

» SUMMERTIME

Jewish Observer

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Temple Concord Takes Bold Steps into the Future



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From the Editor



Barbara Davis

It's amazing how resilient we are. We are relentlessly adapting to new norms, even though it is challenging at times. Many of us, even those in their sixties, seventies and even eighties, are suddenly attending Zoom meetings, participating in virtual birthday and holiday celebrations and holding video chats with our families, friends and neighbors.

We are working from home, shopping online and consulting with our physicians via telehealth. All ages are engaged in e-learning. Our synagogues are streaming services; orchestras are performing asynchronously; libraries are lending digital media instead of books.

At the same time, there are things we are missing so much. We had thought that this issue of the Jewish Observer would be filled with stories of camps, travel and trips to Israel. We never anticipated that instead we would be masked, gloved and still "paused" in quarantined. Still, there is light even in that darkness. People have rediscovered the joy and necessity for sewing. They're baking so much bread that there is a yeast shortage. They're growing their own vegetables and visiting museums online.

And news is still happening. There is soon to be a major change in our community's profile as Temple Concord, our oldest congregation, vacates its historic building and begins to share space with Temple Adath Yeshurun. There's new lay leadership at the Federation and new rabbinic leadership at Congregation Beth Shalom-Chevre Shas.

This issue of the *JO* features an armchair travel page, about a trip to Africa taken by the Jezers and a trip to Morocco taken by members of Temple Concord. Instead of stories about camps taking place this summer, we take a retrospective look at one of the JCC's earliest camps, Bradley Brook, which is so positively embedded in so many people's memories. We feature a bucket list of ten Jewish books, perfect for reading in your armchair or hammock as you while away the days of summer. An article about local Jewish quilters is sure to capture your attention as you read about this fascinating craft which you might even be tempted to try yourself. We hope you enjoy the insights into our community and its members as much as the *JO* enjoys bringing them to you.

Of particular note is Rabbi Shore's d'var Torah about unity. The rabbi writes, "United we stand, divided we fall." If the pandemic has had one good result, it is that it has brought many of us closer together, working for the common good. We have seen it in the filling of the Matan b'Seter cabinet at Menorah Park, secretly stocked by members of our Jewish community and regularly emptied and used by the healthcare workers whose lives and livelihoods are so seriously affected by COVID-19. We see it in the joint Zoom programming that the Rabbinical Council has put together for all of us – a prayer service for coronavirus victims and a study session for Shavuot. And we see it in the generosity of those who donated to the COVID-19 emergency fund and who are making (and even increasing) their donations to the Federation's annual Campaign for Jewish Life, so that the institutions that serve our community can be sustained and strengthened, not only today but in the future. When our resources are pooled, we can accomplish more than any of us can do on our own. The *Jewish Observer* is proud to be the voice of our Central New York Jewish community – strong, united and working together in what is certain to go down in history as one of the most challenging periods of 21st century life.

D'var Torah

by Rabbi Evan Shore



Many articles written about the COVID-19 experience and ensuing isolation have portrayed a society in flux, lacking cohesion and bewildered. I beg to differ. I am amazed at how the human spirit, when faced with obstacles, devises tactics to go around or overcome the hurdle. We, as a community, along with hundreds of others, are suffering jointly. No shul in Syracuse has escaped the effects of the coronavirus. Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller writes: "Our perception of reality is a fragment of the total picture. It's as though we open up a 500-page book to page 126 and read ten pages. Those are the only pages we see. We don't see anything that happened before; we don't see anything that will happen afterwards. Can you imagine judging the characters or understanding the action based on reading ten pages?"

However instead of dwelling upon "why," many have chosen the "what" path. What can be done to help, change or make an impact upon others? On Wednesday May 27th the Syracuse Rabbinical Council sponsored a pre-Shavuot Tikkun Study session. Seven rabbis, representing different streams of Judaism, came together presenting d'verei Torah to over sixty people on Zoom. The obstacle of social distancing was overcome for the sake of Torah and unity.

