

Berkshire JEWISH VOICE

A publication of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, serving the Berkshires and surrounding NY, CT and VT

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Super Tzedakah Week chair Josh Cutler and his son, James

Super Tzedakah Week 2024

In Every Generation, Federation

Jewish Federation of the Berkshires kicks off its 2024 Community Campaign on Super Tzedakah Week, starting May 19. Join us in building a safer and stronger Jewish community through your investment and participation in our work.

As part of the campaign kickoff, the Federation hosts Jewish Community Day on May 19 at High Lawn Farm in Lee from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Last year, more than 450 people attended – can we top that in 2024? See the article below with all the details of this exciting afternoon!

This year, we will help alleviate the growing food crisis in the Berkshires with our Pasta and Rice Collection from May 1 to May 31. Drop off packaged pasta and rice for distribution to local food pantries at: The Berkshire Food Co-op, Great Barrington; Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Great Barrington; Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Pittsfield; and Congregation Beth Israel, North Adams.

PLEASE DONATE!

With antisemitism on the rise in the Berkshires and Israel under attack, it is more important than ever to bolster our community with pride, courage, and Jewish joy. Today, more than ever, our community relies on Federation's leadership and support to navigate these uncertain times and ensure a secure and vibrant Jewish future for the Berkshires.

Federation's 2024 campaign goal is \$1.2 million. Through your gift to the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

SUPER TZEDAKAH WEEK,
continued on page 7



Jewish Community Day 2024 . . . L'Chayim!

Celebrate vibrant, secure, and caring Jewish life in the Berkshires

LEE – On Sunday, May 19 at 2 p.m., Jewish Federation of the Berkshires invites one and all to High Lawn Farm as we come together in celebration of our Jewish heritage, culture, and faith at Jewish Community Day.

Kids and adults alike will enjoy petting the baby animals, visiting the cows and newborn calves, and enjoying a host of crafts and special birthday fun in celebration of PJ Library's 18th Birthday.

Community tables representing Berkshire Jewish organizations will offer information and activities for all ages. Participants can explore the farm, including guided tours of the robotic milking rooms, the cow's waterbeds, and their on-demand massage stations. Of course, there will also be lots of schmoozing, free ice cream (while supplies last), raffles, music, and more!

New this year, we will toast *l'chayim* with the Mobile Dairy Bar serving fantastical milk-based treats, including the Moo-Chaccino, the Campfire S'more, and Thin Mint Cookie to name a few, courtesy of New England Dairy. Lactose-free options are available.

Even as we celebrate Jewish Life in the Berkshires, we remember the

COMMUNITY DAY,
continued on page 5

A Letter From Afula-Gilboa, Israel

Longing for home and creating miniature worlds with everything they need



Just before Passover, we received a note from our friend Tanya Fredman, educator at the Mishkan Museum of Art in Kibbutz Ein Harod: "We received an amazing donation from Federation, and all of us at the Mishkan Museum are deeply moved by the generosity and ongoing commitment of the Berkshires community, especially now when it is needed so, so much. The evacuated families in our area continue to count on the Mishkan as a source of stability and expression in these ongoing very challenging times, and your support is so impactful in enabling us to continue to be a resource of emotional healing through art for them and others in the community. Attached is a photo from a workshop for children evacuated from Northern Israel. The girl who made the piece is a 5th grader. Most of the children are from the northern community of Hanita and have been living in Ein Harod since the start of the war. They have been coming to the Mishkan for weekly workshops, and this particular project was their own initiative that they have been working hard on for the last month. They wanted to create a space that was truly their own and are very proud of it. They created their own miniature world out of different materials, with everything they need."

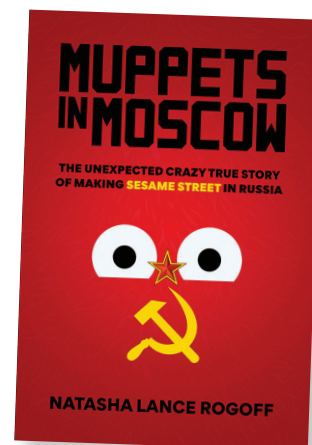
Muppets in Moscow: The Unexpected Crazy True Story of Making Sesame Street in Russia, with Natasha Lance Rogoff

GREAT BARRINGTON – On Friday, June 7 at 10:45 a.m., Federation's Knosh & Knowledge welcomes author Natasha Lance Rogoff in conversation with Avi Dresner about *Muppets in Moscow: The Unexpected Crazy True Story of Making Sesame Street in Russia*. The book is a captivating true story of a young American TV producer's adventures bringing *Sesame Street* to Russia.

The story takes place in the 1990s. Lance Rogoff and her team experience car bombings, assassinations, and the takeover of their puppet production office, as well as culture clashes that pit *Sesame Street*'s progressive values against four centuries of Russian thought. Brimming with insight and nuance, *Muppets in Moscow* explores the post-Soviet societal tensions that continue to thwart the Russian people's efforts to create a better future for their country. More than just a story of a children's show, this book provides a valuable perspective of Russia's people, their culture, and their complicated relationship with the West that remains relevant today.

This free Jewish Federation of the Berkshires program will be presented at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, 270 State Road in Great Barrington. This program is part of "Jewish Literary Voices: A Jewish Federation of the Berkshires Series in collaboration with the Jewish Book Council." For more information and to register, visit jewishberkshires.org.

In March, Avi Dresner spoke to Natasha Lance Rogoff about her story.



MUPPETS IN MOSCOW,
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OP-ED

IN MY VIEW

Navigating Uncharted Waters

By Dara Kaufman / Executive Director, Jewish Federation of the Berkshires



Dara Kaufman

Just two weeks ago, as we sat at our Passover tables, we asked why this night is different from all other nights. I imagine that question set off some interesting conversations in Jewish homes across the world. So much has happened since the October 7 terror attack by Hamas militants, and the impact of that single significant day continues to unfold and evolve.

Over the last 7 months, the Federation has been working diligently to respond and support both locally and in Israel. Our Israel Emergency Campaign and recent Israel and Overseas allocation continue to provide much-needed relief to our brothers and sisters in Israel.

This past February, the Federation hosted a security briefing for our Jewish leaders with the FBI, the Berkshire District Attorney's office, and local law enforcement to help us better understand the threats we are facing and how we can work together to mitigate those threats.

And unfortunately, the Federation continues to respond to local incidents of antisemitism targeting our community – supporting those impacted, calling out the actions when possible, sharing resources for reporting, and engaging law enforcement and local officials when appropriate.

Recently, Federation responded to a resolution presented by a group of citizens to the Williamstown Select Board, calling for an unconditional and permanent ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas. Such resolutions have been presented to city councils and select boards around the country. In many cases, the resolutions are one-sided and contain highly inflammatory language that demonizes Israel. While these resolutions have no direct legislative impact, they influence the thinking of local elected officials and residents.

They also create deep division in local communities and exacerbate the rising antisemitism that Jewish communities are experiencing, including ours.

As a local municipal government with no jurisdiction or mandate to address foreign affairs, Williamstown's singular focus on this specific international conflict was deeply concerning for many in the Jewish community and beyond.

We are grateful to the many residents who responded to Federation's action alert to engage in this public discourse and made their voices heard. I received many calls and emails from residents expressing concern and more than a few were reluctant to speak publicly for fear that they would be targeted.

With the permission of the Select Board chair, I was able share those concerns in my own remarks which I emailed to the Select Board members in advance and also presented publicly at the meeting. You can read my remarks at tinyurl.com/DKremarks. After a thoughtful and difficult discussion, the Select Board chose not to adopt the resolution.

All of us have been fundamentally transformed by the challenges Israel is facing as a nation and those we are facing as a people. This is deeply unsettling, but like our ancestors before us, we can find strength, resilience, and hope in

the celebration of our faith, culture, and traditions as a community.

Like the Hillel sandwich of maror and charoset that we eat at the Passover Seder, life is a continual mix of bitter and sweet and our Jewish traditions teach us that we can celebrate and mourn at the same time.

On May 19, Federation will launch its 2024 community fundraising campaign with our Super Tzedakah Week kickoff at Jewish Community Day, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at High Lawn Farm.

This wonderful day of celebration, enjoyed by more than 450 people last year, is a testament to the diversity, strength, and connection of our Jewish community and the collective impact we have through Federation. Read on in the paper to learn more about the fun and meaningful activities planned, including a special opportunity to send messages of hope and support to the families of the hostages. Volunteers are need to help with this special day, so contact Federation if you can help.

Throughout the month of May, we will also be partnering with Berkshire Bounty to help alleviate the food crisis that has gripped our community and we encourage you to join us in this special mitzvah.

We are most grateful to Josh Cutler, our 2024 Super Tzedakah chair, for his leadership and for sharing all the ways Federation has impacted his family over

We as Jews must fight antisemitism, the demonization of Israel, and the intimidation of Jewish students on campus. But we must never let ourselves be intimidated – and the Jewish way to avoid this is marbim b'simchah, to increase our joy.

– Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

five generations! L'dor v'dor, from one generation to the next, Josh is sharing families Jewish values in action through Federation. See the article on the cover for more about Josh and his Berkshire Jewish journey.

Please take a moment during Super Tzedakah week to make a meaningful gift or pledge to support Federation's 2024 community campaign. Your gift will help bring dignity and care to our older adults, build and strengthen the Jewish identity of our youth and young adults, support vital community building programs, confront rising antisemitism, and create meaningful Jewish life across the Berkshires, in Israel, and around the world.

Over the last few years, we have seen how quickly our world can change. From a global pandemic, rising antisemitism, and the most recent attacks on Israel, the needs and priorities of the Jewish people are constantly evolving.

But through it all, Federation has steadfastly provided the leadership and support needed to navigate the challenges we face and ensure a strong and secure Jewish community.

We are deeply grateful for your support. Thank you!



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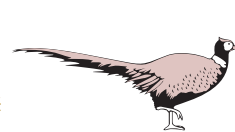


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GUEST EDITORIAL

Four Things To Do When Defending Israel

By Dan Elbaum / The Jewish Agency for Israel

There is an old lawyers' expression: "If you have the facts on your side, pound the facts; if you have the law on your side, pound the law; if you don't have the facts or the law, pound the table."

Since Oct. 7, despite Israel having both the facts and the law on its side in the war against Hamas, I have seen too many defenders of Israel, both lay and professional, "pounding the table" in anger and frustration as Israel is accused of all manner of crimes.

I would like to offer four pieces of advice for a more measured, effective response that applies to social media postings, speeches and even casual conversations with friends.

**First, ask yourself: 'What is my goal?'**

The first rule for any advocate is to understand his or her audience and where he or she wants to take them. Time is an irreplaceable commodity, and it is not productive to waste it trying to persuade someone who cannot be persuaded. In some situations, you might need a more modest goal, or maybe the debate simply is not worth it. Remember that an hour spent virtue signaling to someone equally convinced about an opposing narrative is an hour not spent speaking to someone whose mind can be changed, or at least opened.

As a related corollary, you should also ask yourself what exactly you are debating. Some topics are completely legitimate, and others are not. I strongly believe that Israel's military response since Oct. 7 has been appropriate and restrained considering the circumstances, but I do understand that someone might feel differently. I am happy to engage in that discussion in good faith and I am confident in the arguments that I employ. Conversely, I have very little interest in debating whether the events of Oct. 7 actually occurred or whether Israel has the right to exist. In those cases, the other person is starting at a point that is so divorced from reality that I question the utility of engagement.

Second, acknowledge Palestinian suffering

There is no question that Palestinian men, women, and children who are not associated with Hamas have died since Oct. 7. Wars, even necessary ones, are horrible. The death of innocents is awful beyond words. Full stop.

It is also appropriate, if not essential, to ask why they died. Any honest discussion of Palestinian suffering should naturally include the fact that Hamas leaders in Gaza and Qatar want their own people dead to elicit world sympathy. Any honest discussion should address the cynicism of that same leadership in creating an immense network of tunnels to kill Israelis and save themselves while publicly stating that they have no obligation to protect their fellow Palestinians, in contrast with the steps that Israel takes to save innocent lives, which is without precedent in the annals of warfare.

And yet, none of this makes Gazan suffering any less real or any less horrific. We should mourn their deaths not simply as a talking point or a throwaway line, but because that is what decent people do.

Third, stay away from politics

I know this one is hard and not getting easier, but it is vital.

We live in a highly polarized political age and a nation's policy can swing dramatically based on a single election. It is high time that we as a community remind ourselves that the most important accomplishment of American Jewry since 1948 has been to maintain access to the president of the United States and key decision-makers in government and be able to make our case to them on Israel's behalf regardless of political party.

As the war enters its sixth month, anti-Israel protests mount and pressure on elected officials mount, but we must remember that the overwhelming majority of Americans continue to support Israel in its war against Hamas despite concerns that some might have about the way that it is conducted. Despite all the noise, supporting Israel remains not only the right thing to do but the politically smart thing to do. We must do all we can to not aggravate the tensions in our already politically frayed country. Israel's survival is more important than your personal politics, and you must never forget that.

Fourth, keep it simple

On far too many occasions, I have spoken with well-meaning friends of Israel who fear that they do not know enough about Israel's history or political system to fend off every argument.

Has there ever been a cause, no matter how noble, that justified the rape of women? Has there ever been an oppression that was so severe that it

necessitated the burning of babies? History and context are important, but is there any history or context that explains the kidnapping, torture, and murder that took place on Oct. 7? Does anyone doubt that the war would end tomorrow if Hamas leadership freed the remaining hostages and surrendered power? Does anyone doubt how the U.S. would behave if the same thing happened to us?

Despite all the noise, supporting Israel remains not only the right thing to do but the politically smart thing to do.

Of course, knowledge matters, and we should do what we can to inform ourselves of the history and facts on the ground. There are incredible podcasts and online resources on Israel and the region, and you should listen to them and stay current on the news. At the end of the day though, while Israel needs experts to argue its cause, it also needs character witnesses. Talk about the Israeli person you know, and what they are confronting, on a human level. Talk about fundamentally good people who are trying to do their best to survive in a thriving democracy against enemies surrounding them who glorify death. Ask your listener what they would do to defend their homes in the face of such a threat.

And, at the right moment, it's not the worst thing if you pound on the table a few times, too.

Dan Elbaum is head of North America at The Jewish Agency for Israel and the president and CEO of Jewish Agency International Development. This article originally appeared on ejewishphilanthropy.com.

Letters to the Editor

Your Donation Helps Honor Our Past

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

On behalf of the cemetery volunteers, I would like to express our gratitude for your continuing generous contribution to help maintain the Ahavath Sholem Cemetery in Pittsfield.

This was a very windy winter, which necessitated a lot of tree and branch cleanup. The cost was not something we anticipated. Thank you again for making the cemetery a part of your annual allocations.

Sincerely,
Judith Cook
Pittsfield



*Ahavath Sholem Cemetery
in Pittsfield*

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Berkshire Jewish Voice e-mail: astern@jewishberkshires.org
Phone: (413) 442-4360, ext. 11 Fax (413) 443-6070

OP-ED

RABBI REFLECTION

Shavuot: The Holiday of True Freedom

By Rabbi Seth Wax / Williams College



Rabbi Seth Wax

After all of the special foods and dietary restrictions of Passover, the holiday of Shavuot, which we celebrate this year in mid-June, feels remarkably free-form. Is there anything we can't eat? Not really. Are there special foods to eat? Cheesecake, blintzes, kugel...and for some of us, Lactaid. It marks a striking contrast. While much of our head-space in the lead up to Passover – ostensibly, the festival of freedom – can entail close, meticulous attention to the contents of our meals and their ingredients, Shavuot – which celebrates the giving of the Torah and its myriad laws – can feel much more loose, and paradoxically, more free.

This sense of freedom on Shavuot is noticeable in a deceptively simple manner in the Torah itself. The 23rd chapter of the Book of Leviticus details the sacrifices that were made in the Temple for each of the major holidays. Every sacrifice entailed the offering of some animals, wine, and grains in the form of matza. *Chametz*, or leavened bread, was forbidden on the altar. Yet for the sacrifice of Shavuot, the grain offering was with *chametz* (23:17). While the ancient priests had to be scrupulous in ensuring that matza alone was used on the altar for the rest of the year, for some reason, *chametz* was allowed on Shavuot. The priests, and by extension, the Israelites as a whole, could be much more unguarded in how they prepared the grain offering on this specific holiday. Why is that?

In the Zohar, a collection of mystical teachings that was composed in northern Spain in the late 13th century, we find a reflection on the different kinds of breads that the Israelites ate from the Exodus from Egypt and throughout their wanderings: *chametz* while they were enslaved, matza when they left Egypt, manna when they wandered, and then *chametz* again when they entered the Land of Israel. *Chametz*, as it often does in spiritual interpretations, reflects negative qualities: pride, greed, and most commonly, the *yetzer hara*, the inclination to evil. After the Israelites left Egypt, by refraining from *chametz*, they were able to dissociate from the negative parts of themselves to which they had become inured during their time in slavery. For us, too, when we refrain from *chametz* on Passover, we also seek to purge the parts of ourselves that do damage to others.

But if the point is to be free of these traits, why don't we eat matza forever? If we should try to not be proud or greedy, shouldn't we keep eating matza after Passover ends? Why do we eat *chametz* as soon as Passover is over, and why on Earth did the priests offer it on an altar to God on Shavuot?

That is because, according to the Zohar (2:183a-b), by the time we get to Shavuot, 50 days after Passover and the day on which the Torah is given, the *yetzer hara* is completely destroyed and true freedom is present. The Zohar explicates this point with a story of a prince who was once ill. Seeking to heal him, it

is decided that he should only eat medicine. But fearful that he would consume things that are not good for him while recovering, the king decreed that all other food should be removed from the palace. Once the prince ate only medicine and was healed of his malady, the king decreed that the other food could be returned to the palace and that the prince could consume it, as it could no longer harm him. In the same way, when Israel left Egypt, they were in a fragile, weakened state. God saw that they needed to consume medicine – that is to say, matza – to heal their souls. Once they had done that for a sufficient period of time, it was safe for them to eat *chametz* again. It could no longer harm them in the same way that it had when they were slaves in Egypt. And then especially on Shavuot – the day on which Torah, which is considered the greatest medicine of all, is given – then the *yetzer hara*, the inclination to do damage to others, has no power. Which is why we can engage with it and eat it, and why even the priests could offer it up to God.

