

# Berkshire JEWISH VOICE

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

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

## 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](http://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.

## ברוכים הבאים!

Welcome to the Berkshires!



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.



Jewish Federation  
OF THE BERKSHIRES

THE STRENGTH OF A PEOPLE  
THE POWER OF COMMUNITY.

### 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



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# Rabbi Reflection

## 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 limbs 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 almost a full year into the 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 blooms 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.

Tu BiShevat, celebrated on the 15th of the month of Shevat, invites us to consider that ‘advice from a trees’ more deeply. 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?

I am reminded of a teaching from Rabbi Jill Hammer, who offers beautiful wisdom for this season of winter when we turn inward and spend so much time waiting. She points out that the winter season comprising the Hebrew months of Tevet, Shevat, and Adar is also a season that contains no pilgrimage festivals. After all, in the cold of winter, you can’t travel, so you stay put. 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.”

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 mines Torah for wisdom to address this very situation, asking, “What did the Israelites do when they were waiting? What spiritual habits brought them comfort and sustenance when they were in the desert, awaiting God’s presence?”

*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?*

In this time of looking inward, Hammer suggests, the Israelites were moved to make *themselves* their own “inner sanctuaries.” This conscious act of personal spiritual work was necessary for the Israelites to be ready to receive God’s presence. For the Israelites, and for us, this winter will be a time apart, marked by a sense of anticipation. And, in that quiet time of inner preparation, Jewish time offers us spiritual reinforcement.

As Rabbi Hammer points out, though the winter offers no pilgrimage festivals, we find three holidays marking this period of winter months: Chanukah, Tu BiShevat, and Purim. These three holidays arrive in the midst of winter to remind us of certain things that may aid us in our time of waiting. In the celebration of those holidays, we are reminded of miracles. We are reminded that blossoming is celebrated long after planting, and we are reminded that joy and laughter can be healing. Thus, what may feel like a period of spiritual dormancy is actually a period of subtle growth.

My hope for each of us is that we will find meaning in the wisdom of this season, and sustenance in that ‘advice from the trees.’

*Rabbi Jodie Gordon is a rabbi and the director of education at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire in Great Barrington*



## Letters to the Editor

### Lucky to Have Federation as an Ally

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you for your very generous donation to the Berkshire Immigrant Center. Your contribution to our COVID relief efforts demonstrates your strong commitment to the mission of the Center. We are so lucky to have you as an ally in the fight for immigrant justice.

We are the only organization in the Berkshires that offers comprehensive services for immigrants to promote civic engagement, facilitate cultural integration, and assist in navigating the complex immigration system in the United States. The center also works to build bridges of understanding and cooperation across cultures, to fight racism and discrimination in all forms, and to advocate for the rights of immigrants from all backgrounds.

Find out more about our work on our website, [berkshireic.org](http://berkshireic.org).

On behalf of our clients who benefit from your gift, I thank you deeply for your contribution and for your commitment to making the Berkshires a place where all people are respected and valued.

Best regards,  
Michelle Lopez, Executive Director  
Berkshire Immigrant Center  
Pittsfield

Donate ~ Volunteer  
Make a Difference

## 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 generously donated by this community. Donations to our PJ Library Pajama Drive were delivered to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families in Pittsfield and were distributed to local families during the holiday season. Thanks again to Carr Hardware for providing collection bins at their stores across Berkshire County and to everyone donating who made this effort a success.



Amidst a sea of bags holding more than 400 pairs of pajamas destined to keep local children warm this winter, Federation’s PJ Library coordinator Susan Frisch Lehrer (center) delivers the nightclothes to Tiffany K. Bassi, MS, Investigations Supervisor at the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (left) and her colleague from the Pittsfield office.



# Legacy Giving

## The Rita and Sol Toscher Memorial Fund joins Federation’s Legacy Circle

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 Erdos) 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.



Sol and Rita Toscher

You can now read and share *Berkshire Jewish Voice* feature stories online! Visit [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org) and select **Community & Events> Berkshire Jewish Voice** for links to highlights of current and past issues.

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Thank you volunteers **Ellen Rosenblatt** and the BJV delivery team, **Mitch Greenwald** and **Roman Rozenblyum**.

### The Jewish Transportation Network Discount Taxi Vouchers

for Jewish residents aged 65 years and older

**Purchase \$50 worth of taxi vouchers for \$5**

(\$6 if requested via mail)

Vouchers are valid for three months and can be used with Tunnel City Taxi of North Adams, Rainbow Taxi of Pittsfield or Berkshire Taxi Co. of Great Barrington and Lee.

Some restrictions apply. Limit 10 voucher booklets per person/per year.

**Purchase vouchers at the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires 196 South St., Pittsfield, MA 01201. (413) 442-4360, ext. 10**

This program is funded by the Jewish Women’s Foundation of Berkshire County and administered by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires



### Create a Jewish Legacy Campaign

Please remember the Jewish Community in your will.



#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The *Berkshire Jewish Voice* welcomes signed letters on subjects of interest to the Jewish community. Letters are printed upon space availability. The BJV reserves the right to edit all letters for content, length, and style. The BJV does not print anonymous letters, insults, libelous or defamatory statements. Published letters do not represent the views of the Federation, its board of directors, or the newspaper, but rather express the views of their authors. For verification purposes, please include full name, home address, and a day and evening telephone number. Send letters to: Berkshire Jewish Voice, 196 South Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201, or email: [astern@jewishberkshires.org](mailto:astern@jewishberkshires.org).

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# Your Federation Presents

## JEWS OF COLOR, *continued from page 1*

March and has been a core part of many large-scale national movement teams, bringing an intersectional perspective to the ongoing work of racial justice and collective liberation. McCoy is a pioneer of the Jewish diversity 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 "16 Faith Leaders to Watch" by the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC, is a certified coach for the Auburn Theological Seminary's Pastoral Coach Training Program, and an inaugural fellow of the Sojourner Truth Leadership Circle. She is a renowned national speaker, educator, and spiritual practitioner who celebrates the musical traditions passed down to her from three generations of her African-American

Jewish family as the writer, producer and performer of the Jewish Gospel theatrical production "The Colors of Water."

### The Jews of Uganda – with Rabbi Gershom Sizomu

Sunday, February 21 at 11 a.m.

Rabbi Gershom Sizomu is the Chief Rabbi of Uganda, the leader of the Abayudaya Jewish community, and the first Jewish member of the Ugandan Parliament. The Abayudaya, whose tribal name means "people of Judah," are Uganda's minority Jewish community of 2000 Jews. Rabbi Sizomu will discuss the community's nearly 100-year history and the challenges and successes that they have faced during that time.

The Abayudaya community lives in rural villages in Eastern Uganda. Rabbi Sizomu is the grandson of community elder "Rabbi" Samson and lives near the Moses Synagogue in the village of Nabagoye, which he and others from the community's early 1980s "Kibbutz movement" built with their own hands. Their goal has been to gather what was left of the Abayudaya community back together after the devastating reign of Idi Amin Dada ended in 1979.