The Torah in the Book of Shmot teaches:

לֹאֲרָשִׁי כִּשְׁ-חַתִּי בְּרִדְמָב וְנָתַן יְיָ בְּרִדְמָב וְאֶבְי מִיִּדְיָרָמ וְעָסִי כִּרְהָ דָגָן:

Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain.

Rashi, the classical Bible commentator, explains: The Jewish people encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai were compared to one person, with one heart. The three and a half million people in attendance at Mount Sinai achieved a level of unity that became the catalyst required for the Jewish people to receive the Torah.

A similar unity manifested itself during the pre-Shavuot Tikkun Study Session. This level of unity must continue. During the month of July, Jews will observe the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz. This day marks the beginning of a three-week period filled with mourning, ending on the 9th of Av. Tisha B'Av (9th of Av) is the day world Jewry mourns over the destruction of both Holy Temples in Jerusalem. Our rabbis teach that the main cause of the destruction of the Second Holy Temple was **מִנַּח תֹּאנָשׁ**, needless hatred.

The Zohar (a mystical work also known as Kabbalah) teaches us that all souls in the world, the work of the Almighty, are mystically one. However, when the souls descend to earth, they are separated. Our task is to bring these souls together, strengthening unity, and at the same time eliminate needless hatred from our lexicon and behavior. The need for this behavior is crucial to our well-being and survival.

King David in the Book of Psalms writes:

**וּפְקֹדֵי מוֹלָשׁ שָׁקֵב
Seek peace and pursue it.**

The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, 1809-1879) explains it is not sufficient to want or desire peace, rather it must be pursued and sought after. The rabbis of the Syracuse Jewish community are all working together to make unity, peace and limitless love a reality in our community. There is room for all to join and together we will make it happen. United we stand, divided we fall.

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Introducing Neil Rosenbaum, New Chair of the Board of Directors



Neil Rosenbaum, the new chair of the Federation Board of Directors, grew up in Gloversville, NY. He graduated from Union College and went to work for Xerox in Syracuse where, on his first day, he met Debbie, who was to become his wife. Five years later, he got his MBA from Syracuse and a position with GE. Ten years and four children later, GE decided to move his division to Indianapolis, but Neil and Debbie were determined to raise their family in Syracuse. They were members of Temple Adath and their kids were at the day school and having a fantastic experience.

Three years later, on the day that Neil and Debbie had decided that Neil would take a position with Stanley Tools in Connecticut, he ran into Steve Goldberg who asked him what was new. Five days later, including two days of interviewing, the Goldbergs offered him a position as vice president of eCommerce. He spent fourteen years with Raymour and Flanigan, the last as senior vice president of merchandising. After three decades in corporate life, Neil decided that he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his father and become an entrepreneur. With two partners, he launched a leadership and business development company which focuses on Central New York and the Mohawk Valley. "We are committed to being a catalyst in the reinvigoration of Upstate that is taking hold," Neil declares.

Neil's interest and connection to the Federation stems from his belief that Central New York is given a bad rap by residents and outsiders. He sees the area as a terrific place to live, raise a family and "age in place." "We can't control the weather," he says, "but we can control

how we think of what the area has to offer, the quality and values of the people and what the future holds if we work at it and believe."

Neil joined the Federation Board because he believes that its work is essential. Once on the board, he learned more about the specific roles that the organization plays, and his commitment grew. "I was incredibly impressed with the professional staff and the engaging, passionate and knowledgeable perspective of the board," he remarks. "As we updated the mission and vision of the organization I was particularly driven by the words 'works to build a strong Jewish future in Central New York and Israel and worldwide through philanthropy, engagement, education, and advocacy.' I find that these words represent the unique role that the Federation can play in the uplifting of the community's future."

Neil says that he "was anxious to take on this role because of my respect and love for the community, those that have led the organization in the past, and my desire to drive positive, collaborative work among all community agencies, organizations and agendas. We have raised four children in this hometown that we chose and which welcomed us. I want to be part of ensuring that this gift is provided to as many people as possible in the future. I believe that my varied leadership roles in business and community organizations have given me the background to make a difference. I see the Federation continuing to become an ever more positive, supportive part of the future of the Central New York Jewish and greater community."