In this way, the Zohar suggests, Shavuot is the holiday of ultimate freedom. Bread, which is totally forbidden near the altar throughout the year, is suddenly welcomed on this one day. Forces of pride, destruction, and negativity have no power

Forces of pride, destruction, and negativity have no power on the day when Torah is given, especially after we and the Israelites have moved through the healing process of Passover and the days and weeks that follow.

on the day when Torah is given, especially after we and the Israelites have moved through the healing process of Passover and the days and weeks that follow.

I find this to be a compelling vision for Shavuot. It suggests that the intensive, and sometimes uncomfortable, practices of Passover have an end-goal that falls long after the conclusion of the holiday. Shavuot is the goal we have been reaching toward since the start of Passover, and it represents the fullest expression of freedom we can attain, in both our outer and inner worlds.

Rabbi Seth Wax is the Jewish chaplain at Williams College in Williamstown.

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JOIN US FOR LUNCH AND CONVERSATION AROUND OUR COMMUNITY TABLE

As the weather warms, we are returning to in-person lunches at our kosher lunch program. All are welcome. Reservations are required. See page 14 for the full menu and reservation information.

Thursday, May 16 at Noon

Celebrating Mothers and Important Women

Join us for a delicious kosher lunch to celebrate mothers and other important women in our lives. We invite you to bring a favorite recipe to swap, a photo, or other remembrance to share.

Thursday, May 23 at Noon

Memorial Day Picnic Lunch

Join us for a summer-time kosher Memorial Day picnic lunch (indoors). We welcome stories or memories to honor and reflect on veterans in our lives.

Thursday, May 30 at Noon

Massachusetts State Hate Crimes Task Force Update

Join us for lunch and conversation with Federation's executive director, Dara Kaufman, who will share an update on her work on the Massachusetts State Hate Crimes Task Force.

Thursday, June 6 at noon

Shavuot Lunch

Join us for a festive Shavuot lunch celebrating favorite dairy delights, including an ice cream sundae bar!



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THE POWER OF COMMUNITY.

Berkshire JEWISH VOICE

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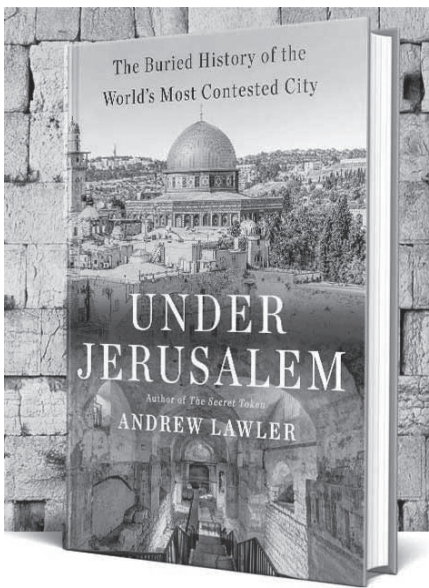
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Your Federation Presents

Under Jerusalem: The Buried History of the World's Most Contested City with Andrew Lawler



On Thursday, May 9, at 7 p.m. – in anticipation of Yom Ha'atzmaut – journey into the tombs, tunnels, and trenches of the Holy City and learn how it brings to life the indelible characters who have investigated this subterranean landscape. With clarity and verve, acclaimed journalist Andrew Lawler will reveal how their pursuit has not only defined the conflict over modern Jerusalem but could provide a map for two peoples and three faiths to peacefully coexist.

This free program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events at jewishberkshires.org. Part of "Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series in collaboration with The Jewish Book Council."

Under Jerusalem: The Buried History of the World's Most Contested

City is the 2024 winner of the Archaeological Institute of America and the Center for American Archeology's 2024 Holton Book Award. The judges said "Jerusalem is perhaps one of the most 'archaeological' places in the world, and Mr. Lawler dives deep into the evidence, telling these difficult and important stories clearly and soberly, letting the reader decide for themselves how best to understand the events in question. Consequently, this book is one that should stimulate productive debate among its readers, especially as regards the ethical, moral, and political stakes of archaeology, the way that archaeology has been used as a tool for imperial and colonial powers, and the clear stakes of archaeology's impact on the modern world."

Andrew Lawler is author of two other books, *The Secret Token: Myth, Obsession, and the Search for the Lost Colony of Roanoke*, a national bestseller, and *Why Did the Chicken Cross the World?: The Epic Saga of the Bird that Powers Civilization*. As a journalist, he has written more than a thousand newspaper and magazine articles from more than two dozen countries. His byline has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian*, and many others. He is contributing writer for *Science* and contributing editor for *Archaeology*. Andrew's work has appeared several times in *The Best of Science and Nature Writing*. For more, visit andrewlawler.com.

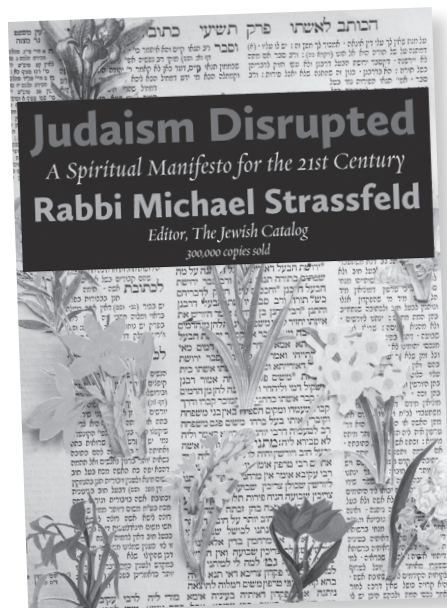
Rabbi Michael Strassfeld on Judaism Disrupted: A Spiritual Manifesto for the 21st Century

GREAT BARRINGTON – On Friday, May 10 at 10:45 a.m., Jewish Federation of the Berkshires hosts Rabbi Michael Strassfeld for a Knosh & Knowledge talk about his book, *Judaism Disrupted: A Spiritual Manifesto for the 21st Century*.

This free program will take place at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, 270 State Road in Great Barrington.

In his latest book, Rabbi Strassfeld illuminates the possibilities of a new Judaism—a framework, as he puts it, with "practices that you can start putting into use right away to live a life of meaning." He adds:

By re-envisioning a Judaism that cultivates inner qualities such as gratitude, patience, and generosity, *Judaism Disrupted* reshapes the tradition into something radically new. Focusing on the ethical imperative to make the world a better and more just place for all its inhabitants, this new Judaism calls on us to live with purpose. The wisdom found in the three-thousand-year discussion of how to live such a life can guide us on life's journey. The practices, old and reconstructed—form a technology to make meaning in our lives and in our world.



Rabbi Michael Strassfeld has been prominent in the American Jewish community for nearly forty years, dating from his involvement as co-editor of the first *Jewish Catalog* in 1973 followed by the *Second Jewish Catalogue*, the *Third Jewish Catalogue*, *The Jewish Holidays*, *The Night of Questions: A Passover Haggadah*, *A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism As A Spiritual Practice*, and many more. Rabbi Strassfeld is currently the executive director of the Jewish

Counter-Culture Oral History Project. He is married to Rabbi Joy Levitt and together they have five children. He is a part-time resident of the Berkshires.

A Question for Rabbi Michael Strassfeld

BJV: Since Oct. 7, Judaism has certainly been disrupted. In terms of the themes of your book, what impact have recent events had on your ideas?

The premise of my book, *Judaism Disrupted*, is that we live in a rapidly changing world. This was true even before the events of Oct. 7. The challenge is to use the teachings of Judaism to hold the complexity of life and not to respond from either anger or fear.

There are two *midrashim* about the moment of the crossing of the sea. One that the angels began to sing as the Egyptian army was drowning and God silences them by saying, "My children are drowning. How can you sing?" The other *midrash* describes the heavenly court deliberating what to do with the Egyptian army. One angel calls for mercy toward the Egyptians. Another angel grabs a brick from one of the buildings built by the Hebrew slaves. It contains the body of an Israelite baby entombed in the brick. At that moment God condemns the Egyptians to drown.

Judaism disrupts the notion that there are simple answers in life. Just as in the Seder, we question what others say and we also question our own beliefs, seeking the way forward.

COMMUNITY DAY, continued from cover

challenges we face as a community and will have a special opportunity for participants to send messages of love and support to the family members of the hostages.

ALL ARE WELCOME and there is something for everyone! Register at jewishberkshires.org. High Lawn Farm is located at 535 Summer Street in Lee. Rain date is Sunday, June 2.

PJ Library 18th birthday celebrations and youth activities are funded in part by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

About High Lawn Farm: High Lawn Farm is a historic landmark farm with some of the most idyllic views in all of the Berkshires. Enjoy a tour to see how their Jersey cows sleep on waterbeds and are milked on demand by a high tech personal robotic milking machines. Visit the renovated museum and check out their on-site farm store, the Farmstead Creamery, which offers homemade ice cream, artisanal cheese and dairy products as well as a variety of other locally produced goods. Open 7 days a week from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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Your Federation Presents

To Get Out of Your Head, Get Out of the House...

**...and join new and old friends with special
springtime Connecting with Community lunches**



PITTSFIELD –As we move through spring and into the glorious months of the Berkshires summer, Federation will be hosting four special-themed Connecting With Community lunches. Come together with conversation and a home-cooked kosher lunch around our community table.

All are welcome!

You'll have a chance to meet with old and new friends to share stories and experiences in order to deepen our sense of the richness of our community and the lives of its members.

All kosher lunches will be held at Knesset Israel at 16 Colt Road and will begin at noon.

Celebrating Mothers and Other Important Women

On Thursday, May 16, celebrate mothers and the other important women in our lives. We invite you to

bring a favorite recipe to swap, or a photo or other remembrance to share.

Memorial Day Picnic Lunch

On Thursday, May 23, we'll enjoy an indoor picnic where we welcome stories or memories to honor and reflect on veterans in our lives.

Massachusetts State Hate Crimes Task Force Update

On Thursday, May 30, Dara Kaufman, executive director of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, will provide an update on the current work of the Massachusetts State Hate Crimes Task Force.

Shavuot Lunch

On Thursday, June 6, join us for a festive Shavuot lunch celebrating favorite dairy delights, including an ice cream sundae bar!

Advance lunch reservations are required and can be made by calling (413) 442-2200 before 9 a.m. on the day of the program. Lunch is free for adults over 60 years of age. A suggested donation of \$3 is welcomed; \$7 for all others.

Connecting With Community is an essential ongoing Federation program made possible through the generous support of our community.

What Do I Do with All This Heritage?

Live theater online presented by The Braid

On Thursday, June 6 at 7 p.m., The Braid returns for another of its popular live theater presentations, this time on the theme "What Do I Do with All This Heritage?" You'll hear stories that range from hilarious to heartbreaking on a journey into the lives of Asian Jews revealing their true stories of struggle and perseverance in trying to hold two age-old traditions in their hearts.



Register for this free Federation online program on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

A cast of professional actors bring to life funny stories of food, heartbreaking stories of isolation,

and triumphant stories of understanding that "all this heritage" doesn't dilute one's Asian or Jewish identities but strengthens both.

These autobiographical stories explore:

- Struggles of patrilineal Asian Jews' search for acceptance
- Adoptees finding their authentic selves
- How mixed-race and interfaith Jews balance honoring their different traditions
- How Jews-by-choice explain their spiritual journey to the people around them.

They'll even explore what happens when someone from a historically Jewish community in Asia comes to America and suddenly finds themselves an outsider in their own communities.

Please note this will be a 65 minute live theater production presented on Zoom presented by actors from the "Go-To Jewish Story Company," The Braid, followed by a moderated Q&A session.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email two days before the program containing information about joining the meeting.

Create a Jewish Legacy Campaign
Please remember the Jewish Community in your will.



**As my parents planted for me before I was born,
so do I plant for those who come after me.**

– Talmud

Thank you to these individuals who through their gift to the Legacy Circle will ensure that the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires thrives long into the future. May your name be a Blessing, and may the example you set inspire others to create their own Jewish Legacy.

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Your Federation Presents

SUPER TZEDAKAH WEEK,

continued from cover



James Cutler's first time in The Shed at the Federation-sponsored PJ Library Family Tanglewood Shabbat

YOU combat antisemitism through advocacy and response, victim support, awareness campaigns, and anti-bias education for local students and faculty to help them address and respond to antisemitic events and bias in their schools.

YOU empower Jewish identity for young people through PJ Library books, family programming, Jewish education grants, volunteer opportunities, and Jewish camp and Israel scholarships.

YOU bring hope and dignity to the elderly with warm meals, holiday care packages, companionship, and the support of our community social worker.

YOU create a safer community through community security grants, training, and engagement with local and regional law enforcement

YOU care for the fragile and vulnerable by providing much-needed food, medicine, medical care, and social services.

YOU unite community in Jewish learning and celebration through educational, holiday, and cultural programs.

YOU strengthen our relationship with Israel through our partnership with the Afula-Gilboa region.

And in this time of crises in Israel and Ukraine, YOU save lives through Federation's immediate SOS response, including emergency fundraising and ongoing Israel education and advocacy.

The terror attacks on October 7 showed us that our world can change quickly. In moments like these, we realize how critical it is to have a strong Jewish community with infrastructure in place to provide leadership and emergency support. Because of donors like you, Federation was ready and able to respond immediately, mobilizing the Israel Crisis Fund, educating and engaging the broader community, and responding to rising antisemitism in the Berkshires.

"If we have learned anything in this moment, it is that American Jews must live in a safe, secure, engaged, educated, compassionate, and supported Jewish community," said Arlene D. Schiff, Federation's president. "We must be able to support the most fragile. We must have strong relations with elected officials and interfaith partners. We must educate and support our young people. We must stand up for our right to be safe and free from persecution. We must be visible and proud. Your support of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires ensures all this and so much more!"

Everything we do in the Berkshire Jewish community and beyond is fueled by the generosity and commitment of people like you. Please see the flyer inside this issue of the Berkshire Jewish Voice for more information on ways to contribute.

In Every Generation, Federation – Super Tzedakah Week Chair, Josh Cutler

Josh Cutler asserts that the way "Federation transcends generations" is the most important message about our work that he will share with the congregations he'll be visiting this May as Super Tzedakah Week chair. So perhaps a good way to introduce him is with an overview of his own generational connection to the Berkshires and its Jewish community.

Josh is a member of the fourth of five generations of his family to live in the Berkshires – his 4-year-old son, James, is in the fifth. His direct forebears first arrived in 1903 to join siblings who had already settled here, living in "the old Jewish neighborhood" around Linden Street just west of downtown Pittsfield. Family businesses included a coal company, a junk yard, a neighborhood grocery, and a dentist's office, where Cutler's father, Alan, practiced for 31 years. His extended family included cousins Ed Skoletsky and Bob Schindler (of blessed memory), the mention of whom can still evoke a warm smile from those lucky enough to have known them. Josh counts Rabbi Harold Salzman of Temple Anshe Amunim as his mentor, who from the time he was a teenager guided him in community affairs and the traditions of Reform Judaism. He first contributed to Federation's annual campaign after the late Howard Kaufman, esteemed founder of KB Toys and long one of the Berkshires' most ardent philanthropists, reached out to him personally; Cutler remembers that he "made the donation in honor of the man who called me."

Josh's connections to these stalwarts of earlier generations – and his appreciation of the "personal touch" they demonstrated in connecting with him – impel his involvement as a leader in the Jewish community today. The 35-year-old Pittsfield-native stays steadfastly connected to his local roots and now works in the Finance Department at General Dynamics. He serves on Federation's board of directors and Allocations Committee, and sustains his lifelong involvement with the synagogue his grandparents joined in 1957, Temple Anshe Amunim (TAA), where he served from 2018 to 2020 as the youngest president in the congregation's 155-year history. The Cutler family's service to the Jewish community is lengthy – Josh's grandfather, Maurice Cutler (of blessed memory), served as the TAA's treasurer for 13 years, and was instrumental in allocation of the funding for the construction in 1964 of the congregation's current home on Broad Street in Pittsfield.

Josh remembers that Federation first impacted his life as a very small child,



Josh and James are regulars at our PJ Library Federation family programs

when he joined Sue Schulman's playgroup at TAA, a Hebrew school program then as now supported by annual campaign dollars. He never went to Jewish summer camp and so did not avail himself of the Federation scholarship that would have been available to him. Mostly, he remembers, he interacted with Federation's work as part of TAA's lay leadership and came to understand its central role supporting the spectrum of Jewish life in the region. So when Michael Wasserman, a fellow Temple leader and lifelong friend, "asked me to contribute to this community by serving on Federation's board, of course I said I'd do it."

Now he sees his son James benefit from the ways that Federation nurtures Jewish youth, both with the support to religious school that it has long provided and with the more robust array of family and community events introduced in the past several years. "I knew I wanted him involved in Jewish life early on," says Josh, who says that the pandemic-era Zoom services allowed him to expose his son to Jewish practice as an infant, earlier than he might have been able to in person. In the years since, the two have been regular attendees at Federation-sponsored PJ Library outings such as last year's Family Tanglewood Shabbat, where they have not only connected with other Jewish families from around the Berkshires, but at which Josh was able to bring James inside The Shed for the first time and "take him right up front for the BSO rehearsal" – certainly a *ldor v'dor* rite of passage for any Berkshire father and son.

Josh says his involvement in Federation's leadership opened his eyes to breadth of the organization's impact. "Until I delved into the budget as a member of the Allocations Committee," he says. "I really had no idea of how much we did. I was able to see how far we make the dollars raised go to keep our local and wider Jewish

community alive and well. Federation is not only focused on the here and now, but looks toward our future, as well."

And this is how our small Federation – which provides essential services and programs that in larger communities are divided among numerous Jewish organizations – works to transcend generations, "supporting people of all ages and all walks of life," says Josh. "In my personal experience, I've seen Federation develop a stronger commitment to Jewish education, continuing its support of congregational schools while also developing more diverse offerings for families that meet people where they are

at in their Jewish journeys. We've always had overnight camp scholarships, but now we partner with Camp Eisner so that younger kids can afford Jewish day camp. Not only that, Federation stays involved with our youth even longer, through subsidies for Israel experiences for young people from their teens into their twenties."