As a leader, Rabbi Sizomu's dream was to attend a



Rabbi Gershom Sizomu

rabbinic seminary to better understand ancient and modern egalitarian Judaism and bring the Ugandan community into mainstream Jewish life. He was awarded a Be'chol Lashon Fellowship in 2003 to attend the five-year Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. He returned to Uganda in 2008 as the first native-born black rabbi in Sub-Saharan Africa and opened a yeshiva to train African teachers and rabbis to serve their ancient and emerging Jewish communities. In 2016, he became the first Jew ever elected to Uganda's parliament.

\*

The third event in this series will be presented on Sunday, March 7, and will feature Ethiopian-Israeli activist Mazal Bisaver. Details will appear in the next issue of the BJV.

## Jewish Justices of the Supreme Court

On Monday, January 4 from 6:45 to 7:45 p.m., join rabbi and historian Dr. David Dalin as he talks about his most recent book, *Jewish Justices of the Supreme Court*, which was a finalist for the 2017 National Jewish Book Award.

This Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org) for a link to this program.

Dr. David Dalin will examine the lives, legal careers and Jewish legacies of the eight Jews 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 life and legacy of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Attention will also be given to the anti-Semitism encountered by some of the justices during their legal careers, and to the changing role of Jews within



Arthur J. Goldberg served as associate justice of the Supreme Court (1962-1965). His clerks included current Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer and attorney Alan Dershowitz

the American legal profession.

Dr. Dalin 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 and the Jews*.

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

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](http://jewishberkshires.org) for a link to this program.

Alejandra Czarny has been singing and playing Yiddish songs since she was a teenager. Originally from Argentina, where she hosted her own Jewish music radio program, Alejandra has for the last 18 years lived in South Florida, where she has long served as the music director of the Temple Sinai of Hollywood.

She has recorded three CDs, the first two of which—"Songs about Songs" 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 Alejandra released her third CD, "Viene Siendo Tiempo," which is made up entirely of her own compositions. In her work, Alejandra 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 lullabies,



Alejandra Czarny

protest songs, love songs, and more. Some of the lyrics will be provided to enhance participation.

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### Thank you to our supporters!

The *Berkshire Jewish Voice* extends a very special "thank you" for the generosity extended by those who have sent in their contributions for voluntary subscriptions to the paper. There are 19 names for the year 2021

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More resources at  
[berkshirecoalition.org](http://berkshirecoalition.org)





# Your Federation Presents

## 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](http://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.

## To Honor Tu BiShevat – My Tree in Israel

Your private brand of Holy Land olive oil direct from Israeli farmers

On Thursday, January 28, from 4 to 5 p.m., celebrate Tu BiShevat with the folks from My Tree In Israel Ltd., an Israeli initiative to connect people from around the world to Israel in a personal and impactful way. They’ll tell participants how they can adopt a tree and receive their own brand of fresh-pressed olive oil from that tree directly from the farmer.

This Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org) for a link to this program.



Presenting will be co-founders Kobi Assaf and Yishai Gelb. They write: “We invite everybody to become true partners in Israel’s amazing success story by promoting Israeli farmers, not through a donation, but by directly investing in Israeli produce. We believe that a win-win situation is created

when people take part in our impactful program. When one adopts an olive tree in Israel, the olive oil that that person will receive is produced instantly after the harvest, fresh from the olive grove in which the adopted tree grows and is labeled with a private brand.”

Furthermore, if you are

planning a visit to Israel, they welcome you to visit your tree and enjoy a VIP tour from your farmer.

“This program is an extraordinary way to support Israeli farmers and to promote the Israeli economy in a personalized and meaningful way,” write Assaf and Gelb.



A bear in Pleasant Valley

## 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 Judean 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 Judean 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.



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



### INTERESTED IN CONNECTING WITH A COLLEGE STUDENT THIS WINTER?

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires has teamed up with the Williams College Jewish Association to offer “Caring Pals” this winter!

Interested older adults can be connected with diverse college students to develop a friendly relationship through phone calls, emails, cards, letters, and/or musical or artistic exchanges. Participation is first come, first served, based on student availability.

INTERESTED? Contact Susan Frisch Lehrer at (413) 442-4360, ext. 14, or [slehrer@jewishberkshires.org](mailto:slehrer@jewishberkshires.org)





# 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:

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j.goldstein@jfwsm.org

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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 15 organizations for innovation in promoting literacy worldwide.

KGI was granted the honor on the basis of a recommendation from Professor David K. Dickinson, EdD, 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 the lessons learned about values.”

Israeli Education Minister Yoav Galant said, “I welcome the international recognition

that has been bestowed ... from the U.S. Library of Congress. Reading books is an important cornerstone in acquiring education and knowledge at any age. To a great extent, a good book opens a gate to new worlds and new horizons as well as significantly helping to enrich language. This is precisely why the Ministry of Education advances a wide range of programs to encourage reading among children. The award is an important recognition that honors all those involved in this important work.”

Said founder Harold Grinspoon: “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 partnership unit responsible for seven international programs that include Partnership2Gether 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**

Adapted from the popular PJ Library® book-gifting program created by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, Keren Grinspoon Israel distributes some 3.5 million books in Hebrew and Arabic each year to more than 500,000 Israeli children, operating through public preschools and elementary schools in partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Education. Israeli children are introduced to a book at school, and each one receives a copy to take home and keep. By the time a child enters third grade, s/he will have a home library of at least 32 books due to KGI’s efforts.

Major funding for KGI comes from the Israeli Ministry of Education and



Galina Vromen

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 humanistic 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.

Winter Programs at Anshe Amunim


**Tu BiShevat**

To celebrate the congregation’s Jewish environmental values and the New Year of the Trees, Temple Anshe Amunim will hold a special Tu BiShevat Shabbat service on Friday, January 29 at 5:30 p.m.

**Reel Theology – Exploring Faith and Jewish Values Through Film**

Temple Anshe Amunim will hold a virtual film discussion series on Thursdays January 14, 21, & 28 and February 4 from noon to 1 p.m. Participants will watch secular movies outside of class and Rabbi Liz Hirsch will discuss these films through a Jewish lens. Join her for one class or the series of classes.

For registration information for these events, please contact the Temple Office at (413) 442-5910 or templeoffice@ansheamunim.org.



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**FEELING LONELY OR ISOLATED?**

As the weather turns colder and the days darker, please remember that the Jewish Federation has a number of care services available. If you or someone you know is feeling isolated or struggling – either emotionally or financially – please reach out to community social worker, Jill Goldstein, at (413) 442-4360, ext. 17 or j.goldstein@jfswm.org.



**WELCOME TO THE JEWISH BERKSHIRES**

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

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

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

**JEWISHBERKSHIRES.ORG**

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**Berkshire Hills Hadassah**  
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(413) 443-4386,  
Berkshirehillshadassah@gmail.com

**B’nai B’rith Lodge, No. 326**

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450 South St., Pittsfield, MA  
(413) 499-9899,  
jewishberkshires.com

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

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

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(413) 528-6378, hevreh.org

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

**Jewish Federation of the Berkshires**  
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**Jewish War Veterans**  
Commander Robert Waldheim  
(413) 822-4546, sellit4@aol.com

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

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



## LOCAL NEWS

# Rabbi Shira Stern on Being a First-Responder, Managing Grief, and Becoming a Full-Time Member of the Berkshires' Jewish Community

Rabbi Shira Stern blazed a trail as one of the first fifty female rabbis in the United States; in 1983, she was ordained by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, from which she also earned her Doctor of Ministry in 2004. In addition to her congregational work, she is also a board-certified chaplain who has served in hospitals, hospices, and long-term care facilities, and has held leadership roles in many rabbinic and social action organizations. She has written extensively and taught university courses on issues relating to women in Judaism.

