

Federation to hold vigil/program about October 7 attack on Aug. 8

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold a vigil/program on Thursday, August 8, at 7 pm, at Temple Israel, 4737 Deerfield Pl., Vestal. The event will start with a vigil featuring area rabbis and the reading of the names of the hostages, and then conclude with a one-hour long presentation by Eitan and Varda Morell, whose son, IDF Staff Sgt. Maoz Morell, was wounded on February 15 while fighting in Gaza and died on February 19 at the age of 22. If the hostages are released before the event,

the vigil will offer thanks and blessings instead. The Federation is looking for volunteers to read the names of the hostages during the program. Volunteers should contact the Federation at 607-724-2332 or director@jfgb.org. Registration for the event is requested to help prepare, but is not required, and can be made by contacting the Federation or registering at www.jfgb.org.

"The stinging loss of Maoz Morell was felt by Jews worldwide," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "People all over mourned his death. His

At right: IDF Staff Sgt. Maoz Morell (Photo courtesy of the Israel Defense Forces)



parents will share the inspirational story of his heroism in life and in death in the context of three generations of Jewish survival and

strength. It is especially meaningful to Eitan to come back to his hometown and share his son's story."

Hubal added, "It's important that we don't forget the hostages and those who died on October 7 or during the fighting that has occurred since. While we continue our lives, the hostages are being held captive and their loved ones wonder if they will ever see them again. We need to raise our voices to show they are not forgotten. We must also remember all those who are risking their lives or who have died defending Israel."

BD luncheon speaker to address "What the Jewish People have Learned since October 7th" on Aug. 10

Beth David Synagogue will host a luncheon and speaker on Saturday, August 10. The community is invited to attend. Morning services will begin at 9:30 am, followed by the luncheon and talk at approximately 11:45 am. The luncheon is free and open to all. Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider will speak on "What

At right: Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Photo by Ora Goldscheider)



the Jewish People have Learned since October 7."

Goldscheider serves as the chief editor of the OU Israel's weekly "Torah Tidbits," is the coordinator of rabbinical and leadership training at Yeshiva University's Gruss Kollel and a faculty member of the Rabbinical Assembly of

America's conversion program in Jerusalem. He is the author of the haggadah "The Night that Unites," as well as the recently published "Torah United."

"We are looking forward to a highly insightful discussion on the Shabbat preceding Tisha B'Av," said organizers of the event.

TBE of Ithaca appoints new rabbi and ed. director

Temple Beth-El, the largest synagogue in Tompkins County, has appointed Rabbi Caleb Brommer, a recent graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, as its new rabbi, and Calle Schueler as the synagogue's new director of education and engagement, both effective July 1. Brommer will fill a vacancy at Temple Beth-El since its former rabbi accepted another position in 2023.

"Rabbi Brommer is a young, traditionally trained rabbi who is forward-thinking and passionate about Judaism," said Jerry Dietz,

who became the synagogue's president on July 1. "Our hope is that his youth and enthusiasm will draw in unaffiliated members of our community while continuing his wide appeal to our congregation."

Schueler will serve as director of



Rabbi Caleb Brommer (Photo by Ellen Dubin)



Calle Schueler (Photo courtesy of Calle Schueler)

the Rabbi Felix Aber Religious School, the B'Yachad Ithaca Jewish Preschool, and youth and family programming at the synagogue. "We feel incredibly fortunate to have someone with Calle's skill, dedication and passion for Jewish learning joining

Temple Beth-El," said Melanie Kalman, the synagogue's former co-president. Schueler, who has a master's degree in Jewish education from the Jewish Theological Seminary, is the former assistant director of family life and learning at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan.

Brommer began his career in Jewish education as the youth engagement and curriculum coordinator at Temple Shalom in Chicago. He then earned a master's degree in Jewish professional studies from the Spertus See "TBE" on page 4

First person spotlight

Hillel Academy: a year in review

By Elliot Zenilman, Tara Kaminsky, Rhiannon Foster, Maren Nasar and Alex Kaminsky

This year at Hillel Academy, many things were business as usual, but behind the scenes, there was a completely new Board of Directors of mostly new parents, so in some ways we were "under new management." We relished the opportunity to do things in a new way with fresh eyes as well as continuing with some long standing traditions and always striving for the best. We, the Board of Trustees of Hillel Academy of Broome County, would like to thank the entire community for their help and support in the 2023-24 school year. We are so thankful to have a community school where the theme is Judaism and children from a range of backgrounds are brought together by shared experiences.

We started the year with administrative changes: updating our decades old bylaws

to reflect the current community size and ensure that we are in compliance with all New York state laws. Thank you to Dick Lewis for his support with this endeavor. We have also introduced some new fund-raising efforts, including a successful Giving Tuesday campaign and Hanukkah candle sale. We thank the community for their ongoing support.

This year, our children took part in community events and had a chance to see our values in action. There were too many trips and events to mention them all, but some highlights included visiting the Syracuse Hebrew Day School to celebrate Hanukkah with the students and teachers of SHDS, the Binghamton Philharmonic visited and presented "Music as Play" to the Hillel Academy students, and second through fifth grades traveled to the Clemens Center in Elmira for the "Doctor Kaboom Science Show." We went on a

walking tour of Binghamton, visited the Phelps Mansion and saw many of the Kilmer buildings around town, exploring our roots here.

Led by Rabbi Moshe Shmaryahu, Hillel Academy students had many opportunities to share Jewish pride and school spirit with the greater Binghamton community. They sang at the Jewish Community Center Hanukkah party and hosted a booth at the JCC Purim carnival. The students held two performances of their "Purim Story Puppet Show" for the JCC Early Childhood Center. We had an opportunity to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at a Binghamton Black Bears hockey game at Visions Arena, teaching the kids pride in our school and that they can accomplish anything they set out to do.

Hillel Academy students held multiple CHOW food drives this year so they could give back to the community. Some of the

students were able to take a field trip to CHOW to see how *maakhal revii'im*, feeding the hungry, and *tzedakah* work in practice. It was eye-opening for many of them to see the empty shelves and then realize, as they stocked them, how far their food donations will go.

Hillel Academy hosted a variety of events to bring the community together, including a community challah bake and *Kabbalat Shabbat*; a family STEAM night full of science, math and engineering activities; and a ladies night out Pilates event, bringing women from various backgrounds together for an evening of mindfulness and schmoozing.

We are so thankful to our teachers for making all of these events and so many others possible. Our school would not be able to do what it does without their dedication and love.

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Opinion

The lives and times of the Rebbe

By Rabbi Aaron and Rivky Slonim

In connection with the 30th *yahrzeit* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M Schneerson, on Tammuz 3, which corresponded this year to Tuesday, July 9, Rabbi Aaron and Rivky Slonim, founders and directors of Chabad of Binghamton, share their ruminations on this milestone.

“Rav Yitzchak taught: Yaakov Avinu did not die.” Rav Nachman replied: “Does it not say that he was mourned, embalmed, and buried?” Rav Yitzchak replied: “My statement is based on a verse. It is written: ‘Do not fear, My servant Yaakov,’ speaks G-d, ‘And do not dismay, O Israel. For I will deliver you from afar, and your descen-

dants from the land of their captivity.’” An association is established between Yaakov and his descendants. Just as his seed is [his descendants are] alive, he too is alive.” (Talmud, Taanis 5b)

This thought-provoking talmudic teaching suggests a re-examination of the construct we call life. Who was Yaakov, and what defined his life in a body? What defines it now?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s 30th *yahrzeit* similarly invites us to rethink our conventional understanding of life. In the three decades since his passing, the impact of the Rebbe’s teachings and work – his presence – has grown in a way that defies logic and eclipses the influence he exerted

during his lifetime.

Life, the Talmud teaches, is defined first and always on the basis of one’s soul. And while, to some extent, this truism applies to each person, it applies uniquely to Yaakov. He not only fathered the 12 tribes and established the Jewish people, but continues to shape the lives of his descendants, an eternal people, to this day. Despite the passage of millennia and our turbulent history, as long as his seed, his children, remain alive – not only genetically but identifiably as the children of Jacob/Israel, a nation apart from all others – Yaakov remains alive.

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Reflections on the “Diaspora Report”: 100 columns and counting

By Bill Simons

On *The Reporter* webpage, my column is referred to as “Bill Simons’ Diaspora Report.” “Diaspora Report” suggests two of the column’s distinctive attributes: the perspective of an American Jew and a broad, eclectic canvas receptive to ethnic and religious observations, our relationship with Israel, politics, the law, sport, society, culture, food and family. Although I wrote widely spaced

pieces for *The Reporter* as far back as January 13, 1994, my regular column began with the June 19-25, 2020, issue. I have not missed a deadline since then. My “Diaspora Report” has now passed the 100-column milestone, time to reflect on its evolution and purpose.

The “Diaspora Report” finds grounding in the belief that understanding the present requires examination of its relationship to the past. Thus, I draw on training and

experience. I have a doctorate in American history and considerable prior publication, both academic and journalistic. In some fashion or another, I have taught American history since 1972, 45 of those years at SUNY Oneonta, but also in varied venues. Moreover, I have presented before numerous ethnic and religious groups, educational institutions, libraries, museums and civic organizations. See “Report” on page 8

One Perspective from Israel

Don’t you dare say those words!

JEREMY STAIMAN

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

When my son was a young boy, he would wipe off our kisses. As hard as that is for a parent, we tried to respect his boundaries, and hoped that he would grow out of it. The years came and went, and we couldn’t kiss him, stroke him or show too much overt physical affection.

He never said, “I love you.” But he did love us, and we didn’t need to hear the words to know how he felt.

At some point in his early teens, I struck a deal with him. Each year, I would take my kids to the side on the eve of Yom Kippur, give them a special blessing, and tell them how proud I was of how they used the unique gifts with which each was bestowed.

He reluctantly assented that at that time, once a year, I could give him a kiss. For years, I waited for that one

special moment when I could plant my lips on his cheek or forehead.

In his late teens, he loosened up. I’m guessing that he had come to the conclusion that kissing isn’t quite as horrible as he once thought. So the boundaries came down, and we got to kiss him more often. But we still never heard the dreaded words “I love you” pass his lips.

He’s a family man now, and is openly affectionate with this wife and kids, but the old taboos remain with us. I have joked with him over the years that I don’t need to hear the words “I love you” from him now, because I know that he does love us, and I know he will say them at my funeral. A bit of black humor, perhaps, but I’m not sure that I’m wrong either.

He’s with most of the rest of the country right now, serving in this vital battle against Hamas. We got a message from him a few days ago, which read: “Going to be

unavailable for the next little bit. I love you guys and be *besimcha* (happy)!”

“I love you guys”? Those were the most terrifying four words I had ever read.

Saying “I love you” was saying: “Listen, Abba. I’m going into a mission now, and I may not live to be at your funeral, so I’m taking this one chance to say those words now.”

How dare you say “I love you”?

How dare you make me cry yet again, wondering if I had already enjoyed my last conversation with you?

How dare you?

Spoiler alert: his part of the mission was canceled and he’s safe and sound. I’ve seen him since then. I’ve hugged him and kissed him. And I’ve told him that I love him.

But he’d better not ever dare tell me again that he loves me. I think that once in a lifetime is all I can take!

In My Own Words

The precariousness of life

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

I’m not particularly interested in the British royal family. Since most of their actions have no impact on my life, I rarely read about them. (And, no, I did *not* watch any of their weddings or the coronation.) Their family arguments are none of my business; I believe even public figures have the right to a private life. However, I admit to being shocked by the announcement that Princess Kate had been diagnosed with cancer. Why? Because it seemed that by virtue of her status, youth and beauty that nothing bad could happen to her. Of course, that’s pure nonsense: life can throw anyone a curve ball regardless of their wealth or status.

Sometimes that curve ball is a car accident that leaves someone physically or mentally disabled. Sometimes just being in the wrong place at the wrong time results in death or severe disability. A perfectly healthy person can drop dead unexpectedly or discover at a routine doctor’s appointment they have a terminal illness. Then there are events like those that occurred on October 7 in Israel when far too many people were killed or taken hostage by Hamas.

Some people feel that those events are preordained or

have a hidden meaning if we could only truly understand it. While parts of the Bible might suggest this is true, that work also includes the book of Job, which offers a very different point of view. Job is never told why so many terrible things happened to him: rather than explaining why they occurred, God basically tells him to shut up. That same idea is featured in a *midrash*: when Moses wonders about the fancy lettering in the Torah, God shows him Rabbi Akiva, first in a classroom and later being tortured by the Romans. When Moses asks why such a wise man was punished, God tells him to stop talking, rather than offering a real answer.

Some of you may be wondering if this discussion is going to offer a revelation that I’m suffering from an illness. I’m glad to say that (thank God) as of this moment I am not. (Please feel to add all the Yiddish phrases my mother would have said so I don’t jinx myself.) But that’s the problem, isn’t it? For everyone, all we can say is that *as of this moment* we are OK. Maybe I’m focusing on this because, during July, I’m scheduled for my regular bian-

nual medical tests and, in August, a once-every-10-years colonoscopy. (Yes, thank you, I already have someone who is going to take me and make sure I get back into my house OK afterward, but I appreciate the offers that might have been coming.)

But all this negative feeling can and should lead to something positive: the appreciation of every joy and pleasure we have in our lives. I’ve written before about stopping each week before Shabbat to note five blessings/gratitudes for that week. They aren’t always things I share because some are quiet moments that might not seem special to anyone else, but feel special to me. I experience a great many of them at my chaplaincy work with the developmentally disabled, but they are also present when I spend time with friends or see a beautiful bird outside my window. Or sit on my front porch with a book in hand. Sometimes, rather than reading, I just take a deep breath and appreciate the sheer joy of being alive. We may not know what tomorrow will bring, something that makes it that more important to appreciate every moment we have right now.



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Federation-Hillel Academy Shabbat in the Park



The Jewish Federation of Broome County, in conjunction with the PJ Library, and Hillel Academy of Broome County held a Shabbat in the Park event on June 28. Children and parents gathered at the park.

At right: Shabbat refreshments were offered to children and parents.



Below: Parents had an opportunity to talk with their friends.



BD Sisterhood held closing meeting



On June 19, the Sisterhood of Beth David Synagogue held its closing meeting of the season, which was open to the entire community. The guest speaker was Rivka Ayelet Kellman, who discussed a variety of home schooling concepts before elaborating upon the version that she has successfully used for teaching her daughter. Shown are some of those who attended the meeting. (Photo by Stacey Silber)



At left: Rivka Ayelet Kellman discussed the merits of home schooling. (Photo by Chaim Joy)



At right: Cathy Velenchik, president of Beth David Sisterhood, conducted the meeting. (Photo by Chaim Joy)



L-r: Judy Silber, Nancy Basmann and Toby Kohn sat at the table while listening to the speaker. Phil Goodman sat behind them. (Photo by Chaim Joy)



L-r: Alex Kaminsky, Elliot Zenilman and Chaim Joy socialized before the meeting. (Photo by Cathy Velenchik)

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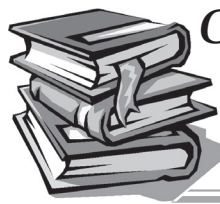
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Off the Shelf

Israelis and Americans

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

Joan Leegant will speak at the Campaign 2025 Federation Super Sunday Brunch on Sunday, September 8. For more information about the event and an interview of Leegant, see future issues of The Reporter.

I spend a great deal of energy looking for books of interest – both for the paper and my personal reading. When I find an author I like, their name goes on one of my lists and I periodically check to see if they have a new work coming out. That list has gotten a bit out of hand so sometimes I miss a book. Take, for example, Joan Leegant. I read and reviewed her first two books: “An Hour in Paradise: Stories” (which was published in 2003 and won the Edward Lewis Wallant Award for the best book of Jewish-American fiction) and the novel “Wherever You Go” (which appeared in 2010). For years, I looked to see if she’d published any new work. After a decade with no new book, her name no longer appeared on the top of my to-look-for list. That means I was delighted to learn a new book of stories, “Displaced Persons” (New American Press), was being published. That work, which won the New American Fiction Prize, has reminded me of just how good a writer she is.

The book is divided into two sections: “East” (meaning Israel) and “West” (meaning the United States). Stories in both sections focus on family and friends, in addition to the daily difficulties of managing life. For example, “The Eleventh Happiest Country” tells the story of two friends, Roi and Tal, who met in the Israeli army. They continued

their friendship when Roi directed his first film, which featured Tal as an actor. That was before Tal became religious and would no longer work as an actor. But now Tal has an idea for a film he wants Roi to direct, even though the details haven’t been worked out. The idea of the film is of less interest than the way Leegant portrays the two men’s thoughts about life in Israel, including how their friendship is so deep that they manage to drive each other crazy, but still love each other like brothers.

The difference between life in Israel and in the U.S. is portrayed in “Beautiful Souls,” when two American teenagers, who are visiting Israel with their parents, are allowed to visit the Arab *shuk* on their own one afternoon. The teens are not impressed with their parents’ sudden desire to practice Judaism: they’ve seen them discard too many fads to accept their sudden conversion to religion. After straying into an alley and entering a restaurant, the teenagers receive a lesson in the complexity of Israeli society.

The stories that take place in the United States are equally good. Hirschman, the main character in “Roots,” is proud of being an agnostic who deliberately flouts Jewish law. When his daughter Wendy becomes more religious and marries Ronald, a dull man whom he dislikes, Hirschman misses the days when she was a protesting firebrand who only needed him when bail had to be posted. However, to his surprise, he finds himself drawn to Ronald’s teenage son and forges a real connection.

“Hunters and Gatherers” focuses on a mother-son relationship, in this case, Gina and her son, Greg, who clearly suffers from a mental health disability. Her husband has moved to another city, but without formally announcing a legal separation, Gina, who has enough trouble trying to keep Greg healthy, is actually relieved to not have to defend her behavior to her husband. The story portrays her deep love for her son and the ways she tries to keep him safe from himself.

A family uses jokes to make serious points in “The Innocent.” After separating from her husband, Pammy lives with her aging and ailing father. Her father tells her he has a debt he needs to repay before he can die in peace. The two travel to the Bronx, where Pammy learns that the truth about the past depends on who is speaking. She also reviews her relationship with her ex-husband, who never understood her family’s way of coping with difficult situations through humor.

My favorite story, which appears in the “East” section, is “Bus.” This four-page work about a mother’s relationship with her son is powerful and moving. Although there is little specific plot, Leegant manages to capture the essence of what it means for a mother to love and care for her son.

Anyone familiar with Leegant’s work will definitely want to read “Displaced Persons.” Lovers of short stories will find much to enjoy and discuss in these pages. Even those who generally prefer longer works will find these stories satisfying and thought-provoking.

TBE

Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership in Chicago.

After teaching at the Chicago synagogue for three years, Brommer said he decided to make the transition to the rabbinate. “I think I just realized that there’s a place where I can go to do the type of Jewish learning and the type of Jewish teaching and the type of Jewish community-building that I want to be doing,” he said. “And it became more and more clear that that was rabbinical school.”

Brommer first visited Temple Beth-El last summer as a scholar-in-residence. In his first trip to Ithaca, he said

he was impressed by the beauty of the area and the active volunteers he met at the synagogue. “The fact that people are ready, willing and excited to spend time and energy working on behalf of the synagogue and the broader Jewish community is really, really moving and exactly what we wanted,” said Brommer, whose wife, Rebecca, is a social worker and a doula.

Brommer said his goals as the rabbi at Temple Beth-El are to expand the size of the religious school and attract young families to the synagogue. “I want to make people

Continued from page 1

feel like they have a stake in their community and in living a Jewish life,” he said. “Living Jewishly has made me a better and more aware person, and I want to give people access points to that.”

Brommer said he would also like to help Temple Beth-El continue to work with other congregations, colleges and universities, and community organizations in Ithaca. “I know that Temple Beth-El has a strong history of interfaith work and I’m really excited about meeting with community organizations in order to forge those partnerships,” he said.

Rebbe

There was a time when Yaakov’s soul was encased in a physical body; now his soul is vested in his children.

The Rebbe’s remarkable “life” that has followed his physical life in a body can only be understood in a similar manner. Indeed, the Rebbe’s greatness was not his intellectual genius, radiant smile, piercing blue eyes, never ending patience and genuinely keen engagement with whoever stood before him. It wasn’t even his brilliant construction of a global network comprising not only his chassidim but, via millions of personal interactions with, prominent and lesser known individuals of every discipline and sector.

It was always and only about how he touched, transformed and elevated the world with his soul. And now, unencumbered by physical constraints, that soul’s reach has only deepened. And more so with each passing day.

There is yet another way we might understand the Rebbe’s life after life.

The Rebbe applied - and through the continued study of his vast ocean of teachings, continues to apply - this unique “soul definition” of life to every person.

And while it took time for his radical view to catch on - even amongst his adherents - it has, in ways both subtle and overt, changed the world: the Jewish world, and far beyond that circumscribed space.

The Rebbe took the iconic - and for most people, abstruse - words of a verse, *ain od milvado* (there is nothing other than Him [God]), and put them into practice in the way that he looked at each person. He saw the soul, which is a veritable aspect of the Divine, in each person, and he refused to be distracted by people’s external veneers. That is to say, the Rebbe saw the spark of God in each individual, their pure core, and, for the Rebbe, there was nothing other than this.

In doing so, he rewrote the rules of Jewish engagement; he pried open the doors of Jewish belonging, eschewing the storied ways of the organized Jewish establishment. To the sounds of deafening criticism, he invented “outreach” although he always called it in-reach.

To the Rebbe, the whole world is a *shul* waiting to happen: the mall, the street, the airport, the school, the prison, the hospital and the army base. If Jews aren’t coming, find them where they are. It’s “to stay, or to go” Judaism suffused with joy and pride that flows from being at peace with one’s deepest core, the soul.

Remarkably, the Rebbe’s teachings are at once expansively universalistic and punctiliously committed to Judaism and *halachic* observance. The Rebbe’s “parish” includes non Jews, but there is no hint of apologetics about his identity as a Jewish leader.

The zero barrier access is not, as some initially misunderstood, an attempt to lower the bar on Jewish observance.



Rabbi Menachem M Schneerson (right) spoke with David Dinkins, then mayor of New York City. Also pictured are aides and photographers. (Photo by JEM, Jewish Educational Media)

On the contrary, it marks the Rebbe’s steadfast refusal to treat any Jew with the soft bias of lower expectations; of accepting their lack of affiliation or observance as a signal that they are not worthy of engaging with seriously.

The Rebbe’s reach was - and remains - vast and global. Defying political orthodoxies and stereotypes, the Rebbe championed both prison reform - a progressive platform - and a moment of silence (devoid of particular religious orientation) in public schools, which would seem to be archetypally conservative. He was hawkish on matters related to Israel’s policies, but not for the typically nationalistic reasons. He repeated over and over again that it was his concern for both Jewish and Arab life that drove his position.

If you sincerely see God in each person, as the Rebbe did, it follows that all people are essentially one. Shortly after the infamous “crown-heights riots” of 1990, the then-mayor of New York, David Dinkins, visited the Rebbe to ask for a blessing for peace “between the two groups - Jews and Blacks - in their neighborhood.” The Rebbe responded, “Not two people and two sides, but one people on one side.”

The Rebbe similarly applied this “soul” perspective to all events and opportunities; he created a “unified field theory” that embraced every aspect of life and of the world.

When, in 1969, Shirley Chisholm made history as the first Black woman elected to Congress, powerful politicians hoped to sideline her by relegating her to an obscure subcommittee of the Agriculture Committee.

One day, she received a phone call from the office of the Rebbe, who lived just one block away from her. When Chisholm came to see the Rebbe and shared her hurt and

frustration at not being able to help the members of her district, the Rebbe urged her to aim higher and replied, “What a blessing God has given you! This country has so much surplus food, and there are so many hungry people. You can use this gift that God gave you to feed the hungry. Find a creative way to do it.”

Shortly afterward, Chisholm met with Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, who told her that Midwestern farmers were producing more food than they could sell and losing money on their crops. Recalling her conversation with the Rebbe, she, together with Dole, led the way in ensuring that those most in need would have access to food through what became the Food Stamp Program and WIC. Just as the body serves as the external housing of the soul, all of life is underlaid by a Divine core, the Rebbe taught, and each encounter presents an opportunity to peel away the external trappings and bring that underlying Divine unity to the surface.

Closer to home, when then distinguished professor of accounting, the late Philip M. Piaker, presented himself to the Rebbe as an instructor at Binghamton, the Rebbe bid him to remember that a university, while a place of great diversity, is a place to showcase universal and unifying concepts.

When looking at Chabad, especially since the Rebbe’s passing, it’s easy to get distracted by the statistics that speak to the movement’s counterintuitive growth: The most recent Pew study revealed an astoundingly high percentage of US Jews’ involvement with Chabad. The number of Chabad Centers and institutions, and the Chabad emissary couples that staff them, rises steadily, and the reach of Chabad’s online presence grows continuously etc.

Numbers, however, fail to tell the real story; they are just the body. As noted, the Rebbe taught us to stay focused on the soul.

Why is the Rebbe more alive today than ever? Because he transmitted the truth that life is defined by the soul.

When we look into the mirror and see our inherent goodness and infinite potential, the Rebbe is alive.

When we look at one another and recognize the unique blessing and contribution each person brings to our universe, he is alive.

When we look beneath the surface of events and discern the hand of God and the positivity that lies within what appears dark and problematic, he is alive.

When we wake up each morning with urgency and do something - one more thing - to fill this world with goodness and kindness and bring Moshiach closer, the Rebbe is alive.

The seeds the Rebbe planted are sprouting everywhere. As long as his seed is alive, he is alive.

JCC held Annual Meeting on June 20

The Jewish Community Center held its Annual Meeting on June 20. During the program, the following awards were given out:

- ◆ The President's Award: Michele Eisenberg (volunteer) and Molly Creveling (community partner)
- ◆ The L'Dor V'Dor Next Generation of

Leaders Award: Board member Justin Salkin and Rachel Ross Priest

- ◆ The Chai Award: Chief Financial Officer Deborah Beylo and UPK teacher Joanna Decker
- ◆ The Harvey R. Singer Scholar/Athlete Memorial Award: Hannah Green
- ◆ The Tzedekah Award: Gerry Hubal
- ◆ The Master Pickleballer Award: Glenn Alenik



Sue Walker, president of the JCC, with Molly Creveling (winner of The President's Award)



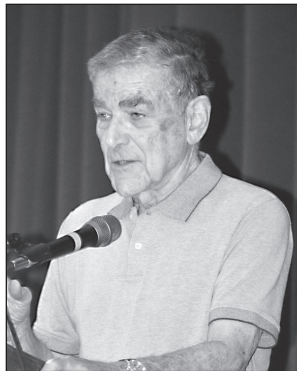
L-r: Sheryl Brumer, chief executive officer, with honoree Glenn Alenik, winner of the Master Pickleballer Award



Those attending the JCC Annual Meeting enjoyed refreshments before the program began.



Hannah Green (The Harvey R. Singer Scholar/Athlete Memorial Award)



Gerry Hubal (winner of the Tzedekah Award)



Chief Financial Officer Deborah Beylo (winner of the Chai Award)



UPK teacher Joanna Decker (winner of the Chai Award)



L-r: Honorees Justin Salkin (winner of the L'Dor V'Dor award), Michele Eisenberg (the President's Award) and Rachel Ross Priest (winner of the L'Dor V'Dor award)



At left: People enjoyed smoozing with each other before the meeting began.

Hillel.....Continued from page 1

Our art teacher, Amy Derkowski, put on an end of the year art show where students showcased watercolors, weaving projects, paper mache and clay sculptures, and much more. The highlight was a neon jungle room, complete with black lights, where the children's creations literally glowed. This installation will be up at our Journal event on September 12, so be sure to join us for the celebration and check out this impressive exhibit!

Sarah MacDougal, our head of secular studies and science teacher, organized a science fair complete with individual experiments, as well as class displays. There were the pre-k students' exhibits on frog life cycles and pea plants, and the first grade animal biomes where they learned about features that help animals survive in their habitats. The older grades made egg cars and raced at different angles to test safety. Individual projects ranged from how to grow an avocado tree from a pit, the process of making maple syrup and exploring different species of birds nests.

Shmaryahu, the head of Judaic studies, organized countless holiday celebrations for the school and our community with assistance from Morah Hadasa Slonim and Morah Ilana Segal. The children enjoyed sukkah hopping to many of the local sukkahs; a Tu B'Shevat celebration with a seder and tree plantings; a Purim party with hamantashen baking, a puppet show and carnival; a Passover seder; and a Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration complete with the children parading with Israeli flags and Shmaryahu's falafel sandwiches.

Our kindergarten and first grade teacher, Danielle Kane, introduced our school to Therapy Dogs 607. We welcomed the

therapy dogs to our school many times throughout the year. The children were able to read to the dogs and cuddle with them, as well. This was an opportunity to help our students build confidence in their reading and social emotional skills. A visit from the therapy dogs was always a treat for the students and we can't wait to welcome Therapy Dogs 607 back to Hillel Academy for more sessions next year.

We are excited for what is to come and know there is more work to do. Next year, we hope to have more community engagement events, like a Sunday morning "pancakes and play" event for young families, a Yom Ha'atzmaut carnival to celebrate Israel's birthday and more. We anticipate our Journal event on Thursday, September 12, and hope the community will join us in honoring two couples who have given so much to our school and the whole region: Dan and Malvinia Sambursky, and Fred and Sandra Weitsman. Dan Sambursky is a fixture in the medical community, not only here, but across the state. The years of work Malvinia and Dan put into serving our school is commendable and invaluable to all of us. Fred and Sandra have beautified our community and school, from the gorgeous artwork at Temple Israel to the Rebecca Weitsman Memorial Dog Park in Owego. We hope you will join us in honoring them for all they continue to do.

We hope to see you at future school events and to celebrate many more holidays and *simchot* together.

Elliot Zenilman is the president of Hillel Academy, Tara Kaminsky is vice president, Rhiannon Foster is secretary, Maren Nasar is treasurer and Alex Kaminsky is the Board of Education chairwoman.

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Weekly Parasha

Chukat, Numbers 19:1-22:1

Moving beyond reason to wisdom

RIVKAH SLONIM, EDUCATION DIRECTOR, THE ROHR CHABAD CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDENT LIFE AT BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

Ours is an era of reason, if not wisdom. From a young age, we are trained to seek proof; we gravitate toward the statistically substantiated and the scientifically qualified. The result is an almost knee jerk rejection of that which transcends the rational.

It is this theme that is central to our *parasha* and is embodied in its name Chukat. Our sages teach that the commandments of the Torah are divided in three categories. The first is *mishpatim*, laws that are perfectly logical and of the sort human beings would in all likelihood have crafted on their own such as the prohibition against murder and theft. The second category is *aidut*, laws that bear witness to axiomatic theological beliefs or/and the most important junctions in our national history. Examples of this include the observance of Passover or the mounting of a *mezuzah* on our doorposts. The third classification is *chukkim*, statutes which defy logic, intellect and intelligence. Examples of these laws include *kashrut* (the kosher diet) and *shatnez* (the prohibition against wearing a garment made of a combination of wool and linen).

In this week's *parasha*, we are introduced to what is the

most celebrated and enigmatic example of this last kind of mitzvah, and certainly – to the contemporary Western mind – the most bizarre.

“Speak to the children of Israel that they shall take to you a red, perfect cow without blemish, upon which no yoke was laid...” (Numbers 19:2). The Torah then delineates the specifics of a purification rite in which this rare species, a red cow (the existence of only nine such calves has been recorded in the annals of history) was slaughtered, its carcass burned, the ashes mixed with spring water and this mixture used to absolve Jews of ritual impurity contracted through contact with death. Among the most difficult details to understand is the paradoxical law that renders impure the priests involved in the preparation of this purifying agent.

So “beyond the ken” is the rubric of the red heifer, that even King Solomon, who was said to understand the entire Torah and the reasons for all laws – even those categorized as a *chukkim* – was stymied.

In introducing this law, the Torah uses the words, “*zot chukat hatorah*, this is the statute of the Torah.” The obvious question is, why doesn't the verse simply state,

this is the statute of the red heifer? The simple explanation is that the Torah is teaching us that this is the *chok* of the Torah, that this is the quintessential of all mind defying, trans-rational *mitzvot* in the Torah.

But there is another way to understand these words as well: True, there are many observances we can “wrap our brains around.” Ultimately, however, on the most essential level, each and every commandment in the Torah is a *chok* – that is, even the many *mitzvot* whose logic is compelling, are – in the final analysis – laws to which we adhere in spite of our rational selves. The underlying premise of a mitzvah is in its being a commandment of God. A mitzvah is an action through which the infinite and the finite meet, through which the creator and the created bond. The etymological root of mitzvah is the Aramaic *tzavta*, which means to connect, to mesh. A mitzvah, then, is an avenue, a conduit, a bridge to the Divine. As such, it not only defines how we live, but represents why we live at all. The mitzvah has intrinsic value in it being the fulfillment of the Divine wish, this is true regardless of how

See “Wisdom” on page 7

Congregational Notes

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

On Fridays and Tuesdays at 5:30 pm, services will be led by Rabbi Micah Friedman via Zoom and in-person.

On Saturday, July 13, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Numbers 19:1-22:1 and the haftarah is Judges 11:1-33. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:45 pm.

On Saturday, July 20, Shacharit services will be held at 9:45 am via Zoom and in-person. It will include the b'nei mitzvahs of Eli and Shira Green. The Torah portion is Numbers 22:2-25:9 and the haftarah is Micah 5:6-6:8. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:30 pm.

The Ritual Committee will meet on Wednesday, July 24, at 10 am.

Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive
 Address: 72 South Broad St., Norwich, NY 13815
 Phone: 334-2691
 E-mail: fertigj@roadrunner.com
 Contact: Guilina Greenberg, 373-5087
 Purpose: To maintain a Jewish identity and meet the needs of the Jewish community in the area.
 Adult Ed.: Call ahead, text or e-mail to confirm dates.

Penn-York Jewish Community

President-Treasurer-Secretary: Harvey Chernosky, 570-265-3869
 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.

Temple Brith Sholom

Affiliation: Unaffiliated
 Address: P.O. Box 572, 117 Madison St., Cortland, NY 13045
 Phone: 607-756-7181
 President: Nick Martelli
 Cemetery Committee: 315-696-5744
 Website: templebrithsholomcortland.org
 Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Temple-Brith-Sholom-114006981962930/
 Service leaders: Lay leadership
 Shabbat services: Either Friday evening at 7:30 pm or Saturday at 10 am from Rosh Hashanah to Shavuot. Holiday services are also held. 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,” while the Saturday morning siddur is “Gates of Prayer.” The community extends a warm welcome to the Jewish student population of SUNY Cortland, as well as the residents of local adult residences.

Services and programs are held by Zoom on the first and second Fridays of the month.

Synagogues limit face-to-face gatherings

For specific information regarding services (including online services), meetings and classes at any of the area synagogues, contact them by phone or e-mail.

Beth David Synagogue

Affiliation: Orthodox Union
 Rabbi: 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: rabbisilber@stny.rr.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.

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.

Congregation Tikkun v'Or

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
 Address: PO Box 3981, Ithaca, NY 14852; 2550 Triphammer Rd. (corner of Triphammer and Burdick Hill), Lansing, NY
 Phone: 607-256-1471
 Website: www.tikkunvor.org, E-mail: info@tikkunvor.org
 Presidents: Martha Armstrong and Mitch Grossman, presidents_22@tikkunvor.org
 Education Director/Administrative Coordinator: Naomi Wilensky
 Bnai Mitzvah Coordinator: Michael Margolin
 Services: All services currently on Zoom. E-mail info@tikkunvor.org for the times and links. Contemplative morning services every Tuesday from 8:30-9:30 am. Saturday mornings, Gan Shabbat and other special services at least once a month. Call for the weekly schedule.
 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, July 12, light candles before 8:21 pm
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 13 9:21 pm
 Friday, July 19, light candles before 8:16 pm
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 20 9:16 pm
 Friday, July 26, light candles before 8:10 pm
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 27 9:09 pm

Temple Concord

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
 Rabbi: Leah Moser
 Address: 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905
 Office hours: Tues.-Fri., 10 am-2 pm
 Phone: 607-723-7355
 Fax: 607-723-0785
 Office e-mail: TempleConcordbinghamton@gmail.com
 Website: www.templeconcord.com
 Regular service times: Fri., 7:30 pm; Sat., 10:35 am, when religious school is in session.
 Hebrew school: Hebrew school meets at 4:15 pm and 5:15 pm on Tues. and Thurs. during the school year unless otherwise noted.

Some services and programs are online only.
 Friday, July 12: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service with Rabbi Leah Moser. Join via Zoom at https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/templeconcord/.

Saturday, July 13: At 9:15 am, Torah study in person and on Zoom (http://bit.ly/3XDnvRE, meeting ID 825 1226 2831 and passcode 743892).

Friday, July 19: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service with Rabbi Leah Moser. Join via Zoom at https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/templeconcord/.

Saturday, July 20: At 9:15 am, Torah study in person and on Zoom (http://bit.ly/3XDnvRE, meeting ID 825 1226 2831 and passcode 743892).

Temple Beth El of Oneonta

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
 Cantor: David Green
 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.

Temple Beth-El of Ithaca

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
 Rabbi: Caleb Brommer
 Rabbi Emeritus: Scott L. Glass
 Address: 402 North Tioga St. (the corner of Court and Tioga streets), Ithaca, NY 14850-4292
 Phone: 273-5775
 E-mail: president@tbeithaca.org and secretary@tbeithaca.org
 Website: www.tbeithaca.org
 Presidents: Melanie Kalman and Alexis Siemon
 Sisterhood President: Gail Zussman
 Director of Education: Calle Schueler
 Services: Friday 8 pm; Saturday 10 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 Sunday, 9 am-12:30 pm and Wednesday afternoons, 3:45-5:45 pm. The teen No'ar program meets twice per month (every other Sunday from 5-7 pm) and is designed with the flexibility to accommodate busy student schedules.
 Adult Ed.: Numerous weekly courses, several semester-long courses and a variety of mini-courses and lectures are offered throughout the year. Call the temple office for more details.

For upcoming services and events on Zoom, visit www.tinyurl.com/HappeningAtTBE.

Jewish Community Center

FUN IN THE SUN AT CAMP JCC

Below: Camp JCC started off the summer with a Ruach Circle to welcome campers.



JCC Friendship Club

The JCC Friendship Club met on June 19. The meeting was called to order by Sylvia Diamond. We recited the Pledge of Allegiance and sang "Hatikvah." Sue Herzog gave the treasurer's report and introduced John Ronzzoni. He told us that he started as a singer at Tri City Opera and is now general manager. Mr. Ronzzoni told us that TCO was started Carmen Sovacca and John Peton.

TCO has been on Clinton Street since 1964! It has grown from one building to include an additional four more. They house all equipment, scenery, wardrobe and so much more. It is a training school for those who want to enter the business.

Mr. Ronzzoni informed us about some of the programs that are coming up. Porchfest will be held August 25, in Binghamton. TCO will be part of Luma on September 6 and 7. The opera "Ugly Duckling" will be presented to local schools. There will be an opera taking place during World War I called "All is Calm."

TCO ends its season in December and writes grants in January. The funds raised by selling tickets do not cover the cost of the performances. Mr. Ronzzoni has mentioned that Stefanos Koraneos, who started here, is now the first director at The Metropolitan Opera House. He also said TCO is the only opera production in this area. He stated, "There are many talented people here."

He told us that they conduct tours at the opera house and we should look for dates. He told us more about the training program and the process on how they select the singers for the shows. At the end, he answered the questions of those who asked.

Come join us on Wednesday, July 17, at the Jewish Community Center, at 11:30 am, and go to a senior center for lunch. RSVPs are needed by Sunday, July 14, by calling 607-772-0726.

Sylvia Diamond
President

Moving any time soon? Or just leaving town for a few months?



Whether you're moving across town or across the country, please let *The Reporter* know so you can stay up to date on community news and quickly receive the paper at your new (or temporary) address!

E-mail treporter@aol.com with "Reporter Address change" in the subject line, or call 607-724-2360, ext. 254, to let *The Reporter* know about your new address.

Wisdom.....Continued from page 6

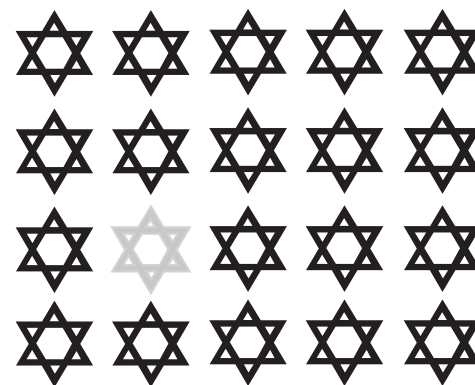
or if it benefits us or makes us feel. This has been most dramatically illustrated in times of religious persecution, but is just as true in our own times, when a mitzvah is simply inconvenient or downright difficult. The fact that we do not dispose of these laws, even at risk of incurring loss – great or small – is testament to an adherence that supersedes methodology and logic.

Next week's *parasha*, Balak, highlights the reciprocal dimension of this dynamic. In *parashat* Balak, we learn that, just as God asks that we adhere to His word in a way that defies logic, so, too, has He fashioned our destiny to transcend the laws of nature.

When the heathen king Balak hires a renowned sorcerer and prophet to curse the Jewish nation, he is sorely disappointed. Despite numerous attempts and a valiant effort, Balam is unable to curse the Jewish people. In fact, each time he opens his mouth he accords them the highest accolades and showers upon them blessing. In exasperation he cries, "I gaze upon it from the hills; behold! A people which shall dwell alone and will not be reckoned among the nations." (Numbers 23:9) These iconic words encapsulate a truth

showcased throughout history. The Jewish people are indeed a nation apart whose existence is completely supra-natural.

Sometimes, it takes an enemy to teach us a profound truth: It behooves us moderns to move beyond reason to wisdom, to an understanding that there are things – in fact, the most important things – we will never understand. We are who we are and do what we do for a reason far beyond what we can fathom.



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Tefillin were not dyed black 2,000 years ago

By JNS staff

(JNS) – Ancient *tefillin*, or phylacteries, were not colored black, as is mandated by contemporary Jewish law, a scientific study has found. The discovery challenges long-held assumptions about the practice of *tefillin* observance.

The research, published in the prestigious journal PLOS ONE, is the work of a team from Israel and Great Britain. A battery of scientific tests showed that two-millennia-old *tefillin* uncovered in the Holy Land were likely the color of their natural leather when they were in use.

Tefillin are small leather cases containing minuscule parchment scrolls inscribed with biblical verses. They are worn by observant Jewish men and some liberal women as part of their weekday morning prayers, one on the head and one on the arm.

“This is a very important discovery,” said Professor Yonatan Adler of Ariel University, who led the study. “This is the first time that [ancient] *tefillin* have been scientifically examined to determine their color.”

He noted that in some *tefillin*, the leather has a natural brown color. In others, however, the very dark color of the leather, which was previously thought to be the result of dyeing, was, in fact, natural. “Our tests have shown that where the leather appears dark, it is the result of a natural process and not intentional dyeing,” he said.

In 1949, archaeologists discovered several leather *tefillin* cases in a cave near Qumran, where the first Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Additional *tefillin* cases were later unearthed in other caves near Qumran, in Wadi Murabba’at and Nahal Se’elim – all in the Judean Desert.

These findings are dated to the same time as the Dead

Sea Scrolls, from around the end of the Second Temple period – or about 2,000 years ago.

The arid desert climate allowed these artifacts to survive for millennia until their discovery, and the *tefillin* cases have been preserved in the storeroom of the Israel Antiquities Authority’s Dead Sea Scrolls Unit in Jerusalem, where the climatic conditions of the caves are replicated.

According to Ilit Cohen-Ofri, head of the conservation laboratory at the Dead Sea Scrolls Unit, “in ancient times, there were two main methods for dyeing leather black. The first method used carbon-based materials – soot or charcoal – to give the leather a black color. The second method was based on a chemical reaction between tannin, a complex organic compound found in many plants and iron oxides. In our tests, we ruled out the possibility that the *tefillin* cases were dyed black using either of these methods.”

The researchers used a variety of techniques, including multispectral imaging, to examine the leather of the *tefillin* cases for traces of black dye or paint. The results of the analyses showed no evidence of black colorants in any of the *tefillin* cases.

“In the dark fragments we examined, the color appears to be the result of natural leather aging rather than intentional dyeing,” said Yonah Maor of the Israel Antiquities



Tefillin from about 2,000 years ago in the laboratories of the Israel Antiquities Authority. (Photo by Emil Aladjem/IAA)

Authority’s analytical laboratory. “Minor water leakage into the caves over the 2,000 years the artifacts have been there could have accelerated the leather aging process. In the past, we have found that some of the Dead Sea Scrolls have also undergone a similar process, which unfortunately has caused the parchment to darken.”

The researchers believe that the practice of coloring *tefillin* cases black is likely due to a later tradition. They suggest that the law requiring *tefillin* to be made black may not have been in place in the Second Temple period when the *tefillin* examined in

the study were used.

“It is likely that in the beginning, there was no *halachic* significance to the color of *tefillin*,” explained Adler. “Only at a later period did the rabbis rule that *tefillin* should be colored black.”

As the centuries passed, Jewish religious authorities continued to debate whether the requirement to color *tefillin* cases black was an absolute obligation or merely preferable for aesthetic reasons.

“It is commonly thought that Jewish law is static and does not develop. Our ongoing research on ancient *tefillin* shows that the exact opposite is true; Jewish law has always been dynamic. In my view, it is this vibrancy that makes *halachah* so beautiful.”

Israeli scholars confirm ancient rabbinic theories via machine learning algorithm

By JNS staff

(JNS) – A new study of the Talmud, the vast Hebrew and Aramaic body of Jewish oral law, confirms ancient rabbinical theories about linguistic variations in certain tractates of the religious texts, according to Israeli scholars.

Through the innovative use of a machine learning algorithm, a team of researchers from Tel Aviv University and Ariel University in Samaria successfully pinpointed several sections of the Talmud that the rabbis had designated as “special tractates” due to their unique language.

“The Babylonian Talmud, primarily composed in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, exhibits various non-standard linguistic features, interspersed throughout it,” per the abstract of the peer-reviewed study, which was first published in the

Journal of Jewish Studies in early April. “Medieval rabbis highlighted some tractates, often referred to as the ‘special tractates,’ which possess a more abundant number of occurrences of these features than others,” the authors explain.

Jakub Zbrzezny, one of the authors of “A computational analysis of the special talmudic tractates,” told Israeli media recently that the research provides “the first comprehensive statistical proof of what humans intuitively have been aware of for centuries.” The algorithm was able to detect “a large percentage of non-Babylonian features in all special tractates,” confirming the theories of Rashi – the foremost biblical commentator – and other prominent Torah scholars.

One tractate, Tamid (“daily burnt offering”), which

discusses the sacrifices in the Temple, was found to have a large number of lines flagged by the algorithm when discussing stories about Alexander the Great, possibly indicating that they were added from a different source.

The algorithm also flagged other sections of the Talmud whose language is close to the special tractates, and several tractates whose dialect is more uniform than the average, the researchers noted. They added that Jewish studies scholars had yet to study this phenomenon.

The Babylonian Talmud contains the Mishnah – the oral Torah – and the Gemara, the latter representing some 300 years of analysis of the Mishnah at the religious academies in Babylon, present-day Iraq.

Report. Continued from page 2

Attempting to set the “Diaspora Report” apart from the presentism of most columns, I employ the historian’s craft as a resource to contextualize stories.

This approach enables me accept that I cannot compete with a reporter filing daily reports. Soon after I began the “Diaspora Report,” *The Reporter* moved to biweekly publication, further puncturing any illusion that I would have first call on telling a story. Instead, I search for a perspective that will stand the test of time. Free of the need to report breaking news, I developed a Jewish column calendar built around certain annual features, such as the roundup of the baseball season, Veterans Day and Kirk Douglas’ *yahrzeit*. For anticipated articles, I thus have more time to plan and schedule archival research, interviews and on-site reporting.

The “Diaspora Report” still sometimes strains again space limitations. However, that has encouraged vigilance against the gratuitous and digressive. Moreover, as with the Tree of Life murders, women in baseball and Jewish delicatessens, I have the option of a multipart series as an alternative to imposing premature closure on a topic.

At a time when local journalism faces formidable challenges and fair treatment of matters vital to Jews is often lacking, it is a privilege to be part of a *Reporter* team committed to quality Jewish journalism. Thanks to Executive Editor Rabbi Rachel Esserman for encouraging me to find significance in diverse areas of Jewish life. And appreciation is due Layout Editor Diana Sochor for investing care in the physical presentation of my columns.

In addition, experienced journalists with serious credentials have contributed to my development as a columnist. Displaying exceptional generosity with his time, expertise, and contacts, Bob Cudmore, dean of Greater Amsterdam/Schenectady (NY) media, opened doors that enable me to chronicle the transformation of the bullied and deprived Izzy Demsky into superstar Kirk Douglas. To prepare me to enter the courtroom in the Tree of Life murder trial, award-winning, *Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle* reporter David Rullo patiently answered questions and gifted context. While covering anti-Israel protest at Columbia University, Associated Press reporter Cedar Attanasio, in addition to sharing detail about antecedent events, heightened my sense of purpose, telling me that local journalism is an essential counter to the ubiquitous echo chamber of national media.

Unlike some of my more didactic and polemical labor union writing, the “Diaspora Report” is not a platform for ideology. The column coda values reflective analysis over strident opinion. 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. And I am a left center, FDR Democrat, but grant a decent respect and civil hearing to viewpoints that challenge mine. In crafting columns, I take seriously the comments of readers, whether appreciative or critical. While situational evaluation of on-going events is subject to reassessment, my fundamental beliefs are deeply rooted.

Since the October 7 terrorist attack, the Israel-Hamas war has challenged Jewish-American journalists. My core beliefs about the conflict – the legitimacy of self-defense and destruction of Hamas, commitment to the survival of the Jewish people, the importance of Israel remaining a Jewish state, the imperative of replacing the current hard-right Israeli government with one that reflects the best of Jewish and democratic values, and the need to plan for a just and secure peace – remain intact. At this point in the conflict, however, tactics, casualties and the misconduct of the Netanyahu coalition have led me to prioritize safeguarding the lives of Palestinian civilians. As war and the eventual post-conflict settlement proceed, the “Diaspora Report” will attempt to voice responsible and constructive response to events happening in real time.

The “Diaspora Report” seeks to contribute to Jewish consciousness, pride and identity without recourse to hyperbole or distortion. Nonetheless, more direct engagement with the underside of Jewish life merits attention in future columns. Past columns confronted the Jewish Nazi Daniel Burros and xenophobic Rabbi Meir Kahane, but have thus far not dealt directly with violent gangsters Bugsy Siegel and Mickey Cohen, corrupt financiers Ivan Boesky and Bernie Madoff, and predatory transgressors Jeffrey Epstein and Harvey Weinstein. Eschewing sensationalism and group shaming, consideration of the factors that led individuals and phenomenon to violate Jewish values may contribute to consideration of future correctives.

Amidst the polarization of our political and cultural discourse, it is a gift and challenge to write the “Diaspora Report.” The goal is for the column to make a difference at a time when news, particularly that about Jews and Israel, is skewed. I aspire to establish a legacy and to publish “Diaspora Report” columns in a book. Pre-publication, my wife Nancy reads everything I write, evaluating expression and content. Nancy doesn’t agree with all that I write, but she believes in me – and the goals of the “Diaspora Report.”

Looking for this issue’s “Jewish Resources”? Visit www.thereportergroup.org/jewish-online-resources to find out what’s happening online.”

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