

# THE REPORTER

Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

August 23-September 5, 2024  
Volume LIII, Number 17

BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

## Federation, JCC to hold joint AED/CPR training

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton's Safety and Security Committee and the Jewish Community Center will hold a program on how to use an automatic defibrillator and perform CPR on Wednesday, September 25, from 6:30-9:30 pm, at the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal. Additional sponsors of the program include the Sisterhoods of Beth David Synagogue, Temple Concord and Temple Israel. The program is free and open to the

entire community. To register for the program, visit [www.jfgb.org](http://www.jfgb.org), or contact the Federation office at 607-724-2332 or [director@jfgb.org](mailto:director@jfgb.org).

"This is really a continuation of our Stop the Bleed program," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "After the program, people mentioned that they had AEDs in their building, but no one knew how to use them. We decided it would be a great idea to offer a class in their use and how to perform CPR."

"At the JCC, the safety and well-being

of our community is a top priority," said Raychel Reilly, COO of the Jewish Community Center. "We are honored to partner with our friends at the Federation to offer a free CPR and AED class to members of our community. This initiative ensures the greater Jewish community is equipped with the necessary skills to provide this vital layer of protection in an emergency situation."

"Training sessions, like this CPR/AED class, offer an opportunity to learn and practice basic life saving skills," said Steve

Malkin, chairman of the Federation's Safety and Security Committee. "As someone already at the scene, you will be able to respond, act and support a life until professional first responders can arrive. You could save the life of a child or adult, stranger or friend, or even a member of your own family. Experience using an AED or knowing how to perform CPR enables you to act – on your own or while being coached by a 911 dispatcher. What would you do to save a life? Nothing is not an answer."

## Super Sunday on Sept. 8 to feature talk on "Israel's multi-culture"

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold the kick-off of Campaign 2025 on Super Sunday, September 8, at 10 am, at the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal. The event will include a brunch and talk by author Joan Leegant called "Israel's multi-culture: it's not just the Ashkenazim and Sephardim anymore – and never was." Attendees will have the opportunity to make their pledge for Campaign 2025 if they have not already done so. The brunch is free due to the generous support of the David and Virginia Eisenberg fund. Reservations are requested by Tuesday, September 3, and can be made by contacting the Federation at 607-724-2332 or [director@jfgb.org](mailto:director@jfgb.org), or by registering at [www.jfgb.org](http://www.jfgb.org).

### "Do a mitzvah – pledge now"

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton has kicked off Campaign 2025 with an emphasis on pledging early. Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation, has urged community members to make their pledge before Super Sunday, September 8. Campaign letters will be sent to donors ahead of Super Sunday to encourage early pledging. People can also use the form on page 9 of this issue of *The Reporter* and mail it to the Federation at 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850; call



the Federation office at 607-724-2332; e-mail Hubal at [director@jfgb.org](mailto:director@jfgb.org); or visit [www.jfgb.org](http://www.jfgb.org).

*This year it's different.*

"We hope everyone will send in the letter with their pledge or make their pledge early by one of the other easy-to-use methods," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "That helps to cut back on the manpower we need to get through the Campaign and reduces the burden on our volunteers. When the community pledges early, the allocation process is also much easier. Do a mitzvah and pledge now!"

Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation, noted that the slogan for Campaign 2025 – "This Year It's Different" – reflects how many people in the community and the world are feeling. "This year, everyone is feeling their own version of a shift – a change – in the world," Hubal said. "Whether it's the war in Gaza, the increase in antisemitism, the protests on campuses or so many people in need, this year feels different. But the Jewish community has been through difficult times in the past and survived by coming together. The same will be true of the future because it's when things get difficult that we witness people's generosity and compassion."

Leegant will speak about Israel as See "Super" on page 4

## Federation plans "Guardian/Greeter Safety Training"

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold a "Guardian/Greeter Safety Training" on Tuesday, August 27, at 6:30 pm, at the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal. Mark Henderson, the director of community security for the Jewish Community Federation of Greater Rochester, will lead the session. The training is open to the entire community. To register for the program, visit [www.jfgb.org](http://www.jfgb.org) or contact the Federation office at 607-724-2332 or [director@jfgb.org](mailto:director@jfgb.org).



The program teaches people to be guardians by showing how they can take personal responsibility for the safety and security of themselves, their families and

their community. It focuses on the skill sets people need to identify, protect and respond to all hazards. The course's motto is, "Get involved. Get empowered. Get trained."

"This training is aimed at all members of

an organization or congregation because at some time almost everyone will open a door and need to make a decision about whether or not it's safe to do so," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "It

teaches how to identify suspicious people, vehicles and packages, and learn ways to protect our community. We all should become active bystanders who can respond to incidents and situations."

## TC/TI Adult Ed. Committee to hold program on Sept. 15

The Adult Education Committee of Temple Concord and Temple Israel will hold a program and brunch on Sunday, September 15, from 10 am-noon, at Temple Concord, 9 Riverside Dr., Binghamton. Rabbi Leah Moser, Temple Concord's new spiritual leader,

will speak on "Gender Diversity and Jewish Values." The entire community is welcome to attend. Refreshments will be served. There is a suggested donation of between \$5-20 per person. A Zoom option will be available: contact the Temple Concord office at

[templeconcordaa@gmail.com](mailto:templeconcordaa@gmail.com) for the link. For more information and to RSVP, contact the Temple Concord office at 607-723-7355 or Temple Israel at 607-723-7461, or e-mail [templeconcordaa@gmail.com](mailto:templeconcordaa@gmail.com) by Wednesday, See "TC/TI" on page 2

## Intersisterhood event to be held on Sept. 24

Temple Israel will host this year's Intersisterhood event on Tuesday, September 24, at 7 pm. The evening will feature a presentation by Dr. Allan Arkush. Following the presentation, attendees will enjoy a musical interlude by Kaskaset, Binghamton University's Jewish *cappella* group. The program will also include time for refreshments and schmoozing. All members of the community are welcome to attend; the cost for the event is \$6. The event is made possible by the generous sponsorship of the Victor and Esther Rozen Foundation,

Those interested in attending are encouraged to make reservations by contacting their synagogue office by Friday, September 20, to ensure a spot.

Attendees will also have the chance to participate in a raffle, thanks to the generous donations from local organizations. Prizes include two memberships in the Binghamton Philharmonic's "Best Seats Club," tickets to a KNOW Theatre production, gift certificates for PS Restaurant, Weis Markets and Price Chopper, and tickets for an Anderson Center concert.

"Intersisterhood is a chance to bringing together members of the community for an evening of connection, learning and celebration in anticipation of the upcoming High Holidays," said organizers of the event. "It provides an opportunity for attendees to mingle and enjoy the sense of community that the Intersisterhood event fosters."

Arkush is a scholar who has been teaching courses on modern Jewish history and thought at Binghamton University since 1987. He is also a senior contributing

editor of the Jewish Review of Books, a position he has held since 2009. "His insights promise to enrich the gathering with thoughtful reflections and discussions," said organizers.

"This event promises to be an enriching experience, blending intellectual discussion, music and community spirit in preparation for the High Holidays," organizers added. "Don't miss out on this unique opportunity to connect with fellow community members and engage in meaningful dialogue and celebration."

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**BD Sisterhood**  
Beth David Sisterhood will kick off the new year with a book discussion on September 11.  
.....Page 3

**Jews in baseball**  
Bill Simons reflects on Jewish baseball players and execs who've worked for the Boston Red Sox.  
.....Page 4

**Antisemitism at UCLA**  
A federal judge orders UCLA to stop enabling protestors who threaten Jewish students.  
.....Page 12

**Special Sections**  
Celebrating Jewish Literature.....5-8  
Congregational Notes ..... 10  
Personal and Business Services .. 11  
Classifieds ..... 12

# TC/TI.....Continued from page 1

September 11, so enough refreshments can be prepared.

In her talk, Moser will explore a number of traditional Jewish texts that recognize a spectrum of gender expression

beyond the male-female binary and discuss their relevance to the efforts of contemporary transgender, nonbinary and gender-nonconforming Jews to find recognition and

welcome in the broader Jewish community. The program will include a short reading from Moser's Jewish young adult fantasy novel, "Magical Princess Harriet."

## Opinion

### One Perspective from Israel

# Worrying about not worrying

JEREMY M. STAIMAN

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

When my eldest son, Avi, was a boy, we took him to see the Disney version of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame." In those pre-streaming days, the movie wasn't playing anywhere near our home in Baltimore, so we found ourselves in a Gentile neighborhood far enough away that we were likely the only Members of the Tribe in the audience.

The film had everything you could ask for:

- ◆ Rich Disney characters.
- ◆ Stirring musical score.
- ◆ Forbidden love.
- ◆ Molten lead pouring down from the cathedral onto the heads of the enemy.

When the film was concluding, and the audience was still very silent, Avi called out: "Did the Jews win?"

Finding ourselves amidst a sea of non-Jews, after viewing a movie whose setting was a church, we were mortified. In our minds, we pictured the hundreds of viewers turning their heads to see who was asking that outrageous question. We tried to shush him.

"Did the Jews win???" he screamed louder. By then, our beet-red faces probably outshone the little emergency lights which lined the cinema aisles.

You can't blame him. So much of the tradition that we and his schooling had provided him was based on the storyline that we Jews were under oppression, threatened with our national extinction, and, with God's help, we won.

*Pesach.* We were emancipated from centuries-long slavery in the most powerful country on earth, leaving their country and its population in tatters.

*Purim.* The leader of the known world assents to our annihilation. In the matter of a year, our Jewish heroes are calling the shots, while our nemeses swing from gallows.

*Chanukah.* The powerful Assyrian Greeks attempt to quash our religious observances. The story ends with a glorious new Hasmonean Dynasty rejuvenating our Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Not to mention latkes and *sufganiyot* (donuts).

*Did the Jews win?*

Yes. Every time.

That's the message we instill in our kids. That God watches over us and will never allow our destruction.

Over the millennia, we have faced villains and pogroms and holocausts and persecutions too many to number. We have suffered and been scarred. But we have prevailed, and we live to not only lick our wounds, but to celebrate our survival. We have our days of sadness, remembrance and commemoration, such as Tisha B'Av. And we have days of joy, where we rejoice in our victories.

As many have noted, Jewish history can be succinctly summarized: "They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat!"

Nowadays, we are fortunate to have our Israel, with its formidable IDF. We have Iron Dome, David's Arrow and David's Sling, to help protect us.

But the combination of our history of triumphs, and our strong defenses, has a dangerous flip side. For many of us, it has led to a sense of invincibility. A year ago, we may even have said that we were impervious to any enemy assault. We know better now.

But one of the central lessons of each of our stories of triumph seems to have been overlooked. We are saved not for naught. We survive not because of *who we are*, but because of *what we do*.

We are saved because we are scared. Scared almost to death.

We are saved because that fright impels us to take a look at our lives, and to commit to making them mean more. To being better people. To serving our God more fully and sincerely.

The common battle cry today too often sounds like: "God, we know you will save us again, because You always do."

That's not a prayer. That's not even real faith.

That's complacency, born of laziness.

My *chavruta* (study partner), Mike, had similar thoughts on the matter, and discussed it with a prominent rabbi. The rabbi told him that you can only truly believe in God once you have experienced the fear and dread that comes before it, and then processed that into the realization that we don't run the world, and that we are in greater, divine hands.

Trust in God only works when it's accompanied by the hard

work. That includes the dread and the panic along the way.

My wife recently wondered, "Where are all the worldwide *tehillim* gatherings, praying for our safety? Why is everyone so calm?"

I'm worried that we're not worrying.

And I'm no exception to this deluded complacency. We took some of the grandkids to the beach the other day, and we heard booms from the south. I had a client meeting yesterday about a new campaign. I'm doing my best to keep a normal routine. That's a common theme around Israel – we go about our business until we can't.

But I worry that I'm not worrying.

*Did the Jews win?*

Yes, when they – we – deserved it. When they – we – earned the mercy.

We are all preparing for an impending attack, perhaps on multiple fronts.

We keep the car tank full. We have candles and flashlights and mattresses and non-perishable food and chargers and even a bucket for use if we can't get to the bathroom. Our *mamad* (reinforced safe room) is as ready as can be.

My Facebook friend, Liron Kopinsky, created a brilliant and astute meme, based on the mythical mascot of MAD Magazine, Alfred E. Neuman. His legendary line was "What, me worry?" (I actually had a poster up of him with his signature tooth-gapped, grinning face and that slogan in my childhood bedroom!)

We can – and we *must* – prepare our *mamad*. But if we walk around with heads held high, smugly declaring "What, me worry?" I fear that we have missed the boat. If we are relying entirely on our precious IDF and on God's impeccable track record of salvation, we are not doing all we can to assure our future.

Let's worry a little more. Our lives are indeed at stake.

At the same time, let's not worry in a destructive, paralytic way. Let's use those feelings to remind us Who is in charge. Let's nurture those fears and let them mature, and finally morph into true faith, and closeness both to each other and to our Creator.