In the summer of 2001, she was trained by the American Red Cross to serve on the Spiritual Air Incident Response Team (SAIR) and subsequently worked for four months at the Liberty State Park Family Assistance Center in the aftermath of the 9/11/2001 attacks on New York City by Islamist terrorists.

Now living full-time in Lenox with her husband, Rabbi Daniel Weber, Rabbi Stern is still working virtually with the Red Cross and other organizations – “I have difficulty saying no,” she says.

Rabbi Stern spoke with the BJV just before Thanksgiving about her career. Our interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Rabbi Shira Stern

**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 or twice a year for decades, so Israel was always a focal point in our lives. Giving back to the community was also always a focal point in our lives, whether or not it was helping someone professionally or helping someone find housing or get a good meal or just to be surrounded by a family.

*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 I tried 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 bat 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, ‘Why don't 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 taken 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.

**BJV: There has certainly been a ‘social justice’ component of your career, as well. I'm looking at your involvement with MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger and as co-president of the Women's Rabbinic Network.**

Rabbi Stern: Absolutely. When my parents questioned 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 rabbi 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 homebound 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

then she would call people she knew would be alone or isolated. And I have learned a great deal from her.

**BJV: I'm curious. Your father was a world-famous violinist – was globetrotting with him part of your experience growing up?**

Rabbi Stern: Yes. There was no question that we followed in his footsteps, especially in the summer. That was the only time that we really spent a lot of time with him because he was on the road a lot. It's interesting, because I spent a lot of the first years of my professional life trying to forge my own path. And was I blessed with a wonderful childhood? Yes, I was, and I would never deny that. Part of why we're here in Lenox is not just because the Berkshires are exquisitely beautiful, but because I remember coming to Tanglewood in the summers and loved it. It was kind of a dream.

**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 responses,’ meaning that if an airplane went down, we would be called to serve and support those injured and the survi-

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

vors, and those whose loved ones had died. And my friend said, ‘Don't worry, you're good. All you have to do is go on call for a month, and nothing ever happens – so don't worry about it.’ That was June of 2001.

My first deployment was over four months when I was coming over to Ground Zero from New Jersey. The train station at Liberty State Park [in Jersey City] was reconfigured to be a family assistance center where we had mental health and spiritual care, and FEMA was there. We had a whole host of agencies who were there to be supportive to those who were, at that point, looking for survivors.

We would then ferry them across the Hudson to [the World Trade Center site], and we would allow them to be there respectfully in silence for as long as they needed to be there. And then we'd have a very short little service; and someone would bring them back and help debrief them and support them. There was such an overwhelming influx of people. I felt connected not just to the people I stood next to, but also to those with whom I worked.

My dad had died between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – ten days after 9/11. And so I was going through my own grief process, and because

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 any remains or if there was DNA to match. It was all-encompassing.

**BJV: As a chaplain, how do you see what's going on now in this country with the coronavirus? People are very afraid. Compare and contrast, if you'd like, the post-9/11 response to what you see happening now.**

Rabbi Stern: [Then] people felt tremendous fear because maybe [the 9/11 attack might not be] the last thing that happens – maybe it was just the beginning of the end.

I'm a bereavement counselor – I went back to school for it after 13 years in the pulpit. And there are, I think, three major emotions that dominate those who are either ill or who have lost someone. The first is a sense of aloneness – not being alone, but aloneness. And a sense of isolation. And of despair. One of the most heartbreaking emails I got was from a former congregant who said ‘it's been six months since anyone's hugged me, or that I could hug anybody.’ That physical isolation is overwhelming for people. So if you are from a family of two or three people and all of a sudden, you're all by yourself, or if you're sitting around the dinner table and there's a very

empty chair at the table, that sense of overwhelming aloneness that takes over. So that's very similar between 9/11 and the pandemic.

We didn't know whether or not there would be another attack, or when there would be another attack, and so that was a little open-ended. Now, things are *very* open-ended. We don't know when this will end, and how do we get there?

...

[Grief] is not linear. It's not a progression. It's different things that overwhelm you at different times, whether or not it is bargaining or acceptance or hope or despair or sadness. It's circular.

We think grief is finite, beginning in a straight path through to the end, and that then there is an end of our sadness. That's not what bereavement looks like, and it's not what communal bereavement looks like either. You know, it's, ‘Oh my God, I'm scared. I'm sad. Okay, I can cope. No, I can't. Well, maybe I can. No, no, I'm really bad.’ And your mind's running, it's running.

**BJV: 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. 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 integral 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 intellectually – now I *really* know how important it is to be part of a community. And I want to continue this

**RABBI STERN**  
continued on page 13



## LOCAL NEWS

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

The Ahavath Sholom 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 (AhavathSholom.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 Graubard

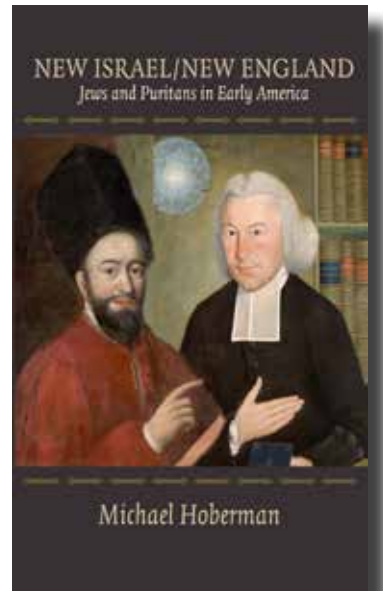
## What is the New England Jewish Experience?

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* and *How Strange it Seems: Cultural Life of Jews in Small-Town New England*. His remarks will be followed by a panel discussion of similarities and differences in Jewish



historical experience among the six New England states.

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 [NEJEconference@nehgs.org](mailto:NEJEconference@nehgs.org).

## Winter Events at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire

### Creative Beit Midrash

Saturdays, January 2, 16 & 30 and February 13 & 27 from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.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](mailto: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 (Fougasse)

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](http://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

Saturdays, January 16, February 13, and March 13 at 9 a.m.

All are welcome to sing and dance their way into Shabbat with Hevreh! The online Shabbat morning experience is a terrific way to center your family for a day of rest and special time together. Join the rabbis and student cantor Gabe Snyder for a lively Shabbat experience.

### Breaking Bread Kitchen

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](mailto:info@hevreh.org) to volunteer.



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## 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.

