

# THE REPORTER

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BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

## Federation to sponsor day at Rumble Ponies on July 18

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will sponsor a Jewish community outing to see the Rumble Ponies baseball team on Tuesday, July 18, at the Mirabito Stadium, 211 Henry St., Binghamton. The game will begin at 6:35 pm. Discounted tickets are \$4 each and must be purchased through the Federation, either at its website,

www.jfgeb.org; the Federation office, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal; or by calling the Federation at 607-724-2332. Vouchers will be given in case of a rainout. The last day to purchase tickets is Friday, July 14; those purchasing by mail



should include the form on page 9 of this paper.

"It's summer and that means baseball!" said Shelley Hubal, Federation executive director. "We thought this would be a great communitywide event for baseball fans, families with

children of all ages and anyone looking to connect with others in the Jewish community. What a great way to spend a summer evening: a baseball game and time with old or new friends."

"We are so pleased to offer reduced price tickets for our Jewish community members. Be sure to join us for a fun evening," Hubal said.

## BD to offer stipend to families/individuals moving to area

Saba Wiesner, Beth David Synagogue's president, has announced what the Beth David executive board called "a unique opportunity" for a family or individual who is willing to relocate to Broome County and become a resident. Thanks to a generous donor, a family or individuals who move to the Binghamton area will receive a monthly subsidy of up to \$500 per month for one year. This \$500 can be applied to a rent or

mortgage payment. The subsidy will be provided for a maximum of three years. In return, the family or individual will be requested to become an active member of the Beth David Synagogue community. To be an active member, a male member, who is above bar mitzvah age, is asked to attend Shabbat services two or more times a month. Female members are asked to be involved in the Beth David Sisterhood.

"Our community," Wiesner noted, "offers affordable housing, no traffic, beautiful parks, a Hebrew day school, a three-hour drive to New York City and a Beth David congregation that will embrace you and your family!"

Wiesner added, "Beth David Synagogue is a warm, friendly, modern Orthodox *shul* with active members. This is a positive and exciting opportunity for both the *shul* and for

the family or individuals who are willing to become a part of the Beth David family. We are excited to hear from interested people and to welcome them to our community."

Those wishing to obtain further information should contact Beth David Synagogue by sending a letter to the synagogue at 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905, e-mailing bethdavid@stny.rr.com or calling 607-722-1793.

## Safeguarding the Jewish community throughout the region

By Ted Merwin

Jewish Journal of WNY

When Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker and a group of his congregants were taken hostage at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, TX, in January of last year, the episode sent shock waves throughout Jewish communities around the world. The upshot for many was that antisemitic violence can happen anywhere, even in small communities with relatively small Jewish populations.

But for those who do reside in smaller communities, the frightening incident was, unfortunately, no surprise at all – the only odd thing was that it had taken so long for

the Jewish world at large to wake up to the fact that Jews are vulnerable no matter where they live.

How can the Jewish community ensure that all Jews are safe and secure? The answer, it turns out, especially among Jews who live in different communities in the same geographic area, is constant and careful coordination, collaboration and cooperation among the Jewish communities in the region.

No one disputes that the logistical, financial and other challenges to protecting every Jewish institution in every Jewish community are formidable. But by using

Rochester as an anchor, Buffalo and other Jewish communities in Central Western New York will be buoyed in their own efforts to safeguard their Jewish populations – and will provide a model, based on the bedrock Jewish ethos of collective responsibility, for similar collaborative strategies in states and regions across the continent.

Indeed, the Central/Western New York region joins many others, both in New York state and throughout the nation, that are in the process of forming innovative, durable alliances among smaller Jewish communities for mutual aid, protection, training and advice.

Working under the framework of Jewish Federations of North America's LiveSecure Initiative, Jewish leaders not just in Buffalo, but also in Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Ithaca, Binghamton and elsewhere in Central and Western New York will be under the same protective shield. LiveSecure exceeded its own initial goal of \$54 million to raise a total of \$62 million to make it possible for every Jewish community to raise a local match and to blossom under the aegis of a professionally trained security director.

The Buffalo Jewish Federation received a matching grant from LiveSecure of See "Region" on page 12

### Spotlight

## Chabad to open new downtown/Westside Binghamton building

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

The Rohr Chabad Center for Jewish Student Life will open a new satellite building in the downtown/Westside section of Binghamton. Rabbi Levi Slonim, who is in charge of downtown and development, noted that Chabad's presence in that area is not new: programming began there in 2005.

"At the time, I was working with my parents on various Chabad projects," Slonim said in an e-mail interview. "Over time, Chabad was getting lots of requests from students living in the Westside for organized Shabbat meals and programming. Along with some student leaders,

we arranged for monthly Shabbat dinners at a hotel on Front Street, which were a big success; they attracted anywhere from 50-80 students. We also hosted Shabbat lunches at the homes of students affiliated with various Greek groups."

These programs led to the establishment of a satellite Chabad House on the Westside with permanent offerings of Shabbat meals and other events. With the new student housing complexes being built in downtown Binghamton, Chabad began receiving requests for programming and Shabbat meals in that area. In 2016, Shabbat meals began in the Printing House before moving to the

current rented space at 60 Henry St.

"Due to the large interest and demand for Shabbat dinners and other programming, and because our current space can only accommodate about 90 or so students, it became clear at the end of 2021 that we needed to find another location that can accommodate a larger volume of students," Slonim said. "Our new center will provide us with 15,000 square feet to be used for a large social hall for Shabbat meals and events, a student lounge and study spaces, a commercial kitchen, a synagogue, programming areas, a library and more."

Slonim noted that it will take a minimum

of nine to 12 months before the building is open – that is, if there are no construction delays. However, he said that the first stage of the project is complete: Chabad has closed on the building. "What lies ahead includes finalizing the architectural plans for the center and the extensive gut rehab construction of the site and of course, a major capital campaign to raise the funds necessary (close to \$3 million) for this project," he added.

The main focus of the center will be undergraduate and graduate students, and young professionals, though Slonim See "Chabad" on page 2

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notes that he anticipates that some local community members may join as well. The center will host weekly Shabbat services and meals, a variety of weekly classes, holiday programming, baking and cooking workshops, mental health workshops and training, study spaces and lounges.

Slonin sees the new center as another step in the local Chabad's development. "This downtown Chabad center is part of the larger story of the development and growth of Chabad of Binghamton over the last 38 years," he said. "Along with the development of the student complexes

in the downtown area over the last 10-15 years came the growth of the Jewish student community downtown."

According to Slonim, "This project is part of 1,210 centers and institutions being established and developed throughout this year marking 120 years since the birth of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. It was the Rebbe who sent Rabbi Aaron and Rivkah Slonim to establish the Chabad Lubavitch presence in Broome County. It is the Rebbe's belief in the inherent potential of every Jew to materialize their purpose in this world and his teachings of boundless unadulterated love

to every Jew, no matter their background, that guide our work each and every day, and continues to motivate us to work harder and reach deeper."

Slonim also noted how members of the university and local community have supported them. "We feel humbled to have such special partners and supporters that have been at the side of Chabad over the years and particularly with this monumental project," he said. "Those include alumni, parents, local community members and, of special note, the Board of Trustees of Chabad and its president Michael Wright."

## Opinion

From the Desk of the Federation Executive Director

### With gratitude

SHELLEY HUBAL

One of the challenges of living in a small Jewish community is having adequate resources. Our few "big donors" are called on frequently to support a plethora of institutions and initiatives.

However, small-town living has many advantages. There is comfort in knowing you are welcomed and appreciated just for "showing up." Nobody is just a number. A new baby? Mazel tov! We can't wait to grow with your family. You have an idea for a program? Yes, we can do that, no problem!

Last year, the generous donors at the Donald Etra Futures Fund gave our community a grant to support our PJ Library program. PJ Library sends free children's books with Jewish content to Jewish children. It is a great way for parents to teach their children about their Jewish

roots and engage the next generation of Jewish people. Because of the Etra Fund gift, we have been able to create a welcoming, engaging space for young families who chose Binghamton to raise their children and enjoy all the benefits of a small Jewish community. Their support has given us some breathing room to say "Yes": "Yes" to new enrollments and "yes" to programming. All without the worry of where to find the funds.

Since January, our PJ Library enrollment has increased by 14 new children, bringing our total active enrollment up to 84! To reach more families, Federation had an active recruiting campaign. We also partnered with the Jewish Community Center for the community Purim carnival, which had more than 200 people in attendance: We ran out of PJ enrollment forms and swag! This July, we will

once again encourage young families to attend our communitywide outing to watch a Rumble Ponies baseball game. Last year, one of our PJ kids threw out the first pitch!

Inspired by the momentum coming from the Etra Fund gift, a generous donor stepped up to give our PJ program a \$500 grant. This will have an impact on our budget and give us even more incentive to engage young families without worrying about the cost.

Small communities are often overlooked. We are so grateful that the Donald Etra Futures Fund remembered us. Their choice has given us the confidence to grow.

If you want to find out more about signing up for PJ Library, or wish to make a donation that supports this program, go to [www.jfgeb.org](http://www.jfgeb.org) and click on the "Local and Global Community" and "PJ Library" tabs.

In My Own Words

### Debating antisemitism

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

I would love to organize a discussion between Dara Horn and Philip Slayton. For those who don't know, Horn is an American novelist who also wrote a book of essays called "People Love Dead Jews: Reports From a Haunted Past," which I wrote about in this column because I felt my comments were more political than literary. (You can read the column at [www.thereporter.org/streams/executive-editor/executive-editor-stream/in-my-own-words-thoughts-about-dead-jews](http://www.thereporter.org/streams/executive-editor/executive-editor-stream/in-my-own-words-thoughts-about-dead-jews).) Slayton is a Canadian lawyer and the author of several books, including "Antisemitism: An ancient hatred in the age of identity politics" (Sutherland House), and my thoughts about that work also struck me as more political than literary.

First, I don't think either author is wrong in their approach because there are many different ways to think about antisemitism. Horn is far more worried about the problem because a) she is deeply involved with the Jewish community, b) is worried about her children's future and c) lives near where the Jersey City antisemitic shootings took place. Slayton is Jewish by patrilineal descent, and admits that "I have never been immersed in the Jewish world." He thinks that allows him to be impartial, while Horn makes no pretense that her emotions aren't involved.

While Slayton's ideas about identity politics are interesting and worth reading, it's his thoughts on antisemitism that prompted the idea of the discussion between the two writers. I agree with him that there is a difference between antisemitism and criticism of the government of Israel. (Note, please, I didn't write Zionism, although he does believe people can disagree with that concept – true of some Jews before and after the state of Israel was established.) Unfortunately, too many people on both sides conflate the two. On one side, there are those who believe any negative comment about Israel qualifies as antisemitic. On the other side are those who condemn all Jews – whether or not they

support a particular Israeli government policy – for anything they dislike about Israel. Unfortunately, when this is taken to the extreme, it means condemning all Jews and is less about Israel than about the hatred of all Jews.

"Antisemitism" is interesting because Slayton also writes about the horrific things done to Jews over time and across the world. But he does not see the same kind of threat in contemporary times. While he writes that many Jewish communities feel that antisemitism is becoming worse in their country and they would be safer somewhere else, he finds it ironic that, for example, French Jews think Britain is safer than France, while British Jews think about moving because they don't consider their country safe. The problem is, of course, that no one knows whether this is overreacting (as is true in many cases) or underreacting (which some would say happened under the Nazis). Many post-Holocaust Jews worry about the future because they are worried about a repeat not only of what occurred in Germany, but in many other areas of the world.

Slayton offers a new approach to antisemitism by dividing it into different types and offers suggestions on how to handle each type:

- ◆ Degradation antisemitism, basically graffiti and insults yelled at someone on the street, which he feels should be ignored because they don't cause physical danger. He sees the attention paid to them as not helping the community, but rather creating hysteria. Slayton doesn't minimize how this can affect people, but only worries when it encourages people to be violent.

