

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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jewishberkshires.org

“The Iran War and Israel’s Election: What Comes Next?”



Middle East Update 2026

On Thursday, November 12 at 7 p.m., the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires’ Middle East Update returns with Ambassador Dennis Ross.

Israel and the Middle East are entering a new chapter. The war with Iran has reshaped the region’s strategic landscape, while Israel’s October election has given voters an opportunity to chart a new political direction. What do the election results tell us about the future of Israeli politics, and what will they mean for Israel’s security and leadership?

Drawing on decades of experience at the highest levels of U.S. foreign policy and Middle East diplomacy, Ambassador Ross will assess the implications of Israel’s election and the aftermath of the war with Iran. How might Israel’s new political landscape affect the U.S.-Israel relationship? What opportunities exist for regional cooperation and the Abraham Accords? What lies ahead for Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? And what role can diplomacy play in shaping the next chapter for Israel and the broader Middle East?

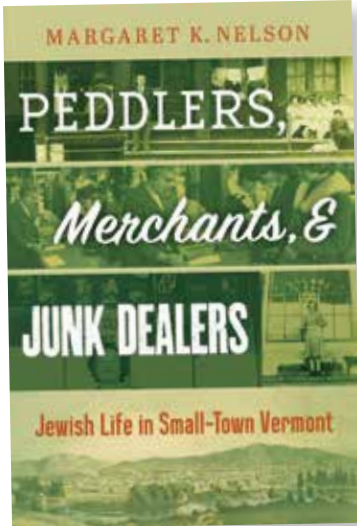
Join us for a timely and insightful analysis of the forces reshaping Israel and the region, and what they mean for the future. A Q&A will follow.

This free program will be streamed online. Please visit jewishberkshires.org to register and receive the link by email.

WHAT COMES NEXT?,
continued on page 15

Peddlers, Merchants, and Junk Dealers: Jewish Life in Small-Town Vermont

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor



On Thursday, October 22 at 7 p.m., Federation hosts Professor Margaret K. Nelson, Professor of Sociology Emerita at Middlebury College, who will discuss her book, *Peddlers, Merchants, and Junk Dealers: Jewish Life in Small-Town Vermont*. This Federation program will be presented via Zoom – register at the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org.

For many years, histories of Jews in the United States focused on Jewish migrants who settled in large cities. *Peddlers, Merchants, and Junk Dealers* offers a rare study of Jews in small town America, illuminating the experiences of Jewish families in towns where they constituted one of, at most, a few Jewish families. In particular, the volume explores the occupational niches of Jews in rural Vermont, from peddling to the ownership of junk yards and dry goods stores that were disparagingly known as “the Jew Store.”

The book also looks specifically at the experiences of Jewish women and children in families headed by men in these occupations. These families lived in communities where they were often isolated from relatives and friends, and without a Jewish congregation. Professor Nelson carefully investigates various aspects of this small-town experience, including how generations of immigrants were regarded by others, how they held onto the practice of their religion, and how they were able to socially integrate into their communities.

By narrating the trajectory of Jewish immigrant experiences through men’s occupations, the volume places the experiences of Jews in Vermont alongside those of other marginalized groups, particularly the families of Chinese restaurant owners and South Asian motel managers, as they established and sustained their own distinctive economic activities in small towns.

In September, Professor Nelson spoke with the BJV about her research. Our interview was edited for length and clarity.

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PEDDLERS,
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Celebrate Jewish Book Month 2026

Start from the beginning with the new graphic novel of the Book of Genesis



We just finished the Torah reading of Parshat Noach, which wraps up with the story of the Tower of Babel. This image from *The Koren Tanakh Graphic Novel: Bereshit Volume 1: The Beginning* vividly illustrates the provocative structure that caused God to scatter mankind across the earth. Please see page 24 for more on this remarkable new imagination of the Torah’s cosmic and dramatic first chapters from Koren Jerusalem Publishers & Booksellers.



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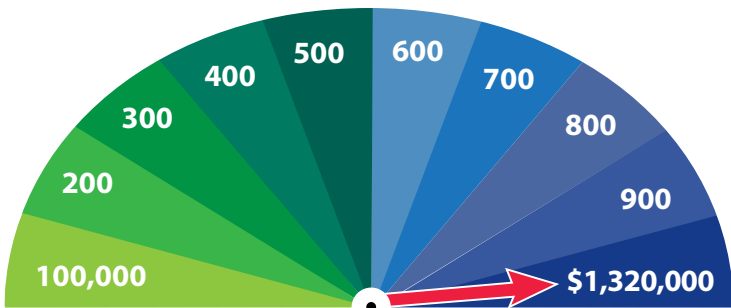
If you have not yet made your gift to the 2026 Annual Campaign there is still time to do so.

Your gift will help us engage the next generation, support the elderly and vulnerable, and sustain Jewish life all year round.

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OP-ED

RABBI REFLECTION

So Far, Sig'd

By Rabbi Val Lieber / Temple Anshe Amunim



Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot are behind us and we are in the Hebrew month of Cheshvan. We enter this month with a fresh perspective. Some people say there are no holidays in Cheshvan. But that is not the case. There is a Jewish holiday none (or nearly none) of us grew up with which falls every year on the 29th of Cheshvan – November 9th this year: Sigd. November 9th is the date we memorialize the horrors of Kristallnacht every year since 1938. This year, by coincidence, it is also the date of the Ethiopian Jewish holiday Sigd.

It is an ancient holiday, but I only became familiar with it in 2008 when Israel made it a national holiday. Since that time, it has become more widely observed around the world by non-Ethiopian Jews.

I was in high school when the news came out in January of 1985 that thousands of Ethiopian Jews had been spirited away to Israel by planes from Sudan in a top secret operation. It was called Operation Moses. The incredible heroic rescue of Beta Israel was like nothing in Jewish history save the rescue of Jews from Egypt in the book of Exodus. From my teenage perspective, Operation Moses was sandwiched in time between the release of “Do They Know It’s Christmas (Feed the World)” by the British rockers in BandAid, and “We Are The World” by American pop artists, USA For Africa. Both of those songs called attention to the calamitous hunger ravaging Ethiopia, and raised millions of dollars to help those who gravely suffered. Even before those famous MTV videos, I was aware of the famine in East Africa. However, I was not familiar with the millennia-old Jewish community of Ethiopia. Like many other American Jews of that time, I was captivated by the story of the Ethiopian Jews in the Gondar Province.

When I first visited Israel in 1987 during college, I was dazzled by the diversity of Jews. The mix of people stood out to me, particularly when riding the buses. I was absolutely thrilled to see Ethiopians on the bus – here they were, in person! The range of Jewish ethnicity in Israel was not something I grew up with in Indianapolis, Indiana, where the Jewish families were mostly named Hirsch, Kleinman, Fineberg, and Kuperstein – Ashkenazi Jews as far as the eye could see. Being in Israel and bearing witness to the diverse lives of Jewish people made me feel even prouder to be Jewish than I already was. What a breathtaking group we are! We lived in so many places, shared a variety of backgrounds, cultures, foods, languages, and ways of life that I was only just beginning to understand. Jews from Ethiopia, India, Tunisia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and so many other places have brought incredible cultural riches to the world, primarily to Israel.



A Sigd celebration in Israel

Israel has made it a cornerstone value to provide a safe haven for Jews the world over. The rescue of almost 50,000 Yemeni Jews in Operation Magic Carpet in 1949, and the rescue of over 20,000 Ethiopian Jews during Operation Moses, and again in Operation Solomon in 1991, are enough to make me a proud Zionist. To me, this is the definition of the word ‘Zionism.’ While I am critical of Israel on many of its policies, I am so deeply proud that Israel has given a home and citizenship to so many “tempest-tost” Jews. For every Jew whose ancestors lived in the shtetl, there is a Jew whose family lived in the Moroccan Casbah or Syrian Aleppo or along the Tigris River in Baghdad. As a rabbi I’m inspired to educate all who are interested about the wide range of diverse Jewish cultures.

For every Jew whose ancestors lived in the shtetl, there is a Jew whose family lived in the Moroccan Casbah or Syrian Aleppo or along the Tigris River in Baghdad.

Regarding Sigd, I’m still just a beginner in observance – mostly I listen to Ethiopian Jewish music and cook and eat Ethiopian food. Last year at Temple Anshe Amunim, we cooked one of my favorites: red lentil stew – Misir Wot – and people loved it. The Ethiopian community observes much more fully. The holiday always falls 50 days after Yom Kippur so it offers a second chance to repent and find the inspirational power of the Day of Atonement. In the Semitic language Ge’ez, sigd means “prostration” - deep, humble bowing – a custom which is part of the observance. Other hallmarks of the holiday include ascending a mountain (like Jerusalem), wearing white, carrying colorful umbrellas, and fasting until mid-afternoon when a feast and music conclude the holiday.

If you are interested to know more about Ethiopian Jewish culture or those of other Jewish groups which are not widely represented in America, I encourage you to check out GlobalJews.org. It is a fantastic resource for life beyond Ashkenazi culture here in the United States and abroad. Next summer, I’m planning to teach a multi-session class about Jews Around the World. So keep your eyes peeled.

Rabbi Val Lieber is the spiritual leader of Temple Anshe Amunim in Pittsfield.



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OP-ED

IN MY VIEW

1,727 Berkshire Students Educated Through the Mobile Museum of Tolerance

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



The MMOT visited Mount Everett Regional Middle and High School in Sheffield last spring.

Last November, the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, alongside Berk12, partnered with the Simon Wiesenthal Center to help launch the Massachusetts Mobile Museum of Tolerance (MMOT) and bring this educational resource to Berkshire County schools. Our goal was simple: to give local students the opportunity to explore difficult subjects such as antisemitism, racism, prejudice, discrimination and the Holocaust in ways that are engaging, age-appropriate and meaningful.

Since then, the results have been remarkable.

The Mobile Museum of Tolerance has visited 10 Berkshire schools, delivered 89 workshops and reached 1,727 students in grades 5–12. Students at Berkshire Country Day School, BART Charter School, Mount Everett Regional Middle and High School, Morris Elementary School, Miss Hall’s School, Drury High School, Eagle Academy, Williamstown Elementary School, Mount Greylock Regional School and Lenox Memorial Middle High School have participated, with additional schools scheduled to host the museum this fall and winter.

The MMOT is a first-of-its-kind initiative in Massachusetts, created by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and fully funded by the Massachusetts Legislature. Its 30-seat, wheelchair-accessible vehicle serves as a highly interactive classroom on wheels. Led by licensed educators, it uses technology, multimedia and facilitated discussion to help students understand the consequences of hatred and prejudice and consider what they can do to make a difference.

A single 45-minute classroom lesson on contemporary antisemitism produced measurable changes in students’ attitudes.

The workshops explore these issues through different lenses. Anne Frank: A Voice of Hope introduces students to Anne’s life and legacy while helping them understand the human impact of the Holocaust and antisemitism and the courage of those who stood up to help others. The Power of Ordinary People examines the Holocaust through the choices of everyday people, exploring the dangers of propaganda and prejudice and the importance of becoming an “upstander.”

The Civil Rights Movement: Learning Empathy Through History explores discrimination, segregation and the continuing work of building a more equitable society. Combat Hate: Digital Media Literacy helps students recognize online hate and misinformation, think critically about what they encounter on social media, and consider how their own choices can either contribute to or challenge a culture of hate.

Together, these workshops give students the opportunity to develop empathy and critical thinking while gaining the knowledge and confidence to recognize and respond to prejudice and hate.

These are not easy topics. But that is precisely why creating thoughtful opportunities for students to learn, ask questions and have honest conversations matters.

We have heard from local educators that these experiences are making a difference. Lindsey Brown, middle school team leader at Mount Everett Regional School, described the Mobile Museum as an “invaluable educational program” that provided students with an immersive and thought-provoking experience while promoting empathy, critical thinking and a deeper

IN MY VIEW,
continued on page 4

Led by Federation Member Sarah Aroeste!

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Berkshire JEWISH VOICE

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To have the *BJV* mailed to your home, please send a minimum donation of \$18.

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OP-ED

A Different Way to Give

As the end of the year approaches, many of us take time to think about the organizations and causes that matter to us and make our year-end charitable gifts. For many donors, writing a check is the simplest and most familiar way to give, and we are deeply grateful for every gift that helps strengthen Jewish life in the Berkshires.

But there are other ways to make a charitable gift that may be worth considering. If you have investments that have increased in value, such as stocks, mutual funds, or ETFs that you have held for more than a year, you may be able to give those assets directly to Jewish Federation of the Berkshires. In many circumstances, donating appreciated securities can allow you to avoid capital gains taxes that would otherwise apply if you sold the investment first. If you itemize your deductions, you may also be eligible for a charitable deduction based on the asset's fair market value.

For donors age 70.5 years old or older, another option is a **qualified charitable distribution (QCD)** from an IRA. A QCD allows you to direct money from your IRA to an eligible charitable organization such as Jewish Federation. The distribution generally is not included in your taxable income and, for those who are required to take minimum distributions, may count toward that requirement.

Donors who have a **donor-advised fund** also want to consider making a year-end recommendation from their fund to Federation. A donor-advised fund can be a convenient way to organize charitable giving and support the organizations and causes that are important to you.

There are also ways to make a gift that costs nothing today. Naming Jewish Federation of the Berkshires as a **beneficiary to a retirement account, life insurance policy, or other asset** can be a meaningful way to ensure a strong Jewish community for future generations. You can also include the Federation in your will or other estate plans.

These options are not right for everyone, and the tax implications can vary depending on your individual circumstances. We encourage you to speak with your financial or tax advisor about which approach may be appropriate for you.

One important consideration: gifts of securities and IRA distributions can take more time to process than a check or online donation. If you are considering one of these options for a year-end gift, it is helpful to begin the process well before December 31.

However you choose to give, your generosity makes a difference. Every gift helps Jewish Federation of the Berkshires build Jewish connection, care for those in need, strengthen our community, and ensure that Jewish life remains vibrant for generations to come.

As you think about your year-end giving, we invite you to consider all of the possibilities. Your financial advisor can help you determine whether a gift of cash, securities, an IRA distribution, or another asset makes the most sense for you.

To learn more about giving options or to discuss a potential gift to Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, please contact Dara Kaufman by calling (413) 442-4360 or emailing dkaufman@jewishberkshires.org.

This article was adapted from plannedgiving.com.

IN MY VIEW,
continued from page 3

understanding of bias, discrimination and intolerance. She also noted that the workshops became catalysts for meaningful dialogue and personal growth for both students and educators.

There is good reason to invest in this kind of education. New research released in August by the Anti-Defamation League's Center for Antisemitism Research found that a single 45-minute classroom lesson on contemporary antisemitism produced measurable changes in students' attitudes. In a randomized study involving 372 students in nine public middle and high schools, students who received the lesson were 14.4 percentage points more likely than those in the control group to reject the statement that Jews have too much power in the United States. The lesson also produced a 15.5 percentage-point reduction in agreement with the antisemitic "dual loyalty" trope. Perhaps just as importantly, 79% of students who received the lesson correctly identified antisemitism as prejudice against Jewish people, compared with 47% of students in the control group.

The Mobile Museum is also reaching beyond school walls. Just a few weeks ago, Federation collaborated with the City of Pittsfield to bring the MMOT to September's First Fridays at Five, where community members could experience the museum and a special art exhibit.

The Mobile Museum of Tolerance is one part of a much broader commitment by Jewish Federation of the Berkshires to working with our schools. For many years, Federation has worked to ensure that schools and young people have the resources and support they need to understand and confront antisemitism and bias, learn about the Holocaust and Jewish American heritage, and build communities grounded in safety, respect and belonging.