SUPER TZEDAKAH WEEK,

continued on page 10

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Your Federation Presents

Israeli Resilience during Dark Days The Times of Israel's Jessica Steinberg to share stories and insights about Israel at war

PITTSFIELD – On Thursday, May 23 at 7:30 p.m., we welcome Jessica Steinberg, Times of Israel arts and culture editor, for a timely and informative program honoring Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'Atzmaut titled "Israeli Resilience during Dark Days."

This free in-person program will be presented at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield. Please register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

What is it like reporting on war in your own country? Times of Israel journalist Jessica Steinberg discusses how Israelis find a sense of normalcy over the last few months and now since the Iranian attack of April 13. After the war broke out on October 7, Steinberg pivoted from covering arts and culture to leading the site's reporting on those held hostage, interviewing families and writing the stories of those missing and taken captive. She speaks daily with those who survived and with the family members and supporters of those held hostage, coaxing out their stories and crafting a wider portrait of the people and the tragic circumstances in which they find themselves.

Steinberg, who lives in Jerusalem with her family, is a sharp, empathetic writer and dynamic speaker who will discuss the current state of affairs in Israel, as families grapple with different kinds of mourning and stress, from sons, daughters, husbands and wives on the front lines, those who have lost loved ones in the



Jessica Steinberg

attacks of October 7 and during the ongoing war, and how Israelis find meaning now and continue to cope.

She is the long-time arts and culture editor for The Times of Israel, a former New Yorker who has lived in Israel for the last 28 years. Since Oct. 7, her journalistic focus has been on how Israeli society pivots and handles war, in art, music, TV and film, culinary arts, and design. She has also delved into children's book writing. Her first book was *Not This Turkey*, which became a PJ Library selection, and she is currently working on a series about kids at a Jewish summer camp.



Help Alleviate Hunger in the Berkshires

Federation Food Drive, options to drop off or pick-up from your home

In conjunction with its 2024 campaign launch, Jewish Federation of the Berkshires is mobilizing the Jewish community to help alleviate the growing food crisis in the Berkshires. You can help feed your neighbors by participating in this important mitzvah through two convenient options.

Rice and Pasta Collection, May 1-31: Throughout the month of May, community members are encouraged to drop off packaged pasta and rice at the following locations:

- The Berkshire Food Co-op, Great Barrington
- Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Great Barrington
- Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Pittsfield
- Congregation Beth Israel, North Adams.

Mobile Food Drive, May 7: Federation is partnering with Berkshire Bounty for a mobile food drive on May 7. Born during the pandemic as a way to safely continue to collect donated food without direct contact, Berkshire Bounty volunteers will drive to donors' homes and collect non-perishable food that is left on porches and mailboxes, and deliver that food to an emergency food site in desperate need of more food. If you would like to donate food for this special mobile food drive, please contact Jenny@berkshirebounty.org. To learn more about Berkshire Bounty or to become a volunteer driver, visit their website at berkshirebounty.org. Thank you to all of our collection partners for helping our community fulfill the mitzvah of feeding the hungry.



Laura Wetzler

Songs of the Lost Communities Concert

PITTSFIELD – On Sunday, May 5 at 2 p.m., join us for a community commemoration of Yom HaShoah-Holocaust Remembrance Day Concert featuring "Songs of the Lost Communities" with Laura Wetzler, singer, songwriter, guitarist, recording artist, and lecturer.

The music will include songs from both Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities celebrating the vitality of prewar Jewish life to commemorate the Holocaust. This free event will take

place at the Berkshire Museum's Little Cinema, 39 South Street in Pittsfield.

Following the concert will be a candle lighting, prayers, and a moment of silence in memory of those murdered in the Holocaust.

Shabbat Across the Berkshires 2024



Last year's Shabbat Across the Berkshires at Congregation Beth Israel

PITTSFIELD – On Friday, June 7, at 5:45 p.m., join with friends from across the Berkshire Jewish community as we come together for a musical, family-friendly Shabbat service led by rabbis from across Berkshire County.

Hosting this year will be Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Road. After the service, stay for a delicious, volunteer-prepared kosher Shabbat dinner.

All are welcome for services. If you wish to stay for dinner, reservations are

required by June 3 at knessetisrael.org/rsvp. Adults \$20, youth 18 and under are free. Space is limited.

This service will also be available via livestream at knessetisrael.org/livestream.

This event is co-sponsored by Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Knesset Israel, Congregation Ahavath Sholom, Congregation Beth Israel, Temple Anshe Amunim, the Berkshire Minyan, Williams College Jewish Association, and Berkshire Hills Hadassah.



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Your Federation Presents

PJ Library Turns 18

A Reflection: Shaping the Jewish community we aspire to be

By Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the Union for Reform Judaism



This story appeared in the December 2023 issue of PROOF, a PJ Library magazine

Eighteen is a special number in Jewish tradition. It is the numerical value of the Hebrew word *chai*, meaning "life." In Hebrew, each letter has a numerical equivalent. For example, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*, is equal to one, the second letter, *bet*, has the value of two, and so on. The Hebrew word *chai* comprises the letter *chet*, which has a numerical value of eight, and the letter *yud*, which has a value of 10. This is why it is common

for Jews to give gifts and donations in multiples of 18, and it is also why an 18th birthday is considered especially auspicious, representing life itself.

Today, as more Jews are unconnected to Jewish life than are connected, PJ Library has infused Jewish meaning into the lives of so many families with young children. Too often, Jewish leaders expect that those who are not yet connected will come into our communities to experience what we think they should want. The brilliance of PJ Library is that it is focused on what we know Jewish families are truly seeking: to make reading time more meaningful by distilling thousands of years of Jewish wisdom for young readers. PJ Library books have captured the attention of children around the world as well as their parents and grandparents.

The *V'havta* prayer says, "teach them [God's commandments] diligently unto your children." But in many families, parents or guardians aren't sure what to teach or how to teach their children about being Jewish – until Jewish books arrive at their doorstep, providing an accessible on-ramp into Jewish life.

We've been called *am ha'sefer*, "the people of the book," as Jewish learning has led to the perpetuation of the timeless values of our tradition as well as our longevity. The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) has been intensely focused on connecting the not-yet-connected and those marginally connected to Judaism and the Jewish community. Likewise, over these past 18 years, PJ Library has sent more than 50 million

books to so many in our community who might never have been connected to the Jewish community otherwise.

The 2020 Pew Research Center survey of Jewish Americans told us that at least a quarter of the youngest generation (ages 18-29) identify as people who are often on the margins of our Jewish communities, including those who are Black, indigenous, or people of color; LGBTQIA+; Sephardic or Mizrahi; interfaith; people who live with a disability; and more. The content of Jewish books increasingly reflects the growing diversity we see within the Jewish community today. PJ Library has operated with a broadly inclusive understanding of what contemporary families look like, which has helped create more Jewish communities where everyone belongs.

the world that God has called us to shape: a world of equity, compassion, wholeness, and peace. That's the bright future we are building, one book at a time, one soul at a time.

Happy birthday, PJ Library. We at the URJ offer our deepest appreciation to the remarkable Harold Grinspoon Foundation and all who make PJ Library possible. We love being your partners in shaping a more connected, inspired, and inclusive Jewish community.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs is the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, which leads a large and diverse Jewish movement reaching 1.5 million people in North America.

On average, more than 100 children across North America sign up every day to receive the gift of PJ Library for the first time.

for Jews to give gifts and donations in multiples of 18, and it is also why an 18th birthday is considered especially auspicious, representing life itself.

This year, PJ Library turns 18, and its 18th birthday means that this transformative program has ignited an entirely new generation through Jewish books. What an exciting milestone deserving of celebration and reflection! Many of the children who received their

PJ Library began with 200 children 18 years ago. Now books reach more than 650,000 children around the world.

A milestone birthday like this is an invitation to reflect on the tremendous impact of PJ Library and, at the very same moment, join in imagining how this wildly successful experiment could help shape the Jewish community we aspire to be. The URJ and PJ Library are creating more pathways for those not yet connected to Jewish life to engage with the riches of Judaism. Those just beginning their Jewish journeys could be our next inspired scholars, leaders, and activists. PJ Library and the URJ are committed to growing our Jewish community and celebrating our vibrant diversity. That diversity not only makes us stronger, but it can also make us more creative and effective in shaping

PJ Library: Impact in the Berkshires

Molly Meador, Coordinator of Volunteers & PJ Library (mmeador@jewishberkshires.org)

- Families / Children Enrolled Now: 132 active subscribers; 105 active families
- Number of Books Distributed in 2023/24: PJ Library shipped 1,975 books to the Berkshires community.
- Families / Children Who Have Participated in Past Years: 555 children and 362 families, to date
- PJ Library Family Programming: 12 events across Berkshire County in 2023/24, with more to come this spring and summer!
- Sponsorship: PJ Library is made possible for Berkshire families through a community partnership of the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, the Spitz Tuchman Family Fund, the Jewish Women's Foundation, and the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

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SUPER TZEDAKAH WEEK,
continued from page 7

Affordable kosher lunches and holiday meals have long been a part of how Federation has served older adults in the community, and Josh says he is also impressed with the way Federation has upped its Connecting With Community and cultural programming. He points to a byproduct of the pandemic experience that Federation has run with – offering stimulating and informative online programs year-round with nationally-prominent thought-leaders that connect our small community with arts and ideas from the wider Jewish world.

Josh remembers that he took the reins as TAA's president four months before the massacre at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue – a challenging time as congregations across the country scrambled to tighten security. Federation, he says, "played a large role in those efforts to ensure the safety of this Jewish community. It established relationships with community partners across the Berkshires, sharing our concerns with police departments and ensuring our security needs are met. Federation coordinated with resources like the Secure Community Network to boost the security systems that further help to protect our communal buildings and gatherings."

Critically, adds Josh, "Federation helped build relationships and an awareness, both within the Jewish community and throughout the country, of the necessity of looking out after one another to make sure we are unified and protected."

And when the worst did occur on Oct. 7, Josh says "it was moving for me to be able to take my son to the pro-Israel vigil in Park Square, where 500-plus Jews and our allies came together with flags and banners supporting Israel. It is essential that we respond in ways like that so that our younger generation can see us coming together and understand the importance of community."

As someone with long ties to the area, Josh also appreciates that Federation honors the past. "The Ahavath Sholem Cemetery in Pittsfield belonged to a congregation that has not been around for many generations," he says. "But Federation each year allocates a meaningful amount of money for its upkeep, honoring the memories those who helped build this community."

Josh says that is particularly important to him, as he believes himself to be a keeper of that history. He cites with gratitude the mentors and friends who guided him – special kavod to Andy Hochberg, Howard Shapiro, Lanny Zuckerman, Deb Cole-Duffy, Rabbi Barbara Cohen, Rabbi Dennis Ross ("who taught me how to be confident in public forums"), Rhoda and Phil Kaminstein, and Ellen and Stuart Masters.

"They gave me all the stories and knowledge of our Jewish community from a time before I was born," Josh says. "Even those people who have passed – I can tell their stories."

Be there when our Super Tzedakah Week chair, Josh Cutler, shares his Federation story with your congregation this May.

Friday, April 26 at 7 p.m. at Congregation Beth Israel, 53 Lois Street, North Adams.

Friday, May 3 at 6 p.m. at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, 270 State Road, Great Barrington

Friday, May 10 at 5:30 p.m. at Temple Anshe Amunim, 26 Broad Street, Pittsfield

Saturday, May 11 at 10 a.m. at the Berkshires Minyan, St James Place, 352 Main Street, Great Barrington

Saturday, May 18 at 10 a.m. at Knesset Israel, 16 Colt Rd, Pittsfield.



UNICORN · COLONIAL · PLAYHOUSE
BERKSHIRE THEATRE GROUP

May 16-June 1
at The Unicorn Theatre
The Larry Vaber Stage

4000 Miles
written by Amy Herzog
directed by Lizzie Gottlieb
with Maria Tucci as Vera

June 13-July 14
at The Playhouse

ABE LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS
written by Robert E. Sherwood
directed by David Auburn
movement by Isadora Wolfe

June 27-July 21
at The Colonial Theatre

MEL BROOKS' YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN
choreography by Gerry McIntyre
directed by Stuart Ross

July 25-August 31
at The Unicorn Theatre
The Larry Vaber Stage

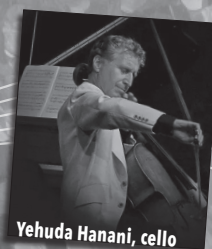
Rodgers & Hammerstein's
PIPE DREAM
based on the novels *Cannery Row* & *Sweet Thursday* by John Steinbeck
directed by Kat Yen
choreography by Isadora Wolfe

The Colonial Theatre
111 South Street • Pittsfield, MA
The Playhouse
83 East Main Street • Stockbridge, MA
The Unicorn Theatre
6 East Street • Stockbridge, MA
(413) 997-4444
BerkshireTheatreGroup.org

ENTERTAINMENT

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH MUSIC

Café Vienna -



"Nervous Splendor"

Sunday, May 19, 2024 at 4pm
At The Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center
Great Barrington, MA

Tickets: \$52 / \$28
mahaiwe.org or cewm.org



MAHAIWE
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Sponsored by ALLEGRONE

LYLE LOVETT + LISA LOEB
IN CONVERSATION AND SONG
FRI MAY 10 AT 8PM

BODEANS
ALTERNATIVE ROOTS-ROCK
SAT MAY 25 AT 8PM

Sponsored by BERKSHIRE GAS

KEB' MO'
BLUES ICON
SAT JUN 15 AT 8PM

BEN FOLDS
POWER-POP VOICE OF A GENERATION
SAT JUN 22 AT 8PM

JUSTIN HAYWARD
OF THE MOODY BLUES
FRI JUL 19 AT 8PM

2024 GALA: SAMARA JOY
GRAMMY-WINNING JAZZ STAR
THU AUG 1 AT 8PM

SEE ONLINE FOR MORE!
Great Barrington, MA • 413-528-0100 • mahaiwe.org



ENTERTAINMENT

A BODY of WATER
by Lee Blessing
Directed by James Warwick
JUNE 21 – JULY 21
Outdoors at the Roman Garden Theatre

SHAKE IT UP: A Shakespeare Cabaret
Directed by Allyn Burrows
JULY 2 – 7
Tina Packer Playhouse

the COMEDY OF ERRORS
of
by William Shakespeare
Directed by Kate Kohler Amory
JULY 13 – AUGUST 18
Outdoors at the Arthur S. Waldstein Amphitheatre

the Islanders
by Carey Crim
Directed by Regge Life
JULY 25 – AUGUST 25
Tina Packer Playhouse

Flight of the Monarch
by Jim Frangione
Directed by Judy Braha
AUGUST 3 – 25
Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre

the WINTER'S TALE
An Enhanced Staged Reading
by William Shakespeare
Directed by Tina Packer
AUGUST 21 – 25
Outdoors at the Arthur S. Waldstein Amphitheatre

PLAYS in Process
A Celebration of Developing Works
AUGUST 27 – 29
Outdoors at the Rose Footprint Theatre

THREE TALL PERSIAN WOMEN
by Awni Abdi-Bahri
Directed by Dalia Ashurina
AUGUST 30 – OCTOBER 13
Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre

Get Tickets: (413) 637-3353
SHAKESPEARE.ORG SEASON 2024 **SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY**

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From Puccini to Parton...
Where Grand Opera meets the Grand Ole Opry

SATURDAY
June 15
3PM & 7PM

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Dalton, MA 01226

\$59 & **\$39**
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www.simplenetix.com/e/opera-cowgirls-tickets-165846

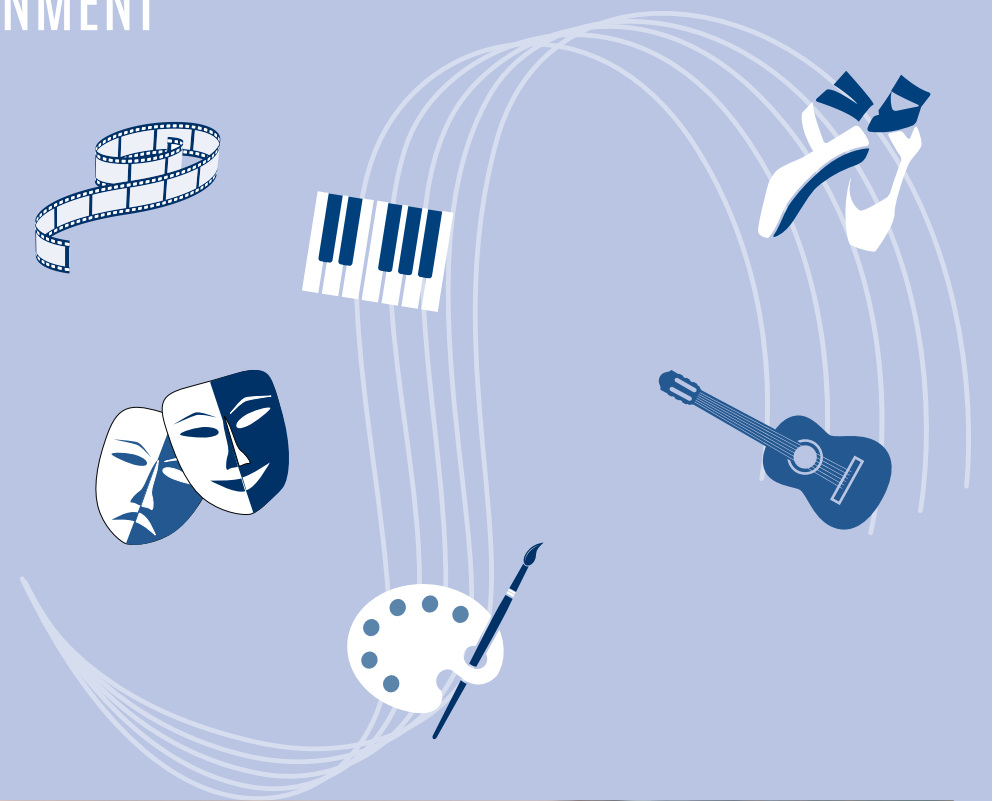
ENTERTAINMENT



Join over 1,500 of the most creative, engaged, and active adults in the Berkshires (and beyond) for non-credit courses, events, and community. Online and in-person!

Learn more at berkshireolli.org or call 413-236-2190

Summer classes begin in June and July!


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A BERKSHIRE EXPERIENCE**

may 30-june 2 / 2024

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berkshire international film festival



BERKSHIRE JEWISH CONGREGATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS

Welcome to the Jewish Berkshires

Everyone is welcome to attend services and events at any of the organizations listed here.

Please call the organizations directly to confirm service times or to inquire about membership.

Learn more about our Jewish community and find great events on the community calendar at:

JEWISHBERKSHIRES.ORG

Berkshire Minyan
Lay-led, Traditional, Egalitarian Minyan
South County
berkshireminyan.org

Berkshire Hills Hadassah
P.O. Box 187, Pittsfield, MA
(413) 443-4386,
Berkshirehillshadassah@gmail.com

B'nai B'rith Lodge, No. 326

Chabad of the Berkshires
450 South St., Pittsfield, MA
(413) 499-9899,
jewishberkshires.com

Congregation Ahavath Sholom
Reconstructionist
North St., Great Barrington, MA
(413) 528-4197, ahavathsholom.com

Congregation Beth Israel
Reform
53 Lois St., North Adams, MA
(413) 663-5830, cbiberkshires.com

Hevreh of Southern Berkshire
Reform
270 State Rd., Great Barrington, MA (413) 528-6378, hevreh.org

Israel Philatelist Society
c/o Dr. Ed Helitzer,
(413) 447-7622

Jewish Federation of the Berkshires
196 South St., Pittsfield, MA
(413) 442-4360, jewishberkshires.org

Jewish War Veterans
Commander Robert Waldheim
(413) 822-4546, sellit4@aol.com

Knesset Israel
Conservative
16 Colt Rd., Pittsfield, MA
(413) 445-4872, knessetisrael.org

Temple Anshe Amunim
Reform
26 Broad St., Pittsfield, MA
(413) 442-5910, ansheamunim.org



Knesset Israel Presents BERKSHIRE JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

~ 38 YEARS ~

Mondays ~ July 8 through August 12, 2024

Show Times: 4:00pm and 8:00pm

**Lenox Memorial Middle & High School
197 East Street, Lenox, MA**

VISIT: www.berkshirejewishfilmfestival.org

Supported in part by John Bergman Charitable Trust, Berkshire Bank, Greylock Federal Credit Union, Harold Grinspoon Foundation, Stuart and Ellen Masters, MountainOne, Marcia and Albert Schmier, Spitz-Tuchman Charitable Trust, Susser Family Trust, Wolfson Family Foundation



HALFMOON

— A KIMAMA CAMP ☘ —

Local Camp provides safe summers where kids can flourish

Camp Halfmoon has long been a summer tradition for families who want their children to experience the independence and adventure that camp provides in a safe environment. For decades, this exciting camp has brought laughter, friendship, and adventure to all who've attended. However, as times change, so too does Camp Halfmoon. We are evolving to meet the needs and interests of today's modern kids while staying true to the legacy that made it a staple in the local community.

We understand the importance of providing a safe and enriching environment. We're proud to say that Camp Halfmoon has made significant investments in its staff, increasing the number of counselors, and ensuring that each undergoes rigorous training and certifications. With a camper to counselor ratio of 6:1, we make sure every child receives the attention and support they need to thrive.



Halfmoon offers a diverse range of activities tailored to suit every child's interests. And perhaps most importantly, our day camp is close to home. Let your kids splash at our waterfront, get messy in our art studio, and explore all the amazing things camp has to offer.



As Camp Halfmoon continues to innovate, one thing remains constant: we will continue to provide unforgettable summer memories for generations to come!



WWW.KIMAMAHALFMOON.ORG
HALFMOON@CAMPKIMAMA.ORG
561-727-9927





Join us at the Community Table

ALL ARE WELCOME: Enjoy a delicious kosher lunch while making meaningful connections! Meals are available Monday and Tuesday for pick up and **Thursday in-person around our Community Table.** Thursday in-person lunches are often preceded by a free program or include a special theme and light program at the table. Check the schedule below.

Lunch is free for adults over 60 years of age. A suggested donation of \$3 is welcome but not required. \$7 for ages 59 and under.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED: Call the Federation's kitchen at (413) 442-2200 before 9 a.m. on day of lunch to reserve your spot at the table or to reserve a meal for pickup.

What's for Lunch?

(GF) Gluten-Free entree • (DF) Dairy-Free entree

MONDAY, MAY 6

Noon, Lunch...Meatloaf (GF) (DF), green beans, garlic mashed potatoes, salad, roll, and applesauce.

TUESDAY, MAY 7

Noon, Lunch...Potato knishes, cauliflower, mushroom soup, pumpernickel bread, and cookies.

THURSDAY, MAY 9

Noon, Lunch...Honey mustard salmon (GF) (DF), noodle kugel, broccoli, salad, challah, and apple dumpling.

MONDAY, MAY 13

Noon, Lunch...Sliced deli turkey sandwich (DF), macaroni salad, lettuce and tomato, rye bread, and peaches.

TUESDAY, MAY 14

Noon, Lunch...Roasted vegetable pizza, mixed bean soup, salad, and brownies.

THURSDAY, MAY 16

Noon in-person lunch...Chicken curry stir fry (GF) (DF), brown rice, tomato soup, pita bread, and apricots.

Special theme: Celebrating Mothers and Important Women in Your Life.

MONDAY, MAY 20

Noon, Lunch...Eggplant parmesan, green beans, spaghetti with sauce, salad, garlic bread, and vanilla pudding.

TUESDAY, MAY 21

Noon, Lunch...Tuna pasta bake, Brussels sprouts, lentil soup, roll, and fruit salad.

THURSDAY, MAY 23

Noon in-person lunch...Barbecued chicken (DF), corn, baked beans, coleslaw, corn bread, and parve cookies.

Special theme: Memorial Day Picnic (indoors).

MONDAY, MAY 27

Closed for Memorial Day.

TUESDAY, MAY 28

Noon, Lunch...Fish and chips (DF), broccoli, salad, pumpernickel bread, and rice pudding.

THURSDAY, MAY 30

Noon in-person lunch...Chicken kabobs (GF) (DF), Oriental blend vegetables, rice, salad, Chinese noodles, and pineapple.

Special theme: Update on the Massachusetts Hate Crimes Task Force with Dara Kaufman.

MONDAY, JUNE 3

Noon, Lunch...Meatloaf (GF) (DF), peas and carrots, sweet potato fries, salad, sourdough bread, and applesauce.

THURSDAY, JUNE 6

Noon in-person lunch...Blintz souffle, California blend vegetables, salad, challah, and ice cream.

Special theme: Shavuot Lunch and Ice Cream Sundae Bar.

MONDAY, JUNE 10

Noon, Lunch...Spinach pie, roasted cauliflower, borscht, whole wheat bread, and apple cinnamon scone.

THURSDAY, JUNE 13

Closed for Shavuot.

MONDAY, JUNE 17

Noon, Lunch...Vegetable lasagna, carrot lentil soup, salad, pumpernickel bread, and chocolate chip cookies.

THURSDAY, JUNE 20

10:45 a.m. Program: Current Events Seminar with Professor Steve Rubin.

Noon in-person lunch...Mediterranean chicken (GF) (DF), asparagus cuts n tips, rice pilaf, salad, hearty white bread, and Mandarin oranges.

MONDAY, JUNE 24

Noon, Lunch...Mushroom and cheese tart, California blend vegetables, butternut squash soup, roll, and tapioca pudding.

THURSDAY, JUNE 27

10:45 a.m. Program: Bernstein & The Hebrew Muse with Laura Wetzler.

Noon in-person lunch...Fish Veracruz (GF) (DF), meadow blend vegetables, couscous, salad, multi-grain bread, and butterscotch pudding.

Recovering from an illness or injury? Cooking becoming difficult?



KOSHER MEALS ON WHEELS:

Meals are available for delivery to qualified individuals to help extend their home independence and health. There is no income requirement, just a simple assessment through Elder services will get your meal deliveries started, if you qualify.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Jill Goldstein at (413) 442-4360, Ext 17, j.goldstein@jfswm.org.

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

Meals-on-wheels drivers are always appreciated. Contact Molly Meador at (413) 442-4360, Ext. 14, mmeador@jewishberkshires.org to inquire.

Meals and programs are made possible by the generous support of our community. The kosher lunch and meals on wheels program is in collaboration with Elder Services of Berkshire county.

Knesset Israel – 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield



ONGOING MINYANS

Saturday, 9:30 a.m.
Sunday, 8:45 a.m.
Tuesday, 7 p.m. Zoom only
Thursday, 7 p.m., Zoom only
Friday, 5:45 p.m.

CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

Friday, May 10 7:45 p.m.
Friday, May 17 7:52 p.m.
Friday, May 24 7:59 p.m.
Friday, May 31 8:05 p.m.
Friday, June 7 8:10 p.m.
Tuesday, June 11
(Erev Shavuot) 8:12 p.m.
Wednesday, June 12
(Shavuot) 9:13 p.m.
Friday, June 14 8:13 p.m.

You can now read and share *Berkshire Jewish Voice* feature stories online!
Visit jewishberkshires.org and select **Community & Events>Berkshire Jewish Voice** for links to highlights of current and past issues.

MAZEL TOV!

Leslie and Roy Kozupsky on their new grandchild.

Nancy Reiner and Ilan Dahan on their new grandchild.

Eliot Stern on being chosen co-captain of the Avon Old Farms soccer team.

Karen Chase on the publication of her new collection of essays, *History is Embarrassing*.

Carrie Lobovits Wright
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THE **STRENGTH** OF A PEOPLE.
THE **POWER** OF COMMUNITY.

ENSURE A VIBRANT, CARING & SECURE JEWISH COMMUNITY MAKE YOUR GIFT TO FEDERATION'S 2024 CAMPAIGN TODAY!

Your gift will help bring dignity and care to the vulnerable, build and strengthen the Jewish identity of our youth and young adults, support vital community programs, confront rising antisemitism, and create meaningful and secure Jewish life across the Berkshires, in Israel, and around the world.



JEWISH LIFE FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

You help young families embrace Jewish values and traditions while building a supportive community with Jewish peers through family programming, PJ Library, and volunteer opportunities.



RESOURCES TO FIGHT ANTISEMITISM

You help young people stand up against hate through anti-bias education in our public schools. You also combat antisemitism and the BDS movement through community programming, local advocacy, and security resources.

DIGNITY & COMPASSION

You provide older adults and homebound individuals with nutritious meals and stimulating programming served up with a side of companionship and compassion through our *Connecting With Community* program and Kosher Meals on Wheels.



JEWISH EDUCATION & VALUES

You nurture a strong Jewish future by providing a high-quality, meaningful, and affordable Jewish education for hundreds of children through critical grants to all of our local Jewish religious schools.



A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

You strengthen, sustain, and connect our community through hundreds of educational programs, holiday celebrations, and the *Berkshire Jewish Voice*, which bring people together and engage them in meaningful Jewish life.



A STRONG JEWISH IDENTITY

You help young people build strong Jewish identities and become future leaders through scholarships for Jewish camp and Israel experiences, as well as leadership development and holiday meals on campus.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT & EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

You help individuals facing unexpected challenges and life transitions receive the support and resources they need. You also provide a safety net of emergency assistance in our local community.



COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND ADVOCACY

You help provide a proactive voice in our community, schools, government, and media, as well as advocacy to address and respond to antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment in our community.



A SECURE JEWISH COMMUNITY

You help keep our community and our institutions safe through ongoing security trainings, building assessments, security grants, a community alert system, and the sharing of best practices to ensure we can freely and securely celebrate our heritage, faith, and culture.



ISRAEL IN TIMES OF CRISIS

When crisis hits in Israel or around the world, you help mobilize local resources to respond with immediate relief, advocacy, and longer-term recovery. From the Israel Crisis to the war in Ukraine, you help deliver an SOS response.

A CLOSE & CARING RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL

You help connect the Berkshire Jewish Community with Israel through our Afula-Gilboa partnership. You also provide programs for at-risk students, shelter for abused women, and support services for disabled youth in Israel.



FOOD SECURITY, HEALTHCARE, & WINTER RELIEF

The war in Ukraine and safe resettlement of Jews fleeing the region has been difficult, but you help provide shelter, transportation, blankets, and heaters. You also bring food, home health aides, and medicine to those who need it most.



DONATE ONLINE AT JEWISHBERKSHIRES.ORG. THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

LOCAL NEWS

“Chant and Chocolate”
Spiritual sweetness and an ancient practice at TAA



CHANT AND CHOCOLATE

- Bring your voice and intention to experience the deep relaxation of mind, body and soul through chant
- Connect energetically to our inner being, to each other, to the earth and to all humanity
- Notice how pain, tension, and emotional stress disappear
- Indulge in a chocolate treat for spiritual sweetness

Chant for love, peace, healing, renewal and hope

PITTSFIELD – Temple Anshe Amunim will host an evening of Chanting and Chocolate on Wednesday, June 12 at 7:30 p.m.

Chant can also be called musical meditation. It has been an ancient practice in many different cultures for centuries and existed among the ancient Hebrews along with timbrels and dances. It was resurrected as a Jewish practice by Rabbi Shefa Gold and has a huge following throughout the world. Our leader, Eva Friedner, trained under Rabbi Gold for two years. Born in Prague, Eva has led chant since 2006.

No previous singing or chanting experience necessary and there is no cost to attend. Indulge in a chocolate treat for spiritual sweetness and explore this ancient tradition.

For more information, please contact Eva at (508) 212-9460 or the temple at templeoffice@ansheamunim.org or (413) 442-5910.

Visit the TAA website at: ansheamunim.org.

Holiday of Shavuot Gaining Popularity in the Berkshires

Reading of the Ten Commandments, plus a delicious dairy luncheon and ice cream party at Chabad

PITTSFIELD – On Wednesday, June 12, celebrate the beautiful holiday of Shavuot with Chabad of the Berkshires by hearing the Ten Commandments and enjoying a festive luncheon and epic ice cream party. Services begin at 10 a.m.; the Ten Commandments will be read at noon followed by festivities.

At a unique crossroads between religion and cuisine, the Holiday of Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai some 3325 years ago and has become a celebration of fine dairy cuisine, as well.

“As the Torah was given and the laws of kosher dining were first received,” writes Chabad co-director Rabbi Levi Volovik, “the Jewish People were not yet capable of properly preparing beef and poultry and as such ate dairy. The rest is history.”

Exquisite cheesecakes, pastas, lasagna, and, of course, cheese blintzes all take center stage during this ancient celebration. A variety of salads and healthful food choices will be part of the Shavuot menu as well.

“When thinking of Jewish holidays, Passover, Chanukah, and Yom Kippur come to mind,” writes Chabad co-director Sara Volovik. “Nevertheless, Shavuot is considered one of Judaism’s major holidays and was in fact a ‘pilgrimage’ when all of Israel would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate in the Temple.”

“No, it isn’t all about the food,” she adds. “What is important is that the community is joining together, hearing the Ten Commandments, and celebrating the Torah. But good food certainly helps!”

All are invited regardless of background or affiliation. Chabad of the Berkshires is at 450 South Street in Pittsfield.

For more information visit jewishberkshires.com or call (413) 499-9899.

Tapping: Techniques for Emotional Regulation

GREAT BARRINGTON – Join Hevreh member Alyson Slutzky on Wednesday, June 5 at noon for an informative class on the tapping technique.

Alyson Slutzky, MSW, LICSW, uses the Emotional Freedom Technique, also known as tapping, with her social work clients at times.

Come hear Alyson explain how our nervous system works to alert us to conditions we need to be aware of. Tapping is known to calm the amygdala, which is our brain’s fear and anxiety center. Many times people who “tap” have a lessening of anxiety and possibly a change of perspective.

Alyson will lead a group session in which we give this technique a try, as well as highlight a few other things that we can keep in our “toolbox” to help us cope with stress.

For more information on Hevreh events and activities visit hevreh.org.

Hevreh to Honor Confirmation Class on Shavuot

GREAT BARRINGTON – On Tuesday, June 11 at 6 p.m., Hevreh of Southern Berkshire honors the 2024 confirmation class during Shavuot.

“We are so proud of our graduating seniors this year who will mark their Confirmation during the festival of Shavuot,” Rabbi Jodie Gordon said.

All are welcome as Hevreh celebrates *Z’man Torateinu*, the festive time of celebrating Torah, during a special service led by Confirmation students who will each offer personal remarks. A special oneg will follow the service.

The entire Hevreh community extends a hearty mazel tov to the confirmands and their families: Aliza Munch, Benjamin Gross, Ella Cohen, Mia Cohen, Makayla Wax, Megan Linick, Levi Citrin, and Shira Sawyer.

For more information on Hevreh events and activities visit hevreh.org.

PJ LIBRARY FAMILY FUN
SAVE THE DATES - SUMMER & FALL 2024

Sunday, May 19, 2024
PL Library’s 18th Birthday Party
Jewish Community Day, 2-4 p.m. at High Lawn Farm, Lee

Sunday, June 9
PJ Library Shavuot Celebration: Climbing and Crafts!
10-11:30 a.m. at French Park, Egremont

Friday, July 5
Splash into Shabbat
5-6:30 p.m. at Card Pond, West Stockbridge

Sunday, July 21
PJ Library at Tanglewood: BSO Family Concert
10 a.m.-noon at Tanglewood, Lenox

Sunday, August 4
Noah Aronson, Live in Concert!
7:30-9 p.m. at Lenox Memorial High School, Lenox

Friday, August 9
Splash into Shabbat
5-6:30 p.m. at Margaret Lindley Park, Williamstown

Sunday, September 15
PJ Celebrates Rosh Hashanah
10:30 a.m.-noon at a Location to be Announced

Sunday, October 27, 2024
PJ Library Fall Sukkot Festival
2-4 pm at Whitney’s Farm in Cheshire

Receive FREE Jewish books and meet local families by becoming a part of our Berkshire PJ Library Program. Visit jewishberkshires.org/pj-library to learn more and enroll your child today!

PJ Library Jewish Federation OF THE BERKSHIRES

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

CAN YOU HELP?
Sunday, May 19
Jewish Community Day at High Lawn Farm

Jewish Community Day is a wonderful fun-filled day of celebration and community, and we need lots of helping hands to keep the event running smoothly.

Volunteers are needed to help with parking, event set up, registration, activity tables, raffles, and so much more!

SIGN UP TO VOLUNTEER
Contact Molly Meador at (413) 442-4360, ext. 14
mmeador@jewishberkshires.org

The Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' Tikkun Olam Volunteer (TOV) Network connects community members of all ages with Mitzvah opportunities to make a difference in our community.

LOCAL NEWS

Hadassah Summer Book Club Titles Announced

The Berkshire Hills Hadassah Summer Book Club will launch its 24th season in May. The group welcomes new members who love to read and discuss books of Jewish content and/or by Jewish authors.

The schedule for this year is:

- May 24: *Forest Dark*, by Nicole Krauss
- June 28: *Betty Friedan, Magnificent Disrupter*, by Rachel Shtier
- August 2: *The Little Liar*, by Mitch Albom
- September 6: *The Stationery Shop*, by Marian Kamal

For more information and directions to the meeting, please contact Carol Goodman Kaufman at cgoodmankaufman@gmail.com

Jewish Music: This, Too, is Torah – A Special Shavuot Concert!



CBI's talented musicians played at last year's Shabbat Across the Berkshires

NORTH ADAMS – On Sunday, June 9 at 3 p.m., Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires invites the community to a concert of great Jewish music from throughout the ages.

Says Rabbi Rachel Barenblat: "At Shavuot we celebrate the revelation of Torah in all of its forms, and we gather to offer up the 'first fruits' of the spring harvest. We'll hear great music, both Sephardic and Ashkenazi, that spans different eras of Jewish history"

Under the direction of Adam Green, the Congregation Beth Israel choir and musicians will offer up a spring harvest of spirit and harmony. All are welcome to join this free event!

Please RSVP at cbiberkshires.com/event/shavuot-concert-2024.

Plus – Ways to Celebrate Shabbat at CBI

Kabbalat Shabbat Services — Friday, May 17 and June 7 at 7 p.m.: All are welcome to celebrate Shabbat with prayer, song, poetry, and heart. The CBI band and choir bring beautiful harmonies to Kabbalat Shabbat.

Jewish Journeys Shabbat — Saturday, May 4 at 10 a.m. (note later time): Join CBI for a special family Shabbat service to celebrate Shabbat in community as participants interweave the morning service with opportunities for Jewish Journeys students to share what they have learned. All are welcome!

Shabbat Morning Services continue on Saturday, May 11, May 25, June 1, & June 15 at 9:30 a.m. Join CBI on Shabbat morning to hear some words of Torah (and some words about Torah) and bask in Shabbat's sweetness. Spiritual tools include traditional liturgy, contemporary poetry, chant, and song... as well as spectacular views from the sanctuary, which connect with the natural world and with our Source.

DONATE.
✧
VOLUNTEER.
✧
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Jewish Women's Foundation of the Berkshires Solicits Proposals to Address the Needs of Berkshire Residents

The Jewish Women's Foundation of the Berkshires (JWF) is soliciting grant proposals from nonprofit organizations for specific projects or programs that further its mission of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). JWF is dedicated to addressing critical needs in the Berkshire community and supporting social action to create a more just and equitable society. We fulfill our mission by providing local organizations with funds to help them:



- Address clients' basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter;
- Promote client self-sufficiency through the provision of such services as literacy training and legal aid; and,
- Empower youth and young adults.

Jewish as well as non-Jewish organizations are invited to apply for grants up to \$5000. Only organizations with registered 501(C)3 status may apply. The application will be available online at jewishberkshires.org/jewish-womens-foundation#2 beginning May 1, 2024. The deadline for submission is May 31, 2024. Final decisions will be announced in September.

In 2023, the Foundation awarded \$79,000 to 24 local organizations. Further information about JWF can be found at JWFB.org.

For information about the grants program please contact the Grants Committee at: jwfberkshires@gmail.com.

JWF is an organization that is welcoming to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, identity, age, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, and nationality.



PINE COBBLE SCHOOL
est. 1937
A good beginning never ends.

facebook.com/pine-cobble-school
instagram.com/pine_cobble_school
pinecobble.org
413-458-4680
163 Gale Road, Williamstown, MA 01267





Scan here to schedule a tour!

ENROLLMENT NOW OPEN

Pre-school through 8th Grade



Our Mission: To cultivate in each student a lifelong passion for learning, a strong sense of self-worth, and respect for others throughout the community.

LOCAL NEWS

Ramblin' With the Rav Returns with a Summer of Hikes Around the Berkshires

Ramblin' with the Rav hikes feature a morning of enjoying the Berkshires – exercise, a beautiful view, good company, a bit of Torah, and fantastic conversation on the trail. This is a wonderful opportunity to build relationships and community while enjoying the outdoors. Rabbi Weiner, spiritual leader of Kneset Israel, leads the hikes, which typically take place on Wednesday and Sunday mornings in the warmer months of the year.

Prospective participants must register in advance for each hike at knesetisrael.org/rsvp. Registrants will receive information about the demands of the route, what to wear, what to bring, where to meet, etc., and be added to an email list for communication before the hike. Poor weather may lead to a postponement to the rain date, usually communicated the day before, and low RSVP numbers may cause a cancellation a day or two in advance.

Each route is unique, with its own difficulty, distance, total elevation gain and approximate duration. Driving time is not included in the time estimate. Participants should be responsible and realistic regarding their fitness and stamina.

All hikes are potentially family-friendly; all but one welcomes leashed dogs, as well. In the summer, some include an opportunity for wading or swimming, at participants' risk. Members and non-members of Kneset Israel are welcome, and there is no charge for the program.

Questions? Please contact Rabbi Weiner by email at rabiweiner@outlook.com.

MAY-JUNE

Sunday, May 5 - Harvey Mtn. & Pinnacle Point, Austerlitz, NY

Moderate, 4.3 miles, 925', 2-2.5 hours

Harvey Mountain State Forest abuts the state line, in the hills just south of I-90. This trail begins with a quick 600' climb to the summit and its spectacular views, a walk along the ridge, and a gradual descent back to the trailhead. Leashed dogs are welcome. Rain date – Sunday, May 12. Meet at KI at 10 a.m. to carpool. The trailhead has a very small parking lot.

Kinderhook Creek Preserve, East Nassau, NY - Wednesday, May 15

Moderate, 3-4 miles with some short steep slopes, 400', 1.5-2.5 hours

Lots of trails crisscross this small preserve that protects a series of wooded ridges parallel to scenic Kinderhook Creek. We will wander the ridges, enjoy the overlooks, and, depending on the preferences of participants, and climb and descend the short, steep ridges by a variety of routes. Leashed dogs are welcome. Rain date - Wednesday, May 22. Meet at KI at 9 a.m. to carpool. The trailhead has a very small parking lot.



Last year, Ramblin' With the Rav hikers caught the azaleas in full bloom at Pittsfield State Forest

Azaleas, Pittsfield State Forest - Wednesday, May 29

Moderate, 5-6 miles, 935-1100', 2.5-3 hours

Depending on trail conditions and group interests, we'll choose a path up the mountain that visits highlights of Pittsfield State Forest – possibly including a climb up Pine Mountain, Tilden Swamp, Berry Pond, and/or the Lulu Brook Cascade – but definitely taking in the seasonal treasure – the summit grove of wild azaleas. We saw them in full bloom last year – we'll see how it goes this time! Be prepared for muddy trail conditions and a steep section. Leashed dogs are welcome. Rain date - Wednesday, June 5. Meet at KI to carpool at 9 a.m. or at the Lulu Brook parking area in Pittsfield State Forest by 9:10 a.m. (\$5 parking fee)

Sunday, June 30 - Flag Rock, Housatonic

Easy/moderate, 3.9 miles, 797', 1.5-2 hours

On the less-visited side of Monument Mountain Reserve, this slowly climbing trail passes through a

beautiful forest and unusual boulders on its way to an extraordinary view of the village of Housatonic and its environs from, you guessed it, a rock that has a flag flying above it. Leashed dogs are welcome. Rain Date - Wednesday, July 3. Meet at KI at 10 a.m. to carpool, or by 10:30 at the trailhead on MA-183 just north of Taft Farm and across the street.

Join Families Together for a Rosh Chodesh Celebration at KI

Plus more Tot Shabbats

PITTSFIELD – Families Together invites both kids and adults to a special program on Wednesday, May 8 at 5:15 p.m. to celebrate Rosh Chodesh, the Jewish new month. Dinner will be served. To RSVP and learn more, visit knesetisrael.org/RSVP.

Families Together is made possible through the generous support of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

About Families Together

Families Together is a community initiative at Kneset Israel for adults and their school-aged and younger kids. Families Together events are a mix of social, educational, and experiential. All Families Together events are free and open to members and non-members alike!

Tot shabbats continue at KI

Kneset Israel invites families to Tot Shabbat with Mike Duffy, a dedicated song-leader and Jewish educator. This monthly event promises singing and a fun way to enjoy Shabbat for children in grades K-1 and younger, along with their parents, grandparents, or guardians. Over the course of this year, kids have learned Hebrew songs and connected to prayers while having fun, and there are still opportunities to join in on this program.

The next Tot Shabbats will be on May 4 and June 1, both Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

All are welcome to join; members and non-members alike! KI looks forward to celebrating Shabbat with you!

Kneset Israel is at 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield.



FEDERATION FOOD DRIVE

Berkshire County is facing a food crisis. Please help us feed our neighbors by participating in this important mitzvah as part of Federation's Super Tzedakah Campaign Kickoff

Pasta & Rice Collection, May 1- 31

Drop-off Locations:

Berkshire Food Co-op, Great Barrington
Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Great Barrington
Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Pittsfield
Congregation Beth Israel, North Adams

Mobile Food Drive, May 7

Food Picked Up From Your HOME

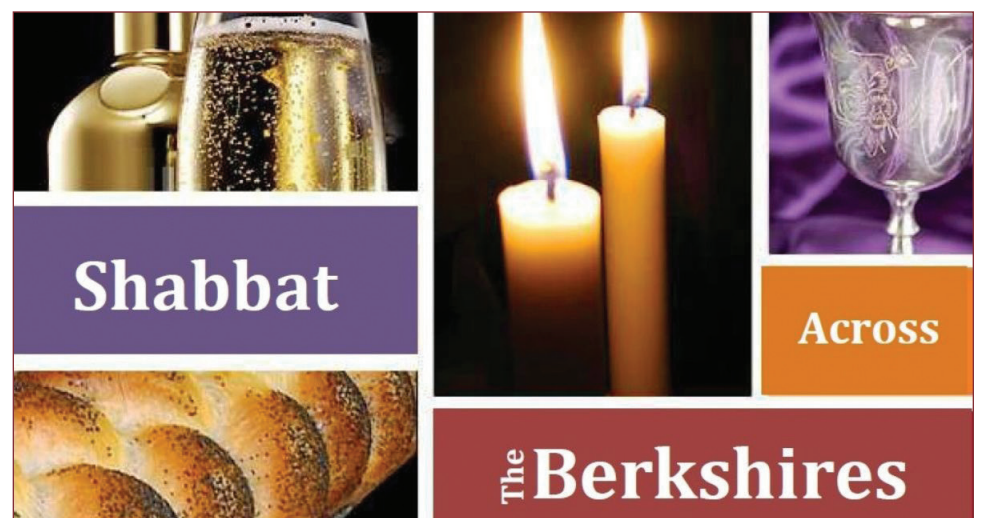
Federation is partnering with Berkshire Bounty for their volunteers to pick up non-perishable food items from your front steps or mailbox to be delivered to emergency food sites.

TO DONATE: email Jenny@berkshirebounty.org.

Thank you to Berkshire Bounty and our collection partners for their support!



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THE POWER OF COMMUNITY.



Shabbat

Across

The Berkshires

Shabbat Across the Berkshires Friday, June 7 at 5:45 pm

Hosted by
Congregation Kneset Israel
16 Colt Road, Pittsfield, MA

Join the extended Berkshire Jewish Community as we come together to celebrate a joyous Kabbalat Shabbat with a musical family-friendly service led by our local Rabbis, followed by a delicious kosher Shabbat dinner.

REGISTER FOR DINNER BY JUNE 2: Adults \$20, Children free.
Reserve at knesetisrael.org/rsvp or call (413) 445-4872, ext 10.

Cosponsored by the Jewish Federation, and Berkshire congregations and organizations.



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ISRAEL & OVERSEAS PARTNERS

Federations Create Israel Emergency Loan Fund to Aid Small Businesses

Jewish Federations of North America announced in March that they have launched the Israel Emergency Loan Fund (the Loan Fund) to inject hundreds of millions of dollars into the Israeli economy. Through the Loan Fund, which will work with existing loan platforms, this new program provides a lifeline to small businesses across Israel severely impacted by the war and without access to traditional banking credit.

Israel is enduring a large-scale economic crisis. Businesses are struggling to survive amid unprecedented pressure. Some measures suggest 25% of all small businesses have experienced revenue declines of more than 50%, with 77% of small businesses in the north and south experiencing revenue declines of more than 50%.

The Loan Fund aims to attract \$100 million in philanthropic investment capital in partnership with Federations, foundations, and other donors, of which over half has been raised. Through credit lines with the banks, these loans can be leveraged up so that the Loan Fund and its partners will be providing hundreds of millions of dollars of essential capital to the Israeli economy at this time of need.

“The capital that we are providing to support Israel’s small businesses will play a vital role in the recovery of the economy following the events of October 2023, ensuring many small business owners will continue to survive and provide jobs

and income,” said Jeff Schoenfeld, co-chair of the Loan Fund.

Operating at scale and across regions, sectors, and industries, the Loan Fund seeks to support the Israeli economy at a time of unprecedented need, sustaining small businesses that employ tens of thousands of people – across different sectors and different geographies.

“Jewish Federations are playing a crucial role in supporting Israel during the current emergency and this economic support is just one strand of the help that we are giving at this time of need,” said Rebecca Caspi, senior vice president of Jewish Federations.

Tens of thousands of businesses have closed or are experiencing critical liquidity issues as a result of the war. This crisis impacts businesses across Israel and in every sector – from agriculture to high tech. Micro-, small-, and medium-sized businesses are particularly at risk given their limited access to liquid capital and the huge disruption in the normal flow of business.

Each business represents the source of income and a lifetime of work and dreams for owners, employees, and their families.

Jewish Federations’ have realized the need to support the Israeli economy at this vital stage. Through their broad relations across the landscape of non-governmental organizations, financial institutions, and government, the Loan Fund will deliver

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You cannot destroy us.
The Jewish people live.**



capital quickly and at scale, across regions, sectors, and industries.

The Loan Fund’s philanthropic resources will be distributed across fully vetted non-bank loan platforms, each of whom provide loans to small businesses in a particular set of markets and sectors. The allocations enable the loan platforms to provide lower interest rate loans and to cover default risks to attack additional leverage from banks.

In addition to the Loan Fund, Jewish Federations’ Israel Emergency Campaign has now surpassed \$783 million and allocated close to \$385 million for humanitarian needs and economic support since October 7th.

“We want to ensure that many small businesses in Israel that have been affected by the war will still have access to much needed capital, including those on the geographical periphery and in sectors often overlooked by the traditional banking system,” said Matthew Salter, director of the Loan Fund.

A portion of our Federation’s \$329,000 contribution to the Israel Crisis Fund is directed to JAFI.

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ISRAEL & OVERSEAS PARTNERS

President Zelensky Marks Pesach With ORT



On April 18, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky visited the ORT 'Simha' School in Kyiv to mark Pesach.

Mr Zelensky met students and teachers and heard about the work being done to continue Jewish education across the country during the war.

He is pictured here with children, staff, and other leaders alongside ORT Representative David Benish.

Dan Green, World ORT Director General and CEO, said: "We are honored that President Zelensky took time to visit Simha and learn more about the remarkable work of staff and students.

"We deeply appreciate the ongoing efforts of the ORT Ukraine team and our supporters worldwide to ensure that students can continue their education and take part in Jewish activities despite the

disruption caused by the conflict. The presidential visit is testimony to their dedication."

On his Facebook page, Mr. Zelensky wrote:

"Before Passover, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of Jewish organizations and students of a Jewish school.

"I am grateful to the entire Jewish community for supporting Ukraine in its struggle for freedom. I am especially grateful for the involvement of international partners, in particular from the United States, in helping our country. Now it is very important to bolster air defense to protect our people."

A portion of our Federation's \$329,000 contribution to the Israel Crisis Fund is directed to ORT.



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OBITUARIES

Beatrice Singer Selig, 100, inspired countless nursing students, devoted to Jewish community

PITTSFIELD – Beatrice Singer Selig, 100, died peacefully at home on Tuesday, March 26, under a full moon, immersed in the love of family and friends at her bedside and in the memories of her treasured deceased husband, Dr. Harry M. Selig.

Born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1923, Bea, as she was known to one and all, spent the next hundred years in a varied and distinguished career. She served as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army Nurse Corps in 1945-47, proudly graduated from Russell Sage College, and was a valued and long-serving Professor of Nursing at Berkshire Community College.

Bea co-led the 1980s movement for equity pay for women in the state of Massachusetts, beginning at Berkshire Community College and ending with a win at the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. She delivered hundreds of babies, beginning at St. Luke's Hospital in the 1950s, and ending with her professorship at Berkshire Community College, where she inspired countless nursing students over decades. A fierce Mah Jongg player until her last weeks, in 1953, Bea and her friends founded the now "Oldest established permanent floating Mah Jongg game in Pittsfield," which will be carried on by second-generation members in the group. She will always be our "East."

With no bat mitzvah at age 13 in 1936 due to her gender, Bea celebrated her bat mitzvah on her 80th birthday. Bea was devoted to the Jewish community that surrounded her, filling many roles at Knesset Israel throughout the decades. Bea was particularly filled with joy at having four generations under the roof at KI. She was a gracious Passover hostess, welcoming guests of all denominations at her Seders. She was an active volunteer at Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. A life member of Hadassah and a nurse, she advocated for women's and family health in both the Berkshires and beyond. Bea was part of a team of Hadassah nurses for the Check it Out program that went into Berkshire County middle and high schools to teach about the importance of breast health and self-care. A plaque hangs for the nursing program in her honor at Hadassah Hospital in Israel.

Bea is survived by her daughter and son-in-law Regina and Steven Mason; five grandchildren and

three great-grandchildren in whom she delighted; Chandi Lauzon, twins Hannah Harvey (Kevin) and Noah Lauzon, his three children Sophia Bella, Solomon, and Coyote and their mother Winter Cantagallo, Cara Rose Lauzon, and Johannes Nightingale. A true matriarch of her family, she also leaves behind an impressive number of bonus family members.

Donations can be made in her name to Berkshire Community College Scholarship Fund (berkshirecc.edu/about-bcc/bcc-foundation/annual-fund-gift.php) or in memory of Beatrice Selig, to BCC Foundation, 1350 West Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201; Capital District Patriot Flight patriotflight.org/donate-now/, or in memory of Beatrice Selig to Patriot Flight, Inc. P.O. Box 13776, Albany, NY 12212-3779; Berkshire Hills Hadassah, P.O. Box 187, Pittsfield, MA 01202; or Home Care Services of Massachusetts, subject line to the memory of Beatrice Selig, 66 West Street, Suite L1, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

Edith Meininger, 100, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother CANAAN, CT – Edith Meininger (nee Goldfarb), 100, passed away peacefully at Geer Village.

Born in 1923, Edith grew up in the Bronx, NY, where her mother Helen's family moved in the early 1900s to escape the Russian pogroms. She was predeceased by Henry, her husband of 66 years, whom she met on a ski trip.

Edith practiced psychology in New York City for many years before relocating to Austerlitz, NY. She experienced great joy in her many friendships, especially with members of her beloved book club.

She is survived by her daughter Claudia; son-in-law Joe; grandchildren Hannah and Eli; step-granddaughter Suzanne and wife Allison; and great-granddaughter Arlo.

In keeping with Edith's wishes, there was no funeral. A private burial service for the family was held at Chatham Rural Cemetery.

Donations may be made to The Chatham Synagogue or the Democratic National Committee c/o Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home, 426 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

Doris Gerry Aaronson, 80, speech teacher, entrepreneur, loved her family

PITTSFIELD – Doris Gerry Aaronson, 80, passed away peacefully, surrounded by

her family, on Saturday, March 30, at Kimball Farms Rehabilitation Center, of colon cancer.

Born in Manhattan on June 25, 1943, Doris graduated from New York University with a bachelor of science degree in Speech. She then attained her master's degree in Speech, also from New York University. She was a speech teacher in the New York school system until moving to Pittsfield.

Doris taught in the Pittsfield school system and was among the first to be appointed to a "permanent substitute" position at Pittsfield High School. She was an entrepreneur, and created several businesses in her lifetime, including sending themed care packages to college students and summer campers on behalf of their parents. She was a life member of Hadassah.

Doris married Attorney Harris N. Aaronson on September 14, 1968, and together, they built a life filled with love and devotion. Their partnership was a testament to the enduring power of that love.

As a mother, Doris poured her heart and soul into raising her two children, Tracey J. Aaronson of Hinsdale and Jack R. Aaronson of Wilton Manors, FL, and Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. The greatest joy in her life was her granddaughter, Sydney A. Smith of Hinsdale. She cherished every moment spent with her family.

She is survived by her husband, children, grandchild, and her brother, Ned Sohn, and his wife Joanne. She was pre-deceased by her parents, Sidney and Beatrice Sohn.

A funeral was held on Tuesday, April 2, at Flynn & Dagnoli Funeral Home, 5 Elm Street, Pittsfield.

Dr. Frances Lippmann, 90, psychologist, mother, grandmother, wife, and friend

STOCKBRIDGE – Dr. Frances Lippmann, 90, passed away peacefully on Thursday, April 4.

Born in Brooklyn, NY on May 30, 1933, she moved to Freeport, Long Island where she spent her early life. While in Freeport, she was a street car drag racer, enjoyed time on her family boat, helped out in her father's car dealership, and played on the Freeport High School Field Hockey Team as team captain.

Embarking on her adult life, Dr. Lippmann attended Adelphi University and continued on to get her doctorate in Psychology from New York University where she, and her soon to be husband who was studying in the same program, first met. She received her doctoral

training at Bellevue Hospital where she was among the first women with a Ph.D. in her department.

Upon leaving New York City, Dr. Lippmann was hired as the first psychologist in western MA to be part of a district-wide special education evaluation team in the Berkshire Hills Regional School District and acted as a mental health counselor at the schools in the area.

She and her husband co-created a free of charge clinic for mental health care in Stockbridge. Dr. Lippmann enjoyed her work in private practice for many years in her house in Stockbridge as well as serving as the director of the counseling center at Williams College. In this role, she trained multiple active psychologists in the Berkshires.

Dr. Lippmann was a member of WMAAP and the Stockbridge Dream Group and enjoyed being a member of and hosting the annual celebration of the Rapaport-Klein Study Group at her home.

She was a psychologist, daughter, mother, aunt, grandmother, wife, and friend to many.

Dr. Lippmann was predeceased by her husband Dr. Paul Lippmann. She is survived by her son John, his wife Jennifer and their children Heru, Phoenix, and Lavender; daughter Eve Jennings and her husband Sean; grandchild Joseph and his wife Caitlin; great grandchildren Aurelia and Sonia; grandchild Lily and partner Josiah; and god-daughter Patricia Andrew.

A celebration of Dr. Lippmann's life took place on Sunday, April 14, at Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home followed by a burial service at Stockbridge Cemetery.

Donations may be made to HospiceCare in The Berkshires c/o Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home, 426 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230.

Bert Pogrebin, 89, renowned labor lawyer, leaves legacy of integrity

STOCKBRIDGE – Bert Pogrebin, a longtime partner at Littler Mendelson P.C. who represented management in labor negotiations and wrote an essential textbook on the subject, died Monday, March 25.

Born Bertrand Pogrebin on April 10, 1934 in Brooklyn, the son of Abraham and Esther Pogrebin, the family later lived in Roosevelt, NJ, a rural cooperative community built by the Franklin Roosevelt administration largely for Jewish garment workers.. Pogrebin

attended Rutgers University and Harvard Law School and, for many years, was a senior partner at Rains & Pogrebin, a law firm in the Long Island suburb of Mineola, NY.

Pogrebin was also a co-founder and board member of the Appleseed Network, a nonprofit network of 18 public interest justice centers in the U.S. and Mexico founded by members of Harvard Law School's Class of 1958. Last year, his daughter, the writer Abigail Pogrebin, and son-in-law, David Shapiro, created the Bert Pogrebin Appleseed Fund for Justice, focusing on the organization's work in New York.

At a memorial service on Thursday, March 28, at New York's B'nai Jeshurun Congregation, he was remembered by family and close friends from the intersecting worlds of liberal politics, feminism, the law, and Jewish life, including Hillary Clinton, actress Marlo Thomas, singer Peter Dinklage and Rabbis Burton L. Visotzky, Angela Buchdahl, and Felicia L. Sol.

Bert Pogrebin and Letty Jo Cottin were married in 1963, barely six months after they met. Over the next 60 years, they modeled a symbiotic marriage that was not just the envy of their friends on New York's Upper West Side but also had political weight. A powerful labor lawyer and one of the most influential figures in the women's movement, the couple demonstrated how two ambitious spouses could raise kids, pursue careers, and support one another without rancor or bruised egos.

"He doesn't need to prove his masculinity or big-foot others in order to feel like a man," Letty Cottin Pogrebin, the author and a founding editor of Ms. Magazine, wrote of her husband in her 2022 memoir, *Shanda*. "He's a Harvard educated lawyer with a stellar, decades-long career under his belt, but I've never heard him brag about himself (only about his kids, grandkids, and me)."

"He was there to be supportive of [Letty], but much more and deeper - supportive of the kind of world that they both wanted for their children and their grandchildren," Clinton, the former Democratic presidential nominee, secretary of state and senator from New York, said at the memorial service. "And we need people like Bert more than ever."

Representing management as what his daughter Robin joked was the "good guy on the bad side," he earned a reputation for fairness and civility that impressed even

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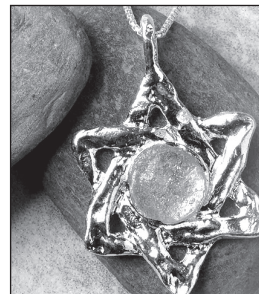
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OBITUARIES

OBITUARIES,

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adversaries. Attorney Bruce Millman recalled working at Pogrebin's law firm and being taught by his mentor "to always appreciate and respect... labor and the aspirations of working men and women and to be ethical in everything we do." In her memoir, Letty Pogrebin recalled that as a young suitor, Bert would pick up a guitar and belt out labor union classics, like "Which Side Are You On?" and "Solidarity Forever."

Pogrebin was co-author of *Labor Relations: The Basic Processes, Law and Practice*, a treatise for lawyers and law students. He taught labor law at New York University Law School, Hofstra University Law School, and Yale University Law School. He also sat on the board of editors of the *New York Law Journal*.

He and his wife lived on the Upper West Side beginning in 1970 and have a home in Stockbridge, where he passed away.

In addition to his wife, Letty, and twin daughters, Robin and Abigail, his survivors include a son-in-law, David, and six grandchildren, Ethan and Maya Klaris, Ben and Molly Shapiro, and Zev and Arlo Pogrebin.

Donations may be made to IKAR at www.ikar.org or The Appleseed Network at appleseednetwork.org.

Gail Phillips, 80, kind, caring, independent woman, nurse and midwife

LENOX – Gail Phillips, 80, died on Tuesday, April 9. She had a full rich life filled with many roles of kindness. She was a daughter, sister, mother, mother-in-law, aunt, grandmother, and very good friend. A kind, caring, and independent woman, she enjoyed a rewarding career as a professional registered nurse and certified midwife.

Born March 29, 1944 in Salem, MA, daughter of Ida Brown Phillips and Hollis Hall Phillips and granddaughter of Harry Franklin Phillips, she lived her entire childhood in Swampscott, graduating from Swampscott High School in 1962. Gail attended nursing school at Lynn Hospital and graduated from

Russell Sage College in Troy, NY with a bachelor of science in Nursing. She passed her nursing boards in MA as a Professional Registered Nurse by the age of 21. She earned her master of science in Health Education from Russell Sage College, and established herself as a Certified Nurse-Midwife, a Master of Science in Nursing, through the Historical Frontier Nursing University in Kentucky.

Gail complemented her midwifery practice with integrative medicine skills of gentle restorative yoga, hypnosis and hypnotherapy, vegan/macrobiotic/Mediterranean healing nutrition, massage therapy including reflexology, mindful-based stress reduction, facilitation of centering pregnancy, and in her retirement founded Phillips Healthcare Advocacy, whose mission is person-centered care for the best possible outcomes within our health-care system.

When Gail was not listening to classical music on the Tanglewood lawn, she could be found planting one beautiful garden after another, including her latest for Congregation Ahavath Sholom in Great Barrington.

Gail leaves two sisters, Beth Phillips Rodman of Berkeley, CA and Holly Sentner of Greensboro, NC; brother, David L. Phillips of Salem; two children, Rebecca Rain (Redbord) of Montvale, NJ and Adam Joshua Redbord and his wife, Emily Higginson Redbord of Sherborn, MA; four grandchildren, beautiful memories, and lifelong wishes of love for each of them, Caroline Ruth Cohen, Juliet Pearl Cohen, Ruby Aurora Redbord, and Theodore Edward Redbord, aka Teddy.

Gail chose to follow Jewish tradition and have a simple burial. Services were held on Friday April 12 at Ahavath Sholom Cemetery, Great Barrington. Gail wishes for you to increase your awareness of the joy that is inherently within, to be present without judgment and reaction to the challenges and stressors that come and go in our lives.



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BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

Dispatches from Williamstown on a Ceasefire Petition

By Steven Miller and Ralph Hamman / Special to the BJV

Steven Miller, a professor of mathematics at Williams College, and Williamstown resident **Ralph Hamman** were among the community organizers who opposed the Gaza ceasefire resolution first proposed to the Williamstown Select Board in November 2023 by members of Berkshires for Collective Liberation, a group made up of Town residents, and students from the Williams College chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). For more information the resolution and how it was ultimately voted down by the Select Board in March, please see Dara Kaufman's "In My View" article on page 2. In this essay, Miller and Hamman write on behalf of other community members who joined together to oppose to the resolution. They share how their efforts coalesced and also some lessons learned along the way that might be useful for other communities in a similar situation.

WILLIAMSTOWN – In a modern world with nearly instantaneous communication and 24/7 coverage, gone are the days of isolation. Actions half the world away quickly resonate and impact us here. In this note, we describe our experiences in Williamstown with the consequences of the inhumane actions of Hamas in early October.

Our community, like most of those around the world, was sick at the devastation, both in the initial attack and in the aftermath. Many people, many of them well intentioned, felt they could not stand by while suffering happened, and similar to many other communities around the world, groups of people organized to speak out against the crisis unfolding.

Good people can and will differ on what not only is the best response, but where it is appropriate to respond. We are just some of many voices who opposed efforts to get Williamstown to chime in on the world scene with policy demands on how to settle a centuries-old conflict. We come from diverse backgrounds with different views on many issues, but we are united in our belief that such actions are not only wrong, but set a dangerous precedent that rather than bringing us together further fragments our communities. Below we share some

We heard supporters of both sides say, either privately to some of us or through intermediaries, that they are terrified to speak up. To us, this is the appropriate local issue: what can we do to create a culture where we can speak to each other.

of our thoughts on why and how we opposed a petition brought to the Select Board to call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. We commend the reader to a truly exceptional editorial in The Berkshire Eagle on March 30, "At a contentious Williamstown Select Board meeting, a critical lesson in official humility," which mirrors many of our sentiments.

There are three key issues: Standing, Suitability, and Substance.

STANDING

Before the Supreme Court takes or refuses a case there is always a discussion about whether or not the petitioner has standing; before examining the merits of taking stands (and if so which stands) on complex international conflicts, boards and towns should first determine if they can. The Select Board has a large number of pressing issues; it is dangerous to open Pandora's box as once we start taking positions on one issue, we must do so on others (or by our silence are we supporting the Russians in the Ukraine, the ethnic camps in China, the list goes on and on). The petition was not about a local issue; it is about international policy, and was not in the bailiwick of our board. This is the philosophy of the Kalven Report -- organizations have spheres where they live; it is not the job of say a custodial union to clean up the world's mess, their jurisdiction is the local ones in our buildings. We are pleased that this argument resonated with most of the board.

SUITABILITY

While a petition of this sort may be appropriate for town meeting, just because we can do something does not mean we should. We are seeing passions inflamed by this issue. One of us serves on the regional school committee; we have hours of discussion about the budget, at the sub-committee and full committee levels, with various town boards, and then with voters, where we openly discuss the how we got here, what we want to do, what resources we have to do, what will be the consequences of our choices. There was no such discussion at Select Board meetings as to the facts of a centuries-old conflict. We fear the board or town weighing in on such a complicated issue, as we are not structured to adequately discuss it. We are not holding hours-long informational



The scene at the February 12 Williamstown Select Board meeting. Photo courtesy of iBerkshires.com.

meetings with advocates of both sides talking about the consequences of well-intentioned resolutions. Further, if we had a citizens' petition, the vote would occur at a town meeting where historically we have on the order of 5% (if we are lucky) of our population present at the end of the meeting.

For those who believe a ceasefire is needed, we urge them to have an opt-in petition so those who want can sign and support. Speak in your own names – do not speak in all of ours.

SUBSTANCE

We focused most of our efforts on the standing and suitability arguments, but there is another axis: the substance of the petition. Several of us met with people behind or supportive of the ceasefire petition. These were good, civil conversations, but there was an unbridgeable divide in our view on the situation on the ground. Some of us worked to try to get a better petition which would call on Hamas to acknowledge the right of Israel, wondering how you can have a ceasefire with someone dedicated to your destruction! In the end, the petition (in our view) did not adequately reflect the moral wrongs of Hamas or that the horrors are the results of a justified retaliatory war. While we were in strong agreements on the first two points, we differed greatly in how much emphasis to give here, with some of us wanting to read into the record the atrocities to balance the emotional appeals uttered by advocates of the resolution.

In numerous discussions we heard supporters of both sides say, either privately to some of us or through intermediaries, that they are terrified to speak up. To us, this is the appropriate local issue: what can we do to come together as a community to have difficult conversations without cancelling people? Given that just a few short years ago people lost friends and businesses for supporting an artificial turf at Mt Greylock High School, we have a long way to go before we can have these conversations without people being justly afraid of being canceled. Until our house is in order we should not presume to dictate to the world.

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BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES IN ISRAEL

“I didn’t know I could miss someone I didn’t know”

A post-Oct. 7 working visit to Israel showed the importance of helping out by being...well, helpful

Since leaving his position as development officer at Federation in November 2023, **Rabbi Mark Cohn** has been serving as spiritual leader of Temple Sholom in New Milford, CT and as the Director of Partnership Development for the Jewish Institute for Liberal Values. For the month of March, Mark visited Israel with his wife, Rabbi Amy Wallk of Congregation Beth El in Springfield. He found opportunities to work first on a farm with Israel Food Rescue and then in support of the Israel Defense Forces as a participant in the Sar-El program. He stayed in Israel for the better part of a month, and here shares some of what he saw in a country five months into a war it never wanted.



After my plane landed, I was so happy to be back in Israel and then, walking toward Passport Control, I passed signs of the hostages – and so began a feeling that no matter where I would go, there would be reminders. And they are ubiquitous – on yellow-knitted scarves tied around the trunks of trees on Rothschild Blvd in central Tel Aviv, in a massive lit up sign on HaBima Square in Tel Aviv, in stores, on people’s lapels, and certainly in the stories people tell.

There is a poster Amy bought. On it, there sits one lone yellow chair with the words: “I didn’t know I could miss someone I didn’t know.” It refers to the hostages and how they are constantly on people’s minds and in their hearts. The lone yellow chair serves as a reminder of the Shabbat table set up in Tel Aviv, in front of the Art Museum, where an empty set table serves as a reminder of the impact of the vicious, genocidal Hamas that not only started this war but has conducted 18 years of fighting against Israel.

One night, Amy and I went to dinner with her daughter, Nina, who is serving in the IDF. We were joined by two dear friends: Gina and Yossi (names changed).

Gina is a psychologist. She spent three months after October 7 volunteering with survivors of the Nova Music Festival. The stories she heard are beyond chilling – you can imagine, as she primarily worked with women.

Her husband, Yossi, went to volunteer at a center where Israelis who have been forcibly removed from the Western Negev and northern reaches of Israel can get support. A loving, vibrant grandfather, Yossi went to spend time with little children so their parents could get a moment’s break to get support for themselves. He wound up playing with a 2-year-old for an hour. As he finished his time with the child, the social worker said: “That is the first time the boy has spoken to anyone since he left his kibbutz on that fateful morning.”

As became a recurring theme for me: tears and silence in the face of the reality of life in Israel right now.



Rabbi Cohn in Israel

I have long said that if I wasn’t a rabbi, I’d be a farmer.

I think my week on the farm ended any such illusions I had about farming. Amy and I volunteered for a week with Israel Food Rescue (IFR), an organization which began in the Fall in order to assist struggling farmers in Israel during the war. Between Israelis called up for reserve duty and foreign workers returning to their countries of origin and Palestinians unable to enter the country (from the West Bank and Gaza), the typical agricultural labor pool plummeted mightily.

IFR has worked with various farms. We worked with the Seishel Farm of Moshav Givati, a community of roughly 1,000 people founded in 1950 by Jewish refugees from eastern Europe and Arab countries. The farm has roughly 200 acres of land and they produce cauliflower, fennel, plums, olives, and eggplant. They have roughly 300 milking cows. The moshav sits about five miles east of Ashdod, a major port and about 20 miles from the northern part of Gaza.

While working in the fields, we saw a few Israeli military drones and at one point heard two major booms, which one of the farmers told us was the IDF destroying a Hamas tunnel. I didn’t know if that statement was factual or hopeful. I hope, and have been told, it is true.

Our group was made up of six to eight people, depending on the day, and most of the participants were with IFR for 5-10 days. As Jews, we were Reform, Conservative, Modern Orthodox, Secular. We were men and women aged from about 35 to 70. We were a TV news producer, a radiologist, an OBGYN, a financial analyst, a researcher and teacher of horticulture, a nurse, a US Air Force Vet, and of course – two rabbis. Most were Jewish – two were not Jewish and of differing degrees of connection to Christianity. We were all committed to supporting Israel, the war effort, the survival of the agricultural industry in Israel, and making sure Israelis know they are not alone.

Our days began at 6:30 a.m. with a hearty breakfast and then a ride to the farm. We worked from roughly 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. In my five days, we assembled cardboard boxes, planted eggplants, harvested a massive amount of cauliflower, ventilated eggplant coverings, and shielded young cauliflower with their own external leaves. Did I mention harvesting cauliflower? Who knew how heavy they can be!??

The farmers were deeply grateful for our efforts and given the IFR’s work, they told us that IFR has helped save their farm. I believe it. Our efforts are a drop in the bucket, but I know that with so many other volunteers in the country right now, there are meaningful ways to contribute. Not everyone can come and not everyone can do the kind of work that is needed. Each of us just needs to help in a way that is...well, helpful.



I first learned about Sar-El when my rabbi volunteered for the organization some 15-20 years ago and I thought how wonderful that Americans (Jewish and non-Jewish) could come to work on an army base to assist the vital efforts of Israel’s military.

When the war broke out in Israel in the early Fall, Amy and I immediately began to consider how and when we could get to Israel and where we might volunteer. Sar-El seemed a natural option and so we were very anxious to help. Thankfully, they have been overwhelmed by applicants and sadly, they have been desperately needed.

We wound up on a massive base in the central part of the country that, among other duties, coordinates the distribution of medical supplies. I was assigned to a small group with three other volunteers, supervised by a civilian IDF employee. Our job was to label supplies and then create emergency medical kits that would be used “in the field.” With every package we assembled, my prayer was the same: May these never be needed but if they are, may they be used successfully and save the life of the wounded ... knowing full well that the injured may be someone in my circle of life and love within one to two degrees of separation.

Another team of volunteers was assembling medical kits that would be used in life-threatening situations. As one of the IDF workers said to them, “If they have to use this kit on a soldier, there is a 50/50 chance he’ll survive.” One of our volunteers had a son in Tzuk Eitan (Operation Protective Edge, 2014 – an earlier fight with Hamas in Gaza). That same type of kit was used on him. Thank God, he survived. Due to proper training, skill, and equipment, Israel now has the capability to get a wounded soldier from Gaza to a full medical hospital within 38 minutes.

If my work on the farm was instant gratification (seeing a head of cauliflower go from the plant, into a box, and off to market), then this week was about delayed gratification, knowing that the medical kits we were assembling may be used in this current war or not for another several years. In either case, the goal was the same: to help Israel and to save life. Our supervisor had us working very hard and we assembled hundreds of medical kits. Why the urgency? As he explained in Hebrew:

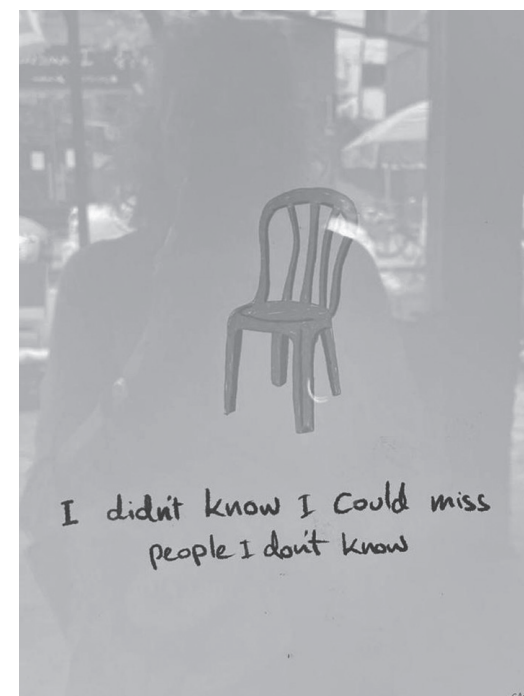
“בגלל כל הבלגן הזה בצפון.” – “Because of all this craziness in the North.”

Meaning: Southern Lebanon with Hizbollah and a potential war upcoming.

Looking at the Jews with whom I interacted this week, I saw Jews of every color, as the base included Israelis from throughout the country: from Ethiopia, Ukraine, France, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Russia, America and more. The rabbinic dream of *kibbutz galuyot* (ingathering of the exiles) is not a dream here. It is THE reality. And for those who say that Israel is a colonialist-white-oppressor, I realize how unaware some people are of Israel’s history and reality and how antisemitism manages to morph and find its way into the minds of those who promote a damaging ideology that endangers Israel and Western, Liberal values.

Amid the awful experience that Israel has undergone with a future still uncertain, there is a palpable sense of determination, creativity, hope, and resilience. How long this can last, I do not know. But as one friend said, “We know we are in a seismic moment and we do not know how it turns out.” Indeed, we don’t. That uncertainty can be numbing and terrifying. But it can also be encouraging and empowering. There are so many things that are beyond our control.

For those things which are in our purview, may we seize hold and dream, hope, create, and DO!



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CULTURE & ARTS

The Birch Festival Spring Edition – May 18-20



business and cultural partnerships. Kutik, a Belarusian-Jewish refugee resettled in Pittsfield by Jewish Federation of the Berkshires in the 1990s, named the festival for his grandmother Sima Berezkina, whose last name means “birch tree.” With significance in many global cultures, birch trees symbolize growth, resilience, and adaptability – qualities that Sima embodied.

The Birch Festival promotes and propels distinct voices in music, whether through new composition or creative interpretation of old favorites. The Festival offers leading musicians a chance to play and establish relationships in the Berkshires, while recognizing the importance of their work by offering compensation that sustains and values their efforts in this industry.

The May edition of The Birch Festival features two performances of Igor Stravinsky’s “L’Histoire du Soldat (The Soldier’s Tale)” on Sunday, May 19, at 4 p.m. at the Duffin Theater, Lenox Memorial High School (197 East St., Lenox) and Monday, May 20, at 6 p.m. at Zion Lutheran Church (74 First St., Pittsfield). The performances will be led by rising-star maestra Fernanda Lastra, currently assistant conductor with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. The performing ensemble will comprise some of the many leading instrumentalists who make the Berkshires such a musically rich community, including several members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The featured performers will be bassist Edwin Barker, violinist Yevgeny Kutik, trombonist Toby Oft, clarinetist Rob Patterson, bassoonist Rick Ranti, trumpeter Tom Siders, and percussionist Mike Williams. Each concert will also include solo and ensemble pieces performed by members of the ensemble.

Alysha Deslorieux will be the narrator for *The Soldier’s Tale*. Alysha portrayed Eliza in the hit-Broadway musical, *Hamilton*, and has also had recurring roles on the television series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* and *Only Murders in the Building*.

On Saturday, May 18, at 9:30 a.m., The Birch Festival Co-Founder and Executive Director Rachel Barker will open the May edition of the Festival with a free community yoga class at The Church on the Hill Chapel (55 Main St., Lenox) in the beautiful labyrinth room. At 11 a.m., also at The Church on the Hill Chapel, Barker will lead a workshop linking *The Soldier’s Tale* to the archetypal elements of the Tarot.

In addition, the musicians will participate in community outreach by performing for the band, orchestra, and theater students of Pittsfield High School, furthering the Birch Festival’s goal of engaging the Berkshire community. Through school and community visits, The Birch Festival also encourages new audiences and builds community rapport by offering free tickets to any school-aged child and an adult family member, and prioritizing event accessibility for young adults. Tickets to the musical performance are \$20 for adults.

“I’m excited to present Stravinsky’s beloved tale with such a great ensemble of musicians and colleagues,” says Kutik. “This work was originally conceived as a community theatrical work, presented from town to town. This spirit of sharing music with the community is exactly what The Birch Festival strives for. We can’t wait to see and connect with members of our community throughout the weekend.”

For The Birch Festival’s complete spring schedule, event registration, and details visit: thebirchfestival.org/events.

LENOX & PITTSFIELD — Following a highly successful launch in fall 2023, The Birch Festival returns with a spring edition from May 18-20, bringing three days of music-making, yoga, and community engagement to the Berkshires. The Festival was founded last year by Lenox-based husband-and-wife team Yevgeny Kutik, an internationally renowned violinist who serves as artistic director, and writer/educator Rachel Barker, who is the non-profit organization’s executive director.

The Birch Festival’s mission is to bring world-leading musicians for artist residencies in Berkshire County schools, and work in tandem with local

Visit the World-Renowned Exhibition, *Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.* in Boston

BOSTON –The world-renowned traveling exhibition, *Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.*, is now on view at The Castle at Park Plaza.

The acclaimed exhibition features over 700 original artifacts and objects from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and over 20 other international museums. It is the first time a collection this immense has been brought together to tell the story of Auschwitz and the

Holocaust to audiences across the world.

Visitors will have a unique opportunity to view genuine artifacts that are rarely on display, as well as hear first-hand stories from the German Nazi concentration and extermination camps. The Auschwitz exhibition, was created by Musealia in cooperation with Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial. The objects range from concrete posts that were

part of the fence of the Auschwitz II-Birkenau camp; large portions of an original prisoners’ barrack from the Auschwitz III-Monowitz camp; and a gas mask used by the SS garrison members who staffed the concentration camp system; to shoes, clothing, children’s dolls, and suitcases that had been packed by Auschwitz deportees in the hopes of one day returning to their lives.

Piotr Cywiński, director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial, expressed, “On a universal and symbolic level, Auschwitz played a pivotal role in shaping the identity of the world after WWII. The belief that humanity must prevent the recurrence of events like the Holocaust and the resurrection of places like Auschwitz was the cornerstone of post-war political changes. These principles of respecting others and promoting peace should be in everyone’s hearts and minds as we approach the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.”

In addition to the hundreds of items displayed from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial, over 20



other international museums and institutions have participated with special loans, such as Yad Vashem in Israel and The Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City. However, this collection of artifacts will only be together for a brief period, and it will only be in Boston for a limited time. Registration for presale tickets is now available at TheAuschwitzExhibition.com.

“An exhibition this substantial and comprehensive on Auschwitz is unprecedented and is unlikely to ever be assembled again. Lending institutions all over the world have come together to make this exhibition possible, and it is a unique opportunity for everyone on the East Coast and beyond to visit *Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.*,” shared Luis Ferreiro, Director of Musealia.

When guests enter *Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.*, they will confront one of recent history’s darkest periods. They will encounter the odious environment and acts that Nazi officers inflicted upon Auschwitz prisoners and learn how the prisoners nurtured hope even in this wretched place. They learn how the same hate that led to over 1.1 million deaths at Auschwitz in addition to millions of others throughout the Holocaust, has shaped the last 80 years to lead to our current world.

John Norman, President of World Heritage Exhibitions, who is presenting the exhibition locally, said, “Within the echoes of history’s shadows, lies a vital truth: to remember, to learn, and to honor. *Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.* stands as an eternal testament, a beacon urging us to confront our past. In Boston, it will stand not just as an exhibition but as an emotional pilgrimage, inviting souls from far and wide to witness the poignant relics and hear the haunting tales. This showcase isn’t merely a display; it’s an unspoken promise to ensure the past’s darkest chapter resonates forever, etching an indelible mark upon our hearts.”

To sign up for tickets to learn more about this exhibition, please visit TheAuschwitzExhibition.com.

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CULTURE & ARTS

How Israel's Black Panthers radicalized its Mizrahi Jews, and changed the country

By Andrew Silow-Carroll / JTA



Black Panthers protest in Tel Aviv, May 3, 1971. The sign at top reads, "Golda, teach us Yiddish," accusing the prime minister, Golda Meir, of favoring Jews from Ashkenazi, Yiddish-speaking backgrounds. (Israel Sun Ltd., from the Judaica Collection of the Harvard Library, Harvard University)

In Jerusalem's rapidly gentrifying Musrara neighborhood, there's a street sign reading "Black Panthers Way."

Puzzled Americans may wonder why Israelis have paid tribute to the radical African-American group that terrified the establishment in the 1960s, but local residents know better: The sign is an homage to the Israeli Black Panthers, a group of Mizrahi youth who borrowed the name and some of the tactics of the American group to demand an end to the discrimination faced by Israeli Jews with roots in the Middle East and North Africa.

In the early 1970s, the Black Panthers held street demonstrations and staged Robin Hood-like protests. They provoked the Israeli government (Prime Minister Golda Meir famously called them "not nice") and brought attention to the dire conditions in places like Musrara, a formerly Arab Christian neighborhood of Jerusalem that served as a sort of dumping ground for the Mizrahi immigrants who flooded into the country in the 1950s.

The Panthers also managed to create what the scholar of Mizrahi Jewry, Sami Chetrit, calls a "mass workshop for rehabilitating an oppressed identity."

Chetrit is quoted in *Israel's Black Panthers: The Radicals Who Punctured a Nation's Founding Myth*, by my JTA colleague Asaf Elia-Shalev. The new book is a history of the Israeli Panthers and the social revolution they brought about. It is told through the recollections of its still-living veterans, such as the Moroccan-born activist Reuven Abergel, archives in Israel and the United States, and a cache of classified police intelligence files on the Panthers.

Perhaps, with war in Gaza and anti-Israel protests being staged around the world, following a year of deep divisions within Israeli society itself, there might not be much of an appetite in Israel or among American Jews for a book that explores Israel's sometimes shameful treatment of its Mizrahi underclass. But Elia-Shalev, 36, sees a degree of hope in the way the Panthers helped change a fractured country for the better.

"I think ultimately the lesson of the Panthers is that a very small group of people that you never expected anything from could change society," he told me.

Elia-Shalev is a staff reporter for JTA. He is an Israeli-American who lived in Israel for six years as a child and has since lived and worked there for what he calls "a third of my life." He currently lives in Los Angeles.

Our interview was edited for length and clarity.

Yours is the first book-length treatment, at least in English, of the Israeli Black Panthers. Why didn't Israeli historians or journalists think they were worth a deeper look?

There are a few reasons. One is that Israeli academia has a blind spot around the history of Mizrahim. The other reason is that Israeli academics have been more interested in theory, and like arguing about the right theoretical framework to think about the Panthers rather than the people who have never been interviewed.

Did your own background draw you to the story?

I'm Mizrahi on my dad's side, who is an Iraqi Jew, and on my mom's side we're Sephardic Bulgarians. At UC Berkeley, my biggest paper in college was about the American Black Panthers and their impact on the student activism of the day on campus. I stumbled upon a reference to the Israeli

Black Panthers, and that they represented the struggle of the Mizrahi Jews, and I was like, "Oh, wait, I think that's me." I didn't have a strong sense of my own heritage at the time, and, wanting to know more, I just was incredibly frustrated that there was almost no material.

You enter the story largely through the biography of Reuven Abergel, who was one of the early activists in what became the Panthers. Tell me who he is, how you connected with him and what he represents about the history of this movement.

I started sitting down with Reuven Abergel maybe 10 years ago, before I knew there would be a book. After college, I worked in the Bay Area for a

little bit, then I moved to Israel to work for Haaretz as a news editor. Within a month of moving to Israel, I went to some party and I met Reuven. And immediately we had a connection. He really wanted to tell his story in English. At that time he was giving weekly tours about the Black Panthers in Musrara, where he grew up incredibly poor, and I would translate. It was a really interesting exercise, having him speak through me. I had to be so attuned to what he's saying because he speaks in philosophical ways and he meanders and he's very intellectual. And he was saying things that were quite shocking to me about Israel's treatment of Mizrahim.

The Panthers emerge in the early 1970s. What was the situation facing Mizrahi Jews, who were on the way to becoming a majority in Israel?

Israel had just emerged from the 1967 war. And there's this economic boom happening in the country, kind of leaving behind the old Israel of the kibbutz and austerity and opening up to the world. There's visible wealth everywhere, at least on an Israeli scale. Mizrahim were largely left out of that economic progress and still living in the same way they'd been living the 1950s, sometimes 10 people to a room in unsanitary conditions, with little or no positive contact with any state institutions, whether it's school or social workers. Police were very present in Musrara and would regularly beat up children and teenagers. And there are thousands of street youth, street gangs, young Mizrahi men in their teens or in their early 20s who just hang out and get into trouble and have no prospects. Something has to happen with that energy.

But what about the army? Weren't they part of the universal draft?

The military, until that point, would disqualify anyone who had any kind of criminal record. And that's important because the military was a vehicle of social mobility.

What becomes the impetus for an actual organization?

It's a little bit mysterious. There's a lot of people who take credit. Again, after 1967, Jerusalem became this mecca for hippies. Until then, none of the student protests or civil rights activity were happening in Israel and then after '67 it comes rushing in. You have these American radicals who start to meet the group that would become the Panthers and start to talk to them about their problems and revolutionaries like the Tupamaros in Venezuela and the Red Army Faction in Germany and the American Black Panthers.

Meanwhile, there's this pioneering group of social workers in Musrara saying, "We need to organize the poor to demand systemic change." They were influenced by people like the American-Jewish organizer Saul Alinsky, who wrote "Rules for Radicals," and other kinds of things that were happening in the United States. They wanted more money for their departments, more money for social welfare. And they were very savvy about using the media to put pressure on politicians and started to feed stories about abject poverty in the slums of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. They started to teach Panthers how to read and write because many of them had never learned. The youth start reading about all the student activism happening all over the world. And so young Mizrahim like Charlie Biton and Saadia Marciano talked about what they wanted, that they should be like the Black Panthers.

And soon this nascent movement came to the attention of the government.

The press loved it. The politicians at first denied that it existed but then started to freak out. Police immediately started putting detectives on this group even though they hadn't done anything. There were informants and high-level police meetings and the organizers realize, "In that case, we should do a protest. We want the government to pay attention to us."

That's how your book opens, with Prime Minister Golda Meir's cabinet freaking out about what a protest in Musrara could end up sparking.

At an emergency meeting, Golda and her advisors discuss what they should do. They thought it would turn violent because they consider these people to be low-life scum who weren't capable of doing anything but be violent. They also have a memory of 1959 when a police officer was shot in Wadi Salib, a Mizrahi neighborhood in Haifa, and there was a big uprising that lasted for months. Golda, as an American, is also attuned to what's happening in the United States with the rise of black militancy.

Until then, Israel had been able to fend off the radical energies that were taking over the streets all over Europe and the United States.

What is the result of the emergency meeting?

She authorized the police to arrest 15 people under what today is called administrative detention, where you don't need to bring actual charges. This was in the emergency code enacted by the British and was the first time that it was applied by Israel to Jews as far as I can tell.

And of course, it backfired. Anyone with any kind of liberal leaning in Israel was asking, "Why are you arresting people?" Word gets out very quickly that raids are happening. And then every bohemian, every left-winger, every kind of professor, all these respectable people descend on City Hall to join the protest. And then they marched over to the police station where some of the Panthers are being held and demand their release. And that taught the Panthers a lesson that what they were doing was very provocative and very threatening. And they knew that they were onto something.

The height of their influence is from 1971 until the Yom Kippur War in 1973. What did they accomplish in that short time?

Their peak dates from that very first protest, March 3, 1971, which was followed by a rapid succession over the next six months of gradually escalating protests, with thousands of people in the streets. A month after arresting them, Meir meets with them in her office to hear their demands. There is a frenzy of articles about them in every newspaper. They force Israel to contend with this domestic problem.

The War of Attrition with Egypt had just ended in 1970, so there was this unprecedented quiet on Israel's borders after 1970 and until the 1973 war. So they get everyone talking about the problem of poverty and very quickly the government starts releasing funding at every level, from education to housing to employment. The Knesset starts passing legislation. In 1972, the year after the Panthers launched, it passed what's been dubbed the "budget of the Panthers" — a massive expenditure on social welfare. It was the first time in Israeli history that the country was spending more on domestic issues, on social welfare, than on military and defense.

They also reform the way criminal justice is conducted. Minors are no longer put through the same process as adults.

While most politicians didn't want to give credit to the Panthers for all these changes, as a result of the Panthers we see the creation in Israel for the first time of a modern welfare state modeled after European social democracy. And, of course, that doesn't necessarily last. Whether it's the 1973 war or the economic recession that followed, you see the rise of the right-wing Likud, which had no interest in turning Israel into a European social democracy.

What I find so fascinating about your book and your recent obituary for Charlie Biton, who died last month at age 76, is that while the Panthers were so rooted in the radical politics of the left, the Mizrahi community as a whole takes a turn to the right, proving key to the election of Menachem Begin's Likud party in 1977 after 30 years of left-wing rule by Labor. What accounts for that?

ISRAEL'S BLACK PANTHERS,
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CULTURE & ARTS

MUPPETS IN MOSCOW,

continued from cover

The BJV Interview: Natasha Lance Rogoff

By Avi Dresner / Special to the BJV

With all of the evil emanating out of Moscow these days, it's easy to forget that there was a brief moment between the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the rise of Vladimir Putin in the early 2000s when Russia was full of hope, promise, and Muppets. Yes, Muppets.

If you're a reader of a certain age – or the parent or grandparent of one – the name evokes images of the unique style of puppet created by the legendary Jim Henson in the 1960s and featured in groundbreaking television shows and movies like *Sesame Street*, *The Muppet Show*, and *Star Wars*.

Big Bird, Bert, Ernie, Elmo, Kermit the Frog, Miss Piggy and Yoda are just a few of the more famous names you'd recognize. However, you're probably not familiar with Zeliboba, Businka, or Kubik, three of the stars of the Russian version of *Sesame Street*, *Ulitsa Sezam*, which aired across the Former Soviet Union from 1996 until 2010.

These characters and the show were brought to life in the face of overwhelming obstacles by the American executive producer Natasha Lance Rogoff and her tenacious team. She has written a book about the experience titled *Muppets In Moscow*, and the subtitle says it all: "The Unexpected Crazy True Story of Making *Sesame Street* in Russia." The book recently came out in paperback and has been optioned for a documentary and a feature film.

The following is an excerpt of our conversation. It has been lightly edited for continuity and clarity.

Natasha, you've got quite a bio. You studied Russian in college and were an exchange student in Leningrad. You published articles about underground Soviet culture, shining a positive light on gays and banned rock musicians, among others. Then you worked in Moscow as a freelance TV journalist, producing the acclaimed four-hour PBS series *Inside Gorbachev's USSR* and directing a feature length documentary, *Russia for Sale: The Rough Road to Capitalism*. All of which ultimately led to you being recruited by PBS to executive produce *Ulitsa Sezam*.

It was so totally random. I literally had no children's television experience. I'm making these really serious documentaries. I often tell this to young women, who are starting out – be open to new directions, because you never know where it's gonna come from.

How was Russian *Sesame Street* different from the American one?

The format was roughly the same. They both combined live action films, animation, and studio segments; but, in Moscow, we shot in this new neighborhood that reflected the multiple, various stages of Russian development. The architecture of the set had rural houses like dachas, buildings from the Khrushchev period, a brick pre-revolutionary house. They mixed it up so that it could reflect all of Russian history, and also both rural and urban settings. That's completely different from the US show, which is modeled after an urban street in Harlem.

And then, as far as the content for the scriptwriting and the educational goals, they were also very different because the educational themes and goals of the American show change each year. It could be focused on race relations, or tolerance of blended families, or something like that. But Russia was coming out of 70

years of darkness with Communism, where neighbors reported on their neighbors to the KGB, so they had a very different focus. One of the most important goals for them was to model kindness and a new kind of warmth and neighborliness. That was a very poignant goal and we really achieved that, to the credit of the team of hundreds of artists working there.

A lot of your book recounts the difficulties of melding American and Russian values in the show. It seemed like a constant battle, at least initially.

There were different cultural clashes that emerged and impacted every aspect of the show from the scriptwriting to the development of the educational goals to the design of the set, and even to the Muppets themselves, encouraging the Russians to accept Muppet-style puppets.

I write about that a lot in the book, and it's hilarious. But at the same time, it was real and an incredibly stressful battle, because usually people imagine *Sesame Street* with the Muppets and, in this case, my colleagues – my head writer, in particular – wanted to use their own traditional wooden marionette-style puppets. The head music director only wanted classical music in the show, but over time I did see many of these same people change and become much more tolerant and accepting. And part of that was this sense of respect that they could see we had for them too, and our genuine wish for them to create a show that reflected their culture, that they'd be comfortable with both aesthetically and musically. And, once they saw that, they started to take more risks themselves, and I believe that it's that process that is necessary for change to happen. It was a fascinating process to watch how change takes place in a society in the midst of revolution and transition.

And you were part of bringing and making that change.

It was such a thrilling, utterly fascinating, and totally consuming experience. Me and my team we really thought we were critical to changing Russia, and that we were participating in something that was transformational in a way that would affect future generations of the country, and I think the show did. I mean it lasted for ten years, and I was very lucky to be part of it; it changed my life. Look where I am now, in my sixties, writing this story.

What led you to write this book 25 years after leaving *Sesame Street* in 1998?

Like everybody else during Covid, I was watching all these Netflix and Amazon shows, and I started noticing that every Russian was an oligarch, a criminal, a thug, a prostitute. And I just thought, this doesn't ring true to the people I worked with at all. And then, of course, the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West, and I said this story really needs to be told now because it's remarkable what we did together, and how it's a roadmap for us to figure out how to work with this country.

Along those lines, one of the things I was fascinated to learn about in the book was the role that Joe Biden played in bringing *Sesame Street* to Russia. He was really critical to the whole process.

He was the most important senator in terms of support. He had to galvanize bipartisan support for this in order for them to appropriate the money to be used for the show [that would] then be matched by either the Russian government, or Russian investors, or philanthropic organizations.

And, in spite of all that support, it took three years from the time you arrived in Moscow in 1993 until the show premiered in 1996 and there were dozens of events that you write about in the book that nearly derailed the whole thing – major dramatic life and death stuff.



Natasha Lance Rogoff in Russia

Absolutely. In the course of producing the show, two broadcast partners got assassinated and another one was blown up in a car bombing.

It was such a violent time – very, very similar to now, and I thought a lot about that when Navalny was murdered recently. It's a brutal place and, at the same time, there's a flip side that it is also the sweetest place, and the friendships that you create there, they're very different from my friendships in America. They're so deep because of the hardships.

Your grandparents fled Russia in the early part of the 20th Century pre-communist revolution due to pogroms and antisemitism. What was it like for you to be there as a Jew at the end of that century post Communism?

It was very much at the top of my mind because my father was quite vocal about his criticism of my going to Russia. He just was like, 'What's wrong with you? Why are you going back? Didn't they cause enough damage already? It's very dangerous. As a Jew, you shouldn't be going there.' And, of course, I was there in the 1980s, so I was familiar with many Refuseniks, and the fact that Jew was stamped in the passport of my Jewish friends. It was a very antisemitic place, and I was absolutely familiar with how being Jewish had affected the careers of my friends like Leonid Zagalsky, who was my closest friend and still is to this day. At the same time, people really viewed me as an American. Most people didn't know I was Jewish. I didn't have Jew stamped in my passport. I'm blonde. Whenever people asked me what my nationality was, I said I was Italian.

But that was pre-Sesame Street.

Yes, and then the Soviet Union collapsed. We set up the new production, and I hired many people of Jewish descent – our research director was Jewish, our producer, many of our writers. And the person who narrated the audiobook of *Muppets in Moscow* is Jewish. She left when she was one, and she does the characters with accents, and it's absolutely fantastic. The book has won a ton of awards as an audio book.

Avi Dresner is a writer, journalist, and first-time documentary filmmaker. He is a two-time winner of the Rockover Award (aka "the Jewlitzer") from the American Jewish Press Association. He graduated with a B.A. in Government from Cornell University and holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from the City College of New York. He is executive producer of the documentary-in-progress, *The Rabbi & The Reverend* and co-screenwriter of the feature film script *King's Rabbi*, both of which tell the story of his father, Rabbi Israel Dresner, the most arrested and jailed rabbi during the Civil Rights Movement and an ally and friend of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Avi lives in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts with his wife, Natasha, and their two sons.

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ISRAEL'S BLACK PANTHERS, continued from page 26

It's important for me to clarify that for every kind of peace movement, Mizrahim were there. They were represented on the left. Charlie Biton, for example, was the first prominent Israeli to meet with PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

I'm always careful about this conversation because there's a sense that Mizrahim are stubbornly anti-peace or stubbornly anti-Arab. But I think they've always been the constituency that's been perhaps the most flexible over time — for example, when Shas, the religious Mizrahi party, voted to abstain rather than oppose the Oslo Accords between Israel and Arafat's PLO. If you look at the far right, the settlement movement, it's always been led by Ashkenazim. The Likud was always led by Ashkenazim, and Mizrahi moderates like David Levy were passed over.

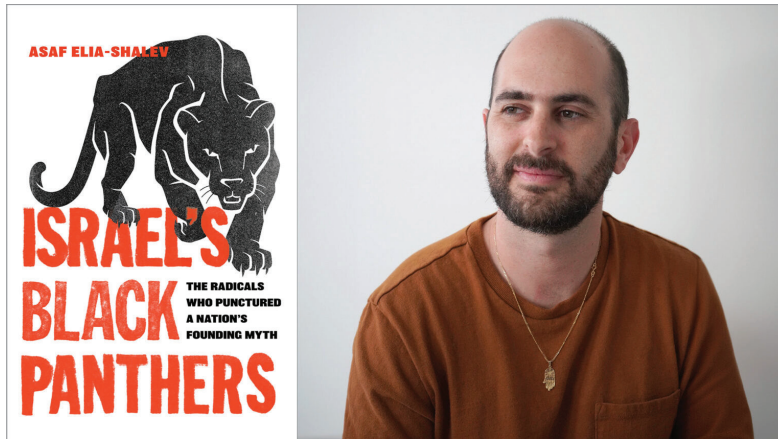
There is also a lot of religious flexibility. Mizrahi are what's called *masorti*, or traditional — ostensibly Orthodox but with a lot of built-in flexibility. They will make allowances for things in a way that the extremist settlers and extreme religious right, who have come to dominate politics in Israel, do not.

But you're right, the Panthers went one direction, and the Mizrahi public by and large went in a different direction.

You write that the Likud represented the outsiders at a time when the Ashkenazim dominated the establishment.

That's a big part of the alliance. The Panthers talked a big game about being very radical and being against the establishment, but unlike the Black Panthers in the United States, they weren't separatists. They believed in the Jewish state and they felt betrayed that they were relegated to second-class status.

Enter Menachem Begin and the Likud, who had their own history of marginalization, and were cut out of centers of power for many years and just maligned in different ways. Begin had a lot of credibility as a founding father, and he had a lot of charisma, and he looked at the grievance of the Mizrahi public and channeled it. In a famous speech he calls them the real Zionists, warriors and his brothers. The Mizrahim in turn saw an opportunity to register their discontent. And so this alliance was forged between these two disgruntled groups. And Likud has kind of been ruling the country ever since, except for pauses here and there.



Asaf Elia-Shalev, a staff writer for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, is the author of "Israel's Black Panthers." (Jeff Sredni; University of California Press)

After their heyday, some of the Panthers took very different paths. Abergel fell on some hard times, and Biton and Marciano made it into the Knesset.

Marciano very briefly makes it into the Knesset, and he did different kinds of activism until he died at age 58.

Charlie Biton joins the communists and they create the Hadash party. He's in Knesset for 15 years and continues to champion Mizrahi causes. They couldn't dismiss him as the crazy radical communist because he represented something real, something widespread and something not marginal to the conversation.

Abergel, meanwhile, becomes an addict and even homeless for a time, correct?

Other Panthers became addicted to drugs that were flowing into Israel in the 1970s and '80s. Hard drugs were a huge problem among the Mizrahi population. Reuven becomes an addict, but for years and years he is able to run a youth center and was teaching kids in afterschool programs. For a very long time he was able to be a functional addict until his life completely falls apart. His emergence as a phoenix out of that period is its own story.

What has been the lasting influence of the Black Panthers, and what kind of gaps remain?

Mizrahim made huge strides since the time of the Panthers. Many have joined the middle class, there's a lot of Mizrahi wealth, there's no question about that. The Mizrahi representation in media is equal or even over-represented at this point.

But there are still areas where there's lack of representation. They're only like less than 10% of university faculty and university leadership. If you look at the prime minister's cabinet, I mean, all the most important roles are held by Ashkenazim. There's never been a Mizrahi prime minister. High culture, whether it's art or ballet, the Tel Aviv institutions, is still very Ashkenazi.

Ten years ago there was a ton of excitement around the Mizrahi struggle. There was a renaissance of all these young people who were doing poetry, musicians like Neta Elkayam, Dudu Tassa, Yemen Blues — making the music of their grandparents that had been seen as irrelevant for many years in Israel. There was hope that Mizrahi

cultural resources would inspire Israel to become more inclusive, more into peace with the Palestinians, more integrated into the Middle East. Mizrahi history would teach Israel about ways to integrate with the Arab world.

And then came the right-wing lurch of Israel as a whole.

Have you thought about how the historical lessons of your book have changed since Oct. 7, after the attack by Hamas and the war in Gaza?

The only event in Israeli history that's kind of a parallel to Oct. 7 was the Yom Kippur War, where there was this really existential threat and an absolute shock to Israeli society, and many, many people dead. And when the elections happened right after the war, no one wanted to talk about poverty, no one wanted to talk about inequality. People wanted to understand why their security had been so compromised and wanted to hold people accountable.

Today in Israel, there's a very strong push for unity in the face of the enemy, just like there was in '73. But once that ended, once the threat was over, that's when Labor fell apart. If history offers any lesson it is that there could be a paradigm shift. In the coming years we might be writing about the downfall of Likud, but there's no guarantee Netanyahu's critics will like what comes next. And I think the questions about Israel's identity are going to continue.



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