

SHALOM

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Shabbat Across America: Please join us for the 2016 Community Shabbat

By Amanda J. Hornberger

On March 4 our community will gather for its annual community Shabbat service and dinner. This year our community Shabbat will be part of Shabbat Across America — a night of unity for Jews all over the United States.

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom in Wyomissing will serve as the host for this

year's Community Shabbat. The service starts at 6 p.m. followed by a kosher dinner catered by Boscov's.

The cost for the dinner is \$20 per adult, with children and youth 18 and under eating for free. We want all community members to be able to attend, so anyone needing financial assistance to attend should contact Sari

Inclendon at 610-921-0624.

Last year more than 170 community members attended our community Shabbat on a cold February night. Our hope is that even more people will join us on March 4 for this special experience. Coming together as a community for this annual event is a special treat for community members

of all ages!

Invitations listing the full dinner menu will be mailed, but you can RSVP via post or by calling Brenda at 610-921-0624. The RSVP deadline is Feb. 24.

For questions or additional information please contact Amanda at amandah@jfreeding.org or 610-921-0624.

Home is where the heart is: An interview with Chaim Peri

Chaim Peri's very name means "fruitful life" in Hebrew, and he has taken that connection to heart. For more than 30 years, Chaim has brought new meaning to the word "life" for thousands of young people around the world who were uprooted or from dysfunctional homes, giving them a long-term home base at Yemin Orde, the Orde Wingate Youth Village in Israel.

The children living at the Yemin Orde Youth Village are often refugees and come from the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. Most have suffered trauma from abandonment, separation from their families, or neglect. Many are at risk of dropping out of school, turning to crime or becoming the victims of violence or homelessness.

At Yemin Orde, each of these children find a home, a family, and a future. The program is supported by local dollars through the Israel Now campaign of the Jewish Federation of Reading.

"There is something that teenagers need like the air they breathe — despite the overt messages to the contrary that they often send us," Chaim said. "It is the presence of parents, or parental figures, in their lives. Deep down, they feel they deserve to be raised by human beings for whom being a parent is one of the central tasks of their life."

"Our emphasis is not on restoring parental authority," Chaim said, "but on restoring parental presence — that hard-to-define elixir that provides teenagers with a sense of guidance as to how to live and be, and the knowledge that the generation that brought them into the world has not abandoned them."

Tellingly, once people graduate



Chaim Peri with Yemin Orde students

from Yemin Orde, they often return "home" to Yemin Orde to visit or to spend weekends or holidays, serving as role models for the younger children at the village. Chaim has played an integral role in fostering this strong sense of community.

"The graduates of Yemin Orde over the years have been my main inspiration to continue and to broaden the scope of our work," Chaim said. "I always maintain that being raised in a reasonable home and community is preferable to even the best and most prestigious boarding institutions."

The successful model that Chaim has created at Yemin Orde has been integrated into 20 educational institutions throughout Israel, shared by all sectors of Israeli society: Jews and Arabs alike.

"I hope to see each Village Way hub serving as a beacon of hope and wholeness in its area," Chaim said. "I would like to see it expanding beyond the borders of Israel; making an impact on educational communities in the Middle East and throughout the world."

In 1998, Chaim received one of the very first World of Children Humanitarian Awards for his dedication to troubled youth at Yemin Orde. In a recent interview with the World of Children, Chaim discussed why education is so vital for a child's well-being, and why he keeps doing this work:

What do you think is the number-one challenge you face serving children in need?

Youth at risk tend to adopt a narrow, self-centered view on life, either because it makes them feel more secure when everything is in flux, or because they have not been exposed properly to the cultures and needs of others. It can be quite challenging to help them open up, or as we call it, "plant the world in their hearts."

What are some of the challenges you face when working in developing countries?

In developing countries there tends to be what I call the "invisible glass ceiling." It is a deeply ingrained doubt that educational processes can truly transform a child's life. This state of mind stems from the educators' personal experience,

creating a negative intergenerational transfer. Combined with the rigidity of local educators' practice, this can strangle the great human spirit that hides in every child. Yet once the barrier is broken, the sky is the limit.

Where do you see Yemin Orde Educational Initiatives going in the next 10 years?

I hope to see each Village Way hub serving as a beacon of hope and wholeness in its area. I would like to see it expanding beyond the borders of Israel; making an impact on educational communities in the Middle East and throughout the world.

What does it mean to you to win a World of Children Award?

I am grateful that my lifetime experience is cherished and can increasingly become a source of guidance to more educators. This, I hope, will allow more children to be exposed to the universal and humane quality of our philosophy and its effective practice.

On Nov. 6, Chaim was honored in New York City with the 2014 World of Children Alumni Award along with five other extraordinary change makers for children.



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a leader in new
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**2016 totals
as of Jan. 8**

**Jewish Community
Campaign
\$141,911**

***Includes transfers from
Donor Advised Funds**

Introducing the LIFE and LEGACY program

By Richard Nassau
Development Director

The Jewish Federation of Reading has been accepted to bring the Harold Grinspoon Foundation's LIFE and LEGACY program to Reading/Berks County. LIFE & LEGACY promotes after-lifetime giving. The program is sponsored locally by the Jewish Community Foundation of Central PA; partnering with the Grinspoon Foundation to implement this transformative program in our area. As a participant, the Jewish Federation of Reading will assist donors, along with area synagogues and agencies, to develop Jewish legacies and secure our



Jewish future.

Legacy gifts have always been part of our culture. Remember the story from the Midrash of a man planting a fig tree. His reply when asked if he expected to see the fruits of his labor, "As my ancestors planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who come after me."

LIFE and LEGACY is about the donor. It focuses on their values and their beliefs. It is designed to ensure all legacy gifts reflect the donor's interests. It is a proven program. From 2012 to 2015, LIFE and LEGACY has been introduced in 21 communities throughout the U.S. During this period over 5,800 legacy commitments have been secured. The estimated value of these commitments is more than \$224 million in future gifts for the Jewish community.

These 5,800 legacies, both large

and small, are helping sustain and transform Jewish communities in new ways. Legacy gifts have been made establishing outreach programs for young Jewish mothers and their families. Donors have created legacies that will provide camp scholarships for children to attend Jewish overnight camps for the first time. Legacy gifts have helped develop new exchange programs that are connecting local professionals with their counterparts in Israel.

Federation's mission is dedicated to the well-being and continuity of the Jewish people. One way we accomplish this is through the use of permanent funds that provide resources for the entire Jewish community. By participating in LIFE and LEGACY, Federation gains access to a wealth of legacy resources, experts, and training. This access

significantly increases our capacity to assist community leaders, families, synagogues, and agencies in creating permanent legacy gifts.

LIFE and LEGACY supports the partnership between the donor and the community. It is not designed to benefit only one organization. Legacy gifts are usually made through a bequest in a Will as an after-lifetime gift. Other communities participating in the program have found that on average, donors are making legacy commitments to multiple organizations.

LIFE and LEGACY is transforming Jewish communities. The results are a stronger Jewish present and a vibrant Jewish future.

For more information about LIFE & LEGACY please contact me at richardn@jfreeding.org.

Reading native takes leading role in regional Jewish program

Rebecca Robinson, a Reading native, recently joined the Jewish Community Foundation of Central Pennsylvania in Harrisburg as the Director, Community and Donor Relations, functioning as Program Director for the new LIFE & LEGACY program.

Rebecca will work closely with the Jewish Federation of Reading and 13 other participating Jewish organizations throughout Central Pennsylvania to implement the program in each community.

LIFE & LEGACY, developed by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, promotes after-lifetime giving to benefit Jewish agencies, synagogues, social

service organizations, schools, and other Jewish entities. The Jewish Community Foundation of Central PA is sponsoring the program; partnering with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation to implement this transformative program in our area.

As a LIFE & LEGACY program participant, the Jewish Federation of Reading will have access to legacy resources, along with increased capacity to assist local synagogues and agencies in securing legacy gifts.

Rebecca brings enthusiasm and passion for Jewish causes to her work. While growing up and as an adult, Rebecca worked and volunteered in Reading, Federation and JCC environments. She participated in the MASA program in Israel for a year. A graduate of Siena College, Loudonville, N.Y., she is a Presidential Scholar, Kappa Delta Pi – International Honor Society.

Rebecca was asked about the influence of the Reading Jewish community on her. "Allowing the central

Pennsylvania community to thrive for years to come is so important to me because the Jewish community that I had growing up helped shape me into the person I am today," she said. "Not only did the Jewish Federation in Reading aid me with scholarships, they also gave me the ability to grow and develop into a well-rounded person."

She understands the importance of legacy gifts, saying, "Allowing other people to experience the love and support of this Jewish community for years to come is what motivates me to work hard and make this program a huge success and integrate it into the fabric of the community. Joining this initiative is truly invigorating. By reaching out to our loyal members who support our synagogues and agencies now and asking them to remember those causes they care about in their wills, we will secure the Jewish community and ensure that it is here for the next generations to enjoy."

"Working in the Central Pennsylvania region has been truly inspiring. The excitement about the LIFE & LEGACY Program is contagious. Community members are buzzing about the importance of participating. It is so energizing to me to work with such enthusiastic people. I know that the LIFE & LEGACY Program is imperative to Jewish Communities all over the country. Jewish communities that have participated have received millions of dollars in commitments by donors who are now including Jewish causes in their wills as a result of the program. I feel very honored and lucky to be a part of such an inspiring initiative!"

For more information about LIFE & LEGACY and about how you can be part of creating a secure Jewish future, please contact Richard Nassau at the Jewish Federation of Reading richardn@jfreeding.org or Rebecca Robinson at Rebecca@pajewishendowment.org.



Rebecca Robinson

Something good is happening in 'Bomb Shelter Capital'

Israel's southern city of Sderot, located less than a mile from the Gaza border, is an experience in contrasts. Though the city's motto since electing Mayor Alon Davidi in 2013 has been "Something good is happening in Sderot", the city is still best-known as the "Bomb Shelter Capital of the World" after having to reinforce every home, playground and bus stop against the constant barrage of Qassam rockets fired at the town since 2001 from the Gaza Strip.

With a population of about 25,000, 95 percent are presumed to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), caused by the incessant attacks. However, with relative calm settling over Sderot since the end of Israel's 2014 conflict with Gaza, the city is taking positive action to create a future for its citizens.

Meir Panim, supported by local dollars through the Jewish Federation of Reading's Israel Now campaign, is one of the city's partners in the quest to bring normalcy and stability to the area.

Though the charity organization is best known for its soup kitchens throughout Israel, in Sderot the needs are even greater than providing food, notes Goldie Sternbuch, Director of Overseas Relations for Meir Panim.

She adds that children need the most help saying that "especially for children from struggling homes and difficult living situations, they need caring mentors and positive experiences and activities to round out



their lives in order to build a future."

In contrast to the city's past "victim" attitude, today Sderot focuses on helping citizens learn to repair and heal the community and themselves. Long-term projects and programs implemented by Mayor Davidi and the municipality are underway, including projects focused on Sderot's youth.

"For the nearly 2,000 teenagers between the ages of 13-18 years old living in Sderot running from rocket fire their entire lives, part of their identity is trauma and poverty," says Daniel Berkeley, manager of the Sderot Youth Department. "Everyone needs healing therapies, healthy distractions, nutritious food and a safe shelter."

In response to this need, the municipality is providing Meir Panim with two buildings to be used as youth clubs. "A large part of the Meir Panim budget goes towards funding youth programs to provide hope for a better future," Sternbuch explains. "Meir Panim presently funds five youth clubs in Israel and we are adding these two to our list."

With the majority of Sderot youth

coming from disadvantaged homes, compounded by PTSD, the need for a nurturing environment is clear. Meir Panim is investing approximately \$296,000 into making the Sderot youth clubs welcoming and safe.

The first round of work is due to begin on the already active above-ground center, called TikvaHope. This building houses two bomb shelters on its premises, a kitchen, and a computer lab.

"Youth centers attract children and parents who cannot afford extra-curricular activities," shares Berkeley. "Without these centers, kids would be wandering the streets doing nothing or worse."

The municipality is funding the costs of Youth Department supervision, administrative support and rent. The additional costs of running the program, including meals, comes from donations made to Meir Panim.

During Operation Protective Edge, teens and young adults from the Meir Panim youth organizations volunteered in shelters and with young people to run programs and organize needs.

"These teens ended up going to neighboring Beer Sheva to advise, train, and strengthen peers based on their own experiences. That is the self-confidence we strive to achieve through the TikvaHope youth clubs," says Berkeley.

The Sderot youth centers are located just around the corner from the city's high schools. The are open three

days a week, operating during after-school hours until 10:30 pm. Everyone is welcomed with no question asked. Once a week, the facilities are used for elder programming.

Sandwiches, snacks, fruits and vegetables are provided. Extra-curricular activities and coursework including music and art, ecology and environmental science, computer lab training as well homework assistance are available. Educational programs on drugs, alcohol and safe sex are run by professionals to limit at-risk behavior.

The volunteer staff come from the IDF and the local Sapir College. The college students create and run educational programs relating to health, fitness, cinema, sports, and holiday activities. There is also ongoing tutoring help by both the college students and teen peers.

An ecological vegetable garden is already growing. Teens at TikvaHope, with the help of their mentors, have built a working fish pond and animal habitats for the purpose of establishing an animal-therapy program.

Andi Franklin, the wife of William Franklin, President of the Jewish Federation of Reading, comments, "It is a privilege to help and be connected to Meir Panim and the great services that they provide throughout Israel."

She adds, "I am really impressed to see the community working as a team with teens, college students and other professionals to nurture children and give them a great future."

From the President's Desk

A short but sweet trip to Israel

By William D. Franklin
President

Although it was a too short eight-day trip to Israel, I was able to visit family and friends and provide physical support during the current period of increased terrorist attacks.



The highlight was a day trip Andi and I took down to a Golani military base on the Gaza border. Carole Robinson, Beth Caster, and Rabbis Michelson and Lipsker had their schoolchildren create Chanukah greeting cards, which Andi had taken to the Golani's 13th Brigade, The Silent Wolves, prior to my arrival. They were greatly touched by their connection with our Reading Jewish community and were still talking about it a week later when we brought them 36 boxes of chocolate rugalach from the Marzipan Bakery in Jerusalem's shuk. The "sweetness" of the moment was warm and wonderful.

It is good to be back in Reading working with you to further nurture our Jewish community and our connections with the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds.



Bill and Andi Franklin with members of the Golani 13th Brigade in Israel.

I was reminded, while reading Daniel Gordis' book on Menachem Begin for our Israel Book club, that Israel continues to be an island of refuge for Jewish people everywhere in a world of enduring anti-Semitism. We may have different opinions on the state (pardon the pun) of

Israel and its actions; however, we hope that through increased connections and interactions, we and our Israeli family can continue to support the important items on which we agree and through open dialogue, better understand and work out our differences.

As per my photo in last month's *Shalom*, your JFR staff and I will continue to stand "on our heads" to support and provide connection within our Reading Jewish community and with Israel and world Jewry.

Thank you.

When winter comes, can spring be far behind?

By Larry Rotenberg
Chairman
(With apologies to Shelly)



The geese are finally flying South
The wind is howling coming from the North

As we prepare the Feast of Tu B'Shvat

We yearn to see the trees sprout forth their growth

Trees are here to give us shade and fruit

And long before we had tree huggers here

We learned to love and cherish every root

And hold the produce of the Earth forever dear

Tu B'Shvat is the Chag Lailanot
And we are stewards of this Earth only a while

So let us save what we cannot

Allow to vanish from this earthly plot

To plant a tree in the Land of Israel
Is to make the desert ever smaller
We then can hear the songs of the birds

And follow the ibex to Eilat

Purim is a holiday for all,
Because we love to watch bad Haman fall

Tu B'Shevat is an orphan holiday.
That never will be final on Jeopardy

And so let's give a cheer for trees
That truly bring along both birds and bees

And promises of better things to come
When all the snow and wind is gone

For who cannot love the lore of Pesach

With its joy and matzo ball soup
And freedom from the slavery in Egypt

Followed by the birth of our new group

Abraham Lincoln's Jewish connection: The untold story

By Howard Blanck

Over the last 150+ years so much has been written about Abraham Lincoln that you would think no more could be possibly written or said. In spite of this, we still sometimes have trouble telling fact from fiction. With that said, we do know quite a bit of factual history of our 16th president. We know of his difficult childhood and marriage to Mary Todd, his law practice, his depression and his humor, his kindness and honesty and of course how he freed the slaves and saved the Union. We know all this and much more, but one area of Lincoln's life that has not received much attention on any level is his remarkable treatment of Jews.

In order to try to understand Lincoln in this regard, it is necessary to look at the times in which he lived. In the mid-19th century there was no such thing as political correctness, and in fact the language and thinking of this Victorian era identified people with their national origin and religion, often in an honorary way. For example, during the Civil War there was an Irish Brigade, Jewish Regiment, Orphan Brigade and a schoolteacher regiment. When blacks were finally allowed in the military they were referred to as United States Colored Troops and then later Buffalo Soldiers (an honorary title given to them by Native Americans).

Of course there was also bigotry along with the slavery question and ultimately the war itself.

Lincoln was born in Kentucky and growing up likely never met a Jew and had only heard of them through Bible stories. When he began his law practice he began to meet several Jews with the most notable being Abraham Jonas.

The two Abrahams had much in common besides their first names. Both were called Abe, both had family roots in England, both were postmasters and in the Illinois Legislature and both were known for their wit as well as being country lawyers, great orators and idolizing Henry Clay. For the only known time Lincoln referred to Jonas as "one of my most valued friends" (1). It's no wonder Lincoln felt this way as among other things, Jonas had a significant role in getting Lincoln elected president.

It should be made clear there was good and bad in both North and South both in general terms and pertaining to Jews. Lincoln changed much of the bad. For example, there was no Jewish clergy in the Army until Lincoln appointed Michael Allen as the first Jewish regimental chaplain. When Gen. Ulysses S. Grant ordered "Jew peddlers" out of his district during the war, Lincoln revoked the order.

Lincoln was never known to refer to any Jew in a negative manner. They were interchangeably called "Israelites", "Hebrews", and "Jews," with the third term sometimes taking anti-semitic tones. Here is an example: Early in the war, Lincoln placed George B. McClellan in command of the army. A good organizer, he was also slow, cautious and simply did not like Jews.

Although for different reasons, Lincoln nonetheless ultimately removed him from command. McClellan is quoted sometime after the war as follows: "We have Germans and Jews...but fortunately there are enough Christian Gentiles to make it pleasant for us and a few others to enable us to be quite independent of the sons of Jacob" (2).

Other generals and political leaders on both sides were in much the same camp including Northern Gens. Sherman and Butler and Southern Gen. Robert Rodes.

Other examples of positive Jewish influence in the war would include Jewish

Gen. William Mayer and his troops helping to put down the worst draft riots in American history in July 1863 in New York City (this was featured in the movie "Gangs of New York"). (3) Even the words in the Gettysburg Address "this nation under G-d were carefully worded not to exclude Jews" (4).

Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln used a Jewish podiatrist, printer, clothier and others for medical and business purposes but it went far beyond that. They regarded them as friends and associates and Lincoln extended many favors and pardons to them.

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SHALOM

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Next deadline, Feb. 5

Anti-Semitism in Europe focus of February film in Reading Jewish Film Series

By Amanda J. Hornberger

Anti-Semitism, immigration, radical Islam and modern-day Europe are the backdrop for "24 Days," the French drama that is the next film in the 2016 *Reading Jewish Film Series*. Based on real-life events, the film depicts the true story of the kidnapping of Ilan Halimi, a French Jew. Ilan's story shocked France and led to a national conversation on anti-Semitism.

The New York Times review of

"24 Days" describes the success of the film as it "conveys the emotional discord between the family's increasing despair and the calm methodology of law enforcement."

Our audience will have the added benefit of hearing from local law enforcement following the screening when Trooper David C. Beohm, Public Information Officer from the Reading Headquarters of the Pennsylvania State Police, will join us to discuss the film.

Trooper Beohm will explain hostage situations and police responses to situations similar to those depicted in the film and help add context to a film will stick with audiences.

Following the conversation with Trooper Beohm, there will be a dessert reception compliments of Sweet Street Desserts.

The Reading Jewish Film Series 2016 is sponsored by the Rubin Educational Fund and Fox Theatres. Tickets are

\$5 per film. All films will be shown on Wednesday evenings at 7 pm at Fox Berkshire, 800 Berkshire Boulevard in Wyomissing. Tickets can be purchased at the theater beginning at 6:30 p.m. the day of the screening. Cash and checks are accepted.

The remaining films for the *Reading Jewish Film Series 2016* are:

Feb. 10 — "24 Days"

March 16 — "Above and Beyond"

April 20 — "Run Boy Run"

Great Decisions series looks at major issues facing the world

By Amanda J. Hornberger

The rise of ISIS. The United Nations. Climate Change. Cuba and the U.S. The Koreans. These are just a few of the hot-button international topics that will be discussed at this year's Great Decisions

series at the JCC.

Moderated by local professors from Albright, Alvernia and PSU Berks as well as community members, Great Decisions is the country's largest discussion group on world affairs. Each week a different global

issue will be discussed by the group after reading the Great Decision Briefing Book and watching the related DVD.

Our group will be meeting on Monday mornings from 10:30 a.m. until noon at the JCC. The cost is \$35 per book or \$40

for two people sharing one book.

To register for Great Decisions and to order a copy of the Great Decision Briefing Book please contact Amanda at amandah@jfreeding.org or 610-921-0624.

Welcoming differences at a special PJ Library event

By Amanda J. Hornberger

Did you know that February is Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month? To mark this month our PJ Library community will be reading "The Mitten String," a book about a deaf woman and her child. PJ Library describes the book: Ruthie

loves to knit and to help people. When her family gives shelter to a deaf woman and her baby, Ruthie realizes there's a way for her to do both at once!

On Feb. 28 at 1 p.m., children through age 8 are welcome to come to the JCC to read "The Mitten String"

and do a knitting craft. We will also be coloring notes to send with mittens and gloves that will be donated to the local community in need. Community members are invited to drop off donations of mittens and gloves at the JCC throughout February.

We kindly ask for RSVPs by Feb. 26,

and we hope to see many of you there! The knitting activity is perfect for our older PJ Library readers!

Please RSVP to Amanda at amandah@jfreeding.org or 610-921-0624 by Friday, Feb. 26. For additional information or any questions please also contact Amanda.

JCC Israel Book Club: 'Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's soul'

By Moisey Schneider

In this book Daniel Gordis tells the story and life of Menachem Begin. It is very well-written and enormously interesting. Begin was born into war and never gave up the hope for the Jewish people, to whom he was deeply devoted. He changed the image of the "helpless" Jew who started to straighten their backs. His legacy was infinitely greater than most of us are able to bequeath. Begin fled the Nazis, suffered under the communists, fought the British and defended Israel against Arab armies. David Ben Gurion had accepted partition and declared statehood at the right moment. Without him Israel might not be. But getting the British to leave Palestine was Begin's accomplishment, which called for armed revolt and leading Beitar and Etzel fighters.

Gordis says the lengths to which Begin and his comrades from Beitar and Etzel went raised painful and ethical questions. However, after the brutal act of retaliation of hanging British soldiers, there were no more hangings of Jews in Palestine. At that time millions of Jewish children, women, and men were dying in Europe, and no one, not FDR, not Churchill, not even most American Jews did anything to help them. The British had sealed the shores of Palestine, the one piece of land that accepted Holocaust victims. Even the United States sealed its own shores, and ships filled with desperate Jews roamed the globe, searching for a place to stay,

but no one would have them.

Gordis described Menachem Begin as the most Jewish of Israel's prime ministers. Begin had a lot of disagreements with Ben-Gurion, especially when the Irgun brought the ship "Altalena" with armaments to Palestine. But in 1961 Ben-Gurion admitted "perhaps I was mistaken". Ben-Gurion also admitted, "If I knew Begin like I know him now the face of history would have been different".

Abba Silver, a leading American Reform rabbi, said, "The Irgun will go down in in history as a factor without which Israel would not have come into being." It was largely thanks to Begin that Israel avoided a civil war and did not descend into chaos as did the French.

When Begin was elected prime minister he was first and foremost a warm Jew who loved the Jewish people like no one else. He was the mastermind behind the Aliyah to Israel of Jews from Morocco, Ethiopia, and the Soviet Union, who dramatically changed Israel. The life and commitment of Begin urges us to look again at what he did and what he stood for and to imagine if we dare, the glory of a Jewish people recommitted to the principles that shaped this Jewish hero who stood in line with Maccabees, Masada fighters, Simon bar Kokhba and Warsaw ghetto fighters.

Daniel Gordis showed us that Begin is still the victim of campaigns waged against him by many for the Deir Yassin massacre. Begin denied that fighters from

Etzel killed so many innocent Arabs, but nobody believed him. Decades later even Palestinian historians would corroborate his claims.

What is striking is that Begin was called a terrorist by many British and Americans. This man became prime minister of Israel, made peace with Israel's most powerful enemy, Egypt, and went from the underground to the Oslo stage to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. When Saddam Hussein, as today's Iranian Ayatollahs, threatened to drown Israel in rivers of blood, Begin understood that a giant clock hangs above Israel and is ticking. He ordered the destruction of Osirak, Iraq's nuclear reactor, amid international outcry. Gordis admits that what would sadden Begin is the Jewish peoples' ability to be so intolerant of the messiness in its own unfolding history yet so understanding of that messiness in the actions of others. Begin understood that to love all humanity equally is to love no one.

Anti-Semitism has morphed over time into a deadly virus, anti-Israelism, which is prevalent in multicultural Europe and on American college campuses and is rising, as in pre-war Germany. However, thanks to Ben-Gurion, Begin and other Israeli leaders, Jewish people now have their own home where they can come and live. For anti-Semites this is not good. Even Jewish American leaders are criticizing Israeli politics. A false multiculturalism has permeated Europe and the U.S., but

Israel can hardly stand alone.

In *The New York Times*, columnist Thomas Friedman called Begin a fascist and said that "his fantasies about power were combined with a self-perception of being a victim." But Begin was not a fascist and strongly supported the rule of law. He had no fantasies about power, which he used only when necessary. His perception of being a victim was no illusion because he witnessed how many of our people were so easily destroyed.

Begin asked to be and was buried on the Mount of Olives next to his beloved wife Aliza and dear comrades-in-arms Feinstein, an Ashkenazi Jew; and Barzani, a Sephardic Jew, who committed suicide than rather than be executed by the British.

The book shows that the future of Israel and the Jewish people is in our hands, and if there is one eternal truth that flows through the life of Menachem Begin it is Hillel's admonition from the Ethics of Our Fathers; "If I am not for myself, who am I? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" At the end of the book Gordis underlines his fascination of his hero. Begin led a life of selfless devotion to the Jewish people, his people, and lived a life of great loyalty to the people into which he was born, to his wife of many years, and to Israel, the land he loved.

The Israel Book group will be meeting on Wednesday, March 9, at 7 p.m. to discuss Dennis Ross' book "Doomed to Succeed." Please plan on joining us.

LINCOLN

Continued from Page 3

The numbers tell a story. Lincoln is known to have had Jewish friends, 14 Jewish supporters and associates, 55 Jewish acquaintances and extended 48 pardons and appointments to Jews all during a time when they made up less than 1 percent of the population that generally did not like them (5).

Stereotypes die hard and one persistent one has been that all the bankers were Jews. Ironically, there was one Jewish banking firm, the Seligman Brothers, who disposed the

incredible sum especially for the time of \$200,000,000 in union war bonds that literally turned the tide for the north as far as finances were concerned (6).

President Lincoln was tragically assassinated on April 14, 1865, which was the fifth day of Passover in addition to being Good Friday. The age in which Lincoln had lived was a deeply religious one in which the hand of the Almighty was seen as moving in both North and South. It is no surprise therefore that Christian churches all over the country drew the comparison of Lincoln to

Christ and synagogues did much the same by comparing him to Moses. In fact, several rabbis suspended the holiday, and Yom Kippur hymns and chants were used as a measure of mourning and respect.

In this season of another political election it should be known we have had several presidents who have been beneficial to Jews. It seems worth remembering that in the end Lincoln really was a uniter, and his acts of just dealings and kindness not only with Jews but others, will no doubt continue to serve

as a model for many years to come.

1. Jonathan D. Sarna and Benjamin Shapell - Lincoln and the Jews A History, Thomas Dunne Books, An imprint of St. Martin's Press, New York, NY. 2015

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

4. Ibid

5. Ibid

6. Bertram W. Korn, Introduction by Allan Nevins - American Jewry and the Civil War, R.Bemis Publishing, Ltd. Marietta, Georgia, 1995

A poetry reading at the JCC

By Jennifer Hetrick

The Friendship Circle at the JCC enjoyed lunch, good conversation, and a poetry reading featuring volume one of "The Labors of our Fingertips: Poems From Manufacturing History in Berks County.

As a nice perk for chatting-minutes in the afternoon, several of the seniors are also poets of their own varieties. A few won honorable mention for poems they recently submitted to the annual Berks Encore poetry contest for seniors. and some of them had great questions about literature itself between sharing individual poems about what fellow seniors in Berks County remember about the jobs that were such a large part of their identities and daily living in the past.

One woman wanted to know how words could be poetry if they did not

rhyme, so we discussed the presence of line breaks, which is absent in prose, and the differences between classical versus contemporary poetry, as well as the benefit of not limiting anyone's expression of self, since poetry is a form of art. there are more kinds of poetry as well as styles and approaches to it than are talked about in the larger culture, and getting to share examples of these and how Berks County's poets as well as those from neighboring counties have skills in all different directions is truly a gift within this project. slam poetry served as just one newer genre mentioned.

We also discussed internal rhyme, which is used in John Heck's poem in the very middle of the fourth line in the second stanza. The way internal rhyme



is often accidental and also subtle gives it a unique and beautiful persuasion in language throwings.

Thank you to Carole Robinson for assisting with eye-scooping scenes for the day, too.



Tasty lesson in making hummus

By Marla Baksic

The cooking classes have been so interesting this past year at Chabad. I was truly excited in December when I learned to make hummus.

In the past, I usually bought hummus at the grocery store. I thought it would be so complicated to make but found out that it is really easy.

Each cooking class has been so innovative and most importantly a great way to socialize with everyone in the community

I hope some of you can join us at our Loaves of Love community challah bake on Feb. 21 at 2 p.m. as we make bread to feed our community's hungry.

Hope to see all of you soon.



Students perform play while learning about Food Pantry

Students from RCOS / KZ Religious School take part in a play while learning about the Food Pantry. Thanks to Sari Inclendon from Jewish Federation Family Service for the informative presentation.

BDS narrative rests on lies; telling the truth can defeat it.

By David Brog

Executive Director,
Maccabee Task Force

From a purely financial perspective, boycott, divestment and sanction campaigns on American college campuses have been a bust. No major American college has withdrawn so much as one dollar from the Israeli economy as a result of this movement. Campus divestment resolutions are merely recommendations from a small and often marginal group of student legislators. Thus far, most college administrators have politely declined the advice.

Yet those who would dismiss BDS as sound and fury miss its startling significance.

BDS has never been about stopping American investment in Israel today. This movement is focused on the far more ambitious goal of ending American support for Israel tomorrow. BDS supporters are working diligently to turn a generation of Americans against Israel and are quite happy to enjoy the fruit of their labor when these students run our government, media and corporations.

This goal is far more realistic than it may seem. Repeated polls show that while America as a whole has never

been more pro-Israel, this support drops dramatically as we move from older to younger generations. BDS is hardly the only reason for this decline. But it contributes to it while thriving in a student body already softened by biased media, hostile academia and a progressive movement that is increasingly embracing a nihilistic relativism.

The good news is that BDS is constructing a house of cards. Some of these cards are outright falsehoods about Israel. Others are merely gross oversimplifications of a complex reality. Pull out a card or two and the edifice falls. Thus we see BDS make lightening advances by slandering Israel with the right words to the right audiences. But then the burden shifts. Now they must hold their territory of lies. They must hide all evidence of Palestinian violence and repeated rejection of peace offers. They must erase all signs of Israeli moderation. The soft underbelly of BDS is the truth.

The mission of the Maccabee Task Force is therefore quite clear. To tell the truth about Israel. To tell it clearly. To tell it boldly. Most of all, to tell it repeatedly. All who seek to fight BDS must do the same.

The Maccabee Task Force recently sponsored a series of focus groups with

students from campuses facing active BDS campaigns. The students who participated knew very little about the conflict, yet most shared a vague sense that Israel is occupying Palestinian land. They were therefore often sympathetic to the idea of boycotts and other non-violent means of pressuring Israel to end this occupation. The BDS narrative has clearly percolated into their minds.

But then something interesting happened. These students were asked to read a series of statements responding to the BDS narrative. They read, for example, that Israel has made some quite serious peace offers to the Palestinians. They read that these offers were rejected, sometimes quite violently. They read that Israel's conflict with her neighbors is a complex one, and that it's hardly fair to place all of the blame for it on one side. In case after case, these students volunteered that these facts made them less sympathetic to the idea of boycotting Israel. What many previously perceived as a righteous stand against oppression suddenly felt more like an extreme effort to scapegoat Israel. And that's precisely what BDS is.

This claim, that the truth about Israel can defeat BDS, is no doubt

causing many jaded friends of Israel to roll their eyes. They're already certain that teaching such history will change nothing. They insist that the only way to defeat BDS is to first unseat Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. What they're saying, in so many words, is that the BDS narrative is fundamentally correct, and therefore only a dramatic change in Israeli policy can defeat it.

Yet such one-sided condemnation of Israel by her supporters rings just as hollow as that of her detractors. Israel's conflict with her neighbors is more complex than they care to admit. And our students are far more comfortable with nuance than they seem to realize. It takes thick ideological blinders to ignore decades of Palestinian rejection, terror, and downright hate. Most American students are not that far gone. They just want to do the right thing. And when it comes to what the right thing may be, they are still moved by facts and logic.

The truth we must share is neither right-wing nor left-wing. While we in the pro-Israel community are divided on so many issues, fighting BDS need not be one of them. Let us go forth and tell the truth. And let us tell it together.

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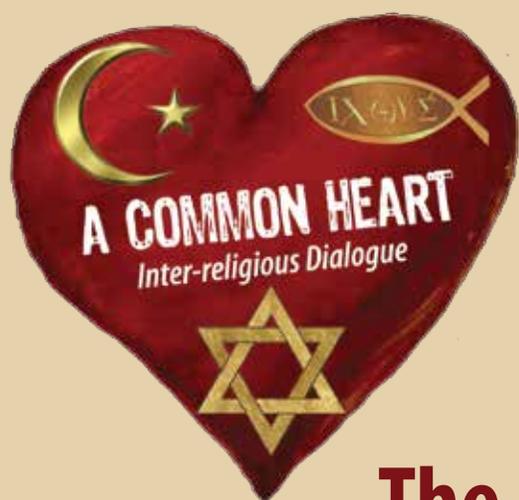
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Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom

Rev. Phillip Rodgers

St. Benedict Roman Catholic Church

Shaykh Yahya Rhodus

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The Evening's MC - **Jo Painter**

Information about the event can be found on our public Facebook page. Simply search for "A Common Heart" or call 610-796-8371 for more information (Holleran Center for Community Engagement - Alvernia University)

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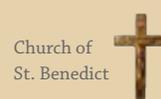
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Congregational News

A Jewish leap year

By Rabbi Yosef Lipsker

Chabad Center of Berks County

In a typical year, we would now be actively preparing for the arrival of the exciting and fun festival of Purim. We would also be casting anxious eyes on the calendar, gearing up for the "Big Clean" as Passover begins to appear on the horizon.

But this is not a normal year, it is a leap year in the Jewish calendar. All plans are now on hold for one extra month. Let's examine the history behind it.

A Jewish calendar year is primarily lunar based. This provides an accurate month, since it is linked to the reappearance of the moon every month. But it does not give us an accurate year — with all the seasons factored in — and we simply add up 12 months and declare it as a complete year.

The secular calendar, which is solar based, is more accurate in



relation to a full year, but its months are not. They are randomly selected to fit in with this yearly cycle.

A lunar month has just over 29½ days. Since it would be confusing to change the date after half a day, we combine two months, which gives us a figure of 59. We then create one month with 30 days, while the next one will have 29 days. This format is used throughout the year — one month 30, one month 29. The total number of days in the Jewish calendar year is: $29\frac{1}{2} \times 12 = 354$.

A full calendar year, however, has 365 days. This means the Jewish calendar year is annually dropping behind the solar one by 11 days. It wouldn't be such a big deal, except that we are instructed to ensure the integrity of the various festivals, particularly Passover, which must be observed in the spring. Some adjustment is in order; otherwise Passover will be celebrated in the middle of the winter!

This is where the extra month plays a prominent role. By inserting its 30 days, we peg back some of the deficit. Over 19 years, there are

seven leap years, and the calendars gradually adjust themselves until they are once again in perfect sync.

The question is: granted, we require an extra month every three years or so, but why was the month of Adar, the 12th month, specifically designated to be doubled? Why not add a new month at a different juncture in the calendar?

The answer is based on a verse from the Book of Esther — the Megillah. Recounting the story of Purim, it reminds us that it took place "in the 12th month — the month of Adar" [Esther. 3, 7 - and others]. The Megillah is emphatic and unequivocal that Adar is the 12th month.

If we introduce the additional month elsewhere in the year, all the subsequent months would be bumped forward, and Adar would not be month number 12. By adding the extra month when we do, Adar is always number 12.

There is something even more amazing. Though there are 13 months in a leap year, the extra month is not considered number 13. Adar 2 is also recognized as the 12th month, along

with Adar 1!

Why?

There is a tradition that the Purim story took place in a leap year and that the miracle happened in the second month of Adar.

The Megillah (as mentioned above) relates that the miracle took place in the 12th month. Since it was in the second month of Adar, we see that the second month (ostensibly number 13) is still considered as number 12.

There is one further reason for Adar being chosen to be doubled. The zodiac sign for Adar is fish (Pisces). One reason for this is that the Jewish people are compared to fish. Just as fish are dependent on water for their survival, so too the Jewish nation is dependent on Torah (compared to water that one can't live without) to survive.

Adar alone has a zodiac sign which is plural — 2 fish. All other months have signs which are single, but Adar has 2. The implication is clear — Adar is the month which is to be doubled, and which would be a harbinger of double blessings. Amen!

LOCAL CONGREGATIONS AND SERVICE TIMES

KESHER ZION SYNAGOGUE (610) 374-1763

Weekly services Saturdays: 9:30 a.m.; Tuesdays, 7:30 p.m.

Friday Evening Service – Please call for service information

REFORM CONGREGATION OHEB SHOLOM (610) 375-6034

Friday, Feb. 6: 6 p.m. Shabbat service.

Fridays, Feb. 13, 20 and 27: Shabbat service, 7:45 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 20: Tot Shabbat, 10 a.m.

CHABAD CENTER OF BERKS COUNTY (610) 921-0881

Saturday mornings: 9:30 a.m.; Friday evenings: 6:30 p.m.

CONGREGATION SHOMREI HABRITH

Local group heading to AIPAC

Keshet Zion's Rabbi Matt Abelson is organizing a delegation from Reading to attend the AIPAC Policy Conference March 20-22 in Washington. All members of the Jewish community, affiliated and unaffiliated, are welcome to join him.

The conference is the largest gathering of America's pro-Israel community. Share with 16,000 other pro-Israel activists, three powerful days packed with keynote speeches by American and Israeli leaders, demonstrations of ground breaking Israeli innovations, inspiring stories from families and individuals, and

many educational sessions and more.

The conference culminates with the opportunity for delegates to lobby members of Congress in support of legislation that enhances the relationship between the United States and Israel.

Members of the local delegation will have the opportunity to speak directly with Sens. Bob Casey Jr. and Pat Toomey, and Reps. Joseph R. Pitts or Ryan A. Costello or to their top aides.

For more information, contact Rabbi Abelson at 610-374-1763 or visit www.policyconference.org.

February ✨ Shevat/Adar



Shabbat Candle Lightings



Torah Portions

February 5
5:09 p.m.

February 5/Shevat 26
Mishpatim (Exodus 21: 1-24:18)

February 12
5:17 p.m.

February 12/Adar I 3
Terumah (Exodus 25: 1-27:19)

February 19
5:26 p.m.

February 19/Adar I 10
Tetzaveh (Exodus 27: 20-30:10)

February 26
5:34 p.m.

February 26/Adar I 17
Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35)

SAVE THE DATE



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Saturday, 2/20/16 at 10:00 am

Saturday, 3/19/16 at 10:00 am

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Tot Shabbat services are held
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Wyomissing, PA 19610
ohesholom.org

Members & non-members are invited! No registration is required.
Please call the Temple office, 610.375.6034, with any questions.

Ancient inscription points to Jewish past for early Christian site

The Times of Israel

When Haifa University archaeologist Haim Cohen called the head of the Golan Heights regional council Eli Malka in December, he said he had a Hanukkah present for him.

"The good news: We've found a new 1,600-year-old Jewish settlement on the shores of the Sea of Galilee," the archaeologist recounted in a phone interview with *The Times of Israel*. "The bad news: They haven't been paying municipal taxes."

Cohen's team recently unearthed a monumental Hebrew inscription at Kursi, on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee on the Golan Heights, providing conclusive evidence that the Roman- and Byzantine-era town mentioned

in the New Testament and Talmud was Jewish. Digs this month at the previously obscure site yielded a village with a large public building — possibly a synagogue — and an enormous inner harbor for large ships.

More impressive, however, were seven lines of Hebrew and Aramaic text carved into a large slab of imported Greek marble. It includes the words "marmaria," "amen," "the holy king" and "the merciful," researchers said.

Cohen was reluctant to reveal much about the inscription until experts had a chance to study the text more thoroughly. He did suggest, however, that "marmaria" could refer either to a type of marble, or — more intriguingly — "the rabbi of Mary."

Haggai Misgav, a Hebrew University

expert in ancient inscriptions who studied the slab on site, said the text was a standard kind of dedicatory text from a synagogue, dismissing as unlikely the possibility that it was from a Judeo-Christian house of worship.

The script used in the text was highly reminiscent of the Trumpeting Place inscription found at the base of Jerusalem's Temple Mount, suggesting the preservation of highly skilled Hebrew masons over the centuries. While it likely dates to around the 4th or 5th centuries CE, the village probably predates it by centuries.

Part of a Hebrew and Aramaic inscription on a marble slab found on the shores of the Sea of Galilee at the Byzantine Jewish site of Kursi. (University of Haifa)

The fact that it was carved into expensive stone, rather than embedded in a mosaic floor as was common in that period, was even more remarkable, Cohen said.

"There's been nothing like this before. We didn't know something like this existed," he said, calling the discovery of Kursi's Jewish history "an exceptional accomplishment."

The site is associated with the account in the Gospels of Jesus exorcising the Gerasene demoniac, casting the demons into a herd of pigs. Early Christians venerated the place and established a monastery there. The remains of the monastery were found in 1970 during the construction of a road, and excavated in the years following.

Nuclear research group appoints 3 Israelis to senior positions

Haaretz

Two years after Israel became a full member of CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research in Switzerland and home to the world's largest particle accelerator, three Israeli scientists have been appointed to senior positions in the center.

CERN's council approved the appointment of Prof. Eliezer Rabinovici as vice president of the institution. Rabinovici, on the faculty of the Racah Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as chairman of the Israeli Academy of Science's National Committee for High Energy Physics, has served for years as Israel's representative to CERN and has worked extensively to

strengthen Israel's scientific ties with the organization.

His appointment at this time is not sealed, because representatives of the 21 countries on the council must approve the appointment.

"I regard this as recognition of Israel's scientific importance, especially in a period that is not easy for Israel in Europe," Rabinovici told *Haaretz*. The two other Israelis appointed to senior positions are Prof. Yossi Nir and Eli Marzel.

Nir, who is dean of the Physics Faculty and head of the Center for Experimental Physics at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, was appointed a member of CERN's scientific

committee. Marzel, who is director general of the state comptroller's office, was appointed a member of CERN's oversight committee.

Neither of the latter two positions are salaried.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu congratulated the Foreign Ministry on his Facebook page for the appointments, saying that the hard work of quiet diplomacy had led to the three appointments.

Dozens of Israeli scientists are involved in particle acceleration experiments in Israel, but this is the first time Israelis have been appointed to official positions at CERN.

Israel was accepted as a member of

CERN in December 2013 with wall-to-wall support by the member countries, among other reasons due to behind-the-scenes diplomacy. It thus became the 21st member of the council and the first one outside Europe. In January 2014, CERN held a ceremony at which the Israeli flag was raised alongside those of the 20 European member countries. This marked the culmination of efforts that began as far back as the early 1980s.

The change in Israel's status costs Israel some 50 million shekels (about \$13 million) but it brings with it quite a few advantages, from prestige and scientific recognition to greater access to the most advanced research facilities and greater access for Israeli firms.

Sowing seeds of success on Ethiopian farms

Israel21c.com

Ethiopian farmer Nuri Awel was quite skeptical about the Israeli project Fair Planet, a nonprofit that gives smallholder farmers access to cutting-edge seed technology and shows them how to get the most from these seeds with minimal

changes to their traditional practices. Awel was so skeptical, in fact, that at first he was lax about following the training recommendations. But once he saw the quality of the new plants, he became an enthusiastic follower.

"His yield was fantastic and he sold

his tomatoes at excellent prices," reports Fair Planet founder Shoshan Haran. "Nuri doubled his annual income from his 1,000-square-meter plot and is using the money to fix his house and send his son to college. One year later, Nuri has tripled his plot, bought more seeds and is implementing everything we taught him."

One organization can have a profound effect on the cycle of poverty, says Haran, whose kibbutz upbringing instilled a strong sense of social awareness.

After earning her first degree in agriculture at the Hebrew University's Robert H. Smith Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment in Rehovot, she worked the fields on her Negev kibbutz for 12 years before returning for a doctorate in plant protection followed by a Fulbright post-doctoral fellowship at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

"When I came back to Israel in 1999 I joined Hazera, the largest seed company in Israel, as head of research collaborations and intellectual property," she tells ISRAEL21c. Then she headed the Trait Exploration and Discovery Unit, and after Hazera was bought by the French company Limagrain, she led its Genomic Expert Group.

After 11 years of developing seeds for feeding people and livestock, she realized that high-quality seeds could go a long way toward increasing agricultural productivity in developing countries. "Their tomatoes used to be small and soft. Now they are bigger and firmer with a longer shelf life... This is a life-changing opportunity, a tool to exit the cycle of poverty."

She approached Limagrain with an idea for a nonprofit to be managed by seed professionals. "I explained that I wanted access to their seeds and knowhow, and we'd do the work on the ground with the farmers." Limagrain agreed, so next she went to Hazera CEO Rami Dar to hand in her resignation. Dar provided Haran with a letter of intent in support of her new initiative.

"That was my first IP asset in Fair Planet. Then we got other seed partners on board to help us choose the right seeds for the local conditions of the farmers we work with. We have to consider soil, climate, plant diseases and local agricultural practices, for example."

Haran registered the nonprofit in Israel in 2012, taking on Alon Haberfeld as Fair Planet's technology manager. He holds a PhD in genetics and an MBA from the Hebrew University, was a research scientist at the government's Volcani Institute and was a plant breeder, product manager and marketing manager at Hazera Genetics. The team also includes Chairman Amnon Tamir, production and marketing specialists Erez Gozan and Avi Einstein, and lead adviser Orlando de Ponti from The Netherlands.

"We all worked on a voluntary basis for three years until we raised money," says Haran.

Fair Planet focused first on famine-stricken Ethiopia, in cooperation with the universities as well as local experts and the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture. Vegetables here are grown in open fields using basic traditional methods.

"Seed companies develop thousands of varieties every year for different conditions, and they share this information with Fair Planet so we can narrow down to five to 10 varieties from each company."

Ethiopian farmers working with Fair Planet can increase productivity more than five times and increase income up to eight times. "A bit of knowhow to support production helps them do it right with better seeds. And the quality of the produce is much better," says Haran. "Their tomatoes used to be small and soft. Now they are bigger and firmer with a longer shelf life, and can be marketed to a higher-end markets in a wider window of time. This is a life-changing opportunity, a tool to exit the cycle of poverty."

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Liberal Arabs developing culture of their own in Haifa

The New York Times recently reported on interesting developments in Haifa, where a hipster Palestinian culture is taking shape.

Though similar to Israeli counterparts in Tel Aviv, they have developed a distinctly Arab identity that is secular,

feminist and gay-friendly.

Arabs make up a fifth of Israel's population of 8 million. Unlike conservative Palestinian populations in other parts of the country, the *Times* reported, many in Haifa offer a striking secular counterpoint. It is easy for young, single people to

get out in this city on a steep coastal hill, with Jews tending to live on its heights and Arabs by the sea. The once working-class city of 280,000 has several universities and has embraced its diversity. The 30,000 Arab residents, around 10 percent of the population, include equal numbers of Muslims and Christians, and they are generally wealthier and better educated than Arabs elsewhere in Israel.

This makes Haifa a comfortable place for liberal Palestinians who want not only

to escape the constraints of conservative Arab communities but also to be among their own people. *The Times* noted that Haifa provides a refuge for liberal Palestinians who want not only to escape the constraints of conservative Arab communities but to be among their own people.

For some, the blossoming Palestinian scene in Haifa is reminiscent of the city during British rule, when a lively Arab cultural life flourished. Much of that ended in 1948 with the war in which Israel was established.

Jerusalem discoveries prove city's historic Jewish ties

JPost.com

Challenges to the inexorable connection of Jews to Jerusalem have been unequivocally disproved by archaeological discoveries, the chairwoman of the US's House Subcommittee on the Middle East & North Africa said on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in December.

The comments, made by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), represented a sharp rebuke to increasing international efforts to delegitimize Israel's connection to Jerusalem despite numerous relics recently unearthed proving an ancient Jewish presence there.

"For quite some time, there has been an effort at the United Nations to delegitimize the Jewish State of Israel, and to try to whitewash the Jewish peoples' historical and Biblical connection to Israel," said Ros-Lehtinen.

"Denying the historic connection of the Jewish people to Jerusalem is false. Amazing archaeological discoveries are frequently made that prove the roots of the Jewish people are in Israel."

The impetus for her address reportedly stemmed from an announcement of

the discovery of an unprecedented impression of King Hezekiah's royal seal from the First Temple period, dating back to 727-698 BCE.

The antiquity was unearthed during the capital's noted Ophel excavations, at the foot of the southern wall of the Temple Mount, under the direction of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Dr. Eilat Mazar.

"This marks the first time that a seal impression of an Israelite or Judean king has ever been discovered within the context of an archeological excavation," Ros-Lehtinen said on the House floor.

"It proves that not only is Israel the religious center for Jews, it is their ancestral and historic homeland."

Moreover, Ros-Lehtinen said that the recent archeological find, among many others which have illustrated Jewish heritage in the capital, led the congresswoman to plan an upcoming visit to Israel to see the discoveries for herself.

"I look forward to visiting the City of David in the near future, to see firsthand the rich history of the Jewish people," said Ros-Lehtinen, former chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Israeli relief team helps flood victims in Great Britain

Jewish Chronicle

Israeli aid volunteers were welcomed with open arms upon arrival in the UK in early January to assist flood victims, according to an IsraAID statement. Heavy rain and high winds battered England, Ireland and Scotland, causing devastating damage to many communities.

"The first team were greeted by locals with open hands and are now mapping the workloads which would include distribution of goods and gutting houses helping people repair their homes," said Shachar Zahavi, founding director of IsraAid.

A team of four IsraAID volunteers arrived in Leeds to survey the damage there and help residents with home repairs. The Israeli relief team also distributed food and warm blankets to those in need.

IsraAID has extensive expertise at gutting flood-damaged homes and helping to rebuild them. In July 2015, an Israeli volunteer team helped gut and fix some of the 375 homes in need of repair in Illinois

in the wake of an EF3 tornado that ripped through the state.

The Israel-based humanitarian relief agency has also partaken in US disaster relief following floods in Denver, Wimberley (Texas), and Detroit, hurricanes in Oklahoma, New York and New Orleans, and wild fires in Washington, among other sites.

"We have responded to 10 floods and tornado disasters in the US and when we saw what was happening to the UK in the news it looked worse than ever before. We wanted to show the community we would be there for them," Zahavi told the *Jewish Chronicle*.

Zahavi said another team of five Israeli volunteers left Israel today for the northern UK to help map the situation.

"Our volunteers will assist with the current effort being carried out and use our experience in these disasters to work out what more we can do and how," he told the *JC*.

Israeli biomed's novel technology could provide cure for diabetes

Israel 21c.com

In people with type 1 diabetes, the insulin-producing beta cells of the pancreas don't function properly. Daily injections or infusions of insulin are necessary to regulate energy-producing glucose absorption in all the body's cells.

Doctors know how to implant type 1 patients with donor islets full of healthy beta cells, but they cannot keep the transplanted cells from failing within a matter of days. Unfortunately, half of all transplanted patients are back on insulin injections one year later, and 90 percent revert to insulin dependency within five years.

Israeli biotech company Betalin Therapeutics is developing an engineered micro-pancreas (EMP) that can sustain significant levels of glucose-regulated insulin secretion from transplanted beta cells.

If this tissue-engineering breakthrough proves effective in human trials, it has the potential to cure, rather than only control, type 1 and even severe forms of type 2 diabetes.

The essence of the EMP is a micro biological scaffold that is added to the donor islets before implantation. It uniquely supports the cells' survival, leading to long-term functionality, says Prof. Eduardo Mitrani, who engineered the EMP in the department of cell and developmental biology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and now chairs Betalin's scientific advisory board.

"The main problem we have in developing new treatments for diabetes is that diabetes is far more complicated than we

think," Mitrani tells ISRAEL21c. "Providing insulin is easy, but regulating insulin has proven very difficult because regulation requires many different sensors in the beta cells."

Findings from Mitrani's lab show that beta cells derived from EMP-supported islets function similarly to freshly dissected pancreatic islets in the lab. They continue to secrete insulin in a regulated manner and in levels comparable to fresh islets for more than three months, whereas beta cells not supported by a scaffold function for about two days.

When transplanted into suitable hosts, EMPs connect quickly with the body's vascular system, and because of their microscopic size they can receive the natural amounts of nutrients and gases needed to survive through diffusion. "Connecting to the network" is essential for proper glucose sensing and efficient insulin secretion.

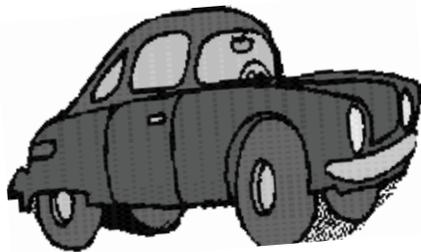
As opposed to artificial pancreases that cannot function to the same degree as a natural pancreas, Betalin's micro-scaffold technology enables creating an actual micro-pancreas, in all its natural complexity, in the laboratory.

"We now are doing whatever is necessary to comply with regulatory agencies in the United States and Canada," says Mitrani.

"We are already in conversation and submitting data to the FDA, which will determine what needs to be done to start our first human trials within a year," Mitrani added.

In anticipation of clinical trials, Betalin has begun a financing round of \$2.5 million from private investors.

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All Around the Town

Mazel Tov to great grandma **Miriam Fogelman**, grandparents **Larry and Shelley Fogelman** and to parents **Lauren and Joshua Valentine** on the birth of Joseph William Valentine.

Mazel tov to **Gaye and Glenn Corbin and Boris Corbin** on the birth of their grandson/great-grandson Max Corbin Leybovich, son of Alyse and Rich Leybovich of N.J.

Congratulations to grandparents **Irene and Ellis Friedman**, now living in

Tucson, Az. and daughter **Marnie and Steve Stiglitz** of California on the birth of their daughter Yara Liana.

Congratulations to grandparents **Fran and Burt Krieger** and parents **Stef and Mike Epstein** on the birth of Simone Camille in San Diego.

We love good news about members of our community! Please share it by emailing Marknem@aol.com.

Until next time: Shalom!

Otto was an Army veteran, and served during World War II, where he received the Bronze Star, Good Conduct Medal, two Purple Hearts and World War II Victory Ribbon. He was the former owner of Keystone Container Company, Inc. Otto is survived by his wife, Doreen, a son Gary Lefkowitz; a daughter Nancy Cabrera and two stepdaughters; Robin Riegel and Kelly Witwer. Other survivors include two granddaughters, two step-grandsons, step-great-grandchildren, his many numerous nieces and nephews and a brother Dr. Edwin Lefkowitz.

Obituaries

Leonard R. Kantor, 82, of Reading. Len was an Army veteran of the Korean War. He is survived by his wife Nancy Irene (Steele) Kantor, his children; Sherry Kantor of Maryland, Philip Kantor and his wife Amanda of Massachusetts, and Eric Kantor of Maryland.

Other survivors include his two stepchildren Kevin and Scott Hoyt and six grandchildren.

Otto S. Lefkowitz, 89, of Kenhorst.

Take a hike for coexistence

Israel21c.com

TECoPeace Middle East (formerly Friends of the Earth Middle East) – an organization of Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists – brought together tour operators and guides from the three populations to create guided treks that each traverse Israeli, Palestinian Authority and Jordanian territory.

The unprecedented tourism collaboration, seed funded by the United States Agency for Development (USAID), aims to promote cooperative efforts “to protect our shared environmental heritage” while giving business opportunities to tourism professionals in all three areas, according to the organization.

Mira Edelstein, Jordan River Projects Coordinator for EcoPeace Middle East, tells ISRAEL21c that the cross-border tourism project is a unique example of regional cooperation. “We involved 150 individual tour operators and guides on 15 tours throughout this year, and then we asked them to sit together and build itineraries for sellable tours, incorporating ‘green’ vendors wherever possible,” she says. “We are proud to reveal the best sides of the Middle East — the sides of landscapes, travel and friendship.” Block quote:

The result of those efforts is two hiking trails, a biking trail and a walking tour. Aside from Jerusalem, the guided tours mostly cover parks and small villages where participants can meet local residents. Guides from each sector will lead the parts of the trips in their own territories.

On September 3, representatives of 25 European tourism agencies joined Deputy Regional Cooperation Minister Ayoub Kara, a Druze Israeli, for the official launch of the cross-border initiative in Tzur Hadassah, 12 miles west of Jerusalem. “I believe that tourism is one of the keys to good neighborly relations,” Kara said at the ceremony. “Therefore, the Regional Cooperation Ministry and I have begun to examine the idea of giving tourists from Arab states the possibility of passing freely to Israel through Jordan, using Jordanian transfer documents.”

EcoPeace Israel director Gidon Bromberg said he expects the tours to attract travelers from around the world. “We at EcoPeace believe that true peace comes through regional cooperation,” he said. “We are proud to reveal the best

sides of the Middle East — the sides of landscapes, travel and friendship.”

EcoPeace leaves the running of the tours to the operators, but will follow up from its offices in Tel Aviv, Amman and Bethlehem to gauge how they’re going. The cost of the tours depends on the number of people participating.

The eight-day Cross-Border Jordan Valley Hiking Itinerary begins with a Palestinian Arab guide in the Auja Valley and proceeds to Wadi Qelt, Jericho, Fasail and Wadi Al-Jaheer. An Israel guide will take over as the group continues to Kibbutz Ashdot Ya’acov, Nahal Tzivon, Nahal Dishon and the Druze village of Peki’in. A Jordanian guide will lead the final leg to the Sharhabil Bin Hassneh Ecopark, climbing and rappelling on the Dalieh cliff, hiking to the Ziglab Dam and trekking in Khirbet Zilmeh and Tibnehs.

The eight-day Eco-Hike of the Holy Land (info@experiencejordan.com) begins at Kibbutz Tzuba and goes to Sataf, Wadi Sorek and Ein Karem before ascending the hills of Jerusalem to see the capital city’s Christian sites. The hikers will go to Wadi Qelt, the Auja Eco Center and the towns of Sanur and Sebastia before crossing into Jordan to visit the Ajloun Castle, Orjan, Petra and Amman.

The 10-day Pedaling Co-Existence tour begins in Nazareth and includes Mount Tabor, the Jezreel Valley, Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee), the Jordan River, Kibbutz Ma’agan, Beit She’an and the Gan Hashlosha (Sakhne) spring. In Jordan, the cyclists will pedal through the Jordan Rift Valley, the ancient Roman city of Pella, Madaba, Mount Nebo, the Dead Sea and Petra. Crossing back over the Allenby Bridge, they will then join a Palestinian guide to tour the Auja Eco Center, Jericho, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Battir; and then an Israeli guide will lead them through the Judean Hills and Beit Guvrin National Park before ending in Jerusalem’s Old City.

The 10-day Nature and Culture Itinerary includes Old Jaffa, Bethlehem, the Judean Hills, Battir, Machrur, Beit Guvrin, the Elah Valley, Mount of Olives, Wadi Qelt, Ein Prat Nature Reserve, Jericho, Auja Eco Center, Sakhne, the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers, the SHE EcoPark in Jordan, the Soap House in Orjan, Madaba, Wadi Mujib, the Dead Sea, Petra and Amman.

Gardening with Vicky

Is it spring yet?

By Vicky Sokoloff

Dec. 22 — the shortest day of the year. I stepped outside, and without a coat, to see that the iris are putting out new growth, the butterfly bushes are covered with young leaves, the jasmine is blooming & the willow tree has new pussys. All these signs of spring made me wonder, “How do plants know when it’s really spring?”

A number of possibilities crossed my mind: temperature, hours of daylight, degree days, cold followed by warmth, or some type of internal clock. Or is the old saying really true: April showers bring May flowers. What role does moisture play? So began my research. Some of what I found was logical; some quite surprising.

Because plants depend on bees, insects and birds for pollination, it’s vital for flowering to coincide with the time that pollinators are in the area. Frost will kill most buds, so trees don’t want to flower too early.

Observation tells us that flowers and trees usually know when to open their buds or start flowering. But the exact way that plants recognize spring has led to much speculation and now scientific research.

A plant’s dormant cycle begins in autumn, when daylight hours shorten and temperatures drop. It’s believed that during the fall, a growth inhibitor hormone called ABA builds up in the plant as it goes into dormancy, causing growth to halt. During this slowing-down process, the food manufactured and housed in the leaves during the growing season moves down into the root zone, converts to starch and is stored for winter. At the same time, physiological changes are occurring inside each cell to keep the plant from freezing.

Once all these stages are complete and the temperature remains near freezing for a length of time, the plant



Jasmine blooming on Dec. 22

is said to be dormant. Each plant species has its own requirement for time spent in the chill period. Once the required number of chill hours are reached, ABA begins to break down. At this point warm temperatures and more hours of sunlight will trigger spring growth.

For bulbs planted underground, this is precisely how it knows to begin inching upward. The growth inhibitor is no longer present in a high-enough quantity to stop growth. Ever wonder how a particular perennial could emerge so quickly once the frost leaves the ground? The same principle applies: the growth inhibitor is no longer present.

To complete the breaking of dormancy, as the surrounding soil and air begin to warm, more hormones kick in. Growth hormones are responsible for both stem elongation and cell division. For all plant material — bulbs, perennials, trees, shrubs and germinating seeds — these hormones are crucial for the development of stems, leaves, roots and flowers.

As the mother of a avian veterinarian I am used to telling people that birds are a lot smarter than most people give them credit for. Now it seems plants are pretty smart, too. So all across nature there are things happening that are vital to our survival and we hardly ever notice how remarkable it all is until something goes wrong.



Bubbies and technology

Karen

Jewish Family Service

Women On Their Own an exciting new program

United Way



By Sari Incledon, M.Ed.
and Carole Robinson

Women On Their Own, a community support group for women dealing with the unique challenges of living on their own, met for the first time on Sunday, Jan. 10 at Reform Congregation Oheb Shalom.

The 10 women in attendance concurred with the dual purposes of the group, as suggested by group organizer Sheryl Weintraub. Not only will group meetings be an opportunity for socialization, members will sustain each other with emotional and physical support. For instance, members can drive each other to doctor appointments and provide an extra set of ears to listen to medical advice.

Many of the women were very interested in having a companion to go to the theater and other cultural events, both locally and out of town. The women



Women On Their Own program debuts.

also agreed to create a service directory for the group. They will share names of trustworthy handymen, plumbers, electricians, landscapers, and snow removal services with each other.

Women On Their Own will meet the third Sunday of the month at 10:30 a.m. at RCOS. The next meeting is scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 20. For more information, please contact Sheryl Weintraub at Sheryl.woto@gmail.com (or call the JCC.)

Caregiver Support

Support groups can provide a wide range of benefits for people caring for family members with disabilities. A group can provide information, tips and emotional support. If you or someone

you know might benefit from being part of a caregiver support group please call Sari or Carole at JFS at 610-921-0624. We would like to start this program if there is enough interest in it.

Taxi Transportation

Did you know that JFS runs a transportation program that helps seniors and disabled people remain independent?

Our Taxi program has helped hundreds of people with their transportation needs in the approximately 25 years we have been running it. JFS sells coupon books to seniors and disabled people who don't drive (or limit their driving). Coupon books sell for \$25 and provide \$75 worth of taxi rides. The coupons are used for only one taxi company – Reading Metro Taxi. Coupons can be used for rides to doctor's appointments, grocery shopping and attending social events. This program is supported by contributions to the Jewish Federation and by a grant from the United Way. For more information call Sari or Carole at 610-921-0624.

Car Donation Program

JFS Reading is part of a nationwide network that accepts cars, trucks, RV's, boats and motorcycles for donation. When the vehicle is sold JFS gets the proceeds and the donor gets the paperwork required by the IRS to claim a charitable donation. Call JFS at 610-921-0624 for more information.

Berks Encore Tax Preparation

Volunteers from Berks Encore's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program can assist families and seniors with incomes under \$49,000. The trained volunteers can prepare federal, state and local tax forms as well as property tax and rent rebate forms. Please call 610-374-3195, ext. 209 to schedule an appointment. Appointments will begin Feb. 1 and continue until April 15. All six Berks Encore locations participate in this program.

Medicare Mondays

Are you turning 65 in 2016? Come and learn the basics of Medicare, how to enroll, how you can supplement your Medicare benefits, what Medicare coverage will cost and what financial assistance is available. All sessions start at 6:30 p.m. To register call 610-374-3195, ext. 208

Feb. 22: Keystone Villa – 501 Hoch Road, Blandon

March 28: Reading Hospital – 5th Avenue Conference Center

April 25: Rittenhouse Senior Living – 2900 Lawn Terrace, Laureldale

May 12 (This is a Thursday): Penn State Health/St. Joseph Medical Center

June 27: The Highlands – 2000 Cambridge Avenue, Wyomissing

July 25: Reading Hospital – 5th Avenue Conference Center

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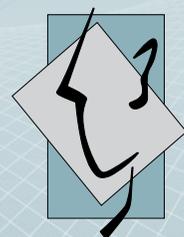
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Contributions as of Jan. 15

Holocaust Library & Resource Center

In memory of:
Shirley Weintraub – Kate Mohn

In honor of:
Dorothy Fineblum's special birthday – Selma Cutler

Jewish Family Service

In honor of:
Birth of Jackye and Jim Barrer's grandson – Elina and Vlad Vaysman
Birth of Robin and Jess Drezner's granddaughter – Barbara and Seth Rosenzweig, Selma and David Levan
Birth of Evelyn Drezner's great-granddaughter – Selma and David Levan
Birth of Corinne and Andy Wernick's granddaughter – Barbara and Seth Rosenzweig
Birth of Laurie and Eitan Kilchevsky's grandson – Debbie Goodman and John Moyer, Barbara Nazimov

In memory of:
Joyce Corbin – Barbara Nazimov, Elina and Vlad Vaysman, Carol and Gordon Perlmutter, Betsy and Al Katz, Barbara and Seth Rosenzweig
Alan Naden – Helene and Henry Singer
Louis Syret – Berna Sherman, Barbara and Seth Rosenzweig
Arthur Levy (Eleanor Reyner's brother) – Barbara and Seth Rosenzweig, Corinne and Andy Wernick

Chanukah Community Campaign

In honor of:
The many dear friends and happy memories we enjoyed in Reading – Judy and Ivan Botvin
In memory of:
Andrew Hafetz – Zena and Harvey Hafetz

Honorials and Memorials

Contributions may be made to the following Funds:

Federation Jewish Community Campaign	\$10
Jewish Family Service	\$10
Leo Camp Lecture Fund	\$10
JFS Food Bank	\$25
JFS Taxi Transportation Program	\$20
Holocaust Library & Resource Center	\$18
Doris Levin Fund	\$10

Federation Jewish Community Campaign

In honor of:
Birth of Gaye and Glenn Corbin's grandson – Cheryl and Eric Farber
Birth of Ellis and Irene Friedman's granddaughter – Cheryl and Eric Farber
Birth of Fran and Burt Krieger's granddaughter – Cheryl and Eric Farber
Birth of Corinne and Andy Wernick's granddaughter – Esta and Randy Neugroschel
Birth of Robin and Jess Drezner's granddaughter – Esta and Randy Neugroschel

In memory of:
Joyce Corbin – Rob and Yvonne Oppenheimer, Susan and Michael Fromm, Cheryl and Eric Farber, George and Marlene Weiss, Anzie and Edward Golden, Susan and Mel Blum, Elaine Safir, Marcia and Marc Filstein

JFS Taxi Transportation Program

In memory of:
Joyce Corbin – Sue and Herb Wachs

Evelyn Thompson Nursery School Fund

In honor of:
Joey Abramson's marriage – Beth and Bob Caster
Birth of Jackye and Jim Barrer's grandson – Beth and Bob Caster

In memory of:
Joyce Corbin – Beth and Bob Caster

We would like to thank everyone for their kind expressions of sympathy and generous donations made in memory of our son Louis.

Sharon & Julian Syret

First Israeli university in China to focus on technology

American Technion Society
The Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, a global leader in science and technology education, has broken ground to launch the Guangdong Technion Israel Institute of Technology (GTIIT) in Shantou, China located in Guangdong Province.

GTIIT, a historic partnership between the Technion and Shantou University, will offer high-level, innovative and research-oriented undergraduate and graduate education.

GTIIT will create not just a new academic facility, but a new era of cooperative research between Israel and China in science, engineering and the life sciences.

For the Chinese, the GTIIT brings the Technion's expertise on creating a topnotch technical institute, as well as a stimulating dose of Israeli-style entrepreneurialism on a strategic level.

"Our unprecedented collaboration will be truly transformational for the Technion, Shantou and Chinese

education. The combination of the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of Israel and the unbelievable scale and resources of China will result in a great partnership... Together we will create a major research institute that will help not only China and Israel, but also mankind in general," said Technion President Peretz Lavie.

At the ceremony, President Peres said that "the establishment of a Technion campus in China is more proof that Israeli innovation is breaking down geographic borders. China is one of Israel's major partners in technology and hi-tech, and there are over 1,000 Israeli companies active in China. I hope that the economic cooperation between these two countries will continue to expand, as both countries have much to share with, and learn from, one another."

"In this day and age, no one has an iota of doubt that technological innovation underpins a country's ability to create collective wealth, and that it is the key impetus to

individual success. Creativity is the defining centerpiece of our time — powering us into the future. Establishing a creative paradigm is not easy to set right, only through education and the rule of law can we build a free and fair, fun and fruitful future for all," said Mr. Li Ka-shing.

For the Technion, the GTIIT means increased global reach and stature. The investment in the collaboration will also benefit the research facilities and infrastructure at the Technion's Haifa campus. It will also form an anchor in the Far East that complements the Technion's partnership with Cornell University at the Jacobs Technion-Cornell Institute at Cornell Tech, in New York City. Finally, an industrial park planned for the GTIIT campus will serve as a foothold for Israeli companies to crack key markets in the U.S. and China.

"I want to thank the Israeli Government and the partners at Technion, for facilitating the progress of human civilization through science and technology that has been the

common aspiration of China and Israel. GTIIT will continue the fine tradition of Technion in Shantou, Guangdong Province so as to build the "Silicon Valley" in South China," said Li Jiange, inaugural President of the GTIIT.

GTIIT will be comprised of three units: the College of Engineering; the College of Science; and the College of Life Science. Areas of study will eventually include chemical engineering, materials engineering, environmental engineering, mechanical engineering, chemistry, mathematics, physics, biotechnology and food engineering, biology, and biochemical engineering. Majors may be adjusted or replaced, depending on the need of Guangdong and the development of the GTIIT.

The initial class of students is planned for this year with an initial enrollment plan of 100 students for chemical engineering. At full build, the GTIIT is expected to enroll some 5000 students made up of 4000 undergraduate and 1000 graduate students.

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The secret in the safe in the Muqata

By Benny Begin

The peace initiatives that have been tossed around here for decades are based on a delusionary expectation that PLO members will abandon their ideology.

There are very few diplomatic secrets in our region that remain undisclosed. One of them, which is apparently kept in a safe in the Palestinian Authority's headquarters in the Muqata, in Ramallah, is the secret peace plan of the Palestine Liberation Organization. A foreign observer might assume that this plan is not so different from the one presented by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas

in September 2008. Its main points: establishment of a Palestinian state on an area that is 100 percent equivalent in size to that of "the West Bank and the Gaza Strip"; creation of a corridor between Gaza and Hebron, controlled by the PLO; division of Jerusalem into two capitals; the surrender of Israeli sovereignty on the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives, which will be administered instead by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the PLO and Israel; and permission for the entry of several thousand Palestinian refugees into Israel over the course of several years.

As contrast to the legend, Olmert's proposal did not surprise

Abbas: Then-U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice updated him about it during a meeting in Ramallah, but he rejected the proposal three times: In September 2008 he refrained from replying to Olmert, in November of that year he rejected Rice's request to inform her that he was accepting the proposal, and in December he refused the pleas of then-U.S. President George W. Bush to announce that he had accepted it.

A foreign observer would probably assume that Abbas rejected the Olmert scheme in 2008 because there was no time left to discuss minor differences between it and the PLO peace plan, but we have testimony from the interested party

himself: In May 2009 Abbas was asked by *The Washington Post* why he had rejected Olmert's proposal. He didn't use the excuses offered by disappointed Israelis, but answered briefly and straight to the point: "The gaps were wide."

From that day until this one, Abbas' threshold demand for entering negotiations with Israel is simple: The starting point of such talks would be the Olmert proposal that he rejected. The "wide gaps" will have to be reduced with the help of further Israeli concessions.

For his part, Joint Arab List MK Ahmad Tibi, who is familiar with the secrets of PLO policy, maintained several years ago that "the maximum that any government in Israel can offer the PLO does not reach the minimum that the PLO can accept."

But to this very day, not a single peace activist among the frequent travelers to Ramallah, Oslo and Geneva has demanded that the PLO reply to the obvious question: What is the minimum the PLO can accept? If Israeli consent to the entry of 5,000 refugees into its territory, according to Olmert's proposal, is not sufficiently generous – would its agreement to 50,000 suffice? Or perhaps 250,000?

The answer is known to anyone who wants to know it. PLO leaders declare that they are not authorized to relinquish fulfillment of the right of every refugee who so wishes to return to his home – an individual right according to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194. Therefore, the PLO is unable to include in a peace agreement with Israel any restriction on the number of refugees who wish to return to their homes. In addition, since the PLO cannot agree to the existence of the nation-state of the Jewish people in any part of Palestine, it cannot agree to any clause in the accord in which it promises to refrain from making any demands of Israel in future.

The peace initiatives that have been tossed around here for over two decades are based on a delusionary expectation that PLO members, who are considered in Israel to be "secular," will abandon their ideology. If we Jews, pragmatists that we are, are willing to sign an agreement that includes giving up Beit El, Nablus and Hebron, the PLO would probably be willing to sign an accord that includes giving up Beit Guvrin, Ramle and Jaffa.

However, these initiators of peace refuse to put their illusion to the test. They don't demand that the PLO reveal its secret and finally present its conditions for an accord with Israel, because presenting those conditions would expose the truth: Not only would an extremist Zionist government headed by Zionist Union be unable to sign a peace agreement with the PLO – even a moderate and sane Zionist government headed by Meretz would be unable to do so.

At present that is the test for anyone who still claims that "the PLO is the solution." Let him please demand of the PLO, openly and consistently, to open the safe in the Muqata and present its plan for a peace agreement with Israel, and let him draw a courageous conclusion in public from the stubborn refusal of the PLO to do so.

Benny Begin is a Likud member of the Knesset.

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