We support this work by investing in educational programs, connecting educators with trusted organizations and subject-matter experts, providing resources and guidance for responding to incidents of antisemitism and bias, and sharing lesson plans and educational resources related to the Holocaust, Jewish history and Jewish American heritage. We also support programs such as Change Makers for Good that empower students to become leaders in creating more inclusive communities.

This work closely aligns with the Massachusetts Special Commission on Combatting Antisemitism's K-12 recommendations, which call for stronger education about antisemitism, Jewish history and the Holocaust, professional development for educators, and effective resources and protocols for responding to antisemitic incidents. Federation is committed to helping Berkshire schools put these recommendations into practice by connecting them with resources, expertise and trusted partners.

Just as important, we have worked to build relationships with superintendents, principals, and faculty so that we can understand what schools are experiencing and respond quickly and collaboratively when challenges arise. Our goal is to be a consistent resource to our schools, not simply when there is a problem, but as they work proactively to educate students and create communities where every young person can learn and belong.

The Mobile Museum of Tolerance is one visible example of this commitment. But it is just one of the many ways Jewish Federation of the Berkshires works alongside our schools to strengthen education, support students and help build a community where there is no room for antisemitism or hate.

Correction

An article in the previous issue incorrectly stated that this Federation's allocation of annual campaign funds to Jewish Agency For Israel was \$15,000. The correct amount is \$150,000. The \$15,000 figure reflects our contribution to JAFI's Small Business Loans program (see letter on the following page).

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 - Where'd You Get That!?, Williamstown

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Letters to the Editor

Affirming the Collective Responsibility
Defining the Jewish People

Dear Friends,

On behalf of The Jewish Agency for Israel, thank you for your recent commitment of \$15,000 in support of Small Business Loans.

The last few years have been deeply challenging for Israel and the Jewish people worldwide. Most recently, Operation Roaring Lion resulted in families across Israel once again facing daily life under attack and extended time in shelters. Communities dealt with devastation, loss of loved ones, and the continued absence of normalcy, while communities in Northern Israel continue to endure ongoing attacks and instability.

Around the world, acts of antisemitic violence and terror left many Jewish communities feeling vulnerable and unsettled, underscoring the importance of a strong connection, resilience, and shared responsibility across the Jewish world.

Guided by our vision of a secure, diverse, and thriving Jewish people, The Jewish Agency continues its work rebuilding Israel and enabling Jews worldwide to engage with Israel, reinforcing the bonds that sustain our people.

Your commitment is a cornerstone of this effort. It enables rebuilding at scale, sustains critical systems, and affirms the collective responsibility that has always defined the Jewish people.

On behalf on our officers, leadership, professional staff, and all those whose lives are being strengthened through your support, thank you for your steadfast partnership and generosity.

Sincerely,
Kim Heiman, *Board Chair*
Jewish Agency for Israel-
North American Council

Danyelle Neuman, *Chief Development Officer*
The Jewish Agency for Israel

Star Student Grateful for Your Support

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you for selecting me as a recipient of the Henry Simkin and Frances Simkin Schiller and Dr. Stanley and Faye Simkin Scholarship.

Being a part of the Jewish community in the Berkshires is very important to me, which makes this award very meaningful to me. Thank you again for your generosity and support.

Warmly,
Ava Mozian
Lenox (and Emory University)

An Honor to be Recognized

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires:

Thank you so much for the Sandra Kronick Smith College Scholarship, and for the wonderful presentation at the Annual Meeting. It was such an honor to be recognized.

The money will help me focus on my studies at Bowdoin, where I hope to learn how to be a good community member and receive the tools to live Jewishly as I move through the world.

Thank you so much.
Sadie Honig-Briggs
Tyringham (and Bowdoin College)

She Finally Decided on Her Favorite Part

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires,

Camp is like a second home. From swimming in the Agam to singing around the campfire, I always feel like I am part of a big community, people I can depend on and trust. Not only is camp a place for fun and games, but also a place of learning. During my time at camp this year I read Torah, led *tefillot*, and learned more about my religion.

This was my third year at camp and I finally decided what my favorite part is. It is making new friends, connecting with old ones, and always having someone there for you. Thank you for helping me go to camp. I hope to go for many more years, and am excited to learn more.

Sincerely,
Shira Palmer,
Chatham, NY

Everybody Got Shabbat S’ha Brownies

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires,

Thank you for all of your hard work and support that has made my scholarship possible. I appreciate it so much; I love going to Eisner Camp and feel so fortunate that I get to.

I had so many fun experiences at camp, one of them being Shabbat. On Friday nights, we have an amazing dinner followed by our evening service. I particularly enjoyed the first Shabbat at camp because my unit, Ofarim, was leading the service. Me and my friends wrote a small piece about the Amidah during the week, which we read on Shabbat. Afterwards, everybody got Shabbat S’ha Brownies. The whole Shabbat experience was so fun.

Shabbat is fun but also meaningful. Instead of doing activities or working, we get to spend more time with each other. Shabbat is a very communal experience; the whole camp is together to celebrate the holiday. I love getting to spend quality time with my friends, and after going to camp for three years, all the people at Eisner feel like one big community where everyone can be themselves.

In conclusion, I had a very exciting and memorable Eisner experience. I love going to camp every summer.

Thank you,
Gemma Tanner (age 12)
Lenox

Very Hard, Though Interesting

Dear Jewish Federation of the Berkshires.

I’m very thankful that the Jewish Federation helped me go to Eden Village Camp. My favorite experience was the *schita*, the ritual killing of the chicken. It was quite the transformative experience which really put into perspective the depth of Jewish religion and how far people are willing to go for it.

The hardest part of the *schita* was the gutting of the chicken. I was the only person in my group who was willing to do it and, even though it was interesting, it was very hard. Again, I thank the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires for helping me have this wonderful camp experience.

Best,
Noah Minkoff
Great Barrington



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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Your Federation Presents

The Jewish Life of Pablo Picasso: An Untold Story, with Linda Burghardt



On Thursday, November 19 at 7 p.m., Jewish Federation of the invites you to a fascinating virtual presentation by journalist, author, and scholar Dr. Linda Burghardt titled “The Jewish Life of Pablo Picasso: An Untold Story.”

This program is free and will be presented online via Zoom. Register on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org

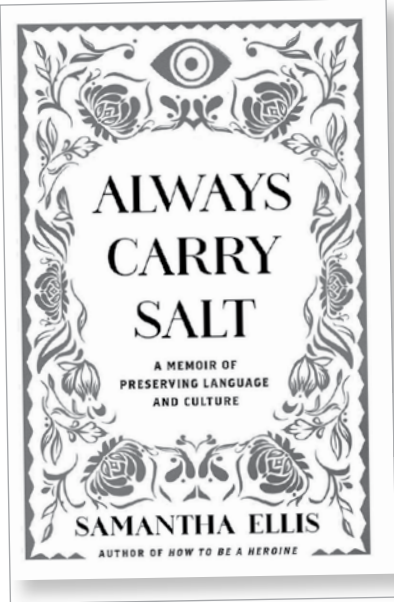
Despite Picasso's immense fame, few people know that he was profoundly nurtured by his Jewish lovers, friends, colleagues, and patrons, and that he developed a deep sense of Jewish values that shaped his worldview and guided his paintbrush. He supported Zionist causes and openly fought injustice and antisemitism through his artwork, once even declaring, “My painting is Jewish painting.”

This multimedia session will explore the untold story of this legendary genius and the critical Jewish influences that catapulted him to the pinnacle of the 20th-century art world.

Dr. Linda Burghardt is the Scholar-in-Residence at the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County, New York. The daughter of two Holocaust survivors from Vienna, her historical and literary work has always been guided by her heritage. She worked as a freelance reporter for the New York Times for 20 years and is the author of three non-fiction books, including two on Jewish topics. Her articles and essays have appeared in major newspapers across the U.S. and overseas, including the Jerusalem Post and the Times of Israel. She holds a Ph.D. from Long Island University and is a frequent lecturer to both national and international audiences. She is also a member of the Berkshire Jewish Community.

Federation programs are made possible through the generous support of our community.

Always Carry Salt: A Memoir of Preserving Language and Culture



On Monday, November 2 at 10:45 a.m., Federation presents acclaimed author and playwright Samantha Ellis for a virtual discussion of her new book, *Always Carry Salt: A Memoir of Preserving Language and Culture*, an immersive and moving meditation on the words and traditions that shape us and what we carry forward into future generations. Joining Samantha Ellis in conversation will be Sarah Aroeste, award-winning Sephardic singer/songwriter, author, educator, and cultural advocate (see page 18 for a story about Sarah's new recording).

This program is free and will be presented online via Zoom. Advance registration is required on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org to receive the streaming link. Part of “Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series, in collaboration with the Jewish Book Council.”

In this life-affirming memoir, Samantha Ellis explores resilience, identity, and the healing power of ancestral music, stories, and recipes. As the daughter of Iraqi Jewish refugees, she grew up surrounded by the rich, vivid sounds of Judeo-Iraqi Arabic – a unique language that is now on the verge of extinction. Realizing she might not be able to pass on traditional idioms to her son, she embarks on a journey to discover how to share this vibrant heritage without passing down the trauma of displacement.

From ancient history to the Oxford School of Rare Jewish Languages, the presentation offers an immersive, moving meditation on the words and traditions that shape us, what we carry forward, and what we must let go of to preserve our culture and ourselves.



Samantha Ellis is a London-based journalist, author, and playwright. The daughter of Iraqi-Jewish refugees, she is the author of the well-received books *How to be a Heroine* and *Take Courage*. Her theatrical plays include *How to Date a Feminist*, *Cling to me Like Ivy*, and *Operation Magic Carpet*, and she also contributed to the screenplays for the first two *Paddington* feature films. Her journalism has been widely published in *The Guardian*, *The Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), and *The Spectator*.

Federation programs are made possible through the generous support of our community.

Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America, with Michael Kimmel

On Thursday, October 29 at 7 p.m., join author Michael Kimmel as he reveals how poor, first-generation Jewish toymakers created the idealized American childhood, based on his book *Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America*.

This program will be presented via Zoom. Visit the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. Part of “Jewish Literary Voices: A Federation Series in collaboration with The Jewish Book Council.”

This American Childhood was Brought to You by Jewish Toymakers

By Andrew Silow-Carroll / JTA

On Saturday mornings in the 1960s and '70s, instead of going to synagogue, I watched cartoons.

Like millions of other American kids, I binged on “Fat Albert,” “The Pink Panther Show” and “H.R. Pufnstuf,” while absorbing endless commercial breaks for games, action figures, model kits and other marvels that might, if I played my cards right, be mine on Hanukkah.

But even if my family didn't spend Saturdays in shul, kids' television immersed me in an unspoken Jewish culture, as Michael Kimmel explains in his new book *Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America*.

It's a study of the mostly first-generation American Jews who led the toy industry in the 20th century, as well as the Jewish child psychologists, children's book authors and comic book creators who, he asserts convincingly, invented the American idea of childhood.

“They created the childhood that they themselves never had,” Kimmel told me in a recorded public conversation, part of “250 Years of American Jewish Life in America,” an online project of the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History and 70 Faces Media, JTA's parent company.

The founders of iconic brands such as Ideal, Mattel, Marx, Hasbro, Kenner, Wham-O and Madame Alexander dolls shared roots in Yiddish-speaking Europe, and childhoods as the sons and daughters of immigrants.

“They were born in poverty on the Lower East Side, and you have all these stories of the scraps that they picked up off the street that they made into things,” said Kimmel. “They had these ideas that children were basically curious and creative, and that they should be nurtured.”

And commodified. Shut out of establishment industries and professions, Jewish entrepreneurs thrived in niches of their own making, capitalizing on and helping propel the consumer culture that exploded after World War I. German Jews ran some of the largest department stores, including Macy's, Abraham & Straus and Gimbels, and Eastern European newcomers became the manufacturers, distributors and sales force that stocked their shelves with dolls, games, and gadgets.

The list of classic toys and Jews who developed them is almost comically long: Barbie (Ruth Handler), Lionel trains (Lionel Cowan), Mr. Potato Head (George Lerner), Yakity-Yak chattering teeth (Eddy Goldfarb), the pogo stick (George Hansburg), the Hula Hoop (Arthur Melin and Richard Knerl), G.I. Joe (Larry Reiner), and Play-Doh and the Easy-Bake Oven (the Steiner brothers: Albert, Philip and Joseph).

Kimmel, a sociologist and retired professor at Stony Brook University, began the project as a family story. His great-great-uncle Morris Michtom, an immigrant from what is now Belarus, founded what would become the Ideal Toy Corporation with his wife, Rose. Michtom had studied to become a rabbi before fleeing conscription in the Russian army. In Brooklyn, he and Rose opened a candy store and, after spotting a newspaper cartoon of Theodore Roosevelt refusing to shoot a bear, began making plush bear cubs.

They called it “Teddy's bear,” and it became a sensation. That story, Kimmel says, led him down a rabbit hole. What he found was startling: Virtually every major American toy company at the turn of the 20th

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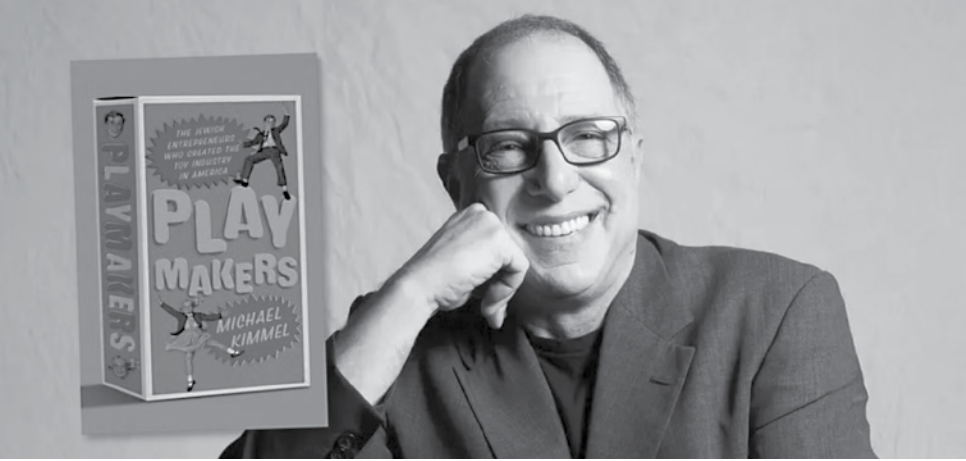
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Michael Kimmel

century, with a few exceptions, had been founded by first-generation Jews.

But Kimmel's argument isn't simply that Jews were good at selling toys. They helped invent the material culture of American childhood.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the prevailing wisdom about raising children could be remarkably grim. One early child-rearing manual, Emmett Holt's *The Care and Feeding of Children*, advised parents to spank a crying baby. John Watson, the influential psychologist, advised parents not to hug or kiss their children.

And yet with industrialization and urbanization, and the rise of household incomes, the 20th century would become what the Swedish writer Ellen Key called the "century of the child." Compulsory education was expanding. Child labor was being abolished. Adolescence was being defined as a distinct stage of life. And new ideas about child development were taking hold.

To this changing landscape came waves of Jewish immigrants, with their own ideas about childhood.

Children, as Kimmel describes this immigrant ethos, were curious and creative. Childhood was a distinct phase of life, not just nascent adulthood. Children's imaginations and intellect should be nurtured rather than broken. The same immigrant culture also prized education, argument, ingenuity and, out of necessity, the ability to make something out of nothing.

The Jewish entrepreneurs not only benefited from such views of childhood, but understood how to turn them into a business model. They were also pushed toward these new industries by a less uplifting force: antisemitism.

Kimmel said that many comic-book artists originally wanted to work in advertising, but advertising agencies in the 1930s and '40s were notoriously hostile to Jews. Like toymaking, comic books became a Jewish industry. Underpaid Jewish artists and writers – including Jack Kirby, Jerry Siegel, Joe Shuster, Will Eisner, Stan Lee and Lily Renée – dreamed up Superman, Betty Boop, the Spirit, Green Lantern, Aquaman, Spider-Man and The Thing, among dozens of others, often giving these superheroes and comic characters coded or actual Jewish backstories.

The same pattern appears in children's literature. Kimmel counts 42 titles on the New York Public Library's list of the 100 most important children's books of the 20th century that were written by first-generation Jews, including Sydney Taylor, Maurice Sendak, Jack Ezra Keats, Jules Feiffer, Esphyr Slobodkina, and Norman Juster.

The Jewish contribution extends to the people who studied children. Kimmel points to a pantheon of Jewish developmental psychologists and physicians – Erik Erikson, Abraham Maslow, Carol Gilligan, Richard Ferber and others – who helped define our modern understanding of childhood.

There was a Jewish element to this, Kimmel argues, but also a distinctly American one: assimilation.

The immigrant entrepreneurs often offered their families and young customers an idealized vision of American life. Ideal Toy founder Morris Michtom named his son Benjamin Franklin Michtom, a name that could hardly announce his American ambitions more clearly.

The irony is that in making an American childhood, Jewish creators were also injecting Jewish sensibility into the mainstream.

That sensibility could be playful, irreverent and suspicious of authority. It could be clever and self-mocking. It could turn a Yiddish joke into a mass-market product, like the Shmoo, a character in Al Capp's wildly popular comic strip "Li'l Abner." Capp (born Alfred Gerald Caplin) drew bowling pin-shaped creatures who happily fulfill whatever humans wish for – one part golem, one part manna in the desert. "Within a year of inception," writes Kimmel, "seventy-five manufacturers had issued more than one hundred Shmoo-related products."

But the Jewish contribution to childhood wasn't always benign.

The toy industry reinforced stereotypes, especially notions of gender. An effort to market a Black baby doll stalled after Ideal declined to put its marketing muscle behind it. And Kimmel readily acknowledges that marketing to children often encouraged "materialism in its worst form," as Dorothy Singer, a child therapist, told a House committee on children's television in 1985. With television, toy companies could advertise directly to children rather than to parents. Children became the sales force, pestering their parents for the latest product.

"It's the seamier side of the things that you create," said Kimmel. "We created, through television advertising, a generation of people who were consumers. There's always that critique of television that it made us more passive, and when we were active, we were consuming."

And yet, he insists, that same culture also made us curious, playful and clever. Many toys genuinely engaged the imagination. Games taught cooperation and strategy. And some of the books and comics that came through this consumer culture opened doors to something deeper.

Kimmel said he was turned on to literature at age 8 by reading the Classics Illustrated version of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The brainchild of Albert Kanter, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, these comic-book versions of the classics sold over 100 million copies and were distributed by 25,000 school districts.

Even the Barbie doll, while often derided for promoting an unhealthy body image for developing children, offered girls a glimpse of a different future than as

PLAYMAKERS,
continued on page 8

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Your Federation Presents

PLAYMAKERS, continued from page 7

a wife and mother, Kimmel argues. Dressed as a surgeon, astronaut or athlete, he writes, Barbie could be “anything you wanted her to be, because she was you.”

Kimmel ends his book with “Sesame Street,” which he sees as a kind of culmination. The groundbreaking children’s show was developed by Joan Ganz Cooney, whose father was Jewish, with the assistance of Gerald Lesser, a developmental psychologist born to Jewish immigrant parents. The show was in some ways an antidote to the world of Saturday morning cartoons. It prepared preschoolers for success in kindergarten with the addictive, engaging style of commercial television. And instead of advertisements for toys, its “commercials” offered lessons in letters, shapes, counting, social skills and concepts such as “near” and “far.”

Just as significant, in Kimmel’s view, is the show’s setting. Instead of the manicured suburban lawn and white picket fence that had come to represent idealized American childhood, “Sesame Street” was set on an inner-city block. Laundry hangs from fire escapes. A neighbor lives in a garbage can. Children grow up amid the messiness of city life.

“It’s a return,” he said, “basically to those very Lower East Side tenements from which this world was created.”

Berkshire Jewish Collective Meetup at Balderdash Cellars

Music, food trucks, games!

By Miranda Meyers / BJC



RICHMOND – On Sunday, October 25 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., join the Berkshire Jewish Collective for a fun, casual afternoon to socialize at the beautiful Balderdash Wine Cellars property.

We will provide snacks and blankets (feel free to bring your own, too!). Free drink tickets will be provided for the first 25 registrants. Come rain, come shine, come chilly autumn weather – we plan to be outside to enjoy the amazing space but if there is inclement weather, we will move inside.

Bring a friend, make new ones, grab a drink, and connect with an amazing crew of Jewish young adults.

No cover – just show up as you are!

If You Go
Balderdash Cellars is at 81 State Road (Route 41) in Richmond

Register on the calendar of events page at jewishberkshires.org. For more info, email bjc@jewishberkshires.com

The Berkshire Jewish Collective is an initiative of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, with support from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.



And here are some pics from our September retreat – we started with some schmoozing and snacks, then moved into a Jewish yoga session led by Elisa Bildner, then had lunch, then did mezuzah making, and finished by spending time at the lake. Thank you, Camp Kimama Halfmoon in Monterey for being such fantastic hosts!



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
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berkshireminyan.org

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

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Chabad of the Berkshires
17 West Street, Lenox, MA
(413) 499-9899
jewishberkshires.com

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ahavathsholom.com

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(413) 663-5830
cbiberkshires.com

Hevreh of Southern Berkshire
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270 State Road, 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 Street, Pittsfield, MA
(413) 442-4360
jewishberkshires.org

Jewish War Veterans
Commander Robert Waldheim
(413) 822-4546
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Jewish Women’s Foundation of the Berkshires
Website: JWFB.org
Email: jwfbberkshires@gmail.com

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

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26 Broad Street, Pittsfield, MA
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JEWISH LITERARY VOICES



A Federation series in collaboration with the Jewish Book Council

Thursday, Oct. 29 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Created the Toy Industry in America
with author and Prof. of Sociology Michael Kimmel

Monday, Nov. 2 at 10:45 a.m. (virtual)
Always Carry Salt: A Memoir of Preserving Language and Culture
with author Samantha Ellis

Thursday, December 10 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Hollywood vs. Nazis: How the Movie Studios Took on Nazis Infiltrating Los Angeles
with author and commentator Michael Benson

Thursday, December 17 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Music Between Your Ears: How Musical Engagement Powers the Human Brain
with neurologist Dr. Samuel Markind

Thursday, January 14 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
Exceptional Hatred: Antisemitism and the Fight Over Free Speech in America
with Prof. of Modern Jewish History James Loeffler.

Thursday, January 21 at 7:00 p.m. (virtual)
To Life: Jews Exploring Nature with naturalist Joel Greenberg.

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JEWISH
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OBITUARIES

Justice Ernst Hey
Rosenberger, 94,
distinguished law career,
active in Civil Rights

LENOX – Justice Ernst Hey Rosenberger, 94, passed away peacefully on Sunday, August 30.

Born August 31, 1931 in Hamburg, Germany, he fled Nazi Germany for New York City in 1935 with his parents, Edith Heyman Rosenberger and Ferdinand Rosenberger, his sister Lotte Rosenberger Kunstler, and his paternal aunt Selma Rosenberger Levy.

In his remarkable life, he attended the NYC public school system, graduating from Stuyvesant High School. After serving in the U.S. Army for two years during the Korean War, he graduated from City College of NY in 1955 and received his law degree in 1958 from New York Law School, where he was editor in chief of the Law Review. He later received his LL.M. from the University of Virginia School of Law. He was admitted to practice in NY, US District Courts, US Court of International Trade, US Court of Appeals, US Supreme Court, as well as Hamburg, Germany.

Justice Rosenberger was in private practice from 1958 to 1972. He was a cooperating attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society. Prior to his distinguished career on the bench, Justice Rosenberger was active in the civil rights movement. He volunteered his services (one of four out-of-state lawyers) in the defense of the “Freedom Riders” arrested in 1961 in Jackson, MS. He appeared in civil rights cases in northern Florida and special election cases in Sunflower and Moorhead, MS. He also consulted on civil rights cases in Georgia and Louisiana.

Justice Rosenberger has been an adjunct professor at New York Law School since 1976 (he received the President’s Medal in 2008); founding director, New York Offender Aid and Restoration; founding president, New York County Lawyers’ Association, American Inn of Court; and Vice Chair, Board of Trustees, New York Law School.

Justice Rosenberger ascended to the role of Justice in the Appellate Division First Department of the Supreme Court of the State of NY, from which he retired to the

law firm of Stroock, Stroock and Lavan. Along with his adoring family, he will long be remembered with respect and appreciation by those who knew him well in West Stockbridge and NYC.

He is survived by his wife of 49 years Dr. Judith Brailey Rosenberger; daughter Anne Elizabeth Rosenberger; nieces Karin Kunstler and Jane Drazek, and their children.

He was predeceased on June 16, 2026 by his son John Brailey Rosenberger. Burial was held in the West Stockbridge Town Cemetery, next to his son, on Tuesday, September 1.

Barbara Leslie Cohen-
Hobbs, 78, supported
the arts, loved travel,
embraced community

STOCKBRIDGE – Barbara Leslie Cohen-Hobbs, 78, died peacefully on Sunday, September 13. Daughter of Gilbert and Ruth “Brownie” Cohen, she lived life on her own terms, adventurous and always ready with a sharp wit and a great story. Her values were shaped in the 1960s at the progressive Stockbridge School, where she embraced compassion and community. While marching for civil rights in Selma, AL, driving through Cold War Russia, or navigating unexpected detours abroad, Barbara approached the world with curiosity and courage.

She attended the Friends World College, studying at different sites around the world. Barbara earned her BFA from Tufts University, a diploma in Applied Studio Art from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and a Master of Science in Art Education from the MA College of Art. She began her career as an arts teacher at North Quincy High School.

In 1973, she married Norman Hobbs, who sadly passed away in 1984.

As a single parent, Barbara dedicated her love to her children. She introduced them to the wider world by sharing her joy for travel, taking remarkable trips with them.

In 1999, she moved full time to the family lake house in Stockbridge, continuing active membership at the Stockbridge Golf Club and supporting the arts curriculum at Monument Mountain Regional High School by substitute teaching. She was

elected to the Stockbridge Planning Board in 2012, a position she held for fourteen years. Service was second nature to her. She poured decades into her community, serving on the Parks and Rec Committee, the Community Preservation Board, and the Stockbridge Golf Club board. She brought people together effortlessly, organizing Stockbridge School reunions for 25 years and preserving the school’s significant archives at the Stockbridge Library.

Barbara was the sister of Andrew Cohen of Longmeadow, MA; loving mother to her children, Alison and Jeremy; stepchildren, Jeffrey, Valerie, Renate and Bradley; grandchildren, Aza and Ilja; step grandchildren Jasper and Cecily; and step great-grandchildren Nolan, Harper and Quinn. She will be missed by her entire family.

Donations may be made to Berkshire Theater Group, where she served on the board for many years.

Dr. Bruce G. Evenchik,
78, respected ophthal-
mologist, genuine
kindness, active in
community

PITTSFIELD – Dr. Bruce G. Evenchik, 78, died tragically on Saturday, September 26, while walking his dog in Kennedy Park in Lenox.

Born November 18, 1947, in Elyria, OH, Bruce was the son of Marvin Adelson and Lois Barbara (Gelman) Evenchik. He received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Cincinnati and his Doctor of Medicine from the University of Michigan.

A longtime ophthalmologist, he was co-founder of Berkshire Eye Associates in Pittsfield. Active in his community, Bruce served as a trustee at Hancock Shaker Village. He was known for his sense of humor and genuine kindness.

His beloved wife of 48 years, Reba Lynn (Hough) Evenchik, died January 1, 2026. He leaves three sons; Jason Evenchik (Delphine) of Aix-en-Provence, France, Craig MacBain of Philadelphia, and Benjamin Evenchik (Martha) of Melrose, MA; daughter, Meghan MacBain (Paul Probine) of Dalton; grandchildren, Liam Probine, Raphael Evenchik, Braedyn Probine, Mina Evenchik, Alexandra MacBain, Ari Evenchik, and Naira Evenchik; and sister, Bonnie Ivancic (William).

Funeral services were held on Thursday, October 1, at Temple Anshe Amunim, Pittsfield. Burial followed in the Temple Anshe Amunim section at Pittsfield Cemetery.

Shulem “Max” Roth, 96,
Rabbi, Cantor, sense of
humor and sharp wit

LENOX - Shulem “Max” Roth, 96, died Sunday, September 27.

Born in Corona, Queens, NY, on November 20, 1929, to Isaac and Pepi Roth, Max was the first of his siblings born in the United States. As a young child, he was fascinated by the music coming from an old hand-cranked RCA Victrola, and quickly memorized melodies to sing around the Sabbath table. He also loved baseball and jazz. Music would continue to play an integral role in his life.

Max studied at the New York College of Music and later, at the Hebrew Union School of Sacred Music,

where he trained to become a professional cantor with a strong, sweet, tenor voice. At 37, he decided to pursue a rabbinic career, and in 1970 was ordained at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati. He served as a cantor and later as a rabbi at many congregations, including in Los Angeles, Dayton, Cleveland, Sarasota, Boynton Beach, and Columbus, GA, retiring at age 80.

Max published musical arrangements well into his eighties, studied piano, took voice lessons, and wrote countless poems which he loved to share with family and friends. He also loved sharing stories from his childhood in impressive detail, making every story feel as if it happened yesterday. Max forged and maintained deep connections with so many. He was an extrovert and could strike up a conversation with virtually anyone. Perpetually curious about others, he could turn strangers into friends in a matter of minutes. His signature sense of humor and sharp wit remained intact even into his final years.

Max was methodical in every aspect of life, from reading to cooking to dressing. He loved tailored suits, hats, and shiny shoes.

In 2011, Max and his wife Florence moved to Berkshire County to be close to his son Joseph and family. He loved the natural beauty of the Berkshires,

OBITUARIES,
continued on page 10

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LOCAL NEWS

KI's Visiting Cantor



Rabbi Cecelia ('Rabbi Cece') Beyer

PITTSFIELD – Knesset Israel welcomes Rabbi Cecelia ('Rabbi Cece') Beyer as its Visiting Cantor/Educator for the 2026-27 school year. Born and raised in Cherry Hill, NJ, Rabbi Cece is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the George Washington University Law School. She is a graduate of Young Judaea, has spent significant time living and working in Israel

and is a life member of Hadassah. She attended Camp Tel Yehudah as a teen, and has spent many more summers working at Jewish camps, including Camp Young Judaea Sprout Lake and Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. More recently, she joined the “founding family” of Camp Zeke, a new Jewish camp dedicated to fitness, the culinary arts, and to the connection of mind, body, and soul in Judaism.

Ordained from the Jewish Theological Seminary in May 2010, Rabbi Cece pursued a concentration in sacred music as part of her studies. She has served the Jewish people as a rabbi, cantor, and education director at synagogues in the New York metro area. Rabbi Cece is also an accomplished singer, actor, and dancer. She is a classically trained soprano, an animal lover, a musical theater buff, and a competitive Irish step dancer.

Rabbi Cece has attained expertise in Hebrew, music, traditional modes of prayer and contemporary Jewish worship; and a spirited and engaging approach to prayer. KI's leadership is looking forward to Rabbi Cece helping congregants learn to uplift prayer experiences at the congregation.

Rabbi Cece will spend about 15 Shabbat weekends at Knesset Israel during the 2026-27 school year. On each visit, she will lead some, but not all services; teach the congregation; and coach individuals and small groups, of various ages, interests and backgrounds. As her students integrate their learning into their leadership of prayer over time, KI will experience renewed worship on Shabbat, energized musical programming, and enlivened services on Rosh Hashana. The visiting cantor/educator program is supported by several financial and in-kind donors.

Rabbi Cece's upcoming visits include weekends in October (23-25), November, and December. Consult the Knesset Israel website calendar for further details.

Autumn at Congregation Beth Israel

NORTH ADAMS – Congregation Beth Israel of the Berkshires (CBI) continues its rich schedule of Shabbat worship, learning, and community programs in the fall, with offerings both in person and on Zoom.

Shabbat Services

Regular Shabbat Morning Services will be held on the Saturdays of November 14 and 21 at 9:30 a.m. at CBI. Hear some words of Torah (and some words about Torah) and bask in Shabbat's sweetness. These services will include traditional liturgy, contemporary poetry, chant, Torah study, and song as well as spectacular views from the sanctuary, which connect with the natural world and with our Source. Onsite and online; Zoom participants will need their own copy of *Mishkan T'filah*, available as an e-book.

Kabbalat Shabbat Services take place on the Fridays of October 23 and November 6 at 7 p.m. at CBI. All are welcome to usher in Shabbat with prayer, music, poetry, and Torah teaching. On some weeks, the CBI choir and musicians will join Rabbi Rachel Barenblat in leading services, offering a reflective transition from the week into sacred time. Onsite and online; digital liturgy will be shown via slideshare, no siddur required for Zoom participants

RSVPs for all services are requested at ciberkshires.com/calendar-of-events. Some dates may be subject to change; congregants are encouraged to check the calendar for updates.

Zoom “Soul Spa” Torah Study will convene via Zoom at 10 a.m. on the Saturdays of October 24 and 31, and November 7, 14, and 21. Jointly led by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat (CBI) and Rabbi David Markus (Congregation Shir Ami), this year's learning is entitled *Paths of Peace: Modern Spirit, Timeless Wisdom* and will explore the weekly *parsha* through the lens of Hasidic commentary, dipping into some of our tradition's richest sources of wisdom and spiritual nourishment. If anyone is observing a *yahrzeit*, the session will close with Mourner's Kaddish.

OBITUARIES,

continued from page 9

the local community, and was a cherished member of The Berkshire Minyan.

His wife of more than 60 years Florence (Sherman) Roth died on February 18, 2015. He is survived by his two sons, Michael A. Roth (Sue Prue) of San Rafael, CA, and Joseph S. Roth (Barbara) of Sandisfield; two grandchildren, Jamie and Rachael; brother, Jack Roth; and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by two brothers and two sisters, Michael Roth, Gee Konigsberg, Harry Roth, and Vicki Kampler.

Max was endlessly curious about the universe, profoundly philosophical, funny, loving, creative, full of life, and above all, one of a kind. He will be deeply missed.

Services and burial in Ahavath Sholom Cemetery, Great Barrington, were private. Contributions in his memory may be made to the charity of the donor's choice.

Ellen (Frankfurt) Schiff, 94, published prolifically on Jewish theatre, longtime professor

NEW YORK CITY - A long-time professor of French and Comparative Literature at North Adams State College, now the

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Ellen (Frankfurt) Schiff, 94, died Friday evening, October 2 in New York City.

A native of Beach Haven, NJ, she was born behind the prescription room of her father's Long Beach Island pharmacy. As a teenager, she worked the soda fountain, seven days a week. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude from Syracuse University, spending her junior year in Paris, where she studied at the Sorbonne. She arrived in France aboard the S.S. Ile de France but arrived in Syracuse in a boyfriend's car, without her parents' knowledge. She went on to earn a master's degree from Syracuse and a Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Professor Schiff published prolifically on Jewish theatre, writing and editing six volumes that included *From Stereotype to Metaphor: The Jew in Contemporary Drama* (1982) to *Plays of Jewish Interest* (2006). She contributed as well to a great number of anthologies and scholarly journals.

After more than four decades in the Berkshires, she moved to New York City, where she immersed herself in the city's cultural life, especially

relishing her evenings at the ballet and opera. She was extremely gifted at following a recipe with surgical precision, sculpting a perfect sentence, and applauding elegance. She could locate humor at the unlikely address and was a master of verbal hijinks. She never saw a spade she failed to identify as a spade. She remained devoted to Long Beach Island, where she spent her summers.

Ellen Schiff is survived by her children, Gary, and his wife Arlene; Stacy, and her husband, Marc de La Bruyere; five loving grandchildren, Sarah, Max, Hannah, Millie, and Josephine; three great-grandchildren; nephew Steve Frankfurt; and sister-in-law Paula Frankfurt. She was predeceased by her husband, Morton Schiff, third-generation proprietor of Schiff Clothing in Adams, MA, by Daniel Berley, her second husband, whom she married in 1998, and her brother Joel Fankfurt.

A funeral was held on Monday, October 5, at Beth Israel Cemetery, Clarksburg. Donations can be made to the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, or the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Hevreh Welcomes Cantor Sarina Elenbogen-Siegel

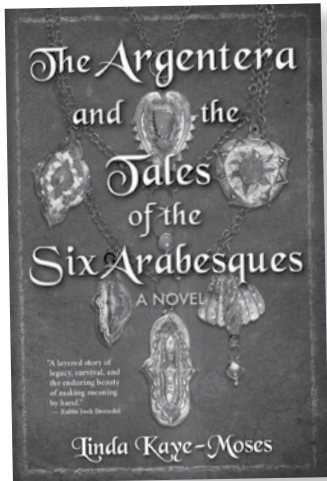
GREAT BARRINGTON – On Friday, November 20 at 6 p.m., Hevreh of Southern Berkshire invites the community as the congregation formally welcomes its new cantor-educator, Cantor Sarina Elenbogen-Siegel at a special Kabbalat Shabbat service and festive oneg.

Cantor Elenbogen-Siegel's teacher and mentor, Cantor Jill Abramson, Interim Head of Seminary Programs and Director, Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music at HUC-JIR will perform the installation.



Cantor Sarina Elenbogen-Siegel

Hadassah Berkshire Hills Winter Book Club for 2026-2027



This winter Berkshire Hills Hadassah reconvenes its winter book club, and invites lovers of literature to participate in lively discussions via Zoom about recent and classic Jewish books.

On Tuesday, November 10 at 7 p.m., the group will discuss *The Argentera and the Tales of the Six Arabesques*, by Berkshire author, Linda Kaye-Moses. When studio jeweler

and book lover Miriam discovers a centuries-old journal in an upstate New York used bookstore, she feels it has found her. Her search for a lost enameled necklace carries her from 5th-century BCE legend through medieval Alsace, Venice, and Spain, uncovering secrets that transform her life and those around her. This 2026 novel is a sweeping tale of art, resilience, and the unexpected power held within objects shaped by human hands.

Discussion facilitator: Barbara Viniar, Berkshire author of *Little Bird*, who started out in academia, teaching Women's Studies part time at the graduate and undergraduate levels and writing her doctoral dissertation on women's moral development in contemporary fiction. After retiring from her second college presidency, she turned to creative writing. Barbara is past president of Temple Anshe Amunim and is also on the Berkshire Hills Hadassah committee for Books in the Berkshires, 2027.

Upcoming Events

The winter book club continues through the winter and into the spring. Check future issues of the BJV for more information.

Wednesday, January 6 at 7 p.m. – *The Jew in the Lotus*, by Roger Kaminitz. Discussion facilitator: Jane Rosen.

Wednesday, March 3, time TBA – *The Tourist's Guide to Lost Yiddish New York City*, by Henry Sapoznik. Presenter and discussion facilitator: Sebastian Schulman, director of special projects and partnerships at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst

Wednesday, May 5, time TBA – Books in the Berkshires 2026 Selection, *Who Loves You Best*, by Marilyn Simon Rothstein. Discussion facilitator: Rosalind Kopfstein. And save the date of June 13, 2027, when the author will appear in person at a time and location TBA.



Your Federation Presents

More Than 300 Rosh Hashanah Gift Bags
Packed, Decorated, and Delivered

Just before Rosh Hashanah, the Berkshire Jewish community showed its seniors how valued they are as nearly 50 volunteers delivered more than 300 holiday gift bags to homes, hospitals, and assisted living facilities throughout the county. This year, thanks to two generous sponsors, Federation included rugalach and honey cake in the gift bags, along with apples, honey, and herbal tea. The gift

bag recipients were delighted with the holiday cards colored by religious school students. Thank you so much to all the volunteers who pitched in on this important mitzvah project.

Interested in volunteering? Contact our coordinator of volunteers Heidi Katz at federation@jewishberkshires.org or (413) 442-4360, ext. 10.





PHOTOS BY DAVID ROLLE

And Connecting With Community hosted a delicious communal lunch just before the holiday. Thank you to Natalia Monahan, our Director of Food Services, for preparing a delicious holiday meal of brisket, tzimmes, roasted potatoes, and butternut squash soup – and yasher koach to Executive Board Vice President Judy Usow for pitching in while our kitchen staff was shorthanded.

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OCTOBER
23-25, 2026

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23
Maira Kalman
Opening Night Party

Girl meets boy,
meets girl, meets
redemption.

Are you
experiencing
wellness
sickness?

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24
Kai Bird, Susan Goldmark,
& Bill Goldstein
Carol Gilligan
& Niobe Way
Laura Buchwald
& noted psychic
Annette Gordon-Reed
& Brent Staples
Saidiya Hartman,
Jamaica Kincaid, &
Farah Jasmine Griffin
Colm Tóibín & Adam Moss

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25
Tom Hammick
Bessel van der Kolk
& Ron Siegel
Ezekiel Emanuel,
Tony Coles, &
Vardit Ravitsky

Tickets + Full
Schedule at
fieldlenox.org



Your Federation Presents

A Spirited Capacity Crowd Enjoyed Our Summer Concert with 613

As we watch the last of the leaves falling from the trees this autumn, August 16 might seem like a long time ago – but sweet memories remain from being together at our summer concert with a cappella sensations 613. More than 500 people filled the Duffin Theater in Lenox for a lively evening of song and laughter that capped Federation's summer season. Federation raised more

than \$15,000 to be directed at our efforts to confront antisemitism and secure our local community. Thank you, PJ Library, Harold Grinspoon Foundation, and our generous community underwriters for helping to fund this annual highlight of summer in the Jewish Berkshires. We are already looking forward to next year!



Love Our Jewish Community?
Help us tell it's story!

Share your story ideas!

Volunteer to write for the *Berkshire Jewish Voice* or share your story ideas and be part of the conversation that connects, inspires, and strengthens the Berkshire Jewish community.

Jewish Federation OF THE BERKSHIRES

Email Albert Stern, Editor
astern@jewishberkshires.org



Your Federation Presents



Chanukah at NightWood

Community Chanukah Celebration
Step into a World of Wonder
Saturday, December 5 from 5:30-7 pm
Hosted by the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires
at The Mount, 2 Plunkett Street, Lenox, MA



Immerse Yourself in NightWood

Stroll through an ethereal winter landscape and immerse yourself in sound, light, and color. NightWood combines music, lighting, and theatrical elements to create an enchanted world of wonder.

Menorah Lighting and Music

After your NightWood tour, join us at **6:15 pm at the Mansion Forecourt** as we kindle the menorah lights and celebrate with music, Chanukah songs, glow fun, holiday treats, and heaters to keep you warm.

Online Purchase of Timed Entry Tickets Required

Federation Group Ticket: Adults \$15, Kids 0-18 free (but ticket required.) Timed entry tickets available on a first come, first served basis. **Tickets go fast, so reserve early! REGISTRATION OPENING SOON.**

This Event is Exclusively Outdoors. Dress Warmly!

Trails can be uneven and require secure footing. Self-guided route is 3/4 of a mile through the woods and gardens and includes both paved and unpaved pathways.



LOCAL NEWS

“The History and Evolution of Jewish Ceremonial Objects Used in the Home”

PITTSFIELD – On Sunday, October 25 at 9:30 a.m., Kneset Israel will welcome Judaica artist Frann Addison for a brunch-and learn program. Combining her metalsmithing skills with her artistic vision, Frann Addison often transforms found objects and antique elements into unique pieces of Jewish ritual objects. Her work acknowledges the past, yet offers new and unusual forms which satisfy the demands of religious requirements. Through hand forming, piercing, soldering, and/or riveting, she creates her one-of-a-kind and limited edition ceremonial pieces.



Tzedakah box designed by Frann Addison

Frann will present a lecture and slide presentation on “The History and Evolution of Jewish Ceremonial Objects Used in the Home.” In addition to discussing major holidays and celebrations and the ceremonial objects used in accordance with them, she will enlighten participants about superstitions, religious requirements, Christian influences, as well as the artistic influence of the countries in which the ritual objects were created. Participants will be introduced to Frann’s own work, as well as ritual objects created by other contemporary Jewish metalsmiths.

Come to be enlightened about this aspect of Jewish cultural and ethnic heritage. Feel free to bring one of your own Jewish ceremonial objects to share!

Frann is honored to have her Judaica in the permanent collections of the American Museum of Jewish History in Philadelphia, the Bernard Museum of Judaica of Temple Emanu-El, New York, the Mizel Museum in Denver, and the Oregon Jewish Museum in Portland. Her work has been featured

in 11 books and magazines, newspapers, calendars, and even greeting cards. This event will take place at Kneset Israel, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield. Pre-registration by Friday, October 23 is required, knesetisrael.org/rsvp. Brunch will take place at 9:30 a.m., with Frann’s presentation to follow at approximately 10:15 a.m. \$10 per person.

Interfaith Thanksgiving at Hevreh



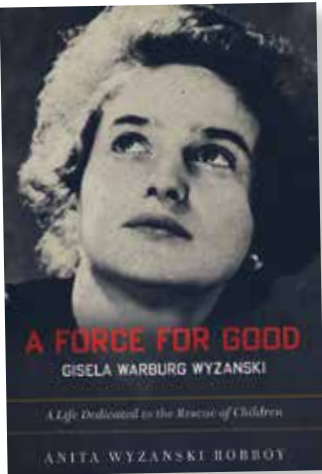
GREAT BARRINGTON – On Thursday, November 19 at 7 p.m., the Second Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Gathering of Gratitude and Community will be hosted by Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, sponsored by the Southern Berkshire Interfaith Clergy Council.

Join members of the Southern Berkshire Interfaith Clergy Council, and members of South County churches for a reflective service, followed by pie and the opportunity for connection and community. For more information go to hevreh.org.

A Force for Good, with Author Anita Robboy

On Sunday, November 8 at 9:45 a.m., Kneset Israel and Hadassah Berkshire Hills Chapter will welcome author Anita Robboy for a brunch-and learn program about *A Force for Good*, the biography she wrote about her mother, Gisela Warburg Wyzanski.

History Professor Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University wrote that this book “shows how a young woman of privileged birth, mentored by Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann and Hadassah founder Henrietta Szold, risked her life to save Jewish refugee children,



crisscrossed the United States raising funds to sustain them, and lived a life of service to others.”

Anita Wyzanski Robboy is both a noted author and a partner in the Boston law firm of Prince Lobel & Tye, LLC. She is currently a Visiting Scholar/ Research Associate at Brandeis University. She authored *A Force for Good* to showcase her mother’s coming

of age story and share her accomplishments, in hope that readers will be inspired by Gisela’s remarkable life, her selfless choices, and her determination to save the lives of countless others.

To attend this program, including a light breakfast, please register at knesetisrael.org/rsvp. Brunch will begin at 9:45 a.m., and the program itself will begin at 10:15 a.m. The cost is \$5 per person. Books will be available for sale.

Location to be announced.

An Evening of Songs and Stories, with Doug Mishkin and Rick Reiss

GREAT BARRINGTON – On Tuesday, November 10 at 7 p.m., join Hevreh of Southern Berkshire for an evening of acoustic melodies and candid storytelling as musician Doug Mishkin and writer Rick Reiss weave together memorable songs and stories. The two craft a seamless narrative arc – a dynamic call-and-response where music illuminates the prose and stories deepen the song lyrics.

Doug is a singer-songwriter best known for “Woody’s Children,” his song celebrating the legacy of Woody Guthrie. In 2025, he released his third album, “Tip of the Spear.”

Rick Reiss is an author, columnist and playwright whose work has appeared in the New York Times and many other newspapers, magazines, and literary journals. He is the author of two books, *Desperate Love: A Father’s Memoir*, and *The Fireflies*, his newly released novel, which was excerpted in the Berkshire Jewish Voice in August.

This event is free but registration is required. Visit hevreh.org for registration and more information.

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for 20s, 30s and 40s

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We will provide snacks and blankets. Feel free to bring your own, too! We will move inside if the weather changes.

Autumn Meet Up - Balderdash Wine Cellars

October 25 at 1 pm

81 State Rd, Richmond

For more info: hjc@jewishberkshires.org

An initiative of Jewish Federation of the Berkshires with support from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation

LOCAL NEWS

Rock ‘n’ Roll and Hebrew: Autumn Classes Continue at TAA

PITTSFIELD – This fall, learn about prominent Jewish rock stars and improve your Hebrew with Temple Anshe Amunim’s Rabbi Valerie Lieber. Classes will have just commenced before the run date of this edition of the BJV.

Jews Who Rock: Continuing on Wednesdays at noon, October 14 and 22.
Rabbi Val teaches about some of the most influential, important and beloved Jews in rock, pop, punk, R & B, Latin pop, and heavy metal. She will profile the individuals, listen to music, and discuss what makes them unique. Some of the artists we will cover include Lou Reed, Bob Dylan, Amy Winehouse, Slash, David Lee Roth, Pink, Joey Ramone, Carly Simon, Herb Alpert, Regina Spektor, Marc Bolan, Geddy Lee and more. Free for TAA and KI members. \$18 for non-members. Register at ansheamunim.org/event/jews-rock

Beginner Hebrew for Adults: 12 Thursdays at noon, October 15 through January 21, 2027.
It’s time you learned your Hebrew letters, and it will be fun. Rabbi Val teaches everything you need to know to begin your Hebrew reading journey. Twelve 40-minute sessions plus workbook included. No cost to members of TAA and KI. Non-members \$54. Sign up at ansheamunim.org/event/hebrew-beginners

Intermediate Hebrew for Adults: 12 Thursdays at 1 p.m., October 15 through January 21, 2027.
Brush up on and improve your Hebrew reading. You will be able to keep up with the prayerbook and learn more! Whether or not you join TAA’s February through June Adult B’nei Mitzvah cohort, this class will help you feel more confident in your Hebrew. 40-minute sessions plus workbook included. No cost to members of TAA and KI. Non-members \$54. Register at ansheamunim.org/event/hebrew-intermediate.



Grief, Grace & Resilience: An Evening of Poetry

GREAT BARRINGTON / LENOX – Following a joint appearance in Brooklyn, Chicago-based poet Dina Elenbogen and Berkshire-based poet Pamela Wax are teaming up for two poetry readings in the Berkshires. On Tuesday, October 27, they will offer a reading at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, 270 State Road in Great Barrington at 7 p.m., and on Wednesday, October 28, they will read at The Bookstore, 11 Housatonic Street in Lenox at 5 p.m.

The poets will read from their newest collections and share a conversation on grief, resilience, and the sacred in everyday life.



Dina Elenbogen

University of Chicago Writer’s Studio.

Elenbogen’s most recent collection of poetry, *Shore*, was called an “eloquent book of testimony and mourning” by poet Edward Hirsch and poet Faisal Mohyuddin said it bears “witness both to the suffering and loss in our world, but also to the healing power of family, faith, community, nature, and, most profoundly, words.”

Pamela Wax is the author of the poetry collections *Walking the Labyrinth*, *Starter Mothers*, and *Every Single Beast of My Heart*. Her poems, published in over 70 literary journals, have received several awards and three Best of the Net nominations. Pam serves as the Director of Adult Education and Programming at Knesset Israel in Pittsfield.

Both humorous and poignant, the poems in Wax’s recently published collection, *Every Single*

Dina Elenbogen is the author of the poetry collections *Shore* and *Apples of the Earth*, as well as the memoir *Drawn from Water*. Her writing has appeared in anthologies including *Jewish Poems of the Third Millennium* and *New Voices: Contemporary Writers Confronting the Holocaust*, as well as in numerous literary journals. She teaches creative writing at the

Beast of My Heart, weave themes of aging, grief, mortality, and morality into a meditation on impermanence and meaning-making. Poet Yerra Sugarman wrote, “An ordained rabbi and a poet of remarkable range and talent, Wax’s stately poems are elegant and consoling, while clear-eyed about our human fragilities, in a voice that never recoils from bringing into focus excruciating truths.”



Pamela Wax

WHAT COMES NEXT?, continued from page 1

About Ambassador Dennis Ross

Dennis Ross is an American diplomat and author who has served at the highest levels of U.S. foreign policy. He was Director of Policy Planning in the State Department under President George H.W. Bush, Special Middle East Coordinator under President Bill Clinton, and Special Adviser for the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Ambassador Ross has published extensively on the former Soviet Union, arms control, and the greater Middle East. His books include *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama*. He has also authored numerous op-eds for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other publications.

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Sweetwood takes pride in its collaborations with community, educational, and cultural institutions to foster a culture of learning and individual development. Through partnerships with esteemed institutions such as Williams College, Berkshire Community College, and other local organizations, our residents have the opportunity to flourish and prosper.



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Our all-inclusive living experience means that you can focus on enjoying life to the fullest, without the stress of homeownership. With a variety of apartment sizes to choose from, with rental and buy-in options, each resident enjoys a comfortable and personalized living arrangement



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We understand that your healthcare needs may evolve over time, and we're here to provide the support you require. We offer concierge healthcare services for an additional fee, tailored to your specific needs.

Interested in learning more about Sweetwood?
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CULTURE & ARTS



Dr. Steve Recommends...
A BJV column about Jewish books and authors

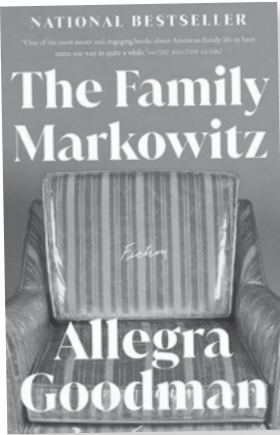


By Dr. Steve Rubin / Special to the BJV

Dear Readers,

For this month's column I would like to focus on one of my favorite, contemporary (Jewish) authors, Allegra Goodman. And although I would enthusiastically recommend all of her works (Goodman has published to date ten novels and dozens of short stories), those in which Jewishness is prominent are of special interest. These include *The Family Markovitz* (1996) *Katterskill Falls* (1998), and her latest, *This is Not About Us* (2026).

The Family Markovitz, one of Goodman's earlier works, is a collection of linked stories exploring three generations of American Jews living in suburban Boston: their generational divide, family conflicts, efforts to assimilate,

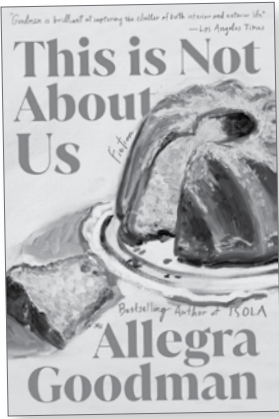
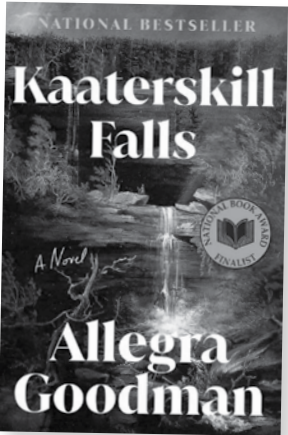


and their different approaches to religion, faith and tradition. *The Family Markovitz* reads like a novel, as the same characters appear in each story, although in different circumstances. Among these are Rose, the aging matriarch; her children; and her one grandchild, Sara, who (spoiler alert!) shocks her family by turning to Orthodox Judaism. Although Goodman portrays the usual Jewish rituals (Bar/Bar Mitzvah, weddings, Passover Seders, funerals, etc.), she manages to avoid stereotypes, and does so with humor, understanding and compassion. The sum total is a book that still resonates today for readers (Jewish and otherwise) thirty years after publication.



Allegra Goodman

Kaaterskill Falls, which was short-listed for the 1998 National Book Award, is perhaps her most explicitly Jewish-centered works, as it examines the tension between an Orthodox Jewish community in upstate New York and the so-called "American" world around them. Goodman here is interested in such recurrent themes as community vs. individuality, the appeal and the difficulty of communal laws and ritual, and the role of women within the world of Orthodox Judaism. How, for example, is it possible to keep your independence and individuality while remaining tied to tradition? Goodman offers no answers. But just as Judaism emphasizes debate and questioning, Goodman too explores issues without giving definitive answers.



This is Not About Us is the story of three generations of the Rubinstein family. Like *Kaaterskill Falls*, the book lacks a convention plot, as the narration switches back and forth juxtaposing stories of the various family members as they move through marriage, divorce, child bearing, and death. As such, *This is Not About Us* is more a collection of linked stories than a traditional plot-driven narrative. Goodman examines the trials and tribulations of the different generations of Rubinsteins; their stories overlap and intertwine; each seems to offer a different perspective – on being Jewish, on being American, and on being part of a multi-generational family. As the NY Times reviewer noted: *This is Not About Us* is "a heartfelt, acutely written collection that forms one wonderfully cohesive unit." At times humorous, often heartfelt, *This is Not About Us* is, ultimately – about us!

His Pain is Our Gain

Gary Gulman jokes about anxiety, Judaism, and more

By Matt Robinson / Special to the BJV

As his minyans of minions know, Gary Gulman (garygulman.com) started his career at the JCC on Boston's North Shore, playing basketball on hoops with collapsible rims.

"There wasn't a kid in the league who could grab net," Gulman recalls in his popular stand-up act. "In the history of the NBA, four people have smashed a backboard. Not a single one was a 10-year-old Jew."

Towering over his parents and most others, Gulman could have pursued a career in sports and was, in fact, recruited to Boston College to play football.

Once he hit The Heights in Chestnut Hill, MA, however, Gulman decided to use his head not to bring pain to others' heads but to bring them joy through his profound and even prophetic comedy routines, including those that he will present at The BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center in New York City on October 24 and 25, the Academy of Music in Northampton, MA, on November 13, and The Egg in Albany on November 14.

When asked how he first made the transition from the offensive line to punch lines, Gulman recalls participating in an open mic in Boston in October of 1993. "I was hooked," he smiles.

And while he fit into the observational style that was made famous by such colleagues as Jerry Seinfeld, Gulman has also made his faith a key element of his funny. In fact, one of his most popular (and profound) pieces offers a list of things that Jews brought to the world that we would all be loathe to live without.

"Enjoy polio!" he quips, citing the world-changing vaccine discovered by Jewish researcher Jonas Salk.

When asked what prompted him to poke fun at people, Gulman admits that, "as I grew older, I realized within my family I was surrounded by very odd people."

Whether it was his mother backing the board members who brought the collapsible backboards to the JCC by insisting, "You never know!" or the people he has encountered outside of his home who claim to want to avoid items made by Jews but who could literally not live without them, Gulman finds funny everywhere, except in some chapters of his own life.

As detailed in his first HBO special, "The Great Depresh," Gulman has dealt with anxiety that crippled him for many years but eventually became the source of some of his most beloved jokes. While most of the special consists of his telling tales from the stage, it also involves home movies and other elements that give the story and its teller added dimensions (other than height), as well as discussion with other comedians and friends who have also dealt with similar issues.



Gary Gulman

"I lost my life to depression for several years," Gulman reflects, "and was so grateful for my recovery that I wanted to share it with people to maybe help them feel less alone and see someone who recovered."

While his anxiety clearly hurt him, Gulman does not think it necessarily "hurt" his career.

"I don't think like that," he responds. "Even if it hurt my career, I would have done it."

Though he still wrestles with his mental health, Gulman is all systems go when it comes to comedy and is currently presenting multiple shows as part of his current tour! In addition to "Gary Gulman's 7th Hour" (which he will bring to Albany and Northampton) and "Grandiloquent" (which he will be taping for broadcast in Tribeca), Gulman is also preparing a special holiday show that will debut at Symphony Space in New York on December 5.

"It's jokes based on the winter holidays," he predicts, "but mostly Christmas and my love for it."

If he can joke about anxiety, faith, and Christmas at the same time, surely there is nothing Gary Gulman can't do to make people laugh.

"I share my humor," he maintains, "because it makes me and everyone laugh, feel better and less alone."

Thank you volunteers Ellen Rosenblatt and the BJV delivery team, Dave Halley, Colin Ovitsky, Megan Dopson and Roman Rozenblyum.



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CULTURE & ARTS

A Rabbi Writes a Book on Why We Need Religion.
Just Don't Call It 'Self-Help.'

Noa Kushner urges Jews to stop asking what religion can do for them – and start asking what it means to enter into a relationship with God.

By Andrew Silow Carroll / JTA

For many Jews, the High Holidays are an annual encounter with a question they spend much of the rest of the year avoiding: Why have a religious life at all?

These Jews may not be regular synagogue-goers, or particularly sure what they believe, but for a few days each autumn they sit in a sanctuary, open a prayer book and wonder whether they should bother with any of it – especially if they find belief in God difficult, or question why they should believe in the first place.



Rabbi Noa Kushner

But her idea is not “fake it ‘til you make it.” Her book argues against one of the most familiar ways contemporary Jews talk about religion: as a means to an end, something they do because it gives them community, makes them more ethical, and helps them grow or otherwise improves their lives.

Kushner considers this a “consumer mentality,” and too close to self-help, which she explicitly rejects. “If we always start and end with our personal responsibility and perspective and never with the tradition’s” perspective, she writes, “then the system simply buckles.”

That is the radical claim of *Pretend You Believe*: Judaism is not ultimately a technology for making better people. Ethics matters enormously, Kushner argues, but it cannot be the ultimate purpose of religion. As she puts it in the book, Judaism exists “for the sake of God. To have another end, even one as well regarded and critical as our ethical behavior, is to misunderstand the religious project and our role in it.”

Kushner is the founding rabbi of The Kitchen, an independent Jewish congregation and institute in San Francisco that she launched in 2011. The Kitchen has become known for its embrace of Jewish prayer, ritual and tradition, as well as for bringing Sephardi and Ashkenazi traditions together. Ordained at Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary, she studied religion at Brown and served as a Hillel rabbi at Stanford. Kushner, 56, is the daughter of Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, the prominent Reform rabbi and author.

“If you enter religion asking what is there for me, you may indeed miss what’s there altogether.”
– Rabbi Noa Kushner

I spoke with Kushner in the week before Yom Kippur about God, doubt, the limits of self-help, and what she hopes happens when skeptics decide, at least temporarily, to pretend they believe.

Full confession here: I'm a regular synagogue-goer. Judaism is probably the center of my life, personally and professionally. But when I talk about why I do what I do, my answers are invariably transactional. I go to synagogue for the community. I study Torah to focus my brain on living an ethical life and maybe hone my thinking skills. I mark the Shabbat as a respite from the crazy work week. What I don't think much about is God. Is it accurate to say that your book seeks to challenge that kind of thinking?

Yes. I heard exactly that over the years. You know: “Don’t worry about the God piece.” And then I eventually came to a point in my rabbinate where I thought, if I as a rabbi can’t advocate for God, who will?

What I’ll say to people [who think as you do] is, you have my *bracha*, my blessing, no matter what. You have my love, no matter what. However, I think this is worth your consideration.

So let's consider the person who may be drawn to a congregation like yours, may want to be part of a welcoming congregation and wants to reconnect with Jewish traditions for the sake of family, or history, or guilt. You even write about how doing rituals and observing mitzvot have their own rewards. What does believing in God, or even pretending to believe, add to the equation?

I would start with politely reframing the question.

“What does God add to the equation?” assumes that we are the center of the universe, and God would be there to bolster, affirm or expand on what we already are. But there is another way of thinking, which is quite traditional: We are not the center of the universe, and religion can teach us that move of humility, which changes a great deal.

And we’re so accustomed to entering any experience in what you called a transactional way, or perhaps as a consumer, that we often miss what religion has to offer. Because if you enter religion asking what is there for me, you may indeed miss what’s there altogether.

Religion is there to remember that you are holy, you are capable of saying holy things and doing holy things and responding to the gift of your life given from the One On High. And as my father taught me, something that is holy is infinitely valuable in its own right, and cannot be used for any other purpose.

I know people who aren't ready to take the literal leap of faith that you describe – that is, to bypass their intellectual doubts to do the stuff of a religious life. How do you convince them?

That’s why the book is called *Pretend You Believe*. You don’t have to have this worked out theologically, intellectually before – as a precursor. Far from it. In classic Jewish terms, it’s what we said at Sinai [when the Israelites accepted the Torah]: “*na’aseh v’nishma*.” We will do, and then we’ll hear.

In other words, doing precedes understanding.

But it’s a faithful doing. It’s not just, “I’ll try it. I’ll wing it.” It’s doing with a conscience, and integrity. We don’t have to have it all worked out in advance in order to participate. It’s saying, “I’m going to enter this arrangement. I’m not going to say there’s no God or God doesn’t matter or God is off the table. I’m going to leap toward it in my action and see what happens.”

This has helped many, many people avail themselves of other realms in religion. And at the end of the day, religion is related to transcendence.

Do you intend your argument as countercultural? We live in a consumer culture, and plenty of synagogues and Jewish institutions have to compete by convincing current and potential members what they get out of participating.

When people come [to The Kitchen], they’re going to come as consumers. “Is this worth my time? What will I get out of it? Should I pay for it?” That’s how we’re trained to think, and so we try to respond to people on that level when they first arrive.

I compare this to Moshe at the Burning Bush. He didn’t know what he was in for. He was kind of asking those same questions, like, “Can I do this? Is this going to work out?” These are normal first questions. It would be unkind to turn people away just because they have that point of view. That’s how we are literally trained to think, every minute of the day, especially in this country.

But if we leave people there, either as unsatisfied or satisfied customers, then I think we as religious leaders have failed. Our job is to help people see that there’s more here than being an unsatisfied or satisfied customer.

One of the striking things about your book is your discussion of ethics, which seems especially countercultural. You argue against the idea that religion is essentially a practice or philosophy for producing good people, or, as you put it, “religion is not meant solely to cultivate an ethical life.”

First of all, there are religious people who are unethical, and there are ethical people who are not religious. So let’s get that out of the way.

And if somebody is connected to religion in order to bolster their strength and their insistence that the world be a better place, they have my blessing.

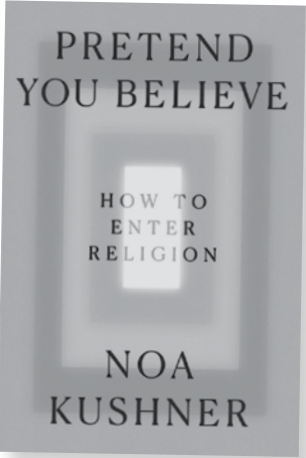
I just humbly suggest that religion is not only there to serve ethical ends. Yes, religion without ethics is not only ethically bankrupt; it’s religiously bankrupt. However, there is more there. Otherwise, it is simply communal ethics.

Once you’ve made religion instrumental, you have diminished its ultimacy, and at the end of the day, religion is there not to serve any one end, no matter how ethical or powerful or meaningful. Religion is there to serve God and live in service of heaven, whether we always understand it or not.

Let's talk about “ultimacy.” As I said, I have a very instrumental way of thinking about Shabbat: It's a chance to take a break from the work week, unplug from obligations, catch up with friends. But what other vistas does Shabbat open that we'd miss if we only think of it as a day of rest and disconnecting?

I hope Shabbat helps a person rest. But at the end of the day, all of the religious rituals and sources and the tradition are there to help us remember our place in the universe.

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CULTURE & ARTS

Orijinal (en bivo)

Sarah Aroeste looks back on her career while moving it to the next stage

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor



Those of us living in the Jewish Berkshires for at least the past decade-and-a-half have had front-row seats for the flourishing of singer/songwriter Sarah Aroeste's career as a champion of Sephardic culture and the Judeo-Spanish language of Ladino. Her musical range encompasses torchy, romantic interpretations of traditional and original Ladino songs, cheerful and educational children's music, and what has so far been her most ambitious work, the historical exploration of her family's Balkan roots in Macedonia, *Monastir* (2021). Outside the purely musical realm, PJ Library kids have enjoyed her bilingual Ladino/English children's books and adults may have connected through projects she initiated such as Savor (a collaboration with chef Susan Barocas pairing Sephardic music and cooking that also organizes overseas tours), and her online Livros Lookout book community and Kantikas Countdown spotlight of global Sephardic music.

"I'm all about the hodgepodge, because Ladino music doesn't have one sonic identity."

In light of all that Aroeste's brand has evolved into, it is interesting to find out that it all began circa 2000 with her first entry level job for the now-defunct National Foundation for Jewish Culture. She was tasked with "putting together a symposium on new Jewish musics," she says (emphasizing the plural *musics*), "and, not for lack of trying, I could not find a Sephardic cutting edge musician doing creative contemporary work in the Sephardic music sphere at this incredibly creative time in Jewish music." This was the heyday of the klezmer revival that saw a huge spike in interest and investment in Jewish culture.

"I was absolutely bowled over by the creativity coming out of the Jewish music world," Aroeste remembers. "The flip side was that I was terribly depressed that my culture was not represented in any way. And so – I kid you not – two weeks later, I gave notice to the Foundation. I said, 'Well, if nobody else is doing this, I'm going to.'"

Aroeste had trained as an opera singer and had studied at the Israel Vocal Arts Institute in 1997. "By coincidence," she says, "my opera coach was the late, great Nico Castel, one of the great vocal coaches at the Metropolitan Opera and the most influential Sephardic musician in America because he had the first commercially published Ladino songbook. Once he realized that we had the same Sephardic background, he began teaching me some of the traditional Ladino repertoire, which I had not grown up with." Her family, she says, had fled the Balkans in the 1910s and did not emphasize their cultural roots while trying to adapt to America, so she knew virtually no Ladino songs.

Aroeste continued studying with Castel when she returned to New York and began incorporating Ladino music into her classical recitals. She says: "Without

fail, audience members would come up to me afterwards and tell me that the Ladino portion was their favorite part. And I really had to stop and think about it. Was it because it was unfamiliar, so their ears perked up and they listened more carefully? Or was it because I was singing it in a different way than perhaps I was singing Mozart, because I connected with the music more? I suspect it's probably a combination of the two, but ultimately I agreed – I much preferred the Ladino music over the opera.

Aroeste's just-released ninth album, *Orijinal (en bivo)*, is a retrospective of her 25-year journey through Sephardic culture as a creator of new music. The collection features reimagined versions of 11 songs from her catalog but, she asserts, "this is not a greatest hits album, meaning it's not the songs that may have been the most popular. These are the songs that that were so meaningful to me at different stages of my life...from that angsty 20-year-old doing my starving artist New York routine" through motherhood and artistic and personal maturity. Aroeste worked with her longtime producer Shai Bakar to reimagine her songs in a small-band setting of five musicians capable of playing and improvising in different styles.

"I'm all about the hodgepodge, because Ladino music doesn't have one sonic identity," Aroeste explains, "The Jews who migrated from Spain, especially to the Ottoman Empire, picked up so many influences along the way from their neighbors. You could have some songs that sounded more Western and some songs that sounded more Eastern, and they used instruments from where they ended up. In my own music, I love pairing weird instruments together, whether it's an electric guitar next to an oud, for example. I did a lot of that in my previous work because I could justify it by living in America and using the instruments of American rock and roll. This album, however, is a live concert recording, essentially, and I wanted to keep it intimate, just five instruments and five musicians on all of the songs."

A perfect example of her process is the song that closes the album, "Espinelo," which presented Aroeste with a unique and fulfilling opportunity. The lyrics date to 1562, and Aroeste discovered them through the research done by an ethnomusicologist working with the Jewish community in Bitola, as her family's hometown of Monastir is now known. The community, she says, had preserved these lyrics about a queen pregnant with twins who has to decide which one to keep so as not to be accused of adultery by her superstitious kinsmen – but not the melody. This left Aroeste with creative choices as a composer. The version that first appeared on her *Monastir* album was conceived for a male singer and performed by Israeli flamenco artist Yehuda Shuky Shveiky, whereas in the version on *Orijinal (en bivo)*, Aroeste herself delivers a propulsive version tinged with a folk-rock sound that is completely different from her original concept.

The musicians came together at a recording studio in Queens, NY, for three days, hashing out ideas together for the first two and then recording the music as a concert on the third. "Shai and I purposely left a lot unplanned because we really wanted the musicians to come to the studio with their own vibe and their own ideas," Aroeste says. "We did just enough to then let everybody have a chance to breathe. Then on, the last day, we filmed it and recorded it." The process encouraged spontaneity in the moment, and was also designed to create a format for the music that could be replicated and taken out on a concert tour in the works for 2027 and 2028.

Even looking back, Sarah Aroeste is ever looking ahead to what's next. The Ladino landscape that has emerged in the 25 years since Aroeste left her entry-level job at the National Foundation for Jewish Culture has, she reports, totally changed. A turning point was the Covid pandemic, which "allowed Ladino speakers and enthusiasts from around the world to find ways to communicate with one another, and many different types of forums cropped up that allowed this beautiful synergy and communication across borders. This awareness of Ladino has only helped the musical aspect."

She adds, "Now there are entire Sephardic music festivals and many, many more musicians. That's all terrific, but still there are not so many people writing new music in Ladino. And that's really why I wanted to do this album, because I wanted to put my stamp on something and show that we can't only be doing what is considered traditional music. And what is traditional music anyway? We cannot trace most Ladino melodies back beyond 100 years, truly. We need people to preserve that body of music, but I also am so deeply proud of the work that I've done to compose new music in Ladino and to show that it is a living, breathing language."

For more on *Orijinal (en bivo)* and to watch in performance videos of her recording of the album, visit saraharoeste.com.



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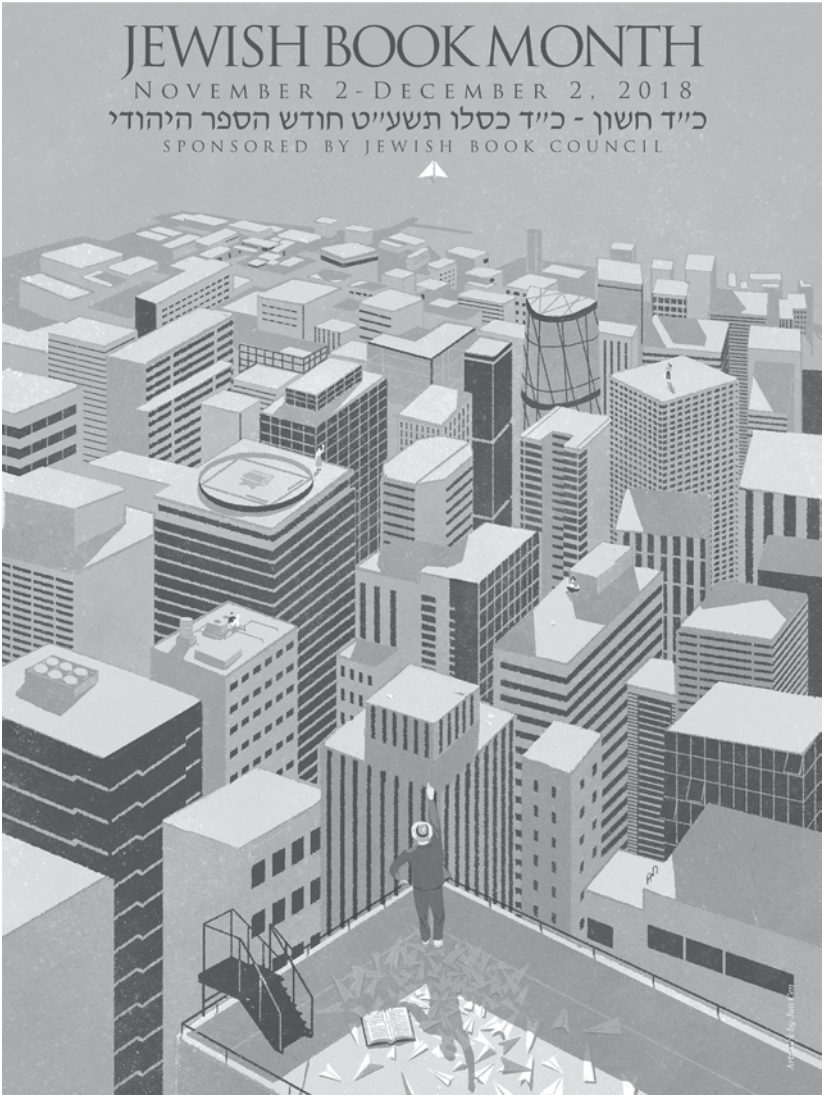
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CULTURE & ARTS

Jewish Book Month 101

Our Story Continues. Read It. Share It.
Keep It Alive.



Jewish Book Month 2018 poster

This year, Jewish Book Council – Federation’s partner in our annual Jewish Literary Voices series of author talks – is celebrating the 101st anniversary of Jewish Book Month from November 3 to December 3.

In 1925, Fanny Goldstein, a librarian at the Boston Public Library, decided Jewish books and Jewish pride were worth celebrating. Fanny set up a display of Jewish books and initiated the first Jewish Book Week.

In honor of Fanny Goldstein’s original book display, the Council is rolling out a community-wide messaging campaign of “Our Story Continues. Read It. Share It. Keep It Alive.” Together, let’s celebrate our Jewish identity and celebrate a century of Jewish stories.

Access the Council’s Jewish Book Month page at jewishbookcouncil.org/events/jewish-book-month.

Ways to Celebrate

Subscribe to JBC’s annual literary journal, Paper Brigade, which is published during Jewish Book Month.

- Read a Jewish book.
- Buy a book by a Jewish author.
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- Join or start a book club.
- Read a Jewish book to children in your home or community.
- Create a bulletin board dedicated to Jewish Book Month in a public community space.
- Invite an author to speak in your community.
- Attend an author event at a local synagogue, JCC or Jewish Federation.
- Display a table of Jewish books in your library, synagogue, JCC.
- Sign up to get weekly book reviews and news from Jewish Book Council.
- Ask your local library to stock Jewish books that you love.
- Ask your local book store to stock Jewish books that you love.
- Recommend a book to friends, your book club or your social media network.
- Find a new book to love on Jewish Book Council’s website.
- Organize a school read-a-thon.
- Invite your local school to join one of JBC’s school author events.
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- Have a delicious meal and read at book a Lehrhaus in Somerville, MA.
- Past JBM posters can be purchased on our website here: jewishbookcouncil.org/events/jewish-book-month
- If you will be in Jerusalem, visit the beautiful new National Library of Israel.
- View the 30 Days 30 Authors series from past years which featured an author video for each day of JBM, which you can find at jewish-bookcouncil.org/
- Listen to a podcast, like the newest one that’s all about Jewish books, The Five Books (fivebookspot.org) or the Jewish kidlit podcast The Book of Life (jewishbooks.blogspot.com).

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That is, we’re not God. And for me to be in a Shabbat is to remember there is a Holy One, and that my job is just to actually be of service. That allows me then to perhaps experience things that I couldn’t anticipate or design.

In your acknowledgements you thank your editor, Ben Hyman, for understanding why you wrote this book. What did he understand that maybe others didn’t?

I tried to sell this book for many years, and everyone wanted me to write a self-help book. They wanted some version of self-help because that’s how we think, and I’m very stubborn, and I said, “No, it’s actually wrong. If you think about this as self-help, you will miss it.”

This is something else. Religion is here to offer us something beyond self-help. If we look at everything through the lens of our own needs – and this really comes from the tradition and from [Abraham Joshua] Heschel – then we will miss great truths, because we can only see so far and only see so much from where we are.

Sometimes we have to grow into another level of understanding, and sometimes the world doesn’t convene around our own particular needs and perspective.

For example, in the book, I talk about crossing the Red Sea. If I am an Israelite, of course I’m thinking of my needs. I’m thinking of running from Pharaoh. That’s a very legitimate thing for me to ask in that moment.

But if I do only that, then I miss the bigger call to bring justice into the world. If instead I imagine God as central, then I see how crossing the sea helps ensure the possibility that righteousness can remain in the world. Religion insists there is a broader vista. Religion is about the grandest and broadest and most ultimate vista beyond our imagining.

We are [speaking] in the midst of the High Holidays. What might a person in the pews be asking in this period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, based on the ideas you explore in your book?

I would say, how is it that I am alive? That I am lucky enough, blessed enough to be alive, and given that I’m alive, what might I do with it? How might I be of service?

And perhaps in addition to that, a person might consider their life vis-a-vis what I call “righteous coordinates” – that is, connected to the people around me, connected to the generations, and connected to the One On High.

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CULTURE & ARTS

PEDDLERS,
continued from page 1

The BJV Interview: Margaret K. Nelson



Margaret K. Nelson

You describe Vermont as a very rugged, mountainous place with harsh winters, a mud season, and hot summers. Did these Jewish immigrants, when they arrived, know what they were getting into in terms of the physical landscape that they would be living in?

It's a great question, but I really don't have an answer for it because I don't know what they were imagining when they came here. I know that most of the people who came were very, very grateful to be away from the pogroms in Eastern Europe. For instance, in Burlington there's a story about a woman kissing the street and saying, 'I'm so grateful to be here.' Some of the oral history interviews that other people collected

also talk about how grateful people like Max Fishman, who's kind of a star in my book, was to be here. Max Fishman [settled in Vergennes and] brought over his sister, Zelda, and brother-in-law, Aaron Cohen, who then becomes the junk dealer in town. Then he brought over his brother Meyer, who actually ended up becoming a multimillionaire [owner of a department store chain].

He also brought over another brother-in-law who came to this country, but who left his wife and children back in the area of Belarus, Poland, Russia. That sister was murdered in a pogrom along with several of her children. So, in terms of expectations, I think they came expecting to be safer. Most people, of course, went to cities, and I think that for somebody like Max Fishman and then Abe Cohen, the idea of being in a small town felt safer to them. Burlington, which is 30 miles up the road from Vergennes, had a substantial Jewish community, as did Rutland, which is 50 miles in the other direction. Both of them had synagogues, and more than one Jewish family in the community. I'm not sure exactly why these people didn't want to be in neighborhoods with a lot of other Jews. I have some hypotheses about it, but I think that they really felt that these small towns offered an economic niche for them and also offered them some kind of safety.

You've seen in the book that I laid out a couple of routes [they took as peddlers]. Those routes take you across mountains that are 3,000 feet high. They take you down into valleys. I was traveling recently between Rutland and a place 20 miles north called Florence. Maybe you see just one house, and then you go another couple of miles, and there's another house, and you go another couple of miles. They might be going to a small town where there might be a cluster of homes, and then the landscape would spread out, and there were probably long periods where there was nobody. There still is nobody on the top of the tops of these mountains. And then they'd come to another house. Now, winters are always brutal in Vermont and they probably were more brutal over 100 years ago when it got a lot colder. When I came to Vermont in 1975, we always had a week in the winter of when the temperature dropped to 20 below and didn't go above zero for a week. That rarely happens now, but it certainly did then. And there must have been more snow and more ice and more everything. Maybe the summers were easier than they are now.

You interviewed, Ed Hirsch [a third-generation Vermonter who was educated at Dartmouth and Cornell, but moved back to his hometown of Lebanon in the 1980s to take over the family department store], who said, "it took a different person to move up to Vermont." And he added, "at least anyone who accepts themselves as a Jew." How do you interpret that? What was he trying to convey?

I think he was saying this isn't an easy place to be Jewish. His family was in Lebanon. His father had spent some of his life in Brandon, living with his sister. Both were not places where there were many other Jews. For him, it was how do you maintain your identity as somebody who is Jewish when, on a daily basis, you're surrounded by Christians? How do you find community among other Jews while not also alienating the people who are your clients, none of whom are Jewish? I don't know that Ed Hirsch himself had wanted to take on that challenge. His father certainly wanted to take on that challenge. Ed's father had graduated from Rutgers University, and had been headed towards a professional career but got waylaid by having been [in the military during World War II and] involved in interviewing people for the Nuremberg trials. He came back to Vermont and said, I need to be safe, I need to be secure – but did not choose to live among Jews. I think they never gave up their sense of themselves as people who were connected to other Jewish people, and yet they chose to live among Christians. That's an interesting and brave and creative choice, and also a choice that was challenging every day in every way.

About the career choices that they had – you write how the more sociable people became peddlers and store owners, while perhaps the more analytical kind of personalities tended to go into the scrap metal and junk business. When these immigrants came over, what kind of pipeline did they have to recognize the businesses in which they could succeed as Jews in America?

If you ended up in Burlington as a Jew, maybe it was because your relatives had already gone there. Some people were sent there because of the clean air and to get them away from industrialized places. If you landed in Vermont, you could buy a pack or rent a pack from supply stores and everybody said, put a pack on your back and go out. That was really the only possibility for starting out and it wasn't terribly expensive. You'd come back to the supply store at the end of the week and you'd say, I sold this and I sold this, so give me more needles, give me more thread, give me more whatever. And you would start out again the next

week. They were creating a consumer base. They found out what they were good at. They found out if they were good at talking up people. They found out people liked to have them come sit on their porch and spread the news. I think the more sociable people did enjoy it. Max Fishman, whether he liked peddling or not, clearly loved being at the center of a store and being sociable in that way. [His brother-in-law and junkyard owner] Abe Cohen came with some experience as a fur trader and so part of what he did in this country was trade furs. Now, if he had wanted to have a dry goods store, he couldn't have done it in Vergennes because Max already had one. So sometimes the options were, do I want to stay where I know one other family or do I want to move on? But these were pretty much the only possibilities.

I was once asked what these men did before they came. Most of these men had no occupation before they came. Maybe it was a brother who brought them over at age 16 and said, okay, see how you can manage peddling. It's not as if they were going into a career path that they were choosing. There were very few options.

You write about the differentiation between residents and strangers, terminology borrowed from sociologist Peter Rose. Explain that so people have an understanding as they come into your talk.

Peter Rose was saying that these very minority Jews living in small towns had a utilitarian approach to the town – this is where I live, but I'm not really of the town. I will make my living here, I will talk to the people here, I will abide by the local norms, but I'm not really a member of the community. Both people's perception of them and their perception of the people in the community was one of difference, of strangeness. Now, that's too simple a way to describe anybody. When they lived in these communities, maybe they didn't go to other people's houses for dinner. They kept kosher. But they knew people and their kids were going to school with one another. And they became aldermen and such, and they became integral to the community. It's not just, oh, these are people buying from my store, but these are my neighbors.

In that sense, I think even in the early years, even in a Max Fishman before he left his store over to his daughter and son-in-law in the 1930s, wasn't just a stranger. I think he was a resident, but he also was a stranger. That is, people saw him as being different, and he saw himself as being different. So much community activity takes place in the church, and of course he didn't go to the church. I got a letter from a [non-Jewish] friend of mine who grew up with some of Max's grandchildren, and she wrote that his family had so much respect in the community, but they knew the Fishmans were Jewish. She said she didn't necessarily know whether somebody was Episcopalian or Catholic or Baptist – they just were part of the community. But she knew this family were Jewish people and were different even though they were well-integrated and had friends in the community.

Explain the "exemption exception."

So, say, if you asked somebody in Vergennes, what do you think about Jewish people, they might answer, "Oh, I don't like Jews, but Max Fishman, he runs a good store. Sarah Gould, she's generous, she's kind. I like Sarah, but I'm not sure I like Jews."

You point out how that in the beginning the difference was perceived as ethnicity or religion, but in subsequent generations, there started to be class differences as these merchants prospered and some even did fantastically well. How much was baked into the next generations to try and stay a little bit under the radar, not so much because of their Judaism, but because of the class distinctions?

Ed Hirsch is somebody who's very clear about that. He says, "In Lebanon. I live the way people in Lebanon live. I'm not showy. I don't go off to Florida. It was important to people." Some of the people in the Max Fishman family and subsequent generations called me and said my discussion of class made them a little uneasy, because they had tried very hard not to distinguish themselves by being quite wealthy and some of these people did become quite wealthy. But I also think that in spite of the notion about small towns as petty places where people gossip and whatever, some of them were genuinely democratic. Everybody lived next to each other. People respected each other across class lines.

You write a great deal about the lives of women and children, and how through the children, these families truly became integrated into the community. But you also describe how a lot of women felt the absence of Jewish community more profoundly than men and more directly, as they were in charge of the home and keeping kosher, and perhaps in the education of the children, as well.

Max Fishman had three wives. One of them died, the other two left. About the women in the first generation – and one of them is Abe Cohn's wife, Zelda – they were trying to keep kosher, which meant that their meat came from far away. They were seen as being peculiar, and probably as being antisocial. I think that their lives were very difficult. A lot of these women came from urban areas with other Jews, and there they were in the middle of nowhere with very few people around. I think it became easier with each generation, especially if people had children who were integrated into the community, who had friends in the community. I think when families stopped really trying to keep kosher, being a housewife became easier.

When women became more involved in the businesses, then their lives became social the way their husbands' lives were social. Some of these women were much better at being sociably involved in the stores than the men had been. It was extremely hard for the first generation of women, then easier in subsequent generations who grew up in the United States, didn't speak with an accent, didn't dress differently. [In the book, Professor Nelson describes the tragic story of

PEDDLERS,
continued on the next page

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CULTURE & ARTS

a woman who could not adjust to rural life, attempted suicide and was ultimately institutionalized.] Less tragic are the women who just said to their husbands, “I’m not staying in Vergennes. I’m going to live in Burlington, and you can commute and I’ll raise the children there where they can have a Jewish education.” There was a pattern of women just getting up and leaving.

Towards the end of the book, you describe what differentiated a lot of the Jewish settlers in Vermont from more recent immigrants to America. You point to South Asian motel operators and Chinese restaurant owners and show how those families tend to stay in these small towns and expand their interests, whereas after the second and third generations, it seems more likely that a young Jewish person would leave the small towns. That’s true, I guess, in the Berkshires, as well. How has Vermont changed for Jews since the days of these still pioneering merchants?

I think we live altogether in a more tolerant society than 100 years ago, although I’m not holding to that these days. We all know that there’s a lot of resurgent antisemitism. If you’d asked me this question maybe ten years ago, five years ago, I might have answered a little bit differently. For people who care about a Jewish identity and care about a religious experience for their children, it’s more possible to find that in small towns. People I interviewed for the conclusion of my book were people who came as professionals, and I think they’re more Jewish than they would be had they stayed on the Upper West Side in New York, because it still feels like being in the wilderness. Places like the Middlebury Havurah, which was created by colleagues of mine and friends of mine, exist because people came and said, ‘How do I continue to show that I’m Jewish in the wilderness?’ A lot of those people, had they not been in a place that’s so white and so Christian, and in many ways so cold, they might not have created this kind of organization. They might not even have given their children religious education. I think it becomes more important to some people to develop and maintain a Jewish identity when they are such a distinct minority.



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.

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|---|
| Anonymous (10) | Jordan & Laura Green | Ellen Schwaitzberg* |
| Ed Abrahams | Harold Grinspoon | Susan Shimelman |
| Norman Avnet* | Ellen Heffan | Martin Silver* |
| Barbara Bashevkin* | Kenneth Heyman | Sylvia Silverberg, in memory of Jerome Silverberg |
| Robert Bashevkin* | Miriam Heyman | Richard A. Simons & Marcie Greenfield Simons |
| Linda J. L. Becker | Ed Jaffe* | Mark & Elisa Snowise |
| Robert Berend* | Phil* & Rhoda* Kaminstein | Harold Sparr* |
| Shelley Berend | Elihu Katzman | Richard & Alyson Slutzky |
| Helene Berger | Marilyn Katzman | Laurie Sukel |
| Helene Berke | Dara Kaufman | Rita & Sol Toscher Memorial Fund |
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| Gerry & Lynn Denmark | Erna Lindner-Gilbert* | *Of blessed memory |
| Jonathan & Lara Denmark | Amy Lindner-Lesser | |
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| | Gary Schiff | |
| | Stephen & Deborah Schreier | |



Jewish Federation® OF THE BERSKSHIRES

POETRY CORNER

Oh My, AI

By Judith Cook

I sit in my chair to write a short rhyme

Or maybe a song if I have the time.

Then – all of a sudden, I become aware

That there might be some odd competition out there.

It might be in a cloud or somewhere in space

They are writing ditties at quite a pace.

It might be a robot or some crazy gee

But, it cramps my style – I repeat (Oh my, AI).

It certainly has gotten my attention

And I admit, it is way beyond my comprehension.

What to do, what to do

I’m definitely not a tech guru (understatement).

But, I am real and they are not

So there’s a plus that I have got.

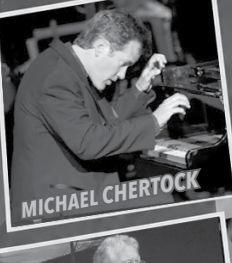
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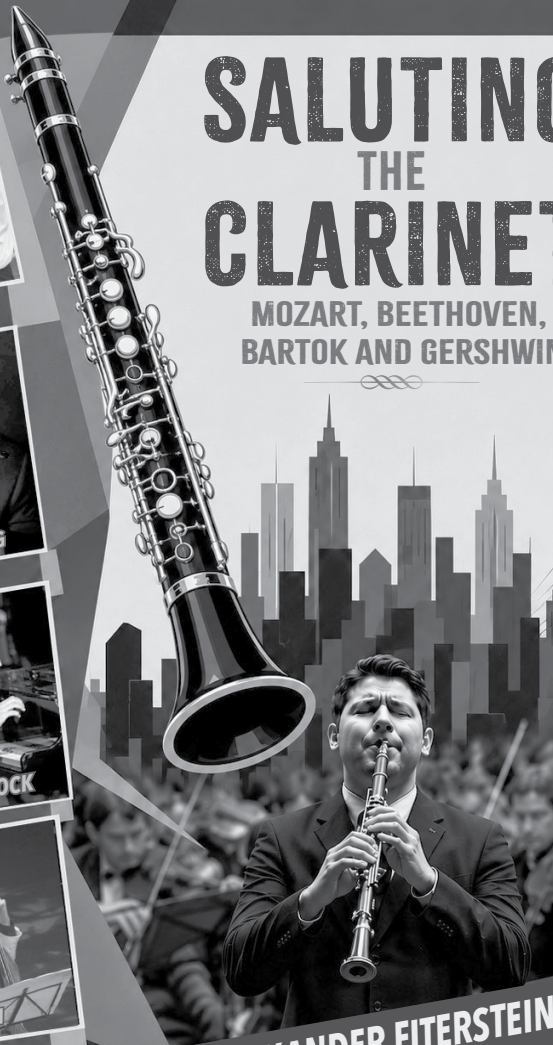
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Kosher Meals to Go—Meals on Wheels

ALL ARE WELCOME: Kosher lunch will be prepared on Mondays, Tuesdays (starting October 20), and Thursdays. Meals to go will be ready by noon for pickup at the Kneset Israel kitchen door, 16 Colt Road in Pittsfield. All meals-on-wheels will be delivered by Federation volunteers in the early afternoon. Suggested donation of \$3 for adults over age 60; \$7 for all others.

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED BY 9 A.M. THE DAY BEFORE THE LUNCH: Call Federation’s kitchen at (413) 442-2200 the day before to reserve a meal for pick-up or to arrange delivery.

What's for Lunch?

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

OCTOBER

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19

Noon, Lunch...Beef bourekas (DF), lentil soup, Persian jeweled rice, zucchini and yellow squash, pumpernickel bread, and apricots.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

Noon, Lunch...Macaroni and cheese, salad, four blend mixed vegetables, broccoli, sour dough bread, and banana pudding.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

Noon, Lunch...Franks and beans (GF)(DF), beef barley soup, sauerkraut, roasted potatoes, roll, and applesauce.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26

Noon, Lunch...Chicken cacciatore (GF)(DF), salad, meadow blend vegetables, pasta with marinara, Italian bread, and Mandarin oranges.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

Noon, Lunch...Salmon croquette (GF)(DF), broccoli cheddar soup, rice, Mediterranean green beans, whole wheat bread, and brownie.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29

Noon, Lunch...Fall vegetable stew (GF)(DF), squash and pumpkin soup, quinoa, roasted Brussels sprouts, dinner roll, and pumpkin cake with cream cheese frosting.

NOVEMBER

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2

Noon, Lunch...Meatloaf (GF)(DF), salad, mashed potatoes, peas and carrots, white bread, and tropical fruit salad.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

Noon, Lunch...Tuna casserole, beet soup, roasted cauliflower, sweet potatoes, multi-grain bread, and tapioca pudding.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5

Noon, Lunch...Stuffed cabbage (GF)(DF), hearty vegetable soup, roasted potatoes, California blend vegetables, rye bread, and fruit cocktail.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9

Noon, Lunch...Chicken pot pie (GF)(DF), celery and apple salad, baby carrots, corn, whole wheat bread, and sliced peaches.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

Noon, Lunch...Eggplant parmesan (GF), Italian bean and vegetable soup, pasta with sauce, garlic spinach, Italian bread, and snickerdoodle cookie.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12

Noon, Lunch...Beef chili (GF)(DF), southwest coleslaw, fiesta corn, rice, corn bread, and pineapple.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16

Noon, Lunch...Pasta primavera, salad, stewed tomatoes, Italian green beans, garlic bread, and rice pudding.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

Noon, Lunch...Chicken paprikash (GF)(DF), cucumber salad, rice with peas, beets, rye bread, and fruit compote.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Noon, Lunch...Vegetable frittata (GF)(DF), carrot salad, hash brown potatoes, meadow blend vegetable, white bread, and baker’s selection of sweet treat.

Kneset Israel – 16 Colt Road, Pittsfield



ONGOING MINYANS

Saturday, ... 9:30 a.m.
Sunday, ... 8:45 a.m.
Friday, ... 5:45 p.m.

CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

Friday, October 16 5:51 p.m.
Friday, October 23 5:40 p.m.
Friday, October 30 5:31 p.m.
Friday, November 6 4:22 p.m.
Friday, November 13 4:14 p.m.
Friday, November 20 4:09 p.m.

MAZEL TOV!

Judge Richard A. Simons, the First Justice in Berkshire County’s Probate and Family Court, on his August 27 retirement.

Edward Udel on his 80th birthday.

Jeffrey Cook on his retirement from a distinguished legal career.

Howard Herman on his induction into the Western MA Baseball Hall of Fame.

Diane Weinstein on her 75th birthday.

Cindy Helitzer on her retirement as a Pittsfield public school nurse.

Marcia Mandel on her 75th birthday.

Laura Rosenthal on her 75th birthday.

Loretta Prives on her 75th birthday.

Leslie Fishbein, a local psychiatrist, on her retirement.

Ari Weiner on his high school graduation.



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WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

Meals-on-wheels drivers are always appreciated. Contact Heidi Katz, (413) 442-4360, ext. 10, federation@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.

BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

TRAVELING WITH JEWISH TASTE
Prickly on the Outside,
Sweet on the Inside

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

During my first week as a volunteer at Kibbutz Malkia, I set off with my bunk-mates to explore the area. Set high upon a mountain, the kibbutz air was clear and the view spectacular. An optical illusion made the mountains of Lebanon appear much closer than they actually were, but warning signs along the border fences told us they were close enough.



Sabra Sabra is a 1933 Polish film about Jewish pioneers in Mandatory Palestine and the challenges they face settling the land and cohabitating with their Arab neighbors. It is considered the first talking film created in Israel.

On our walk we found trees heavy with ripe figs and apples, remnants of an old Arab village, and rusty military trenches.

And sabras.
Halutzim, the Jewish pioneers of 1930s Mandatory Palestine, chose the name tzabar (sabra) as a nickname for native-born Israelis. The plant from which the term takes its name has become the iconic symbol identifying the Israeli: prickly on the outside, sweet on the inside. Although I had learned the sobriquet numerous times, I had never actually set eyes on the plant.

I was about to learn a very important lesson.

I could easily see the large, hard thorns poking out of the sabra's skin. Yes, I thought, that's the "prickly on the outside." What I couldn't see were the tiny, hair-like prickles covering the fruit. So, it didn't matter that I was careful while picking the berry because those little needles soon attacked my fingers. To my everlasting embarrassment, I tried to extract them with my teeth.

This caused the miniscule spikes to assault my tongue.

Lesson learned. Just buy them in the market from the women who know how to harvest them.

The sabra plant, or prickly pear, is actually a cactus. Native to Mexico and the southern United States, it traveled back to Spain with explorers in the 16th century. They then then brought it from there to the Mediterranean where it was perfectly suited to the harsh conditions of climate and soil.

Bedouins brought the plant to Israel, where those sharp thorns served as natural fences and defenses against predators and livestock rustlers. After the 1948 war, Palestinians planted them as property markers for depopulated or destroyed Palestinian villages.

The Arabic word *sabr* translates as patience or endurance. While some claim the name reflects the cactus's ability to endure desert conditions, it is also a powerful symbol of Israeli endurance and resilience – both of the people and the land.

On a lighter note, I think it may also refer to the patience necessary to endure picking the fruit without injury (or embarrassment).

The berry of the sabra plant, in both yellow and red varieties, is sweet and juicy, and it is packed with vitamins and antioxidants. Pureed and seeded, the fruit can be used in everything from cocktails to jams to sorbet.



Sabras on the prickly pear cactus (Opuntia).



Sabra (aka Ruth Bat-Seraph) is a Marvel superhero mutant Mossad agent introduced in 1981 as a kind of Israeli female counterpart to Captain America. According to The Marvel Encyclopedia, she uses "wrist bracelets equipped with neuronic-frequency stunners that shoot 'energy quills'" and wears a gravity neutralizing cape, allowing her to fly. Her mutant powers include superhuman strength, speed, stamina, and the ability to transfer her life force and powers to others. In 2022, the Sabra character would be portrayed in the fourth Captain America film by Shira Haas (of Unorthodox fame), but there was pushback from pro-Palestinian voices. "Marvel is promoting Israel's violence against Palestinians and enabling the continued oppression of millions of Palestinians living under Israel's authoritarian military rule," the Institute for Middle East Understanding tweeted. Subsequently, Marvel dropped the 'Sabra' name and Mossad associations and even stripped her of her powers, turning her into a character similar to Black Widow. As the Jerusalem Post reported: "That softening of the character didn't deter the protesters [at the movie's premiere], who held signs reading "Sabra has got to go" and "Disney supports genocide" while shouting out "Free, free, free Palestine" and "Disney, Disney, you can't hide."

Sabra Sorbet

Cactus pears, as sabras are known in America, are available in supermarkets.

INGREDIENTS:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 2½ lbs. fresh prickly pears (about 7 to 9 fruits), peeled and chopped | ½ cup water |
| ½ cup sugar | 2 T. lemon juice |
| | A pinch of salt |

DIRECTIONS:

Make simple syrup: Combine the sugar, water, and salt in a small saucepan over medium heat until the sugar completely dissolves. Let it cool.

Blend the fruit: Place the chopped prickly pear flesh into a blender and pulse until smooth.

Strain the mixture: Pour the blended fruit through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl to remove all the tiny, hard seeds. Discard the seeds.

Combine: Stir the cooled simple syrup and lemon juice into the strained prickly pear juice.

Transfer the mixture to a metal loaf pan and freeze it for 2 to 4 hours, less if you like soft-serve.



Carol Goodman Kaufman, has just published her second mystery book, Crak, Bam, Dead: Mah Jong Mayhem (Next Chapter Press). The collection of cozy mystery short stories features food writer/ aspiring investigative reporter Kiki Coben and her Mah Jong group as they follow clues from a "Black Widow" murder at sea to a suspicious death at a senior home charity event. Armed with a curious mind and her formidable group of friends, Kiki is ready to prove that the only thing you need to catch a killer is persistence – and maybe just a little bit of luck.

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CULTURE & ARTS

In the Beginning...

By Albert Stern / BJV Editor

I doubt I am alone in sometimes finding myself looking for a little diversion during the weekly Torah reading – so many words on the page in Hebrew and English and also those being chanted aloud in *lashon hakodesh*. When I get the chance, I hunt through the stacks of the Stone Chumash at my synagogue for the newer editions that feature an appendix of full color illustrations, which let me zone out a bit. These pictures are meant to be more instructive than entertaining – you might see an image of a red heifer or the *Kohen Gadol's* ephod as described in the Book of Exodus – but what can I say? Although not a thrill a minute, they serve to pass the time.

There is a visual treat, however, on virtually every page of *The Koren Magerman Tanakh Graphic Novel Bereshit Volume 1: The Beginning*, a newly-released comic book version of the Book of Genesis that takes the story from Creation to the building of the Tower of Babel. This volume embeds the full texts of the Torah's first chapters in both Hebrew and English into dramatic and often dazzling pages of comic book art.

The complete Book of Genesis in comic book form was brilliantly accomplished by underground comics artist Robert Crumb, who in 2009 published what might be the masterpiece of his strange and prolific career. Crumb's black and white drawings and hand-lettering of Robert Alter's translation features on its cover the immortal disclaimer that should be on every edition of Genesis – "Adult Supervision Recommended for Minors" – yet the famously provocative artist was respectful of the stories and had clearly studied the text's meaning(s) quite sensitively. To be sure, Crumb portrayed the scenes of wonder with great imagination, but he was primarily interested in the humans of Genesis, to the point where he drew at least one portrait of each personage mentioned in the book, no matter how obscure. For all its visual sophistication, Crumb's Book of Genesis was foremost a work of astounding psychological acuity.

In contrast, the Koren *Bereshit* uses the full capabilities of the graphic novel medium to convey the purely phantasmagorical elements of the narrative – the six days of creation, the Garden of Eden, angels, Nephilim, celestial realms, Noah's Ark, and the Flood and its aftermath. The editorial director of this version is Jordan B. Gorfinkel, the longtime editor/director of the Batman franchise for DC Comics, and it's amusing to see him credited as "creator and writer" of *Bereshit* given that the text is the original Hebrew and a scrupulous, scholarly English translation. But the storytelling is a product of his vision and imagination, executed by a talented team of graphic artists that includes Israeli illustrator Yael Nathan. The illustrations capture the fantasy elements that, no matter the sanctity and religious import of the Book of Genesis, remain an essential part to the narrative. There's a reason that filmed versions Biblical stories are presented as epic spectacles – the stories are genuinely spectacular. Living in the 20th and 21st centuries, we are accustomed to illustration and moving images – this version of *Bereshit* connects to the kind cosmological wonder and awe the words were intended to evoke in Iron Age Israelites millennia ago.

The image reproduced on this page depicts the creation of mankind – for me, it evokes the art of *The Watchmen* and Marvel Comics' classic Dr. Strange



comics from the 1960s. The Planet Earth of *Bereshit* is a world roiling with supernatural energies where strange things are happening and powers beyond reason interact with material reality. For example, Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden are first presented as pure energy until the Fall, when they morph into physical human beings – one of the really smart touches of Gorfinkel's storytelling. In contrast with Robert Crumb's angsty Children of Israel, and their precursors the humans in *Bereshit* are visually integrated into the mystic. The pages of the book explode with action, movement, and (most impactfully) color. If Crumb was most interested in human psychology, this *Bereshit* portrays the uncanniness of creation and strange landscape the familiar characters of the Bible inhabited.

So how does *Bereshit* fare as Torah in its most literal sense – "teaching"? I think it is an excellent way to learn Torah, whether as an introduction for a young person or for an adult who may be a lifelong student of the text. The words are all there in both Hebrew and English and the illustrations provide a kind of *midrash* for the Book of Genesis. Plus, they are mindful of observant readers. (For example, Crumb draws a grey-bearded Jehovah in his book; no such image of God appears in *Bereshit*.) The images and format devised by Jordan Gorfinkel and his team may help one have a better literal understand what is going on in the text, but more significantly, this presentation opens up more of the multitudes of meanings and imaginative possibilities the Book of Genesis contains. They have done a thoughtful and imaginative job in retelling this foundational book of our culture and I very much look forward to seeing the next volumes in this series.

The Koren Magerman Tanakh Graphic Novel *Bereshit Volume 1: The Beginning* is available on korenpub.com and at other online booksellers for \$24.95. Our readers wintering down in Florida may also be interested in checking out the Koren Jerusalem Publishers & Booksellers bookstore in Boca Raton (at the Fountains Center, 7300 W. Camino Real, Suite 103). Images reproduced with permission.



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