- ◆ Violent antisemitism, which he feels is a matter for government action because this is a matter of law enforcement, noting that all citizens should be protected by their government.

- ◆ Private antisemitism, when Jews are forbidden to join clubs or be hired by a corporation, something he thinks requires "a public policy response." That means passing

laws that make this discrimination illegal. Non-Jewish members of the community can also help by offering their opposition to these rules.

- ◆ Organized public antisemitism, which he believes must be attacked politically and publicly opposed by all citizens, who should, as he notes, "use all tools available including civil disobedience, no matter the risk."

I agree with Slayton that our reactions to some incidents of antisemitism – particularly degradation antisemitism – have been overblown. But I would bet Horn would note how our reaction depends on the country and the government. So many in Europe before and after World War II were happy to adopt organized public antisemitism. All you have to do is look at the web to find examples of those in the U.S. who have no problem attacking Jews. Perhaps part of the difference between Slayton and Horn is based on how much antisemitism they've personally experienced.

What Slayton desires is for us to recognize each other's humanity and learn how to disagree without violence: he writes that disagreements "must be done with integrity, respect, restraint, discipline, and with full recognition that on almost every issue there can be more than one reasonable point of view." I can't speak for the tenor of the times in Canada, but, unfortunately, reasonable disagreement seems to have disappeared in the United States. So many disagreements have led to personal attacks: there seems to be little room for "let's agree to disagree as long as you don't actively limit my right to live my life as I choose." I'm not sure how we can change that except through good leadership on all sides.

Is Horn right in her fears? Does Slayton offer a way to help us reduce antisemitism? I have no idea who is correct. If you ask me for my emotional response, my hope is that Slayton's ideas offer us a way forward, but I fear that Horn is right to be worried about our country and the world.



Shelley Hubal, Executive Director

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#### 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.

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# Hillel at Binghamton announces new CEO

The Board of Directors of Hillel at Binghamton announced that Ira Glasser, who graduated from Binghamton University in 2005, will lead the Hillel at Binghamton team as the organization's first chief executive officer. His appointment is the culmination of a search process conducted in partnership with Hillel International and led by Hillel at Binghamton board members. "At every step of the search process, Ira impressed us with his deep passion for Hillel at Binghamton's mission and vision, his love for Jewish educational engagement and his thoughtfulness," said members of the Hillel board.

Glasser comes to Hillel at Binghamton after a career in Jewish educational leadership, most recently serving

as the director of Jewish life and learning at the Rodeph Sholom School in New York. He brings experience in program and staff management with an eye toward mission alignment, as well as an ability to develop relationships across organizations. His connection to Hillel goes back to his time as a student, when he served as Hillel at Binghamton's student president. He was also active in a number of other student groups, served as the school mascot (Baxter the Bearcat) and gave the 2005 student commencement address. Glasser said that he is excited to combine his passion for the student experience at Hillel at Binghamton with his interest in Jewish education and communal work.

Glasser will start on July 17 based out of the New York

metropolitan area, with frequent trips to Binghamton. The new role was designed specifically to be near alumni, donor and parent communities.

The current assistant director, Jennifer Stone, will be leaving Hillel at Binghamton during the summer as she will be taking on a new role at Northeastern University Hillel. "We have been deeply grateful for everything Jen has done for Hillel at Binghamton over the past three years, engaging students, developing leaders and maintaining organizational stability while our Board of Directors conducted a thorough and thoughtful search process for our next leader," said members of the Hillel board. "We're excited to announce that we're hiring a campus director who will manage all student-facing campus work."

## Book Club at TC announces 2023-24 schedule

The Morning Book Club at Temple Concord announced its book list for its 20<sup>th</sup> reading season 2023-24. Beginning in August, book club meetings will take place on the first Tuesday of the month, except October when the club will meet on the first and fifth Tuesdays; the club does not meet in November. The July meeting will still take place on Wednesday. Unless otherwise indicated, book club meetings take place in the Temple Concord Library and on Zoom beginning at 10:30 am. For the Temple Concord Zoom link, to join the Morning Book Club e-mail list or for the one time July 5 Zoom link, e-mail Merri Pell-Preus at merrypell.preus@gmail.com.

The 2023-24 book list follows; the meetings are on Tuesday, unless otherwise noted:

- ◆ Wednesday, July 5, Zoom only: "Woman on Fire: A Novel" by Lisa Barr
- ◆ August 1: "The Matchmaker's Gift: A Novel" by Lynda Cohen Loigman
- ◆ September 5: "Shanda: A Memoir of Shame and Secrecy" by Letty Cottin Pogrebin
- ◆ October 3: "Kantika: A Novel" by Elizabeth Graver
- ◆ October 31: "The Thread Collectors: A Novel" by Shaunna J. Edwards and Alyson Richman
- ◆ No meeting in November (Election Day)
- ◆ December 5: "Bread Givers: A Novel" by Anzia Yezierska
- ◆ January 2024 – specific date TBA: "One Hundred Saturdays: Stella Levi and the Search for a Lost World" by Michael Frank (memoir)

- ◆ February 6: "Nine Tenths of the Law: A Novel" by Claudia Hagadus Long
- ◆ March 5: "The Village Idiot: A Novel" by Steve Stern
- ◆ April 2: "The Latecomer: A Novel" by Jean Hanff Korelitz
- ◆ May 7: "Shayna: A Novel" by Miriam Ruth Black
- ◆ June 4: "Dinners With Ruth: A Memoir on the Power of Friendships" by Nina Totenberg

Looking for this issue's "Jewish Resources"? Visit [www.thereporter.org/streams/miscellaneous-features/miscellaneous-features/tag/80309](http://www.thereporter.org/streams/miscellaneous-features/miscellaneous-features/tag/80309) to find out what's happening online.

### JCC Friendship Club

The Jewish Community Center Friendship Club met on June 14 after a long absence due to COVID 19. The meeting was called to order at 1:30 pm by Sylvia Diamond. We recited the Pledge of Allegiance and sang "Hatikvah." There was a discussion about meeting once a month. The room will not be available this July because the children at the day camp will be using it. Since the camp will be going on a trip on the third Wednesday, we decided to meet then and to meet the third Wednesday of the month from now on.

Sue Herzog said we should continue to announce our meetings in *The Reporter* and she will also send out reminders by e-mail. We all gave her our e-mail addresses. Fran Ferentinos suggested that the meetings

should be announced in all synagogue bulletins. We then discussed collecting dues of \$3 at each meeting. We missed Moira Shirvan, who is in the hospital. We wish her a speedy recovery.

We enjoyed the music of Deb Foreman, who played piano. After our discussion, we had a community sing and sang songs such as "You Are My Sunshine" and "You're a Grand Old Flag." Bruce Orden sang "Moonshine" and "The 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Song (Feeling Groovy)" by Simon and Garfunkel.

Join us at our next meeting on Wednesday, July 19, at 1:30 pm, at the JCC.

Sylvia Diamond  
President

## DEADLINES

The following are deadlines for all articles and photos for upcoming *REPORTER* issues.

ISSUE	DEADLINE
July 14-27.....	July 5
July 28-August 10.....	July 19
August 11-24.....	August 2
August 25-September 7.....	August 16

All deadlines for the year can be found at [www.thereporter.org/contact-us/faqs](http://www.thereporter.org/contact-us/faqs) under "Q: What Are the Deadlines for the Paper?"

## New method to boost memory during sleep

By Yulia Karra

(Israel21c) – Researchers from Tel Aviv University and University of California recently developed a method that helps improve memory with the help of deep-sleep brain stimulation. Their system enhances communication between the hippocampus, the part of the brain involved in acquiring new memories; and the frontal cortex, where long-term memories are stored. This proves for the first time the unique connection between the two parts of the brain and allows for precisely timed delivery of information.

The study's 18 participants – epilepsy patients who initially entered a study trying to pinpoint the areas of the brain that cause their seizures – reported significant improvement of their memory's accuracy after completing a deep-brain stimulation sleep cycle, compared to their regular sleep cycle.

They completed two memory tests, one after an undisturbed night of sleep and one after a night with deep-brain stimulation. On both occasions, they were asked in the

morning to recognize famous persons whose pictures they had been shown the previous evening. The study found that deep-brain stimulation significantly improved the accuracy of their memory.

The study, published in the *Nature Neuroscience* journal, was led by Maya Geva-Sagiv, in partnership with the laboratories of Prof. Yuval Nir from the Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Department of Biomedical Engineering, and Sagol School of Neuroscience at Tel Aviv University, and Prof. Itzhak Fried from the Department of Neurosurgery at UCLA and the Sackler Faculty of Medicine at Tel Aviv University.

Geva-Sagiv said the goal of the research was to "enhance the natural mechanisms at play, to discover exactly how sleep assists in stabilizing memories."

"We found that our method had a beneficial effect on both brain activity during sleep and memory performance. Our deep-brain stimulation method is unique because it is close-looped – stimuli are precisely synchronized with hippocampal activity," said Fried.

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## Jewish Baseball Players

# Yentl at the bat, part I: Jewish women and baseball, Aviva Kempner

BILL SIMONS

Traditional Orthodox Judaism is patriarchal, evidenced by restricting the rabbinate, minyan and Torah study to men as well as gender separation in the synagogue. The 1983 Barbra Streisand movie “Yentl” dramatized these barriers. In America, Jews encountered a more open society. As the symbol of America, baseball gave many Jewish males a means to affirm their growing comfort in the physical world. The role of baseball in the assimilation of Jewish males has received significant comment. However, Jewish women in baseball remain subject to neglect. Girls and women with baseball interests are typically relegated to softball and spectatorship, and, for Jewish females, ethnicity has added an additional barrier. Although occasional exhibits, conferences and publications have referenced Jewish women in baseball, more work is needed. Our starting point is with three storytellers, women who tell truths about Jewish baseball.

“Yentl at the Bat” focuses on filmmaker Aviva Kempner, sports scholar Rabbi Rebecca Alpert and biographer Jane Leavy. Still prolific, they are of the same generation, born within a five-year period between 1946 and 1951, thus with experiential knowledge of the Neo-Victorianism that prevailed during their 1950s childhoods and of the Second Feminist Wave that emerged during their entry into adulthood. Historical context necessitated that Kempner, Alpert and Leavy confront the place of women, namely their role, within two patriarchal institutions to which they were wedded, Judaism and baseball. Women, as outsiders to the fraternity, view baseball with a different sensibility, perspective and sensitivity than their male counterparts. As documented by their work, Judaism adds an additional component to baseball’s gender prism.

Circumstances of history and birth rendered baseball documentarian Aviva Kempner an observant outsider to America and its national pastime. In 1925, her father, Harold Kempner, a Lithuanian immigrant, arrived in the United States. Pursuing an elusive American Dream, Harold found antisemitism a barrier to medical school. During World War II, Harold served in the American Army that liberated Europe. While stationed in Germany, he married a Holocaust survivor, Helen Ciesla. Their daughter, Aviva, born in December 1946, was the first American-Jewish child born in postwar Berlin. In 1950, the Kempner family settled in Detroit.

Prior to the war, identification with Tigers slugger Hank Greenberg facilitated Harold’s Americanization. For Harold, the ballpark more than night school resonated with the true American vernacular. He shared Greenberg lore with Aviva and her brother, Jonathan. To young Aviva, Greenberg seemed part of the *Kol Nidre*. Her father gave Aviva a counterbalance to the canards that Jews were timid, weak and physically inept.

And it was the filmmaker’s mother, the artist Helen (Hanka) Ciesla Kempner Covensky who inspired her first film, “Partisans of Vilna” (1986), a documentary chronicling Jewish resistance to the Nazis. A native of Poland, Helen survived the Holocaust by posing as a Gentile, but Auschwitz consumed the lives of her parents, sister and other loved ones.

Aviva named her film company the Ciesla Foundation. It preserves the name and legacy of her mother’s family while combatting negative images of Jews by focusing on heroic episodes and individuals. Her second film was “The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg” (1998).

For Kempner, the heroic Jewish freedom fighters of her mother’s Europe and the heroic Jewish baseball player of her father’s America were linked chapters in a larger story.

The September 1934 controversy concerning Greenberg’s competing obligations to the Detroit Tigers, fighting for the American League pennant, and his Jewish heritage, requiring observance of the High Holidays, is central to Kempner’s film. After agonizing soul searching, heightened by conflicting advice, Greenberg played on Rosh Hashanah. His two home runs paced the Tigers to a 2-1 victory. With the pennant all but assured, Greenberg did not play on Yom Kippur.

The great strength of “The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg” rests with Kempner’s ability to capture the consciousness and conversations of the generation of Jewish Americans who came of age with Hank Greenberg. Kempner’s most important audience did not live to see the film. Divorced, Aviva’s father, Harold, moved to Israel in 1973, telling her there were two things he would miss – “his kids and baseball.” Harold died in 1976. Through Harold’s hero, Aviva found a powerful pathway to her fa-

ther. When Aviva presented “The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg” at the Baseball Hall of Fame on Father’s Day 2000, it evoked Barbra Streisand’s moving song “Poppa, can you hear me?” from Yentl.

Most of Kempner’s films have focused on neglected Jewish issues and courageous protagonists. In addition to her Hank Greenberg documentary, another Kempner film features a Jewish ballplayer, catcher Moe Berg.

“The Spy Behind Home Plate” (2019) captures Berg’s outsider status – catcher hidden by a mask, an intellectual in pre-analytics baseball, accomplished linguist secretive in multiple languages, ethnic Jew distanced from ancestral traditions, enigma alienated from family, target of speculation about sexual orientation and America’s unknown top atomic spy during World War II. Primarily a good field, no-hit major league backup catcher (1923, 1926-1939), Berg held degrees from two Ivy League universities and a Sorbonne certificate.

Berg’s Jewishness is central to “The Spy Behind Home Plate,” albeit that ethnic identification in Kempner’s film relies more on assertion and implication than on close examination of beliefs, values, and lifestyle. During World War II, Berg, an OSS operative, monitored Italian and German scientists in Nazi-dominated Europe. He prepared to assassinate Werner Heisenberg, Germany’s leading atomic physicist, with a pistol and then take his own life with cyanide, actions ultimately rendered unnecessary by delays in Germany’s atomic development.

As a Jewish woman and thus a baseball outlier, Kempner reports from a vantage point distinct from the men’s club. She had to fight hard for funding for her Greenberg film at a time when foundation money flowed to Ken Burns’ Baseball series. Then, denied general release, Kempner engaged in a campaign of hard travel to promote the Greenberg film, ultimately a popular and critical success – and her signature work.

Bill Simons is a professor emeritus at SUNY Oneonta where he continues to teach courses in American history. He is also the co-director of The Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, and served as a speaker for the New York Council on the Humanities.



## On the Jewish food scene

# Taste testing cookies

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN

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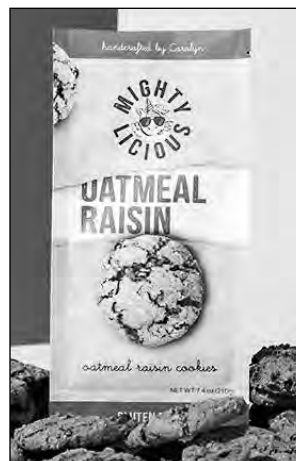
It’s a tough job, but someone has to do it. That’s what I thought after asking for samples of Mightylicious Cookies. Taste testing cookies so readers will know if they are any good is an important part of my job. (If you’re wondering if I’m finding it hard to keep a straight face while writing this, you are correct.)

*The Reporter’s* e-mail is filled with press releases of all kinds. My favorites feature books that sound interesting. My second favorite are those that offer to send food samples. Call it a side benefit of the job, but writing about these samples serves an educational purpose; it lets people know about new varieties of kosher food. While canned and jarred kosher food is fairly easy to find nowadays, that was not always true so sharing this information can help people who not only keep kosher, but have dietary restrictions.

This is true for Mightylicious Cookies since their cookies are not only kosher (they are certified by Kof-K kosher), but are also gluten-free. According to the press release, they are “100% free of gluten, wheat, rye, barley, and RBST. The entire line is made from all-natural, non-GMO ingredients.” (RBST means that dairy ingredients come from cows who did not receive the hormone recombinant bovine somatotropin.)

It offers seven varieties of cookies: brown butter chocolate chip, brown butter shortbread, oatmeal raisin, double Dutch chocolate chip, Grandma Arline’s oatmeal coconut, salted peanut butter and vegan chocolate chip. I didn’t want to be greedy so I only asked to test three kinds: oatmeal raisin, double Dutch chocolate chip and salted peanut butter. I also asked a friend who has celiac disease to help me do the taste testing since she is familiar with other varieties of non-gluten cookies.

The first thing to note is that there are two types of cookie lovers: those who like crunchy cookies and those who like soft, chewy cookies. (OK, OK, there is a third type: people who don’t care what its texture is as long as it’s a cookie, but that’s not important right



Mightylicious Cookies (Photos used with permission of Mightylicious Cookies)

now.) I like chewy cookies, so I was pleased that the Mightylicious Cookies have a great chewy texture. The bags are divided into five packets of two cookies each, making it easy to put the cookies in lunch bags or take them with you on the go. It also helps keep them from going stale.

As for our thoughts about the individual cookies:

◆ Double Dutch chocolate chip: We tried these first. They are very rich. My friend ate half of hers and was satisfied. I finished mine and, if I hadn’t had to taste two more cookies, could have easily eaten a second.

◆ Oatmeal raisin: My friend is not a big fan of oatmeal raisin cookies, but she thought these were fine. I generally love oatmeal raisin cookies. While I enjoyed these, the flavor seemed different. It may be the maple syrup, which I generally like, but have never had in oatmeal raisin cookies before.

◆ Peanut butter: These were my friend’s favorite. She liked that they were not super sweet, which was interesting because they contain the most sugar. However, they also offer the greatest amount of protein. I thought they were good too, but am torn about which cookie I like best.

I’ll be hearing more opinions about the cookies when other *Reporter* staff members taste them. It’s only fair to share the wealth (and the sugar and calories). Mightylicious Cookies are definitely good cookies and not only for those with celiac disease. In fact, if I hadn’t known they were gluten free, I would not have guessed.



# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Jewish humor vs. humor about Judaism

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Is there a difference between Jewish humor and humor about Judaism? Jennifer Caplan, author of “Funny You Don’t Look Funny: Judaism and Humor from the Silent Generation to Millennials” (Wayne State University Press), certainly thinks so, which is why she doesn’t include works by Mel Brooks in her study. Instead she focuses on humor with specific Jewish content. However, Jeremy Dauber, who wrote “Mel Brooks: Disobedient Jew” (Yale University Press), believes Jewish humor – humor with a Jewish sensibility – exists in its own right. The difference in their approaches offers insights on the changing ways comedians and humorists discuss Judaism and how Jewish sensibility has become part of American culture.

In “Funny You Don’t Look Funny,” Caplan charts the ways comedians have approached Jewish ritual practices and the Jewish community, along with their own Jewish identities, over the past century. She believes this close look will offer information “about the relationship between Jews and humor that goes deeper than the mere coincidence that a certain humorist was born into a particular family.” She sees a changing approach by comedians depending on which of these four generations they belong to: “the Silent Generation (b. 1924-45), the Baby Boom (b. 1946-65), Generation X (b. 1966-79) and Millennials (b. 1980-95).” Caplan examines their differences to show how Judaism and Jewish humor have changed over the past century.

Her analysis emphasizes the difference between Judaism and Jewishness. For Caplan, Jewishness is the way people feel about their own identity. That means that someone can feel Jewish and still be alienated from Judaism as a religion. She notes that many comedians have seen Judaism as a “thing,” meaning “something broken, abandoned, or no longer useful.” Her main interest is to determine “whether humorists present Judaism as something vital and useful or dead and dysfunctional.... my argument is that the children and grandchildren of the turn-of-the-century immigrants, the members of the Silent Generation, began a process of Thingifying Judaism that their Baby Boomer children continued.... Gen X pushed back against this Thingification and began to resacralize certain elements in their humor, while profaning others.”

Looking closely at writers/comedians from those generations, Caplan sees a real change in the way they approach Judaism, including which aspects of Jewishness/Judaism they see as fair game for humor. For example, the

members of the Silent Generation she discusses – Woody Allen and Joseph Heller – are atheists who see religion as detrimental to life. However, while they made fun of God, religious texts and/or religious ritual, they valued and sought to protect the Jewish people. The author also explores the writings of Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud to show that, while it was fine to make fun of Jewish ritual and practice, the lives of individual Jews were sacrosanct. They were also willing to let different versions of Judaism exist in the Jewish community, from assimilated Jews to those with Ortho-practice.

Caplan refers to the Baby Boomer generation as the “Copycat Generation” since its members originally followed the path of the Silent Generation, but later began to copy the mores of Gen X. This means that TV shows such as “Saturday Night Live” and “Seinfeld” began by making fun of religion and protecting the Jewish community. As time went by, the author sees their content as coming “to agree with the up-and-coming Gen X comedians who were tearing down tribalism in the interest of multicultural harmony. The Baby Boomers continued the depiction of religious ritual as useless while also opening the door to satirize Jews as people.” The one exception is the Holocaust: there were protests the times someone referred to Nazis or the Holocaust on both of these programs.

According to Caplan, members of Gen X began to take the practice of Judaism more seriously. While not moving toward Orthodoxy, they see Judaism as something whose practices have meaning. She reviews a variety of works produced by this generation – which includes Nathan Englander and the Coen brothers – to show their appreciation of the Jewish community within which ritual can take place. The Jewish aspects of these works portray ritual as having real power and meaning to people.

Caplan notes that the Millennial generation is still developing its ideas of humor, but seems to feel everything is fair game for humor. Their works have moved away from stereotypes – for example, the author notes the different way they treat Jewish mothers in their humor – but are willing to make fun of everything from religious ritual to Israel and the Holocaust. However, unlike prior generations, they are not worried about the future of the Jewish people because they don’t believe that Jews – or the Jewish community – will disappear. These writers/comedians also find meaning in Judaism and Jewish rituals.

“Funny You Don’t Look Funny” is an interesting and

challenging book because Caplan’s ideas run counter to what many people feel constitutes Jewish humor. Her look at the changing generations, though, offers insights into the development of the Jewish communal ideas and ideals over the decades.

While Caplan does not call Brooks’ humor Jewish humor, Dauber feels that Jewish humor plays a prominent role in Brooks’ work, even though he rarely directly wrote about Judaism or Jewish rituals. Dauber’s book is more of an analysis of the comedian’s writing and films than a biography. Yes, there are biographical details, particularly of Brooks’ youth since that plays an important part in his development. His marriages and relationship to his children, however, get short shrift, but readers won’t complain because Dauber is clear that his main interest is how Brooks’ humor is based on his Jewish instincts.

First, Dauber sees himself as “chronicling Brooks’ life – his Jewish life, which in this case is almost the same thing.” That means as a comedian and writer, Brooks’ impulses “ping-pong between allegiance and rebellion.” This is a man who makes fun of the system, yet works within that same system. Unlike Groucho Marx, whom Dauber calls an anarchist, Brooks learned to constrain himself; his main format was parody, which, while making fun of something, also shows admiration for the original. Dauber notes that Brooks took parody further than most comedians: his “parody was nothing less than the essential statement of American Jewish tension between *them* and *us*, culturally speaking; between affection for the mainstream and alienation from it.”

The early part of the book focuses on the atmosphere in which Brooks (whose birth name was Melvin Kaminsky) was raised: his father died when he was young, and his mother and three older siblings were forced to work. That made Brooks the coddled youngest child, while at the same time leaving him free from supervision. Humor was his way to survive and he later picked it as his career path. However, the path was not a smooth one. Brooks slowly worked his way up from a minor performer in the Catskills to being a gofer for Sid Caesar’s original TV show. Dauber follows his career and writes in detail about Brooks’ work and how popular feeling about it has changed. For example, the first film of “The Producers” with Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder was not considered a huge success. It was only with “Blazing Saddles,” which featured an outsider as a hero, that he succeeded in a big way. The movie included scenes that no one else had dared put to film – for example, the cowboys having intestinal difficulty after eating beans – that may have been low humor, but which also captured what might have been the reality of the situation.

Dauber notes that Brooks’ Jewishness is not based on religion, but rather a way of viewing the world. For the author, “Jewishness provided the roots of [his] comedy, and it protected him from the disillusionments of that comedy’s failure to take hold, especially at the beginning. It helped him to look backward, for his source material and otherwise, and to look forward, to stardom and artistic success – just as historical longing and utopian optimism have always been the poles of not just Jewish comedy, but Jewish identity.”

Fans of Brooks’ work don’t have to agree with Dauber’s theories in order to enjoy “Mel Brooks: Disobedient Jew.” The story of his artistic development and the review of his work over the decades will be enough to keep their interest.

## The unusual history of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Black Jewish messiah

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Minor historical figures can have an unusually large impact on history. Take for example, David Reubeni. In his introduction to “Diary of a Black Jewish Messiah: The Sixteenth-Century Journey of David Reubeni through Africa, the Middle East, and Europe” (Stamford University Press), Alan Verskin suggests that Reubeni’s visit to Portugal was the impetus for King Joao III’s request that the pope bring the Inquisition to Portugal. Verskin, associate professor of history at the University of Rhode Island, discusses what is known about Reubeni and offers a translation of the diary Reubeni kept during his travels.

In the opening of his diary, Reubeni writes, “I am David the son of King Solomon, of blessed memory. My older brother is King Joseph who, from his throne in the desert of Habor, rules over thirty myriads – over the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh.” He claims that he traveled to Europe to meet with the pope and the rulers of Europe to gain weapons in order to conquer the Holy Land from the Muslims. The Europe he approached was not one friendly to Jews: Spain would not let a Jew set foot on its shores without special permission. In fact, there were supposed to be no Jews remaining in Spain or Portugal because they either had had to leave the country or convert to Christianity. However, these converts, known as conversos, were still not fully accepted: although they were no longer Jewish, they were suspected of practicing Jewish customs in secret.

While Reubeni never claimed to be a messiah, Verskin says his arrival in 1524 came at a time when “apocalyptic thinking was widespread across social classes [of Europe], and there was an atmosphere of pervasive fear and anticipation of the coming of the End.” While Reubeni’s actual ethnic identity is unknown, his skin color played into a Jewish belief that the lost tribes of Israel were hidden somewhere on the African continent. Although in his diary Reubeni describes traveling through Islamic countries

disguised as a Muslim, the first historical evidence of him outside his diary is when he arrived penniless in Europe, claiming to have been robbed.

Reubeni must have been a convincing speaker. He managed to receive money, clothing and other gifts from every town and country he visited. In Portugal, conversos flocked to him, although Reubeni claims he made no effort to help them return to Judaism. In fact, he chastised those who did because they interfered with his mission. Still, it’s understandable that these forced converts hoped that this mysterious man from a Jewish kingdom was there to redeem them. The fact that Reubeni hoped to conquer the Holy Land and create a Jewish kingdom there also fed into their desire for change.

Reubeni’s diary is interesting for what is missing: there are no philosophical or theological discussions of Judaism. In fact, its pages are filled with trivia. A large portion lists the gifts he gave or received and their cost. He frequently complains about his servants or the evil men who are thwarting his plans. Reubeni is not beyond beating his slaves when they displease him or sending away servants who have made him unhappy. He admits that his anger sometimes gets the best of him and that his desire for honor created problems for his mission.

As Verskin notes in his introduction, there is no historical record of the Jewish kingdom of which Reubeni speaks. Was it real or was he a con man? Was he a Muslim (as he says he had to pretend to be in order to reach Europe safely) who pretended to be a Jew? Did he really plan to conquer the Holy Land or was his plan an elaborate fraud? And, even if it began as a fraud, did he come to believe that he would be able to unite the forces of Europe against the forces of Islam? It’s difficult to tell, which is what makes his story so interesting.

Reubeni’s ending was not a pleasant one. He was arrested when trying to visit the Holy Roman Emperor See “Messiah” on page 6

*This dedicated book section was made possible by a generous donation from Merri Pell-Preus. The Reporter thanks her for her support over the years.*



# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Two mysteries and a thriller

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

◆ The most Jewish content: "Sunset Empire"

A new subgenre of detective fiction features alternative versions of our world. For example, in "Sunset Empire: A Morris Baker Novel" by Josh Weiss (Grand Central), while World War II and the Holocaust did take place, Senator Joseph McCarthy, rather than Dwight D. Eisenhower, was elected the 34<sup>th</sup> president of the United State. The result is agents (known as Hueys) from McCarthy's Un-American Activities Committee Office act as their own private police force, discriminating against Asians, Jews and anyone else they suspect of supporting the communist cause. The U.S. is also fighting a futile war in Korea, and public opinion about Koreans changes when a member of the American Korean community sets off a bomb in a department store.

In the first novel in the series, "Beat the Devils," Baker worked as a detective in the Los Angeles Police Department as the way of atoning for the activities he was forced to take part in during the Holocaust. (To read *The Reporter's* review of the book, visit [www.thereportergroup.org/archives/feature/off-the-shelf-post-world-war-ii-mysteries](http://www.thereportergroup.org/archives/feature/off-the-shelf-post-world-war-ii-mysteries).) After difficulties with both the Hueys and fellow policemen, Morris now works as a private detective. Life takes an interesting turn when the wife of Henry Kissinger hires him to find her husband. Kissinger works for Vice President Richard Nixon and was in town to meet members of the Japanese government. Morris is also asked to look into the disappearance of four men from the synagogue to which he belongs. Could there be a tie between their disappearances and the camps to which Korean members of the community are being transported?

The plot of "Sunset Empire" is a wild ride and includes real life characters, although with very alternative life trajectories. Morris is a great character: he's irritable, argumentative and sometimes his own worst enemy. But he also fights to discover the truth of what's happening at the risk of his own life. Readers who have not read the first novel (but please do because you'll love it) will still be able to follow the plot because Weiss gives enough details to answer any questions they may have. At the end my review of "Beat the Devils," I wondered if that work would be the first of the series. Now I'm hoping "Sunset Empire" is not the last.

◆ The next most Jewish content: "The Chateau"

Thrillers are not my favorite genre because the characters are usually unpleasant and definitely not people I want to spend time with, even in a book. Fortunately, that is not true of "The Chateau" by Jaclyn Goldis (Emily Bestler Books), some of whose characters are so appealing you might want to be friends with them.

The novel begins when four friends visit Provence to stay at the grand manor owned by Seraphine Demargelasse. Three – Darcy, Jade and Vix – met while studying abroad 20 years before. Arabelle, whose grandmother who worked for Seraphine, became friends with them when the college students first visited the chateau. Now Seraphine has invited them for a visit without revealing the reason behind the invitation.

It's clear that all the women have secrets. Darcy, who is Seraphine's granddaughter, believes her husband is having an affair with Jade. Jade knows that Seraphine betrayed her father's family during the Holocaust and wants to regain lost property she believes is in the chateau. Vix, who is fighting breast cancer, has been asked to bring specific tools and wonders what Seraphine wants her to do. Arabelle is generally dissatisfied with her life and a bit resentful of the other women. Then there is Ralph, the mysterious caretaker, who doesn't know much about gardening. When a murder occurs, it becomes clear that someone in the household is

the killer, but who and why?

"The Chateau" is an extremely well done thriller. At one point, I wrote down four predictions and had the satisfaction of having three of them come true, while I was close on the fourth. However, there were so many twists and turns I didn't anticipate that made the work feel incredibly suspenseful. As with any thriller, people are not always what they seem, but, in this case, there were numerous surprises that took my breath away. As for the novel's ending, my reaction was, "No, it can't end now!" Anyone who loves thrillers will want to add this to their list of summer reading.

◆ The least Jewish content: "Karl Marx, Private Eye"

Confession time: the only Jewish character in this mystery is Karl Marx, who considered himself an atheist. That would make his daughter, Eleanor, another character in the novel, Jewish by patrilineal descent. Since nothing connected to Judaism happens in Jim Feast's "Karl Marx, Private Eye" (PM Press), why did I ask for a review copy? How could I resist a book that calls Marx a private eye and includes a 16-year-old Sherlock Holmes? Yes, that Sherlock Holmes, as in the character from Sir Arthur

Conan Doyle's works.

The title of the book is misleading: Marx does not actually work as a private eye. Instead he and the young Sherlock look to solve several murders that take place at a Bohemian spa. Although Marx and Eleanor have befriended the youth, they keep him at arm's length because they are staying at the spa under assumed names since authorities consider Marx a radical troublemaker. The question becomes which of the characters will be able to uncover the true killer and the reason behind the murders.

"Karl Marx, Private Eye" definitely is not a contemporary action-packed private detective novel. The writing style is old-fashioned as if to mimic writers from Doyle's time period. There's also a great deal of philosophical discussion. I managed to guess the murderer, mostly by process of elimination. I was not sure every question was successfully answered, but that's a minor quibble. Although the novel moved very slowly, it was good fun to read about Eleanor, an unusual woman for her time period, and see Feast's idea of how young Sherlock developed the skills he used so well later in his life.

## Nontraditional biographies

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

The dictionary defines a biography as an account of someone's life. Normally, that means outlining the events that took place between a person's birth and death. However, two recent works are as much, if not more, interested in the aftereffects of their subjects' lives than they are of the details of those lives. In "Maimonides: Faith in Reason" (Yale University Press), Alberto Manguel offers far more information about Maimonides' writings and how future generations were influenced by them than he does of his subject's life. While Benjamin Balint does offer more details about Bruno Schultz's life, he also focuses on the artist/author's work and the debate over who should own his heritage in "Bruno Schulz: An Artist, a Murder, and the Hijacking of History" (W. W. Norton and Company).

Manguel seems an odd choice to write a work about Maimonides: in his preface, he acknowledges that, before researching his subject, he only "had a vague notion of who Maimonides was (a great philosopher, a great legislator, a great medical doctor) and I remembered the intriguing title of his *Guide To The Perplexed*, but little more." His reason for writing the book was thinking that "Maimonides might be suitable to my condition of permanent perplexity." That means that Manguel focuses more on Maimonides' ideas than he does on his life story. That is also understandable in a different way: many details of the rabbi/philosopher/doctor's life are lost to history.

Readers do learn some basic details: Maimonides was born Moses ben Maimon in Cordoba in 1138 when Spain was still under Arabic rule. (Although he later gained the names Maimonides and Rambam, Manguel uses the former throughout the book.) Thirteen years later, his family left the area and traveled through other parts of Spain, North Africa and Palestine before settling in Egypt in 1165 where Maimonides lived until his death in 1204. While in Egypt, he practiced medicine, in addition to writing his best known works, "The Mishnah Torah" and "The Guide to the Perplexed." He also produced many medical works and served as a doctor to the royal family of Egypt. Maimonides refused payment for his religious services and teaching, which made his medical work necessary in order to support his family.

The main focus of the book is its overview of Maimonides' work. Chapters focus on him as a physician, a scholar, a philosopher and a believer. Maimonides' philosophical approach was generally a rational one, although contemporary readers may disagree with his approach to rationality. According to Manguel, Maimonides saw the body and soul as one thing: "The soul has its home in the body and guides it from within. In this respect, God's law is aimed at essentially two things: the health of the body and the improvement of the soul; in every case, the health of the former is a means of achieving that of the latter. The soul is also improved by acquiring the true knowledge of all that a human being is capable of knowing. The more knowledge the soul acquires, the better it is able to fulfil God's commandments." Maimonides also felt it was impossible to speak about God's attributes: one should only speak of God in the negative, noting what God was not, rather than defining God in comparison to humans. As Manguel writes, "Careful not to anthropomorphize or define God through external qualities, Maimonides concentrated instead on understanding his commandments. 'Why is this happening?' in Maimonides' mind became 'How should I respond?'"

Although "Maimonides: Faith in Reason" is part of the Yale University Press Jewish Lives series, the work seems aimed at a general audience rather than a Jewish one. Those specifically interested in Maimonides' work from a Jewish

standpoint may find some sections of less interest since they also look at his influence on non-Jewish philosophers and the philosophers who may have influenced him. It also helps to have a basic knowledge of philosophical concepts in order to understand the meaning of specific terms. However, Manguel's book does offer a good introductory look at the work of this major Jewish figure.

While Maimonides/Rambam is a well known Jewish figure, the same was not always true of Bruno Schulz, an artist/writer, who gained headlines when a mural he painted during the Holocaust was found and secretly transported to Israel in 2001. That was only the beginning of the debate about who owned Schulz's legacy. As Balint notes, "Schulz was born an Austrian, lived as a Pole, and died a Jew. His life began under the banner of the Austro-Hungarian double-headed eagle and ended in the genocidal dehumanizations of Nazi occupation. Born a citizen of the Habsburg monarchy, Schulz would – without moving – become a subject of the West Ukrainian People's Republic (November 1918 to July 1919), the Second Polish Republic (1919 to 1939), the USSR (September 1939 to July 1940), and, finally, the Third Reich. Yet to use his own metaphor, Schulz remained throughout a citizen of the Republic of Dreams."

Born in 1892, Schulz's birthplace, Drohobycz, was relatively friendly to its Jews. Balint notes that "during Schulz's childhood, more than 40 percent of the town's inhabitants were Jews, some 30 percent Catholic Poles, and 30 percent Ukrainians. By decades-long tradition, Drohobycz was administered by a Catholic Polish mayor and a Jewish vice mayor. Some 80 percent of the employees and managers in the city's oil refineries were Jews... Most shops were closed on Shabbat." However, Balint writes that Schulz himself had little to do with Judaism, even at one point declaring himself not Jewish in order to marry, although the marriage never took place. His true world was Drohobycz: even though he left on several occasions, he always returned. In fact, even when it became clear that it was dangerous to remain, Schulz refused to leave.

Schulz managed some success as a writer and artist – his stories were praised and exhibitions of his artwork took place – before the German invasion put an end to his career. When the Nazis took over control of Drohobycz, Schulz came under the protection of SS Hauptscharführer Felix Landau, a sadist who tried to protect his pet artist. Landau had him paint murals, among which were the one taken to Israel. Finally, Schulz realized the need to escape and had his plans set, but he was murdered in 1942 before they could be set in motion. Balint includes five potential versions of Schulz's death because there is no agreement about what actually happened.

Most biographies conclude with the death of their subject. However, Balint discusses Schulz's continued influence for 80 more pages, which focus on what happened to his work and reputation after his death. When the Soviet Union took over his town, Schulz's work and life disappeared. Balint writes of how what remained of his work – much was lost during the war – was rediscovered and of the debate that occurred about Schulz's heritage, with him being claimed not only by the Jewish community, but Poland and Ukraine. As Balint notes, "Among his readers and commentators, Schulz's fiction has become a Rorschach for personal and national predilections both." Those unfamiliar with Schulz's work will find learning about his life and heritage gives them a better understanding of the Jewish European experience before World War II. Admirers of Schulz's art and writing will gain a greater understanding of the world that influenced him, even if he did not always acknowledge its existence.

## Messiah. . . Continued from page 5

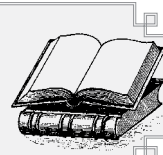
Charles V and condemned by the Inquisition before being turned over to secular authorities to be burned at the stake in 1538. As for his legacy, Verkin notes that Reubeni was largely ignored until after World War I when the Zionist movement began to gain success. Then he was seen as a proto-Zionist: someone who wanted to create a kingdom of Israel with human hands, rather than waiting for God to deliver the Jews. Whatever readers think about Reubeni and his life, his tale is a fascinating look at 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish history.

Rabbi Rachel Esserman's previous book reviews can be found on *The Reporter's* website under "Features" at: <https://www.thereportergroup.org/past-articles/feature-book-review/feature-book-review-stream/book-review-stream>.





# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Graphic fiction and nonfiction

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

◆ A memoir: “We Are On Our Own”

When is a memoir not exactly a memoir? In the case of “We Are On Our Own: A Memoir” by Miriam Katin (Drawn and Quarterly), it’s when the graphic artist is really telling her mother’s story, more than her own. Her memoir recounts the events that took place from 1944-45 in Hungary, when Katin and her mother hid from the Nazis in plain sight.

Esther Levy is just realizing how difficult things are going to be under the German invaders, which is not made easier by the Hungarians who are happy to see Jews forced from their homes. Although she wants to wait for her husband to return from the army, Esther realizes she has no choice but to find a way to escape. This means lying to her daughter, Lily, about everything from the order to give their dog to the Nazis to the many horrible things that happen to her when she tries to keep the two of them safe. Lily has only a child’s understanding and wonders what happened to the God who was supposed to protect her.

“We Are On Our Own” is not only about the evils that befell Jews under Nazi rule, but the horror the conquering Soviet army perpetrated on the Hungarians they were freeing. What the work does show is Esther’s resilience and her desire to protect her child at all costs. The majority of the drawings are done in black and white with blurry lines and unclear outlines of the figures, which fits the tone of the work. The few color pages show the Nazi flag or reflect on Lily’s future. Parents should note that this is not a work for young children, but “We Are On Our Own” is a welcome addition to graphic works about World War II.

◆ A novel: “The Blood of the Virgin”

The desire to write screenplays and direct films seems like a compulsion in Sammy Harkham’s “The Blood of the Virgin” (Pantheon Books). Unfortunately, in 1971 Los Angeles, art doesn’t stand a chance when it comes to commercial films, which Seymour, a 27-year-old Jewish Iraqi immigrant, discovers when his scripts are cut and filming abruptly stopped, or he is forced to work long hours chopping and assembling negatives for B-grade horror movies.

Sammy’s home life isn’t much better: his wife, Ida, is exhausted and unhappy, which is not helped by the

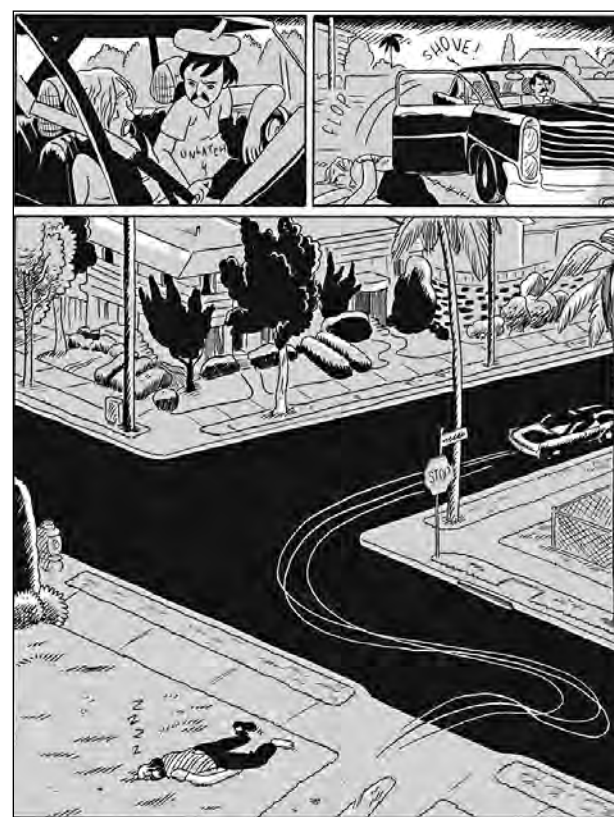


Above, left and right: Pages from “We Are On Our Own” by Miriam Katin (Used with the permission of Drawn and Quarterly)

fact their newborn baby keeps the couple from getting enough sleep. The two don’t spend much time together, especially when they have difficulty finding a babysitter and Sammy must attend a Hollywood party as part of his job. Alcohol, drugs, cigarette smoking and promiscuity abound, which actually makes these parties and the people’s lives seem dreary and joyless, rather than exciting. Among the questions asked are whether or not Ida and Sammy’s marriage will survive. Although the graphic novel features several different versions of a movie called “The Blood of the Virgin,” it’s also unclear if Sammy’s film was actually made.

Harkham’s black-and-white drawings help portray the mood of what occurs, even if only to show time passing without much happening. That includes the few hours of sleep Ida and Sammy get before their baby wakes up crying. There are a few scattered sections in color, including one possible version of “The Blood of the Virgin.” The novel is

definitely for adults and features some explicit sexual content. While it may not have been his intention, Harkham succeeds in making Hollywood and Sammy’s life unappealing. His method of doing so, though, was impressive.



Above and below: Pages from “Blood of The Virgin” by Sammy Harkham (Used with the permission of Pantheon Books)

## The priestly version of the Bible

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have debated the origin of the Bible, generally dividing it into four source documents written or compiled by the Yahwist, the Elohist, the Priestly writers and the Deuteronomist. Numerous books in contemporary times have sought to determine which chapters and verses belong to each source. In “The Consuming Fire: The Complete Priestly Source, from Creation to the Promised Land” (University of California Press), Liane M. Feldman has isolated and translated what she believes are the sections belonging to the priestly authors. Feldman, an assistant professor in the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, has also written a fascinating introduction explaining the reasoning for specific translations and the differences between the priestly book and the finished Bible. For anyone interested in biblical studies, this section alone makes it worth reading her book. Whether or not readers agree with her decisions, her choices and explanations are interesting and thought provoking.

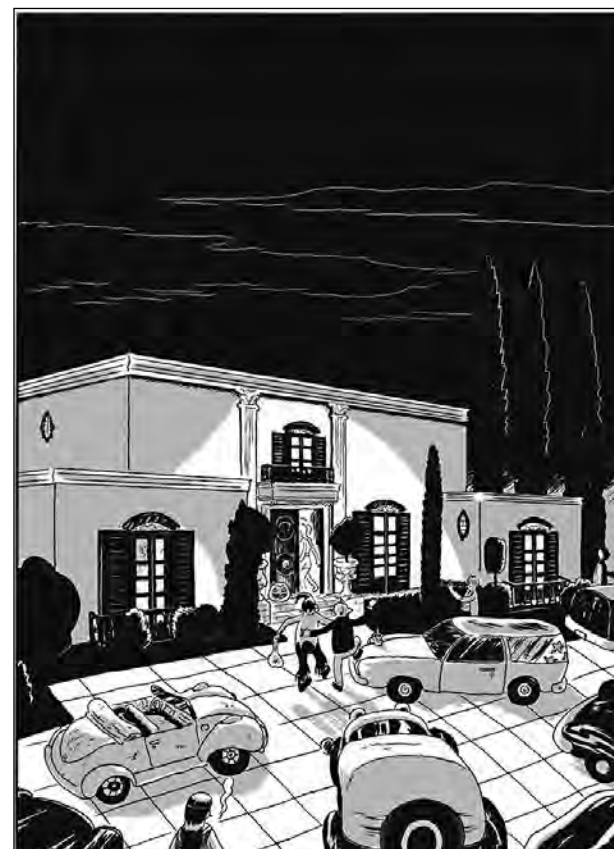
Feldman notes that “the primary reason I wanted to create this edition and translation of the biblical priestly narrative was because I felt strongly that this story needed to be presented as a work of literature.” She knows that some people might not consider it literature in light of contemporary storytelling, but she believes that the conventions of storytelling in the past were different from modern times – particularly when it comes to the genealogical sections, which she suggests readers/listeners of that time would have considered an important part of the literature. Feldman also does not see the work as a priestly text book as some have suggested: instead it is a story. However, the main character is not one human being or God, but rather the Dwelling Place, which is how she translates the *Mishkan*, usually called the Tabernacle in English. The reason for calling it the Dwelling Place is because, in the priestly book, God needs to have a place to live on Earth in order to keep a closer eye on his creation.

The author divides the priestly book into seven sections: “Creation and the Flood,” “The Era of the Patriarchs,” “The Descent to Egypt,” “At Mount Sinai,” “Building Yahweh’s Dwelling,” “The Eight-Day Inauguration of Yahweh’s Dwelling Place” (the longest section and the most important section) and “Leaving Mount Sinai.” Feldman also includes

“Possible Materials from the Priestly Narrative in the Book of Joshua,” but notes it’s far more difficult to isolate the priestly material in that book. What’s fascinating are the stories that are missing: Seth is the only child of Adam and Eve, which means there is no tale of rivalry between Cain and Abel. God never asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Isaac and Ishmael are never at odds. The same is true of Jacob and Esau; Esau never sells his birthright, nor does Jacob steal his blessing. The lack of rivalry continues with Jacob’s children. Joseph’s brothers never sell him to Egypt: he travels there on his own. Something similar is found in the stories of the women: Hagar and Ishmael are never expelled from Abraham’s camp. Jacob willingly marries both Leah and Rachel, and the women are never at odds. Even more interesting is that there is no story of the golden calf because Moses does not spend 40 days on Mt. Sinai.

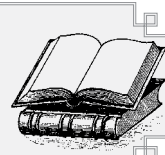
The reason these stories never appeared is due to the priestly book’s specific point of view. Feldman notes there are “five major differences between the priestly narrative and the compiled Pentateuch that shape the worldview of this narrative as a whole: (1) the idea that creation is fundamentally good, (2) the utilitarian approach to the patriarchal stories, (3) the centrality and visibility of the Sinai episode, (4) the focus of the wilderness complaints against the leaders, not Yahweh, and (5) the lack of conquest for the purpose of settlement outside the land of Canaan.” The author explains these ideas in great detail, but, in general, notes that the introductory books are there to lead to the most important moment: the preparation of the Dwelling Place so God can actually live there. She sees the work as having a far more “positive, optimistic outlook” than the final version of the Pentateuch.

Readers may question whether Feldman’s priestly version succeeds as a cohesive work. The answer is yes: if someone unfamiliar with the Bible read her book, they would not know anything is missing. The story stands on its own. There are a few sections where Feldman notes that parts may be missing, but these are minor enough that most readers won’t notice. As for readers who are familiar with the Pentateuch, they may note what is not there, but, if they don’t focus on that, but on what is, they will find that the work makes complete sense. “The Consuming Fire” succeeds in offering its readers an exciting and intriguing way to think about the Bible.





# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Deciding the children's fates

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

It's not unusual for novels to focus on a similar topic. In fact, this happens a great deal with those about World War II and its aftermath. The latest trend is works that look at the effect the war had on hidden children, those separated from their parents and protected by people willing to risk their lives for love or money, or to save a soul. The first novel looks at what happened to these children after the war, the second on the way hiding changed one child and the third on what occurred during the war. All left me with thoughts not only about how little these children understood their fate, but what should, or should not, have happened to them once the war was over.

### "Once We Were Home"

Jennifer Rosner's "Once We Were Home" (Flatiron Books) focuses on four children who lived through World War II. Roger was hidden in a monastery: his baptism occurred only when his relatives hoped to claim him after the war. Ana remembers her birth parents and the journey that brought her and her brother, Oscar, to their new home. Unfortunately, Oscar has no memory of them and wants to remain with the parents whom he has grown to love and who now love him and Ana. Yet, Ana clings to the memory of their birth parents and her life before the war. Renata, whose story begins in the 1960s, visits Israel for an archeological dig and is forced to confront questions about her late mother's life she never pondered before.

It soon becomes clear that Roger, Ana and Oscar will emigrate to Israel after the war. Roger is welcomed by an aunt and uncle who are overjoyed to have found him. Ana and Oscar are not willingly given up by their protectors; however, Ana embraces the woman who helps them leave Europe and is happy to live on a *kibbutz* once they arrive in Israel. Oscar, though, doesn't feel at home and misses Europe. In fact, all three have difficulties in adjusting after years pretending to be something other than who they once were. For example, even though Roger is happy to be with family, he remains confused by his mixed feelings toward both Judaism and Christianity: as someone who has been circumcised and baptized, where does he truly belong? How Regina ties to their stories is revealed only toward the end of the novel. However, she is not the only person to be surprised to discover her true heritage.

"Once We Were Home" is well done, both moving and thought provoking. The author offers no simple answers because there are none. What she does do is provide an excellent look at the way World War II affected adults and children decades after it ended.

### "At the Hour Between Dog and Wolf"

Some novels use interesting devices to show how

their characters change over the years. For example, each section of "At the Hour Between Dog and Wolf" by Tara Ison (Ig Publishing) opens with a school essay written by Marie-Jeanne Chantier about her life. But, as Marie-Jeanne notes, that first essay is "all lies, every word of it." Marie-Jeanne Chantier – the Christian orphan, the 12-year-old niece of Tante Berthe and Tonton Claude, and cousin of their son, Luke – does not exist. Marie-Jeanne is really Jewish Danielle Marton, whose father was murdered by the Nazis early in their occupation of France. Danielle's mother brought her to live with former employees of Danielle's grandparents in the hope that they would protect her.

Marie-Jeanne has difficulty adjusting to farm life after having lived in Paris, but slowly becomes used to the slower pace and begins to make friends. Although one friend is Jewish, she never reveals her own identity. She also starts wondering if her mother deserted her for reasons that had nothing to do with the war. Then Marie-Jeanne begins to suppress all memories of her past: it makes life so much easier to forget everything that occurred before she arrived. Problems arise when she begins to accept the fascist ideas preached by Claude and Luc. That acceptance creates additional problems, ones that may cause harm to those who helped her.

It's difficult to write about the ending of "At the Hour Between Dog and Wolf" without revealing too much of the plot, which raises some of the same questions as "Once We Were Home." The novel will leave readers debating Marie-Jeanne's final choice and what will occur once the last page of the novel is turned. Also open for debate are the reasons why Berthe and Claude risked their lives for someone not of their blood. Ultimately, the novel explores how circumstances beyond their control can change people, for the good and for the bad.

### "The Dutch Orphan"

The plot Ellen Keith's "The Dutch Orphan" (Park Row Books) focuses less on the title character than on two sisters whose lives are forever changed when the Nazis invade Amsterdam. Johanna is horrified by the way the Nazis treat her Jewish musician friends and, with her husband Willem who works at the zoo, finds way to help them and other Jews hide or escape. Unfortunately, Johanna's sister Liesbeth has just married Maurits, a Nazi sympathizer whose main concerns are making money and rising in society.

The two sisters, who were once very close, find politics coming between them. Johanna doesn't trust her sister, especially when someone betrays those helping the Jewish musicians. Liesbeth misses her sister, but feels she must support her husband, even when he complains about her inability to have children. The sisters' relationship becomes

even chillier when Johanna accidentally becomes pregnant.

The Dutch orphan of the title comes into Johanna's life after her own baby is a still birth and she's asked to save the child of a Jewish couple. Will baby Aletta be safe with Johanna, especially if she continues her resistance activities? Plus, how will she and her sister relate now that Johanna has what Liesbeth most desires?

The ending of "The Dutch Orphan" raised questions that readers might not have considered without having read these three novels together. Johanna, Willem and Liesbeth love Aletta, but the novel leaves open questions the author doesn't consider: after the war, will they try to discover if Aletta has any living relatives or will they continue to consider her their daughter? And will they ever tell her the true story of her life? That this is not discussed doesn't diminish the power and suspense this novels holds. In fact, if read alone, these questions might never have risen. But it's difficult not to consider them after reading "Once We Were Home" and "At the Hour Between Dog and Wolf."

### Afterthoughts

What struck me when reading these novels is that the children involved had no real understanding of what was happening to them. Being deserted by a parent is one of the most traumatic events that can occur to a child, yet no one explained to them the reasons behind this desertion. But how could anyone have explained why and how the Nazis were exterminating the Jewish population of Europe? And would the children have truly understood even if they did?

These novels also raise an additional question: What was the correct way to deal with these children after the war? I can understand the many points of views the novels revealed. For children who had no memory of their lives before the war, it's understandable that they might want to stay with the only parents they had ever known. However, I also wondered – especially for boys who were circumcised – whether these children would have been safe if their Jewish ancestry became known. Also, should Jewish families who were searching for any living relatives have been denied the right to regain what little family remained? These children would then live with those who looked like them and could share stories of their birth parents and extended families. While it may have seemed cruel to tear Jewish children from those who saved them, the desire to save as many Jewish souls after the destruction of the Holocaust made the wishes of individual children seem less important for those looking to rescue them. For those rescuers, keeping the Jewish people alive trumped all other consideration. Unfortunately, there is no one answer; these novels made it possible to feel for each and every person involved.

## Three novels by Israeli authors

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

### ◆ "Professor Schiff's Guilt"

Are we responsible for our ancestors' sins? If we have in some way benefitted from their actions, what do we owe the descendants of those they harmed? Readers might expect a novel focusing on this topic to take a serious literary approach. That is not true of "Professor Schiff's Guilt" by Agur Schiff (New Vessel Press), though. Schiff's novel – which is part satire, part farce – offers a humorous and thought-provoking way to think about the past. The seriousness of the topic and the absurdity of Professor Schiff's situation mix to create an unusual work of fiction.

Professor Schiff has no difficulty telling his friends and family that his grandfather's grandfather's grandfather, Klonimus Zelig Schiff, was a slave owner. Klonimus not only owned slaves, but encouraged many of them to convert to Judaism. After the death of his white, Jewish wife, Klonimus left his home in the New World with a pregnant former slave he now considered his wife and several other former slaves – all converts to Judaism – and headed to Africa to create a Jewish colony there. Something happened to the ship, whose wreckage has now been discovered, leading Professor Schiff to travel to an unnamed African nation to reclaim his ancestor's belongings. Unfortunately for him, he is arrested under a new law that prohibits slave owners' descendants from profiting from their ancestors' deeds. While awaiting trial, Professor Schiff is housed in a villa and offered opportunities to learn about Africa.

These sections of the novel are intertwined with the professor's life before leaving Tel Aviv. While trying to collect money owed to him by a lawyer, he is offered Lucille Tettle-Ofosu, an African refugee living illegally in Israel, in exchange for the debt. Professor Schiff falls in love with Lucille at first glance, something his wife, Tami, finds both amusing and frustrating, especially when Lucille comes to live with them. That problem is partly solved when they offer Lucille a job helping Tami's

step-grandfather. However, that solution soon creates additional difficulties.

What can't be captured when discussing the plot of "Professor Schiff's Guilt" is the role that humor plays in the novel. The situations in Israel and Africa are laced with absurdity, especially when dealing with Professor Schiff's naivness: he clearly doesn't understand historic or contemporary racism, particularly how his ancestor and his own actions mirror each other. This leads to a great many humorous situations. The novel is an excellent choice for book clubs interested in moral questions, although some members will shake their heads at just how little Professor Schiff comprehends about his situation and desires.

### ◆ "The Only Daughter"

Some novels offer a panoramic view of the world; others feature a slice of life. One example of the latter is A. B. Yehoshua's "The Only Daughter" (HarperVia), which takes place over the course of several weeks of Rachele Luzzato's life in Italy. Rachele is 12-year-old whose family's religious connections are a bit complex: her father and his divorced parents are Jewish. Although her mother is now Jewish, Rachele's maternal grandparents are Catholic. (Well, one is a practicing Catholic; the other is an atheist who still likes going to church.) Rachele is studying for her bat mitzvah with an Israeli rabbi, but still wants to act in her school Christmas play, in which she's been cast as the Madonna. Unfortunately, her father forbids her from doing so because he fears she will be unable to tell the difference between the play and real life.

Rachele's life is also unsettled because her father has just found out he has a brain tumor. Possible surgery is postponed while the family goes on a skiing vacation, although Rachele also spends time with each of her grandparents. The plot focuses on daily life during this period with the novel's main concern the exploration of family dynamics and Rachele's thoughts about Judaism. However, the writing is beautiful, as are the descriptions. In fact, the novel moves so smoothly, readers will glide through its pages without caring there is not a great deal of action.

One disconcerting thing about "The Only Daughter" is that it's not until page 161 that readers learn the novel takes place in 1999. Up to that point, there was nothing to show that it wasn't written about contemporary times. Yehoshua's last work is an odd little book: incredibly enjoyable, although it's not always easy to pinpoint why.

### ◆ "Where I Am"

Some people feel unsure about their place in the world. That definitely seems true of Reut in "Where I Am" by Dana Shem-Ur (New Vessel Press). Although she has lived with her husband, Jean Claude, in France for decades, she still doesn't feel completely at home. Reut, who was born in Israel, and Jean Claude met when they were in graduate school in the United States before moving to his home country. Reut never finished her degree, but has begun working on it again, in addition to her job translating books into Hebrew. Yet, somehow she still feels unsettled, especially when her Israeli impulses clash with French expectations of appropriate behavior. Even language can leave her unsettled, since she knows it is sometimes impossible to capture the meaning of word in a different language.

Her feelings are complicated by her relationship with Jean Claude, who makes her feel that any difficulties they face are somehow her fault. She is expected to completely support him, for example, hosting a party for Mikhail, an influential Russian writer her husband has befriended. When Jean Claude receives an invitation for them to visit Mikhail in Italy, he doesn't ask if she is interested, but expects her to be as enthusiastic as he is. It comes as no surprise that Reut often feels tired and alienated, and longs for time and space of her own.

While the ending of "Where I Am" leaves readers up in the air about what will happen in Reut's life, Shem-Ur does an excellent job showing the ups and downs of a long-term marriage, particularly the need for constant adjustment when one partner is prickly and changeable. The descriptions of Italy are beautiful and may make readers wish they were there. This novel also shows just how much drama there can be in a simple domestic relationship.

# FAMILY LIVING

## Babies bounce into community families



Solomon Moss Brockman



Dante Duane Decker-Johnson



Millie Pearl Gordon



Kendrick Jacob Harris



Zev Yosef Strosberg



Tessa Rae Walley

Information was supplied by area synagogues.

**Solomon Moss Brockman**

Born: August 6, 2022  
 Parents: Benjamin Brockman and Sophia Strosberg  
 Grandparents: Jeff and Marilyn Strosberg

**Dante Duane Decker-Johnson**

Parents: Jarred Johnson and Francesca Decker  
 Grandparents: Carole Rosen, John Decker and Noriko Oyama

Great-grandparent: Peggy Johnson

**Millie Pearl Gordon**

Born: February 10, 2023  
 Parents: Rachel and Zach Gordon  
 Grandparents: Nancy Dorfman and Jamie Tandlich, and Linda and Arnie Gordon

Great-grandparent: Ruth Dorfman

**Kendrick Jacob Harris**

Born: May 5, 2023  
 Parents: Josh and Cindy Harris  
 Grandparents: Jay and Alysia Harris, Iliana Yaneth Molina de Rivas and Jose Arturo Rivas Ceren  
 Great-grandparent: Matt Latessa, Bernie and Charlotte Harris, Concepcion del Carmen Molina, Manuel de Jesus Guardado, Teresa de Jesus Ceren Peña and Jacobo Rivas

**Zev Yosef Strosberg**

Born: March 31, 2023  
 Parents: Benjamin Strosberg And Madeline Sachs  
 Grandparents: Jeff and Marilyn Strosberg

**Layla Theresa Toolan**

Parents: Victoria Alt and Kevin Toolan  
 Grandparents: Michele Boyle and Allen Alt

**Tessa Rae Walley**

Born: November 16, 2022  
 Parents: Jonathan Walley and Rebecca Walley  
 Grandparents: Jeff and Marilyn Strosberg

**William Michael Weissberg**

Born: April 12, 2023  
 Parents: Jonathan Weissberg and Sharon Sorokin

### Did you know?

(NAPS) – Children can get protection against cancer-causing human papillomavirus with only two doses of HPV vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says this vaccine schedule, down from three doses, still provides safe, effective and long-lasting protection. Learn more at [www.cdc.gov/hpv](http://www.cdc.gov/hpv) or talk to your pediatrician.



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 Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

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**Jewish Community @ Rumble Ponies Game**

**Tuesday, July 18th**  
**Game Starts at 6:35pm**  
**Mirabito Stadium, 211 Henry St, Binghamton**  
**Tickets are \$4**

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will sponsor a Jewish community outing to see the Rumble Ponies baseball team. Tickets can be purchased through the Federation in one of three ways:

- 1) At its website, [www.jfgeb.org/](http://www.jfgeb.org/)
- 2) At the Federation office, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal
- 3) By Calling the Federation at 724-2332

**Tickets are non-refundable. Vouchers will be provided if the game is canceled due to rain.** The last day to purchase tickets is **Friday, July 14**; those purchasing by mail should include the form below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone number\*: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Where you can be reached on the day of the game.

Number of tickets: \_\_\_\_\_

**Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton**

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Carol Miller, MD  
 Kelly Wilmarth, FNP-C  
 Tamara Burger, CNM

401 Main Street, 1st Floor, Johnson City, New York 13790

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## Moving beyond reason to wisdom

RIVKAH SLONIM, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE ROHR CHABAD CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE AT BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

Ours is an era of reason, if not wisdom. From a young age, we are trained to seek proof; we gravitate toward the statistically substantiated and the scientifically qualified. The result is an almost knee-jerk, automatic eschewing of that which must be accepted on blind faith.

This theme is central to our *parasha* and is embodied in its name Chukat. Our sages teach that the commandments of the Torah are divided in three categories. The first are *mishpatim*, laws that are perfectly logical and of the sort human beings would in all likelihood have devised on their own such as the prohibition against murder and theft. The second category is *aidut*, laws that were put into effect to bear witness to axiomatic theological beliefs or/and the most important junctions in our national history. Examples of this include the observance of Passover or the mounting of a *mezuzah* on our doorposts. Finally, the Torah is also

comprised of *chok*, the category of statutes that defy logic, the laws that transcend human intellect and intelligence. Examples of these laws include *kashrut* (the kosher diet) and *shamez* (the prohibition against wearing a garment made of a combination of wool and linen).

In this week's *parasha*, we are introduced to what is the most celebrated and enigmatic example of the *chok* category and, certainly to the contemporary Western mind, the most bizarre. "Speak to the children of Israel that they shall take to you a red, perfect cow without blemish, upon which no yoke was laid." (Numbers 19:2). The Torah delineates the details of the purification rite in which this rare species, a red cow (the existence of only nine such calves have been recorded in the annals of history) was slaughtered, its carcass burned, the ashes mixed with spring water and this unique mixture used to absolve Jews of ritual impurity

contracted through contact with death. Among the most difficult details to understand is the paradoxical law that renders impure the priests involved in the preparation of this purifying agent. So "beyond the ken" is this law that even King Solomon, who was said to understand the entire Torah and the reasons for all laws, even those which are categorized as a *chok*, was stymied and perplexed by the law of the Red Heifer.

In introducing this law, the Torah uses the words, "*zot chukat haTorah*, this is the statute of the Torah." The obvious question is, why doesn't the verse simply state that this is the statute of the Red Heifer? The simple explanation is that the Torah is teaching us that this is the *chok* of the Torah; this is the quintessential of all mind defying, trans-rational *mitzvot* in the Torah.

See "Wisdom" on page 12

## Congregational Notes

### Beth David Synagogue

Affiliation: Orthodox Union  
 Rabbi: Zev Silber  
 Address: 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905  
 Phone: 722-1793  
 Rabbi's Office: 722-7514  
 Fax: 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 Israel

Orientation: Conservative  
 Rabbi: Micah Friedman  
 Address: 4737 Deerfield Pl., Vestal, NY 13850  
 Phone: 723-7461 and 231-3746  
 Office hours: Mon.-Thurs., 8:30 am-3:30 pm; Fri., 8 am-3 pm  
 E-mail: titammy@stny.twcbc.com  
 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 (masks are required for unvaccinated participants).

On Saturday, July 1, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person (masks are required for unvaccinated participants). The Torah portion is Numbers 19:1-25:9 and the haftarah is Micah 5:6-6:8. At 10 pm, there will be Havdalah services via Zoom.

On Monday-Tuesday, July 3-4, the temple office will be closed.

On Saturday, July 8, at 9:30 am, Shacharit services will be held via Zoom and in-person (masks are required for unvaccinated participants). The Torah portion is Numbers 25:10-30:1 and the haftarah is Jeremiah 1:1-2:3. At 10 pm, there will be Havdalah services via Zoom.

### 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: 273-5775  
 E-mail: rabbi-safman@tbeithaca.org, secretary@tbeithaca.org  
 Website: www.tbeithaca.org

Presidents: David Weiner and Linda Aigen  
 Sisterhood President: Gail Zussman  
 Director of Education: TBA  
 Services: Fri. 8 pm; Sat. 10 am, unless otherwise announced.  
 Weekday morning minyan 7:30 am (9 am on Sun. and legal holidays).

Religious School/Education: September-May: Classes meet on Sunday, 9 am-12:30 pm and Wednesday, 3:45-5:45 pm. The Midrashah (eighth grade and high school) classes will meet at times designated by their respective teachers.  
 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](http://www.tinyurl.com/HappeningAtTBE).

### Penn-York Jewish Community

President-Treasurer-Secretary: Harvey Chernosky, 570-265-3869  
 B'nai B'rith: William H. Seigel Lodge  
 Purpose: To promote Jewish identity through religious, cultural, educational and social activities in the Southern Tier of New York and the Northern Tier of Pennsylvania, including Waverly, NY; Sayre, Athens and Towanda, PA, and surrounding communities.



### 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.

### 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: 797-0015, Fax: 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](http://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: Carol Levine, 315-696-5744  
 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.

### 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.

Friday, June 30, light candles before..... 8:25 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 1 ..... 9:25 pm  
 Friday, July 7, light candles before ..... 8:23 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 8 ..... 9:24 pm  
 Friday, July 14, light candles before ..... 8:20 pm  
 Shabbat ends Saturday, July 15 ..... 9:20 pm

### Temple Concord

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism  
 Rabbi: Barbara Goldman-Wartell  
 Address: 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905  
 Office hours: Tues.-Fri., 10 am-2 pm  
 Phone: 723-7355  
 Fax: 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, June 30: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service led by Rabbi Rachel Esserman, Robin Hazen and Suzanne Holwitt. Masks are optional for those attending in person. Join via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y>, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/templeconcord/](http://www.facebook.com/templeconcord/).

Saturday, July 1: There is no Torah study until the fall.

Sunday, July 2: From 10 am-2 pm, rummage sale in Temple Concord's basement. Shoppers are asked to use the Oak Street entrance. Masks are optional, but encouraged.

Wednesday, July 5: At 10:30 am, Morning Book Club, "Woman on Fire: A Novel" by Lisa Barr. The club will meet on Zoom only; an e-mail will be sent from [apreus@binghamton.edu](mailto:apreus@binghamton.edu) prior to the meeting. For more information, contact Merri Pell-Preus at 222-2875 or [merrypell.preus@gmail.com](mailto:merrypell.preus@gmail.com).

Friday, July 7: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service led by Eve Berman and Robin Hazen. Masks are optional for those attending in person. Join via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y>, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/templeconcord/](http://www.facebook.com/templeconcord/).

Saturday, July 8: There is no Torah study until the fall.

Tuesday, July 11: At 8 pm, General Board meeting. The meeting is open to members of Temple Concord. To receive a meeting link, contact the synagogue at 723-7355 or e-mail [templeconcordaa@gmail.com](mailto:templeconcordaa@gmail.com).

### Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive  
 Rabbi: David Regenspan  
 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/Admin. 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.

# SAFE DRIVING

## Top tips for timely performance driving

(NewsUSA) – As millions of Americans know, daily commutes can be stressful and monotonous. Couple that with winter weather, and staying alert is paramount – especially as road conditions start to deteriorate.

To that point, you never know when you're going to need to become a "Timely Performance Driver." Timely performance is a term that describes being present in the moment when driving so you can maximize your car's performance and react quickly to surprising situations on the road. Based on a recent survey, 75 percent of U.S. adults say they need to become "Timely Performance Drivers" at least once a week, and those who reported a need to react quickly to a driving situation say they do so approximately six times per week.

BFGoodrich Tires has conducted a survey of driving behaviors. The study group included 1,009 adults (aged 18 years and older) living in the continental

U.S. The sample was representative of the general population in terms of geographic, demographic and socioeconomic traits. Overall, 82 percent of the survey respondents say that drivers often face unexpected situations on the road, and 54 percent agree that drivers drive better in potentially dangerous situations.

Andrew Comrie-Picard, a professional race car driver, X-Games athlete and BFGoodrich ambassador, emphasizes that drivers of any age can (and should) practice timely performance driving by staying alert so they can push their car to its maximum performance in the moments that matter most.

According to Comrie-Picard, key aspects of timely performance driving include:

- ◆ Looking far down the road to anticipate potential issues and road hazards.
- ◆ Remembering the importance of smooth control inputs, such as braking, throttling and steering.
- ◆ Anticipating road conditions, such as standing

water and slick roads.

- ◆ Driving with two hands on the wheel – no exceptions.
- ◆ Keeping distance between you and the car in front of you.

Comrie-Picard also says it's important to ensure that your tires are appropriate for your car and well-maintained. Specifically, he says to choose tires for their seasonality and performance capabilities during winter weather months, as well as throughout the year.

Additional information on other driving tips, can be found on [www.BFGoodrichTires.com](http://www.BFGoodrichTires.com).

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**DRINKING AND DRIVING IS A DEADLY COMBO**

**DON'T TALK OR TEXT WHEN DRIVING!**

A MESSAGE FROM THE REPORTER GROUP

**DON'T LET ALCOHOL GET BEHIND THE WHEEL**

When alcohol is the driver, nobody's safe! It doesn't take a large amount to do a lot of damage. Even one drink can cloud judgment and slow reflexes enough to hamper fast thinking and total control at the wheel. At holidays when many people celebrate "to the limit," steer clear of disaster. If you take a drink, don't take the driver's seat... and make it a safe and happy holiday weekend!

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**DON'T DRINK & DRIVE**

A community service message from  
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**HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE**

# Capital Jewish Museum opens in Washington, DC

By JNS staff

(JNS) – The Capital Jewish Museum opened in June in the Washington, DC, neighborhood of Judiciary Square – blocks from the U.S. Capitol, the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian museums on the National Mall, and near what was a center of Jewish life in the district a century ago. The museum “explores the Jewish experience in the national capital region and inspires visitors to connect, reflect and act,” per its site, <https://capitaljewishmuseum.org>, which cites an “experimental spirit.”

Among the collections objects are a matchbox signed by President Jimmy Carter and used in 1979 to light the White House Chanukah menorah; *Washington Post* press badges (spanning 1966-1982) of Judith Martin (“Miss Manners”); and a white lace collar that Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the former Supreme Court associate justice, wore on the bench.

The museum owns 24,000 photographs, 1,050 artifacts and 800 linear feet of archival material dating back to 1850, according to a release. The 32,500-square-foot museum consists of four floors and admission is free, except for special exhibits. One current exhibit centers on Ginsburg which the museum calls “visually rich, entertaining, yet rigorous.”



Artist's rendering of the now completed Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. (Photo by Capital Jewish Museum)

The collection also includes the restored, 1876 Adas Israel synagogue building, which has been moved on wheels.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

From JNS.org

### Tech challenge brings Israeli innovation to U.S. health sector

The Israeli nonprofit Start-Up Nation Central recently announced a new initiative, Hospital2Hospital, which brings together Baptist Health South Florida's Baptist Health Innovations and Sheba Medical Center's ARC Innovation in Israel. Start-up companies in their early stages in Israel, which seek to expand in the U.S. healthcare system, are invited to apply to a tech challenge, whose winner will receive \$75,000 to work with Baptist Health and gain mentorship from ARC.

### Neo-Nazis protest at GA shuls

On the night of June 23, some 15 protesters yelled antisemitic things outside Temple Beth Israel, a Reform congregation in Macon, GA. The following day, about a dozen bore Nazi symbols outside the Chabad of Cobb County in East Cobb, GA. Worshipers were reportedly in synagogue while neo-Nazis gathered outside. Per reports, the neo-Nazis were associated with the so-called Goyim Defense League, which is said to be behind the dissemination of many antisemitic flyers. The founder of the group was arrested at the June 23 protest after continuing to use a bullhorn after officers asked him to stop. He was released and was part of the June 24 protest, too.

## Region..... Continued from page 1

\$135,000 over three years that will enable it to take the strides necessary to provide the highest possible level of security for the Jewish community.

According to Debra Barton Grant, associate vice president of LiveSecure at JFNA, “This is one of the first collaborative regional security plans that we are rolling out, and it will be a model for other communities to replicate. We are supporting local communities in their efforts to raise funds locally to receive the national LiveSecure grants with the goal that every Jewish community across North America build local Community Security Initiatives that grow toward meeting the national standards.”

What will help ensure the success of this plan is the leadership of security professionals: Susan DeMari, community security coordinator, is becoming a full-time deputy director to Mark Henderson, the security director for Western and Central New York. They are jointly developing a comprehensive regional security plan, with guidance from the Secure Community Network, the organization that was founded by JFNA, in the wake of the 9-11 terrorist attacks, to cope with the mushrooming threat of domestic terrorism to the Jewish community.

Henderson is a retired police chief from Brighton, a suburb of Rochester. He has led Rochester's RocStrong Initiative for several years and knows the Jewish community well. He and DeMari will take the lead in assessing the security needs of every Jewish organization in the region. They will work with Jewish community leaders across the region to put measures in place – from physical, “target-hardening” enhancements like bulletproof window films and metal doors, to better lighting, to more technologically-sophisticated security cameras and alert systems, to augmented arrangements for armed security guards. As part of the initiative, they are also hiring a grant writer who

will be available to help organizations to apply for both state and national nonprofit security grants.

Just as – if not more – importantly, Henderson and DeMari will conduct regular, intensive, standardized trainings at summer camps, schools, synagogues, JCCs and other places where Jews gather. “Preparation is paramount,” DeMari said. “The more people are trained to react effectively in the case of an emergency, the more lives will be saved – whether through neutralizing the threat, escaping the danger, stopping the bleed, or otherwise acting to protect themselves and each other.”

Henderson and DeMari are advocates of the power of prevention. For example, they collaborated, at the request of the district attorney, to develop a program, that in lieu of charging some high school student offenders criminally, will educate them as to what constitutes a hate crime.

On Juneteenth (June 19), Henderson and DeMari were scheduled to meet with key law enforcement partners at the federal, state and local level to reinforce strategies and protocols needed to combat domestic terrorism in the most effective and concerted way. “We want to make sure that when something bad happens,” DeMari said, “all the necessary networks and relationships are already in place.” A couple of weeks later, Henderson and DeMari will have another, similar luncheon in Western New York.

The closer ties that exist among security experts in the different communities, the more they will be able to share information, resources and best practices. According to Henderson, “We actively partner with both SCN and with UJA-NY's Community Security Initiative on feeding and receiving incident reports from their command centers. They have FBI-like multiscreen monitoring systems that track events of concern in real time across the country.” There is “no substitute,” Henderson said, “for the connections that we are making with national, state and local

law enforcement agencies that make it possible for every incident to get the immediate attention that it deserves.”

Given the size of the Central/Western New York area, instant real-time communication from one end to the other is considered crucial. When the British-American author Salman Rushdie was attacked last August on a stage in Chautauqua, DeMari was notified immediately. She worked with state and local law enforcement to assure there was no imminent threat to the Jewish community.

Shelley Hubal is the executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton. She said that her community “had zero funding or infrastructure for security until LiveSecure came along. We're super grateful for the bigger communities in our region, who are helping to carry the burden financially for us in some ways, since we can't afford all the upgrades that are needed.”

Rob Goldberg, Buffalo's CEO, underscored the need to support Jews throughout the region: “Of course, we stepped forward to work toward supporting Jews in smaller communities like Binghamton, Ithaca and Utica. Hate has no boundaries and these communities are just as vulnerable as we are, if not more so. I'm just so proud of how we have come together regionally to make this new security effort a reality.”

Ted Merwin is a senior writer at the Jewish Federations of North America.

## Wisdom. . . Continued from page 10

But there is another way to understand these words, as well. The Torah is teaching us that ultimately, on the most essential level, each and every commandment in the Torah is a *chok*. That is, even the many *mitzvot* that we seem to understand, whose logic is compelling, are in the final analysis laws to which we adhere in spite of our rationale selves. The underlying premise of a *mitzvah* is in its being a commandment of God. A *mitzvah* is an action through which the infinite and the finite meet, through which the creator and the created bond. The etymological root of *mitzvah* is the Aramaic *tzavta*, which means to connect, to mesh. A *mitzvah*, then, is an avenue, a conduit, a bridge to the Divine. As such, it not only defines how we live, but represents why we live at all. The *mitzvah* has intrinsic value in it being the fulfillment of the Divine wish: this is true regardless of how or if it benefits us or makes us feel. This has been most dramatically illustrated in times of religious persecution, but is just as true in our own times when a *mitzvah* is simply inconvenient or downright difficult. The fact that we do not dispose of these laws, even at risk of incurring loss, great or small, is testament to an adherence that supersedes methodology and logic.

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

When the heathen King Balak hires a renowned sorcerer and prophet to curse the Jewish nation, he is sorely disappointed. Despite numerous attempts and a valiant effort, Balaam is unable to curse the Jewish people; in fact, each time he opens his mouth, he accords them the highest accolades and showers upon them blessings. In exasperation he cries, “I gaze upon it from the hills; behold! A People which shall dwell alone and will not be reckoned among the nations.” (Numbers 23:9) He gives voice to the truism that the Jewish people are a nation apart whose existence is completely supra natural.

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

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