*Then the Jews will win.*

### In My Own Words

# It's just not funny

RABBI RACHEL ESSERMAN, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

I've been watching videos of "Saturday Night Live Weekend Update" hosts Michael Che and Colin Hanks on my Facebook feed. The videos began to pop up after I read about Che and Hanks exchanging jokes while a real-life rabbi sat at their desk, shaking her head at their so-called news reports. Che, who is Black, and Hanks, who is white, gave each other deliberately offensive jokes to read. While the content of the jokes could be vulgar, they were also hysterical. (Hanks, after reading racist jokes written by Che, has been known to comment, "You are going to get me killed!") However, Che has told jokes that are just as bad.) I find myself laughing at the two and watching more and more of their videos. Both hosts of the weekend update are asking us to question how we look at race relations and it works because it makes me think while I'm laughing.

However, not all satire works. For example, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency published an article about a column that recently appeared in the Belgian magazine *Humo*. According to the report, Herman Brusselmans, a Belgian

author, "is being sued by the European Jewish Association after he wrote that Israel's bombing of Gaza made him want to 'ram a sharp knife through the throat of every Jew' he meets." Brusselmans claims he is not calling for the murder of Jews, just noting how angry those living in Gaza must be. His editors call his work satire and say it is not to be taken seriously.

I'm generally fine with satire, but there is something about this one that bothers me. While I understand that his intentions were probably not meant to be antisemitic, I'm not sure Brusselmans would have written a column using any other religious or racial category in that way. He wrote "Jew," not Israeli, not Israeli army soldier, not leaders of Israel, but "Jew." That general word includes those who are calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, who cry with despair at what's happening in Gaza, who have protested Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies in Gaza and the West Bank for decades... as if every Jew in every part of the world is exactly the same and directly responsible for what is occurring.

The reaction of Jewish authorities and institutions is understandable. There has been an upsurge in antisemitic attacks across the world. The fear that someone will take his words seriously is not to be taken lightly: some might see it as a call to action, even though he doesn't mean it to be. History has shown us the need to err on the side of caution when it comes to potential attacks on our brethren across the world.

I don't think a column about anger that includes the desire to kill Jews is funny because those deaths include me and you and our families and our friends. Brusselmans certainly has the right to publish his column, but I hope that next time he will pause before painting every Jew with the same brush. He could have gotten the same point across without resorting to suggesting violence. I may be over sensitive, but even when I dislike something done by a member of a group, I don't want to ever – even in fun – suggest that I want to kill any or every member of that group. In the dangerous world in which we live right now, it's just not funny.



**Jewish Federation**  
of Greater Binghamton

Shelley Hubal, Executive Director

607-724-2332 ~ www.jfgeb.org

#### The Reporter Editorial Committee

Rebecca Goldstein Kahn, chairwoman  
Rachel Coker, Ben Kasper, Rivka Kellman,  
Toby Kohn, Richard Lewis,  
Robert Neuberger, Ilene Pinsker

#### HOW TO REACH THE REPORTER

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

E-mail ~ TReporter@aol.com

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

Extension#/Department ~ 1. Advertising 2. Business Office  
3. Art Department 4. Circulation 6. Editorial/News



BINGHAMTON, NY

#### OPINIONS

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

#### LETTERS

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

#### ADS

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

#### DEADLINE

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

Executive Editor Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Layout Editor Diana Sochor

Advertising Kathy Brown

Bookkeeper Kathy Brown

Production Associate Julie Weber

Columnist Bill Simons

#### Proofreaders

Barbara Bank, Fran Ferentinos,  
Rebecca Goldstein Kahn, Merri Pell-Preus,  
Ilene Pinsker, Heidi Thirer



"The Reporter" (USPS 096-280) is published bi-weekly for \$40 per year by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, 500 Clubhouse Road, Vestal, NY 13850-3734. Periodicals Postage Paid at Vestal, NY and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Reporter, 500 Clubhouse Road, Vestal, NY 13850-3734 or reach us by e-mail at TREPORTER@AOL.COM.

www.thereporter.org

# BD Sisterhood meeting on Sept. 11 to feature book discussion

The Sisterhood of Beth David Synagogue will hold its first meeting of the new season on Wednesday, September 11, at 7 pm, in the Beth David social hall. The program for the evening will be a discussion of the novel "The Little Liar" by Mitch Albom, author of "Tuesdays with Morrie." The discussion will be led by Susan Hubal. The meeting is open to the entire community, both male and female, whether or not they are affiliated with Beth David Synagogue. Female attendees are encouraged to show their support for Sisterhood by paying \$25 to officially become members for the year. Refreshments will be served at the meeting and

non-perishable food items will be collected for CHOW. "The Little Liar" begins during the Holocaust when an innocent young Greek boy is convinced that he is helping his fellow Jews by encouraging them to peacefully board trains that will supposedly relocate them to new homes and jobs. He is changed forever when he discovers the truth and becomes a pathological liar. "The novel is a parable that explores honesty, survival, revenge and devotion," said event organizers. "It is a timeless story about the harm we inflict with our deceptions and the power of love to ultimately redeem us."

The Jewish Community wishes to express its sympathy to **Helen Regenbogen** on the death of her husband, **Adam Regenbogen**

# BD luncheon on Sept. 14 to feature Richard C. Lewis

Beth David Synagogue annual Luncheon series for 2024-25 will be held on Saturday, September 14. The community is invited to attend. Morning services will begin at 9:30 am, with the luncheon and program following the conclusion of services. The luncheon is free and open to the public. Attorney and community member Richard C. Lewis will be the featured guest.



Richard C. Lewis  
(Photo courtesy of Hinman, Howard and Kattell)

include statutory changes that would make the Hate Crimes Act easier to enforce. Also proposed were acts to deal with Internet hate speech, as well as ways to improve hate crimes reporting. "Dick has generously arranged for copies of the task force report to be available for everyone who attends," organizers say, "and will point to other publications that are more relevant than ever in the times we live in." Lewis will also talk about his experience with the various members of an Israeli delegation that came to New York during the height of the encampments and demonstrations, and his continuing interactions with them.

Lewis is an attorney at Hinman, Howard and Kattell. He is licensed to practice law in New York, Florida, Pennsylvania and Illinois.

Lewis was elected to serve as the 2023-24 president of the New York State Bar Association. His term began on June 1, 2023, and, during his 12 months as president, Lewis introduced what have been called "groundbreaking initiatives." One of these was the task force on Combating Antisemitism and Anti-Asian Hate, which Lewis initiated in the first month of his term, and on which he served as executive committee liaison. The task force issued a close to 50-page report, which was passed by the House of Delegates in January 2024.

Lewis will focus on what his position as president entailed, and will highlight in particular the task force's recommendations on combating antisemitism. These

Prior to his election as the 2023-24 president of the New York State Bar Association, he served as vice president for the Sixth Judicial District for the New York State Bar Association. He has also served as the chairman of the House of Delegates, was a past president of the Broome See "Lewis" on page 4

## DEADLINES

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

| ISSUE                  | DEADLINE     |
|------------------------|--------------|
| September 6-19         | August 28    |
| September 20-October 3 | September 11 |
| October 4-17           | September 25 |
| October 18-31          | October 9    |

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

SAME SUE, SAME RESULTS...

**SUZANNE "SUE" KRAUSE**  
NYS Lic. Associate R.E. Broker  
(C) 607-760-3366 | SUEKRAUSE@WARRENHOMES.COM  
THELAURAMELWILLETEAM.WARRENHOMES.COM  
33 FRONT STREET • BINGHAMTON, NY 13905

### JFS IS LOOKING FOR A DIRECTOR

This is a part-time (10-15 hours per week), flexible job that requires experience in the Human Service field and a desire to make a difference in the community.

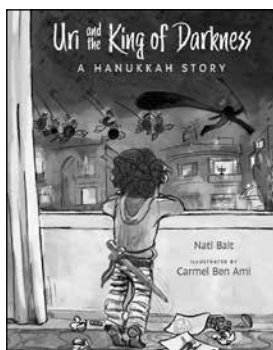
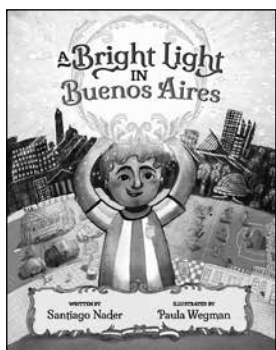
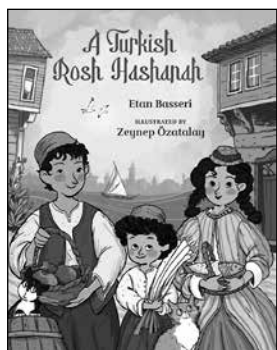
For more information, call 607-724-2332 or e-mail Shelley at [director@jfgb.org](mailto:director@jfgb.org).

## New in Books Kalaniot Books to release new children's books for fall

Kalaniot Books announced that it will release three new children's picture books for the fall 2024 season:

◆ "A Turkish Rosh Hashanah" by Etan Basseri with illustrations by Zeynep Özatalay (Release date: August 6)

Etan Basseri, author of the critically acclaimed "A Persian Passover," offers a work that highlights unique Sephardic traditions that can be incorporated into today's Rosh Hashanah celebrations. The work focuses on Rafael and his cousins, who shop in a Turkish market for the ingredients for their family's celebration. The story takes place in 1850s Turkey.



Book covers are used with permission of Kalaniot Press.

◆ "A Bright Light in Buenos Aires" by Santiago Nadar with illustrations by Paula Wegman (Release date: October 15)

Dani is nervous: it's his birthday, but he is worried that his classmates won't come to his party because a strange bright light follows him everywhere. At first, Dani wishes to be like everyone else, but comes to realize he is perfect as he is. The author addresses such themes as emotional intelligence and self-love.

◆ "Uri and the King of Darkness: A Hanukkah Story" by Nati Bait with illustrations by Carmel Ben-Ami (Release date: October 22)

Uri and Shir wait for their father to return home on the first night of Hanukkah. During their wait, they must battle the King of Darkness to bring the light of Hanukkah to the world. Then their father arrives with a holiday surprise.

**STAY UP TO DATE!**

Follow the Jewish Federation on Facebook and Instagram

[@jewishbinghamton](https://www.facebook.com/jewishbinghamton)

The Reporter is offering sponsorships!

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

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

To arrange for a sponsorship or for answers to questions, contact Rabbi Rachel Esserman at [rachel@thereportergroup.org](mailto:rachel@thereportergroup.org).

I AIN'T AFRAID OF NO GHOST! SCOOBY DOO NIGHT!

## SCOOBY-DOO! MYSTERY NIGHT

HELP THE CAROUSEL CREW SOLVE A STADIUM WIDE MYSTERY

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 23<sup>RD</sup>**  
GATES OPEN 5:30 PM | FIRST PITCH 7:05 PM

Miller AUTO TEAM FIREWORKS SERIES | POSTGAME FIREWORKS SHOW

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 25<sup>TH</sup>**  
GATES OPEN 4:00 PM | FIRST PITCH 5:05 PM

607.722.FUNN [WWW.BINGRP.COM](http://WWW.BINGRP.COM)



# Jewish Baseball Players

## Our tribe at Fenway: Boston in Hebrew

BILL SIMONS

Monday, July 31, 1961. Along with 31,850 other fans, I was at Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox, for an All-Star game. My Uncle Ben took me, age 12, and my cousin Lloyd, 10. It was the best baseball game I ever attended. In the days before interleague play, opportunities to see stars from the rival circuit were limited to All-Star and World Series games. The All-Star game was the only time I ever witnessed Sandy Koufax pitch in person.

The Los Angeles Dodgers' ace was having his first dominant season. Koufax on the mound at Fenway Park made it a Boston baseball memory for me. Pitching the fifth and sixth innings, Koufax yielded two hits, issued no walks and held the AL scoreless. Called due to rain in the ninth inning, the 1961 All-Star game ended in a 1-1 tie.

Previously, beginning in the late 1950s, I had attended several games at Fenway Park with my father, Shep, a coming-of-age ritual. We often sat in the right field bleachers, hoping to catch a home run ball off the bat of the great Ted Williams. I loved Boston's bandbox, technicolor green ballpark with its distinctive caroms and angles, 40' wall in leftfield, closeness of the stands to the playing field and Fenway franks. Sometimes members of Lynn AZA #471, the Jewish fraternal youth group that my father advised and coached, would accompany us.

Given the Sox' many late season collapses, both Fenway and Jerusalem have experienced lamentations at their respective walls. My father gave a Jewish dimension to the Red Sox with stories, real and apocryphal, about the great Jewish Detroit Tigers slugger Hank Greenberg, featuring one that had him hitting an epic 1937 500-plus foot home run over Fenway's centerfield and into the street.

The Simons' connection to the Red Sox paralleled that of many other Boston area Jews. Founded in 1901 and originally called the Americans or Pilgrims, the team adopted the moniker Red Sox in 1908 and moved to Fenway Park in 1912. From 1901-18, the franchise won five World Series, but collapsed after the 1919 season following the sale of Babe Ruth and other stars. With the 1939 arrival of Williams, Boston generally fielded competitive teams until the late 1950s, then descended into futility between 1959 and 1966. After the 1967 Impossible Dream season introduced the modern era, Boston, save for a few downspins, has produced good teams. Through these various cycles, Jews have retained a significant Red Sox presence as players, front-office executives, media commentators and fans.

Over the years, Jewish players have donned the Red Sox uniform. In 1925, outfielder Cy Rosenthal, a Boston native, emerged as the Sox' first Jewish player. More significant as a linguist and wartime atomic spy, backup catcher and bullpen coach Moe Berg finished his MLB career with Boston. Journeymen Joe Ginsberg and Ryan Lavanway also briefly caught for the Sox. Possibly a future Hall of Famer, all-star second baseman Ian Kinsler joined the club near the end of his playing days. Yale intellectual Craig Breslow pitched in relief during two stints with Boston. Much travelled outfielder Kevin Pillar spent part of a season with the team, and utility outfielder Adam Stern posted a couple of campaigns in Boston. Playing part-time during his four Fenway seasons, future manager Gabe Kapler hit credibly. An outstanding defensive first and third baseman, Kevin Youkilis – a formidable batter, Gold Glove winner and high ranker in MVP voting – was the Jewish Red Sox GOAT (Greatest of All Time). A

member of two World Series championship teams, fan-favorite Youkilis spent nearly nine seasons with Boston. During the 2005 season, with Youkilis, Stern and Kapler in the lineup, the Red Sox tied a record for most Jewish players simultaneously on the field for a single team. Youkilis, Lavanway, Breslow, Kapler and Kinsler affiliated with Team Israel.

Jews made their primary impact on Red Sox fortunes as front-office executives. Dr. Charles Steinberg, executive vice president for public affairs, burnished Fenway's fan-friendly environment. Ending the Curse of the Bambino, General Manager Theo Epstein put together the 2004 team that brought Boston its first World Series championship in 86 years and repeated in 2007. Boston Red Sox Chief Baseball Officer Chaim Bloom endured an AL East last place finish, prompting his unceremonious ouster on the cusp of Rosh Hashanah 2023. Former pitcher Breslow succeeded Bloom as Red Sox chief baseball officer.

And it was a Jewish city councilman, Isadore Muchnick, who forced the Red Sox to give a tryout to Black players at Fenway Park.

Jews have never provided the Red Sox with its dominant fanbase, constituting only about 7 percent of the population of contemporary Greater Boston. Nevertheless, as Boston Jews moved from immigrant neighborhoods in the West End and North End, upward to Dorchester and Roxbury,

followed by postwar suburbanization, and recent re-urbanization, they have remained a strong component of Red Sox Nation, evidenced by the Red Sox' annual Jewish Heritage night. The 2024 notice proclaimed: "Gather your Tribe and join ours for the annual Jewish Heritage Celebration at Fenway Park... receive a... Jersey with BOSTON written in Hebrew!"

Experience and insight make Larry Ruttman the face of Jewish Red Sox fandom. During a recent interview, we discussed his engaging baseball memoir, "My Eighty-Two Year Love Affair with Fenway Park from Teddy Ballgame to Mookie Betts." Now 92, he attended his first Red Sox game – part of a roped off, right-field standing room crowd – with his father, Morris, in 1936 and has not missed much of significance at Fenway since then. After retiring from a successful legal practice, Larry has proved a prolific author. Several of the landsman interviews for a previous publication, "American Jews and America's Game: Voices of a Growing Legacy in Baseball," were done at Fenway Park.

Jewish tradition includes High Holiday observance, Chanukah candles and Passover seders. For Boston Jews, it also means allegiance to the Red Sox. Early team allegiances are inherited for life. For more than a third of a century, my son, Joe, an attorney and synagogue president, and I have caught a game at Fenway annually, now accompanied by grandchildren.

## Lewis.....Continued from page 3

County Bar Association (and recipient of the Ted Gallando Award), the president of Broome Legal Assistance Corporation, and the chairman of both the Broome County Bar Association Grievance and Ethics Committee and of the Broome County Bar Association Endowment Committee.

As a member of the Binghamton Jewish community for more than 40 years, Lewis has assumed many leadership positions. He is a past president of Temple Israel and served as president of Hillel Academy of Broome County from 2002-12. He is a past member of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, as well as of its Endowment Committee, and has served as chairman of the Editorial Committee of *The Reporter*.

"We are honored to have Dick inaugurate this season's Beth David Luncheon Speaker series," organizers say. "Even prior to the horrific October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and its continuing aftermath, Dick grasped the importance of addressing hate crimes based on what he saw happening in the world. We look forward to hearing how his year as president of the New York State Bar Association was instrumental in

bringing this issue to the fore as it relates to the reform of New York hate crimes law that was promoted and actualized because of his task force's cutting-edge research and report. His meeting with the Israeli delegation will also prove to be a fascinating source of information and discussion. We encourage everyone in the community to attend this important event at Beth David!"

Beth David's luncheon speaker series takes place the second Saturday of the month after Shabbat morning services, and is open to the community. There is no charge for the luncheon. Since the monthly series' continuation depends on the generosity of contributors, Beth David welcomes and appreciates donations to the Luncheon Fund in order to keep the program going. Donations can be made in honor of or in memory of someone, or to mark a special occasion. Those wishing an acknowledgment to be sent to the person being honored, or to the family of someone being remembered, can indicate that, along with the necessary information. Donations can be sent to Beth David Synagogue, 39 Riverside Dr., Binghamton, NY 13905, Attention: Luncheon Fund.

## Super.....Continued from page 1

a multi-cultural nation and the process of writing about Israel as an American. "Who are Israelis today?" Leegant noted in an e-mail interview. "They're Filipino caretakers, Thai farm workers, African refugees and asylum seekers, along with Druze, Bedouins, Russians, Arabs and Jews from across the Middle East." She plans to discuss "who are they, how they are (or aren't) part of Israeli life, and how they've been affected by October 7," in addition to speaking about her writing. She added that the events of October 7 "have also provided a window into the diverse makeup of Israeli society, which I'm keenly interested in." (For an interview of Leegant, visit [www.thereportergroup.org/local-news/leegant-discusses-writing-and-israel](http://www.thereportergroup.org/local-news/leegant-discusses-writing-and-israel).)

People are encouraged to make their 2025 pledge at the brunch, if they have not already made it. If community members would like to make their pledge ahead of the

kick-off event, they can call the Federation office at 607-724-2332. Making pledges and donations in advance of the allocation process in mid-November will help the Federation know what funds are available to be distributed and will save time for the volunteers that make Campaign calls.

The money raised during the Campaign will then be allocated to local organizations. "The Federation does many things behind the scenes to help all of our local Jewish organizations to be their best," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation. "When you support the Federation, you support the entire Jewish community. With your generous donations, we ensure there are quality, engaging Jewish programs for community member of all ages, support for our neighbors in need and an enduring local Jewish infrastructure."

Hubal added, "Join us to see old friends, meet new ones and listen to what is certain to be a fascinating talk!"

## ROSH HASHANAH 5785 Greetings

**Deadline: September 20** (September 12 issue)

Once again this year, *The Reporter* is inviting its readers to place personal New Year's greetings to the community. These New Year's greeting ads will appear in our September 20 issue.

You may choose from the designs, messages and sizes shown here - more are available. You may also choose your own message, as long as it fits into the space of the greeting you select. (Custom designs available upon request.) The price of the small greeting is \$21 (styles F and J), the medium one is \$40 (style H and I) and the largest one (not shown) is \$78.

To ensure that your greeting is published or for more information on additional styles, sizes & designs, please contact Kathy Brown at 724-2360, ext. 244; or e-mail [advertising@thereportergroup.org](mailto:advertising@thereportergroup.org). Checks can be made payable to *The Reporter* and sent to: *The Reporter*, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850.

**Style H - \$40**  
Actual Size: 3.22" x 1.975"

May you be inscribed in the Book of Life for good health, peace and prosperity.

Your Name(s)

**Style I - \$40**  
Actual Size: 3.22" x 1.975"

May this New Year be a time of peace & joy for you and all those you love.

Your Name(s)

**Style J - \$21**  
Actual Size: 1.52" x 1.975"

May this New Year be a time of peace & joy for you and all those you love.

Your Name(s)

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

Have a sweet, happy & healthy New Year!

Your Name(s)

**ROSH HASHANAH Greetings**

**Deadline: September 20** (September 12 issue)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Greeting Style \_\_\_\_\_ Message \_\_\_\_\_

How you would like it signed \_\_\_\_\_

We accept  Visa  Mastercard  American Express  Discover

Print Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address, City, State, Zip (Registered billing address of card) \_\_\_\_\_

Checks can be made payable to *The Reporter*, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850.

**THE REPORTER**  
Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

**Deadline: Sept. 12**

**YOUR AD COULD BE HERE!**

For information on advertising, please contact Kathy Brown at 724-2360, ext. 244 or [advertising@thereportergroup.org](mailto:advertising@thereportergroup.org)



# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## How the ancient rabbis didn't read the Bible

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Most scholarly works on the Bible focus on its composition, for example, how the book was written and/or who wrote it. Little thought has gone into the way the ancient rabbis actually read the text. According to Rebecca Scharbach Wollenberg's fascinating, but difficult to read, "The Closed Book: How the Rabbis Taught the Jews (Not) to Read the Bible" (Princeton University Press), that's because we assume their method of study was similar to that of medieval time and contemporary times. Wollenberg, though, believes this is a faulty assumption: her evidence shows that the ancient rabbis were ambivalent about the written word and approached the physical Torah scroll as a potentially dangerous object.

The author notes that in Second Temple times, the Bible was not a closed canon; there was no fixed and stable text. The rabbis came to question the nature of the biblical revelation itself since the first revelation was given orally when God spoke to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The first tablets, which Moses broke, were written by God, while the second tablets were transcribed by Moses, meaning that they were written by human hands. Which of these revelations were the full and correct word of God?

Some rabbinic traditions recorded in the Talmud also question whether the written scroll of the Torah text is the original text Moses transcribed. They speak of a Torah written by Ezra and other scribes, who were thought to have reconstructed the text from memory. In these traditions, Ezra is said to have "composed a new edition of the Bible while the people were in exile – adapting both the

writing and the language to their new home by bringing the ancient Hebrew tradition in line with the majority culture's [Babylonian] imperial writing conventions." This included changing both the lettering and some of the words into Aramaic, which was the language used in Babylon.

Physical contact with the biblical scroll was also thought to be potentially dangerous. Wollenberg notes that in later Babylonian traditions, "simple proximity with the biblical text can wipe out both individuals and populations without any spiritual mechanisms at work. In such traditions, the very existence of a material written revelation had become a source of multiform and inchoate terror." For example, there are stories where someone dies because they are holding a copy of the Torah text. The rabbis also worried about the danger that the text could be read and interpreted incorrectly: their concern was that the followers of Jesus, sectarians or heretics could misread God's word.

The most challenging section of "The Closed Book" is the author's discussion of how the ancient rabbis approached studying the text in very different ways than in later historical periods. According to Wollenberg, people did not learn the text by reading from the written scroll, but rather learned to quote from memory. Students were taught to read just enough so they could recognize words, but their main study was to memorize set portions of the Torah, which they were expected to recite when called upon. Even when a scroll was used in a ritual, the readers did not look at or sound out the words, but used the text as a prompt for reciting the memorized version.

Wollenberg also offers stories from the talmudic text that limits when and how long a person could hold and read from a scroll. Deaths were recorded as a punishment for violating these restrictions. Plus, sections of the Torah were changed/censored when read aloud: the four letter name of God was never to be sounded out and sections of the written text that were thought to be incorrect were to be read in corrected versions. When studying, quoting from the text was to be done by memory, rather than reading from the scroll. While it was OK to check a word or a phrase to make sure it was correct, it was considered improper for the teacher to lead the discussion from a written text.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of Wollenberg's discussion is her idea that the ancient rabbis believed there were three versions of Torah: an oral memorized version, a written one and the original revelation at Sinai that was an experience that could not be put into words. The author writes, "Many early rabbinic thinkers would treat Spoken Scripture (*mikra*) as a generational echo of this first, more authentic, biblical revelation that issued from the mouth of God – the fuller spoken scriptural revelation that was captured all too briefly on the first tablets of the law before escaping its written prison to return to its natural state. According to this vision of Sinai and its products, the original spoken iteration of the biblical tradition survived the destruction of the first tablets and would be passed from mouth to mouth as an intangible accompaniment to the written text – as a sort of universal soul of the biblical revelation that was linked to written parchment bodies preserving the revelation on the second tablets, but not contained by them."

The idea of a Torah scroll as a living body that serves as an intermediary between God and humans is also found in some rabbinic texts. The physical scroll becomes a sacred object – something of far more value and worth than its parchment and ink – and was considered a path between humans and God as a kind of replacement for what once occurred in the Temple cult of sacrifice. In fact, some thought the Torah scroll had its own soul and, therefore, was an object to be venerated and handled with care.

Wollenberg notes that, by the Middle Ages, the ancient rabbinic style of study began to disappear, with people focusing on the details of the written word in order to draw meaning from each and every word in the text. While she is unable to pinpoint an exact time and reason why this occurred, she does posit that its occurrence was due to the changing physical nature of what was used for studying, meaning the use of books rather than scrolls. The written version of the text was now thought to have Divine authorship, leaving readers to puzzle out the meaning behind contradictions and variant spellings of words in different parts of the Bible. Some commentators of the time declared that the text was *not* supposed to be easy to read. Its difficulties were there as a challenge for rabbis/commentators to discover its true/hidden meanings.

"The Closed Book" is a scholarly work with prose that can be difficult to read due to its use of foreign terms and academic terms that might not be familiar to all readers. This reviewer is not enough of a scholar to judge whether Wollenberg's theories are correct, but her work made for interesting and challenging reading. Anyone interested in the development of the Bible and biblical commentary will want to read "The Closed Book" and judge for themselves.

## Six women in the Talmud

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Most of the women who appear in the Talmud weren't considered important enough to be named or given distinguishing features. In her fascinating "The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic: Rereading the Women in the Talmud" (Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies/Maggie Books), Gila Fine notes that these women "are generally marginal and almost always anonymous, named after the important rabbi in their life; they are mothers of, daughters of, sisters of, wives of. In all of rabbinic literature, there are just 52 named women, as opposed to over a thousand named men. Of these 52, only a half a dozen are heroines of their own talmudic narrative: Yalta, Homa, Marta, Heruta, Beruria, and Ima Shalom."

Fine looks carefully at the stories of these six women to uncover their true meaning. The women were often maligned by commentators who labeled them with anti-feminine archetypes, for example, a shrew, femme fatale, prima donna, madonna/whore and more. However, the author believes "upon a second reading, that this is not at all the case; once the heroine's story is reread, more closely and in context, her archetype systematically breaks down, and in its place emerges the character of a complex, extraordinary woman, as misunderstood by her own world as by generations of readers." Fine is not claiming that the ancient rabbis were feminists or that the Talmud does not have misogynist content. However, she does believe that these women's stories can be read in a way that shines a positive light on their behavior. Whether this was what the rabbis intended (which Fine does believe is true), readers will delight in her interpretations.

These rereadings of the talmudic stories are difficult to summarize since, after presenting the text, Fine offers a careful, detailed analysis that slowly unpacks its meaning. Noting the traditional interpretations of the story, she then uses a different approach to explain what occurred. For example, Yalta, the wife of Rabbi Nachman, is treated as a shrew by traditional commentators because when Ulla, a visitor to her house, sees no need to share the wine offered in the Grace after Meals with Yalta, she breaks 400 jars of wine kept in the family's wine storehouse. Before explaining the story through Yalta's eyes, though, Fine offers literary examples from ancient texts to 19<sup>th</sup> century literature to put the image of a shrew in context, showing how these women were described as ill-tempered, irrational creatures who often terrorized their innocent, suffering spouses.

What Fine sees as the defining detail to understanding Yalta's reaction is Ulla's explanation as to why she doesn't need to drink the wine. His claim that "the fruit of a woman's body is blessed only through the fruit of man's body" focuses on her role in the reproduction process, meaning she is only the vessel through which her husband has children. The author notes that "for much of the ancient world, the power of procreation belonged exclusively to the man. It was the man who produced life through the generative force of his seed, whereas woman merely carried that life inside her." Yalta feels insulted because she sees Ulla as

denigrating women, calling them unimportant vessels, something that denies her role in childbearing. Destroying the wine vessels is her way of showing Ulla that vessels do matter because without them, there would be no wine to drink. Fine notes that Yalta proves to Ulla that "for any real act of procreation, both woman and man, vessel and seed, are necessary. Women might be vessels, but they are no less essential to the creation of life."

It's impossible to do justice to Fine's discussion of this story and others, but her interpretations of the five other women include:

- ◆ Homa, a femme fatale, twice widowed, who is treated poorly by her neighbors because she demands what she is rightly owed as a widow. Rather than a sexualized single woman, as she is viewed by the town, she seeks a legitimate settlement so she can live the rest of her life in dignity.

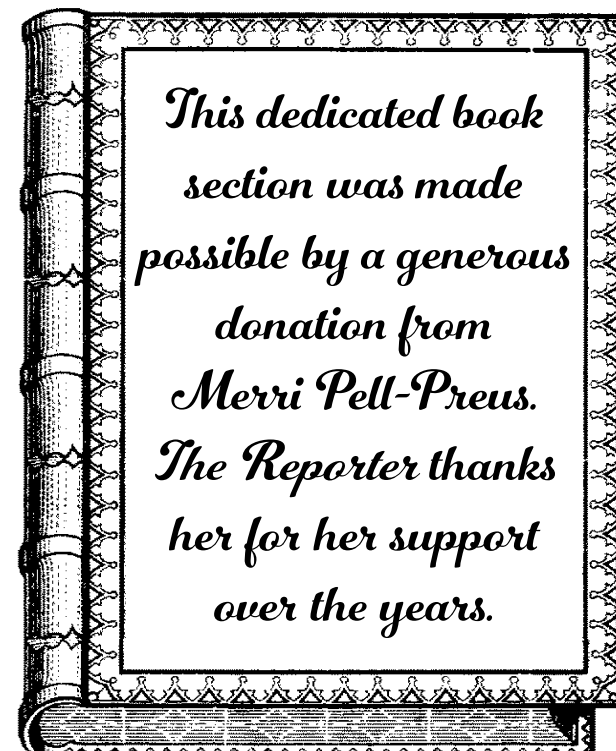
- ◆ Marta, a prima donna, who speaks to the need to take action during difficult times, even if we make mistakes. The story, which takes place during the destruction of the Second Temple, shows a rich woman trying to understand how to survive during the siege.

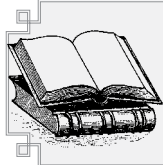
- ◆ Heruta, a madonna/whore, who shows the difficulty some men had understanding sexual desire during the rabbinic period. The story opens with Heruta hearing that her husband still desires sex, although he has forbidden himself from sleeping with her. She had denied herself that satisfaction because she thought her husband no longer wanted sexual activity. But she sees no need for that to continue. Unfortunately, after Heruta seduces him in disguise, he fasts until he dies, showing that he was never able to accept the reality of his bodily needs.

- ◆ Beruria, the overreacher (a woman who overreaches her station), who, in the Talmud, was considered as learned and wise as any man. However, commentators through the centuries wrote about her as a supposed adulteress. Fine looked for the original of this story and discovered that it was not found in the Talmud itself, but added centuries later. This discovery restores Beruria to her rightful place as a righteous woman.

- ◆ Ima Shalom, the angel in the house, is the wife of Rabbi Elizier, who was excommunicated for reasons too complex to explain in this review. Fine notes their role reversal in the public and private spheres, and the difficulties caused by Rabbi Elizier's refusal to accept the authority of his fellow rabbis.

The interpretations featured in "The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic" are far more complex and interesting than these simple summaries suggest. Her careful rereadings of the text are intriguing and exciting, even if not always completely convincing. Readers may wonder if Fine is reading more into the stories than the rabbis originally meant. However, as she notes in the chapter on Ima Shalom, the rabbis declared that the Torah is no longer in heaven: it is rabbinic interpretation of the text that matters. The same could be said of interpreting the talmudic text. "The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic" would be a perfect study text for individuals and groups interested in learning more about the Talmud.





# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## *Keeping secrets in the Soviet Union*

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Being Jewish in the Soviet Union was never an easy thing, even for atheists with no interest in their religion. Telling the complete truth about your experiences in World War II could also create difficulties as Yefim Shulman realized when he returned from serving in the army. Imagine his wife Nina's surprise when, after his death, she discovers a letter Yefim wrote to the KGB that completely overturns her understanding of her husband's experiences during the war. In Sasha Vasilyunk's wonderful novel "Your Presence is Mandatory" (Bloomsbury Publishing), the author alternates time periods as readers learn the true story of Yefim's life.

Yefim, who was born to a Jewish family living in Ukraine, had originally hoped to become a hero, much like his older brother, who had recently returned from his stint in the Soviet army. Serving on the border between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1941, Yefim and his fellow soldiers are subject to a surprise attack by the Germans, which signaled the formal beginning of the war. Soviet soldiers were expected to fight and die for the cause, meaning that being captured by the Nazis was considered completely unacceptable. The result of surrendering was worse for Jewish soldiers: you had to hide all marks of being Jewish or face immediate death. It doesn't spoil the plot to note that Yefim survives the war since he is alive in the opening chapter, which takes place in 2007. What the novel explores are the difficult choices he made not only during the war, but after peace was declared.

The chapters focusing on the decades after the war (beginning in the 1950s) offer insights into Yefim's life and those of his non-Jewish wife, Nina, who faced prejudice from the Soviet system because she lived in territory that was once conquered by the Nazis. Anything that contradicts

the strict Soviet line about the war is punished and that includes soldiers who survived the war in German POW camps. Nina and Yefim's marriage is not the result of a grand love affair, but rather that of two people who know they won't be able to achieve their hearts' desire. But their life together – which includes two children – might have been better with open communication. However, Yefim fears revealing what had really occurred during the war, something that colors almost every aspect of his life.

The best parts of "Your Presence is Mandatory" are the insights the author offers about life in the Soviet Union. For example, even though all Soviet soldiers are supposed to be equal, Yefim discovers that there are various levels of equality. When thinking of his close friend Ivan, he notes that "unlike some other guys at boot camp, Ivan didn't care that he was a Jew, nor that his skin tone was deeper and his last name decidedly not Slavic. He even got offended on Yefim's behalf whenever he heard a joke about a Yid." Even decades later, being called a Yid was not a compliment as Yefim's daughter, Vita, discovers when a drunk insults her. She doesn't understand why someone would call her a Yid: "She had never thought of herself as Jewish. She didn't even know what it meant. To her, the real Jews were foreigners who lived in the distant, exotic land of Israel. Instead, Soviet Jews were just people with particular last names who could be just as studious as her or immature as [her brother], but at the end of the day were simply Soviet citizens." She had not yet experienced the prejudice that

caused people to change their names in order to get into decent Soviet universities or advance their careers.

Yefim's ideas about the army, his country and patriotism changed over time. Before the war, he was pleased to fight for his country. Then he met those who proclaimed that soldiers are simply fodder for war, bodies no one cares about – something Yefim begins to wonder is true for both sides of the conflict. Maybe their governments don't care about the welfare of their citizens. Maybe all they cared about is land and borders. Yefim ponders that idea toward the end of the war, thinking that "in all the twenty-two years of his life, borders never felt permanent or secure: the Soviet Union ballooned, Ukraine changed shape, the neighboring Poland was tossed about like a ball, and the gluttonous Germany had tried to swallow half the world. What a mess it was, and for what? If he ever got out alive, he'd want to understand what made land so desirable that people were willing to kill and be killed for it." What he learned during the war made him doubt that sacrifice was ever worth its cost.

"Your Presence is Mandatory" offers a great deal to ponder, including the meaning of patriotism, the problems caused by keeping secrets from your loved ones and what people must do to survive tyranny and war. The prose is excellent, the plot absorbing with just enough suspense to keep pages turning, and its surprises are heart-rending and moving. This is Vasilyunk's first novel, but she is definitely a writer to watch.

## Uptown Jews vs. downtown Jews

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Uptown German Jews vs. downtown Russian Jews, gangsters vs. reformers, and business owners vs. unions: these opposing groups were active in early 1900s New York City and form the core of Dan Slater's impressive "The Incurruptibles: A True Story of Kingpins, Crime Busters, and the Birth of the American Underworld" (Little Brown and Company). Slater manages to cover a wide variety of material, putting it into perspective to help readers understand how the Jewish world came to be filled with criminals (some of whom were willing to support their families by any means possible) and reformers in a city where City Hall and the police department were filled with corruption.

The work opens with the murder of gambler Herman Rosenthal, a case that changed the face of New York City politics. Slater notes, "The unique circumstances surrounding the murder – namely, the alleged involvement of a cop; an ambitious district attorney; and the fact that Rosenthal had given a confession to that district attorney regarding that cop hours before he was killed – caused the case to become a global sensation. It received more attention than any crime ever had in the city, staying on front pages of papers for the next three years." However, the author feels that the aftereffects of this murder and the story behind what occurred then have not been explored.

According to Slater, the Lower East Side was filled with crime and Jewish criminals. They included gamblers, prostitutes, horse poisoners, thieves and others who preyed on the innocent and unknowing. The author notes that this behavior originally began in the Pale of Settlement in Russia, where Jews were persecuted and given little opportunity to support themselves. He writes, "Overcrowding and isolation produced certain traits in the ghettoized people, traits that could be invoked to rationalize further negative attitudes toward those people, justifying more isolation and more restrictive laws to control the teeming rabble. For the average citizen trying to get by in such an environment, the choice between paying off the cop or co-religionist shaking you down, versus challenging the extortionists, was pretty easy. Bribery was just business. When the uprooted community settled in New York, this aspect of ghetto culture moved with it, until someone decided to take a stand."

It was the German Jews who decided to take on this culture and the Tammany Hall political system – with its crooked police, politicians and judges – to help their brethren. One reason behind this attempt was that restrictions were being placed on immigration: claims that Jews brought crime into the country became a resounding cry. Slater notes that the German Jews faced an interesting problem: "In many respects it would've been easier for the German Jews to favor curbs on immigration. They stood to lose a great deal should disapproval of the Eastern Europeans rub off on them, at a time when they believed they might be nearing acceptance." However, many chose to help their co-religionists. But rather than work through regular channels (which were usually corrupt), a group of reformers was recruited whose members often stepped outside the law themselves, closing down

gambling parlors and other criminal activities without legal permission. This group, called the Incurruptibles, successfully resisted taking bribes or letting those they believed to be criminals off the hook.

Unfortunately, the results of their actions were mixed. While they helped prevent criminals from preying on victims, their actions negatively affected the East Side economy, meaning that there was less money flowing into businesses, which created financial distress. Plus, some members of the community saw no problem with business as usual (bribes, etc.) since the same activities that were condemned when done by the poor on the Lower East Side were often found among the richer classes (drugs, use of prostitutes, gambling, etc.). It's not as if vice belonged to only one section of the community.

A similar problem arose when labor unions used violence against factory owners. When the bosses violently broke up strikes – maiming and/or killing workers – no one complained it was against the law to use force. When the unions used the same tactics on scabs (workers who took the jobs of those on strike), they were condemned and their actions compared to those of gangsters. The same was true when the unions pressured owners to becoming union-only shops. The Incurruptibles hoped to stop these tactics, but were less successful. Slater notes that there were people who believed the unions should be allowed to do what was necessary to protect their members' livelihoods. For example, he writes that, when labor union members were charged with intimidation, Abraham Cahn, the editor of the Yiddish newspaper the *Forward*, felt that "given that manufacturers had run thugs against striking workers for years... why weren't manufacturers charged with crimes?"

In the public's mind, another difference between gangsters and business owners was how they were portrayed in the press. According to Slater, "Papers reported on the colorful lifestyles of gangsters, and many crime journalists transitioned to screenwriting, where their subjects made ideal movie characters. Romantic figures whose lives were dense with dramatic action, beautiful women, and riches beyond dreaming, gangsters offered moviegoers the vicarious thrill of resisting the corporate and legal domination that controlled their own lives. In turn, this habit of glorification gave license to underworld figures to self-righteously maintain that they were misunderstood."

"The Incurruptibles" is filled with fascinating characters who worked on both sides of the law. (Since some of them had very similar names, a list of the cast of characters would have been helpful.) The most interesting parts of the book are the ethical questions it raises not only about the needs of immigrants, but who decides what is moral – especially when the same behavior is lauded in one group and condemned in another. Slater does not glorify either reformers or gangsters, but rather gives readers an understanding of why people behaved as they did in difficult circumstances. His work also shows how even the best of intentions can create unwanted results that may be worse than the original problem. While discussing a serious topic, "The Incurruptibles" was also great fun to read. This is popular history at its best.

## Life then and now

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Some books are deceptively simple. Take, for example, Sayon Liebrecht's "The Bridesman" (Europa Editions). This evocative and poignant short novel – 151 pages – is narrated by Micha, an Israeli expatriate who is called back to visit Israel by his Aunt Adella after he's lived in the United States for 24 years. Her purchase of a plane ticket and the reservation at a fancy Tel Aviv hotel makes him wonder what she wants in return. Micha is a ghostwriter and ponders whether she wants him to write the story of her life. This makes him think back to his aunt's initial introduction to his formerly very close-knit family.

When Micha was a child, his mother, her four brothers and three sisters usually spent Saturday evenings at their widowed father's house. One brother, Moshe, who lived with his father, was a bachelor and his siblings decided it was time for him to wed. Unfortunately, Moshe seems to have an unnamed disability and is not the best marriage prospect. The family also want a bride who shares their Iranian background. Their first prospect is Adella, an orphan, who turns out to be more controversial and demanding than they wish. But after other attempts at matchmaking fail, they agree to let Moshe marry Adella. The only person in the family who seems to like her – besides Moshe – is Micha, who is asked to take part in the wedding.

Micha is surprised when he meets the contemporary Adella, but to say why would spoil parts of the plot. What can be said is that her life and relationship to his family have changed greatly, something that causes him to rethink and reevaluate the past. That leads him – and readers – to a new understanding of what really occurred before Micha left Israel as a teenager.

Liebrecht writes beautiful prose. For example, her descriptions clearly portray Micha's thoughts during his plane trip to Israel: "Images from the past flicker beneath my closed eyelids, presenting me with a riddle which teasingly vanishes before I can contemplate it. A flight attendant leans over me, offering champagne, and I sip the drink, causing pictures to whirl past more quickly. My grandfather rests his open palms on the top of my head; a row of model airplanes are lined up on the shelf above my cousin's bed; the nightlight glows in...[the] bedroom; a platter in a kitchen is stacked with pinwheel cookies; [a friend] and his musician friends disappear from my life; the toiletries in my mother's bathroom are lined up according to height; I feel the electrifying texture of Muga silk." The author does something similar when describing family relationships, while also withholding details that leave readers guessing.

"The Bridesman" is a quiet novel, which is not a complaint since its purpose is to evoke the life of a family and how it changed with the addition of one person. Watching Micha review his life and come to a startling realization, while also learning how one woman took charge of her own life, makes this work well worth reading.



# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Not rom-coms

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

When is a rom-com not a rom-com? When I've mistakenly thought a work's major focus would be on humor and romance. While it was fairly clear from the beginning that "Real Life and Other Fictions" by Susan Coll (Harper Muse) was not a rom-com, I originally thought that "The Goldie Standard" by Simi Monheit (Sibylline Press) leaned in that direction. However, both novels include far more than romance since their characters are forced to make serious decisions about the course of their lives.

Coll, the author of "Bookish People," has written another novel about a complex, interesting woman. (To read *The Reporter's* review of "Bookish People," visit [www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/celebrating-jewish-literature-work-family-comedy-and-deep-feelings?entry=432557](http://www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/celebrating-jewish-literature-work-family-comedy-and-deep-feelings?entry=432557).) Cassie Kline thinks about her life while driving to visit her Aunt Olivia and Uncle Harry, who became surrogate parents after her real parents died in a freak bridge collapse when she was a baby. Her husband, Richard, is not with her, partly because Cassie has discovered he's had an affair with a family friend. Their college-aged daughter is in Europe with friends, something that feels both a relief and a loss. Cassie's main companion, Luna, a rescue puppy, still needs a great deal of training. She's also come to realize her marriage to Richard is lopsided: she's helped him with his weather forecasting career, but he's always expressed little to no interest in her thoughts or career.

The question of why her parents were on that bridge in West Virginia has always bothered Cassie. Her aunt and uncle refuse to talk about it. Although serving as loving parents, they are generally unable to discuss anything dealing with emotions. Cassie feels the need to find out more and fakes having a job interview in order to leave their beach house in Delaware, where she is visiting them for the holiday, to travel to Point Pleasant, WV, where the collapse occurred. She also wants to deal with the obsession that ended her journalism career: that, before the collapse, people were warned by a mothman that something was going to occur. Cassie wants to know if that man was real and if others have encountered him or moths before a disaster.

As a writer, Cassie is looking for closure, something she realizes doesn't always happen in real life. However, in Point Pleasant, she is not only made welcome, but learns that the members of the town are also fascinated with the mothman to the point that you can buy mothman merchandise. Cassie does find answers to some of her questions, which not only helps her understand herself better, but also allows her make better decisions about her future.

While Cassie is middle aged, in "The Goldie Standard," Goldie is in the twilight years of her life. She lives in an assisted living facility, but is still relatively alert. Her local daughter visits her on a regular basis and her granddaughter, Maxie, by her daughter living in California, has moved to New York City to work on her Ph.D. Maxie also visits regularly. Unfortunately, Maxie's boyfriend has broken up with her, leaving Goldie with a mission: find a nice Jewish doctor for her granddaughter. After wondering the best way to handle this, Goldie decides to fake medical issues so Maxie can accompany her on doctor visits. Of course, things don't go the way Goldie expects.

While Goldie thinks her own romantic life is over, she is wooed by Harry, a newcomer to the facility who refuses to take no for an answer. Goldie had a wonderful, loving relationship with her late husband, but finds herself charmed by Harry. His efforts, though, make her think about her life, causing her to tell stories of her past of which her family is unaware.

The novel also includes Maxie's thoughts. After her breakup, she decided to concentrate on her work and forget about romance. But she worries about her grandmother as she takes her on her rounds to visit doctors. They are driven by T-Jam Bin Naumaan, a respected artist who makes ends meet as a chauffeur. However, this non-Jewish charming man is not whom Goldie wants for her granddaughter, although Maxie finds him very interesting and attractive. But, in some ways, his story mirrors that of Goldie, who survived World War II in Germany and married another Holocaust survivor. How this can or cannot be resolved is among the topics the novel discusses.

"Real Life and Other Fictions" and "The Goldie Standard" offer extremely poignant moments. At first, Goldie felt like a bit of a stereotype, but soon became a three-dimensional character. Parts of the story made me feel extremely sentimental. Cassie's story offers a moving, heart-breaking version of what happened to her parents and explains a great deal about her life. Yes, both novels ultimately have some romantic elements, but they offer far more depth than one might expect.

## Thrillers focus on World War II

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Readers might be excused for wondering if recently published thrillers about World War II could possibly offer anything new. After all, numerous thrillers are published every year: can there really be anything different to write about? Fortunately, the answer is yes. Two new novels – "The Goddess of Warsaw" by Lisa Barr (Harper) and "Shanghai" by Joseph Kanon (Scribner) – not only offer interesting food for thought about the ways their characters survive, but absorbing suspenseful stories.

Barr's thriller is simply amazing: its plot is filled with suspense and numerous surprises, in addition to offering an extremely moving portrait of a fascinating woman. The prologue gives a clue that something different is in the offing: In 2008, Golden Age movie star Lena Browning is approached by Hollywood's latest success, Sienna Hayes, who wants to make a film about Lena's life. Lena is interested, but she wants someone who'll tell the full story: that Lena Browning was once Jewish Bina Blonski, a woman who survived the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto. Bina had one advantage over most of the Jews forced into the ghetto: she could pass for Aryan.

This ability to pass leads to a double life, one that allows her to move in and out of the ghetto in order to deliver weapons for the uprising, which few expect to survive. Her most heartbreaking adventure – which was based on real events – will rip apart readers' hearts. But it is Bina's determination to do whatever is necessary – no matter how difficult or horrific – that makes her an incredible character. Since readers meet Lena (Bina) in 2008, it doesn't spoil anything to say she survived the uprising, but her rise in Hollywood also makes for great reading, as does her refusal to leave the past behind. While readers may question her actions, she sees herself as an avenger, something that becomes clear as the pages of this work quickly turn.

While Bina remained in Europe during the war, Daniel Lohr, the main character in "Shanghai," managed to escape Europe in 1938 with the help of his Uncle Nathan, who owned a jazz club in Shanghai. Daniel feared for his life

because he was part of a political group opposed to the Nazis and some members had already been arrested. Life for most refugees was not easy – people were allowed to take very little with them; many arrived in Shanghai penniless – and vice thrived. Nathan was looking to expand his empire, but had to balance a variety of other people's interests, including those of Chinese gangs and Japanese officials, all of whom were on the take.

Daniel, who has never worked with the underworld before, begins to help his uncle but finds that life is far more dangerous than expected, especially when politics come into play. Although, technically, the Chinese still ruled Shanghai, the Japanese were the real rulers and their alliance with Nazi Germany made them dangerous. All that saved the Jews living there was the Japanese belief in the Nazi propaganda that said Jews control the United States, with whom they are not yet ready to go to war. But Daniel finds himself facing moral dilemmas: Is he willing to kill for profit, which he feels will make him no better than the Nazis, or will he act on his principles to fight for what he believes is right? The novel offers some excellent twists and turns as Daniel decides his course of action.

What made reading "The Goddess of Warsaw" and "Shanghai" together so wonderful was the opportunity to explore the paths the characters took in order to survive. Both works question whether self-preservation or fighting against evil should be the characters' motivating factor. Bina/Lena was willing to do questionable things in order to save lives and achieve justice, even after she found success in Hollywood. Yet, she was also willing to risk ruining her life for the same purpose. Daniel, who put his life in danger for a cause in Europe, found himself helping his uncle by performing actions that did not always fit his image of himself. Torn between his righteous father, who died at the hands of the Nazis, and his uncle, who often skirted the law, he must decide which path to take. Book clubs interested in moral dilemmas should find reading these two works together will make for an absorbing and interesting discussion.

## Hearing and telling the wrong stories

Dear Shalom Auslander,

First, I want to say that I looked at photos of you online and you are not fat. Readers may be wondering why I'm beginning my review with that comment, but your second memoir "Feh" (Riverhead Books) opens with you in the hospital because of the weight loss drugs you took that almost cost you your life. My first reaction was, "Boy, someone did a job on him," and the rest of your memoir proved me correct. The stories we are told have an enormous effect on our lives and the ones we pass on the next generation can do the same.

I also need to apologize to you for thinking that you started writing for TV because you were no longer interested in literature. I am a big fan of your books (novels, short stories and your previous memoir) and was disappointed that you were focusing on screenplays. I had not realized you'd lost your advertising job and needed additional income, one that writing for print was not going to produce. (Side note: If I ever teach a course in theology, I plan to use your short story "Waiting for Joe" as part of the class. The two hamsters, who believe their owner is God, are a perfect example of how theological differences can develop.)

But back to your new memoir: It seems your Orthodox background convinced you that human beings and human activity are all feh, which you define as "an expression of disapproval or disgust." Yes, rather than learning that the world is filled with beautiful, wonderful possibilities, you learned from your rabbi's version of biblical stories that God views humans with disgust, something which made you dislike – perhaps even hate – yourself. You note that you were so young when you heard these stories that you can't remember your age; it has always seemed a part of you. What it did was fill your life with darkness and pessimism.

What is amazing is that your memoir is extremely funny. I realize this humor comes from pain. But I love your versions of biblical stories and your take on God speaking to angels in heaven. Yes, I know that some people will find them sacrilegious, but your humor teaches a different way of looking at the world, and it is a legitimate one. You note in one chapter that "William James believed that every philosophy is nothing more than a reflection of the philosopher's own temperament" and I have to agree, although my definition of philosophy is that it's the thing that keeps us from running screaming into the night in despair.

I wish I could reprint your versions in complete detail, but I don't have space. But I do want to note your image of God: "Sometimes, in my darkest moments – when my

heart is broken or my dreams collapse or I can't find a job to provide for my family – I suspect I am God's favorite comedy." You write, "I could use a good laugh," God says as He drops onto His couch and aims his remote at the TV. "Let's watch a little *Auslander*." Gabriel enters, holding a bowl of popcorn, and sits down beside Him. "Is this the unemployment episode?" Gabriel asks. "I love this one." I've never worded it quite that way when things haven't gone well in my life: My version features God looking down and deciding that things have been quiet too long so it's time to stir things up a bit by adding yet another health problem. (Hmm, maybe it's not such a surprise that I love your work.)

Learning about your Orthodox Jewish education and the effects of your family of origin, I realized just how dark and difficult your life has been. I don't remember feeling quite this way when reading your first memoir, "Foreskin's Lament," but you used humor to tell your story there too. Plus, perhaps your life was not quite as hard then as it was when you were writing "Feh." Financial problems – not being able to provide your family with the life you want them to have – is not only disappointing, but can make someone feel like a failure.

I'm sorry you had to give up your house in upstate New York and move to California. I'm sorry that you didn't receive the financial awards you sought. I'm sorry that your friend died. I'm sorry that you feel you infected your sons with your pessimism. Your wife does seem wonderful and I believe she truly loves you, even though it's very clear that you don't love yourself. Her declarations of love at the end of your memoir brought tears to my eyes.

I hope you can find if not peace, then a way to live your life with less pain. What I can do is recommend your book to my readers. I know some won't like your religious point of view or your language, but they've probably already stopped reading this review. Everyone else should buy a copy of your book so you can write more books. I can't wait to read your next one.

Sincerely,  
Rabbi Rachel Esserman

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





# Celebrating Jewish Literature



## Searching for one's life path

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Our lives often take us in unexpected directions. Even those who firmly believe their path is set can realize that something is missing in their lives, even if they can't define exactly what that is. Two recent novels – “To and Fro” by Leah Hager Cohen (Bellevue Literary Press) and “California Dreaming” by Noa Silver (She Writes Press) – offer characters searching for meaning in lives that have taken unexpected turns.

Cohen's novel features an unusual format: it contains two separate works, leaving readers to piece together the connections between them. Open the book on one side and you can read the novel called “To”; flip the work over and you'll find a completely different novel called “Fro.” The book opens with an invitation to read its two sections in any order, although reading them in reverse order would create a different experience. I decided to start with “To,” which is a parable that takes place in an unknown world and time, and concluded with “Fro,” which takes place in contemporary America. There are hints that characters in “To” might be Jewish, although that's not completely clear. However, in “Fro,” Judaism (and a rabbi) plays a role in the characters' lives.

“To” begins with a young girl named Ani deciding to follow the Captain, the man who owns the farm/estate (its exact nature is unclear) where she lives. However, Ani is not related to the Captain: readers later learn why Ani and her mother were forced to leave their original home and how they came to live on his farm. Readers follow Ani's journey, which, while interesting, doesn't seem to have a real purpose other than to introduce characters who teach her a variety of lessons. She also brings a kitten with her, something that allows her to take care of someone beyond

herself. There is one section where Ani stays with a group that gathers to study that reminded me of a yeshiva, although that is never specifically mentioned. What becomes clear is that Ani is searching for something, but is not exactly certain what she is looking for and why she feels the need to continue her travels.

Annamae Galinsky is the main character in “Fro.” She lives with her mother and brother in New York City, but does not feel settled, even though she has their support. Exactly what she is searching for is never made completely clear, except for her feeling that there is some unknown someone who should be her friend. Annamae does find people who help her, including a rabbi who tells her stories and parables to better help her understand herself. The most interesting section deals with Annamae's refusal to write fiction for her English class because she doesn't feel it is fair to control her characters' destinies. In fact, she wonders if she is someone's invention, which plays with the nature of writing stories, including the one Cohen is telling.

The two sections of “To and Fro” have no real conclusion because each ending leads you to the other story. The characters' journeys never really finish, but yet still manage to be satisfying. Readers do have to accept the open-endedness of the work and its physical nature, which sometimes feels more like a gimmick, rather than an integral part of the story. This is not a book for readers who prefer a simple beginning, middle and end to a story. More adventures readers, though, may be intrigued by the daring nature of the book.

While what characters in “To and Fro” were searching for was not completely clear, Elena Berg, the narrator of “California Dreaming,” knew exactly what she wanted

to do. In 2011, she moved from New England to the Bay Area to work as an English teacher for Teach for America. She wanted to share her love of poetry and literature with underprivileged students, partly because her mother and Holocaust survivor grandfather are master teachers. However, her decision to teach in California is partly based on the fact that, decades before, her mother lived there, experiencing a wild, hippy youth filled with free love.

Teaching turns out to be far more difficult than Elena expected. She has little control over her class and finds her students less than interested in poetry since few have the reading skills necessary. Frustrated and feeling unappreciated, she is invited by a former teacher for Teach for America to work for an education technology start-up. At first, she is excited by the work they are doing because she believes it will help students. But it's not long before the technology moves in a different direction and Elena must choose what she wants to do with her life. Affecting her decision is the 2016 election (the characters never expected Donald Trump to win) and the increasing number of wildfires in California. Whether she is simply trying to duplicate her mother's life or finding her own path is something she must ponder.

Older readers will be reminded of The Mamas and the Papas song “California Dreaming” (which I sang while reading and thinking about the novel) and may reflecting on how much life has changed since the 1960s and '70s. Younger readers will note how myths of the past can rarely come to fruition decades later. Elena is an interesting character who discovers that the dream she had of herself may not match the reality of who she really is. That is a lesson many readers will appreciate.

## Wonderful rom-coms with a tinge of the supernatural

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Readers of this column know that I am a big fan of Jean Meltzer's books because, unlike many rom-coms, at least one of her main characters lives with a serious medical issue. (\*) Her latest work, “Magical Meet Cute” (Mira), takes a slightly different tack to this problem and adds yet another dilemma: what do you do when antisemitic posters target you and your community? But it was the potential supernatural aspect featured – did she really create a golem? – that made me decide to review it together with Shelly Jay Shore's first novel “Rules for Ghosting” (Dell): Shore's main character really does see ghosts. However, what really ties these two heart-warming novels is the fact that their main characters wonder if they are worthy of being loved.

Meltzer usually offers the thoughts of two main characters, who serve as the love interests. The first is Faye Kaplan, who moved to Woodstock, NY, after being dumped by her fiancé. Leaving a thriving legal practice, Faye opens Magic Mud Pottery, which allows her to pursue her first love: creating pottery. However, she is rarely satisfied with her work. The problem is her wrist, which was broken by her mother when she was in high school and which was never allowed to heal properly. Faye can't control one finger, which leaves her with what she considers imperfect works because of their misshapen sections and the imprints of her finger where she feels they don't belong.

Although Faye considers herself a Jewitch (that is not a typo) and uses potions and magic incantations to help people, she does belong to a synagogue. Attending a matching-making event at the synagogue under duress, she feels so awful she leaves early. Ever since her fiancé broke up with her, she hasn't wanted to date, feeling she can't be her true self in a relationship – just as she could never be perfect to please her mother, no matter how hard she tried. On the way home, Faye discovers something shocking: antisemitic flyers that target her and other Jewish businesses. She's so upset she drinks far too much and decides to perform a magic ritual: she creates a small, well-endowed, clay golem with red yarn for hair and buries it in her back yard under her rose bush.

Then, hung over and sleepy the next morning, she is on her way to a meeting about the flyers at the synagogue when she hits a tall, extremely good looking, red headed man with her bike. Following him to the hospital, Faye learns that not only doesn't he remember who he is, he can barely speak. Since no one comes to claim him, Faye rescues him – taking him home so he won't have to go to a shelter. Her friends, however, are not pleased with her decision to take Greg – as they decide to call him – in to live with her. After all, no one knows is he really suffers from memory loss or is a con man.

Readers learn Greg's thoughts in the chapters that focus on his point of view. He really has no idea who

he is and is extremely frustrated until he once again learns to speak. He also becomes very fond of and very attracted to Faye – reading the books she keeps in her store, which also serves as her home, and learning about her life. He thinks her work – the pottery she condemns for being imperfect – is beautiful because of its imperfections. As they search for his real identity, he worries that he may be part of the group that distributed the antisemitic flyers. Faye, on the other hand, has a different worry: is Greg the golem she created, a creature who seems perfect at first, but which, like the stories she's read on the internet, will go berserk and destroy her and her town?

“Magical Meet Cute” had a different feel than Meltzer's other works, partly because Greg is such a puzzle – although an absolutely wonderful and romantic one – even to himself. Readers may find themselves debating whether they want him to be a golem or a normal person who lost his memory. The plot is filled with sexy, funny, suspenseful and adventurous moments. I did figure out part of the mystery, which definitely did not spoil the fun, but made me feel pleased with myself for guessing correctly. There are also serious sections about how antisemitic actions create fear and, as Faye learns, how it helps to face those fears with courage and the aid of one's friends and community. My only question after finishing the book was, “When is her next novel being published?”

Reading and reviewing two books together can create problems because sometimes I enjoy one book far more than the other and can only offer faint praise for the second. Fortunately that was not true in this case: I found “Rules for Ghosting” absolutely delightful – a funny, sweet novel with characters you'd like to have as friends. OK, Ezra Friedman is a bit of a mess at times, feeling the need to take care of all the members of his family, even though he is the middle, not oldest sibling. His family runs a Jewish funeral parlor where he played as a child. But after his grandfather, the original owner of the parlor, dies, Ezra begins to see ghosts, the first of which is his grandfather, whom he feels looks at him with disapproval and disappointment.

Part of the reason for this feeling is that Ezra is queer and partway through a transition from female to male. (He has been taking testosterone, but has not yet been able afford top surgery. Instead, he wears a binder most of the day.) The rest of his family has been fairly accepting of this change and he is fortunate to have supportive friends. Ezra finds even more community when he has to move from living alone into an apartment he shares with several roommates. The fact that his former boyfriend lives in another apartment in the building complicates matters. But they've managed to remain friends, and the roommates from both apartments wander in and out of each others' space. Life gets more complicated, though, when Ezra learns that his main source of income is being cut: the yoga

center where he works has to close for renovations and he doesn't make enough from his side gig as a birth doula to fully support himself.

This leaves him unsure about his future when he attends a seder at his parents' house with his two siblings, the rabbi of their synagogue, his wife and Jonathan, their former son-in-law, who just happens to live alone in the apartment below Ezra's since his partner died the year before. Something happens at the seder that changes the lives of both families (I am not going to reveal what it is, but it was a doozy of a thing to announce at a family gathering) and Ezra finds himself working at the funeral home. There is only one problem: in addition to the regular ghosts he sees, Ben, Jonathan's late husband, appears and breaks several of the rules of ghosting Ezra's learned: he appears in more than one place and does something no other ghost has done – speaks to Ezra. Ezra finds himself very attracted to Jonathan, but worries he could be taking advantage of someone still in mourning. Plus, it's difficult to concentrate on romance when the spouse of your love interest is watching. Even worse, Ezra feels that his insecurities and gender issues make him unworthy of being loved.

In addition to its love story, “Rules for Ghosting” offers a well-done look at Jewish funeral practices, particularly *taharah*, the ritual washing of the deceased before burial. Rather than offering specific details of what's done, the novel shows what it means to those performing the ritual, as they take great care to treat the body of the deceased with respect. In fact, helping families during times of grief is what Ezra's family does. While it is not the main focus of the work, this allows readers to realize how wonderful – even with all their idiosyncracies – Ezra's family is. While “Rules for Ghosting” is Shore's first novel, it doesn't read like one: its complex, quirky characters grew on me and I enjoyed every bit of the journey they took.

What stood out to me after reading “Magical Meet Cute” and “Rules for Ghosting” is how both Faye and Ezra felt they weren't worthy of being loved. Faye's difficulties clearly came from her family of origin. While Ezra's parents put too much pressure on him to take care of his siblings, his problems also stemmed from the way society treats those who are queer, creating even more issues for someone who already doesn't feel comfortable in his own skin. I came to care about both of these characters, which also means I'm grateful these novels were rom-coms because it would have hurt had they not found love. Both books come highly recommended.

(\*) To read The Reporter's reviews of Meltzer's previous books, visit [www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-looking-for-romance?entry=395006](http://www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-looking-for-romance?entry=395006); [www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-searching-for-romance-intellect-vs-emotion?entry=420019](http://www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/off-the-shelf-searching-for-romance-intellect-vs-emotion?entry=420019); and [www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/celebrating-jewish-literature-rom-com-heaven?entry=450549](http://www.thereporter.org/book-reviews/celebrating-jewish-literature-rom-com-heaven?entry=450549).

# Federation held vigil/program on Aug. 8



Varda Morell spoke about her son, IDF Staff Sgt. Maoz Morell.



Eitan Morell spoke about his son, IDF Staff Sgt. Maoz Morell.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton held a vigil/program on August 8 for the Israeli hostages held in Gaza featuring area rabbis and the reading of the names of the hostages. The program concluded with remarks by Eitan and Varda Morell, whose son, IDF Staff Sgt. Maoz Morell, was wounded on February 15 while fighting in Gaza and died on February 19 at the age of 22. Around 60 people attended the event. (Photos by Shelley Hubal unless otherwise noted)



At left: Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, opened the program. (Photo by Dora E. Polachek)

## Jewish online resources

### By Reporter staff

A variety of Jewish groups are offering educational and recreational online resources. Below is a sampling of those. *The Reporter* will publish additional listings as they become available.

- ◆ The Center for Jewish History has now made its exhibit "The Golden Path: Maimonides Across Eight Centuries" available as a virtual tour. To tour the exhibit, visit [www.cjh.org/maimonides/tour.html](http://www.cjh.org/maimonides/tour.html).
- ◆ ALEPH will hold a virtual reading of the play "Desert Wind" by playwright/television writer Stephanie Liss, which tells the story of a Jewish Yemenite couple caught

in the midst of the Houthi takeover, on Sunday, September 15, at 7 pm. The cost to attend is "pay what you can." The play also features original music by RebbeSoul. For more information or to register, visit <https://aleph.org/civirm/event/register/?reset=1&id=565>.

- ◆ Pardes will hold the virtual course "Talmud Refresher Course" with Rav Daniel Reifman on Sundays, September 8-29, from 11 am-noon. The course is "designed for those with some prior experience learning Talmud, and the focus will be on gaining reading fluency and the ability to make sense of the flow of the Gemara." For more information or to register, visit [www.coing.co/Pardes/156186](http://www.coing.co/Pardes/156186).

- ◆ Ritualwell will hold the virtual class "Reading and Writing the Mourner's Kaddish" on Monday, September 9, from noon-1:30 pm. The program will look at "the structure of one of Judaism's most powerful and enigmatic prayers, examining some of the context and history of this liturgy and then mapping and writing our own versions." For more information or to register, visit <https://ritualwell.org/event/reading-and-writing-the-mourners-kaddish/>.
- ◆ ALEPH will hold the virtual program "Experiencing the Way of David and the Prophets: An Introduction," led by Jeff "KD" Meyers on Sunday, September 8, at 7:30 pm. See "Resources" on page 12

# Annual Campaign 2025

## THIS YEAR IT'S DIFFERENT. MAKE YOUR PLEDGE EARLY!

We hope we can count on your generosity again in the year to come.

You can make your pledge 3 ways:

- 1) Visit the Federation website at [www.jfgb.org](http://www.jfgb.org) and click on "make a pledge."
- 2) E-mail Federation Executive Director Shelley Hubal at [director@jfgb.org](mailto:director@jfgb.org) with "pledge" in the subject line.
- 3) Fill out the form in this ad and mail it to the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton, 500 Clubhouse Rd., Vestal, NY 13850

Mail this form to:

Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton,  
500 Clubhouse Rd.,  
Vestal, NY 13850

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State/ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Pledge: \_\_\_\_\_



  
*This year it's different.*

 **Jewish Federation**  
of Greater Binghamton



Ekev, Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25

## A solution for Israel's water shortage

RABBI ZEV SILBER, BETH DAVID SYNAGOGUE

Jewish prayer, whether recited communally or individually, contains several aspects that are familiar to all. The *Amidah*, the silent prayer, is the central part of the service. Yet, the most well known part of the service is probably the *Shema*. The *Shema* is composed of three paragraphs from the Torah that are placed together and recited twice daily, morning and evening. The first paragraph, containing the famous verse of *Shema Yisrael*, "Hear, O, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," can be found in the portion read last week. This week's portion of Ekev contains the second paragraph.

All too often prayers are recited without giving much thought to their meaning and message. It therefore behooves us at the time that the source of the prayer is located within the weekly Torah reading to take the time to study its

contents and reflect on the message it has for us.

The book of Deuteronomy is composed primarily of the speeches that Moses gave to the people during the last month and a half of his life, as they were preparing to embark upon the final leg of their journey and enter the land of Israel. These paragraphs of the *Shema* are both contained within the main speech and are included in the "*mitzvah*" section in which Moses discussed our relationship with God based on love, fidelity, covenant and commitment.

The covenantal agreement, Moses says in this second paragraph, requires us to love and worship God and follow His *mitzvot*, commandments. God, as His part of the covenant, will provide the appropriate rain needed for sufficient food to grow to provide our needs. On the other hand, rejection of God will result in drought,

famine and exile from the land of Israel.

The placement of this paragraph within the text of the Torah is also interesting. The section immediately preceding this contrasts the land of Israel with Egypt. Israel, the Torah says, is not like Egypt in that there you "watered the land with your foot," meaning that canals from the Nile River provided irrigation for agriculture. Israel, on the other hand, is a land of hills and valleys, and is dependent on rain to water its fields.

The commentators discuss which situation is better. Is a guaranteed source of water preferred, even though it requires constant work to bring the water to the fields, or is it superior to be able to rely on rainfall, requiring no special labor, even though the quantity and timing of the rain is not guaranteed? See "**Water**" on page 11

## Congregational Notes

### Temple Israel

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

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

On Saturday, August 24, Shacharit services will be held at 9:30 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25 and the haftarah is Isaiah 49:14-53:1. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 8:45 pm.

On Friday, August 30, services will be held at 7:30 pm.

On Saturday, August 31, Shacharit services will be held at 9:45 am via Zoom and in-person. The Torah portion is Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17 and the haftarah is Isaiah 54:11-55:5. A Zoom Havdalah service will take place at 8:30 pm.

On Monday, September 2, the temple office will be closed Labor Day.

On Tuesday, September 3, an Executive Board meeting will be held at 7 pm.

### Temple Beth El of Oneonta

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

### Penn-York Jewish Community

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

### Temple Beth-El of Ithaca

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

For upcoming services and events on Zoom, visit [www.tinyurl.com/HappeningAtTBE](http://www.tinyurl.com/HappeningAtTBE).

### Synagogues limit face-to-face gatherings

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

### Beth David Synagogue

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

### Rohr Chabad Center

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

Chabad will be holding pre-Shabbat virtual programs. For more information, visit [www.JewishBU.com/S2020Partnership](http://www.JewishBU.com/S2020Partnership).

### Congregation Tikkun v'Or

Affiliation: Union for Reform Judaism  
Address: PO Box 3981, Ithaca, NY 14852; 2550 Triphammer Rd. (corner of Triphammer and Burdick Hill), Lansing, NY  
Phone: 607-256-1471  
Website: www.tikkunvor.org, E-mail: info@tikkunvor.org  
Presidents: Martha Armstrong and Mitch Grossman, presidents\_22@tikkunvor.org  
Education Director/Administrative Coordinator: Naomi Wilensky  
Bnai Mitzvah Coordinator: Michael Margolin  
Services: All services currently on Zoom. E-mail info@tikkunvor.org for the times and links. Contemplative morning services every Tuesday from 8:30-9:30 am. Saturday mornings, Gan Shabbat and other special services at least once a month. Call for the weekly schedule.  
Jewish Learning Experiences (JLE) for second through seventh grade classes meet on Sunday mornings. Sixth and seventh grades also meet on Wednesday afternoons. Family programs for kindergarten and first grade held monthly.  
Adult Education: Offered regularly throughout the year. Check the website for details.



Friday, August 23, light candles before..... 7:33 pm  
Shabbat ends Saturday, August 24 ..... 8:31 pm  
Friday, August 30, light candles before..... 7:21 pm  
Shabbat ends Saturday, August 31 ..... 8:20 pm  
Friday, September 6, light candles before..... 7:09 pm  
Shabbat ends Saturday, September 7..... 8:08 pm

### Temple Concord

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

Some services and programs are online only.

Friday, August 23: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service with Suzanne Holwitt, Robin Hazen and Rabbi Rachel Esserman. Join via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y>, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook [www.facebook.com/templeconcord/](http://www.facebook.com/templeconcord/).

Saturday, August 24: At 9:15 am, Torah study with Allen Alt in person and on Zoom at <http://bit.ly/3XDn-vRE>, meeting ID 825 1226 2831 and passcode 743892.

Friday, August 30: At 7:30 pm, Shabbat service with Rabbi Leah Moser. Join via Zoom at <https://bit.ly/3hRmW2Y>, meeting ID 869 9699 8146 and passcode 826330, or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/templeconcord/](http://www.facebook.com/templeconcord/).

Saturday, August 31: At 9:15 am, Torah study in person and on Zoom at <http://bit.ly/3XDn-vRE>, Meeting ID 825 1226 2831 and passcode 743892.

Sunday, September 1: From 10 am-2 pm, Sisterhood Rummage Sale will be held in Temple Concord's basement. Shoppers are asked to use the Oak Street entrance.

Tuesday, September 3: At 10:30 am, Tuesday Morning Book Club: "The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store: A Novel" by James McBride. For more information, contact Merri Pell-Preus at 607-222-2875 or [merrypell.preus@gmail.com](mailto:merrypell.preus@gmail.com). To join via Zoom, log onto <https://bit.ly/3CX-Vd9b>, meeting ID 881 6469 4206 and passcode 653272.

Wednesday, September 4: At 7 pm, Sisterhood board meeting in the Temple Concord library. For answers to questions about the meetings, contact Barb Thomas at 607-759-2573. Anyone interested in joining Sisterhood should contact Carol Herz at 607-222-7144.

### Norwich Jewish Center

Orientation: Inclusive  
Address: 72 South Broad St., Norwich, NY 13815  
Phone: 334-2691  
E-mail: fertigg@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.: Call ahead, text or e-mail to confirm dates.

### Temple Brith Sholom

Affiliation: Unaffiliated  
Address: P.O. Box 572, 117 Madison St., Cortland, NY 13045  
Phone: 607-756-7181  
President: Nick Martelli  
Cemetery Committee: 315-696-5744  
Website: templebrithsholomcortland.org  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Temple-Brith-Sholom-114006981962930/>  
Service leaders: Lay leadership  
Shabbat services: Either Friday evening at 7:30 pm or Saturday at 10 am from Rosh Hashanah to Shavuot. Holiday services are also held. Check the Facebook page or weekly e-mail for upcoming services. Contact the president to get on the e-mail list.  
Religious School: Students are educated on an individual basis. Temple Brith Sholom is a small equalitarian congregation serving the greater Cortland community. Congregants span the gamut of observance and services are largely dependent on the service leader. The Friday night siddur is "Likrat Shabbat," while the Saturday morning siddur is "Gates of Prayer." The community extends a warm welcome to the Jewish student population of SUNY Cortland, as well as the residents of local adult residences.  
Services and programs are held by Zoom on the first and second Fridays of the month.

# Jewish Community Center

## Fun in the sun at Camp JCC



During week three of Camp JCC, campers enjoyed trips to the Syracuse Zoo, Ithaca State Park, Howes Caverns and Edward's Petting Farm, and concluded the week with an outdoor party.



## Water.....

Continued from page 10

The commentators conclude that Israel is superior because, with rain naturally occurring, the people can concentrate on other productive activities instead of irrigation. There is a guarantee from God that the rainfall will be timely and of sufficient quantity, as the Torah says, Israel is the "land that God always cares for, from the beginning to the end of the year." The caveat that our section adds is that this positive "caring" is dependent upon our adherence to God's commands. The commentators take that for granted, assuming that we will live up to our covenantal requirements.

We are living in a period of time that we have frequently seen water shortages in Israel. Although this year's winter has witnessed high water levels in the Kinneret, the water level in the Kinneret, the Sea of Galilee, has often reached dangerously low levels. Desalination projects and the importation of water have all been considered and begun. We are trying to create our own Nile River as a permanent, guaranteed source of water.

Perhaps, it is time to concentrate on ways to guarantee the appropriate annual rainfall instead of looking for man-made solutions. Let us put the covenant to the test, by fulfilling our responsibility, thus requiring God to fulfill His promise to us. All *mitzvot* are important. Yet, we may be able to derive some insight from this week's portion. Moses asks, "What does God require of you? Only to fear

Him and walk in his ways." (10:12) "Emulate God, and we can reap His rewards. Moses continues and describes the attributes of God that we should emulate. "He doesn't show favoritism, nor does He accept bribes. He does justice for the orphan and widow, loves the stranger and helps him

with his basic needs." (10:17-18)

Creation of a just, moral, compassionate and caring society is perhaps the greatest tool we have to secure our own existence and prosperity. Is there a more meaningful way to live the Jewish dream?



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

**PRE-ARRANGEMENTS AND PRE-FUNDING AVAILABLE**  
 Joseph Fritsch  
 Managing Director  
 71 Main St., Binghamton, NY 13905  
 Phone 607-724-1336  
 Fax 800-948-5844  
 parsonsfuneral@yahoo.com  
 www.ParsonsFuneral.com  
**HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE**

**Greater Binghamton's Preferred Electrical Contractor**

**729-3545**  
 Service Upgrades  
 Panel Change-outs  
 Heating Circuits  
 Indoor & Outdoor Lighting  
 Appliance Circuits & Outlets  
 Generator Installation  
 Data & Phone Cabling  
 Audio \* Video \* Security

**FREE ESTIMATES GUARANTEED WORK EMERGENCY SERVICE**

**FREE ESTIMATES GUARANTEED WORK EMERGENCY SERVICE**

**WINTER IS COMING!**  
 Generator Installation  
 Roof De-Ice \* Heat Circuits  
 Heat Tape \* Outdoor Outlets

**10% OFF**  
 with this ad. Cannot be combined with other offers. Valid for Residential Service only. Expires 1/31/25

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

*Want to stay in the know?*

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

**THE REPORTER**

Advertise in the next  
**Personal & Business Services**  
 Special Advertising Section •

If you are the owner or manager of a local business, *The Reporter* has a unique advertising opportunity for you! **PERSONAL & BUSINESS SERVICES**, the highlight of our Nov. 29 issue, will feature an advertising section of display ads in a variety of sizes to suit your copy. Plus, for all ads over 4 col. inches, we will include a FREE mini feature using the information you provide.

**THE REPORTER**  
 November 29 issue  
 Ad Deadline: Nov. 21  
 Contact Kathy at 607-724-2360, ext. 244  
 or [advertising@thereportergroup.org](mailto:advertising@thereportergroup.org) to advertise

**HOPLER & ESCHBACH FUNERAL HOME**  
 "A new family tradition"

Personal Service  
 Professionalism  
 Experience You Can Trust

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

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

# UCLA excluding Jews “unimaginable, abhorrent,” per federal judge

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – “In the year 2024, in the United States of America, in the State of California, in the City of Los Angeles, Jewish students were excluded from portions of the UCLA campus because they refused to denounce their faith.”

So begins an August 13 order from Mark Scarsi, a judge on the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

“This fact is so unimaginable and so abhorrent to our constitutional guarantee of religious freedom that it bears repeating, Jewish students were excluded from portions of the UCLA campus because they refused to denounce their faith,” Scarsi continued. “UCLA does not dispute this. Instead, UCLA claims that it has no responsibility to protect the religious freedom of its Jewish students because the exclusion was engineered by third-party protesters.”

Under principles of the Constitution, the University of California, Los Angeles – a public school – “may not allow services to some students when UCLA knows that other students are excluded on religious grounds, regardless of who engineered the exclusion,” the judge continued.

Scarsi issued a preliminary injunction that requires UCLA to stop providing “ordinarily available programs, activities and campus areas” to the entire student body if they become unavailable to certain Jewish students. “How best to make any unavailable programs, activities

and campus areas available again is left to UCLA’s discretion,” he wrote.

During the week that an anti-Israel encampment was set up on a central part of the UCLA campus, and in subsequent encampments, Jewish students – including the three plaintiffs – felt that they had to “disavow” their religious beliefs to move freely on campus and that they “were excluded based of their genuinely held religious beliefs,” in support of the Jewish state, per the judge’s order.

Scarsi ruled that the defendants have standing, in part because they “have sufficiently shown an imminent likelihood of future injury.” He also wrote that UCLA, when it claims that it is not the source of the injuries to the Jewish students, “misconstrues” that damage.

“The injuries are not simply the exclusion of plaintiffs from certain of UCLA’s ordinarily available programs, activities and campus areas,” Scarsi wrote. “The injuries result when plaintiffs are excluded from certain of UCLA’s ordinarily available programs, activities and campus areas and UCLA still provides those programs, activities and campus areas to other students knowing that plaintiffs and students like them are excluded based on their religious exercise.”

Yitzchok Frankel, an incoming third-year law student

at UCLA, stated that “no student should ever have to fear being blocked from their campus because they are Jewish.”

“I am grateful that the court has ordered UCLA to put a stop to this shameful anti-Jewish conduct,” he added.

“Shame on UCLA for letting antisemitic thugs terrorize Jews on campus,” stated Mark Rienzi, president of Becket and a lawyer representing the Jewish students. “Today’s ruling says that UCLA’s policy of helping antisemitic activists target Jews is not just morally wrong but a gross constitutional violation. UCLA should stop fighting the Constitution and start protecting Jews on campus.”

Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a nonprofit, stated that the injunction “is the first in the nation against a university for allowing an antisemitic encampment,” adding that UCLA is expected to appeal the ruling, which would go into effect on August 15, to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

“I hate to be a broken record on this, but where is the Justice Department?” wrote David Bernstein, university professor of law and director of the Liberty and Law Center at George Mason University’s Antonin Scalia Law School, of the case. “The Justice Department literally came into existence to combat conspiracies to violate Americans’ civil rights.”

## Belgian AI-training co. works to identify online hate speech

By JNS staff

(JNS) – In an interview in July with *The Brussels Times*, Guy De Pauw, CEO of the company Textgain, described efforts to develop artificial intelligence capable of analyzing hate speech. He explained how current AI programs, such as ChatGPT and Google Translate, have rejected efforts to review toxic language online.

“In our commercial projects, we were early adopters of [large language model] technology. But we noticed that for hate-speech detection, we couldn’t really use them,” he said. “You’ve probably had that experience yourself – as soon as you send anything toxic to ChatGPT, it will refuse to handle it.”

He says a team of 12 seeks to create a model that can recognize context in bigoted language.

De Pauw, who anticipated that his company’s final product could be worth millions of euros, said the program aims to “identify toxic messages and also find out what exactly they are about, who is being targeted and understand deeper patterns that are a lot more complex.”

While the Belgian company had spent nearly a decade developing its AI, De Pauw said “people are finally understanding what the technology can do for them. It was always something we had to explain, but now people know, and that makes a big difference.”

He said that contrary to other open-source models for AI, the company would not release its program since “if you release something like this open source, then bad actors will use it to start producing hate speech at scale, which is not the intention.”

## Resources . . . . . Continued from page 9

The cost to attend is “pay what you can.” For more information or to register, visit <https://aleph.org/civcrm/event/register/?reset=1&id=561>.

◆ The Jewish Grandparents Network will hold the virtual event “How Play with Grandchildren Can Bring Out the Sweetness of the High Holidays” on Tuesday, September 17, from 7-8 pm. Sari Kopitnikoff, an experiential educator and Jewish game designer, will offer a variety of “creative, playful (and virtual-friendly!) activities appropriate for children of all ages.” For more information or to register, visit [https://secure.lglforms.com/form\\_engine/s/9Bel7kv-FaXjCyAT5VWTEd](https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/9Bel7kv-FaXjCyAT5VWTEd).

◆ Ritualwell will hold the virtual “Resilience Boost: Spiritual Tools for the Election Season” Wednesday, September 11, from noon-1 pm. The cost to attend is \$18. The program is dedicated to the Jewish values connected to pursuing justice. It will include Jewish texts that reinforce the pursuit of justice. There will also be prompt to help those attending craft their own poem or prayer about the upcoming election season. For more information or to register, visit <https://ritualwell.org/event/resilience-boost-spiritual-tools-for-the-election-season-2/>.

◆ ALEPH will hold the virtual class “T’Shuva: A Return Through the Psalms” on Thursdays, September 12-26, at 7 pm. The cost to attend is \$50. The class will “explore Psalm 27, traditionally prayed every day during the month of Elul, as well as other psalms and practices which will open our hearts, clear our minds, and ready us to journey through the transformative process of the High Holidays.” For more information or to register, visit <https://aleph.org/civcrm/event/register/?reset=1&id=563>.

◆ The Yiddish Book Center will hold several virtual/hybrid programs: “Finding Home (Hungary, 1945) – The Little-Known Postwar Jewish Experience” with Dean Cycon on Thursday, September 12, at 7 pm ([www.yiddishbookcenter.org/events/finding-home-hungary-1945-little-known-postwar-jewish-experience-dean-cycon](http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/events/finding-home-hungary-1945-little-known-postwar-jewish-experience-dean-cycon)); Anita Norich in conversation with Lisa Newman about her recently released translation of Yiddish writer Celia Dropkin’s “Desires” on Sunday, September 15, at 2 pm ([www.yiddishbookcenter.org/events/anita-norich-conversation-lisa-newman](http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/events/anita-norich-conversation-lisa-newman)); and “The Siege of Sidney Street: The East End of London’s Most Sensational Shootout” with Andrew Whitehead on Thursday, September 26, from 7-8 pm ([https://support.yiddishbookcenter.org/site/Ticketing?view=Tickets&id=10925&s\\_src=Event&s\\_subsrc=seigesidneystreet](https://support.yiddishbookcenter.org/site/Ticketing?view=Tickets&id=10925&s_src=Event&s_subsrc=seigesidneystreet)).

◆ Ritualwell will hold the virtual class “Reading and Writing Mi Shebeirach Le’Cholim, the Jewish Prayer for Healing” on Monday, September 16, from noon-1:30 pm.

The class will study the origin of the prayer and, in the second half of the class, allow participants to write and share their own version. For more information or to register, visit <https://ritualwell.org/event/reading-and-writing-mi-shebeirach-lecholim/>.

◆ Uri L’Tzedek will hold the virtual program “A Conversation with Rabbi Yitz Greenberg” on Thursday, September 5, at noon. The cost to attend is \$18. Greenberg will discuss his latest book, “The Triumph of Life: A Narrative Theology of Judaism.” For more information or to register, visit [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_YnjD1tTMSBC8XxG5hm2Yw#/registration](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_YnjD1tTMSBC8XxG5hm2Yw#/registration).

◆ Yeshiva University is offering the nine-part podcast “Nine Days to Redemption” with Dr. Erica Brown about “the war in Israel, the Nine Days and better times to come.” For more information or to listen to the podcast, visit <https://www.buzzsprout.com/2386960>.

◆ Ritualwell will hold a weekly virtual 15-minute online minyan called “Holding Each Other” on Mondays, September 23-August 25, 2025, from noon-12:15 pm. Participants will recite Mourners’ *Kaddish* and *Mi Shebeirach*, the prayer for healing, and engage with a brief creative meditation. For more information or to register, visit <https://ritualwell.org/event/holding-each-other/2024-09-23/>.

◆ The Center for Israel Education is offering online courses, including “How Did the Zionists Create the State of Israel?”; “How Anti-Zionism Is Antisemitism”; “Israel’s Democratic Origins and Its Pluralistic Political System”; “Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Pre-State to 1973”; “Arab-Israeli Conflict: Quest for Normalization, 1973-Present” and “Israeli Identity and Society Through Music and Pop Culture.” There is a cost to take the courses. For more information or to register, visit <https://israeled.org/israel-education-online-courses/>.

◆ Roundtable will hold the virtual Jewish Book Club-Fall 2024 led by Ilan Stavans on Wednesdays, September 11, October 9, November 6 and December 12, from 12:30-2 pm. The cost to attend is \$180. The books under discussion will be “The Garden of the Finzi-Continis” by Giorgio Bassani; “Simple Gimpf” by Isaac Bashevis Singer; “On Borrowed Words” by Ilan Stavans; and “The Street of Crocodiles” by Bruno Schulz. For more information or to register, visit <https://roundtable.org/live-courses/literature/jewish-book-club-fall-2024>.

◆ The Maas Center will hold the virtual program “Rosh Hashanah 101” on Sunday, September 15, from 9-10:15 pm. The program calls itself a “crash course on the Jewish New Year.” For more information or to register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/rosh-hashanah-101-registration-980549659427>.

◆ The Institute for Jewish Spirituality will offer the virtual course “The Shofar Project: Awakening to Action for the New Year” on Wednesdays, September 4-25, from 8-9 pm. The course will offer an “ongoing Jewish spiritual practice to prepare our inner lives for the challenges and joys of the upcoming Jewish year, 5785.” For more information or to register, visit [www.jewishspirituality.org/go-deeper/the-shofar-project-5784-awakening-to-action-for-the-new-year/](http://www.jewishspirituality.org/go-deeper/the-shofar-project-5784-awakening-to-action-for-the-new-year/).

◆ My Jewish Learning will hold the virtual class “An Intro to Yiddish” with Tel Aviv University’s Daniel Birnbaum, on Mondays, September 9-October 28, at 11 am. The class is designed to give attendees a taste of the language and its cultural significance. No background knowledge is necessary. For more information, or to register, visit <https://my-jewish-learning.teachable.com/p/intro-to-yiddish>.

For additional resources, see previous issues of *The Reporter* on its website, [www.thereportergroup.org/jewish-online-resources](http://www.thereportergroup.org/jewish-online-resources).

*Eye-Catching Classifieds*

**YOUR HEATING & PLUMBING SPECIALISTS**

**BAKER'S PLUMBING & HEATING**

*We Also Do Natural Gas Conversions & All Plumbing Work*

Free Estimates • Fully Insured • Residential & Commercial

*We Install, Service & Repair...*

Furnaces • Air Conditioners  
Water Heaters • Gas Fireplaces

**SERVING BROOME & TIoga COUNTIES**

**754-6376**

*Emergency Service 24 Hours*

[pbaker927@yahoo.com](mailto:pbaker927@yahoo.com)

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

For information on advertising, contact Kathy Brown at 607-724-2360, ext. 244, or [advertising@thereportergroup.org](mailto:advertising@thereportergroup.org).

**THE REPORTER**  
Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

Advertisers...  
be a part of these special holiday sections!

Prepare for  
**Rosh Hashanah**  
Issue: September 6  
Ad deadline: August 29

**Rosh Hashanah**  
Issue: September 20  
Ad deadline: September 12

To advertise, contact Kathy Brown at 607-724-2360, ext. 244, or [advertising@thereportergroup.org](mailto:advertising@thereportergroup.org)

**THE REPORTER**  
Published by the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton

