Super Tzedakah Week – Building a Stronger Berkshire Jewish Community Together

Federation’s kickoff to Community Campaign 2021 – May 23-28

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires kicks off its 2021 Community Campaign with Super Tzedakah Week, May 23 to May 28. Join us in building a stronger community through your investment and participation in our work. This year, community members have multiple opportunities to get involved and make a difference.

As part of the campaign kickoff, Federation will host two exciting events on May 23. From 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., community members of all ages can “Get the Scoop” at our socially distanced Jewish Community Day at High Lawn Farm in Lee. From 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., families can make their mark with Mitzvah Madness LIVE!, virtually presented by mainstages educational theater group.

In addition, community members are encouraged to participate in Federation’s Dignity Drive to collect feminine hygiene and incontinence products that will be distributed to Berkshire community members at local food banks and social service agencies.

This year, we may not be calling, but we are asking – PLEASE DONATE!

For over 80 years, the Federation’s annual campaign has sustained our Jewish Berkshires and provided the

COMUNITY CAMPAIGN, continued on page 11

Jamie Bernstein on Famous Father Girl – A Memoir of Growing Up Bernstein

On Thursday, June 3 at 6:45 p.m., we welcome writer, narrator, broadcaster, and filmmaker Jamie Bernstein, daughter of Leonard Bernstein, who will discuss her book, Famous Father Girl – A Memoir of Growing Up Bernstein. She’ll share how she transformed a lifetime of loving music into a career of sharing her knowledge and excitement with others.

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.

Inspired by Leonard Bernstein’s lifelong impulse to share and teach, Jamie Bernstein has devised multiple ways of communicating her excitement about orchestral music. Join Jamie as she shares how her memoir came to be and her intentions in writing the book. Jamie will share some content of the book with us and briefly discuss her father’s centennial in 2018.

Beginning 15 years ago with “The Bernstein Beat,” a family concert about her father’s music modeled after his

BERNSTEIN, continued on page 5

Keep Those Creative Juices Flowing

Hevreh’s Creative Beit Midrash conquers COVID blues and blahs by connecting artists and inspiring new work

Responding to pandemic isolation, members of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire (helped by Rabbi Neil P.G. Hirsch) banded together to form the Creative Beit Midrash. Artists share their work on Saturday mornings, and draw inspiration from each other and Jewish ideas. Above is Olive Tree by Larry Frankel, about which he writes: “Global warming has affected the natural rhythm and weather patterns on earth, as well as the balance of flora and fauna. This image represents a visual portrayal as to what may arise as a casualty of non-intervention by humanity in addressing this global issue.” For more on Hevreh’s Creative Beit Midrash, please see page 23.

Super Tzedakah Week

2021 Campaign Kickoff

Join us May 23-28

Check out the flyer and article in this paper to learn how you can help build a stronger Jewish community for all!

DONATE!
DO A MITZVAH!
CONNECT!
In My View

Focus On What You See – Federation Working for Our Community

Our Super Tzedakah Week co-chair on why his family gives back through Federation

By Avi Dresner

When my family was asked to chair Super Tzedakah Week, we were honored and grateful for the opportunity to give something back to the community that has given so much to us. When we told our sons – 10-year-old Lev and 8-year-old Sasha – about it, they were excited because they figured Super Tzedakah Week must have something to do with superheroes and, in a way, it does, except we’re not the heroes in this story – you are.

We explained to the boys that Federation needs our help to raise $1,000,000 so that it can continue to help our family and others. Sasha’s reaction was, “Wow! A million dollars?! That’s a shi-beep load of money!” That is how he actually says it to circumvent our no cursing rule. Lev’s reaction was, “This is gonna look awesome on my college application!” And that pretty much sums up our kids.

Despite those different reactions, when we asked the boys what words come to mind when they think about Federation, they both had the same response – “Old Jews.” After we stopped laughing, we thought about it and realized that they were actually articulating a profound – albeit inaccurate – perception that many adults may share as well.

In the boys’ case, we could easily understand where that impression came from since, before the pandemic, their most visible interaction with Federation was as volunteer card makers and senior holiday package delivery boys. In that capacity – depending on the holiday – they personally handed out bags stuffed with challah, apples, honey, hamantaschen, matzah, and more to the grateful Jewish residents of Devonshire Estates, a senior living community in Lenox. They also accompanied me one Friday a month to lead Kabbalat Shabbat blessings over the candles, wine, and challah.

Given all of that, the boys’ description made perfect sense. As children, they focus on what they see; then again, don’t we? However, there is so much that Federation does – even for them – that goes unseen and taken for granted by them and, perhaps, by you too.

President George H.W. Bush, who is not someone we often quote, coined the phrase “a thousand points of light,” which seems like someone we often quote, coined the phrase “a thousand points of light,” which seems like an apt phrase to describe the task at hand of making the unseen seen. We don’t have the room to highlight a thousand points here, so just being out “Old” Jews.

As many of you may know, PJ Library is a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, where Natasha works as a nonprofit consultant, mentor, and director of their Leadership Engagement & Advancement Program (LEAP). A big part of her job is helping other Jewish organizations raise money, so Super Tzedakah Week is nothing new for her. It wasn’t always that way, though.

Natasha grew up in Kiev, Ukraine in the Former Soviet Union, where an organization like Federation was illegal. She had no Jewish community growing up so, as the Soviet Union started to crumble in the late 1980s and early 1990s, she helped create one by becoming a co-founder of Congregation Habanim (Habahim – Hope) in Kiev. After getting her M.B.A., she served as the finance director for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for all of Ukraine.

My experience growing up was the exact opposite. As the son of a rabbi, I took my connection to the Jewish people for granted, so much so that I made Aliyah to Israel – another recipient of Federation’s support – where I worked as the first executive director at Knesset Israel in Pittsfield. In addition to my being a writer and documentary film producer, I am a personal trainer and taught physics at Smith Academy, the local Hebrew day school that shut down in 2011. Soon after that, I began teaching at Hevreh’s Religious School, where I still teach and tutor fourth-graders through bar and bat mitzvah students. I also co-chaired the Berkshires Jewish Festival of Books at Hevreh, which was co-sponsored by none other than Federation. That is, of course, not unique to Hevreh.

You would be hard-pressed to find a Jewish-themed program in the Berkshires that doesn’t have Federation’s loving fingerprints all over it and financial support behind it. All you have to do is glance at the vast array of offerings in the pages of this very newspaper, the Berkshire Jewish Voice, or Federation’s annual Berkshire Jewish Summer guide (which will not be published this year due to the pandemic). Everything you see there is supported by Federation in some way, by donors like you and us giving as meaningfully as we can.

For our family, these two publications curate our Jewish year, as we are sure they do for many of you too. Of course, not everything is for us, but knowing there is something for everyone speaks to the breadth and depth of Federation’s impact on our lives as Jews – old, young, and in between. However, that impact goes far beyond just Jews and, in the middle of a pandemic, it is more important than ever.

At the height of the summer surge, the boys became Federation delivery boys once again – this time of pizzas to the Mother- Baby Unit at Berkshire Medical Center, where they were born. This was Federation’s way of letting our health care workers know how much we appreciate them and all they have done for us during this unbelievably tragic and difficult year, and we felt truly privileged to be the ones chosen to deliver that message, which was cheesy in the best possible way.

Super Tzedakah Week is also promoting a Dignity Drive to combat feminine hygiene and incontinence poverty. You can bring dignity to a neighbor in need by dropping off new packaged menstrual and incontinence products at locations throughout the Berkshires from May 1 through May 28, which will then be distributed to local food banks and social service organizations. So much for the boys’ assertion that Federation is just for Jews.

There are countless other examples of Federation’s work to help those in need in Berkshire County, around the country – like victims of the recent Houston winter storm blackouts – and around the world. However, what these countless examples all have in common is Federation’s ability to count on you as much as you count on it.

So, whether you’re an older Jew, a young Jew, or somewhere in between, we hope you’ll join us in giving of yourself and giving to Federation. And, for Sasha’s and Lev’s sales – and all of yours, as well – please be a superhero and please give a shi-beep load!

Delivering pizzas destined for Berkshire Medical Center’s Mother-Baby Unit in June 2020 – Natasha Dresner (black mask) stands behind Lev and Sasha. Accepting the pizzas are Patient Experience Specialist Jen Badley (front) and Interfaith Chaplain Marcie Greenfield Simmons

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Federation – that is, you – they, and so many other kids in our community, would not be able to attend Jewish day and sleepaway camp, which our boys will do together this summer at Camp Eisner for the very first time. Their Federation’s unheralded, unsung work is the very first step to making the unseen seen. We don’t have the space to highlight a thousand points here, so you would not receive a wonderful Jewish-themed PJ Library book each month as they have every month since Federation was called ‘Old’ Jews. As many of you may know, PJ Library is a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, where Natasha works as a nonprofit consultant, mentor, and director of their Leadership Engagement & Advancement Program (LEAP). A big part of her job is helping other Jewish organizations raise money, so Super Tzedakah Week is nothing new for her. It wasn’t always that way, though.

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Rabbi Reflection

Omer and Shmita: Counting Our Way into a New Season
By Rabbi Liz P.G. Hirsch

Recently, as I walked and drove through the Berkshires, it seemed that every tree had begun to flower, and daffodils emerged here and there, dotting our landscape with their cheery, bold-faced yellow. After a snowy, sequestered winter, spring is here. As we enter this spring and early summer, the world is opening up in new ways. After over a year of separation, isolation, challenges, struggles, and loss, we are emerging into a new season in more ways than one.

The promise of return and renewal lie before us. The simple ability for many of us, now or in a short time, is to be able to visit with each other in the homes of friends and family. The return of our beloved cultural venues, albeit with limited or altered programs, and the slow and steady reemergence of Jewish life, each congregation according to its own needs and schedule. We are currently in a period known as the omer, the 49 days between Passover and our upcoming festival of Shavuot. Seven weeks, each containing seven days, brings us from slavery in Egypt to the foothills of Mount Sinai, preparing to receive our Torah.

The omer provides us with a simple structure, with guideposts, and with a blessing to say each day. In some ways, in modern times, we no longer need the omer—we have accurate calendars and walk around with computers in our pockets that tell us, to the millisecond, when Shavuot will arrive! And that is precisely the point of the omer in our modern times. We count to have a moment of kavanah, of intention, each day. We count the omer as a spiritual practice, so that each day, we have the opportunity to say at least one blessing. And we have one more marker of the passage of time, in a year that has been marked by so much sameness, now it truly feels as though we are moving toward something, one more marker of the passage of time.

At its core, Judaism is an agrarian tradition, particularly in the rituals and holidays detailed in our Torah. We feel it especially at this time of renewal and blessing for all! Shmita is a Hebrew word that means “let it lie fallow,” which translates to the cycle of resting the land.

Seven is a special number in our Torah, our text, and our traditions. Six days of creation, and a seventh day of rest—Shabbat. Biblically and for many Jews today, seven days comprise our weekly cycle. Seven weeks of the omer. And every seventh year, shmitu, the cycle of resting the land.

In a year that has been marked by so much sameness, now it truly feels as though we are moving toward something, climbing higher, reaching a new place.

Shmita allows for a period of rest for the land after we have worked it for six years, an early and ritualized form of crop rotation. Just like the omer, seven cycles of seven brings us to another special occasion. Our Torah continues:

“You shall count off seven weeks of years — seven times seven years — so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of 49 years. Then you shall sound the horn loud, in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month — the Day of Atonement... and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee (a yovel, in Hebrew) for you: each of you shall return to your holding and each of you shall return to your family.”

As S. Tamar Kramonokowski explains in The Women’s Torah Commentary:

“The biblical system of a jubilee year has been described as utopian in its vision, promoting a system whereby lands sold under financial distress would be returned to the original owners every fifty years. Under this system, there are checks and balances ensuring a redistribution of wealth at set intervals. This is indeed a utopian vision, grounded both in the religious belief that only God owns the land and people are but tenants on it, and in the socio-economic vision of a remission of debts at set periods.”

The shmitu, that seventh year period of rest for the land, and the yovel, the fiftieth-year jubilee, and the omer can provide us with a frame for this moment, today.

We are emerging from a time of resting and pausing, perhaps against our instincts and predilections. We have all done less in the past months, for the health and safety of our community. We have had to let the land lie fallow. For some, this has been restorative, as it is for the land, which cannot continue to produce crops if it is stripped of its nutrients. Perhaps in doing less, we have found out what really matters, and we have had the chance to create new habits, paths, and opportunities.

This spring, my husband, Rabbi Neil Hirsch of Hevreh and I prepared to welcome our second child. It is a time of reflection for me, of thinking about the shmita and the oof. We read:

“Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest — shabbat shabbaton. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall let the earth rest, the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest...”

It is a time of rebirth for our fields and hillsides, and for our family, too. Arriving at the mountaintop of Shavuot, we take us with the sense of purpose and intentionality of the omer, and the sense of pausing, of thoughtfully doing less, of the shmitu cycle. We will be on family leave from our congregations for a portion of this season, to welcome in the newest member of our family and our Jewish community. We will set aside a period of months and weeks. We are grateful to our communities who have lovingly supported us at this time.

In the coming weeks, we will do a lot more at home, and at the same time, we will do less out in the world. If this unique time in modern history has taught us anything, it is in the blessing of pausing, of appreciating the moment, of knowing how much is enough, of knowing when to rest, and when to rejoice. May it be a season of renewal and blessing for all!

Rabbi Liz P.G. Hirsch is the spiritual leader of Temple Anshe Amunim in Pittsfield.
Exemplary Kind-Heartedness and Compassion for Those Less Fortunate in Israel

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you so much for the very generous grant toward the operation of Meir Panim’s Jerusalem Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchen. Your support this year, as in the past, enables Meir Panim to maintain its food and social services to Jerusalem’s neediest citizens.

The generous grant will make an enormous impact on our services by providing over 812 of the 5,000 lifesaving meals served monthly at the Jerusalem Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchen. From this location, we also provide thousands of meals-on-wheels to Jerusalem’s homebound, disabled, and elderly citizens, including Holocaust survivors.

During the pandemic when Meir Panim’s Jerusalem Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchen was shuttered, 545 packaged meals were prepared in-house daily to be available for meals-on-wheels and takeout. Two hundred meals-on-wheels were delivered to not only the elderly, disabled and homebound individuals, but also those who are newly unemployed or on furlough. The coronavirus pandemic has had a deleterious effect on the middle class and many have now fallen into poverty due to the lack of income this past year.

Volunteers delivered the food while inquiring into the individuals’ welfare and overall state of health, and see if they need other forms of assistance, such as basic equipment like blankets and heaters and appliances, or minor household repairs.

As I write, we have just opened up; however, many are very cautious and continue to deliver meals-on-wheels or takeout. It will take some time until things get back to ‘normal.’ Many thanks again to the leadership of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. Your community’s kind-heartedness and compassion for those less fortunate in Israel is exemplary.

With your help, those Israeli citizens who are struggling to survive will be fed and cared for and will not go to bed hungry. Please know how much we appreciate your partnership with us over the years.

With deep gratitude,
Lorraine Braun
Director of Development/American Friends of Meir Panim
www.meirpanim.org/

Your Campaign Dollars Helped Abused IDF Soldiers Heal

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

On behalf of ELI, I am writing to thank your donors for its grant for ELI’s program for working with sexually abused soldiers in the IDF. This will be targeted to the therapeutic intervention ELI provides to soldiers who have been sexually abused.

Yonatan’s story demonstrates the impact of this program:

Nineteen-year-old Yonatan is one of a handful of men who were sexually abused in the IDF, possibly due to the heighten anxiety of the coronavirus pandemic. He was raped by a fellow soldier, which caused him to have a lot of emotional trauma – both in terms of the incident and his sexuality.

On behalf of Yonatan, we thank you and look forward to a continued partnership.

Wendy Botofkin
American Friends of ELI / www.eli-usa.org

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.

LETTERS, continued on page 5

Guest Commentary

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Abstract Expressionists Virtual Studio Tour and Creative Intentions

On Tuesday, May 11 at 4 p.m. Joyce Raimondo – artist, author, and education coordinator at the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center in East Hampton, NY – will serve as a presenter to explore the theme of creativity and how creative expression informs our lives. She’ll focus on mid-20th century painters in her talk, titled “Abstract Expressionists Virtual Studio Tour and Creative Intentions.”

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

This special session will include a documentary tour of Pollock and Krasner’s studio and share images of studio finds. A roster of other renowned modern artists, including Willem de Kooning, Helen Frankel, Mark Rothko, Ossorio, and Mark Rothko, will be highlighted. The tour will tap into the artists’ studio calendars, sharing insights into the lives and work of the artists, in the context of the American art scene.

Pollock’s signature drip technique producer, as well as a slide show of color. Raimondo will also focus on the practical aspects of an artist’s studio life. For example, when did Pollock paint – what was his schedule? This program will also assist individuals with their own creative practices using Pollock, Krasner, and other artists as examples. Raimondo will share a slide show about artistic or creative goals with some writing prompts.

Present Joyce Raimondo is the author of seven children’s art books, including The Museum of Modern Art’s popular Art Safari series and the award-winning Art Explorers series. She is a sculptor, and her illustrations have been published in The New York Times, Boston Globe, and other publications. For the family programs coordinator at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, she is a leading expert in museum education. She is also the founding director of Imagine That! Art Education.

Your Campaign Dollars Support JDC’s Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues

On behalf of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues, it is our pleasure to acknowledge your recent gift.

The Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues, a coalition of 100 member organizations, has been named as one of the top innovative Jewish projects in North America. Your gift enables the Task Force to sustain and expand its result-driven work to educate and engage the North American Jewish community on issues facing Arab citizens and majority-minority relations in Israel.

This year, the Task Force is seeking to deepen its impact by extending the circle, expanding our educational reach and further developing invaluable resources and materials for our members. With your generous support, the Task Force is able to make a real impact.

On behalf of those we serve, please accept our heartfelt appreciation.

Sincerely,
Mark B. Sisisky, President, JDC
Ariel Zwang, CEO, JDC
Your Federation Presents

Page to Stage to Screen: Intergenerational Celebration Through Theater

Grumbling Gryphons presents:

On Thursday, May 20 at 6:45 p.m., join Leslie Elias, director of Grumbling Gryphons Traveling Children’s Theater, and a diverse cast of players for “Page to Stage to Screen: Intergenerational Celebration Through Theater.” This dramatic and musical program will use the power of language – its rhythms and cadences – to revitalize the mind and the heart.

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.

A mix of drama, the spoken word, and music, “Page to Stage to Screen” is a celebration and affirmation of life through theater. This program, presented by Leslie Elias, invites you to take part in an inspirational journey performed by an intergenerational cast. Through Elias’s dramatic work with elders, children, and young adults, poems, songs, and stories spring to life through mask, music, and collaborative performance.

The show will include a dramatization of Edward Lear’s “The Owl and The Pussycat,” and poems by E.E. Cummings and Langston Hughes, among others. In addition, short films directed by Leslie Elias, in creative collaboration with Ben Willis, an award-winning filmmaker and editor, will be shown. This program aims to delight, inspire, and encourage the music within us all!

Leslie Elias, director of Grumbling Gryphons Traveling Children’s Theater, is a playwright, actress, storyteller, and theater director who has been teaching drama in schools, theaters, and public venues for over 41 years. In 2018, the Connecticut Office on the Arts awarded her the Connecticut Arts Hero Award. She is the recipient of the Northwest Connecticut Arts Council 2018 Culture Max Award for Arts Educator. Additionally, she is recognized as both a teaching and performing artist by the Connecticut Office of the Arts. Ms. Elias has been an artist-in-residence in many schools throughout the United States. Under her artistic direction, Grumbling Gryphons won the 2003 Connecticut Governor’s Arts Award.

Leslie Elias and a member of The Grumbling Gryphons

Food, Farming, and Climate Resilience in the Berkshires

A look at local and global agriculture with Isabella Freedman/Adamah Farm’s education director

Conservatory (Portrait of Frida Kahlo), by Miriam Schapiro, 1988

Jewish Women’s Foundation Presents

Issues Request for Proposals to Support Unmet Needs in Berkshire County

Carol Salus – art historian, book author, and Art History professor emerita at Ohio State University – will present two talks on two noted artists, one Jewish and the other none too fond of Jews.

Monday, May 3 at 6:45 p.m.: “Miriam Schapiro: A Pioneer of the Feminist Art Movement”

Miriam Schapiro was one of the foremost leaders in the feminist art movement in the United States. Since 1970, Schapiro has used the power of her consciousness through her painting, printmaking, and teaching. Nicknamed “Mimi Appleseed” (after Johnny Appleseed, whose dream was for a land where blossoming apple trees were everywhere), she opened paths previously closed and unknown to women artists. Schapiro explored her Jewish identity and the pain of the Holocaust by creating large group murals which she dedicated to the leftist Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, who claimed Jewish ancestry, and in her homage to the French Jewish artist Sonia Delaunay, a co-founder of the Orphism movement.

On Thursday, May 27 at 6:45 p.m.: “Edgar Degas: The Beautiful and Ugly Sides of the Painter”

Degas was one of the most important figures in the artistic vanguard of the 19th century. He painted not only ballet dancers but other elegant topics, such as racehorses. He was also interested in genre scenes, working women, portraits, and landscapes. As his family’s banking wealth soured, Degas blamed his misfortunes on Jewish bankers. When the Dreyfus affair divided France, Degas rejected his dearest Jewish friends, who had been like family. Find out about this aspect of the great painter’s life that is not very well known.

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

In addition to her career in academia, Carol Salus has presented scholarly lectures at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies.

Happy campers at Adamah Farm

PITTSFIELD – The Jewish Women’s Foundation of the Berkshires (JWF), an associate of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, is soliciting grant proposals from non-profit Berkshires-based organizations for projects or programs addressing unmet needs in the community, specifically those that:

• Meet clients’ basic needs for shelter, food, and clothing
• Promote self-sufficiency
• Empower youth and young adults

Both Jewish and non-Jewish non-profit organizations are encouraged to apply for grants up to $3,500.

The Foundation will accept grant proposals beginning on Saturday, May 1, 2021 via an online grant application available at jewishberkshires.org/jewish-womens-foundation. The deadline for submitting a proposal is Monday, May 31, 2021. Final decisions will be announced in September or early October.

In 2020, the Foundation awarded $107,970 to two local organizations. Guided by the Jewish value of tikun olam (Hebrew for repairing the world), the Jewish Women’s Foundation is dedicated to sharing its Jewish values by meeting unmet needs in the community and supporting social action. Further information about JWF can be found on its website (https://jewishberkshires.org/jewish-womens-foundation).
In the Land of Israel – Talkback with TAMIR and Samuel Dinnar

A chance to learn more about Amos Oz’s work and its adaptation

The video recording of Amos Oz’s work In the Land of Israel as adapted and performed by the Israeli/American actress and playwright TAMIR will be available online through the end of May. Visit www.knessetisrael.org/amosplay or Knesset Israel’s channel on the Boxcast app (Roku, Kindle Fire TV, or Apple TV) to watch the performance on demand.

On Wednesday, May 19 at 7:30 p.m., TAMIR will answer questions from the community about In the Land of Israel. It will be a chance to delve deeper into how she conceived her adaptation and developed her characters.

Please visit www.knessetisrael.org/amosplay for a link to this program. TAMIR can also answer questions about her collaborative relationship with Amos Oz, not only on In the Land of Israel but on a second play adapted from Oz’s work titled I Belong Elsewhere, in which she portrayed the mother of the author’s female characters.

To provide more insight into Israel in the early 1980s, when Oz researched and wrote In the Land of Israel, TAMIR will be joined by her friend Samuel (Mooly) Dinnar, an instructor at the Program in Negotiation at Harvard Law School and a lecturer of engineering and computer sciences at the Technion Israel Institute of Technology, and a lover of literature and theater in both English and Hebrew. He is also an affiliated instructor with Shakespeare and Company.

Visit his website at www.samueldinnar.com.

Send your questions in advance to Albert Stern, editor of the Berkshire Jewish Voice, who will moderate the talkback. His email is stern@jewishberkshires.org.

The In the Land of Israel book group, performance, and talkback are co-sponsored by TAMIR and the Berkshire Jewish Voice. The talkback’s production of In the Land of Israel was provided by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

For more on TAMIR, visit www.actorstatmirm.com.

Register in advance for this meeting: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAlcuqhrTMvGdZ3KzOiPiIg- c8FwW0bPUXrw

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

In the Land of Israel
By Amos Oz
A one-woman show
Adapted and performed by TAMIR
Directed by Avishay Greenfeld-Caspi
Music by Adi Rennert
www.knessetisrael.org/amosplay
April 25-May 31

TAMIR
Samuel Dinnar

Ahavath Sholem Congregation’s Cemetery Restoration Needs Your Support

PITTSFIELD – Ahavath Sholem was an Orthodox Jewish congregation in Pittsfield founded in 1911 that closed in the 1990s – it should not be confused with the still-vital Congregation Ahavath Sholom in Great Barrington. The congregation established the cemetery at 1297 Churchill Street in 1912. After the shul shut down, the congregation continued essentially as a burial society. Funds are now being raised to maintain the grounds of the cemetery, a site important to this Jewish community.

Your gift to Ahavath Sholem Congregation’s cemetery restoration will contribute to a comprehensive upgrade to restore the cemetery’s headstones and grounds and to a respectful condition. These funds will also provide some cash flow for ongoing congregational and cemetery expenses. If you wish to contribute, make a check out to Ahavath Sholom and mail to Nan Bookless, 33 Livingston Avenue, Pittsfield, MA 01201. For a list of those buried at Ahavath Sholom visit bit.ly/3j1UWv. A key to the cemetery grounds may be borrowed at the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, 196 South Street in Pittsfield.


On Wednesday, May 12 at 7:30 p.m., Temple Anshe Amunim hosts a panel discussion, “COVID-19: Is Our Future Going Viral?”, featuring local doctors and public health figures.

It will be moderated by Dr. Charles Wohl. Panelists are Paula Ausen, MD, infectious disease specialist; Alan Kolberg, MD, Chair of Health, City of Pittsfield; Gina Armstrong, Director of Public Health, City of Pittsfield; and Laura Kittross, Public Health Program Manager.

To register, go to: tinyurl.com/TAAPanelDiscussion

Ongoing Events at Hevreh

Hevreh of Southern Berkshire invites the community to its ongoing offerings.

Services

Rabbikad Shabbat Services, Fridays at 6 p.m.
All are invited to join Hevreh for a traditional, introspective, and musical Reform service. Services often feature congregant reflections and cantorial intern, Gabe Snyder. To get the Zoom link each week, email info@hevreh.org to be added to the listserv.

Shabbat Morning Experience Saturdays at 10 a.m.
Join Rabbi Jodie Gordon for a contemplative Shabbat morning experience. Some weeks there will be Torah study and discussion, some weeks a Shabbat morning service. To get the Zoom link each week, email info@hevreh.org and be added to the listserv.

Creative Beit Midrash

Saturdays, May 8 & 22, and June 12 from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. Together with Rabbi Gordon, explore Jewish topics through your medium of choice – visual art, music, dance/movement, or written word. These Zoom sessions are for sharing and processing individuals’ creative product through nurturing, not critique. Questions? Contact info@hevreh.org to be directed to Heidi Katz or Larry Frankel. See related story on page 23.
Grinspoon Foundation Wins JFN’s 2020 Shapiro Prize for its LIFE & LEGACY Program

On March 15, 2021, Jewish Funders Network awarded its 2020 Shapiro Prize for Philanthropic Collaboration to the Harold Grinspoon Foundation (HGF) during JFN’s international conference.

While best known for its popular PJ Library program distributing free books to Jewish children, the Springfield, MA foundation has impacted Jewish life just as dramatically with LIFE & LEGACY, a groundbreaking fundraising initiative with 63 philanthropic partners in Jewish communities throughout North America. Arlene D. Schiff of Lenox, formerly the executive director of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, is the national director of the LIFE & LEGACY program.

Launched in 2012, HGF’s LIFE & LEGACY envisions a future of vibrant, well-funded Jewish organizations and communities, with endowment funding available to provide critical support. Through LIFE & LEGACY, HGF and its partners seek to capture the Jewish community’s opportunities through generational wealth transfer.

Over the course of a four-year partnership, LIFE & LEGACY provides training, support, and monetary incentives to motivate Jewish organizations to secure the after-lifetime commitments, often referred to as “planned giving” or “legacy giving,” from their most loyal donors to build their endowments. Key to the program’s success is the use of incentive grants that motivate organizations to have legacy conversations with their most loyal donors and encourages donors to make commitments and formally legalize them in a timely way.

LIFE & LEGACY is “one of the most incredible collaborative programs in modern Jewish times,” says Gideon Bernstein, chair of one of the partners, the Jewish Community Foundation of Orange County, California. “It has not only been successful for its almost $1 billion of documented future gifts for endowing our communities... in over 60 cities, but it has also created an unexpected byproduct of deep collaboration amongst local community organizations who previously competed or didn’t communciate. Most notably, [it has become] a program that helped make Jewish community foundations much more relevant to their donor bases.”

“This year, the funder community recognizes that collaboration is an essential feature of an effective Jewish philanthropic field,” says JFN President and CEO Andrea Spokony. “We face complex challenges that nobody can solve on their own; that’s why much of our work at JFN is geared toward encouraging partnerships among funders.

LIFE & LEGACY is a role model, an inspirational story of funders building long-term, multi-pronged collaborations to address critical issues in the community.

The Shapiro Prize, awarded biennially by Jewish Funders Network, recognizes alliances of forward-thinking Jewish funders who collaborate to have an impact in their chosen fields of interest. It was established in honor of a JFN founding board member, Sidney Shapiro, who died in 2007, and who was regarded as one of the leading lights of American Jewish philanthropy.

Jewish Funders Network is the global networking organization for Jewish philanthropists, with members in 13 countries worldwide and offices in New York, Israel, and Los Angeles. JFN members’ annual charitable giving is estimated at over $1 billion.

Arlene D. Schiff

Programs at Temple Anshe Amunim

Temple Anshe Amunim invites members of the community to participate in its ongoing offerings.

TAA Shabbat Morning Hikes
Please Join TAA for Shabbat morning hikes throughout the summer. On hike day, participants meet at TAA (26 Broad Street in Pittsfield) at 10:45 a.m. The first two hikes will be at Mass Audubon’s Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary on May 15 and at the Berkshire Natural Resources Council’s Old Mill Trail in Hinsdale on June 12. All hikes are accessible to all ages and levels with the option for a longer hike. Appropriate COVID safety precautions will be communicated to all those that pre-register for the event. To register, go to: tinyurl.com/TAAShabbatHikes.

Our Jewish Soundscapes
Join Cantor Rachel Shusky on Tuesday, May 25 at noon for an online program that includes interactive text study, guided meditation, and music sharing. Discover how music is woven into our identities and explore how the melodies from our formative years still matter in our lives today. To register, go to: tinyurl.com/TAAJewishSoundscapes.

Young Families Shabbat Experience
Please join Mike Duffy on Friday, May 21 at 5 p.m., to sing and welcome Shabbat. This experience is geared for families with young children in pre-K through Grade 5. To register, go to: tinyurl.com/ MayYoungFamiliesShabbat

TAA Book Club
Join Barbara Vinson on Thursday, June 10 at noon, for an interactive book discussion on The City of a Thousand Gates, by Rebecca Sacks. Amid the ongoing violence of the West Bank, Rebecca Sacks explores themes of love, marriage, parenthood, ambition, and religion. She weaves together the perspectives of an international cast of characters, each reacting to the murders of an Israeli girl and a Palestinian boy. To register, go to: tinyurl.com/TAAJuneBookClub.

For more information, contact the Temple Anshe Amunim office at (413) 442-5910, email templeoffice@ansheamunim.org, or visit www.ansheamunim.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

BERKSHIRE JEWISH CONGREGATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

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

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

B’nai Brith Lodge, No. 326
450 South St., Pittsfield, MA (413) 499-9899, berkshireberkshires.com

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

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

Hevreh of Southern Berkshire
Reform 270 State Rd., Great Barrington, MA (413) 528-6378, hevreh.org

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

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

Jewish War Veterans
Commander Robert Waldheim (413) 822-4546, r44elit@aol.com

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

Temple Anshe Amunim
Reform 26 Broad St., Pittsfield, MA (413) 442-5910, ansheamunim.org
Traveling with Jewish Taste

Beyond the North Wind: Russia in Recipes and Lore

A pursuit of “the elemental flavors underlying traditional Russian cuisine”

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

Darra Goldstein’s latest book, Beyond the North Wind: Russia in Recipes and Lore (Ten Speed Press), is a beautiful volume with lyrical writing, stunning photographs, and tempting recipes. It opens with the author setting the scene at 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle — “at the literal end of the earth” — in winter. She writes that she was “deliberately chasing the past” to go beyond the Russian dining with which most of us are familiar: the Russian Tea Room imperial cuisine and stereotypical proletarian Soviet fare. She was in pursuit of “the elemental flavors underlying traditional Russian cuisine.”

But why winter, in one of the coldest places on the globe? Several reasons. The first is that she had spent a “very good” summer month in Russia but realized that what came to mind when thinking about “Russia” was winter. (Perhaps it was those icicles growing on Omar Sharif’s mustache in Dr. Zhivago.) So, “in order to write a balanced book,” she says, “I needed to go back in winter, to get a sense of place, with the white nights and the expansiveness. To see all the food they had put up in the summer. To see what the markets were like in the winter.”

The second reason is that the places she wanted to visit are more accessible in winter. Unlike summer, with its rutted and potholed roads, or spring with its unreliant mud, winter roads are covered with a smooth surface of ice and snow. Hence, easier travel.

One more reason: Goldstein’s grandparents came from Byelorussia and Ukraine. As with many of our grandparents, they never talked about their life there other than that it was very hard. She regretted that lack of knowledge. Consequently, she became fascinated by the country, its history, its culture, and its food. But she wanted to explore the nuance of the place, not only the tragic parts of its history.

So, this Williams College professor emerita of Russian and culinary history and founding editor of Gastronomica went north to the remote village Teriberka and east to the Arkhangelsk region for an “authentic” Russia.

Now, to the food that she found there. Not all the recipes in the book are completely authentic, as the author has added some twists to suit her taste, but all speak “Russian.” And some of the ingredients called for may be hard to come by. While kefir has been widely available for years now, raw milk may require a visit to a local dairy farm. Black currant leaves, which Goldstein says are used to keep pickles crisp, are there for the taking — if you happen to have a black currant bush in your yard. (You can also use oak leaves whose high tannin content works similarly) And precisely 350 dandelion blossoms for the dandelion syrup? You may want to enlist some children to gather this particular item in a field free of chemical sprays. Make a contest out of the hunt!

I tested four recipes. Up first was the Pear and Carrot Relish. Russians use it both as a colorful accent to a roast and for afternoon tea. While the relish was certainly easy to prepare with only five ingredients, I found it cloying. Perhaps cutting the amount of honey in half would make it more palatable, unless you, as Russians obviously do, like things really, really sweet.

The Twenty-Minute Pickles, on the other hand, were so good that I’ve made them three times already. Made with Persian (mini) cucumbers and a tablespoon of vodka (this is Russian, after all), they are both easy to prepare and quite addictive. And no black currant leaves required.

Joel gobbled up an entire batch of the Vatrushki (less one for me), a sweet bun filled with a sweetened farmer’s cheese. Russians enjoy these pastries for breakfast, tea, and snack time — which is exactly what Joel did. The only caveat with this recipe is that you don’t need a full pound of farmer’s cheese. One seven-and-a-half-ounce package is more than enough.

When I asked the author to recommend just one recipe among the dozens included in the book’s 300-plus pages, Goldstein didn’t hesitate. Her top choice: the Farmer’s Cheese Pancakes. So, it was back to the dairy case. And absolutely worth the trip. These round, little delights were easy to prepare and scrumptious, golden and crispy on the outside, sweet and creamy inside.

The Jewish Transportation Network

Discount Taxi Vouchers

for Jewish residents aged 65 years and older

Purchase $50 worth of taxi vouchers for $45 ($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/year.

Purchase vouchers at the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires

196 South St, Pittsfield, MA 01201. (413) 442-4360, ext. 10

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires is a community service agency that assists the Jewish residents of Berkshire County. It is supported by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires and administered by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires.

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 follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.

BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

Iyar/Sivan/Tammuz 5781 Berkshire Jewish Voice • jewishberkshires.org Page 9
When I was 37 years old, I went to a new optometrist to get stronger reading glasses, the only type of corrective eyewear I had ever been prescribed. After examining me, this doctor informed me that I had astigmatism in both eyes. That was news to me – in 20 plus years of going to optometrists, the problem had never been diagnosed.

The doctor seemed surprised. He asked me a series of questions about how I perceived things – for example, at night, did I see lines emanating from streetlights and stoplights? I replied that of course I did – doesn’t everybody? The doctor laughed and said, “No, they don’t.” When I first put on my new glasses, not only was I amazed at how different everything appeared (especially at night), but that I’d lived 37 years without an inkling that I was seeing things differently from most other people.

I had a similar type of revelation – albeit one that was psychological rather than optic – while reading Gabrielle Glaser’s important new book, American Baby, which explores adoption in the United States throughout the story of two birth parents and the child they gave up. If I get to what my revelation was later.) The “American baby” she writes about, David Rosenberg, and I happened to be born months apart; we were both adopted by Jewish parents in 1962. Although our circumstances are otherwise quite divergent, thanks to American Baby, I better understand social attitudes (particularly Jewish ones) about adoption in the post-World War II baby boom era, the mores and mindsets that shaped the lives of all of us in the adoption triad – children, birth parents, and adoptive parents.

I also have a better understanding of the legal and psychotherapeutic institutional establishments that created the system in which we all operate. The laws always seemed unfair and the consolation that we’d forever be creating a system of sealed records barring us from accessing fundamental information about ourselves, and the latter assuring us that not being able to know was all for the best. For those of us who wanted more information about our histories, the laws always seemed unfair and the consolation that we’d be better off not knowing seemed to be cold comfort, at best. In documenting the reasoning that created that system, Glaser shows that the way America dealt with adoption in the mid-20th century was not only unjust but also, at times, inhumane.

American Baby covers many aspects of the adoption story: the historical, the personal, the institutional, the psychological, and the activist. It is an important book because, as Glaser writes in her introduction, the narrative is: “...representative of a much larger reproductive- and human rights story that encompassed generations of American women and their sons and daughters, many of whom were exploited for profit and for science. It was an important chapter of American social and cultural history hiding in plain sight, underpinned by a soothing narrative that had repackaged the reality of what it meant to adopt, what it meant to be adopted, and what it meant to surrender a baby you gave birth to. More than 3 million mostly unmarried young women who conceived during the decades after World War II... found themselves funneled into an often-coercive system they could neither understand nor resist.”

American Baby, continued on page 14

American Baby: A Mother, A Child, and the Shadow History of Adoption

Author Gabrielle Glaser tells the important but often overlooked story of adoption in the United States

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

As we welcome in warmer weather to the Berkshires, preparations are underway for resuming in-person connection with our Hevreh.

Visit hevreh.org/welcome to learn about our standards for reopening, and how you can prepare.
COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN, continued from page 1

resources to care for those in need and ensure a safe and strong Jewish community for all. Never was that more evident than this past year when Federation quickly shifted to meet our community’s changing needs presented by the unfolding pandemic.

With your generous support, Federation stepped in to provide emergency grants for food, rent, utilities, and burial support for individuals in our Jewish community. Additional grants were provided to Berkshire food pantries and other organizations to support critical needs of our friends and neighbors across the region.

From increasing social services, expanding meal deliveries, to creating a volunteer support corps and offering virtual and outdoor programming for all ages to connect and learn – Federation provided the leadership and safety net our community needed in this time of crisis.

This year has shown us that we truly are stronger together and that we are all responsible for one another. Our founders created the Jewish Federation precisely so that we have the infrastructure in place to respond to unforeseen crises. And it is because of the generosity of you, Never of you, that we will be ready for whatever comes next.

Our 2021 campaign goal is $1 million. Your gift to the Jewish Federation’s 2021 campaign – whatever it is you can give – will help bring dignity and care to the vulnerable and elderly, build and strengthen the Jewish identity of our children and young adults, and support vital programs and services across the Berkshires, in Israel, and the wider Jewish world. (Turn to page 12 to see all that the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires accomplishes with your gift.)

“Super Tzedakah Week gives our donors, volunteers, and community members the powerful opportunity to come together to make a real and lasting difference,” says incoming Federation president, Elissa Schindler Frankel. “Your collective generosity will help us to take care of our entire community, ensuring that those who are at their most vulnerable can live with dignity and keeping our Jewish community strong and vibrant. Every gift counts!” (For more on Elissa’s new role, please see the story on page 5.)

As our community begins to emerge from and (we hope) move beyond the pandemic, your support is needed more now than ever. Please help us kick off our 2021 Community Campaign by making your gift or pledge during Super Tzedakah Week. Check out the insert in this paper on all the ways you can make your gift. Thank you for making a difference!

Our Super Tzedakah Week Chairs – The Dresner Family

Natasha, Avi, Lev, and Sasha Dresner of Pittsfield – who have long been some of Federation’s most active and dedicated volunteers – have this year stepped up as chairs of Super Tzedakah Week. They’ll be reaching out to our congregations to relate their experience of Federation and to share their thoughts about getting involved and how to give back to this Jewish community.

Natasha, originally from Kiev, Ukraine, is a nonprofit consultant, mentor, and director of the Leadership Engagement & Advancement Program (LEAP) for JCamp 180 at the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. Avi is a self-employed personal trainer and writer who served in the Israeli Defense Force and has served as co-chair of Hevreh of Southern Berkshire’s Berkshire Jewish Festival of Books.

Lev is a fourth-grader who enjoys Tae Kwon Do and spending every spare moment reading. His brother, Sasha, is a gymnast in second grade and is also arguably the world’s foremost expert on the 1970s Russian film version of The Three Muskateers. Lev and Sasha are among the young people whose Jewish education and development have been supported by Federation’s investment in PJ Library, local Hebrew schools, camp scholarships, and fun family-friendly programming exploring Jewish values and traditions.

“There are countless examples of Federation’s work to help those in need,” writes Avi. “However, what these countless examples all have in common is Federation’s ability to count on you as much as you count on it.”

For more on the Dresners and what inspires them to give back to the Jewish community, visit the In My View column on page 2 of this paper.

“A Mitzvah – Support Federation’s Dignity Drive, May 1-28

Menstrual and incontinence poverty is a real but often unseen and overlooked need, especially during difficult times as so many are experiencing right now. You can bring dignity to a neighbor in need by dropping off new, packaged menstrual and incontinence products at the following locations between May 1-28:

- The Berkshire Food Co-op, Great Barrington
- Concepts of Art, Lenox
- Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Pittsfield
- Williams College Bookstore, Williamstown

Federation volunteers will be collecting the donations on a weekly basis and organizing them to be distributed through local food banks and social services organizations across the region.

Connect – Fun for All Ages on Sunday, May 23

Check out these opportunities to come together and celebrate the blessings of Jewish community.

Get the Scoop… Jewish Community Day from 1 to 3 p.m. at High Lawn Farm (535 Summer Street in Lee). We’re kicking off our community campaign with free homemade ice cream and fun for ages 0-99! Explore the farm, meet the cows, check out the artisanal cheese shop, and learn the history of this Berkshire gem, all in a socially distanced outdoor setting. Small socially distanced guided tours of the open-air barns, on-demand milking stations, and historical exhibits will be offered, as well as a mitzvah themed storytime, farm crafts, and bula hoop fun for the young and young-at-heart. Masks, social distancing, and safety protocols will be strictly enforced. Rain date: June 6.

Mitzvah Madness LIVE! at 5 p.m. via Zoom. Grab the kids and grandkids to explore all the ways your family can make the world a better place.

This virtual but interactive program with mainstages theatre will stretch their imaginations and get their bodies moving. PJ Library families will receive an at-home mitzvah project, as well! This program is fun for parents, grandparents, and children together!

Register for these events at jewishberkshires.org

Get the Scoop – Join us at High Lawn Farm on May 23!
WHEN OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS US

Fewer Jews say they are attached to Judaism. Yet 97% of American Jews state that they are “proud to be Jewish.” Our critical challenge is to transform Jewish pride into true participation in Jewish life. And we are already on our way.

Locally, Federation helps children and teens live their Jewishness at school and summer camp. Birthright trips transform young adults’ relationship to Israel. Around the world, in places where the Holocaust and Communism almost wiped out Jewish life, we’re nurturing the efforts of a core of inspiring young people who are reinventing Jewish life.


Federation removes obstacles. We bridge gaps. A hot meal is delivered to a homebound person. A social worker helps an older adult find a safer living situation. Health aides bring food and medicine to those who need our help. Fragile Holocaust survivors receive support they need through the Federation’s social worker. You also help tens of thousands of new immigrants, 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.

In the US and around the world, Jewish people and institutions are being threatened. Security is posted at synagogues. Our children are experiencing anti-Semitic threats at school. Jewish college students encounter toxic anti-Israel and anti-Semitic slogans.

Federation is helping to restore a sense of security by sharing resources, expertise and training to keep our communities safe. Funding anti-bias training in schools, speaking out against hatred, and combating BDS so that Jews everywhere can walk without fear into a synagogue, a Jewish school, or simply down the street.

The world is an unstable place.

We bring security

 Millions of Jews find every day a struggle

We are a lifeline

Younger people feel detached from Judaism

We build connection
WHEN OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS US, FEDERATION IS THERE

HELP US BE THERE! MAKE YOUR PLEDGE TODAY!

Your gift to the Jewish Federation's 2021 Campaign – whatever it is you can give – 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 SENSE OF COMMUNITY
You strengthen, sustain, and connect our community through hundreds of educational programs, holiday celebrations, and the Berkshire Jewish Voice, which bring people together and engage them in meaningful Jewish life.

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.

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.

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 bring food cards, home health aides, and medicine to those who need it most.

A STRONG JEWISH IDENTITY
You help young people across the Berkshires and at UM/ASS 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.

A SAFE PLACE TO CALL HOME
You help tens of thousands of new immigrants, fleeing anti-Semitism in Europe and fighting for the refugees 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 Covid-19 support 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.

Donate or pledge online at jewishberkshires.org. Thank you for making a difference!
• Psychiatrist Samuel Karelitz, who believed an infant’s crying resulted from its intelligence, and experimented by snapping rubber bands on the soles of infants, measuring the loudness of their shrieks.

Perhaps most brutal, perhaps most artless, was the research conducted by Nazi doctors. “The United States had the Nuremberg Accords in 1947 because of human experiments conducted by Nazi doctors,” writes Glaser. “After World War II, the horror of these experiments was so obvious that the world rescinded the research of these evil people.”

“Some of the most appalling given the fact that the experimentation followed so closely on the heels of World War II and the inhuman studies conducted by Nazi doctors,” writes Glaser. “The United States had the Nuremberg Accords in 1947 because of the horrors that happened in Nazi Europe,” she says. “And yet 10 years later, Samuel Karelitz got his first grant from the federal government to conduct those equally sinister experiments on 10-minute-old newborns – in the name of this new adoption industrial complex that could deliver to a set of parents a child almost better than what Mother Nature could deliver herself.”

“Karelitz got his first grant from the federal government to keep babies away from unwanted parents so that he could study them, as a basis for the experimentation,” Glaser recounts. “Louise Wise Services retained a tremendous amount of influence. It was well-funded and well-connected, and played a crucial role in providing Jewish babies to influential people. Glaser writes about how lawyers would not take cases against Louise Wise Services, fearing that the agency might respond by scuttling their own (or their business partners and clients) hopes of adopting children.”

As depicted so powerfully in 3 Identical Strangers, adoptees wishing to access information about themselves amassed by Louise Wise Services will find their records legally sealed for decades into the future. As exasperating as Glaser’s point of adoption’s injusti-
tions can seem, the heart of Adoption Baby is the story of how one woman, a 16-year-old, gave up her son through Louise Wise Services. Under pressure from her dis-"
Mazel Tov to Rabbi Neil P.G. Hirsch
White Plains, NY on May 8.

at Congregation Kol Ami in Bliss. The ceremony was held
grandfather, the late Dr. Albert
boys chanted the same Torah
Max, sons of
Benjamin
mitzvah of her twin grandsons,

continued from page 14

subject, this is where to start.

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has written the most essential

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Mazel Tov
to...

Aileen Bliss on the b’nai
Max and Benjamin, sons of
Jason and Jennifer Bliss
The boys chanted the same Torah

The ceremony was held

at Congregation Kol Ami in

Bliss.

Jason and Jennifer Bliss

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.

MAY

Monday, 3 ............ Make your own turkey sandwich,
vegetable soup, coleslaw, whole wheat bread, and
pears.

Tuesday, 4 .......... Rice, bean, and cheese burrito cas-
erole, yellow rice, and dessert TBA.

Thursday, 6 ............ “Pepperoni” pizza, salad, mixed
vegetables, and peaches.

Monday, 10 ............ Sweet & sour meatballs**#, noo-
dies, peas, salad, rye bread, and fruit cocktail.

Tuesday, 11 .......... Chicken with Ajvar (eggplant &
roast pepper sauce)** #, rice pilaf, salad, broccoli, pum-
pernickel bread, and peaches.

Thursday, 13 ........... Blintz souffle, asparagus cuts n
 tips, fruit salad, Challah, and strawberry shortcake.

Monday, 17 ........... Closed for Shavuot

Tuesday, 18 ............ Closed for Shavuot

Thursday, 20 ............ Fresh fish**, sweet potato fries,
mixed vegetables, multi-grain bread, and tropical fruit
salad.

Monday, 24 ............ Spaghetti & “meat” sauce#, green
beans, salad, garlic bread, and Mandarain oranges.

Tuesday, 25 ............ Chicken patties#, vegetable soup,
French fries, peas & carrots, potato rolls, and applesauce.

June

Tuesday, 1 ............ Sundried tomato & artichoke fritta-
ta**, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, Farmer’s
loaf, and grapes.

Thursday, 3 ............ Tuna salad platters** #, gazpacho,
coleslaw, potato chips, hamburger rolls, and brownies.

Monday, 7 ............ Meat loaf**#, mashed potatoes,
broccoli, salad, rye bread, and apricots.

Tuesday, 8 .......... Turkey salad platters**#, three
bean salad, Challah, and pears.

Thursday, 10 ............ Fresh fish**, salad, zucchini medle-
ly, rice pilaf, multi-grain bread, and sugar cookies.

Monday, 14 ............ Salisbury steak **#, celery rice soup,
hashed browns, oven roasted broccoli & cauliflower, whole
wheat bread, and Mandarain oranges.

Tuesday, 15 .......... Turkey piccata**, rice pilaf, mixed
vegetables, salad, oat bread, and peaches.

Thursday, 17 .......... Greek salad platter**, stuffed
grape leaves, pita bread, and baklava.

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

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 infor-
mation and details on virtual programming, please visit our website www.jewishberkshires.org to sign up for our eblasts to receive a weekly listing of online opportunities.

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

Kosher lunch will be prepared on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Meals to go will be ready by noon

for pickup at the Knesset Israel kitchen door, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.

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

Please call (413) 442-2200 no later than 9 a.m. to reserve your meal for pickup and to arrange delivery if standing instructions are not in place.

All are welcome to reserve meals for pick-up, although delivery may be limited in certain circumstances.

The menus listed below are planned, but may be modified depending on availability of ingredients.

When making a reservation, please inform us if a person in your party has a food allergy.

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.

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dies, peas, salad, rye bread, and fruit cocktail.

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roast pepper sauce)** #, rice pilaf, salad, broccoli, pum-
pernickel bread, and peaches.

Thursday, 13 ........... Blintz souffle, asparagus cuts n
 tips, fruit salad, Challah, and strawberry shortcake.

Monday, 17 ........... Closed for Shavuot

Tuesday, 18 ............ Closed for Shavuot

Thursday, 20 ............ Fresh fish**, sweet potato fries,
mixed vegetables, multi-grain bread, and tropical fruit
salad.

Monday, 24 ............ Spaghetti & “meat” sauce#, green
beans, salad, garlic bread, and Mandarain oranges.

Tuesday, 25 ............ Chicken patties#, vegetable soup,
French fries, peas & carrots, potato rolls, and applesauce.

JUNE

Tuesday, 1 ............ Sundried tomato & artichoke fritta-
ta**, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, Farmer’s
loaf, and grapes.

Thursday, 3 ............ Tuna salad platters** #, gazpacho,
coleslaw, potato chips, hamburger rolls, and brownies.

Monday, 7 ............ Meat loaf**#, mashed potatoes,
broccoli, salad, rye bread, and apricots.

Tuesday, 8 .......... Turkey salad platters**#, three
bean salad, Challah, and pears.

Thursday, 10 ............ Fresh fish**, salad, zucchini medle-
ly, rice pilaf, multi-grain bread, and sugar cookies.

Monday, 14 ............ Salisbury steak **#, celery rice soup,
hashed browns, oven roasted broccoli & cauliflower, whole
wheat bread, and Mandarain oranges.

Tuesday, 15 .......... Turkey piccata**, rice pilaf, mixed
vegetables, salad, oat bread, and peaches.

Thursday, 17 .......... Greek salad platter**, stuffed
grape leaves, pita bread, and baklava.
OBITUARIES

Lorna Miller Strasser, 87, remembered for her generosity of spirit

GREAT BARRINGTON – Lorna Miller Strasser, 87, of Great Barrington and formerly of Weston, CT, passed away at home on Sunday, March 28, after a ten-year battle with cancer.

Born in Cedarhurst, NY, to Abe and Alma Miller, Lorna was an avid and involved Democrat. She received a BA degree in music education from Boston University. She began teaching elementary music in Weston, CT, and continued in Lenox for almost 20 years. She sang in the choirs at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire and Berkshire Choral Festival. She enjoyed traveling to all corners of the earth and took pleasure in taking remarkable photographic excursions of exotic places.

Tanglewood, Broadway, Mahattan Theatre, Barrington Stage, and all aspects of the cultural arts captured her attention, but it was Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, where she served on the board for more than 30 years, that captured her heart.

Lorna was a devoted sister to Joan, who predeceased her in 2016, and (Lorraine). She was a devoted friend.

Incredible love and devotion to her family and friends, and the generosity of spirit and for the community, was second nature to Lorna. She gave back to the Berkshire community, serving as part of their education.

List private showings of her work rather than public shows for most of her career. As a result of her contribution, she was one of the first professional artists to have all 11th graders in the Berkshires see private shows of her work.

She founded and led a campaign for the establishment of the Berkshire Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind & Dyslexic. She also served on boards of HospiceCare in The Berkshires and the Berkshire Choral Festival.

Lorna Miller Strasser, 87, remembered for her generosity of spirit. She will be remembered for her generosity of spirit and for the community, was second nature to Lorna. She gave back to the Berkshire community, serving as part of their education. She was an avid music enthusiast.

To her loving family and friends, and the generosity of spirit and for the community, was second nature to Lorna. She gave back to the Berkshire community, serving as part of their education. She was an avid music enthusiast.

Berkshire Jewish Voice • jewishtuberkshires.org May 3 to June 13, 2021
Herbert "Bud" Aronson, great humanitarian, envi-
ronmentalist, and athlete

LENOX - Herbert "Bud" Aronson passed away on
Wednesday, January 27.

Bud was born in Springfield, MA, was a lifelong
champion of civil rights from his early days as a young
man in high school, when he led the lunch counter with an
African American man who was refused service. He
continued in his days as a union organizer with AFL-CIO and
SEIU, marching with Cesar Chavez in California during
protests of the 1960s. He was active in the antiwar move-
ment, and worked for the rights of hard-working people throughout his
life.

Bud remained active, hiking in the Berkshires, a
place she loved so much.

In 1979, he and Lynn Urban married. They had two
children, in addition to seven grandchildren.

He loved his children-in-law, and for 16 years,
he served as membership chair for the Religious Education
Committee. He was an active athlete, and an artist.

Bud's personal interests and
achievements were important,
and was able to follow and
appreciate what a lucky man
he knew and felt
ready to share what
knows best

As a speech-language patholo-
gist for the Pittsfield Public
Schools. Over the 27 years of
his employment at Temple, he
helped two generations of
children access language and
speech, helping them achieve
happy and productive lives.

She loved spending summer evenings at
Tanglewood, walking 2-3 miles daily, lifting
and was sent to Fort Lee,
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The Jewish Muscleman Who Likely Inspired the Creators of Superman

By Tzvi Sinensky / JTA

With Superman and Lois, the newest TV series involving the character, now airing on the CW network, it’s a good time to recall that Superman was the 1938 brainchild of Jewish creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Many have suggested that the pair were inspired by their own Jewish backgrounds to create Superman as the paradigm of a hero who defined vulnerable populations from their enemies. But there is reason to suspect that a more specific encounter may have inspired them to craft the Superman persona.

The years 1923 and 1924 saw a phenomenon in the United States: tours by Siegmund Breitbart, known as “The Jewish Superman,” across North America. Breitbart performed in Cleveland and Toronto, Siegel and Shuster’s respective hometowns.

While it is nearly impossible to prove — there are no records of Siegel or Shuster mentioning Breitbart — there is reason to suppose that the strongman may have served as something of an inspiration. He wore a cape and was advertised as capable of stopping speeding locomotives.

Who was this man Breitbart, lauded during his lifetime as the strongest man in the world? For featuring Harry Houdini and other top performers, spotted Breitbart and the German male throughout the opening decades of the 20th century, Breitbart was considered one of the strongest men in the world.

Siegmund “Zishe” Breitbart was born to a family of locksmiths in Lodz (now Poland, then Russia) in 1893. In his autobiography, he reports that his family discovered his unusual strength when, at age 3, he extricated himself from beneath an iron bar that had fallen on him in his father’s store. By age 4, he was casting iron in his family shop. His early years were difficult. Expelled from a number of religious schools for using force against fellow students, Breitbart was captured by the Germans while serving in the Russian army during World War I. After the war he remained in Germany, subsisting on the money he earned by performing feats of strength at local markets.

He was at one such 1919 performance that the German Circus Busch, famous for featuring Harry Houdini and other top performers, spotted Breitbart and brought him on board to perform its opening act. As Breitbart’s strongman routine, which had him dressed in hypermasculine costumes such as a Roman centurion, skyrocketed in popularity, and he quickly moved from sideshow to main event. Notwithstanding the fast-rising tide of anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria, Breitbart, who often wore the Star of David while entering the circus ring, achieved a mass Jewish and non-Jewish following in Berlin, Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw.

Breitbart’s act was based on his early experience working with iron. He bent rods into horseshoes, bit through chains, and pounded nails into boards with his fist. He could draw chariots with his teeth. And his image undercut racial stereotypes. A tavern proprietor complained, “My tables are studded with holes because of Hitler’s Jews who could pull heavy weights with their teeth, was considered one of the strongest men in the world.”

Breitbart’s career came to an abrupt end in 1925 when a stage accident involving a rusty nail led to a fatal case of blood poisoning. He was buried in Berlin.

David while entering the circus ring, achieved a mass Jewish and non-Jewish following in Berlin, Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw. Breitbart’s act was based on his early experience working with iron. He bent rods into horseshoes, bit through chains, and pounded nails into boards with his fist. He could draw chariots with his teeth. And his image undercut racial stereotypes. A tavern proprietor complained, “My tables are studded with holes because of Hitler’s Jews who could pull heavy weights with his teeth, was considered one of the strongest men in the world.”

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Unfortunately, the Nazi destruction of Polish Jewry largely extinguished the rich oral legends that perpetuated Breitbart’s memory. But his legend has not persisted and a tender demeanor. “It is greatly symbolic,” Monk declared in his 1925 eulogy, “that for a man who broke chains, it was enough for one person’s good word to render his heart soft as butter.”

Like Clark Kent, Breitbart’s persona was far richer and more well-rounded than his stage persona allowed. He was a mixture of elements — brains, brawn, a gentle nature, and fierce Jewish pride. And he’s still inspiring nearly 100 years after his untimely death.

Rabbi Tzvi Sinensky serves as Rosh Yeshiva of the Gur Aryeh program at Main Line Classical Academy in Bryn Mawr (PA), director of the Lamm Heritage Archives, and editor of The Lehrhaus. He is writing a dissertation on rabbinics and masculinity.

We realize this, which is why having shared values can give you confidence and peace of mind in these uncertain times.

Have a conversation with Gary Schiff, managing director, and the team at October Mountain Financial Advisors.

October Mountain Financial Advisors is a d/b/a of St. Germain Investment Management with an office in Lee, MA.

103 West Park Street
Lee, MA 01238
(413) 243-4331
www.octobermountainfa.com

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The Art and Culture of Singing Yiddish

A talk with singer and musician Polina Shepherd
by Tela Zasloff / Special to the BJV

Yiddish music sings of a diverse world that goes back to the 10th century in a language that was spoken by more than 10 million people, European Jews from Russia in the east to the Netherlands in the west. But by the mid-20th century, this culture was endangered, with its great tradition of writers and thinkers severely depleted following the Holocaust and then the creation of the state of Israel, where the official spoken language is modern Hebrew rather than Yiddish. Yiddish songs and lyrics still speak of a broader culture, however. Throughout our history, Yiddish songs have always been central in urging us to remember that culture, conveying as they do a deep awareness of the fragility of common humanity, our vulnerability to illness and mortality, and the power of exchanging stories about our leaving our homes, either by choice or by force. The melodies and lyrics of these Yiddish songs, some based in ancient modes, sing directly to our hearts and make possible the continued survival and nurturing of that culture.

Polina Shepherd is a passionate advocate of singing Yiddish songs together with others. She is an accomplished and prolific singer, pianist, composer, conductor, and arranger of a Yiddish and Russian song repertoire that she has performed worldwide. She currently conducts five choirs in the United Kingdom and United States that perform Russian and Yiddish folk and art songs connecting those two cultures; performances incorporate her newly-composed material that she bases in the history and culture of Yiddish musical composition and song.

She also has a robust internet presence, with a YouTube page featuring her performances and interviews, as well as a weekly interactive educational Zoom program “Sing with Me: Russian & Yiddish Sessions Online,” in which she explains the dynamics of classic Yiddish and Russian tunes one song at a time. Polina’s latest production is a CD (JSPS005) of her a cappella Russian and Yiddish duets, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, with whom she has performed together and perform vocal music based on Eastern European sound and modal experimentation.

“Music binds people even if they have contrasting views. It’s possible, it’s doable. I don’t have to talk about ideology, or express any political views at all. I just think about joy, about human feelings and connections.” — Polina Shepherd

Her choir work has inspired hundreds of people across the world to want to sing together and perform vocal music based on Eastern European sound and modal experimentation.

Audience response to her work reflects the local culture and political system, as well as the audience’s musical expectations. An encounter following one difficult performance in Switzerland sticks with her – Polina and her husband Merlin played Yiddish songs for a show of an old Soviet-Jewish film, and the audience’s musical performance, a couple who identified themselves as pro-Israel said to them that Yiddish culture was a dying one and also not worth saving. “These opinions do exist in Europe,” she says, “and we often have to convince people otherwise of the importance of Yiddish performance, and presenting Yiddish songs.”

Polina often addresses this question of the sustainability and durability of the “fragile” Yiddish culture. She says: “In Yiddish, no homeland, where people would be keeping Yiddish as the native language, where their children would grow up speaking it. What we have now is communities who support

SINGING IN YIDDISH, continued on page 20

Polina Shepherd

When I was growing up, I really felt that we were all equal. All the kids in our school had a similar kind of life and access to goods, regardless of our backgrounds and our parents’ occupations.”

She ultimately attended the Kazan State Secondary School (a music college), where she studied music history and theory, with piano as a secondary focus, followed by four years at the Kazan State Conservatory. Polina launched her career in many directions and in many places at once – she joined Russia’s first Klezmer band in 1990 at the end of the Russian perestroika period, joined a Romanian Gypsy-style brass band and performed and composed lyrical, ritual, and popular folk songs for holidays and ceremonies worldwide.

Startling at age seven, Polina began 17 years of musical training. Paying for her training was a challenge for her family. She remembers:

“Polina makes music that reflects her roots. She was born in Siberia and grew up in Naberezhnye Chelny, Tatarstan Republic, in a household where the family all sang and played music together. Her mother’s father played the button accordion, the bayan, and her mother, a teacher and librarian, was a professional singer of Russian art songs. Polina learned those songs and later became her mother’s accompanist on piano. Her father, a university professor and computer programmer, took Polina to her first Klezmer concert in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, which encouraged her to join the youth club and, as she puts it, “start learning about being Jewish.” Her father’s parents spoke some Yiddish, but fled far away in Siberia and died when Polina was very young. Her father was one of the founders and fully involved in the Jewish community in their hometown, and although he does not himself perform, he always loved and appreciated music. He watches her online concerts in Naberezhnye Chelny, where the family still resides, “and loves that I have a connection to Yiddish music.”

Polina’s maternal grandfather, Ivan Skovoroda, was not Jewish, but rather of Cossack/Ukrainian heritage and a World War II veteran. He was shaped by the Russian song and classical music traditions, and inspired Polina to perform Russian art music. “He played music constantly – the button accordion, the bayan, and the piano, and I also sang,” she remembers. “I loved listening to him and exploring his music books.”

Polina’s latest production is a CD (150 Voices) of her Russian and Yiddish choirs, and her most recent production is a CD (Sing With Me: Russian & Yiddish Song Sessions Online), in which she presents newly-composed material that she bases in the history and culture of Yiddish musical composition and song. She also has a robust internet presence, with a YouTube page featuring her performances and interviews, as well as a weekly interactive educational Zoom program “Sing with Me: Russian & Yiddish Sessions Online,” in which she explains the dynamics of classic Yiddish and Russian tunes one song at a time. She currently conducts five choirs in the United Kingdom and United States that perform Russian and Yiddish folk and art songs connecting those two cultures; performances incorporate her newly-composed material that she bases in the history and culture of Yiddish musical composition and song. She also has a robust internet presence, with a YouTube page featuring her performances and interviews, as well as a weekly interactive educational Zoom program “Sing with Me: Russian & Yiddish Sessions Online,” in which she explains the dynamics of classic Yiddish and Russian tunes one song at a time. Polina’s latest production is a CD (JSPS005) of her a cappella Russian and Yiddish duets, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo. Listeners praise her music for its sweetness, exuberance, and with Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning Klezmatics, and herself as a duo.
SINGING IN YIDDISH, continued from previous page

that culture here and there across the world, but no home.” She also sees a great deal of stereotyping that presents Yiddish as too funny and shallow, making it difficult for people to grasp the richness and depth of the culture as a whole.

One of her favorite stories of audience reaction is her performing for Boris Yeltsin and his wife, Naina, back in her hometown in Tatarstan. She was then the soloist in a Jewish band that loved performing in Tatarstan, because it was opposed to mainstream Russian culture and supported minority cultures. In the capital, Kazan, the band was the center point of the whole community. The president of Tatarstan started coming to their performances and booking them as one of the ethnic bands of the region at all kinds of big public events. He learned a few words of their songs and liked to come on stage to sing them.

During one of the big local festivals in June, when people go into the fields and dress in bear costumes and sing and dance and eat and drink and perform, Boris Yeltsin, running for his second election to the Soviet presidency, appeared with his wife. The Yeltsins ate and drank with the locals, and listened to Polina’s band’s performance. Yeltsin came up to them afterwards, shaking everyone’s hands and saying “Good, well done, beautiful music.” His wife gave Polina a hug and a kiss, her eyes wet, and said, “This was so beautiful. The music was so beautiful.”

Polina’s development as a vocal artist is still nourished by her passion for the Russian art song, known as a “Romance.” This genre flourished in 19th century Russia, particularly in the salons and private homes of the upper and middle classes, but have not often been performed in Russia since — according to some critics, they are not nationalistic enough. Russian art songs rarely sound like folk music or Russian church music or village church bells. But for non-Russian audiences, this very universal quality makes Russian art songs especially appealing and, because of the beauty of their melodies, close to the Russian audiences, this kind of music was considered decadent, but people always loved it and still do.

Polina finds that the connection between Russian art songs and Yiddish songs goes mostly in one direction — Russian songs influencing Yiddish songs. “Aleyn in Veg,” one of the songs Polina likes to perform with her choral groups, is a good example of the overall Russian art song influence on Yiddish songs. Romances are, according to Polina, “songs that speak purely about the emotions, love and betrayal and the broken heart, and trust and nostalgia and death. We see a lot of parallelism between nature and human feelings — in folklore, folk songs, animals, mermaids, mystical creatures. But when we take these songs to the stage, to more classical music, we think big, so the Romance becomes our association with the stars and clouds, the big winds, the whole universe. It’s all about emotion and passion and the open expression of these feelings.”

Yiddish songs — including those composed in the US — are similar to this type of art song in the sense that they are more classically composed for a stage setting, not for singing at home with the family. The Romance song influence on Yiddish music appears in theater songs, cantorial music, and songs sung by organizations like Workers Circle and the Bund.

Polina summed up her devotion to gathering people to sing together. “Music binds people even when they have contrasting views. It’s possible, it’s doable. I don’t have to talk about ideology, or express any views at all. I just think about love, about joy, about human feelings and connections. And that enables people to come together.”

During our interview, she sang a song, setting a poem to music that she composed. “It’s about a ship sailing to warmer lands with beautiful, yellow sand and people welcoming you. You can interpret it as going home to Israel, or you can interpret it as just going home. I prefer to think of it as coming home to your inner self.”

Tela Zasloff is a writer, editor and English professor living in Williamstown. Her publications include a book about a pastor-rescuer in Vichy France during WWll. the story of her grandmother who emigrated to the US from czarist Russia, doctors caring during the and her recollections of living in Tashkent with her husband in the 1960s. She is currently learning Yiddish and Russian songs from Polina’s Zoom classes.

Note: The video version of this interview can be seen on YouTube https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=1GzLotMfik7&feature=youtu.be, during which Polina sings and accompanies herself on the piano.
Unlikely Juxtapositions and Unexpected Contradictions
Frank London’s Ghetto Songs explores music made inside walls around the globe

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

Call it a sign of the times – when the press release about trumpeter Frank London’s new record Ghetto Songs hit my inbox, I jumped to the conclusion that the co-founder of The Klezmatics had put together a project about the pandemic, a musical reflection about the circumscriptions that fear of COVID-19 has imposed upon our minds, bodies, and spirits.

Actually, London told me when we spoke in early April, the pandemic had “absolutely zero” to do with Ghetto Songs, a project with a global focus that germinated around five years ago, when the peripatetic bandleader had no inkling that his customarily breakneck globetrotting schedule would ever be curtailed.

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London moved the initial concept to the backburner while he collaborated with Beit Venezia in scoring a 2016 production of The Merchant of Venice, which was staged in the former ghetto’s main square, where some of the play’s action transpires. Two years ago, he revisited the ghetto songs idea for a music festival hosted by Germany’s Elphilharmonie Hamburg, “the most prestigious and amazing arts center in Europe, I would argue,” he says. The crack ensemble of American and European musicians and singers he assembled performed again at a concert in Venice, and would have toured during the summer of 2020 but for the pandemic. London retreated to his home in downtown Manhattan, spending a year unprecedentedly off the road, cooking and eating big meals with his family and immersing himself in “the Film 101 class that I never got to take because I was studying music.”

Last September, London was contacted by Beit Venezia’s Shaul Bassi and informed that the organization had received funding that had to be spent before the end of the year – could he pull together a recording based on the ghetto songs idea? “I said, ‘You know I can,’” London remembers. “That’s always been my credo– give me a budget and a deadline, and we’re good to go.”

As my mentor, Ben Mandelson, used to say: “Forward in all directions!” The conceptual challenge London faced was how to winnow down an imposing amount of research into a musically coherent recording that fulfilled his vision of “This is the idea of a 21st-century vocal recital, except with a common through theme. It’s really about the voice.”

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from the two shows in Europe that an audience was able to understand what the band was up to when it segued from Donny Hathaway’s 1970s soul classic “The Ghetto” into Jewish-Italian composer Solomone Rossi’s churchy 17th century madrigal “O dolcezze amarissime.”

Unlikely juxtapositions and unexpected contradictions are precisely what drive ‘ghetto’ music, contends London. “Ghetto borders are porous,” he says. “On the one hand, they limit the discourse between inside and outside – that’s the whole point of the walls – but on the other hand, especially in regard to things like music, people inside are aware of what’s happening outside, and outsiders are aware of what’s happening inside.”

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FRANK LONDON, continued from previous page

to disparate musical styles – the Europeans who played alongside him in the original concerts were not available due to pandemic travel restrictions. These musicians had to express the music’s feeling and intention on instruments not necessarily associated with the original compositions.

In part because nobody was out on the road touring, London was able to enlist a stellar roster of studio musicians – modern Jazz guitarist Brandon Ross, percussionist Kenny Wollesen, cellist Marika Hughes, bassist Gregg August, and Klezmer accordionist Ilya Shneyveys. “You know some people get very defensive when they’re put in a situation to which they’re not familiar,” London says. “All the musicians I have are so strong that they actually look forward to the challenge of trying to do something differently. They have to have incredible virtuosity and range.”

He adds: “Obviously we’re not trying to imitate any of these musics. We’re not trying to be an authentic cover band and do each [song] exactly according to the way it’s [usually] done. I think that’s what helps unify what otherwise could be a really disparate, all-over-the-map recording.”

As fine as the musicianship on the recording, London says that Ghetto Songs is ultimately a showcase for great singing. “It often takes me a while to understand something that I’m doing, and I think that if I were to contextualize it now, I would say this is the idea of a 21st-century vocal recital, except with a common through theme. It’s really about the voice.”

Highlights on the album are the duets by Lebanese-American tenor Karim

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An Unlikely Trio: Artists, Torah, and COVID-19
By The Creative Beit Midrash of Hevreh / Special to the BJV

As the days of pandemic isolation grew from one month to two months to now one year plus, a question keeps arising. It’s a question heard in almost every virtual group meeting on Zoom, among our spiritual leaders, in the political arena, and in the workplace: “What have we learned from COVID that will forge a positive outcome on how we move forward in the future?”

Some of these outcomes and positive impacts have already taken form. At Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, it was the inception of the Creative Beit Midrash. A bi-monthly hijab is a house of study. “Beit” is the Hebrew word for “house.” “Midrash” comes from the Hebrew root word meaning “to seek out...to dig for meaning.” Add artists of all genres and, voila, you have Hevreh’s Creative Beit Midrash.

The Creative Beit Midrash concept was the brainchild of two artists, Heidi Katz and Larry Frankel, who chafed at the reality that their creativity was still being locked away from the rest of the world. Being inspired by what was going on in the world while also connecting with other artists, they hoped, would be inspirational to all who wanted to participate. Over these many months of COVID-19, it was too easy to get locked into looking inward, not outward, which could sometimes lead to mental blocks on an artist’s urge to express feelings through art.

Katz and Frankel wondered what might happen if the Hevreh community came together to study with creative intent. Perhaps the interaction with others could awaken people’s imaginations in new and different ways. So they brought their idea to Rabbi Neil Hirsch, and Creative Beit Midrash quickly became a Saturday morning staple at Hevreh.

The concept Katz and Frankel expressed was “to gather a group of people to explore the intersection of creative and spiritual lives.” an idea that enthralled Rabbi Hirsch, who is himself an artist, photographer, and writer.

Katz recalls: “The idea was to produce and talk about art based on Jewish themes or interwoven with Torah study, using Zoom as the meeting room. An invitation was sent out in early May 2020 to the congregation, inviting all creative souls who felt the need to interact with others to form a virtual group to “explore the intersection of our creative and spiritual lives.”

The initial response brought ten artists into a Zoom space at 8:30 a.m. every second Shabbat. Original participants included visual artists, photographers, songwriters, and writers/poets. Each brought their special gift to share with the others. The group has grown, and each meeting has at least 12 participants, including a dancer who recently joined.

As Larry Frankel observes: “The insights we give each other while discussing our work is both intuitive and informative. What is of even greater importance is that we are supportive of one another and the work we do.”

Creative Beit Midrash has developed into a safe haven for the artists. Relationships based on trust have grown among the participants. Each Creative Beit Midrash includes exploring a Jewish text or concept through the artworks that the participants have created. No critiques are offered – just the experience of sharing and gleaning new insights into one’s own work and appreciating the

FRANK LONDON, continued from previous page

Sulayman Shinnawi the winner of the 2019 Best Classical Solo GRAMMY award and Svetlana Tsvetae Kondish, a versatile cantor steeped in Yiddish song, as well European classical, sacred, dramatic, experimental, and folk music. They have fun with the traditional Judaeo-Venetian “Tufa Tuba,” set to jaunty music composed by London, and capture the North African feel of “Nirdei Naka Rofe,” a traditional Jewish Moroccan melody (with text by 17th century kabbalist, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Musa) that builds in intensity over eight hypnotic minutes.

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BEIT MIDRASH, continued on next page

Rebekah Jordan, Channet. “I painted this piece while working on a series of images focused on leaf veins. I started thinking about the ways leaves model how we carry energy and share connections – what extends our reach and what gets in our way. This piece tries to capture the feeling of that flow.”

Sulayman Shinnawi (Felmay Records) is available on all streaming platforms and a CD version can be purchased from online retailers.

Ghetto Songs (February, Records) is available on all streaming platforms and a CD version can be purchased from online retailers.
BEIT MIDRASH, continued from previous page

creative souls of colleagues. Those viewing the art sometimes see things in the works that the creator did not even realize are there. It is an exciting process that fosters a trusted community, a community that is always open and welcoming to new participants. Creative Beit Midrash has become such an important part of each of the artists’ lives that some participants also spend time together on Saturday mornings when the group doesn’t “offically” meet through Hevreh. In their separate studios, each artist explores new techniques or creates a new work. Participants inspire one another, get to know one another, and support one another through the creative process.

The influence of Judaic traditions is evident throughout the works — sometimes subtle, sometimes overt. Participants explore themes of social justice; of appreciating and saving the environment; valuing family; and of recognizing the bravery and agony of frontline pandemic workers emerge in many works. These themes all reflect the Torah teachings that birthed the concept of tikun olam, repairing the world. As the scientist-artist in the group declared: “Creation helps combine today with action.”

When interviewed for this article, Creative Beit Midrash participants were asked a series of questions. The similarity among the responses was remarkable. People often think that artists create alone, but the Creative Beit Midrash proves that for many artists, that is not so. Hearing how others perceive one’s work is cathartic and inspirational to an artist. Describing one’s creative process and what inspired a particular work allows the artist to see deeper into their own work. Participants’ explanations of their initial interest in the group aligned with the intentions of Heidi Katz, Larry Frankel, and Rabbi Hirsch in starting the

Heidi Katz, Mizrach. “Much of my work inspired by the Creative Beit Midrash during the months of COVID has explored notions of time and space, including directionality. Finding my own center, as well as my place of being, has been a physical and emotional challenge. I often think that artists create alone, but the Creative Beit Midrash proves that for many artists, that is not so. Hearing how others perceive one’s work is cathartic and inspirational to an artist. Describing one’s creative process and what inspired a particular work allows the artist to see deeper into their own work. Participants’ explanations of their initial interest in the group aligned with the intentions of Heidi Katz, Larry Frankel, and Rabbi Hirsch in starting the group – artistic people need to interact with others to keep their creative juices flowing.

Getting together in the studio, as one member observed, “brings different ideas and angles, which is refreshing and echoes my own feelings about my work, which is validating.” Another participant, a writer/author said: “When I sign onto Zoom on Shabbat morning, suddenly I start getting busy in my studio…Thank you! Thank you!”

So what’s next for Creative Beit Midrash after COVID, when meeting in person is again the norm? This question got a unanimous response from the group – their intention is to continue studying and working together, and also show the world what they have accomplished during their time together. Suggestions include creating an Artists’ Gallery at Hevreh; compiling the works and printing a coffee table book; in-person visits to other artists’ studios; and even exhibiting the work as a group in a local gallery.

As Rabbi Hirsch reflects: “Being in community and conversation with other artists is moving. We have given one another a sacred trust, which allows each to explore our creative minds, supporting one another in our own individual creative processes. For someone who spends his career building community, it feels good to find myself in community.”

Creative Beit Midrash may have started during COVID, but it certainly will not end with COVID.

I Pray

By Jadwiga Brown

I pray. I pray silently. I pray aloud
Always my prayer is the same —
I pray that I may use my gifts each day
To make our world more whole

I pray for goodness, peace and justice
I pray that when we look at a person
We see a heart, a soul, not skin tones,
Not disabilities, not whom one loves

I pray that we will learn to truly listen
To people, even those we do not know
I pray we do not turn our backs on others
Instead, we offer an open hand to all

I pray that each of us will choose
To be better, more loving, more caring
I pray that we see beyond ourselves
Chanting “Hallelujah” to our differences

I pray you will allow me to sit by you
To share your prayers with me
I pray that we can journey together
On this beautiful road we call life

Written March 1, 2021, as part of Hevreh of Southern Berkshires’ Creative Beit Midrash