

THE REPORTER

Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

May 31-June 13, 2024
Volume LIII, Number 11

Federation to hold security educational programs in Oneonta on June 9

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold a Countering Active Threat Training and a "Stop the Bleed" program on Sunday, June 9, at Temple Beth El, 83 Chestnut St., Oneonta, beginning at 10 am. Mark Henderson, Secure Community Network regional advisor, will

lead the programs. Henderson has been coordinating security trainings with help from the Secure Community Network, the national Homeland Security initiative of the Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Refreshments will be served. To register

for the program, contact Ron Feldstein at megaceo98@gmail.com.

"Security has become a top priority and we are committed to helping smaller communities like Oneonta to improve their security posture," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation.

The Countering Active Threat Training

is a comprehensive training program that teaches how to counter an active threat event. It was developed for faith-based institutions and houses of worship. Its learning objectives include:

◆ Learning to know when there is an active threat.

See "Oneonta" on page 12

JCC Annual Meeting to be held on June 20

The Jewish Community Center will host its Annual Meeting on Thursday, June 20, from 6:45-9 pm. All JCC members, friends and supporters are welcome to attend. The

event is free to the community. Anyone planning on attending is requested to call the JCC office to make a reservation at 607-724-2417.

The evening will begin with a dessert

buffet prepared by chef Victor Torres from 6:45-7:30 pm. From 7:30-8:30 pm, there will be a series of awards presentations honoring those individuals who went above

and beyond in their service and dedication to the JCC this past year. The event will conclude with the installation of the 2024-25 JCC Board of Directors.

Federation, Hillel Academy to hold Shabbat in the Park on June 28

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Broome County, in conjunction with the PJ Library, and Hillel Academy of Broome County will hold a Shabbat in the Park event on Friday, June 28, at 10:30

am, at Arnold Park, Andrews Road, Vestal.

The event is open to all families with young children. It will include Shabbat refreshments, music and storytelling. The children will also have the opportunity to use the park's play-

ground. RSVPs can be made by visiting www.jfjb.org/ or e-mailing director@jfjb.org.

"Shabbat in the Park will give families a chance to get together for some relaxed, laid-back pre-Shabbat fun," said Shelley

Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "Summer is the best time to gather, relax and make new friends. We hope young families of all ages will come out and share in the sweetness of Shabbat."

Save the date

Hillel Academy Journal event to be held Sept. 12

Hillel Academy of Broome County will hold its annual journal event on Thursday, September 12, in the evening (time TBA), at Temple Israel. This year's Theodore Sommer Community Service Award honorees are Fred and Sandra Weitsman. The A. M. Pierson Award hon-

orees are Dan and Malvinia Sambursky.

Tickets and ad sales are underway, and the entire community is invited and encouraged to attend. To buy tickets for the event or place an ad in the journal, contact the Hillel office at frontoffice@hillelacademyofbc.org or 607-304-4544. More information about

the journal and the dinner will be available in future issues of *The Reporter*, including an advertisement showing the cost of journal ads. Former advertisers should look for that ad or for e-mails from the school.

"We are thrilled to honor people who have made such a difference not only

for our school, but for the greater Jewish community and the entire Southern Tier!" organizers of the event said. "There are few people in the area who haven't been touched by the generosity of the Weitsmans and we are so grateful for their continued support."

See "Journal" on page 11

Spotlight

Federation talks security, antisemitism

By Reporter staff

When Shelley Hubal began her tenure as executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, she thought the major portion of her work would be fund-raising to keep community institutions healthy during a time when the Jewish population of Broome County was decreasing. She also wanted to increase the number of Jewish events for people of all ages, from children to seniors. Then life changed.

"The first problem that occurred was the pandemic," Hubal said. "We looked for ways to keep the community connected, even when we could not gather in person. Looking back on the number of programs we produced, I believe we did an excellent job."

However, other concerns soon rose, those connected to security issues and the increase in antisemitism in American society. "I never thought there would be a day when Jewish organizations would have to restrict entry to their buildings—locking their doors or having police officers guarding them, but that has become a reality," she said. "There

have been too many attacks on American Jewish institutions, so security has become a priority. I want every building that contains a Jewish organization to be safe."

She also finds the increase in antisemitic writing and actions disturbing. "Far too much criticism of Israeli policies have crossed the line into antisemitism," she noted. "And that problem seems to be growing even in our own community."

Hubal recently dealt with this issue when a Binghamton City Council resolution was put forth supporting a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. "I knew the resolution would pass and ultimately not have an impact on our community. So, while I disagreed with the resolution, my concerns were to make certain that it did not cross the line into anything overtly antisemitic and that the council meeting would become unsafe," she said. "I contacted the Jewish Federations of North America and asked for support. Through JFNA, I was able to have a consultation with one of their policy experts. We read through the resolution and its

supporting documents together. Ultimately, with the council of the JFNA expert, various community members, BU students and our security expert Mark Henderson, I decided to not attend the council meeting. Hillel at Binghamton was hosting a talk by a NOVA music festival survivor the same evening and I decided to support that instead."

Hubal noted another issue that arose

recently took place on the Binghamton University campus. "I also consulted with Mark Henderson in regard to the student encampment and Israel rally at BU," she said. "He alerted the Secure Community Network about the events so they could monitor social media. In short, there is a lot going on behind the scenes. I am learning

See "Talks" on page 4

SILVER SPONSOR

The Reporter's Editorial Committee and staff thank Jean and Lew Hecht for sponsoring this issue of THE REPORTER in honor of their grandson, Noah Grills, becoming bar mitvah

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Federation meeting

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold its Annual Meeting on June 19.

.....Page 3

Honor Flight

Dennis Foreman reflects on the recent Honor Flight he went on and his time in the Air Force.

.....Page 4

Shavuot

A cheesecake recipe for Shavuot; mourning the blintz in *The Reporter's* Jewish food column.

.....Page 4, 9 and 10

Special Sections

Celebrating Jewish Literature 5-8
Personal & Business Services 9
Gifts for Dads and Grads 11
Classifieds 12

Opinion

Passover: After the eighth day

By Bill Simons

"In every generation, each Jew should regard himself as though he too were brought out of Egypt. Not our fathers alone, but us also, did the Holy One redeem; for not alone in Egypt. Not our fathers alone, but us also, did the Holy One redeem; for not alone is Egypt but in many other lands have we groaned under the burdens of affliction and suffered as victims of malice, ignorance and fanaticism."

The preceding words come from my 1923 copy of "The Union Haggadah: Home Service for the Passover." At sundown on April 30 (22 Nissan 5784), Passover 2024

came to an end. More so than at any previous time in my life, the injunction to regard myself as part of deliverance from Egypt continues to resonate after the eighth day.

For me, Passover is the most indelible Jewish holiday. It is home and family-observed, rendering Passover accessible and experiential. Rooted in sacred tales and venerable traditions, Passover synthesizes family histories within the collective Jewish experience.

Passover 1951: With my parents, Shep and Elaine, we motor from our triple decker in Lynn, MA, to the first-floor rental in nearby Revere of my maternal grandparents, the

rarely present Grandpa Sam and beloved Nana Kahan. Not yet 2, I am given four small sips of wine from a special blue ceremonial glass at appropriate intervals in the seder. The wine imprints a dreamy primal memory.

For over a decade, my paternal grandparents, Joe and Bertha Simons, hosted what I still regard as the template seder. Their four children accompanied by spouses and the 11 Simons grandchildren participated. From Grandpa Joe's formidable extended family, his widowed sisters and unmarried nieces and nephews were invited. **See "After" on page 12**

One Perspective from Israel

Will we ride that bike again?

JEREMY STAIMAN

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

It was a memory that tickled at the very edges of my imagination, as if it had wafted in on a warm breeze.

It was oh, so familiar.

At the same time, it belonged to a stranger. Someone from a different time. A more innocent time.

The memory was beckoning to me, but I couldn't hear its message.

The only sentence fragment which I could decipher was:

"When I was a young boy in Binghamton..."

You've probably heard of Binghamton, NY.

You probably know that there's a university there. Maybe you drove by it, driving on Route 17 from New York to Toronto.

You may even know college students who have attended the school. Lately, it's made some news, as the Student Association passed a BDS resolution. To be fair to the school, the president of Binghamton University is a good friend to the thousands of Jewish students who attend there, and

the Chabad recently held a Shabbat dinner where 2,200 attended, and exhibited their Jewish pride.

I know a very different Binghamton. One just miles from the university, but very much on another planet. I grew up there, in idyllic, charming small-city America.

The Binghamton of my youth was the kind of place where you could ride your bike a mile or two without fear, to Carvel's for ice cream.

It was the kind of place where the Reform temple was a block away from the Orthodox *shul*, and the rabbis all **See "Bike" on page 12**

In My Own Words

Zionists and anti-Zionists

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Zionism is defined as "an international movement originally for the establishment of a Jewish national or religious community in Palestine and later for the support of modern Israel." I am a Zionist because I believe the state of Israel has a right to exist, just as does every other established nation. Is Israel perfect? No, but, then again, no nation is. Has it done things of which I don't approve? Yes, but so has the United States, Canada, Germany, Japan, Russia, etc. (a list that could include almost every nation) and no one is claiming they don't have the right to exist.

Anyone who knows me personally knows that I am a Zionist. Then, why do I feel the need to proclaim that fact in this column? It's because of an oped that appeared recently in the Forward. The column was written by two former students of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (my alma mater). They claim that RRC is such a hotbed of anti-Zionism that any support of Israel was considered racist by their fellow students, which was just one of the things that made them so uncomfortable they withdrew from the school.

According to a Jewish Telegraphic Agency article, Rabbi Deborah Waxman, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, noted during the recent graduation ceremony that "the stance of the Reconstructionist movement since the time of Mordecai Kaplan to this day is that Israel has a right to exist and is a vital center for Jewish life and the Jewish people." However, she also noted that "any litmus test we have in the Reconstructionist Movement is not about particular stances around Israel."

I know many Reconstructionist rabbis who support Israel. I also know many who don't, including some who do not believe the state of Israel has a right to exist. This was confirmed in the JTA article, which noted that "RRC graduates and students make up at least 25 of the 45 members of the rabbinical council of Jewish Voice for Peace, the biggest Jewish anti-Zionist organization." However, a group of Reconstructionist rabbis recently formed Beit Kaplan, which notes on its website that its members "unequivocally support the right of Israel to exist, and to exist as a Jewish state."

I consider myself part of the post-Holocaust generation,

meaning a generation for whom the world never felt like a completely safe place. I remember talking to my mother about the Holocaust when I was a teenager; she asked me if I thought something like that could happen in the United States. My answer was a simple yes. That answer has now been informed by a greater study of Jewish history. If the United States lives up to its ideals, then Jews will forever be safe here. But so many countries have not lived up to the ideals of their founders, that there is always a question mark about the future.

At the same time, I have no desire to move to Israel. The United States is my home and I feel an obligation to help it become the nation of its ideals. But in the back of my head, Israel has always been a potential safe haven, the place that would be open to me if Jews were once again persecuted. That is something that the anti-Zionists obviously don't feel: the need to know there is a place Jews can go if they are once again oppressed or expelled.

I understand some of their frustration. I am not happy with Israel's current government. I am actively displeased **See "Zionists" on page 12**

Letters

Remembering the second anniversary of the Buffalo massacre

To the Editor:

"To believe is to remember." – Rabbi Abraham Heschel

Here in the Southern Tier, we remember that a young man from our community traveled to Buffalo and carried out an act of mass murder motivated by racial hatred. We remember the 10 African Americans who were killed. We remember the three individuals who were injured. We remember the communities that struggled with the traumatic after effects of this hate-fueled violence.

We remember, and we also believe in the power of love to bring healing, conviction and a renewed intention to work together for healthy relationships. The Binghamton

Children of Abraham, an interfaith community dedicated to works of justice and compassion, would like to extend an invitation to residents of the Southern Tier to remember with us those who were killed, injured or otherwise impacted by the violence that occurred on May 14, 2022. Join us in making a contribution to the Buffalo 10 Scholarship at www.unyumc.org/resources/buffalo-10-scholarship.

It is our hope that our donations will have both symbolic and practical meaning. Our giving can be a symbol for our continued focus on efforts to confront the culture of racism that led one of our young people into such evil. Our contributions can also be a practical help to those in

Buffalo struggling not only against the devastating effects of specific racial violence, but also nurturing young leaders who bring caring and vision to a community that has endured other harms of racism.

We remember, and we work toward collective action to make sure it will never happen again. Adding our energy to efforts for healing and leadership development in the neighborhoods one of ours harmed is a first step in our work.

The Children of Abraham's "goal is to build mutual trust and respect among local persons from the Abrahamic religious traditions through interfaith conversation and education."

Eve Berman, Lani Dunthorn and Barbara Thomas



Jewish Federation
of Greater Binghamton

Shelley Hubal, Executive Director

607-724-2332 ~ www.jfgeb.org

The Reporter Editorial Committee

Rebecca Goldstein Kahn, chairwoman

Rachel Coker, Ben Kasper, Rivka Kellman,

Toby Kohn, Richard Lewis,

Robert Neuberger, Ilene Pinsker, Elliot Zenilman

HOW TO REACH THE REPORTER

Mail ~ The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Rd. Vestal, NY 13850

E-mail ~ TReporter@aol.com

Phone ~ 607-724-2360 or 800-779-7896

Extension#/Department ~ 1. Advertising 2. Business Office

3. Art Department 4. Circulation 6. Editorial/News



BINGHAMTON, NY

OPINIONS

The views expressed in editorials and opinion pieces are those of each author and not necessarily the views of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton.

LETTERS

The Reporter welcomes letters on subjects of interest to the Jewish community. All letters must be signed and include a phone number; names may be withheld upon request.

ADS

The Reporter does not necessarily endorse any advertised products and services. In addition, the paper is not responsible for the kashruth of any advertiser's product or establishment.

DEADLINE

Regular deadline is noon, Wednesday, for the following week's newspaper (see deadline dates on page 3). All articles should be e-mailed to TReporter@aol.com.

Executive Editor Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Layout Editor Diana Sochor

Advertising Kathy Brown

Bookkeeper Kathy Brown

Production Associate Julie Weber

Columnist Bill Simons

Proofreaders

Barbara Bank, Fran Ferentinos,

Rebecca Goldstein Kahn, Merri Pell-Preus,

Ilene Pinsker, Heidi Thirer



"The Reporter" (USPS 096-280) is published bi-weekly for \$40 per year by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, 500 Clubhouse Road, Vestal, NY 13850-3734. Periodicals Postage Paid at Vestal, NY and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Road, Vestal, NY 13850-3734 or reach us by e-mail at TREPORTER@AOL.COM.

www.thereporter.org

Federation to hold 2024 Annual Meeting on June 19

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold its 2024 Annual Meeting on Wednesday, June 19, at 7:30 pm, at the Jewish Community Center. The event will include the election of the new Board of Directors. The Federation's Annual Report will be available at the meeting in hard copy. It will also appear on the Federation website and in the June 14 issue of *The Reporter*.

"With so many events happening in our community,

we decided to not include a special program at the annual meeting," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "As we look back at the last year and all we have accomplished, including sponsoring or co-sponsoring 23 communitywide programs, we hope the community will see the value of their gift to the Federation."

Members of the Board of Directors are:

◆ Executive Committee: Suzanne Holwitt, president; Howard Warner, immediate past president; Mark Walker,

vice president; Jeffrey Shapiro, treasurer; Lee Schechter, assistant treasurer; Eileen Miller, secretary; Charles Gilinsky, assistant secretary; Marilyn Bell, Campaign chairwoman; TBA, endowment chairman; and Randy Friedman, community relations chairman.

◆ Board members at large are Rita Bleier, Nancy Dorfman, Dennis Foreman, Sondra Foreman, Steve Gilbert, Tara Kaminsky, Barbara Mullen, Jeff Platsky, Josh Shapiro, Rose Shapiro, Arieh Ullmann, Cathy Velenchik, Susan Walker and Elliot Zenilman.

◆ Affiliate organization representatives are Sheryl Brumer (Jewish Community Center), TBA (*The Reporter*), Neisen Luks (Temple Concord), Arthur Seigel (Temple Israel), Rabbi Zev Silber and Benny Kellman (Beth David Synagogue), Rabbi Moshe Shmaryahu (Hillel Academy) and Rabbi Aaron Slonim (Rohr Chabad Center). Steve Malkin is the chairman of the Safety and Security Committee.

BD Sisterhood June meeting to discuss homeschooling

The final meeting of Beth David Sisterhood for the 2023-24 season will be held on Wednesday, June 19, at 7 pm, at Beth David Synagogue. The meeting will be open to both men and women, whether or not they are affiliated with Beth David Sisterhood or Beth David Synagogue. The evening's speaker will be Rivka Ayelet Kellman, who will relate her personal experiences homeschooling her daughter. She will discuss various approaches to home schooling, some of which, such as "unschooling," have been called controversial, but effective.

Kellman is a Jewish educator of students of all ages and has been a homeschooling parent for five years. She has a background in curriculum design and psychology of education.

"Even though none of us are likely to be home schooling any of our children or grandchildren, it should be fasci-

nating to learn about these approaches to education which were unheard of when most of us were school age," said organizers of the event.

Donations for CHOW will be accepted at the meeting, and mitzvah cards, which are \$3 each, may be requested at any time.

Also, Stacey Silber continues to accept donations of new and used items of all types that she will attempt to sell in order to raise money for Sisterhood. Anyone with items to donate should contact Silber directly at 607-727-9738 or silbercreations@gmail.com, or notify the Beth David office.

Anyone on the Sisterhood's e-mail list should receive a flyer designed by Rabbi David Serkin as a reminder about the meeting. Anyone who wished to be added to the list should send their e-mail address to the Beth David Synagogue office at bethdavid@stny.rr.com with the request.

Former WRJ NE district president coming to TC on June 21-22

Former Women of Reform Judaism Northeast District President Robin Sobol will be at Temple Concord on Friday-Saturday, June 21-22. She will lead services on the Friday evening, which will begin at 7:30 pm, and Torah study on Saturday morning, which will begin at 9:15 am. Then 11:30 am, there will be a Sisterhood brunch followed by Sobol leading a Sisterhood orientation. "All members of the Sisterhood board are urged to attend all the events, but especially the orientation," said incoming Sisterhood President Barbara Thomas.



Robin Sobol (Photo by Ted Sobol)

Sobol currently serves as programming and fund-raising vice president on Congregation Emeth's Sisterhood board in Albany, NY. She also has

served as treasurer and president. In addition, Sobol served as WRJ Northeast District Area director, treasurer, vice president, first vice president and president.

In her various positions, she has led Shabbat services, co-facilitated Speaker's Bureau Training and spoken at Sisterhoods throughout the Northeast District. For her WRJ work, Sobol chaired the WRJ Board Nominating Committee, participated on the Executive Committee Nominating Committee and has worked on a yearlong program to onboard and train the new WRJ board members. She also chaired WRJ Board Leadership Training.

Sobol is a member of Congregation Beth Emeth in Albany, where she has served as a board member. For the last six years, she has been an officer to the Board of Trustees. Beth Emeth encompasses 740 family units. She has chaired the Education Committee and the Ritual Committee. She has served as secretary to the board and, for the last four years, has served as treasurer. Beginning July 1, Sobol will assume the role of first vice president of the congregation. "She loves to sing in the choir and enjoys the challenges of chanting Torah and writing *d'vrei Torah*," said organizer of the event.

Tea and Talk

Chabad of Binghamton, with co-sponsorship from the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, holds Tea and Talk programs, a bi-weekly hour-long gathering for local Jewish seniors who are looking for "a meaningful conversation," from 11 am-noon, in Chabad's atrium on the second floor. The program is open to all and free of charge.

Upcoming date is: June 20

To RSVP or for more information, visit www.JewishBU.com/Tea or call 607-797-0015.

Coming to our June 28 issue...



FAMILY LIVING and PETS

We'll be featuring advertisers that focus on health, wellness, education, family planning for fun & education and for your children's future. If you or your business fits into any of these or other categories in relation to Family Living, or if you have any special services for the family pet and their well-being, reserve your ad space now!

To advertise, contact Kathy Brown at

607-724-2360, ext. 244, or

advertising@thereporter.com

Issue date: June 28 • Ad deadline: June 20



Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

Annual Meeting

Thursday, June 20, 2024

6:45 to 9:00pm

Free to the community

Dessert Buffet

Awards Presentations

Officer's Installations

RSVP please by June 12th!

500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal
(607) 724-2417

Looking for this issue's "Jewish Resources"?
Visit www.thereporter.com or [jewish-online-resources.com](http://www.jewish-online-resources.com) to find out what's happening online."

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to Ilene Pinsker on the death of her mother,

Ethel Hershkowitz Pinsker

DEADLINES

The following are deadlines for all articles and photos for upcoming issues of the biweekly REPORTER.

ISSUE	DEADLINE
June 14-27	June 5
June 28-July 11	June 19
July 12-25	July 2 (early)
July 26-August 8	July 17

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

SAME SUE, SAME RESULTS...

SUZANNE "SUE" KRAUSE
NYS Lic. Associate R.E. Broker

(C) 607-760-3366 | SUEKRAUSE@WARRENHOMES.COM
THELAURAMELVILLETEAM.WARRENHOMES.COM
33 FRONT STREET • BINGHAMTON, NY 13905

SPEND MEMORIAL DAY AT THE BALLPARK

MONDAY, MAY 27TH

FIRST PITCH 6:35 PM
GATES OPEN 5:30 PM

PREGAME HAPPY HOUR WITH LIVE MUSIC & DRINK SPECIALS
FEATURING LIVE MUSIC BY HOT DOGS & GIN

FRIDAY, MAY 31ST
FIRST PITCH 7:05 PM
GATES OPEN 5:30 PM

MARVEL SUPER HERO NIGHT

SUNDAY, JUNE 2ND
FIRST PITCH 5:05 PM
GATES OPEN 4:00 PM

SOCK OUT CANCER

SECURITY METAL LIFE JOIN US IN THE FIGHT TO SOCK OUT CANCER!
KIDS EAT FREE

DOUBLE-A NATIONALS VS. DOUBLE-A METS

CALL 722.FUNN or VISIT www.BINGRP.com

f /RUMBLEPONIESBB @RUMBLEPONIESBB

www.BINGRP.com | 607.722.FUNN(3866)

First person

Foreman discusses Honor Flight and time in the Air Force

By Dennis Foreman

On April 27, I had the extreme privilege of participating with 38 other military veterans in an Honor Flight. Our local organization, Twin Tiers Honor Flight, is a non-profit, charitable organization created solely to honor America's veterans for their sacrifices. As part of the national Honor Flight Network, they transport veterans to Washington, DC, so they can visit and reflect at their memorials at no cost to the veteran. This organization of civilians and former military veterans organizes trips from Binghamton to Washington, DC, about three times per year. They arrange all transportation, meals and lodging. Every veteran is required to have a guardian, whose responsibility is to be with the veteran at all times to make sure the veteran is on the bus, in good condition and ready to go, before every departure, whether from the city, the hotel, a rest stop or a memorial. Guardians also push wheelchairs for their vet and help them in emotional times at the memorials. My lovely wife, Sandy, served as my guardian. All the vets received two red T-shirts (one long sleeve and one short sleeve)



The veterans visited a number of memorials during their Honor Flight. (Photo by Lewis PhotoConcepts)

us the hidden place where the builders had put the famous "Kilroy was here" inscription from World War II days, with the Kilroy image included. This softened the solemnity of the occasion. After that, we went to the FDR Memorial and then had time for a box lunch and photos at the Iwo Jima Memorial. After lunch, we boarded the buses for our return to Binghamton. When we arrived at the Legion Hall, there were a lot of people waiting to welcome us home, including TV news reporters and cameras, and Elsie Doetsch, who had been on an all women's Honor Flight.

I was eligible for the Honor Flight because I spent four years on active duty in the U.S. Air Force. I had been working at IBM in Endicott for just a year and the Vietnam War was still going on. IBM could not get me an occupational deferment, so I enlisted and went to basic training. Then my appointment to Officer's Training School came through. After OTS, as a new second lieutenant, I was sent, with Sandy, to Biloxi, MS, for Communications Officer School, in a class with eight other electrical engineers. We went through the program in half the required time and received commendations as Outstanding Honor Graduates. The USAF Communications Service said we were to be the first communications engineers, but they didn't know where we should be sent.

We were instructed to write letters to a commander to tell him what experience we had. I told them about my programming work at IBM, so they sent me to the Communications Computer Programming Center in Oklahoma City. I worked in an off-base office building, because our unit was responsible for maintaining the software for secure text messaging from the U.S. to Vietnam, using some of the most modern computer systems available at the time from IBM and Univac. While there, I led a research team that designed and built a new programming language to be used by the Air Force for future digital communications systems.

Talks Continued from page 1

how important it is to act deliberately for the sake of safety." Hubal noted that people have reached out to her because of their concern about Binghamton City Council's resolution, but she doesn't believe the Federation should call more attention to an action that has no real influence on events in the Middle East. "I think we should support Israel through fund-raising and community education, fight antisemitism through outreach and focus on ways to keep our community safe, particularly being on the lookout for active threats," she said. "We continue to monitor those with the help of the Secure Community Network and we take every one seriously."

and a small, lightweight backpack (12x14); the guardians received blue ones and both got other gifts, as well. We met at American Legion Post 1645 in Binghamton for breakfast, registration, some photos and instructions about the trip. At 7 am, we were on our way to DC in two Shafer buses. When we arrived in the DC area, the buses took us to Navy Memorial Plaza for photos, after which we rolled out to the Korean War, Lincoln and Vietnam memorials. Two hours later, we arrived at the USAF Memorial back in DC. We then checked in at the Sheraton Pentagon City hotel. We freshened up a bit and then headed for dinner in the hotel ballroom. Sunday morning, there was a non-denominational service, followed by breakfast. At 7:45 am, we departed for Arlington National Cemetery for photos and the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We, then, traveled to the World War II Memorial, where we had time to walk around and take pictures. One of our staff showed



On the Jewish food scene

Mourning the blintz

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

My mother and I used to make blintzes* for Shavuot when I was young. She manned the pan and I helped fill them. The first blintz shell never came out well: we usually used it to make a mini-blintz. Sometimes my mom would use two pans for the shells, which she carefully laid out on cloth towels. Then, when we had enough shells, we would fill the blintz shells with a mixture that contained cottage cheese, farmer cheese or a combination of both. I think the filling included sugar, but I don't remember what the other ingredients were. The blintzes would then sit in the refrigerator until we were ready to fry them for dinner. Our regular toppings were defrosted frozen strawberries and/or sour cream. Between my dietary restrictions and my mom's lack of desire to cook, we stopped making blintzes a long time ago. In fact, most people I know no longer make blintzes. They might buy frozen ones and make a blintz casserole of them, but I haven't seen an individual blintz in more years than I want to remember. I understand because making

blintzes is a time consuming task and we've found other dairy products to use for the celebration. My synagogue started using ice cream to celebrate Shavuot when Rabbi Lance Sussman was the rabbi. He would invite the congregation to join the confirmation class for one last night of study on the evening of Shavuot. We talked about doing something, but never finalized plans. Then one year, I just picked up several half gallons of ice cream for the gathering, which we ate while we were studying. When Rabbi Michele Medwin was here, I brought the ice cream and she made mini-cheesecakes. During Rabbi Barbara Goldman-Wartell's tenure, we began having ice cream sundae celebrations, which proved very successful. All through this, no one openly complained about our not having blintzes for the holiday. That included me because I know that until I'm willing to volunteer to help make them, it's better to keep my mouth shut. As for my mom's recipe for blintzes, I have no idea where it is. She

used to have a notebook filled with recipes (including a ton she cut out from newspapers and never made), but I don't know if it's included there or if it was something passed down through the generations of her family. I actually like having ice cream and ice cream sundaes: both the shopping and the clean-up is far easier than if we were making blintzes. Since it is the custom to eat dairy on Shavuot, they fulfil that requirement. (By the way, eating dairy is not a legal requirement like eating matzah on Passover. We only say a general blessing, not one that notes this was commanded by God.) But when I am feeling nostalgic, I remember making blintzes with my mom. Keeping that memory alive is far more important to me than the food we ate. *For those who are unfamiliar with blintzes: the shells of a blintz resemble those of crepes, but they are folded to form small, closed rectangles around a filling like the one described above. Some people put fruit in their fillings, but we never did.


Coming to our July 12 issue...

*The 2024 Annual

Community Guide

the largest issue of the year, with special dine-out and health care sections!

Contact Kathy Brown at 607-724-2360, ext. 244, or advertising@thereporter.org to advertise!



THE REPORTER
Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

★ Issue date: July 12 • Ad deadline: July 3

Want to stay in the know?



Send your e-mail address to treporter@aol.com (with "e-mail blast" in the subject line) to stay up-to-date on the latest news between *The Reporter's* biweekly issues! We promise not to share it with anyone and we won't send you junk, just good stuff!



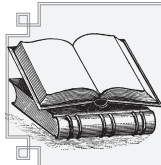
THE REPORTER

The Reporter is offering sponsorships!

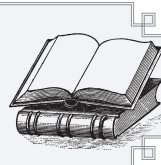
Celebrate your simcha with the community or honor your loved one.

There are four levels: Bronze \$200, Silver \$400, Gold \$600 and Platinum \$1,000.

To arrange for a sponsorship or for answers to questions, contact Rabbi Rachel Esserman at rachel@thereporter.org.



Celebrating Jewish Literature



A romance, a marriage saga and detective stories

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

◆ “The Phoenix Bride”

An impossible romance between a Jew and a Christian in England in 1665: that’s one of the many interesting plot elements offered in the very moving “The Phoenix Bride” by Natasha Siegel (Dell). It’s only been 10 years since the once expelled Jewish population has been allowed to return to England and physician David Mendes is well aware his position is precarious. A Jewish doctor can easily be accused of murder if a non-Jewish patient dies. But that doesn’t stop him from attending to Cecilia Thorowgood, a young Christian widow suffering from a broken heart who is practically imprisoned in her sister’s townhouse in London. Their first meeting reminds them both of the wounds they bear: Cecilia mourns her husband who was lost to the plague, just as David misses a dear friend – a deeply loved friend – who was also lost to the same disease.

David’s employment was a last gasp measure since Cecilia’s sister and brother-in-law have no love for the Jews on their shore. But they do have plans for Cecilia’s future – ones she is not privy to at first – and need her well enough to fulfil them. David keeps a professional distance from his patient, but Cecilia soon discovers he is the only person she can confide in and with whom she feels comfortable. That leaves her wanting more. But David has his own sorrows to overcome: the realization that he couldn’t cure those he loved, something that makes him feel like a failure as a physician and which colors his personal life.

The course of their love is not smooth and the novel’s ending may not please some readers since there are no miraculous fairytale happily ever afters in “The Phoenix Bride,” just humans struggling to create meaningful lives in the midst of hardships. The novel offers many topics for discussion: the uncertainty the Jews of England felt about their place in British society, the lack of control women had over their lives during that time period and the way people were forced to conform to societal mores, even at the cost of their personal happiness. This excellent novel

will break and heal readers’ hearts.

◆ “Falling Through the Night”

Many novels focus on one of two time periods: the romance that occurs before someone marries or the problems a couple faces after they wed. “Falling Through the Night” by Gail Marlene Schwartz (Demeter Press) portrays the development of a relationship before and during marriage. However, neither period is easy for queer 30-something Audrey Meyerwitz, who longs for a partner and children. Unfortunately, she suffers from deep anxiety, panic attacks and insomnia. She’s also never completely come to terms with her family of origin: Audrey was adopted by a woman whom she considers her mother. However, her mother now focuses on her younger foster children – most of whom also have disabilities – and now has little energy for helping Audrey.

Fortunately, Audrey’s good friend Jessica helps her set up an account on a dating site where she meets Denise, a French Canadian. It doesn’t spoil the plot (since it’s revealed in the summary offered on the book jacket) to note that the two manage – with misgivings and problems – to marry and start a family. The book then explores the difficulties of married life – not only those of balancing a home life with friendships, but the complex decisions someone with mental health issues must make to protect herself. Some of the decisions made are heart-rending for Audrey and the reader. Audrey also learns that life is far messier than she expected, particularly when her fantasies of an ideal family must be given up in order to create a world in which she can successfully cope. She also learns that there is no guarantee for continued happiness: she must always be alert to the dangers that threaten her and her family.

Parts of “Falling Through the Night” felt more like vignettes, offering short scenes of different parts of Audrey’s life, than a complete novel, but, by its end, the scenes come together to show a fuller portrait. At times, readers may lose patience with Audrey, but that is one of the novel’s lessons: showing just how hard it is to live with the mental health issues Audrey faces every day.

◆ “The Cost of Living and Other Mysteries”

Frank Wolf is not your average private detective. Having lived through World War II in hiding with his wife and daughter, this former professor of philosophy moved to Brooklyn, taking whatever work he could find before hanging up his sign as a detective in the 1970s. In “The Cost of Living and Other Mysteries” by Saul Golubcow (Wildside Press), Wolf’s grandson, Joel Gordon, narrates three of Wolf’s cases. Gordon, both while in law school and then as a lawyer, serves as a legman for his grandfather by helping him gather information in order to solve and prevent murders.

The first two mysteries are relatively short: one concerns a kosher butcher who was murdered and the other an 8-year-old Chasidic child who disappeared on his way home from school. In the former, an insurance company asks Wolf to investigate since the deceased recently took out a very large insurance policy. It’s the detective’s knowledge of Jewish customs that reveals the true killer. Jewish knowledge also plays a role in the second case and offers insight into the close society of ultra-religious members of the Jewish community.

The third and longest story features a cold case: the police have been unable to discover who murdered a 16-year-old yeshiva student three years before. The student’s father is a client at the law firm where Gordon now works. He asks Wolf and Gordon to solve the case so he and his wife can finally find peace. I thought I knew not only who the murderer was, but his/her motive early in the story. I was completely wrong in both cases. The story’s ending was a bit convoluted, but ultimately convincing.

“The Cost of Living and Other Mysteries” reads half like the hard-boiled detective novels that Wolf loves and half like a Sherlock Holmes mystery where answers are pulled from thin air. Part of the fun is watching Gordon try to discern his grandfather’s thoughts and decisions. The work will appeal to mystery lovers looking for plots with Jewish content.

Ancient approaches to intersex individuals

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Close study of ancient texts – mishnaic, talmudic and midrashic – often shows that there was no one monolithic way of thinking about almost anything in rabbinic Judaism. That includes opinions on sexuality and gender, as shown in “And the Sages Did Not Know: Early Rabbinic Approaches to Intersex” by Sarra Lev (University of Pennsylvania Press). Lev, a professor of rabbinics at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, admits that her studies contained surprises since the text offered more options and greater flexibility than expected.

Lev’s work speaks to two audiences: those who are interested in rabbinic writings (whatever the topic) and those interested in works about identity politics. The two interests do not always overlap. What the author does note is that her work is “not a book *about* intersex people. This project does not seek to discern anything about intersex people living in the rabbinic period. It is, rather, a book about people *who talk about* intersex people.” However, she does not see the rabbinic discussions as purely theoretical. Although Lev does not focus on how these thoughts affected real-life people, she does believe that intersex people existed during rabbinic times, just as they do today.

Lev focuses on two types of intersex individuals: the androgynos and the tumtum. The ancient rabbis realized these individuals did not fit into traditional binary gender categories, the androgynos because their bodies contained features of both sexes and the tumtum because the person’s sexual features were hidden. The rabbis generally subscribed to a binary system – male and female categories – and were focused on what laws, responsibilities and behaviors were required by individuals in each category. Their main concern with intersex individuals seems to be how they fit into the legalistic, rabbinic system. Lev notes that “all the early rabbinic material that include references to an androgynos or a tumtum consider her/him a regular member of society. Rabbinic sources discuss issues such as an intersex person’s marriage, inheritance, and basic conduct... rabbinic texts do not assign individual androgynoi exclusively to the category of either male or female. Rather than consider each individual intersex person either male or female... the rabbis of Seder Androgynoso determine what *every* intersex person should do on a halakhah-by-halakhah basis.”

The author notes that the texts viewed do not offer only one approach to the subject. There are times when the text does not support a binary approach, as when Rabbi Yose sees the androgynos as being neither male or female, but in a category of their own. At other times, the binary is reinforced

as when the rabbis declare that in one specific instance, they should be treated as male, while in other cases, they should be treated as female. To make matters even more complex, there are times when the rabbis treated them as both men and women. Lev offers a chart comparing some of these approaches, which looks at the laws of impurity, inheritance, the consumption of sacrifices and more. The author also explores these in more detail in her writing, noting the difficulty of offering one specific approach.

Lev does not believe that the rabbis were trying to remove all doubt about the appropriate place of intersex individuals in rabbinic culture, writing that “the rabbis often lay down principles that enable us to live with cases of uncertainty, but only so far as those cases serve to reify the normative categories. The rabbis’ concern with the gray areas is neither eradication nor inclusion. It was a simultaneous foray into the margins and the affirmation of a center from which they can build a culture and into which they may take refuge.” That allows Lev leeway to explore the different ideas without having one mindset, something that fits into the rabbinical discussion as various rabbis offered differing opinions on not only what legal ruling connected to intersex individuals, but the nature of intersex beings.

The author discuss several different models as a way to understand rabbinic approaches, including:

◆ The uncertainty model: Since the rabbis were uncertain to which sex the individual belonged, these individuals were required to follow the prohibitions placed on both sexes. This severely limited their place in society and the actions they could perform in order to make certain they did not break any biblical or rabbinic laws.

◆ The “non”-model: This model places the androgynos and tumtum outside of the system, making them what Lev calls “essentially category-less.” They are neither male or female, and therefore are invisible in reality, even though they are written about in the text.

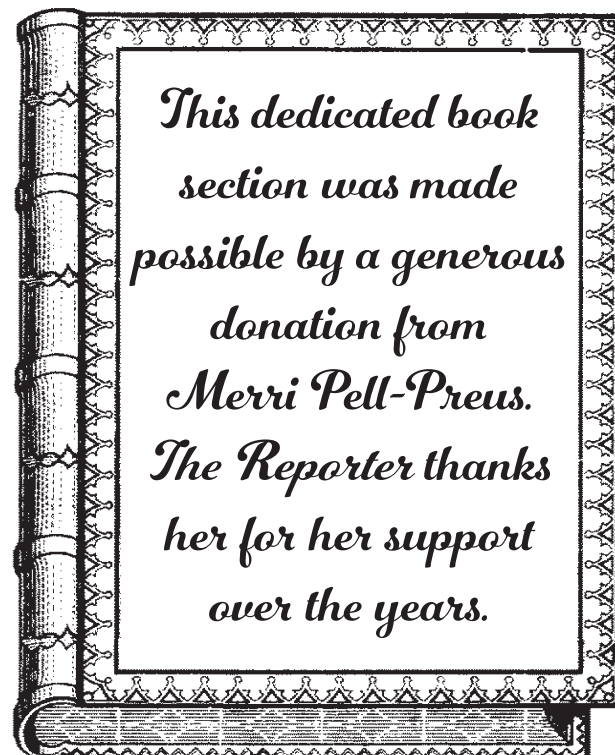
◆ The maleness model: These texts place the androgynos in the male binary category. Lev sees this approach as concealing physical and other differences. However, the author notes that the rabbis also saw the androgynos as a different variation of male, meaning their actions could still be problematic.

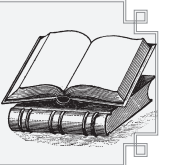
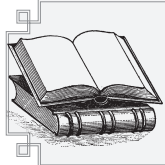
◆ Part /part model: This model sees the intersex person as part male and part female. This usually means that in some circumstances the intersex person is told to act as a male (following the laws for men), while at other times, their actions are based on the laws for women.

In her conclusion, the author notes how difficult it is to pinpoint rabbinic opinion. At times, the androgynos

and tumtum are lower on the rabbinic social ladder than women. But at other times, they are treated as men and have male privilege, which places them higher on the social ladder. There is, therefore, no one simple explanation of rabbinic thought on the topic and that may be the point. Lev writes, “Rather than aiming for resolution, the rabbis leave uncertainty in place. They do not mitigate it (as in the uncertainty model), ignore it (as in the maleness model), or contend with it (as in the part/part model). Rather, this text exposed uncertainty before us to wrestle with, in all its complexity.”

This review cannot do justice to the amount of material covered in “And the Sages Did Not Know” with its almost 260 pages of text. The writing is very scholarly and contains not only examples of quotes from, and discussions of, rabbinic sources, but a great deal of philosophical writing on the topic. This means that readers focused on one or the other will have to wade through a great deal of material that may not be of interest to them. Lev’s work, however, does offer challenging and intriguing thoughts that should open scholarly discussions. The range and depth of her book is impressive and is sure to be of interest to anyone in the field of intersex studies.





Celebrating Jewish Literature

Living with, and talking about, the dead

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

A funeral is one of the most difficult tasks a rabbi performs. It can also be one of the most meaningful, whether from learning unexpected details of a person's life or bringing comfort to their loved ones. Note, not closure, but comfort, because there is no closure. In fact, learning how to live with loss and death can greatly enrich a life as Delphine Horvilleur, a Liberal French rabbi, shows in her beautiful and moving work, "Living with Our Dead: On Loss and Consolation" (Europa Editors).

Horvilleur, who studied to be a physician before becoming a rabbi, notes that the ill and dying are often hidden in contemporary times. That makes it more difficult for people to accept death when it comes because we often hope for medical miracles. Even Horvilleur tried to keep death from her home by never returning directly there after a funeral. That changed with the pandemic, which she notes brought death directly to her door.

When pondering the many different roles a rabbi plays, Horvilleur discovered an unexpected one: storyteller. The ability to tell a story plays an extremely important role during funerals: "Knowing how to narrate what has been said a thousand times before, while giving the person who hears the story for the first time unique keys with which to unlock the meaning for themselves – that is my function. I stand by the side of women and men who, at turning points in their lives, need stories. These ancestral stories are not only Jewish, but I speak them in the language of this tradition. They create bridges between eras and generations, between those who were and those who will be. These sacred stories open a path between the living and the dead. The role of a storyteller is to stand by the gate to ensure that it stays open." These stories breach the wall between life and death, helping mourners to carry their loved one

with them, even as the years pass.

In the different chapters of "Living with Our Dead," Horvilleur offers stories about funerals she's performed, showing how each are the same, yet different, due to the uniqueness of the individuals who have passed away. She notes that doing a eulogy can be difficult because she is often just repeating what the mourners have told her. Understanding that her role is to transform their words, she writes that what she is doing is "accompany[ing] the grieving, not to teach them something they don't yet know but to translate what they have told me so that they in turn can actually hear it. In that way, the narrative that left their lips returns to their ears by the intermediary of a voice that isn't theirs, or at least not altogether theirs. It's a voice that creates a dialogue between their words and an ancestral tradition, transmitted from generation to generation, to both 'good' and 'bad' Jews, and especially to those who are doing their best."

Horvilleur notes the importance of saying the *Shema* when someone is dying. She sees that declaration as a way of proclaiming that no matter what divides us, there is always a chance of unity – that a part of those who have passed away remains alive with their loved ones. She writes this in context of one of the most difficult funerals a rabbi can do: that of a beloved friend. By being both a friend and rabbi, Horvilleur sought to offer her friend what was needed, although, in the end, she, too, mourned a painful loss.

Horvilleur shows one woman's ability to live with death when she writes about Miriam, whom she met when she was an apprentice rabbi in New York City. The author was surprised when this vibrant older woman told her that she was once so depressed, she spent all her time and energy planning her own funeral. The event that changed her

life occurred after Miriam's daughter told her they were going shopping. However, rather than being taken to a store, Miriam's driver dropped her off at the Riverside Memorial Chapel. There they held her funeral: family, friends, neighbors and storekeepers she knew all gathered to discuss her life. The gathering was not morbid; rather, the people told stories about their connections to Miriam and laughed, enjoying the chance to celebrate her. It gave them the opportunity to show their love, something that changed Miriam's life. No longer did she plan her funeral; instead, she now tried to live her life to the fullest.

Horvilleur also writes of her time in Israel more 25 years ago – listening to Yitzhak Rabin speak hours before his death – and how that experience ties to her ideas of Zionism. She uses biblical stories to inform her visit to a relative's grave in the French countryside, walking through a cemetery she had never expected to visit. In each case, her understanding of the Bible and Jewish tradition underlies her writing. For example, when discussing the story of Cain and Abel, and King Solomon's "Ecclesiastes," she writes that, "Everything that we build solidly ends up wearing out, disappearing, while that which is fragile, ephemeral, fallible, paradoxically leaves indelible traces in the world. The mists of past lives don't evaporate: they permeate us and lead us where we never thought we would go."

"Living with Our Dead" is only 151 pages, but that number belies its wisdom and depth. Horvilleur's work speaks to everyone, not just rabbis. Her writing is clear and, although her point of view is that of a rabbi, she also fulfills her aim as a storyteller, offering her readers a new way to view the world of death and dying. "Living with Our Dead" comes highly recommended for those who have mourned and those fortunate enough to not yet be touched by death.

A FEMINIST CLASSIC REPUBLISHED

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

During the past few decades, scholars and feminists has been recovering work written by Jewish women during the first half of the 20th century. The majority of these books are from the Ashkenazic world, which makes the new edition of the novel "Mazaltob" by Blanche Bendahan, translated and edited by Yael Azagury and Frances Malino (Brandeis University Press), even more welcome since it offers a view of Sephardic culture. Also included in the book are essays by Azagury and Malino giving background about Bendahan's life and the culture in which the novel

takes place. The work, which was originally published in 1930, was Bendahan's first novel. Although the author lived most of her life in France, her story takes place in Tetouan, Morocco.

Mazeltob is both the title of the book and the name of its main character. The name derives from the phrase *mazel tov*, meaning good luck. (It is not uncommon in the Sephardi and Mizrahi world to substitute a "b" sound for the "v.") However, readers will discover that Mazeltob does not have much good luck. Although she's attended school and is well educated in French, she has no control

over the course of her life since marriages are arranged by parents and all women are expected to marry. The man who seeks her hand is Jose, who returned from Brazil to Morocco to find a Jewish wife as custom demands. However, he is used to living as he pleases, which means drinking and carousing with friends.

It doesn't take Jose long to realize that he's made a mistake, leaving him looking for an excuse to return to Brazil without Mazeltob. Her return to her parents' house makes her an object of pity as the years pass without her husband sending for her. Making matters worse, her childhood friend Jean, who is half Jewish, realizes he has always been in love with her. Mazeltob feels the same, but has no way to free herself from her marriage since no one knows how to contact Jose. This forces the two lovers to make difficult decisions about their future.

Of great interest were the Moroccan Jewish customs that may be unfamiliar to Ashkenazic Jews. For example, although Mazeltob moves into the same house as her husband after her marriage, she is not allowed to leave her bed for the first seven days, nor is he allowed to spend time alone with her. The community also pities those who die in the early days of the week: they believe the souls of the dead can only ascend to heaven on Fridays. Those who die before that are doomed to wander the earth for several days.

A woman's place in this society is greatly circumscribed. Mazeltob's face was not only covered with a veil when she married, but she lowered her eyes because she considered herself unworthy of looking at the rabbi doing the ceremony. When someone dies, women can attend the candle flame lit after the death, but their prayers are considered worthless. Any woman who is divorced or widowed stands no chance of marrying again: they are only allowed one man in their lives. The reason men do not want to marry these women is because tradition says any children born to them will resemble the woman's first husband, rather than her current one. It should be noted that although Bendahan writes what her characters believe, her novel seems a protest against the role of women.

The question when an older work is republished is whether it stands on its own or serves mostly to satisfy reader's curiosity about the past. My feelings about "Mazaltob" were mixed. I felt distanced from the characters and didn't get emotionally involved in Mazaltob's story until its end. However, I did have a strong reaction to the treatment of women in the society in which she lived. Of greater interest to me was learning about the many different customs that were practiced. Others may find the plot and emotion of this doomed love story more emotionally involving. Book clubs may also find those customs and the decisions Mazaltob makes worthy of discussion.

*A thank you to Bryan Kirschen, chairman of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and an associate professor of Spanish and linguistics at Binghamton University, for his help in clarifying that not only is the "b" substituted in place of a "v" in writing, but in pronunciation.

Love, sex and war

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

◆ "We Are Only Ghosts"

Some people know how to be invisible. It's a trait 42-year-old Charles Ward has perfected as a waiter at Café Marie in New York City in 1968. Almost no one – whether at work or in his very private life – knows anything about his past or how he came to the United States. That changes one day when someone he knew in Europe enters the café. In "We Are Only Ghosts" by Jeffrey L. Richards (John Scognamiglio Books/Kensington Books), readers learn the tragic story of Charles' life and his attempt to finally understand the true meaning of what happened to him.

That recognition begins the sad and brutal tale of Charles' relationship to Berthold Werden. Before World War II, Charles was Karel Benakov, a Jewish teenager living with his parents in Czechoslovakia. At the age of 17, Karel, his parents and his sister were sent to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. There, Obersturmführer Werden took an interest in Karel, rescuing him and allowing him to live in the basement of his home, which was a short distance from the camp. Life there was not easy because Berthold's wife and son hated Karel and treated him poorly. However, Karel was grateful for the relative safety he found there. But Berthold wanted something else from Karel, something Karel was willing to give in order to remain alive. However, other feelings grew during their time together: a sense of gratitude for being allowed to live and finally escape Europe for the United States.

Those mixed feelings remain in 1968 when Charles makes himself known to Berthold, who first moved to Brazil after the war before coming to live in New York. Using an assumed name, Berthold runs a jewelry store and lives a quiet life. The two begin an uneasy relationship, one that leaves Charles wondering if he will remain a ghost for the rest of his life, unable to tell people who he really is. Then something happens that forces Charles to face his past and make important decisions about his future.

"We Are Only Ghosts" is a powerful, moving and disturbing novel. It contains graphic sexual content and violent episodes that may shock some readers. These are not gratuitous: they explain the characters' psyche and reactions to events. The work will leave readers debating

the nature of love and connection, in addition to pondering just how fine is the line between love and hate.

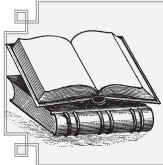
◆ "Bonfire Night"

Before Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, British Jews could have been excused for wondering if their homeland would side with Germany. The British Union of Fascists was reported to have between 40-50,000 members at one time. If it ruled England, no Jew would have been safe from persecution. "Bonfire Night" by Anna Bliss (John Scognamiglio Books/Kensington Books) opens with a scene based on the real life Fascist-sponsored march that took place in the East End, a Jewish section of London, in 1936. It's there the two main characters meet. Kate Grifferty is a photographer snapping pictures she hopes will appear in one of London's newspapers. David Rabatkin, a Jewish medical student, is hoping to keep his brother, Simon, from getting into trouble. The two are drawn to each other, even though they both know their families would not approve of their relationship.

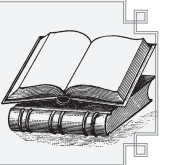
Irish Catholic Kate lives with a father who blames her for the death of her mother in childbirth and is only willing to let her live with him if she pays her own way. David is a member of a close-knit Jewish family to whom it is very important he marry someone Jewish and continue their traditions. To make matters more difficult, David wants a conventional relationship, while Kate has no desire to marry.

Their stories continue during the war years when German planes bomb England during what is known as the Blitz. Kate and David each try to find their own way, but are unable to forget the other. However, a secret Kate keeps may change the course of both their lives. Their ability to make decisions is complicated by the sheer necessity of surviving and the worry about whether Britain can win the war.

"Bonfire Night" is not a conventional love story, so some readers may be dissatisfied with its ending. However, it does ring true to the needs of both main characters. While Kate and David feel three-dimensional, some of the minor characters come across as stereotypes, particularly the members of David's family. Jewish readers unfamiliar with British antisemitism of the time will be particularly interested in the opening section of the novel.



Celebrating Jewish Literature



Exploring Leviticus

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Commentaries on the Bible are rarely page turners. Even the most interesting are more likely to make people nod their head in agreement than encourage them to eagerly continue reading. This is especially true for works on the biblical book of Leviticus, which, with its listing of sacrifices, is of little interest to some contemporary readers. An exception to this is Rabbi David Fohrman's "Leviticus: A Parsha Companion" (AlephBeta Press/Meggid). A few chapters were so interesting that I couldn't stop reading until I finished them. Even those chapters whose arguments were less convincing are still worthy of study for the brilliant ways that Fohrman ties his ideas together. Readers do not have to agree with his thoughts to enjoy his work.

Fohrman notes that many readers have difficulty understanding why Leviticus is part of the Bible because it is so different from the first two biblical books. He writes, "Let's face it: Genesis and Exodus had a really good story going: God develops a relationship with a family of humans, but they eventually become enslaved in Egypt, until the Lord frees them from bondage with signs and wonders. Hollywood has made quite a bundle out of telling the story from *The Ten Commandments* to *The Prince of Egypt*. But then along comes Leviticus, and rudely interrupts the narrative flow of the Torah." The question Fohrman explores is whether Leviticus can be best understood by noting its relationship to the stories found in Genesis and Exodus. He sees the repetition of words and phrases in the three books as connecting them in order to create what he calls "a rich tapestry of meaning."

An example of this can be found in the chapter "Vayikra 1: A Peek into the World of Offerings." Fohrman believes that each sacrifice listed relates to sacrifices offered by characters in Genesis and Exodus. It's impossible to completely explain the connections in detail in this short review, but the author sees the *chatat* (sin) offering as connected to the first time humans sin, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The *shelamim* (peace) offering is similar to the covenant offering made between Jacob and his father-in-law Laban. The author discusses how Noah and Abraham made the *olah* (burnt) offering. Noah's occurred after his exit from the ark, while Abraham's was done as part of the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac. Fohrman sees these offerings as representing three different aspects of our relationship to God: the *chatat* represents respect, the *shelamim* sharing and the *olah* awe. He believes that, while we no longer make animal sacrifices to God, they still offer ways to understand our connection to God.

Dark and funny Jewish humor

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Confession: I'd never heard of actor/comedian Brett Gelman before learning about his book "The Terrifying Realm of the Possible: Nearly True Stories" (Dey Street Books). I also didn't remember seeing its title on any list of upcoming books with Jewish themes. Even when I received an e-mail about it, I wasn't sure I could review it for the paper. Although the characters seemed to have Jewish names, it wasn't clear the stories contained Jewish content. Fortunately, I answered the publicity person's e-mail and asked that question because not only are its characters Jewish, but Gelman's very dark and strange work offers the most jaundiced and jaded look at Judaism and God since Shalom Auslander's "Beware of God." His characters, though, reminded me of early Woody Allen films, the ones filled with nebbishes and their overbearing families.

Gelman's stories feature characters from a wide range of life stages. Abraham Amsterdam (the child) either has severe mental health issues or is actually being tormented by demons. Mendel Freudenberger (the teenager) wants so desperately to be popular that he can't tell when other teens are making fun of him. Formerly popular comedian and actor Jackie Cohen (the adult) watches his career disappear after writing, directing and acting in one of the most politically incorrect films ever produced. Iris Below (the senior) drives her son to distraction in one of the funniest sections of the book. Although the last section features Z (the dead), God's appearance is the story's highlight and will either delight or offend readers. That section also ties together other sections of the book.

However, readers are less likely to become invested in the characters' lives than in Gilman's humorous descriptions of their thoughts and actions. For example, Abraham has just learned that Christians hate Jews, although he doesn't

In "Emor: A Solar System in Time," Fohrman explores the idea of Shabbat. He opens with a fascinating idea focusing on the first mention of Shabbat in Genesis: the "first of all Sabbaths was God's very own. Notice that this celebration of the Sabbath by God didn't involve any humans, nor do humans, at the time, even know about it. We, the readers of the text, many years after Creation, know about it. But at the time, God didn't command Adam and Eve to observe the Sabbath or even tell them that He was resting. For all we know, Adam and Eve were completely unaware of the Sabbath's existence. That first Sabbath was God's, and God's alone. He was the Being to rest on it." Fohrman sees this Sabbath as a prototype to the Sabbaths that humans will later celebrate. He explores how the Sabbath is not just for humans, but for all living things, animals and plants. A break from creating is needed because all creation includes some form of destruction: for example, he notes how making bread includes the killing of plants/seeds. For Fohrman, this act of destruction and creation means "every time we make a loaf of bread, it is like we are playing God. We foster life and then snuff it out, wielding the mysterious forces of life and death as tools to serve our creation needs." Just as God took a break from performing these acts, so, too, do we need to do the same.

In the interesting, but not completely convincing, chapter on *parashat* Behar, Fohrman talks about "The Yovel and Children of Cain." He notes yet another way the laws in Leviticus are related to specific stories found in the books of Genesis and Exodus: "A law may come to rectify a

historical wrong. Or, on the other side of the ledger, a law may seek to reenact a high point in our history, ensuring that its legacy continues to influence the life of a nation even after the passage of centuries. Sometimes, it may be a little of both. A law may pick up on a hopeful potentiality in a story that was, tragically, never actualized." In this case, the Sabbatical year is tied to the story of Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, who murdered his brother, Abel. Since the chapter is 40 pages long, it's difficult to summarize the discussion, but it focuses on how the descendants of Cain are connected to what is not done during the Sabbatical year and how this ties to the lesson that we are all our brothers' keepers. Even readers who are not convinced will be intrigued by the discussion.

Other chapters offer excellent looks on their particular *parashot*, including the one on Kedoshim, which offers 30 pages of discussion on one verse, "Love your neighbor as yourself." (19:18) Fohrman writes easy-to-read prose and offers explanations that novice readers of the Bible should be able to understand. Those who have more background will find even more to appreciate. Readers will find themselves looking forward to his commentaries on "Numbers" and "Deuteronomy."

Reviews of Fohrman's earlier *parashot* companions can be found at <https://www.thereporter.org/features/off-the-shelf-biblical-commentary-by-rabbi-rachel-esserman-368553> and <https://www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-parasha-and-prophet-by-rabbi-rachel-esserman?entry=377675>.

Disconnections

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Some experiences can permanently affect people's lives. That often causes a disconnection with their family and friends who are unable to understand how they have changed. Leela Corman explores this idea in her graphic novel "Victory Parade" (Schocken Books). The novel mostly takes place in Brooklyn in 1943, but the effect of having lived during World War II underscores the action.

Rose Arensberg, who works as a welder in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, connects the different characters. Rose lives with her daughter, Eleanor, and Ruth, a German-Jewish refugee. Although married to Sam, who is serving in the U.S. Army, Rose is in the midst of an affair with a disabled former veteran. Her marriage was the result of an unexpected pregnancy and she worries about what life will be like when her husband returns. Ruth, who suffers nightmares from what happened to her in Germany, takes no nonsense from male customers, something that causes her to be fired from several jobs. She finds fitting employment as a professional woman wrestler, although her anger remains a problem. At the end of the novel, Sam returns to his family, but is haunted by what he saw in the concentration camps of Europe. Unfortunately, none of these characters are willing or able to talk about their experiences.

The graphic format of "Victory Parade" leaves readers having to fill in some of the blanks behind the meaning of the actions and words of the characters. However, that seems to be the point: as in real life, we often have to guess what lies behind the behavior of those we know. The drawings are stark and blunt; this is not a prettified version of the world, but rather a rough and raw one. The work features examples of nudity in a sexual context and includes scenes

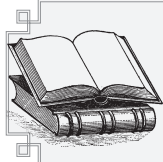
from a concentration camp. While definitely not a book for children, it serves as an intriguing and disturbing vision of life during World War II.



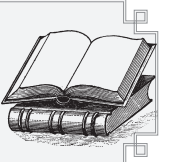
A page from Leela Corman's "Victory Parade" (Graphic credit to Leela Corman/Reprinted with the permission of Schocken Books)



Above, left and right: Pages from Leela Corman's "Victory Parade" (Graphic credit to Leela Corman/Reprinted with the permission of Schocken Books)



Celebrating Jewish Literature



Jewish mystic or psychological breakdown

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

The essence of some novels is open to debate. Even when readers learn about the character from several viewpoints, there are questions that may never be fully answered. To be fair, some readers of Toby Lloyd's "Fervor" (Avid Reader Press) will feel confident that they know exactly what happened to Elsie Rosenthal, while others will still be puzzled at the novel's end. What is clear is that something happened to Elsie after her grandfather, Yosef, a Holocaust survivor, died.

Hannah and Eric Rosenthal are observant Jews who live in North London with his father, Yosef, and their three children, Gideon, Elsie and Tovyah. As Yosef approaches the end of his life, Hannah interviews him about his experiences in the Holocaust, something that greatly affects her children. To make matters worse, once he dies, Hannah publishes a book about their conversations, which reveals a secret Yosef would have preferred to take to his grave. But the family's splintering really begins when Elsie disappears for several days. It doesn't spoil the plot to reveal that she is found, but the Elsie who returns is noticeably different in behavior and actions.

The aftereffects of her disappearance continue almost a decade later. Due to her uncontrollable and dangerous behavior, Elsie has been in and out of mental health institutions. Gideon moved to Israel to remove himself from the family sphere. Tovyah attends Oxford University where, because of his serious and pedantic nature, he is disliked by almost everyone. The one exception is his next door neighbor, Kate, who finds his behavior and ideas intriguing. While Hannah's first book and controversial support of Israel has made her an unpopular figure on the Oxford campus, it is her latest work that has pushed Tovyah even further from his family: she writes that Elsie's issues are being caused by her involvement with Jewish mysticism, which has left her either possessed by a spirit or lost in a different spiritual sphere. However, Tovyah, who has dis-

avowed religion, believes his sister's problems are caused by their dysfunctional family.

Kate's own relationship to Judaism is interesting, partly because she had no idea she was Jewish when a child. In fact, her father only learned that his mother was Jewish after she died. It was also then that he discovered the man whom he thought was his father was, in fact, his mother's second husband. As to whether any of his mother's extended family still existed, that remained a mystery. Since both her parents were not religious, Kate had little experience with Judaism beyond her brother's Jurassic Park-themed bar mitzvah, one her brother decided he wanted on his own. Tovyah notes that, according to the laws his family follows, she would not be considered Jewish, although Kate does feel a connection to Judaism.

Although a majority of the novel follows Kate and Tovyah at Oxford, Elsie's behavior underlies the interactions that occur. Readers will debate whether Elsie really has had mystical experiences (one section featuring Kate will make that seem a possibility), if she does suffer from mental illness (other sections lend credence to that possibility) or if she is deliberately self-destructive (a thought offered in still others). This may leave readers feeling unsatisfied if they wish to have one idea completely confirmed. Even reading Elsie's thoughts in one section did not completely solve the mystery.

The most interesting parts of the work, though, focus on different family members' feelings about Judaism. Tovyah challenges his family's Orthodox practices and opinions. For example, he ponders "the problem of God. God, who is everywhere, all places at all times, and yet also was nowhere ever. The constant intrusion of nothingness. Tovyah had to thank him for every scrap of food that passed his lips but couldn't even say his name... This was the twenty-first century, wasn't it, they lived in liberal, democratic, modern Great Britain. In affluent North London! The indignities of feudalism, of expulsion, of

shtetl life, of the Pale of the Settlement, were centuries behind them (centuries!) And here they were, behaving like the lowliest, mud-licking serfs, thanking the invisible *Lord* for the food they ate."

What Tovyah does not realize is how important being religious is to his mother, who came from a secular Jewish background before becoming Orthodox. Her parents were "affluent, liberal, and fully assimilated" and felt "no need of old-world hocus pocus." It was a personal revelation that brought her to Judaism: "As she closed her eyes she was aware of a crowding presence, infinitely perceptive; a judgement more intelligent, more penetrating than her own; an eye without dimensions; an ecstatic vision, searing hot. The dizzying realization that she and everything was turning. Forever.... Every act of cruelty or kindness is both known and recorded, everything thing we've ever done weighted in the balance. And we are never, any of us, isolated. Think these thoughts, take them seriously, and you must change your life." That was when Hannah felt the need to find a synagogue and become part of the traditional Jewish world.

Between their different feelings about Judaism and about how best to help Elsie, Tovyah and Hannah are unable to come to terms because they inhabit extremes, each refusing to acknowledge the feelings and thoughts of the other. That includes the disturbing event at the end of the novel, one which Kate also experiences and which changes the direction of her life.

Readers may have mixed feeling about "Fervor." The novel is well written, but the different narrative threads – some told in first person and some in third person – didn't always hold together. As mentioned before, there seems to be no one clear understanding of Elsie's experience, something that may appeal to some readers, but which others will find off-putting. Lloyd is definitely a writer to watch, though; it will be interesting to see his approach to Judaism and family life in his future works.

Israelis in the U.S. and Israel

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

There's been a backlash against Israeli authors recently, everything from leaving negative reviews on websites because the authors are considered Zionists to the cancellation of readings and book signings. Refusing to read these authors, though, would mean missing two excellent and interesting works: Maya Arad's "The Hebrew Teacher: Three Novellas" (New Vessel Press) and "On Her Own" by Lihi Lapid (HarperVia). The stories in the former take place in the United States, while the latter offers a view of Israeli culture.

Arad's author biography notes that she is the author of 11 books, but this is the first of her fiction to published in the U.S. When reading the title story, I looked at the publication date of the original Hebrew work (it was 2018), because its message is so timely, she could have written it yesterday. The story focuses on Ilana, a Hebrew instructor at a college in the Midwest, who's faced with a disturbing new Hebrew literature professor at the university: Yoad

Bergman-Harari. To Ilana's surprise, Yoad dislikes reading literature and is only interested in the philosophical and sociological implications of the writing. He also refuses to participate in local Israeli community events and is very left-wing in his politics. The two clash because Ilana, whose life revolves around her teaching of Hebrew and her connections to the community, cannot understand his attitude. Arad does a wonderful job showing how the personal is indeed political and the shifts in academia's thoughts about Israel.

The two other novellas focus on family relationships. In "A Visit (Scenes)," Miriam travels to the U.S. to visit her son, Yoram, and his family because they have not visited Israel in years. She longs to get to know her grandson and spend time as a family. Unfortunately, Yoram, who works in Silicon Valley, is rarely home and her daughter-in-law, Maya, can barely stand to be in the same room as her. Even worse, they didn't prepare her grandson, Yonaton, for her visit so he treats her as a scary stranger, that is, when he

even gets to spend time with her. That's because he spends long hours at a daycare center so Maya can work on her Ph.D. The story has greater depth than this summary suggests, though, because Arad not only offers Miriam's viewpoint, but those of Yoram and Maya. Those sections show the barely visible cracks in their marriage they are trying to hide from Miriam and themselves.

"Make New Friends" portrays problems that can occur when a mother invests too much interest in her daughter's social life. Efrat, who lives in California with her family, worries that her middle-school-aged daughter, Libby, does not have enough friends. Oh, there seem to be girls who are willing to talk to her when they see Libby in a store, but those same school friends never invite her to any gatherings. Efrat crosses a line when she begins to follow those girls on social media, something that has implications to her relationship with her daughter. The story is clever in that Arad slowly reveals as much about Efrat as she does about the relationship of the preteens.

"The Hebrew Teacher" is so good, it made me wonder why more of Arad's work has not been published in English. I hope this book is just the first of many.

While all of Arad's stories take place in the United States, Lapid's novel offers an interesting view of the underside in Israel. It opens with a disturbing look at Nina, a teenager who ran away from home with Shmueli, an older married man and petty criminal. After Shmueli becomes abusive and Nina witnesses a crime, she runs away from him. Looking for a safe haven, she finds herself hiding in a stairway of an apartment building in Tel Aviv with no idea what to do next. Her problem is partly solved when Carmela, one of the building's residents, finds her and thinks Nina is her granddaughter. It quickly becomes clear that Carmela suffers from dementia. Lapid's descriptions of Carmela's wavering between knowing what is happening around her and the fog that comes over her feels convincing and is extremely moving.

Nina pretends to be Carmela's granddaughter and begins to care for her, both practically (for example, cleaning her apartment) and emotionally. However, Nina, also worries about her mother, Irina, a Russian immigrant, who is desperate to learn if her daughter is OK. Irina had warned Nina not to leave with Shmueli and now regrets the fight they had that night. But Shmueli is looking for Nina and visits Irina, frightening her and leaving her worried about what will happen if Shmueli finds her daughter.

Lapid also offers the thoughts of several other characters, which makes the novel feel episodic at times, but does produce a more complete portrait of life in Israel. The work comes together in the end with a satisfying and moving conclusion. It also offers readers a chance to ponder the meaning of family and what constitutes a home, which makes it an excellent work for book clubs.

Humor. Continued from page 7

really understand exactly what happened between the Jews, Jesus and the ancient Romans to cause that hatred. He does know one very important thing, something that will influence the course of his life: People don't hate Jews if they're funny. "If a Jew is funny, people forget they're a Jew and they could be loved. If a Jew is funny, he or she would become famous. He or she could become quite popular. 'Cause that's what fame is. Popularity. Popularity on a grand scale. And that's the second thing Abraham wanted the most. To be popular."

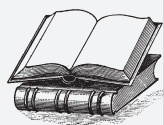
The plot of Jackie's film will make readers either gasp with horror or laugh. Even though everyone else who worked on the film wants to forget its existence or claims to have PTSD from the filming, Jackie defends his work. The film, called "Auschwitz Antebellum," was supposed to be "a magical realist romantic comedy about a Jewish prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp and an enslaved Black woman on a plantation in the antebellum South magically switching places, then, after switching places, learning the similarities of their two situations, then after learning their similarities magically finding themselves together, first in the concentration camp, and then the plantation." The two then fall in love, marry and form a successful jazz record

label. It won't be a surprise to learn that Jackie was never able to get a film financed after this one was shelved without being shown in theaters.

Z feels fortunate to have a private meeting with God after arriving in heaven. Well, at least, Z does at first. But there is a problem; it turns out that, although God claims to hate insecure people, God is the most deeply insecure creature Z has ever met. Z is then faced with a dilemma: be truthful in his conversation with God and possibly get expelled from heaven or lie. The decision is not made any easier by the fact that God's temper gets triggered when God is asked a question. At one point, God explains a need for validation from humans, saying, "I have a universe to run. A pretty great universe at that, right? Sure, it's not perfect. What is? But it's a universe, and I should get some credit for that. Now I know what you are going to say. If I am so secure, why do I need the validation, right?... I just deserve it. There, I said it. I deserve the credit and, sue me, I want to be acknowledged for that. That's my right, right? At least I can ask for that? After all I've done, right? I mean, I invented sex, for crying out loud. That's pretty cool. Right?" Things only go downhill after that, which means Z soon gets to experience the joys of hell.

While I had a wonderful time reading "The Terrifying Realm of the Possible," the stories didn't make a lasting impression. It's the humorous sections I remembered, especially the most outlandish ones, rather than the characters and their actions. The book is obviously not for everyone: it aims to challenge and offend, all the while offering a very Jewish view of the world.

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



BD Sisterhood Donor meeting held



The Beth David Sisterhood Donor meeting was held at the home of Alan and Julie Piaker. Shown are attendees enjoying the refreshments and each other's company.



Those attending listened to Benny Kellman speak about student experiences on the Binghamton University campus since October 7.

It's Shavuot, get a little cheesy

By Miriam Szokovski

(JNS)—It's that time of year again when cheesecakes galore are popping up all over the place. To be honest, I'm not the biggest fan, but this recipe is one even I enjoy. The actual cheesecake is lighter with a slight lemony undertone, and the fresh fruit helps temper the richness.

You can use this cheesecake as a base and add your toppings of choice. Some suggestions: caramel, chocolate ganache, fresh berries, pie filling, lemon curd or roasted rhubarb. I went very simple with oranges, kiwis and strawberries.

Why are we talking about cheesecake? Shavuot is almost upon us – it begins after sundown on Tuesday, June 11, and lasts until the evening of Thursday, June 13 (outside of Israel, where it's celebrated for just one day) – when we rejoice in the giving of the Torah by hearing the Ten Commandments being read in the synagogue. Some of the customs specific to this holiday include decorating our homes with greenery and eating dairy foods.

Classic Cheesecake With Fresh Fruit (Dairy)

This recipe is closely based on a recipe by English-born Australian food critic, columnist and recipe writer Matt Preston. I've

made one or two very small adjustments.

Prep time: Less than 60 minutes

Difficulty level: Intermediate

Allergens: Nut-free and soy-free

Prepare the pan:

◆ You will need a 9-inch springform pan for this recipe. If you don't have a springform pan, you can use a regular pan, but the cake will be difficult to remove. You may need to cut it while it's still in the pan.

◆ This cheesecake cooks best in a water bath, so you'll need a larger pan that the springform pan can sit in.

◆ Wrap the outside of the springform pan in 2 to 3 layers of foil. This helps keep the water from seeping through the crack around the base.

Crust:

4 oz./120 grams tea biscuits, crushed

1/3 cup sugar

8 Tbsp. butter, melted

Pinch of salt

Crush the tea biscuits to a fine crumb, and mix with the sugar, salt and melted butter.

Press the mixture down firmly into the base of the springform pan. Use the back of a spoon to help compress the mixture.

Bake at 350°F for 10 minutes, then set aside to cool.

See "Shavuot" on page 11



Benny Kellman spoke about student experiences on the Binghamton University campus since October 7, including what occurred on campus in recent weeks.



Those attending listened to Benny Kellman speak about student experiences on the Binghamton University campus since October 7.

The Reporter wants the community to kvell with you

If your baby was born between July 2023 and July 2024, submit your baby's picture to *The Reporter* for the annual Family Focus issue, which will be published on June 28. Pictures must be e-mailed by Tuesday, June 18. Parents



and grandparents are welcome to e-mail a photo to TReporter@aol.com as a JPG or TIF. Please include the baby's name, sex, date of birth, parents' names, grandparents' names and great-grandparents' names.



ERNEST H. PARSONS FUNERAL HOME
Faithfully Serving Broome County Since 1928

PRE-ARRANGEMENTS AND PRE-FUNDING AVAILABLE
Joseph Fritsch
Managing Director

71 Main St., Binghamton, NY 13905
Phone 607-724-1336
Fax 800-948-5844

parsonsfuneral@yahoo.com
www.ParsonsFuneral.com

HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE

Disaster Clean-Up

Fire & Water Damage Restoration

Mold Removal
Dehumidification
Moisture Testing • Contents
Building Cleaning
Packouts & Storage
Construction & Repairs

24/7 Including Holidays
607.748.0128 (ph)
607.748.3604 (fx)

Arthur Diamond, President
3216 Watson Blvd.
Endwell, NY 13760

www.disaster-cleanup.com

Greater Binghamton's Preferred Electrical Contractor

FREE ESTIMATES
GUARANTEED WORK
24 HOUR
EMERGENCY SERVICE

729-3545
429 Commerce Road
Vestal, New York 13850
blanding-electric.com

Complete Home Rewires
Service & Meter Upgrades
Panel Change-outs
GFCI / AFCI Plugs
Appliance circuits / outlets
AC & Heating Circuits
Outdoor landscape lighting
Pool & Spa Wiring
Insurance Claims

Summer Home Improvement
\$75 OFF

Electrical Panel Change-out OR **Service Upgrade** (200 Amp)
\$50 OFF 100 Amp or 150 Amp
Change-out or upgrade
Valid for residential service only.
Cannot be combined with other offers.
Not valid on prior sales or services. Offer expires 8/31/24.

ADVERTISERS! Advertise your **Personal & Business Services**

July 26 issue • Ad Deadline: July 18
To advertise, please contact Kathy Brown at 607-724-2360, ext. 244, or advertising@thereportergroup.org

Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

HOPLER & ESCHBACH FUNERAL HOME

"A new family tradition"

Personal Service
Professionalism
Experience You Can Trust

COMPARE OUR PRICES
We charge far less than other area funeral homes

Kurt M. Eschbach, Funeral Director
483 Chenango Street Binghamton
607-722-4023
www.HEfuneralhome.com



Weekly Parasha

Bechukotai, Leviticus 26:3-27:34

Hope in dark times

RABBI MICAH R. FRIEDMAN, TEMPLE ISRAEL

How can we cultivate the resilience necessary to persevere through periods of great suffering?

Certainly, one key ingredient to resilience is hope. When we hold on to and feed hope, then we strengthen our capacity to overcome the oh-so-many challenges of our lives in this world.

Certainly, and sadly, over the course of Jewish history, our people have endured many periods of great suffering. Yet, just as certainly, we have persevered to this day and will continue, with God's help, to persist for many future generations.

How has our people maintained the hope necessary to sustain this perseverance? What wellsprings within Jewish tradition have fed our capacity for resilience?

One such source for hope and inspiration that has echoed through the hearts of countless generations of Jews since

our wandering in the wilderness is a Divine promise articulated in the final Torah portion of the book of Leviticus. Before we turn our attention to this promise, however, we should understand the context in which it is expressed and with which it contrasts.

The *parasha* of Bechukotai, before concluding with a summary of some of the central *mitzvot* we receive in Vayikra, outlines a choice for the Jewish people. If we walk in the ways of the laws of God, then we will live in safety and security in the land promised to our ancestors with plenty of sustenance to share. If, however, we take God for granted and we do not play our part in the covenant through performing the *mitzvot*, then we will be exiled from the land and suffer greatly for many generations. This picture of reward and punishment may sound familiar to you. Perhaps, it leads you to think of the fifth book of our

Torah, Deuteronomy, in which Moses returns frequently to such rhetoric of reward and punishment as he exhorts the children of Israel to walk in the way of the *mitzvot*. Or, perhaps, it makes you think of your own efforts to encourage children to behave properly. If you listen, you might have said, I will give you candy. If not, I will put you in time-out.

This rhetoric of reward and punishment, of blessing and curse, is not unique to our *parasha*. However, what is remarkable (if not entirely unique) is the promise that we encounter immediately after reading about the punishments for our misbehavior. In essence, God says to us: "even in your worst suffering, I will remember you and I will not abandon you" as we read in Leviticus 26:44-45 as translated by Everett Fox: "And yes, even then, when they are See "Times" on page 11

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, June 1, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Leviticus 26:3-27:34 and the haftarah is Jeremiah 16:19-17:14. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:30 pm.

An Executive Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 4, at 7 pm

On Saturday, June 8, Shacharit services will be held at 9:45 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Numbers 1:1-4:20 and the haftarah is Hosea 2:1-22. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 9:30 pm.

The office will be closed on Wednesday-Thursday, June 12-13, for Shavuot.

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.

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.

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.

Penn-York Jewish Community

President-Treasurer-Secretary: Harvey Chemosky, 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 Beth-El of Ithaca

Affiliation: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Rabbi: TBA
Rabbi Emeritus: Scott L. Glass
Address: 402 North Tioga St. (the corner of Court and Tioga streets), Ithaca, NY 14850-4292
Phone: 607-273-5775
E-mail: president@tbeithaca.org, secretary@tbeithaca.org
Website: www.tbeithaca.org
Presidents: Melanie Kalman and Alexis Siemon
Sisterhood President: Gail Zussman
Director of Education: TBA
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.

Friday, May 31, light candles before..... 8:14 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, June 1 9:15 pm
Friday, June 7, light candles before..... 8:19 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, June 8 9:20 pm
Tuesday, June 11, light candles before..... 8:21 pm
Wednesday, June 12, light candles after..... 9:22 pm
Thursday, June 13, yom tov ends 9:23 pm
Friday, June 14, light candles before..... 8:23 pm
Shabbat ends Saturday, June 15 9:23 pm

Temple Concord

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism
Rabbi: TBA
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, May 31: At 7:30 pm, At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service Sisterhood Installation and an oneg sponsored by Sisterhood. 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, June 1: At 9:15 am, Torah study in person and on Zoom (http://bit.ly/3XDnvRE, meeting ID 825 1226 2831 and passcode 743892).

Sunday, June 2: From 10 am-2 pm, Sisterhood Rummage Sale in the basement. Shoppers are asked to use the Oak Street entrance.

Tuesday, June 4: At 10:30 am, Tuesday Morning Book Club: "Dinners With Ruth: A Memoir on the Power of Friendships" by Nina Totenberg. For more information, contact Merri Pell-Preus at 607-222-2875 or merrypell.preus@gmail.com. To join via Zoom, visit https://bit.ly/3CXVd9b, meeting ID 881 6469 4206 and passcode: 653272

Friday, June 7: At 7:30 pm, At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service with the Coker family. 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, June 8: There will be no Torah study. At 10:30 am, Noah Grill's bar mitzvah will take place.

Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive
Address: 72 South Broad St., Norwich, NY 13815
Phone: 334-2691
E-mail: fertigj@roadrunner.com
Contact: Guilia Greenberg, 373-5087
Purpose: To maintain a Jewish identity and meet the needs of the Jewish community in the area.
Adult Ed.: Shabbat study sessions are held on designated Saturday mornings at 10 am. Call ahead, text or e-mail to confirm dates.

Congregation Tikun 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
Rabbi: Shifrah Tobacman, rabbishifrah@tikkunvor.org
Presidents: Sue Merkel and Laurie Willick, 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.

Shavuot. . . Continued from page 9

Cheesecake:

- 24 oz. cream cheese (3 cups)
- 1 cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 2½ Tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1¼ cup heavy cream

Let the cream cheese come to room temperature.

Using an electric mixer (stand or handheld), beat the cream cheese until smooth. Add the sugar and mix until fully incorporated.

Add the eggs one at a time. Wait until each one is fully incorporated before adding the next.

Pour in the lemon juice, vanilla and salt; mix. Slowly pour in the heavy cream and mix until smooth.

Pour the cheese mixture over the base.

Place the springform pan into the larger pan and add 1 inch of water to the larger pan.

Bake at 350°F for approximately 60 to 75 minutes. In order not to overcook the cake, turn off the oven when the center is still jiggly, but not completely wet. Leave the cheesecake to cool in the oven for an hour. Then remove and let it cool completely.

Refrigerate cake until cold. Run a knife around the edge of the pan, then gently release the springform.

Top with fresh fruit. I used oranges, kiwi and strawberries.

Miriam Szokovski is a writer, editor and author of the historical novel "Exiled Down Under." She is a member of the Chabad.org editorial team, and also shares her cooking and baking on Chabad.org/food.

Journal. . . . Continued from page 1

Organizers continued, "Dan and Malvinia Sambursky spent many years on the board of Hillel, working hard to keep the ship sailing smoothly and building community in the process. Without their commitment, we might not be standing today.

"Having a Jewish day school is essential to bring young families to the area," organizers added. "We couldn't do this without support from the entire community."

The physical journal will be given out at the event and also sent out to members in the community. "This is where we show our gratitude to people who help lead our community," organizers commented. "We are so excited to bring the community together in support of our school and to honor the Weitsmans and Samburskys. The event will be one you won't want to miss!"

Times. . . . Continued from page 10

in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, I will not repel them, to finish them off, to abrogate my covenant with them, for I YHWH am their God! I will bear-in-mind to their [benefit] the covenant of the former-ones whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, before the eyes of the nations, to be a God for them; I am YHWH!"

At the very same time that the Torah tells us that we should expect trials and tribulations on the road ahead, God tells us not to give up hope because we will not completely be destroyed. Even through the worst conditions, we will be remembered and we will again have the opportunity to fulfill the hopes of our ancestors.

Since ancient times, Jews have drawn from this verse a sense of confidence that we will collectively persevere even in the face of the strongest and most cruel forces of oppression. In both the collection of *midrash* on Leviticus called *Torat Kohanim* and in the Aramaic interpretive translation of the Torah called *Targum Yonatan*, we see each of the phrases used in this verse mapped onto various eras of Jewish history. "Not spurn them," "not repel them" and [not] "to finish them off" refers to our oppression under Babylonian, Hasmonean and Roman empires. Strikingly, the final phrase "I am YHWH (the Eternal)" is understood to refer to the apocalyptic war of Gog and Magog referred to in some of our most perplexing prophetic passages. The *midrash* and *targum* understand this verse to be offering us the reassurance that even in the most violent and trying era in human history, we can count on God to continue to assure our well-being, survival and perseverance.

So, this passage at the end of Vayikra attempts to reassure us of God's everlasting love and dedication to the Jewish people. This knowledge has been a source of hope and comfort for generations of Jews since antiquity. Yet, the awareness that the Jewish people will collectively persevere may not provide us with the hope, reassurance or comfort we are looking for on a personal level as we struggle with the circumstances of our own lives.

Here, we can turn for guidance to the path of the great Eastern-European spiritual teacher called the Ba'al Shem Tov (Besht), of blessed memory. The Besht taught paradoxically that the darkest of places in which we find ourselves, the situations and contexts where it seems like God is most hidden, these places are themselves openings for connection to the Source of Life Who Sustains. I pray that we may all find openings for light and hope within the dark places of our lives and, through these, cultivate the hope that will sustain us for many years to come.

Jewish Community Center

JCC Friendship Club

JCC Friendship Club met on May 15. The meeting was started by reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance" and singing "Hatikvah." Beverly Zelman introduced Robin Greenblott, who spoke about her career as a pharmacist, as well as some of medications and immunizations. Robin is retired from Wegman's Pharmacy, but returns occasionally to help out. She began by saying that medications should be taken the same time every day. Some should be taken on an empty stomach and some should be taken with food. She said that those who take medication to lower cholesterol, such as Lipitor or statins, should not eat grapefruit. She also stressed if you are taking medication to sleep you should not take medication that has the side effect of drowsiness.

She continued talking about nine immunizations. She told us that the flu shot takes two weeks to be effective. She also mentioned that even if you get the Covid shot you can still get it, but it will be a milder case. She said that the shot for RSV was new last year and everyone over 60 should get it. It is not for only infants anymore. She said everyone should get immu-

nized for shingles every three to six years. Even if you had shingles before, you can get it again.

She answered questions about some medicines members are taking. Those taking medication for high blood pressure may get dizzy if they stand up quickly. This is called postural hypotension. Some suggestions she made were to eat a banana every day to prevent leg cramps and take prednisone, a steroid, with food. She ended by informing us that Binghamton University School of Pharmacy in Johnson City was started in 2017. The Decker School of Nursing at BU is moving to Johnson City. There are plans to start a school for physical therapy and also occupational therapy.

The next meeting of the JCC Friendship Club will be on Wednesday, June 19. The speaker will be John Rozzoni from the Tri-Cities Opera. He will talk about programs and performances. He will tell us a little bit about what they do and their history.

Sylvia Diamond
President

Gifts for Dads & Grads



To advertise,
contact
Kathy Brown at
724-2360, ext. 244,
or advertising@
thereportergroup.
org

WWW.AUDIOCLASSICS.COM

AUDIO • HOME THEATER • STEREO

Phone/Fax **607-766-3501**

BUY • SELL • TRADE • REPAIR • CONSIGN

3501 Vestal Road Vestal, NY 13850

Hours: Mon-Fri 8-5:30 • Sat 11-4



Celebrate your milestone with a Graduation Simcha

Do you know someone who will be graduating this year? Why not surprise them with a congratulatory Simcha ad in *The Reporter*? The Graduation Simcha issue date is June 14, with ad copy due June 6.

For information on other sizes or to place your simcha, please contact me, *The Reporter's* Advertising Representative Kathy Brown, at 607-724-2360, ext. 244, or advertising@thereportergroup.org, or mail this form to The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850.

With all my heart, I thank you in advance.
Kathy

MAZEL TOV, DAVID
On Your Graduation
from the ECC and UPK
Love, Mom & Dad
(small - \$20)

RACHEL,
MAZEL TOV
ON YOUR GRADUATION
FROM BU! GOOD LUCK IN
GRAD SCHOOL!
LOVE, MOM AND DAD
(medium - \$40)

Mazel Tov, Sadie!
Congrats on
your VMS
Graduation!
Love,
Aunt Sheila
& Uncle Dave
(large - \$60)

Name of Graduate _____
Greeting as you would like it to appear _____
Your Name _____
Your Address _____
Phone/e-mail _____



Must be received by **June 6th** for our June 14th Issue.
Mail to: The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal NY 13850 or
e-mail info to advertising@thereportergroup.org

Bike.....Continued from page 2

got along, and helped each other out.

The kind of place where my parents would leave the car in the driveway at night, with the keys on the dashboard, without giving it a second thought.

I left Binghamton, at least on a full-time basis, when I went away to high school in New York City in 1977. I returned home many times over the years, until my parents fled the frigid upstate New York winters and headed south, almost 20 years later.

From what I have heard, much of the innocence and charm of those days are relics of the past. Nowadays, the *shul* has trouble getting a minyan on Shabbat.

Now there are BDS resolutions being passed, and the crime rate has soared.

Now, no one would think of leaving the keys in the car sitting in the driveway.

Oneonta.....Continued from page 1

◆ Understanding the difference between security and safety.

◆ Developing a better understanding of active threat incidents.

◆ Explaining appropriate modes of action to use during an active shooter incident, including “run, hide, fight.”

◆ Understanding how to prepare for an active threat event.

◆ How to respond to law enforcement’s arrival.

◆ Recognizing the importance of additional trainings, such as the “Stop the Bleed” program.

◆ Being able to commit to action during an active threat event.

The “Stop the Bleed” program is designed to enable trained bystanders to take life-saving action if needed until professional help can arrive following an accident, mass shooting or other acts of violence. Instructors focus on training people in all walks of life to become immediate responders.

Zionists.....Continued from page 2

with its policies in the West Bank and Gaza. But that does not mean that I don’t believe it has the right to exist, any more than I don’t believe the United States should exist for its continuing policies that adversely affect our Native American population. And I have to wonder what exactly would happen to all my fellow Jews in Israel if groups like Hamas controlled the country. I fear the October 7 massacre would only be a preview of the horrific actions that would take place.

Right now, all I foresee is the creation of another generation – on both sides – filled with hate and murder. However, if people think that all the problems in the Middle East will disappear if the state of Israel ceases to exist, they are only fooling themselves. Other countries in the area are fighting wars within their borders and no one cares about those innocents dying. Only when Jews or Israelis are involved do the protests begin.

Perhaps the mysterious memory had risen from a bottomless well, the echoes reverberating off the walls until they were but a faint – almost unrecognizable – remnant of the original.

It arose because it wanted something from me. “When I was a young boy in Binghamton. Don’t you remember?” Still oh, so familiar.

My childhood in Binghamton was a life that is very much part of me, yet the half century that has passed often make it seem like another lifetime.

One of the matriarchs of the community, Marlene Serkin, recently passed away. My purpose here is not to eulogize her – others have done a fine job of that at her funeral and beyond.

But it is about honoring her. Not in a 1970s kind of way, but in a very 2020s kind of way.

Someone had the great idea to create a WhatsApp group of former and present Binghamtonians, in her memory. Within days, the number of people in the group soared past 100 and kept climbing.

The group spans the years from the 1960s (perhaps even 1950s!) to the present, and includes accomplished academics, learned rabbis, devoted housewives, doctors, lawyers, school teachers and principals, and even a rocket scientist who was instrumental in creating the Iron Dome. A surprising number, given the small size of our hometown, have made *aliyah* over the years and now live in Israel.

But on the playing field of this WhatsApp group everyone is equal. Everyone has come to reminisce, to reflect on childhood memories, to share old class photos, to joke about this or that thing that happened to them in the course of growing up in the fantasy world of Binghamton.

Everyone brings their inner child to the group and feels free to let it roam about and to hop on its bike and pedal to Carvel’s once again. To travel on the school bus together to Hillel Academy. To sing and dance with the NCSY group after *shul* every Shabbat morning.

“Where are you?” the echo calls. “You used to know me so well! Why can’t I see you?”

The voice, the memory, was beginning to take form. Oh, so familiar.

The banter is delightful on the WhatsApp chats. Representing many decades, not everyone on the group knows each other, but there are so many shared experiences that it’s always a fun read.

Is it a rabbit hole, like so many traps on the Internet? If it is, it’s a supremely heartwarming one. While there have been times when I’ve awoken to close to 100 new posts, most days there are just a few. As *Pesach* approached, someone posted recipes from an old *shul* cookbook. One was from my mother, a “h, for an apple kugel. I hadn’t

thought about that dish of hers for decades.

The group has also featured some brilliant observations. The rocket scientist, who would have every justification to be prideful of his accomplishments in so many areas, keenly noted that growing up in Binghamton, with its sense of simple living and collegial teamwork, infused its residents with a lifelong sense of humility.

Despite the uplifting injection of youth and beautiful positivity in the group, I somehow find reading the posts disquieting at times. There’s this nagging feeling that I don’t really belong. That I’m too old for this.

At first, I couldn’t place it, but I think I have reflected enough to realize that while everyone seems to have dived head-first into this digital sandbox of nostalgia, I had somehow left my childhood behind, my youthful exuberance long ago dissipated, having been locked away in a closet.

It was tiring – and even a bit scary – to open that creaky closet door and peer inside. I didn’t go digging for photos to post, or old school memorabilia, or scrapbooked memories. I replied to the posts of others, but didn’t initiate much of my own.

I held back.

“I see you now. There you are! Come take my hand. Let’s go play!”

I think I figured out who you are now! No wonder you seemed so familiar!

There is sobering responsibility that comes with realization. My inner child was calling me. It wanted to get out and play with the other kids in the group, but it was unsure where to start.

I want to let that free spirit roam free, but it means laboring up a mountain of hesitancy and uncertainty until reaching the peak, and peering over to the other side.

All these years later, it’s going to be a challenge, both mentally and physically, but I’d like to give it a shot. Can a body which now relies on handfuls of medications each day actually manage to get on that bike, to once again feel the wind in its hair as it clammers up the long hill to the ice cream shop?

“I know you can do it,” says that voice not from beyond, but from before. Not from afar, but echoing from the deep recesses of within.

Before I know it, he has grabbed my arm, and he breaks into a sprint, as I struggle to keep up.

I notice that my injured shoulder, on which he is tugging, isn’t experiencing the shooting pain it normally does. Maybe, I think to myself, this isn’t so bad, after all.

“Hurry,” he says.

“We’ll do this together. I’ll help you remember how.”

I start to run faster.

Not so bad.

Not so bad at all.

After.....Continued from page 2

card tables temporarily extended the dining table. We went through the entire haggadah, telling the story of the deliverance from Egypt and emphasizing that it was our story. Knowing that Grandpa Joe had led our immigrant family from Tsarist Russia to the new American promised land lent him a Mosaic presence. Symbolic foods burnished ancient rituals. When my grandfather announced that he was leaving the room to wash his hands, I joined the other children in “stealing” the *afikomen* in anticipation of ransoming it for a reward. When the entrance door to the house was open, we could see, abetted by imagination and wiggling of the table, the fill line of Elijah’s cup descending. Across the decades, the security and warmth generated by those large Simons seders still resonates amongst the grandchildren who are now themselves grandparents.

During my high school, college and early employment years, my parents, sister Jo Ann and I would celebrate the first night seder with my mother’s sister, Lucille, Uncle Ben and cousins Lloyd, Robert and Stephen. And Nana Kahan was still with us. Even when living in distant outposts, I would return for those seders. Those Simons-Benson seders were imbued with confidence derived from Israeli military triumphs in 1967 and 1973, the decline of American antisemitism, the business ascent of my father and Uncle Ben, and achievements by the Simons and Benson cousins.

Time and dispersal scattered the family of my youth, and my grandparents, our anchors, died. My first marriage ended in divorce. My son, Joe, knowledgeable about the man whose name he carried, and I were not alone on Passover. Faye Munson, the soul of the Jewish community in Oneonta, NY, invited us to share in her robust family seders. And her father, Donald, was the pre-eminent hider of the *afikomen*.

Even while doing relief work on the Mississippi Gulf in 2006, following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and living in a tent with students in the land of the stranger, Passover provided grounding. As April 12, 2006, my first day on the Gulf Coast, drew to a close, Passover arrived. Tent Village in Pass Christian, MS, lacked the resources for a seder, but I had brought a box of matzoh. Two of my fellow volunteers, SUNY Oneonta students Ian Gillman

and Steve Kaplan, shared the matzoh with me. Despite our unconventional observance, we felt that the true spirit of Passover had brought us to this ravaged place.

Passover 2024: On the first night, Nancy prepared traditional foods, and I led an intimate, family seder. For the second night, I joined more than 100 SUNY Oneonta students for a robust, joyous seder hosted by Chabad Rabbi Meir Rubashkin, wife, Fraidy, and their seven young children. The gathering began by singing “Take Me Out to the Seder” to the tune of “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” From the balcony, the children threw waves of projectiles at us to announce each plague. By Zoom, Nancy and I shared the third night with our four grandchildren and observed a venerable Simons competition to determine who could read “Chad Gadya” the fastest, an honor earned by granddaughter Hannah.

Passovers recent and distant played a major role in shaping my Jewish conscience and consciousness. Thus, a fresh communication from my cousin, Robert, gave me pause. In response to my Passover greeting, he wrote, “All my life, our family and community at large believed to a point of moral certainty that we Jews were different... We rode with the Freedom Riders, made moral decisions, and we knew what was right and what was wrong... Right now... Jews have killed more people, more women, more children that at any time in our history. The mass graves are not Jewish mass graves. We are now the bringers of forced migration, famine, the destruction of hospitals and schools with complete disregard of Jewish values.”

Introspection followed Robert’s Passover words. I remain convinced that Hamas is a terrorist group committed to the destruction of Israel and Jews, builds tunnels in locations to use civilians as a shield, and would repeat the atrocities of October 7 if given a chance. The Israeli war of self-defense to destroy Hamas and to rescue the hostages must continue. However, it is imperative to prioritize protecting the lives of Palestinian civilians and to start planning for a just two-state peace. Passover dictates our obligation to abet the deliverance of innocents, not to preside over their annihilation, lest we become Pharaoh.

Eye-Catching Classifieds

The Care You Need - in the Home You Love

Affordable, Professional Home Care You Deserve

Let At Home Help provide you or your loved ones independence and dignity by providing non-medical care services in the familiar surroundings of home, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Some of our many services:
Companionship • Alzheimer’s & Dementia Care • Medication Reminders • Grocery Shopping • Laundry • Hospice Support • Overnight Care • Meal Preparation • House Cleaning
Plus other services tailored to your needs

607-238-1123 • Locally owned and operated • Free consultation
AtHomeHelpofBinghamton.com

YOUR HEATING & PLUMBING SPECIALISTS

BAKER’S PLUMBING & HEATING

We Also Do Natural Gas Conversions & All Plumbing Work
Free Estimates • Fully Insured • Residential & Commercial

We Install, Service & Repair...
Furnaces • Air Conditioners
Water Heaters • Gas Fireplaces

SERVING BROOME & TIOGA COUNTIES

754-6376
pbaker927@yahoo.com

It just makes cents to advertise here in **The Reporter!**

For information on advertising, contact Kathy Brown at 607-724-2360, ext. 244, or advertising@thereportergroup.org.

THE REPORTER
Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton