there was standing room only [in synagogues] right after 9/11.

[In New Jersey,] we were a small congregation, yet we were getting 75 to 100 streams [online for services]. We’re hearing that there are people who are still coming to services virtually, even those who were not doing so prior to the pandemic; they’ve gotten into a habit. And I’m hoping that that habit of connecting through your screen translates into a feeling of being an important part of the community because you feel attached to all these people whose faces we see on Zoom.

I’m hoping that translates into a feeling of ‘Oh my God, I knew the community was important to me. I now know I really know how important it is to be part of a community. And I want to continue this...
Winter Events at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire

Creative Beit Midrash

Saturday, January 2, 16 & 30 and February 13 & 27 from 6:30 p.m. to 9:45 p.m.

Together with Rabbi Neil Hirsch, explore Jewish topics through your medium of choice – visual art, music, dance/movement, or written word. These Zoom sessions are for sharing and processing individuals’ creative product through nurturing, not critique. Questions?

Contact info@hevreh.org to be directed to Heidi Katz or Larry Frankel.

Beyond Bread: Winter Baking Course

Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., January 14 (Barbari) & February 11 (Pugassou)

Join master baker Cheryl Holbert of Nomad Bakery for a curated Zoom baking class. Bake delicious creations full of Jewish soul and creativity. All ages and kitchen experiences are welcome. Each course is $30 per person. Visit hevreh.org/winterbread to sign up and view the ingredients list!

State Senator Adam Hinds: His View of the Berkshires

Friday, January 15 at 6 p.m.

As part of Shabbat evening services, Hevreh welcomes Berkshire County Senator Adam Hinds as guest speaker. Senator Hinds will reflect on the state of our community, the effects of COVID-19, poverty, and where we go from here. Please join Hevreh in celebrating Shabbat with Senator Hinds via Zoom.

Zoom Into Tot Shabbat In Your PJs

Thursday, February 4 at 3:30 p.m.

Every Thursday of the year, a meal free to the community is sponsored by organizations around Southern Berkshire county. The Breaking Bread Kitchen meal in February is sponsored by Hevreh. Help prepare and serve a distanced-to-go meal for about 100 at the American Legion Hall on Rt. 7 in Sheffield. Clean up is usually done by 6 p.m. Any amount of time you can give is appreciated. Email info@hevreh.org to volunteer.

Supporting the Arts, Culture, Environment, and Social Needs in the Berkshires Since 1984

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(413) 328-4211

Financial Assistance Available

No one could have anticipated the financial impact this pandemic would have. The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires has provided a safety net for our Jewish community for more than 80 years and we are here to help individuals and families through this difficult time.

The Federation is offering online financial assistance to help Jewish community members struggling with essential needs such as food, utilities, mortgage and rent. Additional critical needs may be considered. Interest free loans are also available.

Any Jewish community member who has been impacted financially by the pandemic may be eligible. You do not have to belong to a synagogue or be part of the Federation to apply. Requests will be assessed on a case by case basis and are per household. All inquiries regarding assistance will be kept strictly confidential.

To inquire about assistance please visit

jewishberkshires.org/covid19-assist

Local News

Introducing a New Community Venture at Congregation Ahavath Shalom: An Online Marketplace

The Ahavath Shalom community is blessed with a wealth of creative talent, including painters, photographers, sculptors, composers, poets, and writers of every kind.

From CAS: “Since our current lives have become so different from the norm, the congregation thought its artisans and writers could benefit by an opportunity to show and sell their creations. This online marketplace is also meant to assist members of the broader community who are looking for special gifts without having to go out shopping. All purchases will also support CAS.”

The art and books for sale are posted on the CAS website (AhavathShalom.com) and the weekly CAS emails will have a link to the page. In order to make a purchase, please contact the seller directly and he/she will take care of the entire transaction.

A t-shirt with an image by Paul Grubard

What is the New England Jewish Experience?

On Sunday, January 24, from 2 to 4 p.m., learn more about the Jewish connection to this part of the United States we call home with the New England Jewish History Collaborative, a new group composed of Jewish historical societies and Jewish Federations from across the region.

“What is the New England Jewish Experience?” is an online event launching the Collaborative that will ask questions such as “Do New England Jews share a common experience?” “Is there a regional identity?” “What resources are available for studying New England’s Jewish history?”

The Collaborative invites historians, archivists, genealogists, and others interested in Jewish history to explore the regional experience of New England Jews.

The keynote talk will be delivered by Michael Hoberman, Ph.D., Fitchburg State University and author of New Israel/New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America. Hoberman will also support CAS.”

The event will conclude with an introduction of resources created by the New England Jewish History Collaborative highlighting the resources of Jewish historical organizations in New England, including a new website and guide.

The event was still being organized at press time. For more information and registration, please email NEJCollaborative@nehgs.org.
“What I can do is enough, as long as it is done with intention…”

Nina Lipkowitz on her coronavirus-year series of bold and introspective watercolors

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

In the months before the coronavirus pandemic shut downs, Great Barrington’s Nina Lipkowitz and her husband John were actively pursuing their passions as peripatetic travelers and creators of art. John is a photographer, while Nina goes through phases with media and subject matter. In the first phase of her career, she worked as a potter. When she was first featured in the BJV back in 2016, she was primarily producing sensuous watercolors of flowers from her garden and eye-popping abstract compositions on her iPad. When we circled back with her in 2018, she was working autobiographically, exploring her father’s trauma and her sister’s illness and its effect on her family, working with photo transfer and mixed media. I asked Nina where she was at before the pandemic changed everything. She told me that she and John had been traveling in New Mexico and Ireland. Artistically, she had been inspired by people she met on those trips to paint portraits—“straight painting” using acrylic paints, something she says she’d never really done seriously before.

One example is the arresting image below of a cloaked figure inspired by a child “[I gave her an older face]” she met in Derry, Northern Ireland, on a hike. Over a period of months, Nina says she got back into painting and that basically was Day One of me starting to paint.

“I was in absolute terror.”

Nina says she got back to work on April 6th, the day she joined the Jewish Studio Project. Its participants immerse themselves in what, according to the group’s website, is “a unique methodology (the Jewish Studio Process) that combines creative practices from the field of art therapy with Jewish learning techniques, and spiritual community building.” At the first session, the young Philadelphia-area Reconstructionist Rabbi Rebecca Richman prompted Nina’s group to summon memories, sensations, and emotions to stimulate the creative process. Says Nina: “I wrote: ‘Time is confounding in this moment. Practice letting go of control. What I can do is enough, as long as it’s done with intention. As the subsequent day, each one numbered rather than named, and kept starting each entry, however, by writing: ‘I am fully present. I write that down as my intention for whatever it is I’m doing.’”