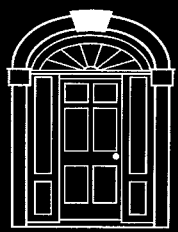
The Federation is offering onetime financial assistance to help Jewish community members struggling with essential needs such as food, utilities, mortgage and rent. Additional critical needs may be considered. Interest free loans are also available.

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](http://jewishberkshires.org/covid19-assist)

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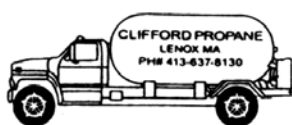
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CULTURE AND ARTS

“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

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

– and after what she describes as a powerful virtual Reiki session with her friend, David Holley – what started to pour out of her was a series of abstract watercolor paintings that bear some resemblance to her iPad images, but that possess an added depth, richness, and mystery that is informed by her emotional response to what the pandemic has wrought.

Part of the Jewish Art Project program involved the study of liturgy. Participants grappled with verses from the Hallel – “From the narrow place I call out to God, who answered me with the divine expanse” (Psalm 118, ‘*Min ha’metzar...*’) – that reflect how our ancestors confronted the challenge of their own lives narrowing. Nina says she immersed herself in the text study, but what she started to produce was “not connected to a verse or to religion or *anything* in an intellectual way. [The paintings] were just my guts coming out.”

Over a period of months, Nina completed one painting a day, each one numbered rather than named, and kept



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.”

The early part of the process “was very freeing. I loved the colors I was using and was just having a blast.” She adds: “My studio has windows. So I look outside and see my garden. But I was never inspired to paint flowers or even the colors of the garden that once might have inspired me. I am more inspired by what the colors of my paint and my ink do when they hit the paper. It was almost like the material was driving me more than anything inside my head.

“But my energy moves in spirals, and there were no spirals” in those early works,

says Nina. As spring turned to summer, however, the spirals began to appear in her paintings, 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 Hevreh choir. The absence left her feeling “bereft.” 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 culminating 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 over the summer. 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. And 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*.”

*“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.”*

with her in 2018, she was working autobiographically, exploring her father’s traumatic World War II service and its effect on her family, working with photo transfer and acrylic paints on canvases.

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 Halloween 2019.

Nina’s home studio was filled with portraits in this vein for a scheduled exhibition, “and then, you know, March 13th” – the day President Trump declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency. “John and I personally shut down and said, okay, this thing is real. And I didn’t do anything artistically – or actually in any way – because

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.’ And that basically was Day One of me starting to paint.”



Nina says she started the process by working in other artists’ styles, following their paths, copying their images, and absorbing their techniques. But as she continued to work with Rabbi Richman

a journal of how she felt and what was on her mind on the day of its creation. She started each entry, however, by writing: ‘I am fully present.’ “I write that down as my intention for whatever it is I’m doing,” she says, “so I have no idea of what’s to come.”

As late winter turned into spring, Nina says she felt restless and started to leave the confines of home in order to



“Always Trust Your Cape”





CULTURE & ARTS

# Elvis Presley – Litvak, Shabbos Goy, and King of Rock ‘n’ Roll

An “Only in America” story told by Roselle Kline Chartock in her new book, *The Jewish World of Elvis Presley*

*The Jewish World of Elvis Presley* is a new book by Great Barrington’s **Roselle Kline Chartock**, writer and artist and professor emerita of education at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. From the book’s synopsis:

“Elvis and Jews: At first glance these two words may not seem to go together. But the truth is that, despite growing up in a poor, fundamentalist Christian family in the Deep South – an area sometimes known for its anti-Semitism – Elvis Presley nevertheless developed a deep affinity to Jews. This book contains answers to two questions: What accounted for this deep affinity? And what was the nature of the personal

relationships Elvis developed with the Jews he befriended in Memphis – including merchants and members of his inner circle, the Memphis Mafia – and those he met in the music and movie industries? In this vivid description of Elvis’ Jewish world – that also reflects his humanitarian and philosophical interests – Roselle Kline Chartock reveals a little-known side of this rock ‘n’ roll icon, including Presley’s own Jewish heritage. There is within this book ample evidence that Presley’s personality as well as his musical gifts were shaped, in part, by his Jewish world.”

Chartock points out a Berkshire connection in the book. In an interview with Great Barrington resident Abby Schroeder, wife of the late Aaron Schroeder,

Chartock discovered that Aaron was at the top of the list of Presley’s top ten songwriters and co-wrote 17 songs for Elvis. Five of them became number one hits, including the multi-million seller “It’s Now or Never.” The book contains a look at Schroeder’s life and work as a songwriter who, interestingly, also played a role in a lawsuit that altered the direction of Presley’s career.

The BJV is pleased to share some excerpts from *The Jewish World of Elvis Presley*:

## 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’s maternal great-great-grandmother, Nancy Burdine Tackett was from a Jewish family that emigrated from Lithuania. As Jewish descent is determined matrilineally, her daughter Martha Tackett Mansell would have been considered Jewish, as would Martha’s daughter “Doll” Mansell Smith; Doll’s daughter Gladys Smith Presley; and Gladys’s 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 him 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 be 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 religions, the neighbors liked each other from the beginning....

With her lovely smile and white hair, Jeannette Fruchter can be seen briefly in a documentary in which she... explained how, once a month, they would have the Presleys over for Friday Sabbath night dinner. “Elvis loved our food,” she said, “especially the challah. He would have his peanut butter and banana sandwich, his favorite food, on challah. And he loved matzoh ball soup and tsimmes.” They loved Jewish cooking, Jeannette said.

The Fruchter’s daughter, Judith Minkove, later confirmed that her parents invited the Presleys for meals in their house and in their Sukkah on the Feast of Tabernacles each fall. When Max Wallace, who helped produce a satirical 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 in his pocket.” Elvis was, in fact, the Fruchter’s *Shabbos Goy*, a person who does certain tasks on the Sabbath when Orthodox Jews are not allowed to, for example, turning on the lights or making phone calls. (The term, now considered inappropriate, has been replaced by “Shabbos helper.”) Jeannette said Elvis

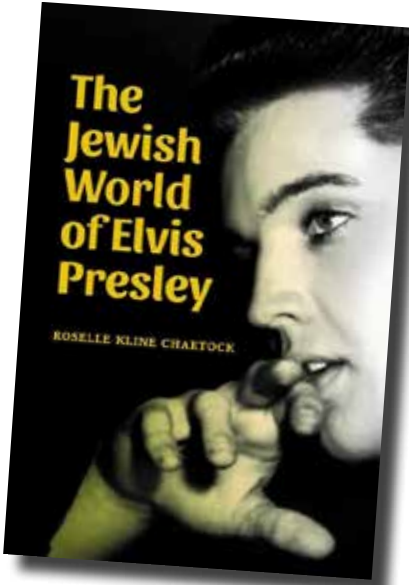
would come over every Saturday morning. “Usually you give a small tip to the gentile who does this for you. They were very poor. But Elvis would never accept any money; he said it was his pleasure.” With a sense of humor and some irony, Judy Minkove said, “Had my parents known of Elvis’ lineage, they would NEVER have asked him to turn on lights on Shabbat.”

## From Chapter 5: “Elvis’ Tailors: The Lansky Brothers Then and Now”

Perhaps the best known among the relationships that Elvis had with Memphis’s Jewish merchants is the one he shared with the Lansky brothers, in particular, Bernard, or Bernie, or “Mr. B,” as his son, Hal, called him in the store, or “Mr. Lansky,” as Elvis addressed him. Either way, it was Bernard Lansky who called Elvis “a very good friend, much more than a customer.” For more than twenty years, Lansky Brothers took care of Elvis’ wardrobe.

While most of the other students at Humes High wore jeans and tee-shirts, Elvis, in his last year or so at school, began to stand out because of his unique style. It all started when, in 1952, a teenage Presley was ushering at Loew’s State Theater, a movie-house on Main Street around the corner from Beale, where he liked to hang out and watch Black musicians, pimps, and others in their flashy

ELVIS, continued on next page



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CULTURE & ARTS

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 conversa-

tion 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,



Hal Lansky, owner of Lansky Brothers, “Clothier to the King,” with Roselle Chartock. On the wall behind them is a picture of Elvis with Bernard Lansky, Hal’s father and founder of Lansky Brothers.

as Streisand holds the record for the female with the most number-one albums, according to *Billboard*.

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Friday, January 1 ....4:12 p.m.  
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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.’ So that’s my fervent wish - that we translate this recognition that community sustains us into a physical response. So you think ‘I want to come 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.

You can now read and share *Berkshire Jewish Voice* feature stories online! Visit [jewishberkshires.org](http://jewishberkshires.org) and select **Community & Events>Berkshire Jewish Voice** for links to highlights of current and past issues.



# 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](http://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 Kneset Israel kitchen door, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.*

All meals-on-wheels will be delivered by Federation volunteers in the early afternoon.

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

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

Adults 60 and over: \$2 suggested donation. Adults under 60: \$7 per person.

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



## What’s for Lunch?

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

For more information on specific programs please see “Your Federation Presents” section of this paper.

- JANUARY**
- Monday, 4** ..... Meat loaf\*\*#, salad, mashed potatoes, peas & carrots, rye 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, pears, and tea.
- Tuesday, 12** ..... Roasted chicken\*\*#, roasted cauliflower, green beans, salad, Challah, peaches, 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, stewed 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.
- FEBRUARY**
- Monday, 1** ..... Meat loaf\*\*#, noodle soup, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, rye bread, apple-sauce, 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



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OBITUARIES

Irwin Moiseff, 78, US Navy submarine veteran, patriot, engineer, and motorsports enthusiast

PITTSFIELD – Irwin Moiseff, 78, died on Monday, November 16, at his home. He was born in Williamsburg, NY on March 3, 1942, a son of the late Louis and Rose (Grass) Moiseff. Irwin graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School and then enlisted in the US Navy, where he served on the USS James Monroe in the submarine division.

After his military career, he was employed at the General Electric Company in Pittsfield from 1966 to 1974. Irwin then graduated from North Adams State College with a physics degree and continued his career at General Dynamics as a software engineer. He worked remotely on a part-time basis for Real Time Innovations in Sunnyvale, CA. He was a member of Chabad of the Berkshires, Greylock Rider Dirt Bike Club, Berkshire Snow Seeker Snowmobile Club, Hoosac Valley Motorcycle Club, Submarine Veterans in Northampton, and Castleton Boat Club. One of his greatest joys was taking his boat out on the Hudson River.

Survivors include his wife, Lyn (Sinclitico) Moiseff, whom he married in 1990, and his daughters, Amy Moiseff of Glastonbury, CT, and Cathy Kerns (Mark) of Jacksonville, FL. He also leaves a stepdaughter, Margaret Sullivan of Kirkwood, WA, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He also leaves a sister, Phyllis Jacobson (Matthew) of Mt. Kisco, NY, as well as a niece and nephew.

A graveside service for Irwin was held on Tuesday, November 17, at Kneset Israel Cemetery in Pittsfield, with Rabbi Levi Volovik of Chabad of the Berkshires officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Hospice Care in the Berkshires, Chabad of the Berkshires, or a charity of your choice through the Flynn & Dagnoli-Bencivenga Funeral Home, 5 Elm Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201. There will be a celebration of Irwin's life at a later date.

Herbert A. Praver, 95, excelled as a home builder

KEY BISCAINE, FL – Herbert A. Praver, 95, passed away on Saturday, October 10.

Herbert went to Florida in the 1960s and excelled in his career as a single-family home builder. He loved spending his summers in the beautiful Berkshire mountains. An avid tennis player, Herbert played well into his eighties and often

enjoyed a great meal and a glass or two of wine.

He is survived by his devoted wife, Nancy; his loved children, Lisa and Michael; grandson Matthew; and sister Elaine. A private graveside service was planned. Donations can be made to [www.feedingsouthflorida.org](http://www.feedingsouthflorida.org)

Peter H. Stolzar, 76, active member of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire

GREAT BARRINGTON – Peter H. Stolzar, 76, died Wednesday, November 18 at Fairview Hospital.

Born May 22, 1944, in New York City, son of Davis and Marjorie (Morse) Stolzar, Peter grew up on Long Island and moved to the Great Barrington area, where he has lived for the past several years. Peter attained his law degree from George Washington University Law School and worked as an attorney in New York City for many years. He was an active member of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire.

Peter is survived by son, Samuel Stolzar and wife Tara; two brothers, Michael Stolzar and wife Karen and Andrew Stolzar and wife Joan; three grandchildren, Jackson, Easton, and Leah. Peter was predeceased by his wife, Joanna (Berg) Stolzar. A graveside service was held Sunday, November 22 in Cedar Park and Beth El Cemetery in Paramus, NJ. Condolences may be made through [birchesroyfuneralservices.com](http://birchesroyfuneralservices.com).

Eleanor “Ellie” (Chaneles) Ware, 87, elementary school teacher, loved to travel

PITTSFIELD – Eleanor “Ellie” (Chaneles) Ware died Thursday, November 26 at Hillcrest Commons.

Born in Brooklyn, NY on May 19, 1933, daughter of the late Samuel and Emma (Sandomirsky) Chaneles, she attended schools in New York City and New Haven, CT and graduated from the University of Connecticut.

Ellie was employed for many years as an elementary school teacher for the City of Pittsfield. She was a member of Temple Anshe Amunim in Pittsfield. She loved to travel and attended the theater. Ellie was an avid fan of the University of Connecticut's basketball teams. Her husband James Ware died in 1982. She is also predeceased by her three siblings Benjamin, Irving, and Sol Chaneles. Survivors include nieces and nephews and many friends.

Private graveside services were planned in the family plot in Pittsfield Cemetery. Donations can be made to

Temple Anshe Amunim, 26 Broad Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

Kenneth Boris Grinspoon, 88, piloted a Piper aircraft at the age of 80

LENOX – Kenneth Boris Grinspoon, 88, died peacefully after a brief illness in his home with his wife by his side.

Born on March 28, 1932 in Newton, MA, Ken maintained homes in New York City and Lenox. After a long career in education, Ken's proudest achievement was fulfilling his lifelong dream to pilot a Piper aircraft at the age of 80.

Ken is survived by his wife, Selina Morris; daughters Elizabeth and Jennifer; daughters by marriage Pamela and Jessica; his beloved brother Harold; and six grandchildren.

Ken's laughter and warm spirit will be sorely missed at Tanglewood, Jacob's Pillow, and other performing arts venues.

A memorial service will be held at a future date. The family suggests a donation to the Lenox Library Association.

Samuel J. Karlin, 90, followed successes and non-successes of Red Sox, Patriots, and Celtics

PITTSFIELD – Samuel J. Karlin, 90, died Wednesday, December 2, at his home. Born in Boston, MA on September 16, 1930, a son of David and Zelda Karlin, he graduated from Boston Public Latin School, Suffolk University, and Bentley School of Accounting. Samuel was a veteran of the Korean War and served in the US Army. He was employed by the US Treasury Department for the Internal Revenue Service where he retired as the group manager in its Pittsfield office in 1987. Samuel was a member of Kneset Israel. He enjoyed traveling throughout the United States and Canada. He also liked to follow the successes and non-successes of the Red Sox, Patriots, and Celtics.

Samuel was predeceased by his wife, Edith (Siegel) Karlin, who died on December 5, 2013. Survivors include his three children, Joel, Sharon and Eric. His sister, Sylvia Kaiman, died December 31, 2014.

A graveside service was held on Thursday December 3 at Kneset Israel Cemetery with Rabbi David Weiner, spiritual leader, officiating. Donations may be made to the Arthur and Sylvia Stein Endowment at Kneset Israel in care of Flynn & Dagnoli-Bencivenga Funeral Home, 5 Elm Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

Paula Pomerantz, 83, nurse, cook, loved hiking, avid naturalist

PITTSFIELD – Paula Pomerantz (Pua Rifka), 83, died peacefully at home due to complications of cancer on Tuesday, December 1, with her husband at her side.

Born September 18, 1937 in Yonkers, NY, the daughter of Max (Nachum Laeb) Waxstein and Phyllis (Chayah) 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 27, 1943.

Paula attended Temple Anshe Amunim religious school and was confirmed. She was active in Girl Scouts and Junior Friends of the Berkshire Athenaeum. Young Paula was an avid reader and loved the outdoors, camping, hiking, and archery. During one camping trip on Mt. Greylock with a youth group, she and friend Judy Abrams left the main group at the Thunderbolt shelter to sleep outdoors in a blanket roll near the mountain's summit. She always remembered this summer evening fondly.

Paula attended Camp Young Judea in New Hampshire and, like her mother and grandmother Nelson (who were active Hadassah leaders), became an ardent Zionist.

When Paula and her boyfriend, Philip Pomerantz (who later became her husband), graduated from Pittsfield High School in 1955, they seriously considered Aliyah. But, she stayed in the United States to pursue a career in nursing. She attended the Westchester School of Nursing in Valhalla, NY, earning her RN in 1958. She was employed at Pittsfield General Hospital, including on the maternity unit.

Paula and Phil were married on July 12, 1957, by Rabbi Harold Salzmann (of blessed memory) at Temple Anshe Amunim in Pittsfield. Children Deborah Judith, Sarah Beth, and David Isaac were born in 1964, 1965, and 1966. While pregnant, Paula started studying at Berkshire Community College and decided to aim for an eventual BA in History. With the young children, Paula was a “stay-at-home” mom and a student, volunteer at Temple, and active in politics.

In 1972, Paula transferred to UMass Amherst, and the family relocated there in 1973. She received her BA in 1975, and the family moved back to Pittsfield and their roots. With a recession in progress, Paula was again employed in nursing as a private duty nurse.

When father-in-law Herbert Pomerantz died in November 1976, Phil inherited his father's small business. The family moved into a new duplex home on Williams Street with mother-in-law Ann. Paula was offered a sales job with Abbott Pharmaceuticals, but Phil convinced her to use her skills promoting the family business. The couple worked side by side, running the business until retirement.

Over the years, Paula always had a large garden in the yard, growing vegetables to feed her family of six and often more family and friends. She cooked all of the family's meals from scratch and had a freezer full of delicious meals at the ready. Her grandchildren always looked forward to her Shabbat challahs. Paula was a devoted fan of the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera. She also remained an active member of Temple Anshe Amunim, attending Torah study over Zoom even during this pandemic year.

Paula and her family enjoyed weekend hiking, camping, and longer backpacking trips to New Hampshire and the Maine north woods. In her retirement, she became an avid naturalist, guiding school children on hikes at Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary. She was also a regular guest and naturalist at the Appalachian Mountain Club's Cold River Camp in New Hampshire. Cold River Camp became a true spiritual home for her and she made many friends over the summers spent there.

Paula is survived by her high school sweetheart, Phil, whom she married at the age of 19. They were married for 63 years. She leaves her three children; daughters Deborah and Sarah Pomerantz of Falls Church, VA; son David Pomerantz, MD and wife Maribeth of Williamstown; three beloved grandchildren, Molly Almeida, Miriam (Mim) Pomerantz, and Adam Pomerantz; sister, Louise Waxstein Lubin of Chappaqua, NY; three nieces, Rebecca Lubin, Hilary Linder Griffith, and Joselin Linder; two nephews, Samuel Lubin and Joshua Lubin; and many dear friends, too many to name, but especially Rhoda Kaminstein and Edward and Ellen Bond.

Burial was held at Ahavath Sholom Cemetery in Pittsfield. In Paula's memory, the family asks that those who wish may donate to The Audubon Society's Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, 472 West

OBITUARIES, continued on next page



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BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

Israel, Land Of Milk and Honey.....And Whisky

Our whisky maven talks with the CEO of Milk & Honey Distillery about what makes his Israeli single malt distinct

By Alex Rosenblum / BJV *Bronfen* Correspondent

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 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 impending introduction into North

America of the first single malt whisky made/distilled in the Land of Milk and Honey. The announcement also invited the newspaper editors to contact M&H Distillery for more information. Naturally, as the self-anointed scotch maven of Pittsfield and its environs, I graciously volunteered to take on the task of interviewing the M&H Distillery’s representative. After a flurry of emails, I had the pleasure of speaking at length over the telephone with Eitan Attir, CEO based in Tel Aviv of M&H Distillery.

Eitan, whose passion for his job and product was evident over the telephone, recounted that until the last dozen or so years, Israel’s high taxes and tariffs discouraged the importing of scotches and the production of whiskies. However, with the reduction of these tariffs, the widening of the overseas market, and the growth of

*M&H moves its barrels of aging whisky to different regions of Israel, from Tel Aviv to the Dead Sea, to the desert near Egypt, and soon to the Galilee.*

trade and tourism all contributing to a robust economy, a few investors had the foresight to see the potential of the economic potential of investment in good whisky.

Less than ten years ago, a small group of investors formed Milk & Honey and purchased stills, mash tuns, and other equipment from

Scotland in order to set up a distillery in the Tel Aviv area. They also had the good sense to bring in Dr. Jim Swan – a legendary Scot chemist/distiller/philosopher/guru who introduced successful whisky operations in India, Taiwan, Canada, and Scotland – to oversee their new business. With local-grown Sabra talent, they immediately started to experiment with different recipes for a superior and unique scotch-style single malt.

The production of scotch is zealously guarded in Scotland by the government-supported Scotch Whisky Association, which mandates distillation 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 “*mashke*” different. He pointed out that M&H was currently experimenting with the use of varied oak barrels from the USA, Portugal, 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 distinguishes 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. Thus, the maturation process of the whisky involves interaction with the tannins of the charred barrel wood in the different degrees of charred 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



Eitan Attir

climate conditions that both heighten and shorten the ageing process and produce a fine bouquet 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 (*Shiv’at HaMinim*) listed in the Torah as being special products 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. *Yiddisheh khokhme!* 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 production 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.

Shortly after our telephone conversation, I was contacted by friends Jim and Sean at Spirited Wine and Liquor in Lenox. We enthusiastically discussed their stocking their Berkshire establishment with the various M&H single malt and blended whiskies – and miraculously, just before Chanukah, Spirited received its first case of M&H single malt and M&H gin. *Ness gadol?*

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, of course, Scotland.

M&H Israeli single malt! A new meaning to ‘*L’Chayim*’?



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OBITUARIES, *continued from previous page*

Mountain Road, Lenox, MA 01240, the Appalachian Mountain Club’s Cold River Camp in North Chatham, NH, or Temple Anshe Amunim, 26 Broad Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201

**Elaine Baum, 77, loved traveling and attending concerts**

STOCKBRIDGE – Elaine Baum, 77, died Tuesday, December 8 at Kimball Farms Nursing Care Center.

Born in Pittsfield October 18, 1943, the daughter of Charles and Shirley Knox, she attended local schools and was a 1961 graduate of Pittsfield High School. She was employed by the Berkshire Mutual Insurance Co. and later Minkler Insurance Co.

Elaine loved tending her gardens, traveling with her husband, and attending concerts at Tanglewood, especially the BSO. She and her

husband Robert Baum were married in Lenox on January 8, 2005.

Besides her husband, she is also survived by her son Sean Carroll (Susan) of Dalton; daughter Alison Worrick (Jim) of Pittsfield; Tiffany Baum (Kevin Kump) of Lenox; Ronald Baum of Brazil; Gregory Baum of Fort Lauderdale, FL; and Avi Robinson Baum of Jerusalem, Israel; grandchildren Eric Worrick, Corinna Kate Carroll, Rose, Brianna, and Shali Baum; sisters; Suzanne Coughlin (Don) of Lady Lake, FL, Patricia Kelley (Wally) of Lakeport, CA, Polly Lombardi (John) of Pittsfield, and Kelly Jones (Bill) of Pittsfield; brothers Steven Knox of Oakland Park, FL, and Jeffrey Knox (Lynn Majewski) of East Brunswick, NJ.

A private burial service was planned at Ahavath Shalom Cemetery in Great Barrington.



BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

The Road to Arab-Israeli Peace Should go through Muscat

Opinion by Alex Lederman



Alex Lederman of Pittsfield is the National Organizing Fellow of IPF Atid, the young professionals program of Israel Policy Forum. He graduated from Yale University with a BA in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and served as an intern at the US Embassy in Muscat, Oman. Alex grew up in the Berkshires, his Jewish development supported by Federation Hebrew school funding and a 2016 Israel scholarship.

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 counterweight to a destabilizing Iran and the crown jewel of potential Israeli allies. The Saudi-Israeli normalization question continues to dominate the news cycle following Prime Minister Netanyahu's secret meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in November. Another Gulf nation, however, is quietly mulling its own accord with the Jewish state. That country is the Sultanate of Oman. Oman might not be as alluring as Saudi Arabia, but Israel would reap both practical and symbolic benefits by establishing ties with the Sultanate. Israel ought to take Oman seriously as a potential regional partner — and there is reason to suggest that Oman may be ready to reciprocate.

Oman stands apart in a region shaped by competing alliances and endless proxy wars. It enjoys cordial relations with all of its neighbors and is respected internationally as a force for stability and peace. An integral partner to its fellow Gulf Cooperation Council states, Oman has fought to keep the GCC together after Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain cut ties with Qatar in 2017. The Sultanate maintains a close alliance with the US, but its credibility in Tehran helped

bring the Iranians to the table to negotiate the JCPOA nuclear deal. Similarly, Oman has served as a diplomatic back channel to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, even as its Saudi and Emirati allies carried out a brutal and unsuccessful military campaign to oust 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 Israeli 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 known trip of an Israeli leader to the Gulf. In 1996, the countries agreed to open trade missions and collaborated in opening the Middle East Desalination Research Center in 1997. Although Oman rolled back its engagement with Israel amid the Second Intifada in 2000, the question of Oman-Israel relations re-emerged in 2018 when Netanyahu met with Sultan Qaboos.

Oman's tepid engagement with Israel has stopped short of full recognition, and Oman has not openly expressed interest in full diplomatic relations. Following the Netanyahu-Qaboos 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 may better position it as a mediator in the conflict. Oman's track record with the JCPOA is a testament to its ability to bring sworn enemies to the table. Normalization with Israel would curry favor in Washington, but Oman also has a genuine interest in

promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace. The newly-minted Sultan Haitham bin Tariq is likely eager to prove himself as a statesman and respected moderator in Qaboos's image.

While the Palestinians and their allies have chastised the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan for “betraying” their cause, Oman could mitigate damage to its credibility by requesting an Israeli concession on the Israeli-Palestinian front. In exchange for normalization, Israel could implement a comprehensive settlement freeze or even a small-scale transfer of Area C territory to the Palestinian Authority. Oman could also insist on including clear language in support of the two-state solution in the agreement.

On the Israeli side, assuming Netanyahu retains the premiership in the near future, it is difficult to say whether he would see such an arrangement as worth the political blowback from his pro-annexation base. Oman would likely not embrace Israel without an Israeli concession, lest it alienate the Palestinians. Unlike the UAE, for whom Netanyahu agreed to “suspend” annexation, Oman is not on most Israelis' radar as a regional player. However, as Netanyahu considers his legacy and reputation as a highly competent statesman, it behoves him not to overlook the Sultanate. The aforementioned concessions are not inconsistent with the Trump Plan, which Netanyahu endorsed. Indeed, previous right-wing prime ministers have given up more for less.

Normalization with Oman has unique benefits to offer Israel. At this point, the Arab countries that have relations with Israel all fall within the pro-Saudi bloc, united in its opposition to Iranian imperialism. Mutual fear of Iran has naturally drawn these nations closer to Israel, thereby cementing Israel's place as a part of a regional alliance alongside pro-Western “moderate” Sunni Arab states.

Though this alignment does benefit Israel, it only goes so far to integrate it into the Middle East. An anti-Iran alliance between Israel and a few Arab countries is unlikely to broaden public acceptance of Israel in Arab societies.

Oman, however, an independent player not beholden to Riyadh, is in a unique position to do so. Mutual fear of Iran would not be a factor in Oman-Israeli normalization, as Oman has no quarrel with Iran. Oman and Iran

*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.*

have robust diplomatic and economic ties and Sultan Haitham appears poised 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 from Israel to Iran and Hezbollah.

Oman, home to the lesser-known Ibadhi branch of Islam, would also be the first Arab state with a non-Sunni regime to normalize with Israel. An Israel-Oman agreement would cement Israel's status as an accepted part of the Middle East, beyond sectarianism and partisan geopolitics, while signalling to the Palestinians that the Arab world at large is disillusioned with their intransigence. It would, in essence, normalize normalization.

Following an Israel-Oman accord, the Saudis might feel more comfortable bringing their covert ties with Jerusalem out into the open. Kuwait and Qatar, two other Gulf states that do not always toe the Saudi line, might also consider doing so. Embraced by all six GCC states, Israel will have truly begun to cast aside its status as a Middle Eastern pariah.

Up to this point, security

concerns have dominated the Arab-Israeli normalization process. Israel's under-the-table ties with the Gulf that preceded the Abraham Accords never would have materialized in a world without the Iranian threat. Israel's relations with Egypt and Jordan hardly qualify as “normal,” with minimal civilian contact and distrust running deep. If Israel truly wants to become an integrated part of the Middle East, it needs to look past obvious military alliances and reach beyond the Saudi orbit.

Oman, the uncontroversial friend-to-all and the bridge across the geopolitical aisle, 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 quarrel 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 blog, and the opinions expressed are not intended to represent the views of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires or its affiliates.*

MAZEL TOV

Mazel Tov to...

- Steven and Renee Finn** on celebrating their 50th anniversary.

\*

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

\*

**Moe England** on celebrating his 90th birthday.

\*

**Lorraine German**, whose book *Soil 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 Blidner**, authors of *The Berkshires Farm 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, Boston's biggest and most beloved cookbook event celebrating regional talent.

\*

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Federation Board of Directors member **Anne Schnesel** on the birth of great-granddaughter **Margaux Elliot Barshay** in Santa Monica, CA, on December 10, 2020. Proud parents are **Samantha and Devin Barshay**. Margaux is their second child and Anne's third great-grandchild.



BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

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 the country, and 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 been active over the centuries in all facets of Indian society, including 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 the 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 Kondungallur, destroying homes and synagogues.

Yet another group of refugees, called Paradesi Jews, joined their fellows in Cochin the 15th and 16th centuries. Mostly *conversos* fleeing the Portuguese Inquisition, they came to Goa, on the southwest coast of India. Remember that word "relatively"? Unfortunately, the Paradesi were not to find peace there because in 1505 Portugal, having benefitted from Vasco de Gama's discovery of the route to the Far East, claimed parts of India as its own. The Portuguese established a branch office of its Inquisition, centered in Goa. During their reign of terror, they charged over 16,000 "Old Christian Nasranis" with Judaising 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 historical twist, a Baghdadi Jew, Lt-Gen J.F.R. Jaco was elected state governor of Goa in 1998. He was just one of many other Jews in prominent positions, but that accomplishment in Goa was especially sweet.

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 the 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 Baghdadi 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 B'nei Israel. According to historian, Shalva Weil, the B'nei Israel claim their roots from 14 Jewish survivors of a shipwreck of refugees who washed ashore some 1900 years ago. Despite their

claims of being descended from the kohanim, the Temple priests, they assimilated into the local culture so much that their ignorance of Judaism grew — although they did continue to recite the Shema and observe Shabbat. In fact, according to historian Nathan Katz, their Indian neighbors nicknamed them the "Saturday oil-pressers" because they did not work on Shabbat.

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

Then in 2002, modern science confirmed B'nei Israel's priestly ancestry claims via DNA testing.

And then there are other, smaller groups who claim descent from the Ten Lost Tribes. The B'nei 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 reclaimed their faith and began to practice a form of pre-Talmudic Judaism. Similarly, the B'nei 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.

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 the country

Chicken Chitarnee

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 teaspoons cumin                |
| 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil                       | 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes     |
| 6 large onions halved, then sliced                         | 10 cardamom pods*                |
| 2 teaspoons sugar  | 1 28-ounce can diced tomatoes    |
| 6 cloves garlic finely chopped                             | 1 tablespoon tomato paste        |
| 2-inch ginger root, finely chopped                         | 5 tablespoons fresh lemon juice  |
| 2 mild fresh green chili peppers (if you prefer more heat) | 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar |
| 1 tablespoon turmeric powder                               | 1 teaspoon salt                  |
| 2 tablespoons ground coriander                             | 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 chicken pieces and coat well with the onion and spice mix. Cook for 2 minutes.

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

Bring to a boil, then lower the heat. Cover and simmer for 60 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked through.

Turn the heat off and add the rest of the vinegar and lemon juice. Stir to mix.

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

Garnish with cilantro leaves.

Serve with Basmati rice.

\* 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](http://carolgoodmankaufman.com) and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.



NEWS

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 of a special government decision that was approved unanimously. I will continue acting on behalf of the Bnei Menashe community to ensure and expedite the Aliyah of the remaining

community members in India. We are blessed to see their arrival to Israel during the festival of Chanukah – this is a tremendous light for us all. We will accompany and help all the *olim* throughout their process of absorption, and we will do everything we can to support their successful integration into Israeli society.”

The momentous Aliyah of hundreds of members of the Bnei Menashe community follows months of preparation spearheaded by the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration in cooperation with the Shavei Israel organization.

“As we celebrate the festival of Chanukah 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.*



Members of the Bnei Menashe community arriving at Israel’s Ben Gurion Airport on December 15, 2020

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NEWS

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 new 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. Among them, 286,000 (9.9%) live in extreme food insecurity, up

from 252,000 (8.8%) before the pandemic (according to the National Insurance Institute of Israel). About 143,000 (+4.8%) households have been newly categorized as food insecure since the beginning of the pandemic, and 34,000 have been newly categorized as dealing with extreme food insecurity.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, 422,000 new Israeli households found themselves in financial hardship. The percentage of the households that suffer from financial hardship jumped from 24.1%, before the pandemic, to 38.6% (an increase of 14.5%). Of the households that reported encountering financial hardship during the pandemic, 77% are Jewish families. As a comparison, 58% of Jewish family households faced financial hardship before the pandemic.

The study also reports that 86% of elderly citizens in need of support are experiencing loneliness. Of this group, 21.6% fear they might die at home with no one knowing.

The Latet’s Alternative Poverty Report, analyzed by the Rotem AR Institute, is an integrative study comprised of three questionnaires based on the United States Department of Agriculture’s methodology. The study sampled 1,818 Israelis ages 18 and up (including members of the general public, people in financial need and heads of

nonprofit charities) during September-October of 2020.

The report also found that during the pandemic, Israel’s middle class shrunk by 15.5%, 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% 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 economic 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 build 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 Weintrob. “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 descend 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



Floridians 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 Groisman, 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 benefiting 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 Hatzalah of Miami-Dade, an organization of volunteer paramedics.

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For calendar listings and events

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

Thank you to these individuals who through their gift to the Legacy Circle will 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.



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CULTURE & ARTS

Once in a Full Moon

“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.





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