Join Us for Our Annual Meeting on June 29!

Federation to unveil results of its strategic planning initiative during this online event

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**En Frente De Mi Te Tengo**

Sarah Aroeste reimagines the lost Jewish world of her family’s ancestral home with her new album, *Monastir*

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Berkshire-based singer Sarah Aroeste has long been an ambassador of Ladino music and Sephardic culture, but with her new album – and the broader undertaking it is a part of, The Monastir Project – she delves deeper into her family’s roots in the Balkans. For more on this recording and the global roster of musical talent Aroeste assembled to realize her vision, please see page 22.

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"Leonard Cohen’s Mystical Midrash,“ with Seth Rogovoy

Local music journalist kicks off his “Great Jewish Rock Poets” series

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Leonard Cohen

On Monday, July 12 at 6:45 p.m., nationally-renowned (but still our favorite local) music and culture journalist Seth Rogovoy will initiate the two-part “Great Jewish Rock Poets” with “Leonard Cohen’s Mystical Midrash.”

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

In this multimedia program including music, images, and close textual comparisons, Rogovoy explores the deep and profound influence of the **Mystical Midrash, continued on page 5**
Rabbi Reflection

This Year’s Early “Festivals of the Eternal”

Prepare for autumn High Holy Days falling in summer this year

By Rabbi Neil P.G. Hirsch

Are the High Holy Days going to be early or late this year? The answer is that they will be as they are every year. Rosh Hashanah is on 1 Tishrei, and Yom Rippur will be observed ten days later. But that is according to the Jewish calendar, and we tap out the rhythm of our lives on the secular calendar. This year, Rosh Hashanah begins the evening of Monday, September 6. Rosh Hashanah shares the date with Labor Day. Based on how we measure time, the holidays sure do seem super early.

Determining when holidays fall has long been a deep consideration for our people. Leviticus 23 tells us the precise dates upon which the holidays fall. “Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them. These are the Festivals of the Eternal that you shall declare as holy” (23:2). Shabbat, Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Rippur, and Sukkot all find origins in this biblical chapter, coupled with basic instructions as to how and when we are to observe particular holidays. The Jewish institutional world is organized around the calendar. We are event-based.

Given our obsession with dating and timing our holidays, the art and science of Jewish scheduling has not been without controversy. In I Kings, Jeroboam seems to have approved a deviation from calendar norms. In Talmudic and late Antiquity, sectarians adjusted for how they thought best to observe the festivals. In the 10th Century, the calendar was used to assert the political and religious power of one Jewish community over another. Babylonian rabbis challenged the authority of rabbis living in the Land of Israel, disputing the calculation of the Hebrew calendar. The dispute and severing that ensued marked the beginning of a new creative period in Jewish thought.

We still struggle to figure out when to observe particular holidays. Jews in Israel observe seven-day festivals, while in the Diaspora, we add in an additional day. The American Reform movement follows the Israeli calendar, and in many cases does not observe the extra days of chag. In our blended lives, we also wrestle with how to fit it all in. do our academic calendars match up with our Jewish calendar? What about our regular workflows and interrupting them for various holidays? What about summer plans and when Tisha b’Av falls? July 18/19 this year?

If we are serious about making Judaism a part of our lives, answering such questions is part of the process. Moreover, prioritizing Jewish practice over other calendar conflicts testifies to the seriousness of our spiritual pursuits. This past year has given many the opportunity to recalibrate the many priorities that fill our days. Pandemic restrictions have transformed how we experience time. Days flow into one another.

This year, the holidays fall unbelievably early on the secular calendar. Let us come back into our communities, at the appointed times, with full hearts, ready to start this new year with joy and awe. The rabbis of Berkshire County look forward to seeing you over the holidays.

Rabbi Neil P.G. Hirsch serves the congregation of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire in Great Barrington.

Prioritizing Jewish practice over other calendar conflicts testifies to the seriousness of our spiritual pursuits

A Crisis Within a Crisis

Your campaign dollars help domestic violence victims in Israel during the pandemic

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you on behalf of the women, children, and staff for your continuing generous donations to the Haifa Women’s Crisis Shelter. Your support is very helpful to our effort to provide a safe haven for domestic violence victims who reside in our shelter – now more than ever. The Haifa Women’s Crisis Shelter is full. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the shelter’s residence has experienced a crisis within a crisis and more than ever require an experienced and professional response to help them deal with both the trauma of violence and the stresses inherent to lockdowns, social distancing guidelines, and the economic crisis.

Best regards
Dina Hevlin Dahan, Executive Director

In the next few months, we will complete our building project. The shelter in our new building will be able to serve 40 percent more women and children. Your support designated for furnishing the therapy rooms in the new building is very much welcomed!

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you volunteers Ellen Rosenblatt and the BJV delivery team, Michael Albert and Roman Rozenblyum.

Thank you on behalf of the Haifa Women’s Crisis Shelter and all those we serve.

Dina Hevlin Dahan, Executive Director

We Look Forward to Seeing Your Smiling Faces In Person Soon!

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires is working diligently but cautiously towards reopening our office and providing opportunities for our program participants to safely come back into face-to-face community.

As we make changes to our programs and services, we will post the most up-to-date information on our website, jewisberkshires.org, and in our weekly e-communications.

We ask for your patience as we work towards our ultimate goal of bringing people back together to celebrate, learn, and engage in meaningful Jewish life.

Letters to the Editor

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We ask for your patience as we work towards our ultimate goal of bringing people back together to celebrate, learn, and engage in meaningful Jewish life.
Most of us are familiar with the adage, “Home is where the heart is” – but never did these words ring more true for me until my experience this past year.

After living in the Berkshires for nearly 20 years, I accepted an offer to work for a Reform congregation outside of Philadelphia in February 2020. At that time, no one could have predicted that a global pandemic was on the horizon; regard- less, the homesick feeling I endured reminded me of my 8-year-old self at sleepaway camp. I had been unaware of how strong my ties were to this amazing community.

As COVID-19 began to shut the world down, my isolation and loneliness grew, and I longed to be back in Western Massachusetts despite the cold and snow. I missed my husband, Tim, who had stayed in Great Barrington to finish out the school year as Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School’s prin- cipal. After the COVID-19 disruption, he decided that he needed to stay one more year to see the school district through the crisis. I missed my friends, and I longed for my Jewish home and the community I had served for so many years as the executive director of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire.

When I made the difficult decision to give up my new job and move home, I had no idea what I would do next. I just knew that I needed to return to where my heart was and where I felt connected.

It was undoubtedly fortuitous that I ran into Dara Kaufman, executive director of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, on a cold winter day in early February. Dara and I had worked together on many projects and programs over the years, and as we stood in the produce aisle of Price Chopper, she gave me a synopsis of what Federation’s year had been. I was impressed – but not surprised – with how quickly the Federation was able to pivot during this crisis and continue to serve and support those in need.

The Federation has been a staple in the Berkshire-Jewish community for 81 years. My first personal experiences included the annual financial support they offered each religious school family at Hevreh, and the PJ Library programs we attended when our daughters, Alison and Ruthie, were younger. Over the years, I enjoyed Federation-sponsored lectures and concerts but knew little about the importance the Federation played in providing social services and resources for those in need.

Early in my professional career at Hevreh, I began to truly understand the vital role the Jewish Federation of the Berkshire has in our community. Not only does it help to link the synagogues throughout Berkshire County with programs like Shabbat Across the Berkshires, but it also responds to crucial issues in real-time. When a Hevreh student faced anti-Semitism in his middle school, the Federation quickly came to his aid and was able to help him. Federation is where the heart is.

I was impressed – but not surprised – with how quickly the Federation was able to pivot during this crisis and continue to serve and support those in need.

Across the country, the Federation helped provide security walk-throughs to identify areas of vulnerability and resources to create better security processes.

When I had the opportunity to join Federation as its development officer, it felt ‘beshert.’ ‘I am so excited to begin my work to help the Federation reach our 2021 campaign goals. Our kickoff event held at High Lawn Farm on May 23 could not have been more perfect. After a year of isolation and lockdowns, more than 200 people came out to tour the farm, eat delicious ice cream, and, most importantly, re-connect. (Please see photos on pages 12 & 13.)

Seeing so many friends and meeting new members of the community touched my heart. I look forward to working with the staff at the Federation, the board and its president, Elisa Schindler Frankel, and the abundance of dedicated volunteers in order to raise awareness and the necessary funds to fulfill the Federation’s ongoing mission.

Remember that it all starts with you, and every gift makes a difference.

If you haven’t already sent in your pledge or made your donation this year, please help us reach our goals. Your financial support enables us to build a stronger Jewish community in the Berkshires.

Janet Lee is the development officer of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. Contact her at jefl@jewishberkshires.org or by calling (413) 442-4360, ext. 19.
Your Federation Presents

“American Pastorals: Philip Roth and Allegra Goodman”

On Monday, June 21, at 6:45 p.m., join literary scholar Michael Hoberman for a talk about the work of two important but different writers in “American Pastorals: Philip Roth and Allegra Goodman.” This Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at jewisberkshires.org for a link to this program.

Two of the greatest Jewish American novels of the late 20th century – Philip Roth’s American Pastoral and Allegra Goodman’s Kaaterskill Falls – were published within one year of one another, in 1997 and 1998. Literary scholar Michael Hoberman will talk about how these two books, seemingly so different from one another, bear nearly identical implications regarding the dangers of social isolation, especially for Jews. Michael Hoberman is a professor of American literature at Fitchburg State University and is a graduate of Reed College and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His books include New Israel New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America and, most recently, A Hundred Acres of America: The Geography of Jewish American Literature. In 2010, he was Fulbright Senior Professor of American Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. His articles on Jewish American literature and history can be found in Tablet Magazine.

“JEWHOOGING NEW YORK: Iconic NY Jews, A-Z”

On Thursday, July 8, at 6:45 p.m., join scholar Dr. David E. Kaufman as he shares tales of famous Jewish New Yorkers in a program called “JEWHOOGING NEW YORK: Iconic NY Jews, A-Z.” This Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at jewisberkshires.org for a link to this program.

Dr. Kaufman will present a visual and historical celebration of Jewish accomplishment in the arts and culture of New York City – and in multiple social, economic, religious, and political realms. Proceeding from the notion that New York is “the greatest Jewish city in the world” (in the words of newspaper publisher Harry Golden), Kaufman will review a series of notable New York Jews in alphabetical order. He will thus survey the various fields in which New York Jews have made their mark on their city and the world at large.

Dr. David E. Kaufman is a scholar of American Jewish history and a former tenured professor at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles and Hofstra University on Long Island. His publications include the books Shul with a Pool: The ‘Synagogue-Center’ in American Jewish History and Jewhooing the Sixties: American Celebrity and Jewish Identity. Currently, Dr. Kaufman is engaged in building a public history organization called “NEW YORK JEW: Center for New York Jewish History, Culture, and Community.”
MYSTICAL MIDRASH, continued from page 1

Jewish background and scriptural roots of the late Leonard Cohen's life and work. Regarding Cohen's lyrics, poetry, and interviews, we will see how the legendary rock poet's familiarity with Torah, Talmud, and Kabbalah infused his creative output with a deep and abiding spirituality. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on and discuss how Cohen can best be seen and appreciated as a Jewish artist.


For three decades, Rogovoy's work has appeared in the English-language national Jewish publication, The Forward, to which he is a contributing editor. Seth is a former board member of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. The second program in this series, to be presented later this summer on a date to be determined, will focus on Bob Dylan.

To register for this event, please visit our calendar of events at jewishberkshires.org for a link to this program.

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From Farm to Table.

On Monday, June 28 at 6:45 p.m., join Cathy Zises, local farmer and descendant of the Margareten family behind Horowitz Brothers, who will recount her seed-to-Seder matzah story, "Matzah From Farm to Table." This Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at jewishberkshires.org for a link to this program.

Cathy Zises is the farmer/owner of Zfarm in Ghent, NY, who will share her journey in cultivating a biodynamically grown spelt grain to create matzah. Zises is the great-granddaughter of Regina Margareten, "Queen of Matzah," who, with her family and partners in Brooklyn, co-founded Horowitz Brothers and Margareten Company, purveyors of Jewish foods and, most famously, Passover matzah. Cathy bought her farm in 2013 and has connected her biodynamic farming techniques with the Jewish community. She brought family heritage — and the gift of modern-day farming with the ultimate goal of providing biodynamic farming practices through the various stages and processes into matzah. Cathy chose spelt as the grain for this endeavor and plants it at a farm that she now leases. She harvested it, and has the help of local farmers to thresh and mill the grains into flour; finally ready for matzah baking.

Join us for this modern-day story that traces its roots, literally and figuratively, from family ancestry of the 1800s to Cathy Zises farming for matzah. Zises is also a Kripalu Mindful Outdoor Guide and ISHTA yoga instructor.

"To Till and To Tend— Jewish Environmental Ethics around Food Production and Consumption"

On Monday, June 14 at 6:45 p.m., we welcome Rabbi Dan Pink, whose subject will be "To Till and To Tend— Jewish Environmental Ethics around Food Production and Consumption.” This Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented via Zoom. Please visit our calendar of events at jewishberkshires.org for a link to this program.

Rabbi Dan Pink negotiates the Middle Fork River, near Boise, ID.
On the Ground Responding to Crisis

The moment rockets started raining down on Israel, JDC launched into action and began providing relief and assistance to the most vulnerable populations in Israel. We could do that because of Federations like yours, whose core support ensures our seminal work, day in and day out. As you have seen in your community, in times of crisis and conflict, it is the most vulnerable (homebound older adults, families already at-risk, people with disabilities) that experience even greater levels of stress and trauma. Today, JDC remains focused on responding to the most urgent and emerging needs of vulnerable Israelis.

The generous support that your Federation has made possible in past emergencies is felt today, at this very moment. The critical services and infrastructure that were put into place during past emergencies is proving crucial today, as municipalities and other government issues that have surfaced since the onset of the crisis.

At this time, JDC has brought together a high-level “day-after” plan addressing civic and social engagement. We are also launching a program to promote diversity, sensitivity training, and conflict resolution in the workplace.

As was demonstrated in past emergencies, one of JDC’s greatest strengths is our ability to create the foundations upon which individuals and communities can rebuild and emerge more resilient and prepared for the next emergency.

At this time, JDC has reintroduced its Community Caseworker program, which was vital to alleviating stress, loneliness, and fear in past crises. JDC will recruit and train caseworkers to help share the caseload of municipal social workers, calling vulnerable elderly, assessing needs, and providing critical emotional support.

Psychological Support and Trauma Relief for Israelis with Disabilities: A large number of people with disabilities are struggling with ongoing emotional difficulties that affect their daily functioning. These individuals will need medical and rehabilitation services, but Israel is not equipped for this upick in demand. JDC is helping to develop technology that alerts relevant caregivers and authorities of deteriorating emotional states via digital tools that detect loneliness, distress and agitation, mild depression, and more.

Thanks to the support of Jewish Federations of North America, individuals, and foundations, JDC is answering the call of the Jewish people in times of crisis and will continue to do so as Israel recovers from this terrible crisis.
**Ongoing Events at Hevreh**

- **Services**
  - **Kabbalat Shabbat Services,** Fridays at 6 p.m.
  - All are invited to join Hevreh for a traditional, interactive, and musical Reform service led by Rabbi Jodie Gordon and Rabbi Neil Hirsch. To get the Zoom link each week, email info@hevreh.org and be added to our listerv.
  - **Shabbat Morning Experience** Saturdays (Time TBD)
    - Join Hevreh for a contemplative Shabbat morning experience. Some weeks there will be Torah study and discussion, some weeks a plattle Shabbat morning service. Some weeks TBD.
    - Lunch N Learn
      - Wednesdays June 16, 23, & 30 and July 7, 14 & 21 at 11:45 a.m.
      - Our tradition teaches that when two (or more) sit together and discuss words of Torah, God dwells with them. Study is one of the many ways a Jewish community experience together and in the spiritual. Join Rabbi Hirsch each week to continue on the path of sacred learning. All are welcome.

**Summer Events at Temple Anshe Amunim**

- **PITTSFIELD** – Temple Anshe Amunim is a Reform Jewish Congregation that promotes engaging and widespread participation in services, education, cultural, and social action programs. For more information, contact the Temple Anshe Amunim office at (413) 442-5910. email templeoffice@ansheamunim.org or visit www.ansheamunim.org
- **Shabbat Morning Hikes**
  - Please Join TAA for Shabbat morning hikes throughout the summer. Hikers meet at TAA at 10:45 a.m. Upcoming hikes will be at the Appalachian Trail on June 26; at Kennedy Park on July 24; and at the Boulders in Dalton on August 7. All hikes are accessible to all ages and levels, with the option for a longer hike. 
  - **July 3:** Male Beauty in the Stories of Samuel
  - **July 10:** Anointed Ones: Spiritual next in the Books of Samuel and in Us
  - **July 17:** Almost: Love and Loyalty in the Book of Samuel
  - **July 24:** The Prophetic Message as the Catalyst for Change
  - **July 31:** The Downside of Do’s and Don’ts: Family Dysfunction and Al Pacino Meet the Books of Samuel at 10:30 a.m. (special time),
  - **To register:** tinyurl.com/TAAShabbatHikes
  - **Black-Jewish Relations: A Historical Perspective**
    - Please join Robyn L. Rosen, PhD, on Thursday, July 8 at noon for this discussion. Dr. Rosen is a professor of History at Marist College. To register, go to: tinyurl.com/TAALecture
  - **Havdalah and Open Mic Night**
    - Please join Mike Duffy on Saturday, July 10 at 7 p.m. for Havdalah, and stay for an open mic night. All are welcome to join in the fun, whether to enjoy the performances or share your talent.
    - To register, go to: tinyurl.com/TAASummerHavdalah

**Knesset Israel This Summer**

- **PITTSFIELD** – Knesset Israel, the Conservative synagogue at 16 Cott Road near the center of Pittsfield, is open for services, programming, and meals this summer. All are invited to participate in Shabbat and special events. An updated calendar is available at www.knessetisrael.org.
  - Knesset Israel policies this summer reflect the evidence-based recommendations of the CDC and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Those who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 need not practice social distancing or wear masks while attending synagogue, while those who are not yet vaccinated should do both. The community recognizes the anxiety some people experience as they return to in-person gatherings and aims to support the journey back towards normal life. Some seating at summer events will be designated for social distancing, and many events will take place in a big tent in Knesset Israel’s backyard.
  - Visitors and members are welcome to participate in-person or, if outside the tent, participate, in-part, or online through the Knesset Israel livestream, which is available at www.knessetisrael.org, or see Knesset Israel’s channel on the TRT2, FoxTV, Apple TV).
  - **Shabbat**
    - Knesset Israel leaders are especially pleased to invite broad participation in dynamic in-person services and delicious meals.
    - **Most Friday evenings,** June through August, worshippers will enjoy spirited Kabbalat Shabbat services in a variety of styles – acoustic, amplified or traditional a cappella – beginning at 5:45 p.m. in the tent. On select Friday evenings – June 18, July 16, August 20 – the congregation will welcome Shabbat with an informal outdoor Shabbat dinner (limited seating, by reservation at www.knessetisrael.org, 820/adults & 6 free/18 & under) at 5:45 p.m., followed by Kabbalat Shabbat services at approximately 7:15 p.m.
    - Every Shabbat morning, engaging and participatory services that incorporate prayer, song, Torah reading, and study, will take place in the congregation’s sanctuary at 9:30 a.m. A light kiddush in the tent will follow services.
  - **Weekday Prayer**
    - This summer, Sunday morning minyan will meet bo’el’el (in the tent) every week at 8:45 a.m. followed by refreshments. On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, the congregation will convene on Zoom at 7 p.m. for weekday afternoon and evening services. Consult www.knessetisrael.org for login information.
  - **Wildman Scholar-in-Residence, July 16-18**
    - Rabbi Richard Agler, the founding rabbi and rabbi emeritus of Congregation B’nai Israel in Boca Raton, will be teaching all weekend on themes related to his recent book, The Tragedy Test – Making Sense of Life-Changing Loss. He’ll talk about the Talia Fund and its Talia Agler Girls Shelter for trafficked, abused and exploited girls in Nairobi, and about the Tisha B’Av fast day, as well. The weekend also includes traditional services for Tisha B’Av, at 9:15 p.m. on Saturday night by candlelight and on Sunday morning at 8:45 a.m. More details are available at www.knessetisrael.org

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  - by Phone: 413.448.2274

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Jewish Federation of the Berkshires Awards Grant to Ahavath Sholem Congregation, Inc.  

PITTSFIELD – In late May, the board of directors of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, through its Allocations Committee, awarded a $5,000 grant to Ahavath Sholem Congregation, Inc., to help with perpetual care and maintenance of its historic cemetery. “Ahavath Sholem wishes to thank the Federation for its generous grant,” said Judith Cook on behalf of Ahavath Sholem Congregation, Inc. “We appreciate their interest in ensuring the ongoing care of this sacred piece of Jewish history in the Berkshires.”

Katherine Blumenthal, president of the Federation, welcomed the move to help with the cemetery’s care. “It is a privilege to support our local congregations and their efforts to perpetuate their cemeteries,” she said. “We all look forward to being able to participate in the 2022 tour of the cemetery.”

Ahavath Sholem Congregation, Inc. has been administered by attorney Harris Aaronson and Judith Cook. Many Berkshire families have relatives buried at Ahavath Sholem, which is still available for burials. Recently, a short-term community fundraiser initiated by Susan (Schecter) Peled (a Pittsfield native now living in Israel) addressed the need to restore the cemetery’s headstones. Thanks to many individual donations, the effort exceeded its goal, and work has begun. The much-appreciated Federation grant builds on this community effort.

Editor’s Note: The historical congregation referred to in the story is not connected to the still-vibrant Congregation Ahavath Sholom in Great Barrington.

Tour De Berkshires
Take a cross-country bicycle tour with Hevreh on July 11

On Sunday, July 11, Hevreh of Southern Berkshire will host an incredible one-day bicycle journey down the length of Berkshire County. This fun-ride will start with rear tires in Connecticut, and end with front tires in Vermont, and end with rear tires in Massachusetts. If you are a long-distance rider, or this is a challenge you would like to take on, Hevreh would love for you to join in the fun! COVID precautions will be taken. If you’re interested in helping arrange the day – or would like more details than were available at press time – please reach out to Rabbi Neil Hirsch at nhirsch@hevreh.org.

The views expressed are the author’s.

Tour De Berkshires

LOCAL NEWS

PITTSFIELD – In late May, the board of directors of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, through its Allocations Committee, awarded a $5,000 grant to Ahavath Sholem Congregation, Inc., to help with perpetual care and maintenance of its historic cemetery. “Ahavath Sholem wishes to thank the Federation for its generous grant,” said Judith Cook on behalf of Ahavath Sholem Congregation, Inc. “We appreciate their interest in ensuring the ongoing care of this sacred piece of Jewish history in the Berkshires.”

Katherine Blumenthal, president of the Federation, welcomed the move to help with the cemetery’s care. “It is a privilege to support our local congregations and their efforts to perpetuate their cemeteries,” she said. “We all look forward to being able to participate in the 2022 tour of the cemetery.”

Ahavath Sholem Congregation, Inc. has been administered by attorney Harris Aaronson and Judith Cook. Many Berkshire families have relatives buried at Ahavath Sholem, which is still available for burials. Recently, a short-term community fundraiser initiated by Susan (Schecter) Peled (a Pittsfield native now living in Israel) addressed the need to restore the cemetery’s headstones. Thanks to many individual donations, the effort exceeded its goal, and work has begun. The much-appreciated Federation grant builds on this community effort.

Editor’s Note: The historical congregation referred to in the story is not connected to the still-vibrant Congregation Ahavath Sholom in Great Barrington.

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ANNUAL MEETING, continued from page 1

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 60 households for the year 2021.

Susan Cartun
Larry Frankel and Elisa Schindler Frankel
Robert and Carole Landau
Judy Moss
Marc and Margot Schwartz
Richard and Alyson Slutzky

Thank you to our supporters!

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Susan Cartun
Larry Frankel and Elisa Schindler Frankel
Robert and Carole Landau
Judy Moss
Marc and Margot Schwartz
Richard and Alyson Slutzky

SEED WHAT YOU READ! BECOME A SUBSCRIBER TODAY!

Yes, I support the Berkshire Jewish Voice! Please accept my voluntary tax-deductible subscription contribution.

Mail check payable to:
Jewish Federation of the Berkshires
196 South Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201
(Please add Berkshire Jewish Voice in the memo)

_____ $360 Mensch & Honorary Publisher
(Supports color printing in one edition of the Voice)

_____ $180 Sponsor

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_____ $36 Friend

_____ $18 Supporter
(Already on file)

Name to be listed: _________________________________________

☐ I wish to remain anonymous

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) 442-4300, ext. 10

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

ANNUAL MEETING,
continued from page 1

deliver the Executive Director’s Report. During the meeting, outgoing members of the Federation board of directors will be recognized for their contributions and the nominated slate of 2021-2022 officers and directors will be elected. The proposed slate is listed on the sidebar on the right side of this page.

The Federation will also award the Henry Simkin and Frances Simkin Scholarship, given to Jewish high school seniors who have demonstrated high academic achievement and leadership in the Jewish and broader communities.

Our Strategic Plan

In late summer and early fall of 2019, the Federation’s strategic planning committee, advised by Eric Phelps and Rainmaker consulting, solicited community input and feedback through a series of town hall meetings, focus groups, individual interviews, and an online survey.

The committee concluded the final stage of a strategic planning initiative and intended to present their findings and recommendations as COVID-19 hit in March 2020. At that time, the Federation board voted to put the plan on temporary hold to direct Federation resources to respond to more immediate needs of the community.

Eric Phelps will present the key findings of the community feedback and the Federation’s plans to implement the recommendations of the strategic planning committee.

Register online at jewisberkshires.org.

The Commission of the Berkshires of the Jews presents the following slate:

OFFICERS (2 years)
Eliza Schindler Frankel (President)*
Jen Sacon (Secretary)
Judy Ussor (Treasurer)
Josh Bloom (VP)
Jane Glasser (VP)
Eliza Sperger Bildner (VP)*
Natalie Matus (VP)

TERM ENDING 2022 (3 years)
Stuart Masters
Michael Wasserman
Seth Wax
Tom Savoy
Gal Birenstein
Michael Ury
Len Schiller
Stephanie Ilberg Lamm
Judy Cook

TERM ENDING 2024 (3 years)
Ellen Heifles
Kathy Fraker*
Richard Slutzky*
Arlene Schiff*
Arielle Pink Schlette*
Jane Karlin*

* Newly nominated for a first 2-year term

** Newly nominated for a second 3-year term

In accordance with the Federation’s bylaws, additional nominations may be considered when submitted by a petition signed by fifteen Berkshire Jewish Community members and received by the secretary at least ten days prior to the annual meeting.

81st ANNUAL MEETING

JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL MEETING INCLUDING BOARD ELECTIONS, THE SIMKIN-SCHILLER COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS, AND PRESENTATION OF THE FEDERATION’S NEW STRATEGIC PLAN.

Join us for our annual meeting including board elections, the Simkin-Schiller College Scholarship awards, and presentation of the Federation’s new strategic plan.

81st Annual Meeting

Featuring a presentation of Federation’s new strategic plan

June 29, 2021 | 7:30 p.m.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Years ago the BBC did a series on the world’s great religions. The presenter finally came to his program on Judaism. He walked into a Jewish religious seminary and interviewed Elie Wiesel. The presenter said, “Professor Wiesel, Judaism seems like a very noisy religion. Do you have such a thing as silence in Judaism?”

Wiesel thought for a moment, and replied, “Judaism is full of silences. It’s just that we don’t talk about them.”

BARRINGTON STAGE COMPANY
AWARD-WINNING THEATRE IN DOWNTOWN PITTSFIELD

WHO COULD ASK FOR ANYTHING MORE?
THE SONGS OF GEORGE GERSHWIN

Music by GEORGE GERSHWIN
Lyrics by IRA GERSHWIN, and GEORGE GERSHWIN
Additional Lyrics by MAURICE CHEVALIER
Conceived by JULIANNE BOYD and DARREN R. COHEN
Directed by JULIANNE BOYD
JUNE 10–JULY 3
UNDER A TENT AT THE PRODUCTION CENTER
34 LAUREL ST, PITTSFIELD

CHESTER
BAILEY

By JOSEPH DOUGHERTY
Directed by RON LAGOMARSINO
JUNE 18–JULY 3
BOYD-QUINSON STAGE
30 UNION ST, PITTSFIELD

ELEANOR

By CHRISTINA HAM
Directed by GERRY McINTYRE
JULY 23–AUG. 15
OUTSIDE UNDER THE MAIN STAGE TENT
JULY 16–AUG. 1
OUTSIDE IN THE COURTYARD AT THE UNICORN THEATRE

Berkshire Hills Hadassah
Join Us on Zoom to Celebrate
Hadassah’s Youth Aliyah
Israel’s at-Risk Children programs
Wednesday, June 16th at 7pm
Register at berkshirehillshadassah@gmail.com or call 413-443-4386
THE HILLS ARE ALIVE AT THE
BERKSHIRE JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL
July 5–August 23, 2021

BerkshireJewishFilmFestival.org
info@berkshirejewishfilmfestival.org

Generous support from the Wolfson Family Foundation, John Bergman Charitable Trust, Greylock Federal Credit Union, Berkshire Bank, MountainOne, Spitz-Tuchman Charitable Trust and Harold Grinspoon Foundation

Arts & Entertainment
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film festival • CABARET • BOOKS
Music • ART

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Enjoy a fresh ice cream cone or celebrated Cheddar cheese on our Jersey cattle farm across the fields behind our Farmstead Delicatessan Shop.

Tour for the whole family. Open every day!
535 Summer Street LEE, MA 01231
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KABBALAT SHABBAT
UNDER THE TENT
Join Hevreh all summer in our backyard. Visit hevreh.org/welcome for more information.
FRIDAYS AT 6 PM

for more information: nhirsch@hevreh.org
The excitement and joy in seeing one another again was palpable in the crisp clear air of High Lawn Farm, where more than 220 community members came out to enjoy the day together on May 23. Young families, often with grandparents in tow, enjoyed stories, crafts, and making pet blankets for the local animal shelter. There was also a lot of hula hoop twirling! Everyone enjoyed the museum, milk barns, nursery and interacting with the cows. And of course it was made all the sweeter by their delicious homemade ice cream!
A special thank you to our Super Tzedakah Week chairs, Avi, Natasha, Sasha, and Lev Dresner, as well as our many volunteers, attendees, and donors who helped us kick off Super Tzedakah Week in sweet style. To date we have raised over $390,000! It was a perfect way for our community to come together again! Thank you to these volunteers:

Myla Blum
Michael D’Alton
Avi Dresner
Lev Dresner
Sasha Dresner
Elisa Frankel
Larry Frankel
Jane Glaser
Avi Dresner
Lev Dresner
Sasha Dresner
Elisa Frankel

Jane Karlin
Maya Kaufman
Ofer Kaufman
Ros Kopfstein
Allie Lamm
Everett Lamm

Natalie Matus
Roger Matus
Shiffra Perlmutter
Julie Quain
Alice Schiller
Anne Schnesel

Alice Stephens
Lisa Udel
Shira Weiner
Rebecca Wollin

Tammuz/Av 5781
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Traveling with Jewish Taste

You Say Potato, I Say Картофель

The Tribe’s deep ties to the Russian empire (eastern in European still shape how we understand (and feed) ourselves

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

Having reviewed Darra Goldstein’s beautiful cookbook, Beyond the North Wind: Russia in Recipes and Lore, in last month’s column, I realized that in all the places we’ve “visited” in this column, Russia has not been among them. And, considering that all of my grandparents came from that country (at least according to every official document in our possession), it’s probably about time.

One of the reasons I’ve been hesitant to do so is that, in attempting to research my own family’s history, I’ve been dazzled by national borders that have moved back and forth over the centuries, depending on who had conquered whom most recently. In the 20th century alone, the Soviet Union sucked up satellites, only to see them separate again after the fall of that empire. But now the Kremlin has pulled its Hoover out of the closet as it yet again massed troops along the border of Ukraine and its Crimean oblast.

As for my family: My paternal grandmother came from a town called Lida. When she emigrated to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, there was in Russia. Hence, the notations on her immigration documents and marriage certificate. But, along the way, Lida has also belonged to Lithuania and Poland and to the White Russian. The same story goes for all my other grandparents, and probably for many of our readers’ ancestors.

But how did our people get to “Russia” in the first place?

The background of so many American Jews, the first image of “Russian Jews” that pops into our heads may be an exclusively Ashkenazi one, the Russian Empire extended far and wide. It includes many other communities, including Sephardim, Crimean Karaites, Rymychak, Mountain Jews, Bukharan Jews, and Georgian Jews.

Jews, having migrated from areas as diverse as Greece, Babylonia, and Persia, can trace their significant presence in Armenia and Georgia back to the Babylonian captivity. They first appeared in Belarus, Ukraine, and the European parts of Russia in the 7th century CE. As might be expected, the merchants among them didn’t stop once they reached Russia but traveled as far as India and China to ply their business. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, on their way south-east during the 8th century, they passed through Khazar lands and so impressed the people there that the natives converted to Judaism. The Khazar kingdom became “The Land of the Jews.”

Kiev, too, situated on the overland trade route to Germanic lands, had a significant Jewish population. But beginning in the 11th century, they were confined to an area known as Jewish Town, perhaps the first ghetto in the Russian Empire. To access the ghetto, one entered the Gate of the Jews.

Given their bad experience in many Western European countries, ranging from persecution to expulsion, Jews happily migrated to Poland in the early 1300s, at the invitation of Casimir III. Casimir was among the best of the rulers under whom our people have lived. He not only prohibited the enforced baptism of Jewish children (and the kidnapping that enabled that nefarious act), he instituted severe punishment for the desecration of Jewish cemeteries.

And when Lithuania took control of Western Russia later that century and granted rights to the Jews, many of our people began to explore new opportunities in the world beyond their shirelets.

But the good times were punctuated by large-scale horrors. In the mid-1600s, pogroms began to devastate Jewish communities. Whether perpetrated by their neighbors in Ukraine, Russia, Poland, or Belarus, these large-scale massacres would occur periodically for centuries. In the pogroms of 1918 to 1922 alone, 150,000 Jews in Ukraine and Belarus were murdered.

One important development in Jewish history occurred in Poland-Ukraine in the 1700s. Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, aka the Baal Shem Tov, founded the spiritual movement that became known as Hasidism. With the help of his disciple, Meir ben Solomon, Poland spread throughout Eastern Europe, giving hope and joy to many Jews who weren’t able to spend their days in study but could still experience the universal presence of God, even in the seemingly mundane.

Then, toward the end of the 18th century, Tsarina Catherine II (the not-so-Great) sent the Jews packing to the Pale of Settlement, the western region of the Russian Empire. The Pale expanded over time and by the 19th century included all of Ukrainian, Lithuania, Belarus, most of Ukraine, the Crimean peninsula, and Bessarabia. The area became home to about five million Jews.

One would think that Catherine’s decree might have been enough to placate the anti-Semites. But even within the Pale, some cities were off-limits to most Jews, and when Alexander II became Czar in 1881, he enacted harsher laws and prohibited the use of Hebrew and Yiddish in printed materials, resulting in newspapers published in the Cyrillic alphabet. The final insult: In 1948, after so much suffering during World War II and the Holocaust (more than 2,000,000 Soviet Jews died, either fighting or in Nazi-occupied territories), the Soviets shut down the Moscow State Jewish Theater.

Ultimately, the refusal of movement arose in the 1970s, compelling hundreds of thousands of Jews to demand the right to emigrate. The Soviets were not accommodating, but with leaders like Anatoly (now Natan) Sharansky and the Diaspora Jewish community, they ultimately gained their freedom. According to the Davis Center at Harvard University, almost two million Jews and their non-Jewish relatives have emigrated from the FSU since 1970, more than half going to Israel and the West.

Despite the huge loss, the country’s Jewish population is still the third-largest in Europe, after France and the United Kingdom, with almost 200,000 Jews.

The huge loss due to emigration, the country’s Jewish population is still the third-largest in Europe, after France and the United Kingdom, with almost 200,000 Jews.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She is currently working on a food history/cookbook, tracing the paths that some of our favorite foods have taken from their origins to appear on dinner plates and in cultural rites and artifacts around the world. She invites readers to read her blog at carolgoodmankaufman.com and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.

Despite the huge loss due to emigration,...
WHEN OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS US, WE ARE THERE
HELP US BE THERE! MAKE YOUR PLEDGE TODAY!

Your gift to the Jewish Federation’s 2021 Campaign will help bring dignity and care to the vulnerable and elderly, build and strengthen the Jewish identity of our children and young adults, support vital community programs, and create meaningful Jewish life across the Berkshires and beyond.

JEWISH LIFE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES
You help young families in the Berkshires embrace Jewish values and traditions while building a supportive community with Jewish peers through family programming, PJ Library, and volunteer opportunities.

RESOURCES TO FIGHT ANTI-SEMITISM
You help young people stand up against hate through anti-bias education in our public schools. You also combat anti-Semitism and the BDS movement through community programming, national advocacy, and security resources.

DIGNITY & COMPASSION
You provide older adults and homebound individuals with nutritious meals and stimulating programming served up with a side of companionship and compassion through our Connecting with Community program and Kosher Meals on Wheels.

JEWISH EDUCATION & VALUES
You nurture a strong Jewish future by providing a high-quality, meaningful and affordable Jewish education for hundreds of children through critical grants to all of our local Jewish religious schools.

A STRONG JEWISH IDENTITY
You help young people across the Berkshires and at UMASS Hillel build strong Jewish identities and become future leaders through scholarships for Jewish camp and Israel experiences, as well as leadership development and holiday meals on campus.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT & EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
You help individuals facing unexpected challenges and life transitions receive the support they need through the Federation’s social worker. You also provide a safety net of emergency assistance due to COVID-19.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS & ADVOCACY
You help provide a proactive voice in our community, public schools, media, and government, addressing anti-Semitism, social justice, Israel, and other issues important to our community.

A SAFE PLACE TO CALL HOME
You help tens of thousands of new immigrants, who are fleeing anti-Semitism in Europe and fighting in the Ukraine, build better lives for themselves and their families in Israel through job training and support services that ease their transition.

CARING IN TIMES OF CRISIS
When crisis hits, in the Berkshires or around the world, you help mobilize local resources to respond with immediate relief and longer-term recovery. From support through COVID-19 to whatever the future holds, you help deliver an SOS response.

A CLOSE & CARING RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL
You help connect the Berkshire Jewish Community with Israel and you also help provide programs for at-risk students, shelter for abused women, and support services for disabled youth.

FOOD SECURITY, HEALTHCARE, & WINTER RELIEF
Winters are long and cold in the Ukraine, but you help the most vulnerable prepare with warm clothes, blankets, and heaters. You also bring food cards, home health aides, and medicine to those who need it most.

Donate or pledge online at jewishberkshires.org Thank you for making a difference!
documents, the one labeled “nationality.”

Here are two definitions of “nationality,” a term so very important to the Soviets (although keep in mind that there are multiple nuances to both definitions): 

1. The identity of belonging to a particular nation. Synonym: Citizenship.
2. An ethnic group forming a part of one or more nations. Synonym: Ethnicity.

By the Soviet definition, the “nationality” of not only the Jews but of everyone else living in the Soviet Union should have been “Soviet” because we all were citizens of the Soviet Union. However, that was not the case for any person who was Jewish was such a thing as a “Soviet” nationality. In the USSR, the state employed the second definition, “ethnicity,” not only for the Jews but also for everyone else.

Shown above is an example of a Soviet-era passport for a Jewish person born in Vitebsk (Vityebsk, now in Belarus) on 24 June 1887. Finally, Wikipedia gives what, in my opinion, is a better introduction: “Marc Chagall, born in Chagall, Russia, is a Russian-French artist of Belarussian Jewish origin.” How is this possible? Let’s look at the documents their parents had filed.

When Jews traveled from one place to another, primarily merchants, they had to declare their nationalities to their schoolteacher, who recorded it in a class journal. In my first year as a 21-year-old student, I refused to fill in the nationalities of my classmates – I left that column empty. I felt as if I would get into trouble, because no one cared about such distinctions anymore – I was wrong – the school’s administration knew the nationalities of all of us students. And even though we papers their parents had filed. They knew exactly who was different – and treated them that way.

Produced below are examples of the last document many Jews received from the Soviet government – a visa to emigrate abroad. When Jews expressed the desire to emigrate from the Soviet Union, the government stripped us of citizenship and took away our all-important RUSSIAN(?) JEWS, continued on page 17.
Knossen Israel
16 Colt Road, Pittsfield
ONGOING MINYANS
Sunday 5:45 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Tuesday 7 p.m.
Thursday 7 p.m.
Friday 7 a.m. and 5:45 p.m.
Saturday 9:30 a.m.
and evenings: approximately 30 minutes before sunset
CANDLE-LIGHTING
Friday, June 18 ...... 8:14 p.m.
Friday, June 25 ...... 8:16 p.m.
Friday, July 2 .......... 8:15 p.m.
Friday, July 9 .......... 8:13 p.m.
Friday, July 16 ...... 8:09 p.m.

MAZEL TOV
Mazel Tov to...
Eliza Pratt, daughter of Josie and Len Pratt, on her June 5 bar mitzvah at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire.
* Ada Mosian, daughter of Matt and Sharon Mosian, on her June 19 bat mitzvah at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire.
* Sadie Honig-Briggs, daughter of Rebecca Honig and Joshua Briggs, on her June 26 bat mitzvah at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire.
* Allen and Ellen Rosenblatt, on the May 29 bar mitzvah of their grandson, Adam Rosenblatt.

RUSSIAN (?)
Jews, continued from page 16
passport, replacing it with a visa that we had to pay for. (Mine is on the right; the shared visa of my wife, Galina Dobrynina, and our children is on the left.) As we waited for the chance to leave, we could not work, and our children could not go to school – in fact, the teacher of our 9-year-old son, David, told his class that he was the only Jewish boy in the economy of the state. (And this was in 1988 – perestroika.) My family left the USSR in 1989 and made a new American life in Boston. Some still may think of us as being of “Russian” origin, although nothing could be further from the truth. We are also sometimes asked why we worked so hard and risked so much to leave the USSR? These people may think that we were “citizens” of the Soviet Union – but as the “Nationality” line on our passports show, we were just “Jewish” as far as the state was concerned. And that is why we left the Soviet Union.

Yefim Kogan, who summers in Lee, is the JecetheGen.org Bessarabia group leader and coordinator. This article is based on research for a presentation at the 39th International Conference on the Jewish Genealogy in Cleveland in the summer of 2019.

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

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

 Meals-on-Wheels & Meals to Go – Advance Reservation Required
Kosher lunch will be prepared on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Meals to go will be ready by noon for pickup at the Knesset Israeli 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.

JUNE
Monday, 14 .......... Salsbury steak**, celery rice soup, hash browns, oven roasted broccoli & cauliflower, whole wheat bread, and Mandarin oranges.
Tuesday, 15 .......... Turkey picatta**, rice pilaf, mixed vegetables, salad, oat bread, and peaches.
Thursday, 17 ........ Greek salad platter**, stuffed grape leaves, pita bread, and baklava.
Monday, 21 .......... Sloppy Joe**, mango juice, corn, mashed potatoes, salad, hambuger rolls, and fruit cocktail.
Friday, 22 .......... Roasted chicken**, tomato juice, mixed vegetables, rice pilaf, pumpernickel bread, and pareve chocolate chip cookies.
Thursday, 24 .......... Curried egg salad platter*, cucumber salad, 3 bean salad, oat bread, and butterscotch pudding.
Monday, 29 .......... Sesame chicken patties with sweet & sour sauce, brown rice, Oriental vegetables, salad, rye bread, and pineapple.
Tuesday, 30 .......... Barbecued brisket**, coleslaw, sweet potato fries, salad, corn bread, and brownies.

JULY
Thursday, 1 .......... Grilled hamburgers**, apple juice, 3 bean salad, potato salad, potato chips, hamburger roll, and watermelon.
Monday, 5 .......... Closed for Independence Day
Tuesday, 6 .......... Stuffed meat loaf**, gazpacho, French fries, peas & carrots, whole wheat bread, and grapes.
Thursday, 8 .......... Asian tuna salad (gluten free upon request), pineapple juice, coleslaw, Farmer’s loaf, and cookies.
Monday, 12 .......... Fish sticks, borscht and potato, sweet potato fries, mixed vegetables, potato bun, and lemon pudding.
Tuesday, 14 .......... Spanakopita, tri-colored pasta salad, green salad, pita bread, and baklava.

Thursday, 15 .......... Dairy chef’s salad**, dairy free upon request, pesto potato salad, multi-grain bread, and oatmeal raisin cookies.
Tuesday, 20 .......... Barbecued chicken**, mango juice, corn cobettes, green beans, salad, potato bread, and grapes.
Thursday, 22 .......... Tomato basil quiche, apple juice, sal-
ad, pretzels, rice salad, Challah, and peanut butter cookies.
Monday, 26 .......... Grilled hot dogs**, hearts of palm salad, vegetarian beans, tater tots, hot dog buns, and water-
melon.
Tuesday, 27 .......... Pomegranate glazed chicken**, mixed vegetables, salad, rice pilaf, pumpernickel bread, and tropical fruit salad.
Thursday, 29 .......... Meat chef’s salad**, pineapple juice, coleslaw, 3 bean salad, pita bread, and Mandarin oranges.

AUGUST
Monday, 2 ............ Meat loaf, tomato juice, peas & car-
rots, hash browns, rye bread, and applesauce.
Tuesday, 3 ............ Turkey salad, gazpacho, asparagus vinaigrette, pretzels, rice salad, Challah, and fruit cocktail.
Thursday, 5 ............ Black bean burgers with cheese, creamy peach yogurt soup, Mexican corn, hamburger rolls, and watermelon.
Monday, 9 ............ Ratatouille with turkey**, polenta, salad, Farmer’s loaf, and peas.
Tuesday, 10 ........... Cinnamon honey chicken**, salad, rice pilaf, meadow blend vegetables, dinner roll, and pita.
Thursday, 12 .......... Tuna egg salad platter**, coleslaw, potato salad, chips, oat bread, and parve chocolate chip cookies.
Monday, 16 .......... Spaghetti & meat sauce**, summer zucchini soup, green beans, salad, garlic bread, and apricots.
OBITUARIES

Myrna Ilene (Galler) Hammerling, 78, embraced life with a joy of learning, a spirit of knowledge, caring deeply, and living fully

PITTSFIELD – Myrna Ilene (Galler) Hammerling was born in New York City on September 7, 1942 to Jack and Sally Galler.

Put simply, Myrna was the essence of this life, embracing life with a joy of learning and a thirst for knowledge, growing deeper and living fully, leading and making a difference without ever shunning the spotlight, and taking pleasure in helping others thrive and grow. Myrna loved a good crossword, met her friends regularly at the gym, meditated, did yoga, enjoyed living and the arts, and was a nifty devotee of Rachel Maddow. Myrna was articulate and affable as a person one could possibly be. She worked hard to build her life to the very highest standard with a sharp intellect and infectious smile, and formed friendships with those she came in contact with along the way. Even as a student, she was complete without acknowledging the 62-year love affair she enjoyed with Elie Hammerling. The two dated at Wingate High School, went on to Brooklyn College, and got married on April 4, 1963. They were at each other’s side, laughing, loving and learning until Elie’s passing in 2020.

In 1967, Myrna graduated Brooklyn College with a master of arts in Speech and English teacher in Brooklyn. She dated Brooklyn College with United States for a better education and support. He was a radio commentator for the BSO. He contributed to the Metropolitan Opera and the PBS series “Live From Lincoln Center,” which he inaugurated in 1976, and which features ballets, symphonic music, chamber music concerts, plays, and other performances presented at the New York arts complexes.

“Tanglewood as an audience casters,” Mr. Bookspan once said. “As announcer for “Live From the Metropolis Opera” in addition to “Live From Lincoln Center,” which he inaugurated in 1976, and which features ballets, symphonic music, chamber music concerts, plays, and other performances presented at the New York arts complexes.

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After working for Boston- area radio stations, Mr. Bookspan moved to WQXR, the classical station serving New York University, to become program director for more than 20 years. And he was a music critic and a music hearer at that time. He would find all sorts of hacks and novelty movies to show his wife and son to get the best of the ordinary. He was always there. One of the finest classical music critics to write about. He was a music critic and a music listener at that time. He would find all sorts of hacks and novelty movies to show his wife and son to get the best of the ordinary. He was always there. One of the finest classical music critics to write about. He was a music critic and a music listener at that time. He would find all sorts of hacks and novelty movies to show his wife and son to get the best of the ordinary. He was always there. One of the finest classical music critics to write about. He was a music critic and a music listener at that time. 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OBITUARIES, continued from page 18

Tanglewood and the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield for many years. Bookspan was so well known at the BSO’s summer home in Lenox that the words “the Voice of Classical Music” were inscribed on his regular seat in The Shed on his 85th birthday. He was married for 54 years to the former Janet Sobel, an opera director and drama coach who died in 2008. He is survived by their three children: Rachel Sobel (Richard Zeff), 6 grandchildren; 1 great granddaughter; and a world full of music.

Funeral arrangements are in the care of Flowers & Friends of The Boston Symphony Memorial Contributions, 301 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02115, (617) 638-9267, box@ogc.org, contribute or American-Israel Cultural Foundation, 178 Columbus Avenue, P.O. Box 237133, New York, NY 10023, (212) 557-1600 ext. 4, https://aicf.org/contribute/.

Robert “Bob” J. Rhodes, 76, great love and respect for the military

PITTSFIELD — Robert “Bob” J. Rhodes passed away suddenly at home on Saturday, April 3. Born in Dickinson, ND on March 13, 1945, to Amelia A. and Robert M. Rhodes, Bob was a graduate of Pittsfield High School, class of 1962. He went on to attend Texas Wesleyan College in Fort Worth for 3 years. He enlisted in the US Navy and served as a Corpsman in the Naval Hospital in San Diego, CA.

From 1970 to 1971, Bob served in Vietnam with the 1st Regiment, 1st Marines Division as a Navy Hospital Corpsman. Upon return from active duty, he transferred to the Naval Reserves and was called back to active duty for 5 months during Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

Bob completed his educational degree, graduating from the University of Massachusetts in 1974. Bob had a great love and respect for the military and when invited to join the local Marine Corps he became known as “Doc” to his buddies. Bob marched to the beat of his own drum, continued with education courses and working along the way. He had employment at Jimmy O’s, was a substitute teacher in Pittsfield, a caregiver, and worked in retail before retiring.

Survivors include his sister and brother-in-law MaryEllen and John Parteau of Dalton; nephews, Stephen Wichman of Johnson, VT; Christopher Wichman of Pittsfield and their families; niece, Stephanie Pogorek and family of Millbury, MA. Some cousins who remained very close are Fortune Hagan of Simpsonville, KY; James Olsen of Santa Fe, NM; and Emily and Edward Peak of Pittsfield.

An outdoor memorial recognition of Bob’s life was held Sunday, June 6 at the Utiny Terrace at Dwyer Wellington Funeral Home, Pittsfield. Donations can be made to Toys For Tots, c/o Dwyer Wellington Funeral Home.

220 East Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

ADL’s annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, issued in April, recorded a total of 1,242 incidents of harassment across the United States, an increase of 10 percent from 2019. At the same time, reported acts of vandalism and assault declined by 18 percent and 49 percent, respectively, and there were no anti-Semitic fatalities reported in 2020.

“Despite the decline, the overall number of anti-Semitic incidents tracked by ADL remains historically high,” said Robert Trestan, ADL New England Regional Director. “Even against a backdrop of pandemic related restrictions, hate found a way to rear its ugly head in communities across our region moving from the streets to online. Particularly disturbing was the phenomenon of ‘Zoombombing’ targeting schools and Jewish institutions.”

A total of 40 cities and towns in Massachusetts recorded at least one anti-Semitic incident in 2020, some including multi-county outreach.

Major Findings:

In 2020, ADL recorded 73 anti-Semitic incidents in Massachusetts. Despite the 36 percent decrease from 2019, incidents remain historically high. The majority of 2020 incidents reported to ADL were incidents of vandalism (38), followed by incidents of vandalism (35). Harassment and vandalism incidents decreased by 38 percent and 33 percent, respectively. Anti-Semitic incidents took place in a wide variety of locations including places of business, private homes, public areas, Jewish institutions and schools, and online.

Massachusetts recorded the sixth highest number of incidents per state in the country (73), following New York (396), New Jersey (295), California (289), Florida (127), and Pennsylvania (101).

How ADL is Responding

ADL has a comprehensive approach to addressing anti-Semitic incidents and behavior. This includes prevention efforts through youth education as well as working to enact laws that will improve federal, state and local prevention tactics and response to anti-Semitic hate crimes and all forms of hate violence.

ADL provides education and training everyday to students, reaching young people at a time when they are most vulnerable to bullying and social pressures. ADL’s No Place for Hate, Peer Leadership Training, and Words to Action programs teach understanding and promote inclusivity in schools and on campuses, respectively. (Editor’s Note: ADL has partnered with the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires to provide this type of training in middle and high schools in Berkshire County.)

ADL also works with victims and universities to respond to anti-Semitic harassment and other worrying incidents on college campuses. ADL informs law enforcement of extremist threats and help law enforcement professionals recognize and disrupt potential threats. Finally, ADL is leading the effort to make Holocaust and genocide education mandatory in Massachusetts schools following the passage of the Holocaust and Genocide Education statute in New Hampshire last year.

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This year, the Berkshire Jewish Film Festival marks its 35th season. Over these past 35 years, the BJFF has shown hundreds of films to thousands of people. Last year, with the pandemic forcing organizers to close the theater doors, the BJFF was able to continue as a virtual festival showing films online and engaging the audience members with Zoom talkbacks. This year, the festival returns with a full seven weeks of programming — including the five short films being shown on August 9, eighteen films in total will be shown. Films range from political documentaries, biographies, comedies, heartfelt family stories, and animation.

About the BJFF
The brainchild of Dr. Zev Raviv, the festival was led by Margie Metzger for 30 years. For the first 20 years, the films were shown on a 16mm projector at Knesset Israel in either the sanctuary or the social hall. At the very beginning, a crowd of 25 was considered a success. Amy Abramovich helped run the concession where people could buy ice cream and other goodies. Because it was (and still is) a fundraiser for the Knesset Israel Hebrew School, it was important to involve the students, and each year a contest was held to design the program cover.

The tide turned in 2000 with the screening of the documentary, The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg. There was standing room only and it was then that public perception of the film festival changed. And the rest is history!

All of the information about tickets, season passes, and Zoom talkbacks can be found on the festival website berkshirejewishfilmfestival.org. BJFF would not be possible without the generous support of:
• The Wolfson Family Foundation
• John Bergman Charitable Trust
• MountainOne
• Spitz-Tuchman Charitable Trust
• Greylock Federal Credit Union
• Berkshire Bank

The Harold Grinspoon Foundation

July 5
4 p.m. A Crime on the Bayou — Documentary. A Black man bravely challenges the most powerful white supremacist in 1960s Louisiana with the help of a young Jewish attorney.
8 p.m. Mr. Jones — Narrative. Welsh journalist Gareth Jones risks his life to expose the truth about the devastating famine in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s.

July 12
4 p.m. Schokken: On the Edge of Consensus — Documentary. Salman Schokken, the “king of department stores” in Germany before World War II, possessed a unique collection of 60,000 rare books, founded a modern, Jewish publishing house, and later owned the Haaretz newspaper.
8 p.m. Michael Tilson Thomas: Where Now Is — Documentary. Born into a creative Jewish family, Michael Tilson Thomas is the third generation of his family to pursue an artistic career and has spent his life stretching the boundaries of classical music.

July 19
4 p.m. Soros — Documentary. Demystifying the controversial financier who dares to tackle global problems, illuminating the life of one of the world’s richest philanthropists.
8 p.m. Shalom Taiwan — Narrative. This uplifting dramatic comedy follows the misadventures of Rabbi Aaron as he tries to raise funds to repay a loan by embarking on a transformative journey to Taiwan.

August 2
4 p.m. The Invisible Line: America’s Nazi Experiment — Documentary. A teacher seeking to explain how Hitler brainwashed the Germans, H.S. students were subjected to a Nazi-like code of conduct. The 5-day experiment spiraled out of control, attracting students to the rising fascist movement.
8 p.m. Tango Shalom — Narrative. Moshe Yehuda, a Hasidic Rabbi and amateur Hora dancer, played by Jos Laniado, enters a televised Tango competition to save his Yeshiva from bankruptcy.

August 9
4 p.m. — 5 Short Films. Cinema Rex, Mum’s Hairpins, Eddy’s World, Empty Spaces, and A Father’s Kaddish
8 p.m. 200 Meters — Narrative. A 200-meter distance becomes a 200-kilometer odyssey as a Palestinian father embarks on a perilous journey to reach his hospitalized son in this tense yet tender family drama about the human toll of oppression.

August 16
4 p.m. Comrade Dov — Documentary. A thought-provoking portrait of a unique politician who refuses to give up even as reality deals him one blow after another.
8 p.m. Winter Journey — Narrative non-fiction. Centering on a father and his son’s search for the truth about his parents’ experiences during Hitler’s ascent, George Goldsmith (Bruno Ganz) recalls the events leading to his and his wife’s 1941 escape from Germany.

Celebrating 35 Years of the Berkshire Jewish Film Festival
Virtual screenings and Zoom talkbacks over 7 weeks this summer

CULTURE AND ARTS

Summer Rentals in the Heart of the Berkshires
Two private accommodations in stately home on Wendell Avenue in Pittsfield.
Short walk to Chabad and around the corner from Congregation Knesset Israel and Temple Anshe Amunin.

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2) Studio: 1st floor with kitchenette and private full bathroom.

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• YOU GET the rabbinical support you need in times of joy and sorrow.
• YOU RECONNECT with your community and your Jewish roots.
• YOU CAN PARTICIPATE in a variety of services, classes, and programs that keep Judaism alive and flourishing in Berkshire County.

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The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires encourages you to affiliate.

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Serving Berkshire County for three generations.
YIDSTOCK 2021 Brings Some of Klezmer’s Biggest Stars to the Virtual Stage

A 75-minute program featuring songs of social justice

AMHERST – The Yiddish Book Center’s annual YIDSTOCK: The Festival of New Yiddish Music will be presented as a pre-recorded, 75-minute program featuring a dozen musicians from around the world—including Frank London, Polina Shepherd, and Sveta Kundish (all featured in the May/June Berkshire Jewish Voice)—performing Yiddish songs of social justice. The program will stream virtually on Sunday, July 11, at 4 p.m.

YIDSTOCK musicians will be performing a broad and eclectic repertoire of social justice songs recorded exclusively for YIDSTOCK and drawn from Yiddish music and literature. These include labor anthems, protest songs, humanitarian odes, songs of struggle, and songs based in Yiddish poetry. The program’s theme of social justice is drawn from the Yiddish Book Center’s Decade of Discovery, a ten-year programming initiative, which in 2021 is themed to “Yiddish and Social Justice.”

Other artists taking part include Eleanor Reissa, Lorin Sklamberg, Cilla Owens, Sarah Myerson and Ilya Shneyveys, Niki Jacobs from the Netherlands, Polina and Merlin Shepherd from Brighton, UK, Sarah Gordon and Michael Winograd from Brooklyn, Tatiana Wechsler, Eleonore Weill and Zoe Aqua, and Patrick Farrell.

The pre-recorded program will be emceed by YIDSTOCK artistic director Seth Rogovoy.

“Moving this year’s event to online provides us the opportunity to present musical artists from around the world,” says Rogovoy. “It allows us to include a number of artists who haven’t performed at YIDSTOCK previously—fully half of the artists will be making their YIDSTOCK debuts.”

For more information about the artists and to reserve a ticket, please visit yiddishbookcenter.org/yidstock.

In addition to the pre-recorded program on July 11, the Yiddish Book Center will be presenting a series of virtual public programs in July on the theme of Yiddish and social justice, including a talk about Yiddish music of the Holocaust and one about Jewish protest singers of the 1960s, as well as a conversation with several YIDSTOCK performers. Check the Yiddish Book Center events calendar for details and registration for these events coming soon.

Yevgeny Kutik Performs Beethoven’s Violin Concerto in Debut as Soloist with the Boston Civic Symphony

BOSTON – On Sunday, June 13 at 3 p.m. Russian-American violinist Yevgeny Kutik, known for his “dark-hued tone and razor-sharp technique” (The New York Times), makes his debut as soloist with the Boston Civic Symphony, performing Beethoven’s Violin Concerto.

Led by Music Director Francisco Noya, the program will be free to watch, broadcast live from the First Church in Cambridge. The program also includes Respighi’s “The Birds” and Walker’s “Lyric for Strings.”

“Beethoven’s Violin Concerto is perhaps the best-known violin concerto in the entire repertoire. Interestingly, the premiere of this work in 1806 was not successful (possibly because the violinist was forced to sight-read the piece during the performance), so it lay un-played for nearly 40 years,” says Kutik, who grew up in Pittsfield after our Jewish community helped resettle his family from the former Soviet Union. “It is a wonderful privilege and honor to be able to perform and study this great work – and to build upon the legendary performance tradition of this piece.”


Reopening News

The Yiddish Book Center has announced it will begin its phased reopening on Thursday, June 24. The Center will be open to the public on Thursdays, Fridays, Sundays, and Mondays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sarah Aroeste’s New Album Evokes the Lost Jewish World of Monastir
Produced during the global pandemic, this 10-song recording brings together musicians from the US, Israel, and Macedonia

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

Only in America – someone who is both a “national treasure” in the Republic of Macedonia and the South County community coordinator for PJ Library of Berkshire County.

It’s an improbable feat, yet one that Berkshires’ Sarah Aroeste – recording artist, children’s book author, and ambassador for all things Ladino – has accomplished.

Aroeste – recording artist, one that Berkshires’ Sarah Aroeste – is rich, romantic, and ultimately tragic, with memories of its lost Jewish population with a 2017 performance in Bitola, which was called Monastir when it was part of the Ottoman Empire. As Aroeste shared in an article she wrote for the BJV in 2018, she was overwhelmed by the way her standing-room-only concert at the Bitola Cultural Center was organized by non-Jewish Macedonian enthusiasts of her music and heritage. “To say that I received a homecoming welcome would be an understatement,” she wrote. “I had never felt as appreciated as I did when I was in Macedonia. The people there are in love with their Jewish history. Not because they hold a collective guilt for past wrongs, but because they miss Jewish life and believe it added so much to their history. They want it to return.”

As exhilarating as that first Macedonian reception was for Aroeste, she says she wanted to make sure the experience “wasn’t just a fluke.” Soon after returning to the Berkshires, she connected with Joshua Bloom, husband of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire’s Rabbi Jodie Gordon (and Federation vice president), who had done human rights work in Macedonia from 2001-2004. “I caught it in a photograph (shown at left) where you could see a whole bunch of musicians and people dancing together. In this one shot, you see Macedonians, Israelis, Albanians, and myself – you know, the American. There were Jews, Christians, and Muslims all in this one snapshot – I looked at that photo afterwards, and I thought, oh my gosh, I need to do something to harness this cooperative feeling that we all have. And the best way I can do that is with music.”

Aroeste also carried a heartfelt personal motivation for The Monastir Project – to honor her cousin Rachel, who is 103 years old and her last surviving relative born in the city (and who is among the 2 percent of the Jews who survived World War II). “She is an absolute miracle,” says Aroeste. “And before she dies, quite honestly, I want to leave my mark for her and dozens of Monastir Jews, so they can have something physical that they can listen to or hold in their hands for posterity so that they know that the memory of this community lives on.”

Aroeste says she wanted the packaging of the Monastir album to have a tactile quality that conveyed something of the way she inherited her family’s experiences. “In the song I wrote (“Mi Monastir”), I used very, very specific memories from my grandfather and from my cousin Rachel – the textures of their stories and the smells of the foods they cooked, and the descriptions they used to give me. I knew that I didn’t want this to just be a ‘functional musical experience.’ Sadly, most people don’t even bother with liner notes anymore because everybody downloads their music. For these, the liner notes are so critical to understanding more intellectual, esoteric albums, especially ones that are not in English, and I put so much detail in my mark for her and dozens of Monastir Jews, so they can have something physical that they can listen to or hold in their hands for posterity so that they know that the memory of this community lives on.”

Aroeste, continued on page 23
effort and pride into the research and the storytelling behind the songs.

She worked with Israeli-American graphic designer Amos Funk who “understood the vibe. I knew I wanted to use old postcards as my backdrop, and he had the idea of using fonts that would be like a handwritten note. I wanted to punctuate it with real images of Monastr and of my family and of different memories.”

I found that the most enjoyable was to listen to Aroeste is first to read Aroeste’s excellent introduction and then keep the visuals in front of you – each track has its own page that captures something of the spirit of the song. The translations and the transliterations of the Ladino, Macedonian, and Hebrew lyrics take you deeper inside the song, and the visual images that appear have the effect of drawing you deeper into the musical sound while connecting you with the people and places shown in the photographs. One can imagine the people in scenes responding to the same melodies – the images of the city and its surroundings let you peer into their world. Particularly moving is the image of the family members on page 7 to “Mi Monastra” – as the family of Aroeste’s cousin Rachel was taken away in 1943, a neighbor removed that menushah hoping to someday return it. Years later, as Aroeste describes in her essay, it was given back to Rachel.

Creating a song list that would fulfill her vision for The Monastir Project was another challenge, and Aroeste drew on the connections she made with musicologists, preservationists, musicians, and archivists around the world in the years she has worked as a singer and student of Ladino music and Judeo-Spanish culture.

“I knew that I want to have a very balanced experience,” says Aroeste. “About half of it would be recorded in Macedonia and half of it would be recorded in Israel. I wanted half of the music to be from the Macedonian side and half of the music to be from the Judeo-Spanish side. That was the challenge – culling the music from different sources to find that unique balance, because I didn’t want it just to be from the Jewish point of view. I wanted it to be a snapshot in time.”

The global pandemic disrupted her plan for the recording process. In March 2020, Aroeste and her Israeli producer/arranger, Shai Bachar, had arrived in Macedonia to work with Balkan singers and musicians, unaware that the US borders would soon be closed.

“We knew the danger, but it hadn’t exploded until probably five days later,” she says. “I was one of those people who was caught in Europe when Trump closed the borders. So my poor husband Jeff had to return it. Years later, as Aroeste and Bachar then returned home, she to the Berkshires and he to Israel. It soon became apparent that the recording sessions lined up in Israel would not happen, and so Aroeste had to adapt. Like many other musicians, she built a soundproofed home recording studio in order to keep working.

The pandemic had a dire effect worldwide on the livelihoods of musicians who could not record together or perform live – and Israel was one of the first countries to completely shut down. “For months and months before anybody else, [Israeli musicians] were just sitting at home with nothing to do.”

The Monastir Project was another challenge, and Aroeste drew on the connections she made with musicologists, preservationists, musicians, and archivists around the world in the years she has worked as a singer and student of Ladino music and Judeo-Spanish culture.

“I knew that I want to have a very balanced experience,” says Aroeste. “About half of it would be recorded in Macedonia and half of it would be recorded in Israel. I wanted half of the music to be from the Macedonian side and half of the music to be from the Judeo-Spanish side. That was the challenge – culling the music from different sources to find that unique balance, because I didn’t want it just to be from the Jewish point of view. I wanted it to be a snapshot in time.”

The global pandemic disrupted her plan for the recording process. In March 2020, Aroeste and her Israeli producer/arranger, Shai Bachar, had arrived in Macedonia to work with Balkan singers and musicians, unaware that the US borders would soon be closed.

“We knew the danger, but it hadn’t exploded until probably five days later,” she says. “I was one of those people who was caught in Europe when Trump closed the borders. So my poor husband Jeff had to return it. Years later, as Aroeste and Bachar then returned home, she to the Berkshires and he to Israel. It soon became apparent that the recording sessions lined up in Israel would not happen, and so Aroeste had to adapt. Like many other musicians, she built a soundproofed home recording studio in order to keep working.

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Aroeste adds that working on the lyrics pages for Israeli-American graphic designer Amos Funk created the lyrics pages for Monastir. “Aroeste tries by 32 performers – and were recorded in five countries. I had an introduction and then an end, the music and vocals were recorded in five countries by 32 performers – and were put together by Aroeste and Bachar largely in the Berkshires. Bachar, who has dual US and Israeli citizenship, arrived in August 2020 to finish the album at Aroeste’s home studio. When I asked Aroeste what it was like recording her vocals – very emotional, very dramatic – without a backing band from which she could draw energy, she answered: “It really was a challenge. I didn’t feel comfortable doing it just by myself. It was a very disjointed way of doing things, so I really put my trust in Shai. He would record all of the percussion of some of the songs first, and then he would go to the bass, and then he would fill it in with woodwinds. So each song was constructed from the ground up because we had to do it in such a piecemeal way. And it doesn’t have that same live recording vibe but it also gave us the chance at every step to really take a step back and say, ‘Is this the right feeling of this song? Is this how we want to move it forward?’ And we could not have done that if we were in a live studio. So did have some benefits in that we could really take each song step-by-step.”

It wasn’t just musical homage, it was meant to be the opening of cultural dialogue to help preserve the stories of Jewish Monastir. And I think working piece-by-piece in some ways helped that, giving that much more meaning to the dialogue part of it.”

Monastir can be purchased at saraharoeste.com/store

What will continue as The Monastir Project “The international cooperation part of it was central. That is what gives me such meaning about the project, that we had so many hands a part of it – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Macedonians, Israelis. That was the point of the project.”

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Aroeste adds that working on the lyrics pages that helped her achieve her goals for the album, and
The Story of the Star of David

The six-pointed star represents peace and harmony in Buddhism, while alchemists believed it symbolized nature – how did the Star of David acquire its significance in Judaism?

By Sharon Cohen / National Library of Israel

“Something of man’s secret enters into his symbols.” — Gershom Scholem

The Star of David originated long before it was adopted by the Jewish faith and the Zionist movement: it appeared thousands of years ago in the cultures of the East, cultures that use it to this day. In the past, what we know today as the Star of David was a popular symbol in pagan traditions, as well as a decorative device used in first-century churches and even in Muslim culture.

But how is the Star of David tied to the fate of the Jewish people?

In the Hebrew context, the Star of David is actually referred to as the “Shield of David” (magen David), a phrase first mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, not as a symbol, but as an epithet for God [Peskach 117b]. Another link to the shield concept is a Jewish legend according to which the emblem decorated the shields of King David’s army: what’s more, even Rabbi Akiva chose the Star of David as the symbol of Bar Kochba’s revolt against the Roman emperor Hadrian (Bar-Rochba’s name means “son of the star”).

The Star of David only became a distinctly Jewish symbol in the mid-14th century, when the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV granted the Jews of Prague the right to carry a flag, and they chose the six-pointed star. From Prague, the use of the Star of David as an official Jewish symbol spread, and so began the movement to find Jewish sources that traced the symbol to the House of David. On the other hand, the renowned Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem claimed that the Star of David does not originate in any way in Judaism. Though he noted the symbol was identified on a Jewish seal from the seventh century BCE found in Sidon, as well as in 3rd-4th century CE synagogue decorations, the star was found alongside other symbols that were known to not be of Jewish origin.

So where can we find representations of the hexagram (a six-pointed star) in other cultures?

The hexagram has been used in India for thousands of years, and can be found on ancient temples and in daily use; in Buddhism it is used as a meditative aid to achieve a sense of peace and harmony, and in Hinduism it is a symbol of the goddess Lakshmi—the goddess of fortune and material abundance.

Hexagrams abound in alchemy, the theory and study of materials from which the modern science of chemistry evolved. Magical symbols were commonplace in this ancient theory, and alchemists recruited the six-pointed star to their graphic language of signs and symbols: an upright triangle symbolized water, an inverted triangle symbolized fire, and together they described the harmony between the opposing elements. In alchemical literature, the hexagram also represents the “four elements”—the theory that all matter in the world is made up of the four elements: air, water, earth and fire—effectively, everything that exists. One could say that the star is the ultimate alchemical symbol.

Alchemy borrowed the idea from the classical Greek tradition that masculinity symbolizes wisdom, while femininity symbolizes nature; man is philosophy and woman is the physical world. The illustration below, which appears in an 18th century alchemical text, shows a man holding a lantern as he follows a woman holding a hexagram – wisdom being the key that reveals the secrets of existence.

In Islam, the hexagram is referred to as the “Seal of Solomon,” and it adorns many mosques around the world. Until 1945, the emblem was also found on the Moroccan flag. It was changed to the five-pointed star (pentagram), when the six-pointed star became the emblem of the Zionist movement. The use of this symbol has diminished throughout the Islamic world for the same reason. The hexagram can also be found in medieval and early modern churches—although not as a Christian symbol, but as a decorative motif.

Despite its use in other cultures, the Star of David is emblazoned on the Israeli flag, and thus it is considered the undisputed symbol of the State of Israel, regardless of its origin. A symbol’s power, after all, is in the meaning we give to it.

Sharon Cohen is the director of the National Library of Israel’s social media communities. This article originally appeared on the National Library of Israel’s blog, a trove of fascinating stories about Judaism, the Land of Israel, the Diaspora, and the Middle East – visit the website at: https://blog.nli.org.il/en/.

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