As late winter turned into spring, Nina says she felt the burst of creative energy that birthed the abstract watercolor paintings ebbing. She’s experimenting with new materials and new ideas, and has already exhibited some of her 2020 paintings in a show online. Now, she says, she’s able to explore the outdoors. Walking with a trainer, she discovered Berkshire hiking trails she had never traversed, and the experience transformed not only her physical wellbeing, but also her perspective.

“This is a time of expansion and contraction,” she realized. “So my life contracted, but then there was this enormous expansion art-wise and also being out in nature. And they don’t reflect each other. I saw that my world was contracting because I couldn’t do what I had always done, and we couldn’t travel and I couldn’t see people—I mean, our kids didn’t come for five months. It was just John and me and the synagogue (Hevreh of Southern Berkshire), thank God, and the painting program, thank God, and then the hiking. Our lives were very contracted, but in a lot of ways, it expanded into places I never been before. I’ve never painted like this.”

As spring turned to summer, however, the spirals began to appear in her paint-ings, and as summer gave way to fall—and the High Holy Days—“my spirals went more into circles. They stopped being open.”

Nina says she felt she missed the runup to the holidays, a time she would have been rehearsing with the Herreh choir. “The absence left her feeling ‘herreh.’” She missed the connections with other people she would customarily have from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, as well as the personal and spiritual journey culmi-nating with the closing of the gates at the end of the Day of Atonement. And as fall has now changed into winter, Nina says she is beginning to feel that the burst of creative energy that birthed the abstract watercolors ebbing. She’s experimenting with new materials and new ideas, and has already exhibited some of her 2020 paintings in a show online. Now, she says, she’s able to consider the substantial body of work she created in response to the pandemic in the way a musician might listen to a recording of their music, “looking at it a different way than as the person who created it.”

Leaving 2020 behind and moving into the uncertain months ahead, Nina says: “It would be real easy for me to stop right now. I’m not going to, because part of this COVID thing, part of what saved me, is that I can go and make art whenever I want. You know, when other people might be saying, ‘I can’t do this, I can’t do that.’… I don’t want to start watching movies all winter. It’s really important for me to keep my creativity going.”

“Always Trust Your Cape”
From Chapter 1: “Elvis: Jewish Roots, Jewish Symbols”

Throughout Elvis' short life there have been many examples of how – through thought and action – he revealed the depth of his emotional, and at times familial, connection to the Jewish religion. One such example was when, on one of his regular visits to his mother’s grave in Memphis’ Forest Hill Cemetery, Elvis decided he wanted to have a Star of David placed on her headstone opposite the cross that had been engraved there after Gladys died in 1958. His decision may have been based on knowledge of his Jewish roots, which one of his friends, George Klein, said Elvis knew about and was very proud of.

(Elvis’ maternal great-great-grandmother, Nancy Burdine Tackett was from a Jewish family that emigrated from Lithuania. At Jewish descent is determined matrilineally, her daughter Martha Tackett Manskell would have been considered Jewish, as would Martha’s daughter “Doll” Mansell Smith; Doll's daughter Gladys Smith Presley; and Gladys’ son, Elvis Aron Presley – Ed.)

Two other Jewish friends, Larry Geller and Marty Lacker, sometimes accompanied Elvis on his visits to the cemetery, and it was with Lacker’s help that Elvis was able to follow through with his plan to design a gravestone for Gladys with a Star of David, despite his father Vernon’s apparent displeasure and his manager’s, also. When Colonel Tom Parker heard about it, he told Elvis not to make that information public as it wouldn’t help Elvis’ image as an idol in the heartland if it were known he identified himself in some fashion as Jewish.

... Although many of Elvis’ friends have written books about their relationship with him, Larry Geller’s are the only ones that include details about Elvis’ affinity to Jews and Judaism and Jewish literature. Larry was the one, as he tells it, to whom Elvis could safely confide his feelings and angst and with whom Elvis could connect intellectually and spiritually. Geller recalled the time, for example, when Elvis told him about Gladys sitting down when he was young and telling him they had Jewish blood and then warning him not to tell anyone, because she knew “people didn’t like Jews,” including some in his own family, his father for one. Learning about his Jewish roots may have been one of the reasons Elvis was receptive to the books about the Jewish religion and other traditions that Larry brought him. Another reason may be that Elvis had, for many years, been on a personal spiritual quest, seeking answers to questions about his life and whether it had a greater purpose, answers he hadn’t yet been able to find.

From Chapter 2: “Elvis and the Rabbi Upstairs”

It would have been most unusual if Elvis and his family hadn’t crossed paths with Jews, because, by the time the Presleys arrived in Memphis, Jewish-owned stores lined the streets, and Jews had already established synagogues as well as Jewish schools. In fact, taking on the position as head of a religious school is what brought Rabbi Alfred Fruchter and his wife to Memphis. For more than a year, the Presleys (after living in several other locations), became the rabbi’s downstairs neighbors in a Victorian duplex at 462 Alabama Street. The house was located in an area around North Street, known as “the Pinch,” a mix of immigrant communities where poor Jewish families and others initially settled before acquiring the means to move elsewhere. Despite the fact that the two families sharing the same house were from vastly different cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs, the neighbors liked each other from the beginning….

With her lovely smile and white hair, Jeannette Fruchter can be seen briefly on screen with her parents in the documentary about a search for Elvis’ Jewish roots, asked Jeannette if, during those meals, Elvis would wear a yarmulke, she told him, “He always carried a yarmulke, she said.”

The Jewish World of Elvis Presley

SUCCESSFUL 2021 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

This year, more than ever, young people will need Summer camp!

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

APPLICATION DEADLINE: JANUARY 16
Download an application at jewishberkshires.org

Assistance is made possible by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires with support from the Jewish Women’s Foundation and the Arthur and Helen Maislen Camp Fund.
ELVIS, continued from page 11

Clothes. Elvis coveted their threads, most of which came from Lansky Brothers.

As the legend, or the myth, goes, Bernard Lansky (1927-2012) noticed a gangly teenage boy hanging out in front of the store staring at the clothing in the window. He was sporting a greasy, light-brown pompadour and wearing a movie theater uniform, and he was White, an anomaly among the Black entertainers that frequented Beale Street, “a good-looking young man,” remembered Bernard, who, one day, reportedly went outside and beckoned the young Elvis to come into the store, offering to outfit him in some of the store’s “snazzy” clothes. “No sir,” he said. “I ain’t got nothin’. But when I do, when I save up some money, I’m gonna come in here and buy you out.”

To that, Bernard allegedly replied, “Hey, do me a favor, don’t buy me out. Just buy from me.” And Elvis did, at first on credit (Bernard was the first to extend credit to Elvis), then, later on, when he could, indeed, have bought Bernard out.

Michael Freedland, a British writer who interviewed Bernard a year before he died in 2012, learned that Bernard had been one of nine children whose family had come to America in the 1800s from Eastern Europe. He said Bernard peppered his conversation with Yiddish “that came naturally to him,” his favorite expression being noch a mol or “once again,” usually spoken in exasperation; and he’d use examples of what might be called jive talk, like “he’s cool in the pool,” and all with a thick Southern accent.

From the APPENDIX – Elvis and Barbra

[Barbra] Streisand and Elvis attended each other’s Las Vegas concerts and enjoyed a close relationship during the time they shared the Vegas spotlight. On one of his visits to her dressing room he told her that she was the only one who ever intimidated him. And in 1975, he stopped one of his Vegas performances to thank Streisand for attending, telling the audience she had “one of the finest voices in the world.”

In 1976, Streisand offered Elvis a rare opportunity, to be the co-lead in her 1976 musical film, *A Star is Born*, and Elvis was interested. But Colonel Parker was initially turned off when Streisand defied his rules and spoke directly to Elvis before talking with him. And then the Colonel went on to make several impossible demands – financial and otherwise – the result being that the role eventually went to Kris Kristofferson. Marty Lacker, one of Elvis’ friends, said the reason the Colonel “killed the idea” was because he feared Streisand would give Elvis good advice about the business side of showbiz. And there was also the likelihood that, if the film succeeded, Elvis would find a way to leave the Colonel behind. Many of Elvis’ friends believed that had he been able to take that role, his dream of being a respected actor could have become a reality.

Streisand’s 2014 album, “Partners,” includes a duet with Elvis singing “Love Me Tender,” the latest beyond-the-grave collaboration approved by Elvis’ estate since his death in 1977. Streisand said she could never understand Elvis’ records at first. “Then years later,” she said, “I did, [and] God, this guy is good. He had a wonderful sexuality about him and energy. He was a star; he was bigger than life.” And of the virtual experience, she said, “Because I’d met him a couple of times, it felt like our spirits were touching.” At the very least, they remain connected by the fact that both achieved the highest levels of stardom, as Streisand holds the record for the female with the most number-one albums, according to *Billboard.*
with each other. I mean, that’s don’t like that. We need to be the realization that being what I’m hoping continues. The world a better place, to commanded as Jews to make mitzvah it’s a commandment. We’re a good deed, because mitzvot ber] all of those good works important.’ pandem] because that was the High Holidays [during the festival; I want to go to shul; want to go to the Jewish film Festival of Books; I’m going to deliver packages during the pandemic] because that was the High Holidays [during the pandemic] because that was important.’

When we start to emerge, I’m hoping that (we’ll remem- ber) all of those good works – I’ll just call them mitzvot. There is a huge difference. That’s the first thing I teach to 7th graders – don’t call a mitzvah a good deed, because it’s not. It’s not a good deed; it’s a commandment. We’re commanded as Jews to make the world a better place, to leave it in a better place than it was when we first came into this world.

And that commitment is what I’m hoping continues. The realization that being alone really sucks. And that we don’t like that. We need to be with each other. I mean, that’s not very poetic. But it’s true.

Connecting with Community
Nourish Your Body, Mind, and Soul!

In response to coronavirus guidelines...
As of press time, all in-person Connecting With Community programming has been canceled. For the most up-to-date information and details on virtual programming, please visit our website www.jewishberkshires.org to sign up for our eblasts to receive a weekly listing of online opportunities.

Meals-on-Wheels & Meals to Go – Advance Reservation Required
Kosher lunch will be prepared on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Meals to go will be ready by noon for pickup at the Knesset Israel kitchen door, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.

All meals-on-wheels will be delivered by Federation volunteers in the early afternoon. Please call (413) 442-2200 no later than 9 a.m. to reserve your meal for pickup and to arrange delivery if standing instructions are not in place. All are welcome to reserve meals for pick-up, although delivery may be limited in certain circumstances.

The menus listed below are planned, but may be modified depending on availability of ingredients. When making a reservation, please inform us if a person in your party has a food allergy.

Monday, 4 ............ Meat loaf**, salad, mashed potatoes, peas & carrots, eye bread, applesauce and tea.
Tuesday, 5 ............ Chicken marsala**, celery rice soup, noodles with mushrooms & onions, peas, Farmer’s loaf, fruit cocktail, and tea.
Thursday, 7 ............ Fresh fish**, salad, mixed vegetables, rice pilaf, whole wheat bread, peanut butter cookies, and tea.

Monday, 11 ............ Beef stew**, noodles, salad, potato bread, peas, and tea.
Tuesday, 12 ............ Roasted chicken**, roasted cauliflower, green beans, salad, Challah, peas, and tea.
Thursday, 14 ............ Lasagna roll-up, minestrone soup, salad, mixed vegetables, garlic bread, sugar cookies, and tea.

Monday, 18 ............ Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Tuesday, 19 ............ Lemon & herb chicken**, Italian wedding soup, spinach, rice & lentils, oat bread, pineapple, and tea.
Thursday, 21 ............ Macaroni & cheese, steamed tomatoes, salad, multi-grain bread, raspberry shortbread cookie, and tea.
Monday, 25 ............ Barbecued chicken**, salad, corn, green beans, white bread, Mandarin oranges, and tea.
Tuesday, 26 ............ Tuna salad platters**, vegetable soup, roasted Brussels sprouts, hot dog rolls, tropical fruit salad, and tea.
Thursday, 28 ............ Fish sticks, mushroom soup, sweet potato fries, mixed vegetables, hamburger rolls, chocolate chip cookies, and tea.

You can now read and share Berkshire Jewish Voice feature stories online! Visit jewishberkshires.org and select Community & Events>Berkshire Jewish Voice for links to highlights of current and past issues.

Knesset Israel
16 Colt Road, Pittsfield
ONGOING MINYANS
Sunday 5:40 a.m. and 7 p.m.
Tuesday 7 p.m.
Friday 7 a.m. and 5:45 p.m.
Saturday 9:30 a.m. and evenings approximately 30 minutes before sunset

CANDLE-LIGHTING
Friday, January 1 ...: 4:12 p.m.
Friday, January 8 ...: 4:19 p.m.
Friday, January 15 ...: 4:27 p.m.
Friday, January 22 ...: 4:35 p.m.
Friday, January 29 ...: 4:44 p.m.
Friday, February 5 ...: 4:54 p.m.

RABBI STERN, continued from page 8
feeling and I’m going to do so.”

That’s my fervent wish - that we translate this recognition that community sustains us into a physical response. So when I’m about to go to a physical response. So when I’m about to go to the Jewish Festival of Books; I want to go to the Jewish film festival; I want to go to shul; I’m going to deliver packages like I delivered packages on the High Holidays [during the pandemic] because that was important.

When we start to emerge, I’m hoping that we’ll remember all of those good works – I’ll just call them mitzvot. There is a huge difference. That’s the first thing I teach to 7th graders – don’t call a mitzvah a good deed, because it’s not. It’s not a good deed; it’s a commandment. We’re commanded as Jews to make the world a better place, to leave it in a better place than it was when we first came into this world.

And that commitment is what I’m hoping continues. The realization that being alone really sucks. And that we don’t like that. We need to be with each other. I mean, that’s not very poetic. But it’s true.

Connecting with Community
Nourish Your Body, Mind, and Soul!

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What’s for Lunch?

# Dairy Free, ** Gluten Free Main Entrée
For more information on specific programs please see “Your Federation Presents” section of this paper.

JANUARY
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Thursday, 28 ............ Fish sticks, mushroom soup, sweet potato fries, mixed vegetables, hamburger rolls, chocolate chip cookies, and tea.

FEBRUARY
Monday, 1 ............ Meat loaf**, noodle soup, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, eye bread, applesauce, and tea.
Tuesday, 2 ............ Turkey piccata**, rice pilaf, asparagus cuts n tips, salad, Challah, cake and tea.
Thursday, 4 ............ Fresh fish**, zucchini rice soup, noodle kugel, mixed vegetables, salad, muffins, cookies, and tea.
Monday, 8 ............ Stuffed cabbage casserole**, baby carrots, rice, salad, pumpernickel bread, apricots, and tea.
Tuesday, 9 ............ Roasted chicken**, vegetable soup, hash browns, green beans, Farmer’s loaf, applesauce, and tea.
Thursday, 11 ............ Chef’s choice of pizza, salad, broccoli, Mandarin oranges, and tea.

Homebound or recovering from an illness or injury?
Let us help you arrange for a kosher lunch to be delivered through our Kosher Meals on Wheels Program. Call (413) 442-4360, ext 10
Herbert A. Praver, 95, ex- celled as a home builder

Herbert A. Praver, 95, a former
Berkshire home builder, passed away in Florida in January 2021.

Praver was born in Newton, MA on May 1, 1925, and graduated from Newton North High School in 1943. He served in the US Navy during World War II as an aviation machinist's mate on the USS James Monroe, a submarine tender.

Praver moved to the Berkshires after the war and started his own home building business in 1946. He continued to build homes in the Berkshires, including the Berkshires, Chabad of the Berkshires, and the Shul of the Berkshires, until his retirement in 1987.

Praver was predeceased by his wife, Edith (Siegel) Praver, who passed away in 2004. He is survived by his stepdaughter, Paula Pomerantz, 83, nurse, cook, loved hiking, avid naturalist

PITTSFIELD — Paula Pomerantz, 83, died peacefully at home due to complications of cancer on Monday, January 4, 2021, with her husband at her side.

Born September 18, 1937 in Yankeeville, NJ to a family of Max (Nachum Laeb) Waxstein and Phyllis (Chaya) Nelson Waxstein, Paula, in infancy, moved with her family to Plainville, CT and, in 1944, to Pittsfield. Her sister Louise was born in New Britain, CT on January 25, 1939.

Paula attended Temple Anshe Amunim religious school and was confirmed. She was active in Girl Scouts and Junior Friends of the Israeli Youth Group. Young Paula was an avid reader and loved the outdoors, camping, hiking, and bird watching. During one camping trip on Mt. Greylock with a youth group, she and other kids had a left the main group at the Thunderbolt shelter to sleep outdoors. They were left alone on a blanket roll near the mountain's summit.

She always remembered this summer evening, among the hikes and adventures, as being special. Paula attended Camp Young Judea in New Hampshire and was deeply involved in the Jewish community, including volunteering at Temple Anshe Amunim, teaching young children how to knit, and leading a team of volunteers.

When Paula and her boyfriend, Philip Pomerantz (who later became her husband), moved to the United States to pursue a career in nursing, they found work at Pittsfield High School in 1955, where they met and started a lifelong relationship.

To her Shabbat challahs. Her grandchildren always looked forward to her Shabbat challahs.

Paula was a devoted fan of the San Francisco Giants baseball team, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Opera, and the American Symphony Orchestra.

Paula and her family enjoyed outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, and bird watching. In her retirement, she became an avid gardener, often hosting family gatherings outdoors.

Paula and her family enjoyed regular trips to New England and often stayed in Maine north woods. In her retirement, she became an avid gardener and spent many weekends with her grandchildren, often hosting family gatherings outdoors.

Paula passed away on New Year's Eve, 2021, leaving behind her devoted husband, Philip Pomerantz, and their children, Paula and Philip, who are both survived by her devoted husband, Philip Pomerantz.
On July 28, 2019, the budding Berkshire Hills Hadassah Men’s Association held its inaugural and successful whisky tasting at the Hilton Garden Inn. Attendees heard from experts and tasted several aged, delicious single malt scotches – and an Israeli Milk & Honey Distillery young single malt, which I was able to procure from a whisky distributor in the United Kingdom. During our tasting, I mentioned that several Israeli distilleries were beginning to produce single malt and grain whiskies for worldwide sale, hoping to tap into recent growth, consumption, and popularity of these spirits in the Jewish community and the general population. After a general consensus that the M&H had potential – and some talk about following up on the new product – the anticipa- tion among aficionados for Israel’s first single malt soon receded with the introduction of new and high import tariffs on foreign whisky, the rise of shipping costs to the USA, the lack of perceived marketing efforts from the Israeli distilleries, and finally the world spread of the coronavirus this past spring. Recently, however, our venerable BJV editor Albert Stern received an email from M&H Distillery in Tel Aviv, no doubt sent to every editor of every Jewish newspaper and newsletter in North America, which trumpeted the Jewish newspaper and newsletter in coronavirus this past spring.

The announcement also invited the Jewish community and the general population. After a general consensus that the M&H had potential – and some talk about following up on the new product – the anticipation among aficionados for Israel’s first single malt soon receded with the introduction of new and high import tariffs on foreign whisky, the rise of shipping costs to the USA, the lack of perceived marketing efforts from the Israeli distilleries, and finally the world spread of the coronavirus this past spring. Recently, however, our venerable BJV editor Albert Stern received an email from M&H Distillery in Tel Aviv, no doubt sent to every editor of every Jewish newspaper and newsletter in North America, which trumpeted the introduction of M&H to the USA. They also had the good sense to bring in Dr. Jim Swan – a legendary Scot chemist/philosopher/guru who introduced successful whisky operations in India, Taiwan, Canada, and Scotland – to oversee their new business. With local-
grown Sahar talent, they immediately started to experiment with different recipes for a superior and unique scotch-style single malt.

The production of scotch is zeal-ously guarded in Scotland by the government-supported Scotch Whisky Association, which mandates distil- lation guidelines such as a 3-year minimum for ageing in barrels, double distillation in stills, the use of malt and barley, and the limitation on any additives to the recipe. Even the use of the word “scotch” is reserved for the whisky made only in Scotland.

Eitan stated that M&H adheres to the SWA guidelines, but quickly responded to my inquiry as to what makes the Israeli “mashiko” different. He pointed out that M&H was currently experiment- ing with the use of varied oak barrels from the USA, France, and Spain. He stressed that M&H ages its whisky in “STR” barrels – shaved, toasted, and re-charred in fire. Most of these barrels previously held kosher wine, sherry, and rum. (By the way, the distillery does not run on Shabbat and holidays, and is Star K approved.) So, I pressed again: what distin-
guishes M&H whisky? Eitan responded enthusiastically that the Israeli terroir - the fancy word for the complete natural environment in which a wine or whisky is produced including factors such as soil, topography and climate, all of which impact the taste of the product – is different than in Scotland’s.

M&H moves its barrels of ageing whisky to different regions of Israel, from Tel Aviv to the Dead Sea, to the desert near Egypt, and soon to the Galilee. less than ten years, a small group of investors formed Milk & Honey and purchased stills, mash tuns, and other equipment from America of the first single malt whisky made/distilled in the Land of Milk and Honey. The announcement also invited the Jewish newspaper and newsletter in coronavirus this past spring.

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M&H moves its barrels of ageing whisky to different regions of Israel, from Tel Aviv to the Dead Sea, to the desert near Egypt, and soon to the Galilee. Thus, the maturation process of the whisky involves interaction with the tannins of the charred barrel wood, and in the changing humidity and climates. And I pursued: “So, nu, what makes Israeli whisky really different?” And Eitan, again barely pausing, responded that in addition to optimum climate conditions that both heighten and shorten the ageing process and produce a fine whisky in fewer years than its Scottish counterpart, M&H has been experimenting with ageing a portion of its whisky in pomegranate wine barrels. The biblical pomegranate? One of the seven species of agricultural products (Shi’ah HaMishmorim) listed in the Torah as herbs, spices and pro-ducts ancient Israel? A symbol of Rosh Hashanah that has been discussed by our rabbis for millennia is now being used to enhance the taste of my single malt whisky? And for the more “enlightened,” it’s a fruit not only tasty but also high in antioxidants. Yudhufesh Kehokhe’me! Here was yet another reason to eagerly anticipate the introduction of M&H to the USA. Lastly, Eitan informed me that he was expecting M&H to triple produc-
tion of its whiskies, lightly peated bottles, sherry bottles, etc., this coming year to about a quarter of a million bottles. Their spirits will be for sale in 20 countries.

Lastly, after our telephone conver-
sation, I was contacted by friends Jim and Sean at Spritzed Wine and Liquor in Lenox. We enthu-
siastically discussed their stock- ing their Berkshire establishment with the various M&H single malt and blended whiskies – and miraculously, just before Chanukah, Spritzed received its first case of M&H single malt and M&H gin. Ness gaidel? We even floated the real possibility of a “live” Berkshires whisky tasting this summer in a safe environment, featuring the anticipated M&H from Israel and other world single malts from India (Amrut), Taiwan (Kavalan), and Australia (Shi’ah). M&H Israeli single malt! A new meaning to L’Chaim!

Eitan Attir

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bring the Iranians to the table to negotiate the JCPOA nuclear deal. Similarly, Oman has also served as a diplomatic back channel to the Houthis rebels in Yemen, even as its Saudi and Emirati allies carried out a brutal and unsuccessful military campaign against them. In short, Oman does not conform to conventional notions of how alliances in the Middle East work. Rather than falling into the orbit of Saudi Arabia or Iran, Oman plays a unique role as friend to all, enemy to none. It is only natural that this “all” include Israel.

Oman does have a history of limited cooperation with Israel. Several meetings between Israel and Omani officials took place in the 1990s, beginning with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s historic visit with Sultan Qaboos bin Said in Muscat — the first visit of an Israeli leader to the Gulf. In 1996, the countries agreed to open training missions and collaborated in opening the Middle East Desalination Research Center in Oman in 1997. Although Oman rolled back its engagement with Israel amid the anti-Israel sentiment of 2000, the question of Oman-Israel relations re-emerged in 2018 when Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said met with Sultan Qaboos.

Oman’s timid engagement with Israel is under threat of full short of full recognition, and Oman has not openly expressed interest in full diplomatic relations. Following the Netanyahou-Gulf meeting, Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi reiterated the Sultanate’s commitment to a solution to the Palestinian problem prior to normalization with Israel. This position is consistent with the Arab Peace Initiative endorsed by the Arab League in 2002, which conditioned recognition of Israel on a negotiated two-state solution. However, the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan, all signatories of the Arab Peace Initiative, disrupted this status quo when they normalized relations with Israel this year. Oman, therefore, may feel liberated from the API as a precedent and decide that having relations with Israel and the PA is a better position it as a mediator in the conflict. Oman’s track record with the JCPOA is to help its ability to swingBrowse elements to the table. Normalization with Israel would carry favor in Washington, but Oman also has a genuine interest in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace. The newly minted Sultan Haitham bin Tariq is likely weighing normalization as a statesman and respected moderate in Qaboos’ image. The Palestinians and their allies have chased the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudanese. Israel’s normalization with Oman might be ready to continue the friendly relations established under Qaboos. Oman-Israel normalization would enhance cooperation and dialogue throughout the region, rather than escalate tensions. Indeed, Oman would likely serve as a backchannel to Israel in Iran and Hezbollah.

Oman, home to the lesser-known Russba branch of Islam, would also be the first Arab state with a non-Sunni regime to normalize relations with Israel. An Israeli-Oman agreement would cement Israel’s status as an accepted part of the Middle East, beyond the Arab states that have relations with Israel. When Netanyahu met with Qaboos in Muscat, Oman was keen on a negotiated two-state solution for Israel without an Israeli annexation. As a part of a regional alignment, such normalization would cement Israel’s status as an accepted part of the Middle East.

In the wake of the Abraham Accords, through which Israel established full diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, all eyes are now on Saudi Arabia. A preeminent regional power, the Kingdom is seen as the centerpiece to a destabilizing Iran and the crown jewel of potential Israeli allies. The Saudi-Israel normalization question continues to dominate the news cycle following the Israel-Palestine peace. The Saudi-Israel normalization is the obvious place to start.

All Middle Easterners stand to gain from greater cooperation and dialogue with Israel, an economic powerhouse with a dynamic population and the will to thrive against all odds. It is only inevitable that Oman, and other Arab nations that have no quartet with Israel, welcome the Jewish state as a rightful member of the Middle Eastern community.

This article was originally published on Alex’s Times of Israel column. Any opinions, findings, and interpretations expressed are not intended to represent the views of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires or its affiliates.

Mazez Tov

Mazel Tov to...

Steven and Renee Finn on celebrating their 50th anniversary.

* Federation president Amy Lindner-Leiser on the birth of granddaughter Camilla Zoe Connell – proud parents are Maya and Scott Connell

* Moe England on celebrating her 90th birthday.

Lorraine German, whose book Sud and Shul in the Berkshires: The Untold Story of Sandisfield’s Jewish Farm Colony will be reviewed in the winter edition of the Historical Journal of Massachusetts, which is published by the History Department at Westfield State University.

* Rabbi David Weiner, who was honored as a hero by the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts on December 3 for making a difference in Knesset Israel’s life during the pandemic.

Professor Miriam Udel of Emory University (and the Udel family) on the publication of Honey on the Page: A Treasury of Yiddish Children’s Literature, a collection she edited and translated.

* Robert Bildner and Elisa Spungen Bildner, authors of The Berkshires Food Table Cookbook, which won New England Cookbook of the Year and Honorable Mention for Single Topic (local farming) in the Fifth Annual Readable Feast Festival. Best in Show and most beloved cookbook event celebrating regional talent.

* Federation Board of Directors member Anne Schneel on the birth of great-granddaughter Madeleine Tanya Barshay in Santa Monica, CA, on December 10. Proud parents are Samantha and Devin Barshay. Madeleine is their second child and Anne’s third great-grandchild.

Bonnie L. Flamenspan, director of Influencers & sunshine, Inc. MA 01270 (413) 528-1900 Fax: (413) 528-5891

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BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

The Road to Arab-Israeli Peace Should go through Muscat

Opinion by Alex Lederman

In the wake of the Abraham Accords, through which Israel established full diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, all eyes are now on Saudi Arabia. A preeminent regional power, the Kingdom is seen as the centerpiece to a destabilizing Iran and the crown jewel of potential Israeli allies. The Saudi-Israel normalization question continues to dominate the news cycle following the Israel-Palestine peace. The Saudi-Israel normalization is the obvious place to start.

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Traveling with Jewish Taste

Indian Jews

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

Indian Jews? And no, I don’t mean the Native Americans that 19th century clergy believed were remnants of the Ten Lost Tribes. I mean Jews in India.

And why not? After all, following conquests and expulsions by a series of enemies over the millennia, our ancestors have found themselves dispersed to all four corners of the globe. In previous columns, we’ve seen how, following the Assyrian conquest, some Jews migrated south to Africa. Much later, some crossed the Atlantic to South America. So why wouldn’t others have traveled east to India?

India has been home to several diverse communities of Jews arriving at different times in history, from as early as the 10th century BCE. In fact, Jews were one of the first foreign religious groups documented to have arrived in India. They have enjoyed a life there relatively free of the anti-Semitism so common in other countries (key word “relatively”). Because of that welcoming atmosphere, they have actively participated in business, government, the military, and the Bollywood film industry.

The oldest community of Jews in India are those known as the Cochin Jews, named for the tropical islands off the southwest coast of India they came to at the time of King Solomon. According to historian Shalva Weil, they traveled along with the king’s merchant ships and remained. Eleven centuries later, following the Romans’ destruction of the Second Temple, refugees from Judaea joined them.

The Cochin Jews enjoyed a very close relationship with their Indian rulers. It was so special, in fact, that in the year 1000 CE, the King of Kerala granted to one Joseph Rabban special privileges as described in a set of engraved copper plates. These plates testify that these rights and privilege shall remain with the Jews “as long as the world and moon exist.” The plates are kept today in a glass display case at the Paradesi synagogue in Mattancherry.

The Jews lived peacefully for centuries after that, but apparently the “world and moon” did cease to exist because, after Rabban’s death, the copper plates lost their powers. Privileges that the king had granted were revoked, and in 1524 a band of Moors, jealous of the Jews’ success in the lucrative spice trade, attacked the community of Kandy, destroying homes and synagogues.

Yet another group of refugees, called Paradesi Jews, joined their fellow Jews in Cochin in the 16th and 17th centuries. Mostly conversos fleeing the Portuguese Inquisition, they came to Goa, on the southwest coast of India. Remember, this is much more tolerant Dutch seized control of their outposts in 1660. In a nice twist, a group of “New Christians” with crypto-Hinduism. Dozens were executed.

The Portuguese continued persecuting the local Jewish population until the much more tolerant Dutch seized control of their outposts in 1660. In a nice twist, a group of “New Christians” with crypto-Hinduism. Dozens were executed.

The Portuguese established a branch office of its Inquisition, centered in Goa. During their reign of terror, they charged over 16,000 “Old Christian Nasarim” with Judaism and “New Christians” with crypto-Hinduism. Dozens were executed.

The Portuguese continued persecuting the local Jewish population until the much more tolerant Dutch seized control of their outposts in 1660. In a nice twist, a group of “New Christians” with crypto-Hinduism. Dozens were executed.

The Paradesi Jews, living relatively free of persecution, also enjoyed a special relationship with their Indian rulers who ruled the area from 1661 to 1705. Under the Portuguese, paradesi Jews had enjoyed little to no harassment. Under the Dutch, the rulers took a more enlightened view of the Jews, allowing them to live in peace and prosperity. The Dutch were not anti-Semitic, and the Jews were allowed to practice their religion freely.

Then in 1849, the British took control of the area. The British were more tolerant of religious diversity than the Dutch, and the Jews enjoyed a period of relative freedom.

However, in 1933, the British passed the Government of India Act, transferring power over India from the Company to the Crown, under whose rule India remained for almost a century. During their reign, the Jews were able to maintain their own community centers and synagogues, and enjoyed a level of freedom that had been unheard of under the previous rulers.

In the meantime, the British also wanted to take advantage of the East Asian spice trade, so in 1608 they established themselves in other parts of the country with their East India Trading Company. Then, in 1858, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act, transferring power over India from the Company to the Crown, under whose rule India remained for almost a century. While under British imperial rule, Indian Jews prospered, due in large part to their connections they made throughout the empire. Because they had done so well under the Raj, many assimilated into British culture and began speaking English. And why not? Unlike in other countries where the Jews prospered, the non-Jewish Indians did not display overt jealousy, and the Tribe suffered virtually no anti-Semitism.

Even so, despite the community’s success and acceptance, several milestone events changed things. Upon the end of the Raj in 1947, the subsequent rise of Indian nationalism, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the majority of Jews made aliyah to Israel. The mass migration left a mere 5,000 Jews in India, primarily in the capital city of Mumbai. Despite such a significant decrease in population, the remaining Jews have continued to play an active role in Indian life.

The next wave of immigrants after the Paradesi were the Baghdadi Jews. Hoping to take advantage of trading opportunities, they landed in the west-coast port of Surat in the early 1700s. They were joined later by their co-religionists fleeing religious persecution in the Muslim countries. Although they were all called Baghadji Jews, they came to this west-Indian state not just from Iraq, but from Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Afghanistan as well. This group found great commercial success in their new home country.

The third main group of Jews in India is the Bnei Israel. According to historian Shalva Weil, the B’nei Israel claim their roots from 14 Jewish survivors of the Assyrian conquest who landed in the west coast of India. Hoping to take advantage of trading opportunities, they landed in the west-coast port of Surat in the early 1700s. They were joined later by their co-religionists fleeing religious persecution in the Muslim countries. Although they were all called Baghadji Jews, they came to this west-Indian state not just from Iraq, but from Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Afghanistan as well. This group found great commercial success in their new home country.

The B’nei Israel established a branch office of its Inquisition, centered in Goa. During their reign that word “relatively”? Unfortunately, the Paradesi were not to find peace there. But apparently the “world and moon” did cease to exist because, after Rabban’s death, the copper plates lost their powers. Privileges that the king had granted were revoked, and in 1524 a band of Moors, jealous of the Jews’ success in the lucrative spice trade, attacked the community of Kandy, destroying homes and synagogues.

The Cochin Jews, in the country much longer, took it upon themselves to provide instruction to the Bnei Israel in normative Judaism. However, even with the education and their ultimate return to their ancestors’ faith, when Bnei Israel members made aliyah to Israel after the establishment of the State, the B’nei Israel didn’t immediately accept them as Jews. Luckily, that changed in 1964.

Then in 2002, modern science confirmed Bnei Israel’s priestly ancestry claims via DNA testing.

And then there are other, smaller groups who claim descent from the Ten Lost Tribes. The Bnei Menashe live in the northeastern Indian state of Mizoram and Manipur. While this group claims ancestry in the tribe of Menashe, Baptist and Evangelical missionaries converted them en masse to Christianity in the 19th century. In the 1970s, this group claimed their faith and began to practice a form of pre-Talmudic Judaism. Similarly, the Bnei Ephraim maintain they are descended from the tribe of the same name. This group’s reclamation of the faith of their ancestors dates from as recently as 1981.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention an incident that marred modern life in India. In 2008, Islamic extremists from Pakistan murdered scores of people in 12 separate locations in Mumbai, including at the Chabad House. While not committed by Indians and targeted not exclusively at Jews, the massacre was most definitely an example of radical religious zealotry.

Please see the related story on page 18.

Chicken Chilatane

Serves 6

This curry is very popular in the Indian Jewish community, and no wonder why. It is easy to prepare and fills the house with the most wonderful aroma. And the taste! A hint: Make this the day before you plan to serve it. The flavors meld overnight and render it even better the next day.

Ingredients:

- 1 cut-up chicken
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 inches ginger root, finely chopped
- 6 large onions halved, then sliced
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 6 cloves garlic finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 mild green chili peppers (if you prefer more heat)
- 1 tablespoon turmeric powder
- 2 tablespoons ground coriander
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 10 cardamom pods*
- 28-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 5 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Cilantro leaves for garnish

Instructions:

In a large stockpot, sauté the onions and the sugar in the oil over medium heat for 3 minutes, until soft.

Add the garlic, ginger, chili peppers, turmeric, coriander, cumin, pepper flakes, salt and cardamom and cook for 30 seconds.

Add the chopped tomatoes, tomato paste, 1 tablespoon of the vinegar, and half the lemon juice, stirring to mix.

Turn the kibbeh and then pour in the remaining lemon juice. Stir to mix.

Turn everything onto a serving platter. Grind pepper over all.

Serve garnished with cilantro leaves.

* Make sure to put the cardamom pods to the side. While they impart terrific flavor to the curry, they are not pleasant to eat by themselves.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She is currently at work on a food history/cookbook, tracing the paths that some of our favorite foods have taken from their origins to appear on dinner plates and in cultural rites and artifacts around the world. She invites readers to read her blog at carolgoodmankaufman.com and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.
252 Members Of India’s Bnei Menashe Lost Tribe Immigrate To Israel

TEL AVIV – “I am delighted to have the honor of bringing members of the Bnei Menashe community to Israel, after many years of waiting,” said Israel’s Minister of Aliyah and Integration, MK Pnina Tameno-Shete. “This follows the approval of a special government decision that I promoted for the immediate Aliyah of about 250 new olim.”

On December 15, 2020, 252 new olim from India’s Bnei Menashe community landed in Israel. Hailing from northeast India, they have preserved Jewish tradition across generations. Their Aliyah is the result of a government decision promoted by Tameno-Shete with the support of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi David Baruch Lau; Minister of the Interior, MK Aryeh Machluf Deri; and the Foreign Minister, MK Gabi Ashkenazi.

“The Bnei Menashe community is close to my heart. Upon assuming the position of minister, I made expediting the Aliyah of the Bnei Menashe community a top priority,” said Tameno-Shete. “I am happy to have the honor of renewing their Aliyah following my advancement to the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration in cooperation with the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration in cooperation with the Shavei Israel organization.”

As we celebrate the festival of Hanukkah and the miracle of the flask of oil, the Aliyah of the lost tribe of Bnei Menashe after 2,700 years of exile is itself a modern-day Chanukah miracle and for that we thank Minister Tameno-Shete,” said the founder and chairman of the Shavei Israel organization Michael Freund. “The story of this unique community that maintained its connection to the Jewish people and the land of Israel down through the generations is powerful and inspiring, and I fervently hope that we will soon see all the remaining Bnei Menashe make Aliyah as well.”

Out of the hundreds of olim who will arrive in Israel, there are some 50 families and 24 unmarried individuals, four infants under the age of two, 39 children aged 12 years old or younger, and 19 seniors aged 62 years or older.

Since 2003, 2,437 members of the Bnei Menashe community have made Aliyah, with only 24 members of the community making Aliyah in 2019.

Please see the related article about the Jews of India on page 17.
268,000 Families in Israel Pushed Into Extreme Poverty Amid Coronavirus Pandemic, New Report Says

Annual report by nonprofit Latet organization finds 22.6% of families in Israel suffer today from food insecurity

JERUSALEM – A new report presented on December 9, 2020 to Israel President Reuven Rivlin, detailed a worrying increase in the depth of poverty, financial hardship, and food insecurity among Israeli households amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. According to the annual report by the Latet organization, a nonprofit that provides various welfare and food aid services, some 3.8 million Israelis live in poverty and more are going hungry now than prior to the pandemic. Latet’s Alternative Poverty Report found that during 2020, the number of households living in poverty has jumped from 20.1% of households before the pandemic to 29.3% (now a total of 850,000 households), meaning some 268,000 households now live in poverty.

Unlike the State of Israel’s official poverty report which measures poverty based on income alone, the Latet’s Alternative Poverty Report measures poverty according to households lacking essential needs in housing, education, healthcare, food security, and the ability to cover the cost of living. According to the new report, today 656,000 Israeli households (22.6%) suffer from food insecurity, compared to 513,000 (17.8%) before the pandemic.

The report also found that during the pandemic, Israel’s middle class shrunk by 6.2%, with 29% of the middle class financial scores decreasing. Amid the pandemic 50.7% of Israel’s general population reported significant economic damage, while only 19.6% reported significant health damage. Only 23.8% of Israeli households report that their financial condition is standard or above standard, compared to 45% pre-pandemic.

The need for financial help among Israel’s population jumped to 70% amid the pandemic. 24% of Israel’s population report that they did not get financial help although they needed it. Further, 79.1% of the Israeli public believe that the government should be the one to address the rising poverty numbers. Only 21.3% think that the government is fulfilling its responsibility to do so.

“The surge in poverty rates confirms the most pessimistic economic forecasts of the beginning of the crisis and highlights the weaknesses of the ecosystem in Israel,” said Founder and Chair of Latet Gilles Darmon. “The Coronavirus has upset the delicate economic balance and pushed tens of thousands of new families into extreme hardship and poverty, but it is the state that has created the conditions for this fragility, by previously refusing to invest significantly in those families to avoid social resilience.”

“The coronavirus pandemic erupted as a health epidemic and has developed into an unprecedented socio-economic epidemic,” said Latet’s Executive Director Eran Weinrobt. “We are in the worst economic crisis in the country’s history, which will take Israeli society years to recover from. We have to stop the bleeding as hundreds of thousands of Israelis descended from a temporary crisis due to loss of employment into a life of poverty from which it is difficult to impossible to recover. If the government does not invest tens of billions of shekels (NIS) in the most vulnerable communities, the collapse will be inevitable and create social gaps that cannot be bridged.”

Florida Offers Specialty License Plate That Supports Israel

By Ron Kampeas / JTA

Floridaians can now stand with Israel even while stuck in traffic.

A graphic designer from Boca Raton came up with the winning design in a contest to create a specialty license plate saying that “Florida Stands with Israel.” Daniel Ackerman’s blue, white and orange design was chosen among more than 100 submissions in a competition sponsored by the Israeli-American Council, the group said in a news release in December.

The bipartisan slate of four lawmakers who initiated the law passed this year launching the competition along with Gabe Grossman, the mayor of Bal Harbour, served as the judges.

“The concept focuses on Florida’s state flower, the orange blossom,” Ackerman said in the release. “The beauty of this flower, contrasted against the Star of David in the form of a tropical leaf, represents the Florida-Israel relationship and the fruit this partnership bears, ultimately benefitting both states.

The symbol interacts with the two waves on top and bottom giving nod to the Israeli flag, Florida’s sandy tourist destinations, and Israel’s deserts in bloom.”

The plate will go into production once 3,000 applicants have paid for presale vouchers. Proceeds will go in part to Hatalah of Miami-Dade, an organization of volunteer paramedics.
“Once a month a full moon rises in the night sky. But every time that big bright circle has a different name.” Once in a Full Moon, by Carolinda Goodman – aka the BJV’s own Traveling With Jewish Taste correspondent, Carol Goodman Kaufman – is a new picture book aimed at 3- to 6-year-olds that tells the stories behind this monthly visitor. Artwork is by Mariia Luzina.

Carol’s fascination with the night sky dates back to her days as a camper, when she and her friends would look up at the moon, stars, and clouds from their sleeping bags. In this book, she invites young readers to step outside and take notice of the full moon each month with rhymes that capture the distinctive qualities and moods of each season.

The book is currently available on Amazon, and Carol is sharing the proceeds with Youth Aliyah, Hadassah’s child rescue project, of which she is the US national chair.