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Roast and toast to honor Sheryl Brumer

JCC Annual Fundraising Gala on Nov. 7

The Jewish Community Center will hold its Annual Fundraising Gala on Saturday, November 7, at 7 pm. The gala will feature a roast and toast honoring JCC Chief Executive Officer Sheryl Brumer. The deadline to purchase tickets, or become a sponsor, is Sunday, October 25, which can be done online at www.binghamtonjcc.org/gala, by calling the JCC at 607-724-2417, or by stopping by the JCC's front office. An individual ticket is $70 and includes drinks, dinner, dessert and evening entertainment.

"For 45 years, Sheryl has helped shape the JCC into the organization and community we know today," stated gala organizers. "Her leadership, dedication and love for the JCC have touched generations of children, families, staff and community members – and after 45 years, she has certainly collected a few stories along the way. As Sheryl prepares for retirement, we're bringing together the people whose lives have intersected with hers to celebrate the accomplishments, friendships, memories, and unforgettable moments that have defined her remarkable career. And because no 45-year career comes without a little material, we may also revisit a few moments Sheryl would much rather we forget."

Proceeds from the 2026 Annual Fundraising Gala will be invested in the JCC's Centennial Campaign, which will support critical capital improvements that will help ensure the JCC remains able to serve the community (visit www.binghamtonjcc.org/anniversary for more information). Funds raised toward the Centennial Campaign will be matched by the Eisenberg Foundation, up to $400,000.



L-r: Sue Walker and Sheryl Brumer at the 2025 JCC annual meeting.

Sponsorship levels for the gala are:

◆ Bronze, $250, which includes two tickets, recognition on social media, image/logo displayed during cocktail hour and recognition in the event program.

◆ Silver, $550, which includes four tickets, everything included at the bronze level, plus an individual social media post recognizing the sponsorship.

◆ Gold, $1,200, which includes eight tickets, everything included at the silver level,

See "Gala" on page 5

Film Fest announces 2026-27 films and dates

By *Reporter* staff

The Binghamton Jewish Film Fest will feature five events during its 2026-27 season, including one in-person viewing and discussion. People will be able to register for links to the films and discussions at www.jfgb.org.

◆ "Lucky Star": The Zoom discussion of the film will take place on Sunday, November 22, at 7 pm. Dora E. Polachek, Ph.D., professor emerita of Romance languages and literatures at Binghamton University, will lead the discussion. The film is in French with English subtitles. Registration is due by Wednesday, November 18. The link will be sent out on Thursday, November 19, and the film will be available for viewing from Thursday-Sunday, November 19-22.

In "Lucky Star," a French army deserter hatches a plan to have his family pose as Jewish, hoping to persuade local smugglers to guide his family to the free zone. "The deceit quickly spirals into comic mishaps, mistaken identities, unlikely alliances with Resistance fighters, and perilous close calls that test their assumptions and reveal hidden reserves of courage and heart," according to the Atlanta Jewish Film Festival, which screened the film. "This spirited, wartime dramedy mixes danger with disarming humor and adventure.... [It] offers an unexpected take on moral awakening and the surprising ways human folly can rise to meet history."



Benoît Poelvoorde and Pascal Elbé in "Lucky Star." (Photo from Memensha Films courtesy of Yann Zenou Entertainment (YZE) - ADNP - UGC Images - France 3 Cinema)

"'Lucky Star' is a favorite of the Film Fest Committee," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, which sponsors the Film Fest. "It mixes dark humor with touching moments of tragedy and heroism. I think everyone will find this film worthwhile."



Mohammad Ghazawi as Khaled in "The Sea." (Photo courtesy of Memensha Films)

◆ "The Sea": The Zoom discussion of the film will take place on Sunday, December 13, at 7 pm. The discussion will be moderated by Rabbi Micah Friedman of Temple Israel. The film is in Arabic and Hebrew, with English subtitles. Registration is due by Wednesday, December 9. The link will be sent out on Thursday, December 10, and the film will be available for viewing from Thursday-Sunday, December 10-13.

"The Sea" tells the story of Khaled, a 12-year-old boy from Ramallah, who "gets the chance to see the sea for the first time

See "Film" on page 6

Matching grant for *The Reporter*

By *Reporter* staff

The Reporter announced that it has received a $5,000 matching grant courtesy of the David and Virginia Eisenberg Fund. Donations will be accepted now through Giving Tuesday, December 1. Donations may be made several ways:

◆ Give online through The Reporter Group's website, www.thereportergroup.org.

◆ Through the Giving Tuesday e-mail that will be sent by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton. Anyone who does not receive Federation e-mails, but would like to be on the list, should e-mail director@jfgb.org with "Federation e-mail list" in the subject line.

◆ Mail donations to *The Reporter*, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850 with "matching grant" in the check's subject line.

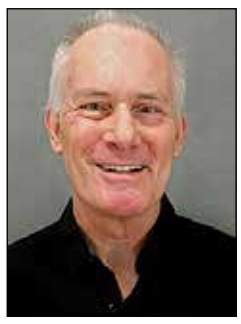
"We are grateful to once again receive a matching grant from the David and Virginia Eisenberg Fund," said Diana Sochor, executive editor of *The Reporter*. "They have been so generous over the years, and we deeply appreciate all they have done and continue to do."

Sochor added, "If you are thinking about making a donation to the paper, this is the perfect time to do it. So many Jewish newspapers have ceased publication or are turning into online publications only. Although *The Reporter* is now monthly, I am so glad we are still able to produce a hard-copy newspaper for our readers, which is great for anyone who likes to read the paper on Shabbat, but doesn't get on the

See "Grant" on page 4

TI/TC Joint Adult Ed. brunch on Oct. 25

The Temple Israel/Temple Concord Joint Adult Education Group will present a brunch program on Sunday, October 25, at 10 am, at Temple Concord, featuring Andy Horowitz, who will read the short story "Reunion" by Nathan Englander. A voluntary contribution between $5 and $20 is welcome, and reservations are requested by calling Temple Concord at 607-723-7355 or Temple Israel at 607-723-7461.



Andy Horowitz (Photo by Andy Horowitz)

Horowitz, a dancer and actor, has performed his choreographic works at more than 2,000 venues in 30 countries, including London's Southbank Center, New York's Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, the Seoul Arts Center, Berlin's Akademie Der Künste, the Stadsschouwburg of Amsterdam, the Kravis Center and others. He has been a featured performer on CBS's "Late Night with David Letterman," the A&E Network, MTV, HBO, Canada's Musique Plus, Germany's ARTE Network, the BBC

See "Brunch" on page 4

Silver Sponsor

The Reporter's Editorial Committee and staff thank Rabbi Rachel Esserman and Richard Esserman for sponsoring this issue of The Reporter in honor of the 20th yartzeit of their father, Edward Esserman.

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Opinion

Rabbi Samuel Stahl: Judaism more concerned with deed than creed

By Bill Simons

With a Team Israel cap covering my head, I joined more than 100 other Jews at the July 5, 2024, outdoor *Kabbalat* Shabbat service by the shores of Lake Chautauqua. For me, the highlight of the service, conducted by Rabbi Samuel Stahl, was the sermon. Still resounding of voice with a formidable physical presence at 84, Rabbi Stahl, while strongly supporting Israeli measures against violent Hamas terrorists, also insisted upon compassion for innocent Gaza residents caught in the maelstrom of war. To those of us theologically uncertain but striving to follow an ethical path, Rabbi Stahl asserted that Judaism is more concerned with deed than creed. Those words carry profound meaning for me.

I am a Jew, Reform by upbringing and belief, Conservative by association and affiliation, Orthodox by ancestry and Chasidic by appreciation for Chabad, but respectful of diverse religious practices, Jewish and Gentile, that embrace the dignity of all humankind. But Rabbi Stahl's assertion of deed over creed took me back to my earliest encounters with Reform Judaism.

During the 1950s, I lived in a two-family house across from a Congregational Church in Swampscott, MA. The good people of that church invited my newly formed Reform congregation, Temple Emanu-El, then without a physical home, to hold Saturday morning Sabbath services in their sanctuary. Still in elementary school, I crossed the street by myself on many Saturday mornings. It was not the theology or rituals but the sermons of Rabbi Martin Katzenstein that attracted me. Across many decades, Rabbi Katzenstein's words remain etched in memory, particularly his image of humanity seated at a table laded with bountiful food, but starving because restraints only allowed arm movement from the repast on the table to a neighbor's mouth, a gesture at which the assemblage balked. Rabbi Stahl provided trajectory and addendum to those long-ago sermons of Rabbi Katzenstein.

Tucked into a corner of western New York, Chautauqua Institution, an iconic educational, cultural and religious community that morphed from Protestant exclusivity to interfaith pluralism, provided the setting for me to get to know Rabbi Stahl through his Shabbat services, conversation, gift of an inscribed autobiography, email exchanges, video sharing and meeting over food with our wives. While I have taught courses at Chautauqua over five summers, Rabbi Stahl has provided leadership not only to Jewish sojourners, but to collaborative religious endeavors since 1998. Accompanied to Chautauqua by a significant cohort from his San Antonio temple, he has played multiple roles – clergy, lecturer, theologian-in-residence, builder of bridges across sectarian divides, negotiator and advocate.

Life's journey has taken Samuel Stahl from his 1939 birth and coming of age in Sharon, PA; earning degrees at the University of Pennsylvania (bachelor of arts) and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (master arts and doctor of Hebrew letters); U.S. Army captain/chaplain in South Korea; rabbi (1969-1976), Temple B'nai Israel, Galveston, TX; and senior rabbi (1976-2002) and rabbi emeritus (2002-present), Temple Beth-El, San Antonio, TX.

Rabbi and Lynn Stahl, married since 1966, comprise a formidable team. A speech pathologist and audiologist, Lynn, possessed of exceptional social skills, forged networks of caring in temple and community. They adopted two daughters, Heather and Alisa, who would make the senior Stahls proud grandparents of six.

Finding Reform Judaism rooted in social justice, Rabbi Stahl invested *tikkum olam* (repair of the world) in his conduct of religious services, sermons, writings, teaching, community engagement and interfaith collaborations. During his time in the military, for example, he would take off his uniform to participate in protests against the Vietnam War. Over the decades, he has visited the homes of the suffering, fought against religious and racial discrimination, and collaborated in efforts to combat poverty.

This column yields the concluding words to Rabbi Stahl. As part of the May 22, 2026, service honoring his 50 years of service to Temple Beth-El, Rabbi Stahl, with candor and conviction, addressed one of humanity's central questions – "Organized Religion: Bane or Blessing?" Drawing examples from Christianity, Islam and Judaism, he acknowledged "sordid" and "shameful" episodes that critics cite in arguing that religion "has inspired more hate than love." Pre-Vatican II Catholic espousal of deicide (doctrine of collective Jewish guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus), for example, fostered antisemitism. More recently, "Muslim extremists destroyed thousands of lives at the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001." Nor, emphasized Rabbi Stahl, is Judaism blameless. Rabbi Stahl drew attention to the impact of fanaticism on intra-Jewish relations: "Yigal Amir, an observant Orthodox Jew, targeted Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's prime minister, as a sinner. He objected to Rabin's willingness to offer land for peace to the Palestinians… he found support in Jewish religious texts in order to commit murder."

Then, Rabbi Stahl's May 22, 2026, sermon pivoted to organized religion's plethora of positives, amongst them: faith-based leadership, particularly from African American churches, that challenged Southern segregation; the establishment of health and educational networks by religious groups; and providing meeting space and/or support for such benevolent enterprises as AA meetings, nutritional needs and tutorial programs. He noted his own Temple Beth El's commitment to Meals on Wheels and its summer camp for children from low-income families.

Moreover, religion, noted Rabbi Stahl, allows us to confront the essential questions of human life, existence and death; provides a community of belonging; connects generations through customs and traditions; and presents ethical ideals, even those that remain aspirational rather than actualized.

Ultimately, Rabbi's Stahl's semicentenary sermon offers an ecumenical challenge to understand and act upon the highest principles of religion: "[I]t is not that religion

See "Stahl" on page 4

One Perspective from Israel

Grand theft auto – A wrong turn along the way

JEREMY M. STAIMAN

This article originally appeared in the Times of Israel *and is being reprinted with permission.*

I'm not going to lie. I'm a pretty good match for many of the stereotypes of the absent-minded, bumbling husband.

I can hardly unitask, let alone multitask.

If you ask me to get something from another room, there's a fair chance that somewhere in my meandering between the bedroom and the living room, my eye will be drawn to something else and I'll lose track entirely of my original mission.

If you send me to the grocery store without a list, you're asking for trouble. If you send me with a list, it's even odds that I'll get to the store, only to realize that the list is still sitting at home on the table.

—

Here we sit, having just concluded the season of repentance. Even with all of the Vidui confessions, there's one more item about which I need to come clean.

It started innocently enough, with a trip to the supermarket. I thought I had enough time to do a little shopping before picking up Chana from work. That was probably a bit of wishful thinking on my part. Deciding to get the car washed while I shopped upgraded that wishful thinking to borderline delusion.

It was easy enough to rationalize that I had time for both. One of the underappreciated strokes of genius in Israeli society is its penchant for locating car washes in mall parking lots. What better way to make the most of your time than to drop your car off, do your shopping and place your booty in the boot of the car (for those of you in the U.S., that's the trunk)? As an added bonus, you don't have to search for parking!

And so, one day several months ago, I did exactly that, entrusting my car to the attendant, leaving the ignition on and the key fob resting in the cup holder. With less than an hour to shop, I searched for a cart, descended to the supermarket and walked into… bedlam.

I don't remember if it was *erev Pesach*, but it sure looked like it. The aisles were choked with shoppers, and the checkout lines could hardly be distinguished from the throngs filling every nook and cranny of the store. My borderline delusion now blossoming into full-blown fantasy, I forged ahead. I limited myself to a few items and headed for the checkout.

By this time, I had about 30 minutes until I needed to be at Chana's work, which was about seven minutes away. I stood on line. And waited. And waited.

And waited.

Twenty-five minutes later, I had hardly budged. It was time to come back to earth and admit defeat. I abandoned my shopping excursion and ran for the elevator back to the car.

I quickly paid for the wash, jumped in the car and headed for the pickup. Along the way, I noticed with chagrin that the car was not as clean as it should have been. Some windows seemed cleaner than others. The vacuuming was perfunctory at best. This place usually does an excellent job, so I was surprised and disappointed. Mostly, though, I was laser-focused on getting to Chana as quickly as possible, so I wouldn't leave her waiting after a typically hectic day at work. Everything else could wait.

I pulled up in front of her office and she popped right into the passenger's seat.

"You do realize this isn't our car?" she asked. "You didn't notice that the roof color is different than ours? And we don't have a steering wheel cover?"

Oops. I had inadvertently jacked some wheels, as we like to say in the hood.

Quickly, we returned to the scene of the crime, all the while listening for approaching sirens and scanning the horizon for SWAT teams. Chana promised to visit me often in prison. I wondered if they'd allow her to bring me her legendary challah.

Fortunately, the car wash personnel had not even realized the car was gone, while the car's rightful titleholders were probably still engulfed in the market maelstrom three floors below. No charges would be filed.

We quickly traded the unwashed getaway car for our own sparkling model and made our escape.

Thus ended my notorious caper – and my brief but eventful career as an auto thief. The wanted posters came down. I was once again allowed an *aliyah* in my *shul*. I returned to my usual role as your typical bumbling husband. All is once again right with the world.

At least until the next time I get the car washed.

Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

Shelley Hubal, Executive Director

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Mega Challah Bake at BU on Nov. 9

The Rohr Chabad Center – in co-sponsorship with local community organizations – will host a Mega Challah Bake on Monday, November 9, at 6:30 pm, in the Mandela Room at Binghamton University. The fee is $6 for the community with reservations made in advance. Reservations can be made at jewishbu.com/challah.

At the event, hundreds of students and community members are expected to join in mixing, kneading and shaping challahs, one of which they will keep and one of which will be given away by participants. A gluten free option will be available. Those participating will also have the opportunity to taste many flavors of challah and will receive gift to take home in addition to the challahs.

"The Mega Challah Bakes, held in cities small and large, bring the community together in a fun and easy celebration of Jewish heritage. In our case, we will be uniting our campus and local communities and through campus and local Jewish organizations co-sponsoring and lots and lots of people coming out to enjoy this activity together," explained Goldie Ohana, coordinator.

BD Sisterhood paid-up membership dinner on Nov. 11

Beth David Sisterhood will host its annual Paid-Up Membership Dinner on Wednesday, November 11, at 6 pm, in the Beth David social hall. Paid-up Sisterhood members will enjoy a complimentary pasta dinner. Non-member friends and guests – women and men – are welcome to attend for $15. Non-dairy and gluten-free options will be available.

Sisterhood dues remain at just $25 per year. Membership helps support Sisterhood programs and community activities, refreshments at meetings and an annual contribution to Beth David Synagogue.

The evening will feature Caty Strong, Broome County representative for Clear Path for Veterans, who will discuss the organization's efforts to support veterans, service members, families and caregivers. Clear Path provides assistance with wellness and mental health, employment, skill development, crisis intervention and other services designed to help veterans build stability, connection and a sense of community. The organization serves service members regardless of discharge status and collaborates with other community partners located at the Veterans Resource Center to provide coordinated support.

Reservations are requested by Friday, November 6, by calling or texting Stacey Silber at 607-727-9738 or e-mailing silbercreations@gmail.com. "If you forget to RSVP, please come anyway – there should be enough food for everyone, said event organizers.

Mitzvah cards ($3) will be available at the meeting and attendees are invited to bring nonperishable food donations for CHOW.

For information about upcoming Sisterhood events or to be added to the Sisterhood e-mail list, contact Beth David Synagogue at bethdavid@stny.rr.com.

Klezmer Fund-raising Concert in Waverly on Nov. 15

A Klezmer Fund-raising Concert will be held on Sunday, November 15, from 2-4 pm, at the Waverly High School, 1 Frederick St., Waverly, NY, featuring the Klezmer Ensemble at Cornell University. The concert is sponsored by the Penn-York Jewish Community in partnership with the Jewish Center and Federation of the Twin Tiers. Tickets cost $20 for adults and $10 for students, and may be purchased online in advance at www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/klezmer-concert-waverly-high-school or at the door.

"Experience an afternoon of live Klezmer music!" said organizers of the event. "Enjoy traditional Jewish melodies, spirited rhythms and community connection, all while helping to support local organizations working to address food insecurity. We're also encouraging concert-goers to bring non-perishable food donations for our participating food pantries."

All proceeds will benefit eight local organizations addressing food insecurity throughout the Twin Tiers, including Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga, which serves the Nichols area, not far from Binghamton.

BD Shabbat luncheon on Nov. 14

Beth David Synagogue's Shabbat Luncheon Speaker Series continues on Saturday, November 14, with Rabbi Barry Baron, whose topic will be "Medieval Rabbis and Modern Europe: A Personal Exploration." Shabbat services will commence at 9:30 am, with the luncheon and program following the conclusion of services.

Building on an invited talk he gave in Germany last June, Baron will discuss the lives and works of three medieval rabbis – one in England (Rabbi Yom Tov), one in Germany (Rabbeinu Gershom) and the third in France (Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, aka Ralbag). He will describe the times and places in which they lived, and how those places and their Jewish communities look and feel today. "These three rabbis hold a definite fascination for me," he added. "Their legacies are monumental; I welcome this opportunity at Beth David to bring to light how their contributions relate to living in the 21st century."



Rabbi Barry Baron (Photo by Dora E. Polachek)

From 2019 to June 2026, Baron served as chaplain and campus rabbi at Colgate University where, as part of Colgate's Jewish Studies Program, he also regularly taught "Rabbis Reinventing: The Making of Judaism as We Know It."

A graduate of the Army's Command and General Staff College, Baron holds a bachelor of arts in history from Cornell University. In 1988, he received his master of arts and rabbinic ordination from Jewish Theological Seminary.

See "BD" on page 6

OF NOTE

Salomons

Linda Salomons, president of the Friends of the Vestal Public Library, has been named the winner of the 2026 FLS Daniel W. Casey Library Advocacy Award by the Friends of the Library Section (FLS) of the New York Library Association, which each year honors an outstanding volunteer or group whose dedication goes far above and beyond to support libraries and community service. "Linda embodies this spirit in every way!" said a Vestal library representative in a Facebook post. "Since pioneering this new chapter of the Friends of VPL in 2024, Linda has built a passionate team of volunteers running bimonthly book sales, sorting book donations and securing vital corporate sponsorships."

TC Book Club to meet on Nov. 3

The Temple Concord Book Club will meet on Tuesday, November 3, at10:30 am, in the library to discuss "Sisters of Fortune" by Esther Chehebar. For more information, contact Nancy Basmann at nancybasmann@outlook.com.

*The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to **Abbi and Brett Foreman** on the death of their son,*

Lee Foreman

*The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to **Jim Marcello** on the death of his mother,*

Donna Marcello

DEADLINES

The following are deadlines for all articles and photos for upcoming printed issues of the monthly The Reporter .

ISSUE	DEADLINE
December	November 11
January 2027	December 9
February	January 6
March	February 10

All deadlines for the year can be found at www.thereportergroup.org/contact-us/faqs under "Q: What Are the Deadlines for the Paper?"

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On the Jewish food scene

Butter!

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

I'd originally deleted the e-mail from The Nosher website featuring the article. Then I moved the e-mail back to my inbox and clicked through the link, copying and pasting the article into a document to read later. However, I still haven't been able to get myself to look at it. Why? The article is called "The Jewish History of Margarine," but to even consider the use of margarine was a blasphemy in my family. My mother would never let margarine darken our doors. What did we use instead? Butter and more butter, and nothing but butter, especially for baking.

I get why Jews looked for non-dairy variations of dairy food: that meant they could be eaten at a meat meal. For those who needed bread at a meal – no matter how many different kinds of food were on the table, my grandfather asked for bread! – butter certainly makes it more palatable. I remember when non-dairy creamers first began to be used: no matter how fancy a meal was, they came to the table in their original containers to show they were non-dairy. Now they are so common that no longer needs to be done.

However, back to butter. Someone once complained to my mother about a recipe my mom gave her, saying the item wasn't as good as the one my mom made. What was my mom's first question? "Did you use butter or margarine?" The answer was clear: margarine. After that, my mom would only give that recipe (and others) to people if they promised to use butter. (As an aside: someone once refused to give my mother a recipe for some dessert. I don't remember what it was, but I know that my mom later found that recipe in *The New York Times* and made copies to pass to everyone she knew who baked.)

As a child, I was also a big butter fan. I would eat whole pats of butter in restaurants. (Yes, just the butter by itself.) When I dream of a bagel, I think of an onion one smothered in butter (meaning butter almost dripping from its sides). The fried butter on a stick that can be found at some state fairs doesn't appeal to me, but that's because my idea of healthy eating has changed. I don't use much butter, but let's be clear that pancakes, waffles and popcorn are better with butter. (As for popcorn, I mean real butter, not the stuff they use in movie theaters or on most microwave popcorn.)

Will I someday bother to go back and read the article about margarine? I doubt it. Even thinking about margarine seems a betrayal of my family's beliefs. It's butter, and only butter, all the way!

Israel's Jezreel Valley wins international Wine Tourism award at Croatian event

By JNS staff

(JNS – Oct. 13) – Israel's Jezreel Valley received the Best Resilient Practice in Wine Tourism award at the 11th Iter Vitis Awards, held on October 9 in Ilok, Croatia.

The award recognizes the region's ability to sustain and develop its wine tourism sector through several challenging years, while supporting local businesses and community initiatives, according to Israel's Tourism Ministry. The award was presented at the historic Principovac Manor House as part of the Dunav Wine Festival, attended by representatives from 16 countries.

Iter Vitis – in Latin, "The Way of the Vine" – is a network of interconnected, regional routes and historic paths spanning dozens of countries that cover the entire Mediterranean basin and historical wine cradles. The Iter Vitis Awards is a certified Cultural Route of the Council of Europe that promotes wine-producing regions, sustainable tourism and international cooperation.

"The Ministry of Tourism is proud to support initiatives that strengthen local businesses and introduce visitors from around the world to Israel's rich culture and agricultural heritage," said Michael Izhakov, director-general of Israel's Tourism Ministry, according to the ministry statement. "Despite the challenges of recent years, the region has continued to grow and develop its wine tourism," he added.

According to Iter Vitis, the Jezreel Valley was selected for its commitment to maintaining its wine tourism activities and strengthening local cooperation despite the difficulties posed by war and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Jezreel Valley's "Wine Valley" initiative, established six years ago, connects 18 wineries across the region. Led by the Jezreel Valley Regional Council's Tourism Department in partnership with local winery owners, the initiative has expanded considerably since its establishment.

New wineries have opened, thousands of acres of vineyards have been planted, and a wine school has been established in the town of Tzipori, located in the Lower Galilee. Festivals and events have also helped connect the valley's agricultural traditions with its growing tourism sector, according to the ministry.

As part of the region's tourism development, the Jezreel Valley Wine Route has introduced the Jezreel Valley Taste Pass, a digital platform that brings together wineries, farms, restaurants, cafés, heritage sites, artisan workshops and accommodations. Through QR codes and interactive maps, visitors can explore the area's attractions, while smaller businesses benefit from greater visibility alongside established wineries, the ministry noted.

Originally published at https://www.jns.org/news/israel-news/israels-jezreel-valley-wins-international-wine-tourism-award-at-croatian-event.

Grant. . . . . Continued from page 1

computer that day. We try to be the one-stop shop for those interested in learning about Jewish events in our community."

Sochor also noted, "Over the past four years, *The Reporter* has received Syracuse Press Club awards and American Jewish Press Association Simon Rockower awards, which is pretty impressive for a small community newspaper."

Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation, was also pleased that *The Reporter* received the grant. "I think the paper is a valuable addition to our community," she said. "It not only lets me know what local organizations are doing, but helps keep us connected. Thank you to the Eisenberg Fund for its gift. I know the generosity of our community will make this fifth Giving Tuesday mini-campaign a success."

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•Mail donations to The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850 with "matching grant" in the check's subject line.

Jewish community given preview of LUMA exhibits



The annual LUMA Projection Arts Festival in downtown Binghamton fell on Rosh Hashanah this year. Co-founder Joshua Ludzki and his team arranged a preview of the LUMA installations, guided by Ludzki, on September 10, the day before the holiday began, so that members of the Jewish community could see the various installations in downtown Binghamton. Approximately 40 people attended that evening, seen here in front of one of the LUMA installations. (Photo courtesy of Dora Polachek)

Brunch. . . . . Continued from page 1

and Madrid's Telecinco.

Horowitz has acted in some 50 movies, including "No Choice" (2025 Best Narrative Feature, Dances with Films, LA); "Pancakes and Syrup" (2024 Best Comedy Feature, Manhattan Film Festival); and "Creeping Death" (2024 Best Slasher Feature, Atlanta Horror Fest).

Horowitz holds a B.A. in theatre from Binghamton University and an M.B.A. from Syracuse University. He lectures on entrepreneurship and offers choreographic workshops at schools and conservatories throughout the world. He is artist-in-residence at Binghamton University's Department of Theatre, and lives in Binghamton with his wife, Carol. Horowitz is a member of SAG-AFTRA, AGMA and UUP.

Stahl. . . . . Continued from page 2

is bad. It is rather that some people who embrace religion do things that are irreligious… Therefore, let us not judge a noble religion by its ignoble practitioners… Our challenge then is to live as best as we can, even as imperfect human beings, by the ethical and moral mandates of our diverse religious communities."

Navigating back from religious universals to Judaism, Rabbi Stahl counseled, "When we in the Jewish community… practice Judaism at synagogue or at home, we pray and sing many of the same words our ancestors spoke… certain Jewish prayers, like the *Shema*, remain the same. They engender a feeling of bonding with fellow Jews.… Our Jewish tradition emphasizes the message of hope." At a time of disturbing polarization within American Jewry and amongst Israelis as well as between Diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews, Rabbi Stahl's words merit serious attention.

BD Shabbat luncheon on Dec. 19 on "'Wedding Gown Preservation: Four Generations Strong"

Beth David Synagogue's monthly Shabbat Luncheon Speaker Series continues on Saturday, December 19, with Michael Schapiro, whose topic will be "Wedding Gown Preservation: Four Generations Strong." Shabbat services will begin at 9:30 am, with the luncheon and program following the conclusion of services.

As president of the Wedding Gown Preservation Company, Schapiro will share the history of a family-owned business that was started in 1913 by his grandmother Sara Schapiro in her husband Joseph Schapiro's tailor shop in Endicott. Schapiro's parents, Irvin and Barbara, followed, and now, along with his wife Sue and son Colby, the 113-year-old business sees its third and fourth generation family members continuing the enterprise in the same location. "With over 60 workers, and high-profile celebrities from all over the United States sending their gowns to us," Schapiro adds, "we are arguably the number one business in bridal gown preservation. I look forward to sharing why that is so and how we maintain that standing."



Michael Schapiro (Photo courtesy of Michael Schapiro)

Born and raised in Binghamton, Schapiro earned his B.A. from Ithaca College in 1981 with a major in finance. Upon graduation, he joined the family business along with his brothers Bob and Jeff. A longtime member of Temple Israel, he has also served on the board of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA). "I've lived here all my life," he noted," and love the community and love what we do. The added bonus is knowing that we will continue as a family company, with our son Colby on our team. He and his family are now also Binghamton residents."

"The Wedding Gown Preservation Company originated over a 100 years ago in Endicott and continues to thrive there. It is a true multi-generational success story," organizers say. "We look forward to a fascinating presentation by Michael about how from its humble beginnings the Schapiro family business became known and trusted throughout the United States for its truly unique way of preserving treasured memories!"

The luncheon program's continuation relies on the generosity of contributors. Donations to the Luncheon Fund are appreciated, and can be made in honor or memory of a loved one, or to mark a special occasion. Acknowledgments can be sent by request by including the necessary information. Donations can be sent to Beth David Synagogue, 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905, Attention: Luncheon Fund.

Hochul says NY will join federal school-choice tax-credit program

By Rikki Zagelbaum

(JNS – Oct 11) – New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, who has said that she intended to opt the state into U.S. President Donald Trump's federal tax-credit program for education, said on October 9, after program details were released, that she will formally bring the state into the program.

The Orthodox Union said the program could direct more than $1.5 billion annually in the state toward educational expenses, including yeshiva tuition.

Rabbi Binyamin Krauss, principal of SAR Academy, told JNS that the Modern Orthodox day school in Riverdale, in the Bronx, has "been following this and advocating for its passage for a long time. ...I believe it is a potential game changer for our system," he said. "We will collectively need to do a good job explaining the program to our constituents, but this is an avenue to making quality Jewish education more affordable for the bulk of our families, to increasing the quality of our offerings, increasing faculty compensation – which I believe needs to be a top priority – and strengthening our facilities with the ability to focus development on that instead of only scholarship.

"This is a huge win for New York," he told JNS. "We are grateful to the governor

See "Credit" on page 15

Gala

Continued from page 1

plus a custom social media post or video recognizing the sponsorship.

◆ Platinum, $2,500, which includes 10 tickets, everything included in the gold level, plus recognition on the front and back cover of the program as an "Event Sponsor."

Gala organizers are asking for volunteers to help with event preparations and on the night of the gala. They are also asking for community members to share their "Sheryl Moments" to help them roast the guest of honor, which can be shared by e-mailing JCC COO Raychel Reilly at raychelr@binghamtonjcc.org. "Have a favorite story, photo, message or memory of Sheryl? Share it with us! Submissions may be incorporated into the Gala Celebration," said organizers.

"Don't miss this opportunity to honor Sheryl Brumer and her 45 years of dedication and imagination," said Sue Walker, former JCC president. "Please contact the JCC or check out the website, www.binghamtonjcc.org/gala. You don't want to miss this opportunity to support Sheryl and the JCC."



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Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

Film

Continued from page 1

in his life on a school trip," according to Menemsha Films. Unfortunately, soldiers at an Israeli military checkpoint declare his travel permit invalid and send him back home. "Deeply disappointed, Khaled sets out to the sea on his own, even though he doesn't know the way and doesn't speak Hebrew," Menemsha Films continued. "When his father, Ribhi, an undocumented laborer working in Israel, learns that his son is missing, he leaves his job in search for him – risking arrest and the loss of his livelihood."

Director Shai Carmeli Pollak noted, "When I wrote 'The Sea,' I wasn't thinking about making a 'political' film, but rather a film about people: about the relationship between a father and his son, a journey film and a coming-of-age story, made in the tradition of humanistic and socially conscious cinema like Vittorio De Sica's 'Bicycle Thieves' or the wonderful films of Iranian director Jafar Panahi. Together with producer Baher Agbariya ("Atash," "Personal Affairs," "Mediterranean Fever"), we embarked on a unique adventure: a film made by a mixed crew of Jews and Arabs, shot in Palestinian villages, along the separation wall, in Bnei Brak, Ramat Gan and Tel Aviv.

"Amid today's violent and brutal reality, this film moves audiences to tears," Pollak continued. "Perhaps because it presents something that feels so absent in our world today, compassion and love for all human beings. These are the very things 'The Sea' offers in abundance, straight from the heart."

"The Sea is a film that is gripping, painful and yet also tender," said Hubal. "The protagonists of this drama will stay with you for a long time. I hope the community will join us for this screening and what is sure to be a meaningful discussion."

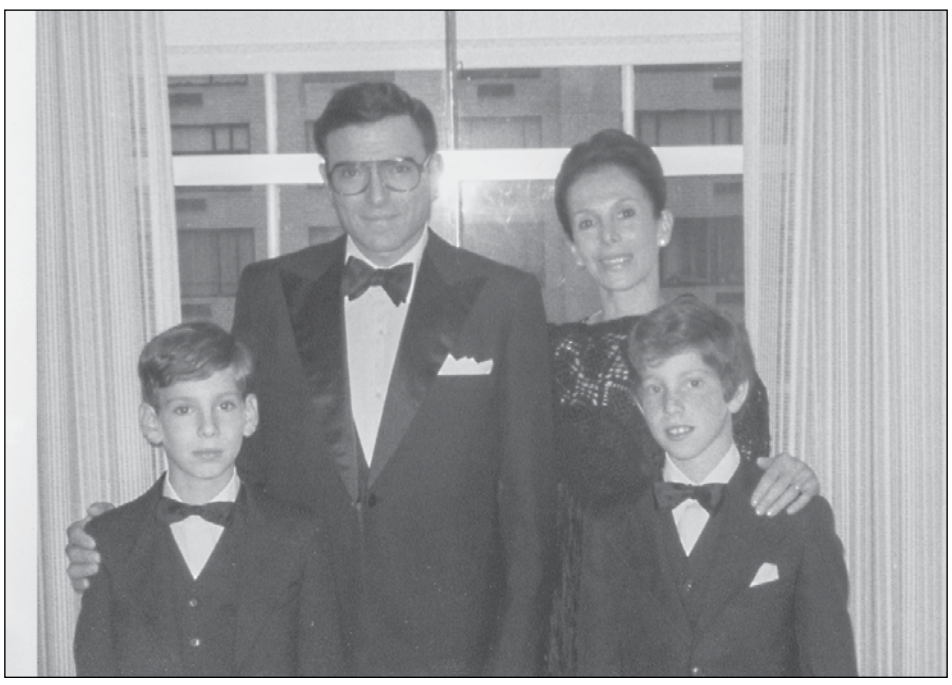
◆ "Death & Taxes": The Zoom discussion of the documentary film will take place on Sunday, January 10, at 7 pm, The discussion, moderated by Ben Kasper, professor emeritus at SUNY Broome, will also feature the film's director Justin Schein. The deadline to register is Wednesday, January 6. The link will be sent out on Thursday, January 7, and the film will be available for viewing from Thursday-Sunday, January 7-10.

The deathandtaxesfilm.com website notes "'Death & Taxes' is a feature documentary about wealth, inequality and the American Dream, viewed through the lens of the estate tax and the very personal story of a father and son at odds over what kind of inheritance we want to leave our kids and our country. Filmmaker Justin Schein's father, Harvey Schein, liked to say he lived the so-called 'American Dream': rising from poverty in Depression-era Brooklyn to great financial success as one of America's top CEOs of the 1970s. But Harvey Schein also spent the last 20 years of his life fixated on trying to keep his hard-earned wealth from the taxman – an obsession that almost broke the Schein family apart. More broadly, inherited wealth and the tax system that shields it have badly distorted American democracy, perpetuating racial and economic inequity in the country." It was filmed over more than 20 years and weaves family footage together with interviews with experts from all sides of the tax debate.

"We are deeply divided as a country," notes Justin Schein. "Those on the right blame big government and regulation for stifling innovation, while the left believe inequality and unchecked corporate profits are hampering social mobility. And at the center of this conflict is the often unspoken, unsexy issue of taxes. Taxes get to the core of how we see the role of our government, what our economics are, and who we want to be as a nation. And while these battles have long gone on in committee rooms on Capitol Hill, they have also been happening for decades at my family's dinner table, between my father and me. 'Death & Taxes' is that story."



Sharon Strimban in "The Property." (Photo by Yaron Scharf)



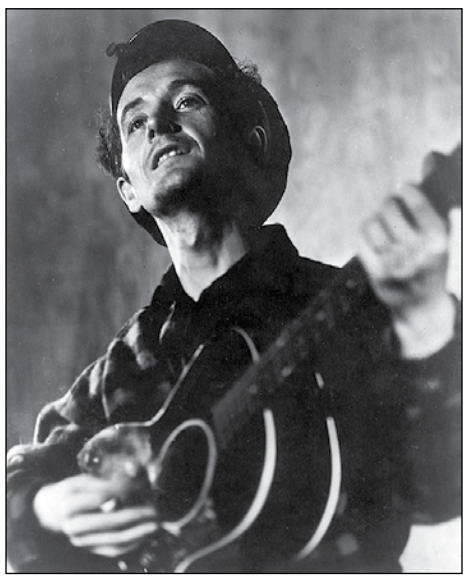
L-r: Justin Schein, Harvey Schein, Joy Schein and Mark Schein in 1978. The family is featured in the documentary "Death & Taxes." (Photo courtesy of Schein Family Archives)

◆ "The Property": The Zoom discussion of the film will take place on Sunday, February 28, at 7 pm. The discussion will be moderated by Nancy Bassman, Ph.D., a historian who trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and earned a doctorate in urban studies from the University of Kent in Canterbury. The deadline to register is Wednesday, February 24. The link will be sent out on Thursday, February 25, and the film will be available for viewing from Thursday-Sunday, February 25-28. The film is in Hebrew and Polish, with English subtitles.

"The Property" is based on Rutu Modan's graphic novel. IMDB.com's summary of the film states, "Regina and her granddaughter Mika embark on a journey to Poland to reclaim their family property seized during World War II, but their quest quickly unravels. Regina unexpectedly decides to abandon the mission entirely, leaving Mika lost and confused. To complicate matters further, an irritating distant relative keeps appearing at every turn. Just as Mika finds herself falling for a charming tour guide, Regina seizes the opportunity to pursue her own hidden agenda: finding her long-lost love, from whom she was separated 70 years ago."

"We grew up in a Jewish-Polish home, but there was no talk of Poland in our house. All we knew about the country our family had come from, we learned at school. In other words – the Holocaust. Our parents and their parents had all fled to Israel as refugees at the break of World War II," said Dana Modan, the film's director. "The film tells our family's personal story, but in our opinion it reflects a universal story of different generations, and their own unique ways of dealing with history. In a world that still insists on splitting itself into groups, identities, peoples and religions, we are searching for the personal and human connections that can be formed between people. Relationships that circumvent all fences. The film tackles heavy, emotionally-charged subject matter, which is why we made the conscious choice to approach it with a comedic lens. We believe this is the human, honest way of viewing reality."

◆ "Dustbowls and Jewish Souls": An in-person screening of the documentary film about singer and songwriter Woody Guthrie will be held on Sunday, April 11, at 10:30 am, at the Jewish Community Center. The screening is co-sponsored by the Temple Israel/Temple Concord Joint Adult Education Group. The discussion will be moderated by Steve Gilbert, Ph.D., professor emeritus of psychology at SUNY Oneonta. The registration deadline TBA.



Woody Guthrie, is the subject of the documentary "Dustbowls and Jewish Souls." (Photo courtesy of Woody Guthrie Publications)

Menemsha Films notes in its description of the documentary that, "The name Woody Guthrie conjures images of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s... However, Woody's horizons extended far beyond the dusty Oklahoma hills of his youth.]Living[in New York City in the 1940s, he was introduced – both personally and professionally – into a vibrant Jewish culture that he wholeheartedly embraced and ultimately had a deep influence on his life and his music. 'Dust Bowls and Jewish Souls' also weaves in the story of Aliza Greenblatt, an immigrant from Ukraine who later became a prominent Yiddish poet and songwriter – and who also happened to be Woody's mother-in-law."

"I'll never forget the moment when I first discovered that Woody Guthrie had written a song about Hanukkah," says Steven Pressman, the director and producer of "Dust Bowls and Jewish Souls." "My curiosity kicked in immediately, and from that moment on I almost felt that I had an obligation to tell this remarkable story about this little-known Jewish side of Woody's life and music."

"The Film Fest committee worked hard to choose a variety of films with varying topics and genres," said Hubal. "We are so pleased with this year's line-up."

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BD

Continued from page 3

In 2017, Baron received the Jewish Theological Seminary's honorary doctorate of divinity (honoris causa) in recognition of his more than 25 years' achievements and contributions to Jewish spiritual life.

Following ordination, he was commissioned as an Army chaplain, and served on active duty at Fort Benning, GA, from 1988-91. He continued as a chaplain in the United States Army Reserve, which included deployment as chaplain in Afghanistan and Iraq. Baron retired from the Army in 2018. Over a 14-year period beginning in 1991, he also served as rabbi in synagogues in Houston, TX (Beth Am), in Youngstown, OH (El Emeth) and in Vestal (Temple Israel).

Baron and his wife, Jill, have lived in the area since 1997, where they raised their three children, who now live in Atlanta and New York City.

"We are honored to have Rabbi Baron return to Beth David to share his insights concerning the lives and teachings of three iconic Torah scholars," organizers say. "His research, life experiences and remarkably engaging speaking style will surely make for a fascinating Shabbat event, to which the community is warmly invited!"

Celebrating Jewish Literature

A golem and a dybbuk

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

The majority of fantasy novels I've read about golems, dybbuks and other supernatural characters have been serious works because the relationships between those creatures and the human ones tend to be fraught and unpleasant. However, that is not the only way to approach the subject: some authors use humor when portraying their supernatural characters. That's what made two novels – one about a golem and the other featuring a dybbuk – so interesting to read at the same time. The wonderful conclusion to the Golem and Jinni trilogy, "The Gates of Midnight" by Helene Wecker (Harper), is filled with drama, anguish and suspense while the delightful reprint of "The Dyke and the Dybbuk" by Ellen Galford (Sinister Wisdom) was not only funny, but offered a satire of the corporate world.

Those who enjoyed the previous Golem and Jinni novels will definitely want to read "The Gates of Midnight." For those who have forgotten what occurred in the first two books, Wecker offers a basic outline of previous events in the form of a diary written by Chava Levy, the golem. In the last book, Chava and Ahmed, the jinni, defeated the evil Yehudah Schaalman, the golem's creator, and trapped him in a flask that is buried under the sands of Syria. Chava now leads a peaceful life in a house hidden behind walls in Brooklyn, while Ahmad moved to Chicago to start a new life after pretending to have been killed in a fire. The two talk on the phone every day and, although they miss each other, have been unable to find a way to share their lives in the same city.

The two characters face great danger when Schaalman escapes from the desert after the flask that contains him is found and brought to the United States, where it ends up in the hands of a mob enforcer. Schaalman is looking to fully escape his prison and gain control of Chava again and enslave Ahmad. The problems Chava and Ahmad face are complicated by the 1929 stock market crash; the appearance of Thomas Beshara, who works to help build the Empire State Building, but whom readers learn has a previous connection to Chava and Ahmad; and Kreindel Altschul, who once had her own golem protector and who dabbles in mystical secrets that Chava finds dangerous. The complex and exciting plot covers more than 450 pages, with the several plot lines coming together to create a suspenseful and satisfying ending.

What makes "The Gates of Midnight" such a success is that even the non-human characters feel real and convincing. Chava worries about losing control of her anger and hurting innocents. It's difficult for her to adjust to normal life, something that is not helped by the fact that she never ages and has to move before people realize there is something different and strange about her. Ahmed faces similar problems, in addition to his desire to use his skills to create something meaningful and awe-inspiring. However, his differences – his Middle Eastern looks and the distance he must keep from his coworkers – work against him. The humans in the book are also interesting, particularly Kreindel, who loves studying Torah and Kabbalah, but who has to hide her studies because, if revealed, she would lose her job as the head of an orphanage for Jewish girls. Although "The Gates of Midnight" could be read as a stand-alone novel, for a full understanding of the plot, readers would do well to read all three books.

While Wecker's novel is a serious work, "The Dyke and the Dybbuk" is laugh-out-loud funny. Galford strays from the traditional idea of a dybbuk: this is not a lost soul forced to remain on earth due to unfinished business. Instead, Kokos (the only one of the dybbuk's names that humans can pronounce) is part of an official business that employs various kinds of supernatural creatures (not all of which are Jewish). Unfortunately, Kokos was not successful in her last assignment: her possession of Gittel, a young woman in a village in Europe, ended when a rabbi imprisoned her in a tree for 200 years. When finally released, the dybbuk discovers just how much the world changed during that time: not only is the village and all its people gone, her company has been bought out by another global enterprise and there are a ton of new rules and regulations she is supposed to follow.

However, Kokos wants to finish her original employment: she was hired to possess the women of this particular family for at least 30 generations. Unfortunately, continued possession looks to end with the current Gittel, Rainbow Rosenbloom, who is a lesbian and doesn't want to have children. The challenge interests Kokos: how can she create problems for a secular, totally Jewishly uninterested person whose sins would have made the original Gittel blush. Ah, there is one way to disturb Rainbow's life: Kokos makes her fall in love with an ultra-Orthodox woman and plots Rainbow's return to the ultra-Orthodox lifestyle. While the dybbuk enjoys the challenge, her corporate superiors keep trying to break the contract. Although, at first, Rainbow found the dybbuk intrusive and interfering, she begins to enjoy her company, even when Kokos makes her behave oddly. The plot follows their adventures to a fun and satisfying ending.

My favorite scenes in the book feature Rainbow's four aunts who love her, but criticize everything she says and does, from her name to her lifestyle and work life. Although the Passover seder is great, the section when Rainbow drives three of her aunts to visit the fourth was hysterical. Kokos' comments on the corporate world and societal changes are also really well done. There are touches of seriousness, as when Kokos compares the world's treatment of Jews and demons, noting that "one upon a time, the Christian world made no distinction between Jews and demons – knowing both had horns," that add depth to the novel.

What's amazing about "The Dyke and the Dybbuk" is how contemporary it feels. Although Galford originally published the novel in the 1990s, it's as relevant today as it was then. Kokos was enjoyable and fun company, although I'm not sure I would want to be possessed by her. I think she would make a really interesting friend, though. That's a high recommendation.

A different look at Deuteronomy

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

I would not refer to most Torah commentaries I've read as exciting and page-turning. This is especially true when the author and my theologies differ greatly. However, although Rabbi David Fohrman approaches the text from an Orthodox point of view, which includes accepting the biblical stories as historically accurate, I find his commentaries on the biblical text fascinating. This is partly because he offers a close reading of the text, looking to see what it actually says, rather than what other commentators have decided it means. Even when I don't agree with his thoughts, I enjoy reading them because I always learn something new. That's true of his latest work "Deuteronomy: A Parsha Companion" (Aleph Beta Press/Maggid). Once again, I found myself eagerly turning pages to learn the new and interesting ideas he offered about the text.*

Fohrman's work does not offer a verse-by-verse commentary, but rather discusses lessons readers can learn from each *parasha* or explains parts of the text he found puzzling. His specialty is showing the connections between different books of the Torah and how, when taken together, they can teach us something of greater importance than the individual verses can do on their own. For example, he discusses several laws found in Deuteronomy, and shows how they refer to previous stories and later biblical books. Readers probably won't be surprised that he ties the law of inheritance – the fact that the eldest son, even if born to a hated wife, must be given a double inheritance – to the story of Jacob, Leah and Rachel, although his discussion is cleverly done and offers insights into the character of Jacob's children. What was unexpected was showing how the law of captive women is reflected in the book of Esther. Even when he seems to be stretching his point, Fohrman's commentary on Esther's behavior was extremely interesting, particularly the reason he posits for Esther's refusal of the cosmetics and other beauty aids. Esther has been taken captive by the king – as have all the women he collected who will now be part of his harem forever – but, like the captive woman, she does not seek to beautify herself. In fact, a close reading of the text shows that what captured the king's heart was not her beauty, but her grace and kindness.

The author writes about the law of sanctuary cities as an example of how the Torah seeks to find a workable way to protect members of Israelite society. For example, Fohrman looks at both sides of the law, of how inadvertent killers are allowed to escape to a sanctuary city to prevent being killed, but also how a blood avenger is allowed to shed their blood if they don't do so. He notes how the inadvertent killer was most likely neglectful, but still doesn't deserve to be put to death. However, he also understands how a blood avenger will feel such pain and grief over the death of his loved one that his desire to punish the killer makes sense. The larger point is that both these people are tied together by death, whether an inadvertently one or one as a form of justice. According to Fohrman, the Torah looks to teach that "the justice system, in the Torah's world, isn't merely a mechanism for making sure that everyone gets what's coming to them. It is a vehicle through which society teaches its highest values." He notes that the Torah seeks a "balanced path," writing that "the truest response to human failing is not to repeat it, but to demonstrate the better path that isn't taken. For it is only by doing so, by refusing to let apathy answer apathy or zealousness answer zealousness, that we can hope to build a society that navigates successfully between the shoals of those two deadly extremes."

Many of the ideas Fohrman explores are too complex to explain in a short review because it's impossible to duplicate the author's careful step-by-step approach. However, his amazing interpretation of why Moses wasn't able to enter the Promised Land is worth trying to summarize. The traditional approach is that it was Moses' striking a rock, rather than speaking to it, so the Israelites will have water to drink that prevented him from being allowed to enter. Fohrman sees this as the concluding event in a series of events that are the real reason Moses is unable to fulfill his dream. The first event dates back to the Golden Calf, when God tells Moses that God will kill off the sinning Israelites and replace them with the descendants of Moses. Moses refuses to allow that to happen. Fohrman notes that there is something very important to note in what the Israelites actually say about the calf: they are less worried about being left alone in the desert than about losing Moses, whom they see as their only connection to God. The idea that Moses is their connection to God can also be found in what happens when the Israelites are attacked by the Amalekites. It's only when Moses' hands are held up by Aaron and Hur when Moses tires that the Israelites are able to defeat their attackers. What Fohrman makes clear is that the Israelites see Moses as the one who makes this possible. It is Moses, rather than God alone, who protects them.

Fohrman ties what occurs to Moses to the story of Jacob and Jacob's dream that takes place when he is fleeing his brother Esau. The promise God makes Jacob then is that God will bring him back safely to the land he is fleeing. The author doesn't believe that occurred when Jacob first returned to Canaan with wives and children, because his family soon moved to Egypt where his descendants became slaves. The fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob will take place now, when the Israelites cross the Jordan River. However, their belief that they need Moses to connect to God is wrong. That link must be broken. Forhman believes that, in some way, the Israelites worship Moses, which is why there can never be another prophet like him: all the people are able to connect to God, from the highest priest to the lowest in the land, including the water carrier. If this sounds a bit far-fetched, that's because it's a summary of more than 100 pages of close text study. However, even if readers don't agree with Fohrman's ideas, watching them develop is incredibly thought provoking and inspiring.

Fohrman is an excellent teacher: he talks directly to the reader and even notes when they may feel that his textual comparisons are less than convincing. For those who enjoy a close reading of the text, his discussion of how different sections of the Torah are related are well done, even if one doesn't agree with his interpretations. It's worth it, though, to follow his reasoning for the lesson he teaches. All five of his *parasha* companions belong on the shelves of anyone who enjoys learning about the twists and turns of Torah.

**To read* The Reporter's *reviews of Fohrman's commentaries on the previous books of the Bible, visit www.thereportergroup.org/features/off-the-shelf-biblical-commentary-by-rabbi-rachel-esserman-368553, www.thereportergroup.org/features/off-the-shelf-parasha-and-prophet-by-rabbi-rachel-esserman-377675, www.thereportergroup.org/features/cjl-exploring-leviticus-467131 and www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews/cjl-exploring-the-biblical-book-of-numbers.*

This dedicated book section was made possible by a generous donation from Rebecca Birchard. The Reporter thanks her for her support over the years.

Celebrating Jewish Literature

Biblical first families and God as a parent

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

The publication of new biblical commentaries may seem without end, but those who love studying the stories found in the Torah text are often eager to discover new and different lenses with which to view them. Sometimes, the book was disappointing, merely rehashing what was said in prior publications. That is not true of the excellent and exciting "God and the First Families: Parenting, Trauma, and Healing in the Book of Genesis" by Stephen Spector (The Jewish Publication Society). Spector, a professor emeritus of English at Stony Brook University, not only reviews interpretations of other biblical scholars, but offers his own fascinating slant on the text.

In his introduction, Spector notes the underlying question he seeks to explore in his work: "Who is God?" This is not an existential question for him, but rather grounded in the idea that God seems to answer some prayers (for example, the author's teenage prayer that his mother would survive cancer) and not others (for example, those who died in the Holocaust). He writes, "God answered my prayers and not theirs. Balancing these two realities has left me in an uncomfortable place spiritually: I am a skeptic who deeply believes in God." He then reviews different American's concepts of God and notes the ways God acts as a parent in the Bible, two things he finds complement each other. However, the author also notes the many traumas the biblical first families faced partly due to God's parenting approaches, which changed over time. Spector also mentions how the patriarchs and matriarchs can serve as models of how *not* to parent.

Some of the parenting styles that the author believes God follows include the authoritarian (children are expected to obey without being given an explanation behind a parent's decision or the reason for a punishment), permissive (generally not giving children any directions and allowing them to act as they please), neglectful (ignoring children, even when they are harming themselves) and authoritative (children are expected to behave, but parents communicate the reasons behind decisions to help them with their personal and moral growth). These definitions are simplifications, but give a basis for Spector's understanding of how God's parenting styles that mirror those of humans.

In Genesis, the author sees God using several parenting styles. For example, it is an authoritarian God who tells Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of good and evil because no explanation of the reason behind that decision is given. The same is true for the binding of Isaac: Abraham is told what to do without God explaining the reason behind the demand. Spector sees a change, though, when God begins to interact with Abraham's descendants: "God in the later Genesis stories focuses less on obedience and submission and more on the moral and emotional development of Israel's ancestors. An old Jewish saying holds that you know your suffering has been sent by God when it teaches you something. That's what happens to Israel's children as Genesis draws to a close."

Many of the characters are traumatized by what occurs to them. That trauma was then passed down through the generations. The binding of Isaac is one example. Spector writes, "Although the Binding is a test of Abraham, it is Isaac who pays the greatest price and sustains the most injury. The emotional damage that the *Akedah* inflicts on him affects him deeply, and I propose that it infects his children and their children. Authoritarian parenting has silenced God's favorite patriarch, Abraham, and injured Abraham's son. Both have submitted to a higher authority, Abraham to God's and Isaac to his father's. The family has proved worthy. But the price has been high, perhaps too high for mere mortals to endure without incurring injury. The experience exposes the fragility of the mortal players in the divine drama."

In the later stories in Genesis, God does not directly explain what the characters need to learn, but instead teaches them lessons through the actions of others. For example, Jacob cheats his brother Esau out of his birthright and is then tricked by his father-in-law Laban to not only marry both his daughters, but work seven additional years to pay for marrying Rachel. Joseph's brothers learn humility and are sorrowful for their actions against him, as shown by the way they seek to protect Benjamin when he is threatened in Egypt. They pass a test that allows Joseph to reveal his true identity. Joseph does not speak to God, but does note that he feels that it was God who brought him to Egypt, giving divine approval of his actions.

Spector does admit that one parental approach won't work with every child in every situation. He sees a difference between to God's interactions with individual members of a family – one where the authoritative approach works – and his approach to the Israelite people as a whole, where authoritarian methods work best. The author notes God's return to the authoritarian approach during the Exodus from Egypt, when God governs by offering laws for all to follow, rather than dealing individually with each family.

This short review cannot do justice to "God and the First Families." Anyone interested in analyzing biblical stories will want to read this book. It would also work for classes or study groups that can discuss in more detail the different possibilities Spector offers. Readers do not have to agree with all the author's interpretations to find this a thought-provoking and rewarding work.

Novels about different countries and times

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Italy/U.S.

"How are these two characters related?" is a question that readers will ask when reading "Like Wafers in Honey" by Leah Eskin (Levine Querido). The novel is both a look at Italy under Mussolini during World War II and an exploration of life in the U.S. from 1950-2000. Each chapter is divided into three sections: in the first, 17-year-old Stella Fortuna and three of her siblings avoid transportation to a detention camp, hiding from fascist troops and those who would betray them. The second features recipes of Italian Jewish delicacies. The real life Edda Machlin serves as the main character in the third story – a woman who traveled to the U.S., married and tried to understand American culture, while offering friends and neighbors a taste of the dishes she knew growing up in Italy.

In other hands, this might have been an uneasy mix, but Eskin manages to turn these disparate sections into a charming narrative. Stella is poetic and imaginative, which makes her thoughts easy to read, even when she frequently has to move to escape being captured. However, her experiences teach her something important: that people are complicated – a mix of good and bad – something that makes her long "for her old sewing scissors, wish[ing] she could fashion a coat of many colors for each character in this story." Edda, on the other hand, is down to earth and offended by what is called Italian food in America, something that leads her to write her own cookbook. She also must decide what to do with her memories of life in Italy during the war. One of her brothers notes, "Either you choose to forget, and live that slice of life that remains for us. Or you can choose to remember, and risk falling into the abyss. So, a compromise. To be able to survive and live a normal-looking life, I forget. But not within me. No, I remember."

Unlike many Jewish World War II novels, "Like Wafers in Honey" does not focus on the Holocaust. Instead, it is a story of survival – survival when the world around you becomes one you no longer recognize, a world that once accepted you and now rejects your very existence. It also looks at how one survives and makes a new life when those years are over.

Guatemala/Berlin

Eduardo Halfon is noted for writing moody novels featuring a fictional version of himself as the main character. Many of his works are explorations of his family or his personal experiences, although he does claim they are not accurate views of his life. This is also true of his latest work "Tarantula" (Bellevue Literary Press), which looks at a traumatic experience that occurred at a Jewish survival training camp in 1984, while also discussing his relationship with his father and his meeting with a counselor from the camp in Berlin in contemporary times.

The traumatic camp experience opens the novel, but the narrative soon turns to why the author's family moved to the U.S. when he was around 10 years old. At 13, Halfon was sent to Guatemala to attend a Jewish survival training camp. The parents think this means learning how to live in the wilderness – camping in tents and learning how to navigate in a forest. Unfortunately, the counselors have something more sinister in mind. However, before readers learn exactly what happened at the camp, Halfon talks about his difficult relationship with not only his father, but Judaism. In fact, the two seem tied in his mind. The narrative moves in circles, with the author learning the reason behind the traumatic experience before readers learn about the specifics of his experience. Underlying the story are his thoughts about memory, not only the different ways people remember and disagree about events, but how these memories of childhood remain, underlying adult behavior even when people are unaware of them. However, as Halfon learns, they can rise at unexpected times and affect our actions.

"Tarantula" is not for those who prefer a straight narrative, but it does leave readers with a great deal to ponder and discuss, making this book a good choice for book clubs. Readers may debate whether some of what is revealed is true or invented, but that just makes the work even more intriguing to read.

Ancient Moav

There have been numerous debates about why so many adults readers now deliberately seek novels written for young adults. One simple reason is that many of these works feature moving stories about interesting characters whose dilemmas offer life lessons. That's certainly true for Sharon Reiss Baker's "Last Days in Moav" (Apples and Honey Press), which focuses on three siblings during the days before the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land after the Exodus from Egypt. The narrative generally rotates between three siblings. However, the eldest son, Netanel, offers a very different point of view than the other main characters, his twin siblings, 16-year-old Milcah and Gidon: Netanel died in a flood a few years back, but his soul remains attached to this world, making him a *rapha* (a ghost-like figure) that no one can see or hear. That means he watches his family, but is unable to communicate with them.

Milcah and Gidon are healers who not only use herbs, but are able to channel healing from God. This leaves them open to charges of witchcraft, which is punishable by death. Their family life is not easy: their father helps command the army, but is not a loving and caring figure. He ignores their younger brother, Avidan, and spends little time with their mother, who has sunken into a depression. However, he dotes on his new, pregnant wife. Milcah feels no one will ever want to marry her, but ponders other possibilities for her future when she meets someone new in the marketplace. Unfortunately, that future is threatened when she and Gidon are accused of deliberately killing a neighbor's goats. The fine line they must follow to prove their innocence will determine the course of their lives.

"Last Days in Moav" is filled with suspense and has an excellent plot. Its characters felt three-dimensional, developing and learning more about themselves and those around them. All of the characters except for Moses came from Baker's imagination, allowing readers to view events from a very different point of view. Lovers of biblical-themed fiction will definitely want to add this work to their library.

Spiritual advice

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Life can be difficult and finding a way to deal with those difficulties is not always easy. Whether it's a tragedy that breaks one's heart or the accumulation of everyday cares and concerns that leaves one feeling overwhelmed, the days can seem a never-ending, gray, lifeless trudge. Two new works offer ways to help people through tragic times and/or find joy and meaning in life: Rabbi Amy Grossblatt Pessah discusses how she continues to find and create joy after the death of her 20-year-old son to brain cancer in "The Wholeness of a Broken Heart: Pathways to Resilience and Renewal" (Monkfish Book Publishing Company), while Debbie Plawner uses colors and symbols for readers to create a more spiritual life in "Illuminated Paths: 52 Ways to Access Your Inner Wisdom Through the Colors of Torah" (The Collective Book Studio).

Pessah notes in her introduction that life is difficult and of the need to move through the grieving process, using faith to find the beauty that remains in the world. The author reminds readers that, while we cannot choose what happens to us, we can choose how we respond. However, she is clear that people need to cultivate faith now, before facing the illness or death of a loved one. It is through processing the brokenness that Pessah found ways to craft wholeness. She accomplished that by connecting to community, family, friends and nature.

Readers should note that Pessah has a kind of faith that others may not share: she believes that her late son sends her signs, everything from practical jokes he would have played to events that remind her of him. While that idea may not resonate with everyone (it didn't with this reader), she still offers a great deal of excellent advice, particularly how not to be permanently swallowed by sorrow. Yes, there are days when she feels overwhelmed by the death of her son, but she still looks to find joy somewhere that day. The author correctly notes that life is bittersweet and offers practical suggestions for when one feels overwhelmed. These include allowing oneself to deeply feel those emotions; focusing on the moment; making sure to breathe in the joy and breathe out the sorrow; spending time in nature; and being kind and compassionate to oneself, which includes realizing that some days are going to be more difficult than

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Celebrating Jewish Literature

Legend, real person or a bit of both

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Some books are difficult to review because they aren't what you expect. That was the case with "I, Wandering Jew: A Five-Century History of Our Modern Condition" by Yair Mintzker (Princeton University Press). Mintzker's book is a well written, in-depth work about the legend of the Wandering Jew. My problem? I thought there was going to be more Jewish content. There were also some sections that left me puzzled, which says less about the work than my sense that the author and I were focusing on different parts of the legend.

In his introduction, Mintzker discusses the origin of the Wandering Jew legend. The story seems to have first appeared in a pamphlet published in Germany in1602. It tells of a German student who met a man called Ahasverus, who claimed to have been alive when Jesus was crucified. When Jesus tried to rest against the wall of Ahasverus' shop while carrying the cross, Ahasverus cursed him. Jesus is then said to have answered, "I will stand here and rest, but you must go!" According to the pamphlet, Ahasverus was then forced to wander the world until the Second Coming. The author also notes that this legend was accepted as fact by the Nazis and was yet another reason they condemned the Jewish population of the world.

Readers might expect Mintzker to discuss the origin of the pamphlet first and then show how the idea of the Wandering Jew was later adopted by the Jewish community. Instead, he writes about this in reverse order, something that was a problem for me. His first chapter, which takes place in 1952, deals with a so-called Wandering Jew, who traveled from Europe to Israel and then to South America. The man turns out to have been a real person and there is even a record of his death. Yet, Mintzker sees the Wandering Jew as part reality and part myth, noting that how people think about the idea matters as much as the legend. I didn't find this particularly convincing, at least in this chapter.

His chapter on "The Nag," written by Yiddish author Shalom Jacob Abramovitsh under the name Mendele Mocher Sforim (which translates into Mendele the Book Seller), does show how the legend became part of the Jewish psyche. The main character of the novel tried to assimilate into Russian culture, only to find that the books he reads for his schooling drive him mad. The work compares the Jewish people to an overworked wreck of a horse (the nag), which comes to symbolize the Wandering Jew. The author notes that "over the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the stereotypical Ahasverus was cast as a sympathetic Jew, before becoming part of a concrete embodied reality. Some Jews could now identify deeply with, and live vicariously through, a version of the Wandering Jew."

The next two chapters focus a great deal on the origin of the original pamphlet and Protestant theology. Mintzker tells of those who, in 1711, proved that the legend was not based on a real event or person, although some still felt there was a general truth to the idea of Jews being cursed. The discussions of various versions of Protestant theology were beyond my general knowledge. (I confess to knowing about Luther and Calvin, but I never studied Protestant divisions of the time in any detail.) Mintzker notes the way these theologians disparaged each other (with the name calling reminiscent of today's social media).

It is in the second chapter that the author does his big reveal: Mintzker believes that the original story actually had nothing to do with Jews. He not only notes the theologians being made fun of, but the one who inspired the Wandering Jew legend. That not only made the theologian seem like a buffoon, but compared him to those who don't believe in or understand Christianity. Most casual readers will not recognize the names of these people: they are not major figures for those who know little about the origins of the different forms of German Protestantism.

The last chapter, which returns to the present day, offers a third-person look at Mintzker's life. He sees himself as a Wandering Jew, first living in Israel and then traveling to different parts of the world. For him, the Wandering Jew serves as a literary symbol and a fact of life. He asks the question: "At its core, Ahasverus's legend depicts Jews as eternal strangers no matter who they are or what they do. But in light of postcolonial discourse, one has to wonder: if Jews aren't indigenous to what they call the Land of Israel, where exactly *are* they indigenous? In America? Poland? Scandinavia? Jews, according to postcolonialism's binary ideology, are always and everywhere alien; their fate is to remain wandering Jews."

It was the story of the author's life found in that chapter of "I, Wandering Jew" that made me glad I persevered and finished the book. The work concludes with a translation of the original story of the Wandering Jew found in the 1602 pamphlet. What will remain with readers is the thought that a work of fiction can take on its own life and affect generations who believe its truth. That is a lesson worth contemplating.

War and survival

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Someday I am going to get a t-shirt printed with the phrase, "Even I can't read everything (but not for lack of trying)." That was one of the reasons I didn't originally ask for a review copy of Yishay Ishi Ron's "Dog" (Soncata Press), which later went on to win two national Jewish Book Award: the Miller Family Book Club Awards and the Jane Weitzman Award for Hebrew Fiction in Translation. The other was that I knew the subject matter made for difficult reading. However, I was debating buying a copy when I saw that Ron had another book coming out: "The Girl Who Rode the White Lion" (Soncata Press). When I asked for a review copy of that work, the publisher sent me that book and "Dog." What is clear from reading both is that Ron writes powerful and moving fiction.

Both works are partly based on real life. "Dog" tells of an Israeli soldier who is so traumatized by what occurred during his time in Gaza that the only way he can forget those events is to medicate himself with heroin. He sleeps in an abandoned building in Tel Aviv and spends his days begging for money so he can buy more drugs. The unnamed soldier now goes by the name Geller, based on the fact that he believes that someday he'll be able to bend a spoon with his mind like the famous illusionist Uri Geller. Although his family cares about him, Geller can't bear to spend time with them because he feels like a complete disappointment. The only family member he visits is his father, whose stroke has left him unconscious and who is being kept alive by machines.

Geller's life changes when a stray dog enters his life. The dog is injured and Geller wants to help him, even though he is unable to help himself. When Geller collapses on his way to taking Dog (as he is now called) to a vet, Geller is taken to the hospital and the dog is almost abandoned. Fortunately, Doris was walking by at the time and, even though she doesn't want a pet, decides to take care of Dog. Curious about Geller, she and Dog seek him out at the abandoned building after he is quickly released from the hospital. Doris is the only who seems to accept Geller as a human being even with his drug habit. It's not that she doesn't want him to get clean, but she is still willing to befriend him even if he continues to take heroin. In fact, parts of the plot hinge on the fact that Doris looks for Geller even in places he believes are too dangerous for her to enter.

The author uses different points of view to help readers better understand his characters: Geller speaks in the first person, while the third person is used to present Dog and Doris' thoughts. The sections featuring Dog are convincingly canine: it's clear that Dog is an animal, not a human in disguise. My only complaint is that the novel seems to end, rather than conclude, leaving readers to ponder or debate what happens after the last page.

"Dog" is painful and disturbing to read, which is the point. Geller suffers from post-traumatic distress, but, after having been a member of an elite Israel Defense Force unit, it's hard for him to admit that he can't cope with his memories. Using heroin not only numbs him, but makes him forget the past. At least, that's true until his body once again demands a hit. Ron dedicates his book "to the combatants whose eyes have seen things that their minds refuse to forget." What Geller and those combatants experienced was heartbeaking. My final reaction was to think that rather than thanking soldiers for their service, we should apologize to them for all they suffered.

It's clear that "Dog" is based on Ron's personal experiences, something he notes in his biography. That made me wonder if he could write about events he has not personally experienced. I'm glad to say the answer to the question is yes. "The Girl Who Rode the White Lion" is not only powerful and moving, but extremely suspenseful. It focuses on two time periods: Nazi Germany before and during the beginning of World War II, and several countries in the late 1950s.

The section about the Frank family takes place during the earlier period: Sarah's father has been sent to a concentration camp by a former friend of the family who is now a member of the SS. Hubert Zimmer has always been envious of his friend's success and partly in love with his wife, Ruth. Although relationships are forbidden between Germans and Jews, Zimmer tries to rape her. Ruth manages to escape with her daughter, although no one will help her for fear they will also be arrested. Seeking shelter at a circus, Ruth orders Sarah to hide. What happens then is something readers will have to discover for themselves, but Ron definitely captures the magic Sarah feels at the circus, particularly the wonder she experiences seeing the elephants and lions perform.

The 1950s section begins in New York City with the death of a white lion who lives at the Central Park Zoo. While doing an autopsy on the lion, Dr. Mark Spencer discovers a ring with the SS insignia on it. Unable to control his curiosity, Mark travels to France and then Israel to learn why and how the lion came to swallow the ring. His search not only uncovers secrets, but changes his life as he learns more about what happened to the Jewish community of Europe during the war.

Ron does a superb job allowing readers to see into the minds of his characters. Particularly of interest are the chapters featuring Zimmer's thoughts. Readers come to understand his psyche while still being able to disdain and condemn his actions and thoughts. The members of the circus where Sarah hides are also shown as complete characters with conflicting emotions and desires. That includes the problem faced by one character: is it permissible to save someone you love if you have to sacrifice someone else to do so?

While readers may correctly guess how the white lion swallowed the ring, that does not negate the suspense since there is far more to the tale than one might at first suspect. The novel's ending proved surprising, heartrending and satisfying. "The Girl Who Rode the White Lion" is based on a real story, but the author successfully fleshes out the details of his characters, good and bad, in an amazing way. Ron is definitely a writer to watch. I look forward to more of his works.

Advice

Continued from page 8

others. That advice can speak to anyone facing great life problems: even in the midst of the worst days of their lives, they can look to find joy in the world, just as Pessah does.

"The Wholeness of a Broken Heart" offers a great deal of wisdom, even for those who disagree with Pessah's theology, because the practical applications of her ideas can still be helpful. Her work is rooted in Jewish concepts, from the importance of Shabbat to the value of community, and is filled with stories about those who have found joy after suffering sorrow.

While Pessah's work offers a traditional approach to spirituality in that it features written text, Plawner presents an intriguing way for readers to explore a different path to spirituality. Her work comes with a short booklet, an oracolor wheel and a set of 52 cards. The author bases her work on the Zohar, a Jewish mystical text, that says that a soul journeys through four levels of light, light that the author sees as interacting with color. Three realms – mind, body and heart – are connected to various color pathways. Each color offers English and Hebrew concepts to explore. For example, under the term mind, readers can concentrate on gratitude/*bracha*, intention/*kavanah*, attitude/*tzedakah* or attention/*hineni*. Each individual color is used as an avenue to understanding four levels of meaning: *pshat* (surface level understanding), *remez* (using the Hebrew word to explore additional meaning), *drash* (practical suggestions to use this idea) and *sod* (a spiritual meaning that suggests ways for readers to reflect on what they've learned). Each page ends with a blessing for readers related to the theme of the card.

Plawner relates several different ways to use the cards. Readers can search the deck to find a color that appeals to them and then ponder the Jewish concept offered. The author also suggests different types of readings that can be done through layouts that may remind readers of tarot cards. These step-by-step suggestions will help those with no experience in using color and illustrations to explore spiritual ideas.

What does stand out is how beautiful the cards are. Although sometimes the subtle shades of colors can make them difficult to read, they are a pleasure to look at and explore. Even those who might scoff at using cards to explore spirituality may enjoy sifting through and setting out their favorite cards. Plawner's work offers an intriguing and very different approach to exploring Jewish concepts and ways to incorporate them into readers' lives.

Celebrating Jewish Literature

Romance, social media and sex

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

One reason people enjoy romantic comedies is because their endings are predictable: a true rom-com guarantees its main characters a happily ever after. Even if they face serious problems – physical or psychological – readers know that everything will work out in the end. In a world where that often doesn't happen, these books not only offer comfort, but the thrill of an exciting romance readers may never themselves experience. That's certainly true of two recent rom-coms, "Soon By You" by Dahlia Adler (St. Martin's Griffen) and "Extracurricular" by Rachel Lynn Solomon (Berkley Romance). Although the characters belong to two different worlds, the novels have several things in common: both feature characters who are afraid they will never experience a satisfying relationship and who find their world impacted by social media. Both works also offer a great deal of explicit sex, something readers who prefer more chaste works should note.

"Soon By You" takes place in New York City's tight- knit Modern Orthodox community. Twenty-nine-year-old Arielle (Ari) Becker fits the category of always-a-bridesmaid-never-a-bride, although she's not sure she ever wants to get married. A free spirit who has a not-so-great reputation in her community, she has hooked up with (but never had actual intercourse with) several men, none of whom look at her as a serious marital prospect. What does bother her, though, is that most of her married friends no longer want to maintain their friendship, greatly reducing her social life. She worries this may happen with her current roommates: one is getting married and the other is in a serious relationship. Ari also knows she can't afford their apartment by herself, which would mean looking for new roommates. Matters are not helped by the fact that Ari hates change, but can do little to stop it.

The romantic element of the story begins during a wedding and, of course, it's dislike on both sides at first sight. When Ari tries to balance on her high heels during a wedding ceremony, she loses her balance and steps on Judah Klein's foot. Judah is the strictly Orthodox singer everyone wants at their weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs and other happy occasion. He is 33 years old and unmarried, something unusual in his community. However, even though he has gone on numerous dates, he's never been attracted to any of the women. Plus, he has a far more strict Orthodox practice than Ari, including being *shomer negiah*, meaning that he won't touch a woman who is not his wife. Unfortunately for him, Judah can't seem to avoid Ari and finds that, for the first time in his life, he actually feels desire for someone. The novel answers the question of whether two people with such different approaches to life can form a mutually satisfying relationship.

"Soon By You" is laugh out loud funny. (My favorite line in the book is when Judah, who doesn't yet know Ari's name, refers to her mentally as "Stompy McGlaremaid" for the if-looks-could-kill glares she gave him when they were waiting for the bride and groom to walk up the aisle.) Watching Judah come to terms with his feelings for Ari was a pleasure. Seeing Ari learn someone could care enough to risk his reputation for her – many of their interactions in public appeared on social media – was heart-warming. There is more sex content than one might expect from a book focusing on the Orthodox community, but it works since it portrays the way Judah comes to terms with his sexual feelings and what he wants from life.

While "Soon By You" was funnier than "Extracurricular," Solomon's novel does not lack in its own delights, particularly in how it made one of its main characters, Ramona Wilder, feel so believable. Ramona is a singer/actor with a very successful career who decides to retire when she is 26. Her mother had pushed her into show business at a young age and Ramona feels that everything she's done – from the almost starvation diet to the men she dated – were part of her career path, not her life. Now she wants to find out who she really is and do something she never had the chance to do: attend college.

However, things are different than Ramona expected when she attends her first class, an introduction to psychology taught by the 36-year-old, recently divorced Nick Navarro. Nick has just moved into a guesthouse owned by his sister. Although he loves her and adores his niece, he feels like a failure because of his divorce. How could he not notice that his ex-wife was so unhappy that she found a more satisfying relationship with one of her coworkers? Although he enjoys his research, Nick deeply loves teaching and is looking forward to this semester as a break from feeling sorry for himself (although he does try to limit those feelings to only 10 minutes a day). He is also up for tenure this year, but his career has been so successful, he's not actively worried about that occurring.

Of course, fireworks start when Ramona turns up in his class. Their introduction does not go well: he walks in to find her yelling at one of the other students, who had been making disparaging remarks about her, remarks he didn't hear. He's not sure she's actually there to learn or if this is a stunt to help her career. Ramona reacts badly to his comments and, at first, has difficulty adjusting to being in school. She is also dealing with mixed feelings about her relationship with her mother and, when one of her former co-stars is accused of sexual assault, mentally revisits what occurred during their time together. Plus, all her relationships with men have been transactional: they thought she could help their career and didn't care about her feelings so she is definitely not looking to hook up with anyone.

This wouldn't be a rom-com if Ramona and Nick didn't start a relationship. However, he is her professor, making the relationship a forbidden one, at least until the semester is over. Plus, the 10-year age difference makes him uncomfortable, as does having to hide from the public eye. Is it possible for them to overcome their differences and for Ramona to find meaning in life beyond her former career? In addition to discussing these issues, "Extracurricular" also looks at the meaning of stardom and the positive effects that performers can have on the lives of those who adore them.

While I enjoyed both books (the pages of each flew by), I wondered after I finished them if the romances were realistic. It's clear that that is not one of the requirements for rom-coms and I appreciated the endings of both works. I did ponder, though, whether part of that enjoyment came from the fact that in each work, the men seemed unable to control their desires. I'm not talking about sexual assault: they both respected and cared for these women. However, Judah is willing to risk his career by being involved with someone members of the community think is beneath him, and Nick is willing to risk his tenure and all he's worked for by being with Ramona. That kind of devotion seems more like wish-fulfillment than reality. Wish-fulfillment, though, is one of the reasons readers love this genre and what makes it so popular: as messy as these romances can get, readers know there will be a warm, happy, satisfying ending.

Lost sacred works

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Years ago, I reviewed two books about the Cairo geniza. I had a clear preference for one of the books, but two friends who also read both preferred the other. When thinking about our difference of opinion, I realized that they were interested in the discovery of the documents and the work the scientists did to make them legible. The reason I preferred the other book was because its main focus was on the actual writings themselves, for example, legal contracts and marriage documents, etc., found in the geniza. This came to mind when reading "Hidden Scrolls, Buried Bibles: How We Discover the Sacred Past" by Eva Mroczek (Yale University Press). I had hoped to learn about the contents of the scrolls themselves. Instead, Mroczek's focus is on her subtitle: the myths told about lost scrolls, and the stereotypes and prejudices offered in the stories of their recovery. The lessons she teaches offer a new way to view these documents and the tales of how they were discovered.

Mroczek initially looks at the structure of the biblical text, noting that the Bible we have was not inevitable since that text was affected/formed by a variety of factors. She writes, "A scribe would have encountered a variant oral version of a patriarchal legend; a redactor could have decided to combine sources differently, choosing one version of a story rather than intertwining two, texts now lost could have been preserved by accident or design, while some of the books we now have could have perished in flames." In fact, there are currently at least three different versions of the biblical text: the Jewish Bible, the Catholic Bible and the Protestant one, which differ on the number of books they contain and the order in which they occur. While the author does not specifically write of talmudic discussions about the inclusion of such selections as the Song of Songs, she does note how in Kings 2 the priest Hilkiah discovered a scroll, a document that is accepted as law, even though its commandments may not have been previously practiced. (Some scholars believe this was the book of Deuteronomy, but it is never specifically labeled as such.)

The author also talks about what may be missing from the biblical texts currently available. For example, the book of Proverbs is said to contain only a small number of those written by Solomon. Hippolytus, an ancient historian, believed that Solomon actually wrote 3,000 proverbs and 5,000 songs. According to Hippolytus, King Hezekiah's officials were the ones who chose which works would become part of the biblical canon. Mroczek also writes of the discovery of scrolls that offer alternative versions of the biblical text, although it is exceedingly rare for the accepted version of the text to be changed to feature any of these variations. She notes that the scrolls were copies made by different religious sects, which, either by accident or deliberate intent, changed the text.

According to Mroczek, finding a perfect text is impossible: "A stable unchanging text is only an abstract ideal." This is partly due to the fact that these texts are vulnerable to time, nature and human actions. That is why so few hidden texts appear whole; insects, weather, fire, etc., can easily ruin a scroll, leaving scholars trying to piece together the original, a difficult – if not impossible – task. However, there are Jewish legends that suggest extra copies of the Torah were made so it would never be lost. This tradition notes that Moses made 13 copies of the Torah: one for each tribe and a 13th to be placed in the Ark of the Covenant. Later legends suggest that this 13th scroll is now safely kept in heaven.

Mroczek is particularly interested in the myths that surround the discovery of these hidden texts. She notes that almost all contain the same elements: an ignorant person chasing an animal or seeing an animal enter a cave/hole that contains scrolls. These people – usually natives of the area – are said to have no idea what the texts are worth, sometimes using them to start fires or wrap objects. Other tales note that, while they may be ignorant of their value as sacred items, they know the scroll can be sold for a profit. These stories have become a genre of their own with the author noting that, even when they are clearly not true, people prefer them to learning what actually occurred. She see these stories as racist since they treat the Arabs who found these scrolls as ignorant and crude – viewed as if their culture has not developed since biblical times.

"Hidden Scrolls, Buried Bibles" seemed less a cohesive work than a review of disparate subjects. However, it also contains a great deal of interesting material, particularly its discussion of a variety of Jewish and Christian traditions concerning these texts. Where it succeeds best, though, is in its analysis of the myths of the discovery of these works: readers will find themselves viewing these stories very differently.

Rabbi Rachel Esserman's previous book reviews can be found on The Reporter's website under "Features" at www.thereportergroup.org/book-reviews.

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Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

Holocaust memorial service held



The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton held a memorial service at the Holocaust Memorial Monument in the Temple Israel Cemetery on September 20, led by area rabbis. Approximately 20 community members attended the event.



Rabbi Micah Friedman participated in the Holocaust memorial service.



Federation President Suzanne Holwitt welcomed those attending the Holocaust memorial service.

IBM and the Holocaust lecture held



More than 100 community members attended a lecture by author Edwin Black (standing, at left) on October 5, at the Jewish Community Center on "How Thomas J. Watson and IBM Co-Planned and Organized the Holocaust." The talk was arranged by the Binghamton Holocaust Memory Group. (Photo by Shelley Hubal)



L-r: Edwin Black and Eliot Fiks, who helped arrange Black's October 5 talk. (Photo by Shelley Hubal)



At right: Edwin Black spoke about "How Thomas J. Watson and IBM Co-Planned and Organized the Holocaust." (Photo by Richard Stram)



In center: Lucy Mehl (on right) and her daughter, Lisa Warner

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Style E - $21
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Your Name(s)

Style F - $21
Actual Size: 1.52" x 1.975"

HAPPY CHANUKAH!
YOUR NAME(S)

Post-Oct. 7 Jewish engagement surge in U.S. continuing steadily, new study suggests

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

(JNS, Oct. 8) – A new study by the Jewish Federations of North America suggests that the surge in Jewish interest and engagement that emerged after Oct. 7 continues three years later.

Most respondents (52 percent) said they have maintained increased involvement with a Jewish community over the past three years. Another 23 percent of American Jewish respondents said they are engaging less, but still more than before Oct. 7.

"Last year, we shared that between 2024 and 2025, there was a dip in the surge, a lower rate than it had been the first year" after Oct. 7, Mimi Kravetz, chief impact and growth officer at the Federation, told JNS. "I thought it would slowly decline," she said. "Yet this year, instead of finding a decline since last year, there was a leveling off or new normal of engagement in Jewish life."

There has been a concomitant increase in the money Federations are raising in their annual campaigns, the Federation stated in July. It announced a 15.4 percent jump in money raised in fiscal year 2025 over the prior year, to $2.9 billion, the biggest increase in a decade and the largest amount it ever raised in a non-crisis year. The Federation is the umbrella group of 141 local Jewish Federations, and about 300 smaller communities around North America.

In the new survey, 2,836 American Jews answered questions about their attitudes toward and level of involvement with the Jewish community and its institutions. The polling firm Burson conducted the poll from May 4-27. The Federation has released related surveys about once annually since Oct. 7.

Other findings show that awareness and confidence in community safety grew over the last year. Some 58 percent of Jewish Americans now say that they know where to turn if targeted by antisemitism, which was up from 46 percent in 2025. The survey's margin of error was plus or minus 1.84 percentage points.

"Real opportunity"

Self-reported awareness of security programs protecting Jewish institutions rose from 39 percent last year to 57 percent in 2026, and 60 percent of respondents said they believe Jewish organizations are effectively providing safety and security for their community. That was up from 47 percent last year.

"People are still showing up, still learning and still finding their way into Jewish community," Kravetz stated. "There's a real opportunity to reach even more of them, and we now have lessons from individuals and institutions doing this work on how to sustain this new normal."

Almost all (96 percent) respondents said there is "some" or "a lot" of antisemitism in the United States, which was the same percentage that Pew Research Center reported in 2020.

Some 65 percent of the respondents to the Federation survey said there is a lot of Jew-hatred in the United States, up from 45 percent in 2020.

In their local communities, 68 percent said there is "some" or "a lot" of antisemitism. About the same percentage said that right after Oct. 7.

The number of American Jews who said they are concerned about Jew-hatred in general in the United States has stayed the same over the past several years (84 percent).

Some 34 percent of Jews are more cautious about being identified as Jewish, according to the survey, while 37 percent said they are feeling more proud to be Jewish.

A key barrier to greater involvement in Jewish life was political tension, the survey suggests, with 88 percent of respondents saying that they are tired of the debate over Israel and discussion of Jew-hatred. They prefer focusing on different aspects of Jewish life and mostly move around within their local community to find a place where they feel more comfortable, the study suggests.

Most of those who say they have become more engaged as Jews are doing so in informal social settings, like at-home Shabbat dinners, in workplace affinity groups and through friends, the survey said.

Originally published at https://www.jns.org/news/u-s-news/post-oct-7-jewish-engagement-surge-in-us-continuing-steadily-new-study-suggests.

For Nova survivors, Oct. 7 trauma persists three years later

By Canaan Lidor

(JNS – Oct 7.) – Three years after the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, 79 percent of the survivors of the Nova music festival have been recognized as having a psychiatric disability, while only about 60 percent are employed, according to Efrat Atun, CEO of SafeHeart, which provides mental-health care to survivors.

The third anniversary of the massacre comes amid renewed psychological distress among survivors, with more seeking psychiatric treatment than a year ago, Atun told JNS on October 6. SafeHeart's team handling complex cases is "flooded with cases," she said.

About three-quarters of Nova survivors were between 18 and 24 when they attended the festival, Atun said. More than 300 people were killed at the festival near Kibbutz Re'im, accounting for nearly one-third of the approximately 1,200 people killed on Oct. 7.



Mourners gathered at the site of the Nova music festival, near Kibbutz Re'im in southern Israel, on October 7, 2026. (Photo by Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

She added that recurring security escalations can trigger trauma symptoms and prolong recovery.

"The massacre interrupted their lives just as they were getting started," Atun told JNS. "From previous years, we know that distress peaks precisely when the spotlight fades. That is why continuity of care matters now more than ever."

Ayelet Cohen-Wieder, a clinical psychologist who works with SafeHeart, told JNS that inadequate government funding, bureaucratic obstacles and a failure to rebuild public trust were hampering survivors' recovery. Asked whether Israel's mental-health services were meeting survivors' needs, she replied, "Not enough at all."

Cohen-Wieder rated the state's response at three or four out of 10, citing insufficient funding and limited access to treatment. She said only a small portion of SafeHeart's budget comes from the government through the National Insurance Institute and Health Ministry, with most of its funding coming from donations.

She also criticized the process of seeking assistance through the Israel Ministry of Defense, saying that its bureaucratic complexity causes some people to abandon their claims without receiving the help they need. "Our government didn't learn what they have to learn," Cohen-Wieder said.

Civilian volunteers mobilized immediately after the attack to fill what she described as a vacuum left by government institutions.

SafeHeart began operating on October 7, 2023, when therapists and organizers of safe spaces at festivals mobilized to help survivors, according to Atun. Trauma therapists from Israel's festival and safe-space communities founded the organization, and the Health Ministry and National Insurance Institute now recognize it as a provider of mental-health services for festival survivors.

Its network has provided more than 75,000 hours of therapy to survivors, Atun told JNS. About 400 therapists specializing in trauma, including practitioners familiar with psychedelic experiences, provide long-term individual treatment to more than 1,000 survivors, she added.

Cohen-Wieder estimated that roughly half of the organization's survivors had made substantial progress in integrating the trauma into their lives. Some have created music, shared their experiences internationally or developed startups addressing stress and anxiety. But progress can coexist with acute anxiety, she said, and renewed security threats can cause setbacks.

"Every alarm could cause you to freeze for a day, or sometimes more than a day," Cohen-Wieder told JNS.

Originally published at https://www.jns.org/news/israel-news/for-nova-survivors-oct-7-trauma-persists-three-years-later.

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New discoveries shed light on ancient Jerusalem at City of David Conference

By Eve Harow

(JNS – Sept. 15) – Ancient Jerusalem came vividly to life in early September as archaeologists and researchers gathered for the annual City of David Conference to present new discoveries and fresh analyses of finds unearthed beneath the modern city.

The City of David, south of the Old City and topographically below the Temple Mount, is widely identified as the urban center of ancient Jerusalem. As excavations continue, archaeological evidence is adding to scholars' understanding of the city described in biblical and other historical sources. Carbon-14 testing and other scientific dating methods are providing critical insights into the finds.

Among them are ancient royal clay seals, or bullae, bearing biblical-era Hebrew names; First Temple-period remains, including a destruction layer associated with the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.; Second Temple-era Judean coins stamped "For the Freedom of Zion"; arrowheads associated with Seleucid-era battles; Roman-style buildings; jewelry; ceramics and other artifacts attesting to ancient Judean and Israelite life in Jerusalem.

Exploring ancient Jerusalem

In the hours leading up to the conference, which is devoted to new discoveries and fresh analyses of previous finds, participants were offered tours of archaeological areas generally off-limits to the public.

One tour went beneath the former Givati parking lot, where excavations have been underway for more than 20 years in the Tyropoeon Valley, west of the ancient city that King David conquered from the Jebusites some 3,000 years ago. Among the recent finds were rare remains of burned sycamore wood dated to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple.

Other tours visited the newly opened Pilgrimage Road, used by pilgrims during the Second Temple period; mysterious rock-cut rooms, possibly sacred spaces, on the eastern slope; newly discovered roads near the southern wall of the Temple Mount; and the Pool of Siloam. A more challenging walk took participants to the Valley of Hinnom, or Gai Hinnom, associated in the Book of Jeremiah with the sacrifice of children to Moloch. The Hebrew name later gave rise to "Gehenna," a term associated with hell.

The conference itself took place under a mild Jerusalem evening sky near a replica of the Theodotus inscription, which refers to a Second Temple-era synagogue and facilities for pilgrims. The master of ceremonies was Dr. Eyal Meron, a researcher and respected teacher of tour guides.

The mystery of the Acra

Dr. Ayala Zilberstein presented research on the Acra, the Seleucid fortress that the Hasmoneans struggled for years to overcome. Its location has long been debated, with ancient sources and modern scholars placing it at different sites. Zilberstein made the case for its location in the Givati excavation area, below the Temple Mount but overlooking the lower city.

Her presentation also highlighted the distinction between two central areas of ancient Jerusalem during the First and Second Temple periods, a continuity disrupted by the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile. One was the sacred precinct on Mount Moriah, where the Temple and its religious services were centered and where large numbers of pilgrims gathered during the three pilgrimage festivals. The other was the city of permanent residents, with the homes, streets, markets and infrastructure of daily life.

Rethinking Jerusalem's water system

Dr. Eli Shukrun continued a discussion sparked by last year's discovery concerning the dating of the Pool of Siloam, suggesting that elements of Jerusalem's water system may predate King Hezekiah by about a century. The findings have implications for how archaeologists understand Jerusalem's tunnels and waterworks, including those traditionally associated with preparations for the Assyrian threat at the end of the eighth century B.C.E.

The discovery is also spurring renewed interest in adjacent areas, the channels leading to the pools and their functions. Researchers are examining whether some structures may have been destroyed by earthquakes, including one mentioned in the Book of Amos. The Bible and historical sources such as Josephus remain important references alongside the archaeological and scientific evidence.

Roads to the Temple

The southern wall of the Temple Mount has been a major focus of excavation over the past year, as explained by Prof. Ronny Reich. His fellow researchers include Dr. Yuval Baruch and Esther Rakov Mellet.

Among the questions being examined is how this area accommodated the enormous influx of pilgrims arriving in Jerusalem for the festivals. How did priests and Levites reach the Temple? Where were shops located? And how were sacrificial animals brought into the compound?

Dr. Nachshon Szanton presented findings from research conducted with Dr. Joe Uziel and Ari Levi into the function of roads leading from the pool and the lower gate toward the city. The road from the lower city diverged. One route led to a monumental street that enabled worshippers to move toward the gates on the southern side of the Temple Mount complex. The other headed northwest toward the upper city and its more ordinary streets. The researchers titled their presentation, "Between the Sacred and Profane."

A past that remains alive

After the lectures, shuttles returned participants to Jaffa Gate and the parking lots, train platforms and bus stops of modern Jerusalem. Those who walked through the Old City encountered throngs of Jews making their way to the Western Wall for Selichot prayers ahead of the High Holidays.

In the absence of the Temple, prayer replaced sacrifice and the Western Wall became Judaism's most prominent place of prayer. Yet through collective memory and the painstaking work of archaeologists and scientists, ancient Jerusalem remains tangible. So, too, does Jerusalem itself – a city once again sovereign under Jewish rule, where Hebrew is spoken and the Bible remains part of the living culture.

The discoveries in the City of David are considered integral to deciphering the past of this incredible place.

Originally published at https://www.jns.org/feature/new-discoveries-shed-light-on-ancient-jerusalem-at-city-of-david-conference.

Colombia opens embassy in Jerusalem

By Etgar Lefkovits

(JNS – Oct. 11) – Colombia planned to inaugurate an embassy in Jerusalem on October 14, making it the 10th country to establish a diplomatic mission in Israel's capital.

The move is part of a major foreign policy reversal by Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella, who took office two months ago and moved to restore bilateral ties with Israel after the previous administration severed them. It also comes amid a right-wing wave in Latin America that is driving a diplomatic shift toward better relations with the United States and Israel.

Colombian Foreign Minister Omar Bula was to travel to Israel for the ceremony.

Israel and Colombia restored diplomatic and economic relations in August following the inauguration of the new Colombian government, reversing a two-year freeze initiated by former President Gustavo Petro over the war against Hamas in Gaza. The South American nation also became the second country after the United States to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Nine countries currently have embassies in Israel's capital: the United States, Fiji, Guatemala, Honduras, Kosovo, Naoero (Nauru), Papua New Guinea, Paraguay and Somaliland. All the other nations that have diplomatic relations with Israel maintain their embassies in Tel Aviv or its suburbs. U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem during his first term set the stage for other countries to follow suit.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is expected to be the next country to move its embassy to Jerusalem. Argentine President Javier Milei and Sen. Flávio Bolsonaro, the front-runner in the Brazilian presidential race, have both pledged to move their countries' embassies to Israel's capital.

Originally published at https://www.jns.org/news/israel-news/colombia-to-open-embassy-in-jerusalem-on-Wednesday.

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Kathy has lived here for 40 years, moving from Long Island to meet and marry her husband. She loves the outdoors, even in the winter. She is ready to help you advertise your business in *The Reporter*, in Binghamton and Scranton, the best way she can. Call or e-mail her to discuss options.

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Rabbinic Thoughts

Connections between Sukkot and Chanukah

RABBI CALEB BROMMER, TEMPLE BETH-EL, ITHACA

We currently stand precisely between the joyous festivals of Sukkot and Chanukah, so I thought this is a perfect time to explore the connections between these two holidays. There is a minority opinion, recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud in tractate Ma'aser Sheni, that Chanukah would be an appropriate time to enact the laws of *biur ma'asrot*, the checking of the tithes. Essentially, these laws went into effect each year to make sure that Jews had properly tithed their wealth, and paid their fair share toward the Temple, to the poor and to the otherwise disadvantaged people in their communities. Chanukah, at the beginning of the winter months, marks the completion of the post-harvesting process – the end of the threshing season, if you will. And so, it is a practical time to check your produce, tally your final numbers and make sure your tithes are up to snuff. But there is also a profound spiritual and religious connection to another agricultural moment on the Jewish calendar.

Sukkot, which marks the end of the harvest season, gets a special mention in the apocryphal (not in the Tanach, but had historical Jewish authorship) book of II Maccabees. It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the 25th day of the same month, which was Kislev. They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the Festival of Sukkot, remembering how not long before, during Sukkot, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to God who had given them success in purifying God's own holy place. They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year (II Mac. 10:5-8).

The texts that record the Maccabean victories take special care to note that, since the Jewish community was not able to observe their biblically-commanded pilgrimage holiday of Sukkot at its proper time, they made an adjustment. Once the Temple was purified, the first thing they did was observe Sukkot. You've heard of Christmas in July, now get ready for Sukkot in December!

It is meaningful to include here the fact that, according to the book of I Kings, chapter eight, Solomon dedicated the first Jerusalem Temple during the festival of Sukkot. So, it would appear that Sukkot and Temple dedications have a storied past. This makes it all the more compelling that Chanukah, interpreted as an opportunity to do all the dedications we didn't get a chance to do in the preceding season, has a deep connection to Sukkot.

Sukkot is why Chanukah lasts eight days. Sukkot is why on Chanukah, we chant the unabridged *Hallel*. The

See "Connections" on page 15

Congregational Notes

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Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
Rabbi: Leiah Moser
Address: 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton NY 13905
Office hours: Tues.-Fri., 10 am-2 pm
Phone: 607-723-7355
Office e-mail: TempleConcordBinghamton@gmail.com
Website: www.TempleConcord.com
Please contact Temple Concord for Zoom links.

Some services and programs are online only. For Zoom links, contact Temple Concord.

Services, ongoing classes and evening prayers at Temple Concord:

Fridays: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service (in person, on Zoom and on Facebook).

Saturdays: At 9:15 am, Torah study (in person and on Zoom) and at 10:30 am, Shabbat service (in person).

Wednesdays: At 5:30 pm, evening prayers (in person). At 6 pm, adult education classes (in person and on Zoom). Contact the temple office for more details.

Upcoming events:

Sunday, November 1: From 10 am-2 pm, Sisterhood Rummage Sale; buy one children's clothing, get one free. Also from 10 am-2 pm, Re-Sale Boutique. All sales will be held in the Temple Concord basement and on the stage. Shoppers are asked to use the Oak Street entrance.

Tuesday, November 3: At 10:30 am, the Tuesday Morning Book Club will discuss "Sisters of Fortune" by Esther Chehebar. For more information, contact Nancy Basmann at nancybasmann@outlook.com.

Sunday, November 15: At 3 pm, Temple Concord will host an interfaith Thanksgiving service, organized by Interfaith Broome County.

Penn-York Jewish Community

B'nai B'rith: William H. Seigel Lodge
Purpose: To promote Jewish identity through religious, cultural, educational and social activities in the Southern Tier of New York and the Northern Tier of Pennsylvania, including Waverly, NY; Sayre, Athens and Towanda, PA, and surrounding communities.
For more information, contact the Penn-York Jewish Community at pennyorkjc@gmail.com.

Temple Brith Sholom

Affiliation: Unaffiliated
Address: P.O. Box 572, 117 Madison St., Cortland, NY 13045
Phone: 607-756-7181
President: Mark Suben
Cemetery Committee: 315-696-5744
Website: templebrithsholomcortland.org
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Temple-Brith-Sholom-114006981962930/
Service leaders: Lay leadership
Shabbat services: Services are usually on the third Friday of the month and led by a variety of leaders. Check the Facebook page or weekly e-mail for upcoming services. Contact the president to get on the e-mail list.
Religious School: Students are educated on an individual basis.
Temple Brith Sholom is a small equalitarian congregation serving the greater Cortland community. Congregants span the gamut of observance and services are largely dependent on the service leader. The Friday night siddur is "Likrat Shabbat." The community extends a warm welcome to the Jewish student population of SUNY Cortland, as well as the residents of local adult residences. The Board of Trustees meets on the second Tuesday of the month.

Services and programs are held by Zoom usually on the third Friday of the month.



Beth David Synagogue

Affiliation: Orthodox Union
Rabbi: Moshe Shmaryahu
Rabbi Emeritus: Zev Silber
Address: 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905
Phone: 607-722-1793
Rabbi's Office: 607-722-7514
Fax: 607-722-7121
Office hours: Tues. 10 am-1 pm; Thurs. 9 am-1 pm
Beth David e-mail address: bethdavid@stny.rr.com
Rabbi's e-mail: rabbishmaryahu@gmail.com
Website: www.bethdavid.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/bethdavidbinghamton
Classes: Rabbi Zev Silber will hold his weekly Talmud class every Tuesday evening after services.

Temple Beth-El of Ithaca

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Rabbi: Caleb Brommer
Address: 402 North Tioga St. (the corner of Court and Tioga streets), Ithaca, NY 14850-4292
Phone: 607-273-5775
Website: www.tbeithaca.org
President: Nommi Nadich
Director of Education and Engagement: Calle Schueler
Services: Friday 6:30 pm; Saturday 9:30 am, unless otherwise announced. Weekday morning minyan 7:30 am (9 am on Sundays and legal holidays).
Religious School/Education: September-May: Classes meet on Sundays from 9 am-noon and Wednesdays from 4-6 pm. Teen Midrasha meets Tuesdays from 6-8 pm.
Adult Ed.: Numerous weekly courses, several semester-long courses and a variety of lectures are offered throughout the year. Call the temple office, or email secretary@tbeithaca.org, for more information.

Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive
Address: 72 South Broad St., Norwich, NY 13815
Phone: 607-334-2691
Purpose: To maintain a Jewish identity and meet the needs of the Jewish community in the area.

Congregation Tikkun v'Or

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
Address: PO Box 3981, Ithaca, NY 14852; 2550 Triphammer Rd., Lansing, NY
Phone: 607-256-1471
Website: www.tikkunvor.org
E-mail: info@tikkunvor.org
Presidents: Eric Maroney and Judith Saul
Education Director: Jennie Lavine
Administrative Coordinator: Kenny Berkowitz
Bnai Mitzvah Coordinator: Michael Margolin
Services: All services currently on Zoom. E-mail info@tikkunvor.org for times and links. Contemplative morning services every Tuesday from 8:30-9:30 am. Friday evenings, Saturday mornings, Torah study, Gan Shabbat and other special services at least once a month. Check the website for details.
Jewish Learning Experiences (JLE) for second through seventh grade classes meet on Sunday mornings. Sixth and seventh grades also meet on Wednesday afternoons. Family programs for kindergarten and first grade held monthly.
Adult Education: Offered regularly throughout the year. Check the website for details.

Friday, November 6, light candles	4:33 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, November 7	5:32 pm
Friday, November 13, light candles	4:26 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, November 14	5:25 pm
Friday, November 20, light candles	4:20 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, November 21	5:20 pm
Friday, November 27, light candles	4:16 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, November 28	5:16 pm
Friday, December 4, light candles	4:14 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, December 5	5:14 pm

Temple Israel

Orientation: Conservative
Rabbi: Micah Friedman
Address: 4737 Deerfield Pl., Vestal, NY 13850
Phone: 607-723-7461 and 607-231-3746
Office hours: Mon.-Thurs., 8:30 am-3:30 pm; Fri., 8 am-3 pm
E-mail: office@templeisraelvestal.org
Website: www.templeisraelvestal.org
Service schedule: Tues., 5:30 pm; Fri., 5:30 pm; Sat., 9:30 am – all via Zoom and in-person

On Fridays and Tuesdays at 5:30 pm, services will be led by Rabbi Micah Friedman.

On Saturday, November 7, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Chaye Sarah.

On Saturday, November 14, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Toldot.

On Saturday, November 21, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Vayetze.

On Saturday, November 28, Shabbat services will be held at 9:30 am. The Torah portion is Vayishlach.

Upcoming events:

Tuesdays, November 3, 10 and 17: "Hebrew Learning" for children class at 4:30 pm.

Tuesday, November 3: Executive Board meeting at 7 pm.

Thursdays, November 5, 12 and 19: "TI Cheder," weekly lessons for ages 5-12, from 4-6 pm.

Friday-Sunday, November 13-15: Rabbinic student Sheindl Spitzer-Tilchin will participate in services.

Tuesday, November 17: Board of Trustees meeting at 7 pm.

Friday-Sunday, November 20-22: Rabbinic student Idan Erez will participate in services.

Wednesday-Friday, November 25-27: The temple office will be closed for Thanksgiving.

Temple Beth El of Oneonta

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Cantor: Josh Stein
Address: 83 Chestnut St., Oneonta, NY 13820
Mailing address: P.O. Box 383, Oneonta, NY 13820
Phone: 607-432-5522
E-mail: TBEOneonta@gmail.com
Regular service times: Contact the temple for days of services and times.
Religious School/Education: Religious School, for grades kindergarten through bar/bat mitzvah, meets Sunday mornings.
For the schedule of services, classes and events, contact the temple.

Rohr Chabad Center

Affiliation: Chabad-Lubavitch
Rabbi Aaron and Rivkah Slonim, Directors
E-mail: aslonim@binghamton.edu
rslonim@chabadofbinghamton.com
Address: 420 Murray Hill Rd., Vestal, NY 13850
Phone: 607-797-0015, Fax: 607-797-0095
Website: www.Chabadofbinghamton.com
Rabbi Zalman and Rochel Chein, Education
E-mail: zchein@Jewishbu.com, rchein@Jewishbu.com
Rabbi Levi and Hadasa Slonim, Downtown and Development
Chabad Downtown Center: 60 Henry St., Binghamton
E-mail: lslonim@Jewishbu.com, hslonim@Jewishbu.com
Rabbi Yisroel and Goldie Ohana, Programming
E-mail: yohana@Jewishbu.com, gohana@Jewishbu.com
Regular service times: Daily 7:30 am, Friday evening 6 pm, Shabbat morning 9:30 am, Maariv and Havdalah one hour after candle-lighting time, Sundays 9:30 am.
To join the mailing list, for up-to-date information on adult education offerings or to arrange for a private tutorial, for details concerning the Judaica shop and resource center, or for assistance through the Piaker Free Loan Society or Raff Maasim Tovim Foundation, call Chabad's office at 797-0015.

Chabad will be holding pre-Shabbat virtual programs. For more information, visit www.JewishBU.com/S2020Partnership.

Israel opens first national defense pavilion at Morocco airshow

By JNS Staff

(JNS – Oct. 11) – Israel's Defense Ministry opened its first national pavilion in Morocco at the Marrakech Airshow 2026, marking the Jewish state's first official participation in the defense exhibition since the signing of the Abraham Accords, the ministry said.

The Marrakech Airshow took place from Oct. 7-10 at the Royal Moroccan Air Force Base in Marrakech, Morocco. Eight Israeli defense companies showcased combat-proven technologies, including loitering munitions, AI-powered robotic systems, autonomous navigation for unmanned aerial vehicles, laser guidance for first-person view drones and satellite communications. Elbit Systems, Israel Aerospace Industries and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems exhibited alongside the Defense Ministry pavilion.

"Israel's first-ever participation in an exhibition in Morocco marks an important milestone for the Israel Ministry of Defense and the Israeli defense industry," said Brig. Gen. (res.) Yair Kulas, head of the ministry's International Defense Cooperation Directorate, known as SIBAT.

Alongside the industry pavilion, an official Israeli Air Force delegation, led by the head of the IAF Training Department, Col. A. (full name withheld for security reasons), attended the Marrakech exhibition for the first time, according to the Israel Defense Forces. The biennial event brought together commanders and senior officials from air forces worldwide, including delegations from Africa, the Arab world, Europe and the United States.

The IDF stated that the delegation's visit represents a significant step in deepening professional ties and strengthening mutual trust between the IAF and the Royal Moroccan Air Force.

During the visit, Col. A. met privately with the commander of the Royal Moroccan Air Force to discuss cementing strategic ties and continued bilateral cooperation. On October 8, Col. A. and the Israeli defense attaché to Morocco, Col. Sharon Itach, held a series of professional meetings and toured the Israeli defense industry pavilions to advance defense-technological cooperation.

Jerusalem and Rabat normalized diplomatic relations in December 2020 as part of the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords. Morocco's rapidly expanding defense-procurement relationship with Israel reflects a broader regional realignment tied to the Abraham Accords, a Western observer told JNS ahead of the airshow.

Addressing Morocco's growing acquisition of Israeli defense technology, the observer said Rabat is buying across the board, "buying both defense and offense, sensors, ISR [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance capabilities], drones."

While Morocco is directly financing some purchases, the source added that "it's clear that part of the money comes from the Gulf," adding that the funding pattern reflects a wider trend. "This is another expression of the Abraham Accords, or of the regional shift taking place, in Morocco and in the region. It's not only bilateral, there are other eyes here, and maybe actors for whom this is of interest," the observer said.

Israel and Morocco announced the elevation of their diplomatic missions to the status of full embassies and the appointment of ambassadors during a trilateral summit with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Mike Waltz at his New York residence on September 16.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita reaffirmed their commitment to a number of measures aimed at upgrading relations between their countries during the meeting, which took place on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly's annual General Debate.

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Connections

Continued from page 14

celebratory *Hallel* chant, which involves reciting Psalms 113-118, is abridged in most of its recitations throughout the year. But it is not abridged on Sukkot, and so the same goes for Chanukah. The biblical sacrifices on Sukkot begin with 13 bulls on the first day, and decrease by one for each consecutive day. The famous minority opinion of the School of Shammai records in the Talmud that on Chanukah one should begin with eight lights and decrease each night so as to mirror the Sukkot sacrifices. Obviously, today we follow the practice of the School of Hillel to increase the light each day, but the importance of the connection between these two festivals is meaningfully preserved in our tradition.

But perhaps the most meaningful and important connection can be gleaned from the epistolary introduction to the book of II Maccabees. There, the Jews of the Land of Israel write a letter to their coreligionists in Egypt. Their letter ends as follows: "We prayed to the Lord and were heard, and we offered sacrifice and grain offering, and we lit the lamps and set out the loaves. And now, see that you keep the festival of booths in the month of Kislev, in the 188th year" [124 B.C.E.] (II Mac. 1:8-9).

The Jews are an adaptable people. If we can't observe Sukkot in its proper time, we will observe it at a different time, and our people all over the world will be brought into the practice. Our faith, our ritual observance, our striving to do God's will is intimately bound up with the calendar and the agricultural process. But in extenuating circumstances, even when the calendar falls away, our faith, our ritual observance, our striving to do God's will does not.

Credit

Continued from page 5

for listening to our needs and for promoting something that makes sense for all students, public and private alike."

Sydney Altfield, CEO of Teach Coalition, an Orthodox Union program, stated that "for Jewish families, this means the chance to give their children an education rooted in who they are, without being priced out. ... We are deeply grateful to Gov. Hochul and every parent, educator and partner who helped bring us here," Altfield stated.

She said that Hochul opted to prioritize New York's children, "and families across our state have reason to celebrate. ...Behind this moment are parents, who never stopped fighting for their children, and communities who came together because they believed more was possible," she stated.

Jay Greene, a senior fellow at the Defense of Freedom Institute who focuses on education, told JNS that Hochul's decision. Is a "huge boost for families in the state, including those seeking a Jewish education. Especially after how New York politicians have been hassling Jewish schools over everything from Covid closures to curriculum requirements, it is gratifying to see a decision that actually helps families at Jewish schools," Greene said.

"The scholarship tax credit will make a Jewish education much more accessible to more families," he told JNS. "Jewish education is a key component of Jewish continuity, which will also be strengthened by this decision."

Krauss, of SAR, told JNS that he is "impressed by the successful joint work of Teach Coalition, the Federations, Prizmah and other national organizations to allow the schools to focus on awareness and fund-raising, with the burden of effective administration being managed efficiently and appropriately."

Hochul, a Democrat, stated that she had "been clear from the start that New York would participate in the federal scholarship tax credit program if, and only if, all schools and students, including those in our public schools, could benefit.

"After a careful review of the federal regulations, we believe this program has the potential to bring millions of additional dollars to New York students and families without taking a single dollar from public schools or our state or local budgets," she stated.

The Trump administration said in new guidance that the Education Freedom Tax Credit program, which is set to take effect on January 1, allows taxpayers to claim dollar-for-dollar federal tax credits of up to $1,700 – or $3,400 for married couples filing jointly – for donations to organizations that provide scholarships for elementary and secondary-school expenses. The program requires governors to formally opt their states in for parents to be eligible to access the tax credits. Initially, families earning up to 300 percent of the area's median income can qualify for scholarships, including those whose children already attend private schools.

Scott Bessent, U.S. treasury secretary, stated that the program "marks a new chapter in educational freedom and opportunity by establishing America's first nationwide school choice program and empowering states to give students and families more options." The secretary said that "30 states have already opted in, and we encourage all 50 states to participate so every American student and family can benefit."

Hochul said on October 9 that "I'm not going to leave money on the table when it could help our kids. That's why I have also been directly engaging with business leaders, who have committed to use this program to support public school students and their academic needs," she stated. "I look forward to working with education leaders across the state to make sure these resources reach students in every community."

In May, the governor's office told JNS that Hochul awaited "information from the federal government on the program" and that she would "review the details of the policy for poison pills that could harm New York's education system."

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, a Democrat, has also opted his state into the program, which was established under Trump's 2025 tax and spending law, known as the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

The New York Times reported that Polis and Hochul are the only two Democratic governors to opt into the program, and that Republican-controlled legislatures in Kansas, Kentucky and North Carolina overrode vetoes by Democratic governors.

A White House map lists Virginia as having opted in, after Glenn Youngkin signed it up as the first state to join when he was governor. Under current Gov. Abigail Spanberger, Virginia's participation is reportedly under review.

More states are expected to opt in after the U.S. midterms elections in early November.

"Now the work begins," stated Altfield, of the Orthodox Union. "We look forward to working with the governor's office to get New York's scholarship organizations approved and ready so families can start benefiting on day one."

Yeruchim Silber, director of New York government relations for Agudath Israel of America, thanked Hochul for "following through" on her commitment to opt into the program. "This decision opens the door to millions of dollars in additional educational resources and opportunities for students in public and nonpublic schools alike, without taking a dollar away from public education," he stated.

Agudath is "deeply grateful to the governor and her team for recognizing the importance of this opportunity and ensuring that New York's children and families will be able to benefit," Silber added.

Originally published at https://www.jns.org/news/u-s-news/ny-will-join-federal-school-choice-tax-credit-program-hochul-says.





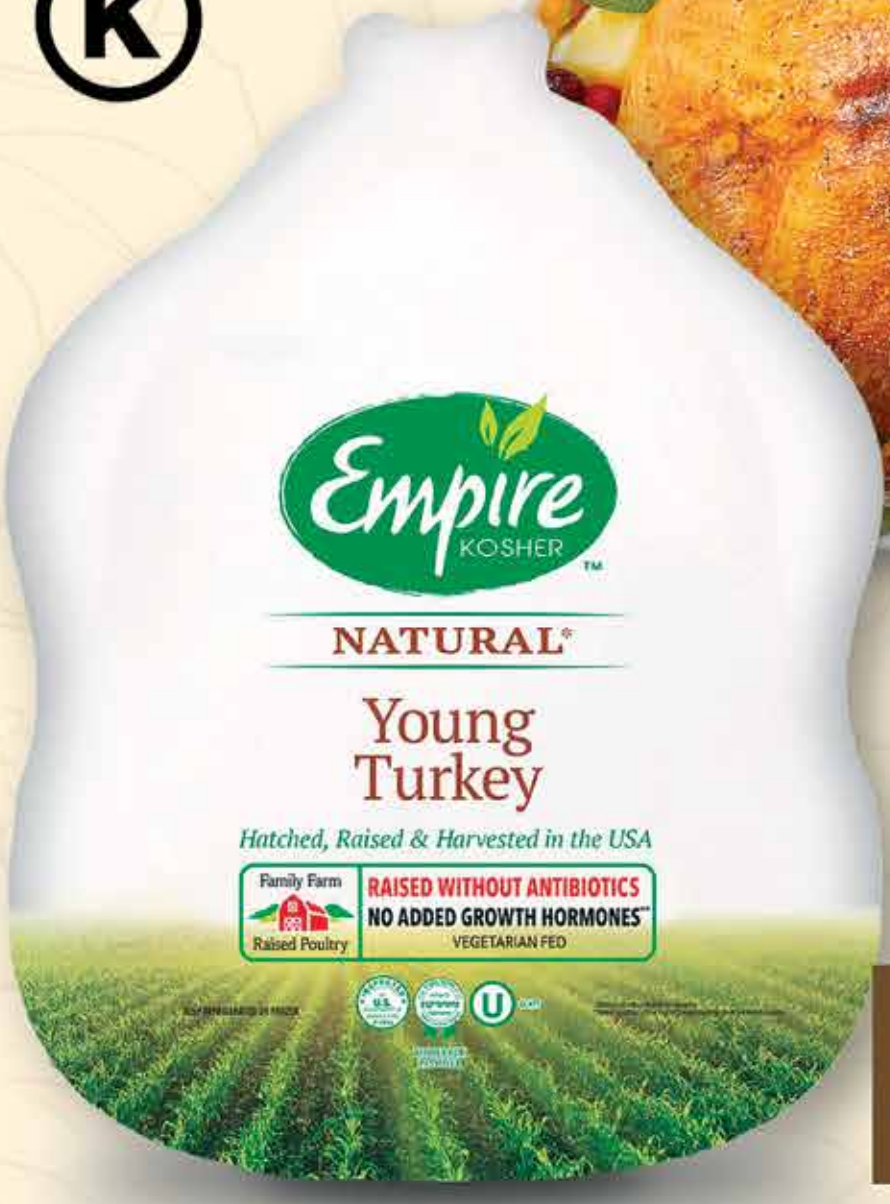
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