In the short term, Neil wants to focus Federation's efforts and resources "on recovery from the pandemic crisis and providing support to the people, agencies and organizations we serve." In the longer term, he wants to continue to build "a collaborative, unified and forward-thinking community that is ready to adapt to the realities facing Jewish communities locally, nationally and world-wide."

Michael Balanoff President/CEO



There are so many kinds of Jews: Sephardic, Ashkenazic, Mizrahi, Ethiopian, Hasidic, Haredi, Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform, observant Jews, shomer shabbat Jews, 2-day-a-year Jews, lapsed Jews, good Jews, bad Jews, not sure I'm a Jew Jews, patriarchal Jews, matriarchal Jews and the Jewishly-adjacent. No one can categorically say what it means to be a Jew. There are probably as many answers as there are Jews. So what does it mean when we put the word "Jewish" in front of a name. What makes our Jewish Federation Jewish? What makes our Jewish Community Center Jewish? What makes the Jewish Home Jewish? What makes our community Jewish? What makes you Jewish?

What does it mean when we say that a person has a "yiddische kup"? Is there such a thing as a "Jewish head" or a Jewish way of thinking? What do we mean when we say a person "looks Jewish" or "acts Jewish"? What do white supremacists mean when they chant "Jews will not replace us"?

I have been called "a dirty Jew." I was told I was not "an authentic Jew." I was told, "Hitler didn't do a good enough job." These comments stung, but they also served a purpose. They made me think about what it means when I call myself a Jew.

I refuse to let anyone else define my Jewishness. I think every day about what it means to put Jewish in front of the name of the organization for which I work, the

building in which I work, the community which I serve. We know that in the weeks and months ahead we will see increased antisemitism, economic turmoil, institutional reorganization and perhaps even collapse. Is there a way to address these issues from a Jewish perspective? Is there a way to solve these problems in a Jewish way? What does it mean to have a Jewish perspective? A Jewish identity? A Jewish purpose? Does it mean the same thing to everyone?

In the coming weeks and months, the Federation Board will be compelled to examine every aspect of our Jewish communal life. The leaders of the Jewish community will have to reflect on how we spend our finite funds, what our community needs to be a community, and how we fulfill our mission in a post-pandemic 21st century. And as we do so, the crucial question we must continually ask ourselves is: What does it mean when we put the word "Jewish" in front of our Federation's name?

To help us address this, I would like to invite you, the members of our Central New York Jewish community, to share with me your answers to the question: What do you mean when you put "Jewish" in front of your name? And what Jewishness do you expect from the Jewish institution you belong to?

Please send your thoughts to mbalanoff@jewishfederationcny.org. We are all in this together and Federation is all of us.

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Temple Concord to Sell Building, Move to Temporary Quarters at Temple Adath Yeshurun

If all goes as planned, Temple Concord will embark on its next 180 years by selling its building at 910 Madison Street in Syracuse and relocating temporarily to shared space at Temple Adath Yeshurun while envisioning its 21st century home.

Change is part of the heritage of Temple Concord. Syracuse's first congregation, then known as *Kneseth Sholom*, was founded in 1839 by twelve peddlers who first met at Bernheimer & Block's in Syracuse seeking items for resale and coreligionists with whom to worship on Shabbat. German was still the language of the congregation. Ten years later, the Society of Concord built a synagogue on Harrison and Mulberry Streets. The new building contained elements reflecting its Orthodox origins, such as separate seating for men and women and a *mikvah*. But due to the growing influence of the Reform movement, the Torah reading table was moved away from the center. Within a decade or so, an organ, a choir and English prayers were intro-

duced and women sat with men, who were ordered to uncover their heads during services. Those opposed to such heresy left to form Adath Yeshurun, also known as the "Rosenbloom shul," after its leader. The congregation continued to prosper, and in 1911 dedicated the present temple, located at 910 Madison Street. A school wing was added in 1961. Other reforms continued, including the elimination of the assigned pew system and the installation of women on the Board of Trustees.

The 21st century has brought a new challenge. The 180-year-old congregation, the ninth-oldest still-active Reform congregation in the United States, is currently confronting the existential crisis afflicting many Jewish congregations: its membership is down, its building is old and in need of repair and it has insufficient financial resources.

Last year, the temple received an offer from Landmark Properties Student Housing Developers to purchase its building for

nine million dollars and convert the property to a 202-bedroom student apartment building. The congregation voted to accept the offer. Its president, Ken Steiger, said, "The sale is a matter of life or death for the congregation, which otherwise would have run out of money in less than three years. Without the sale of this building, it would have been very difficult for us to continue on in the way we have been structured. It would have required drastic changes to how we function, the services we provide and the people that are involved."

Opposition to the sale and razing of the building focused on its historic sanctuary, which was added to the National Registry for Historic Places in 2009. After lengthy negotiations and a vote by the Syracuse Common Council, it was agreed that the sanctuary would be saved but additions built in 1929 and 1960 would be razed. It was reported that the developer would construct an L-shaped building that would wrap around the sanctuary.

The next issue for the congregation was where to go on a transitional basis while envisioning its next home. Several options were considered until an agreement was reached with Temple Adath Yeshurun on a space-sharing arrangement, through which Temple Concord would have co-equal use of the TAY building. TAY co-president Chaim Jaffe said, "Temple Adath Yeshurun is proud to be able to help Temple Concord during its transition. We look forward to welcoming the members of Temple Concord and enabling them to continue their rich and vibrant history." Temple Concord's newly-elected president Sally Cutler said, "While this is a space-sharing arrangement, I'm sure we'll find opportunities for collaboration in our community programs, such as our lecture series, our film series, and our music series, in addition to social action initiatives and involvement." She added, "Not only is this sale a boon to us financially, it also is enabling us to begin creating our 21st century Temple Concord, and we are actively engaged in the process of envisioning what will ultimately be our new home. Temple Concord is committed to being the robust Reform congregation that we have always been in Central New York."



Here for CNY. As always.

Faster Treatment = Better Outcomes

People have been avoiding emergency rooms fearing they will be exposed to the COVID-19 virus.

Getting to the hospital quickly is critical for patients suffering heart attacks or strokes, when heart and brain cells can die by the minute. Other serious conditions — such as severe headache or stomach ache — can also cause long-lasting damage if treatment is delayed.

Our regionally recognized emergency services, cardiac care and Comprehensive Stroke Center teams are here 24/7 to provide you and your family with rapid intervention and treatment for all medical emergencies.

Your Safety = Top Priority

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- ▶ Screening patients, visitors and staff at entry points
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- ▶ Rigorous deep cleaning/disinfecting of all surface areas

Don't wait to go to the Emergency Department – Call 911

#TakeMeToCrouse

Shabbat with the Abayudaya

by Rabbi Daniel Jezer and Dr. Rhea Jezer

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to spend a weekend with a remote African tribe?

We have traveled to nine African countries on safari, staying in elegant lodges or visiting modern cities. We also visited rural areas, seeing barefooted villagers carry water jugs on their heads, grass-covered huts, and children in dusty clothing playing made-up games without toys. Although guides sometimes took us to small villages for brief stops, we wondered what life there was really like.

So when we were invited to join a group of twenty rabbis and spouses to spend Shabbat with a Jewish tribe in Uganda, we jumped at the opportunity. Getting there was arduous. After a 22-hour flight from Syracuse to Entebbe, we travelled in three old unairconditioned vans which periodically broke down on the hot nine-hour trip on rutted and cratered dirt roads.

When we reached our destination, to our amazement, villagers crowded around us with greetings of “Shabbat shalom.” Although they looked and dressed like any villagers in a poor dusty village, the men wore kippot and spoke some Hebrew along with their native tongues. They were so excited to see us because we were the first rabbinic mission ever to visit the Abayudaya, which means, literally, “The Jews.”

Who are these people? The Abayudaya became Jewish more than 100 years ago. The British were attempting to convert the population to Christianity. The chief of the tribe had a falling out with the British, and announced that he liked the Hebrew Bible and not the New Testament, and therefore, he and his tribe were now Jewish. They practiced Judaism



as they read it in the Torah with no knowledge of rabbinic Judaism. Although they realized that Judaism had changed since biblical times, they did not know how. Over the past several decades the Conservative and Reform movements reached out to the Abayudaya, teaching them to become part of the mainstream world Jewish community. Some converted to Judaism following halachic practices. The leader of the tribe spent six years studying at the Conservative rabbinical school in Los Angeles and is now an ordained rabbi. Some studied in Israel. A few young adults staff Conservative and Reform summer camps in the United States. There are about 2,000 members of the tribe spread over nine villages.



The highlight of our trip was Shabbat. The service was almost exactly like any Conservative service in the U.S. Ever wonder what happens to the prayer books our synagogues discard? There they were. Kabbalat Shabbat was amazing. Although the melodies are similar to ours, they were accompanied by drums using African rhythms and native dancing. The joy and spirit of the service were exhilarating. Shabbat morning celebrated three b'not mitzvah. Each young woman read fluently and flawlessly from the Torah and led parts of the service. Each of the American rabbis gave a short d'var Torah, translated into the Abayudaya language. After services we broke into study sessions. Their knowledge of the Torah and the sophistication of their insights and questions were impressive. The groups included teenagers as well as adults. We were surprised to learn that there are similar Jewish tribes in other parts of Uganda and Kenya.

Before the trip, we had read about the tribe. Poverty is widespread. Salaries begin at \$2 a day. We inquired as to how we could contribute. Although lunch at the high school is only fifteen cents a day, many students could not afford even that. We decided that as emissaries from Syracuse, we would ask our community to help. About thirty people contributed \$2,600, enough to provide lunch for 550 students for an entire semester. We wish that each donor had been with us when the principal and teachers expressed their thanks, as the students did an African dance while singing todah rabah!

Our trip was vigorous, exhausting but extremely worthwhile. It opened our eyes to a tribe that loves Judaism, coming to it from a history that is radically different from ours. They have deepened our appreciation of our Jewish life.

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Temple Concord's Encounters with Jewish History in Morocco

By Carol Radin

Eighteen Temple Concord congregants with family and friends, led by Rabbi Daniel Fellman, got a close-up view of Jewish history in a country where the Jewish community was once the largest in the world. The group visited the Moroccan cities of Casablanca, Fez, Rabat and Marrakesh, touring old Jewish quarters (*mellahs*) with narrow winding streets, beautifully-restored synagogues and sun-blached cemeteries. From the 15th to the 20th centuries, at least 250,000 Jews resided in Morocco, swelling with a wave of immigrants banished from Spain in 1492. Today, with only about 2,500 Jews in the country, synagogues are few and far between. Some are cultural sites only, although a few remain active. The Moroccan government continues to promote restoration of Jewish cultural sites and respect for its Jewish residents.

Rabbi Fellman reflected on the timing of the trip, saying, "As I've been more engaged with my Muslim partners here and come to know them and become friends with them, I wanted to learn more about the country where Moroccans and Jews co-existed peacefully and warmly." Temple members were surprised and pleased to tour a Jewish museum in Casablanca. They visited the restored Ibn Danan Synagogue and the El Fassiyin Synagogue, both in Fez, and the still active Slat Al Azama Synagogue in Marrakesh. Slat Al Azama, which dates from 1492, was particularly enthralling with striking walls of azure blue and white ornamented contrasts. Seat after seat was marked with the names of current congregants and individual prayer books.

Another active Marrakesh synagogue, Bet-El, welcomed the group for Friday Shabbat services. While women sat in their separate section and peered through the divider of bars, the fifteen men in attendance chanted prayers in rich reverent voices. Afterwards they participated in a lively dinner at the home of a Bet-El congregant. In a small apartment, their host's family set service for twenty at long tables



in their living room, and brought out heaping bowls of squash soup, a gefilte-like fish course, enough chicken for a regiment, pickled and stewed vegetables and a bounty of fresh fruit. After dinner, their exuberant host led the singing of *H'nei Matov*, *Am Yisrael Chai* and a standing finale of *HaTikvah*. With hugs and cries of "We love Shabbat!", everyone truly felt the joy of Shabbat.

Many other encounters were equally rich and unique. Rachel Rothman experienced a transformative connection when she and her daughter, Jamie, were able to discover the roots of their Moroccan ancestors. With a childhood address in hand, she found her grandmother's house in an old Jewish quarter of Marrakesh. On an afternoon Rabbi Fellman considered the most moving of the trip, he said *Kaddish* with Rachel, Jamie, and other congregants at the grave of Rachel's great-grandparents.



Bonnie Leff was impressed with a presentation by a young Muslim man from the *Mamouna* Society, an organization which promotes Muslim-Jewish understanding, who explained that, "In the past in Morocco, instead of locking up their *chametz*, the Jewish community would give it to their Muslim neighbors. The Muslim neighbors would hold a *mamouna*, a feast celebrating the end of Passover for their Jewish neighbors." The group also enjoyed a Moroccan cooking class, where they made a tagine of colorful squashes, peppers and onions sunken in olive oil and fragrant spices. Joe Greenman loved the food, especially the lemon-oiled roasted lamb. Everyone enjoyed the marketplaces where bargaining was required for leather goods, gauzy shirts and colorful *djellabas*. Snake charmers, jugglers and camel rides were part of the high-energy scene.

What made the strongest impression on all of the participants, though, was the enlightening journey into Jewish history in a country where one major world religion acknowledges the value of another.



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Hillel – Needed in New Ways

» Book Review

Ten Jewish Must-Reads You Will Always Remember

by Jackie Kassel

The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah

This book club favorite takes place in France during WWII. It follows the stories of two young sisters and their difficult and dangerous lives during very difficult times. Each plays a central role in the Resistance, though in very different ways. This historical fiction novel provides insight into what happened in France during the war, educating readers while holding their interest as a great read.

In the Garden of Beasts by Erik Larson

It's 1933 in Berlin. William Dodd is America's ambassador to Germany while under Hitler's rule. Much of the story revolves around his daughter Martha and her lifestyle while in Germany. However, the important theme of the book is Dodd's role in reporting the political climate in Germany at the time, and the world's inability to recognize the tragedies unfolding under Hitler. As all of Larson's books, this is masterfully researched and written.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Beautifully written, this book tells the story of Liesel, a young girl growing up in Germany during WWII. She steals books to quench her thirst to read and learn, but the heart of the story is the relationship she develops with Max, the Jewish man her family protects. This is a powerful, moving read with many themes--the mystery and power of words, the kindness and cruelty of man and relationships that cross a generation.

Exile by Richard North Patterson

David Wolf, a Jewish lawyer on his way to becoming a Congressman, defends a former girlfriend, who happens to be Palestinian, accused of killing the Israeli prime minister. In his quest to solve the mystery of the assassination, David faces not only danger, but questions and resolve about his own beliefs and future. This book of fiction is well-written and presents both sides



Jackie Kassel

and many questions about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The Secret Chord

by Geraldine Brooks

This historical fiction revolves around the life of King David. While the reader may or may not choose to believe some aspects of King David as presented, the book provides a fascinating picture of what life was like in his lifetime. It is beautifully written and highly recommended. Take a close look at the lyrics of "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen. It is strikingly similar.

Orphan #8 by Kim van Alkemade

This book follows the fictional life of Rachael Rabinowitz from ages 4-40 in New York City. At age 4, she and her brother are placed in New York's Orphaned Hebrew's Home, following their mother's death and their father's disappearance. The conditions of the home and medical experimentation are central themes to this book. It is disconcerting that such conditions and atrocities could happen in a Jewish facility, yet this piece of historical fiction is well-researched and documentation accredits the themes exposed by the author.

Lilac Girls by Martha Kelly

This is the fictional story of three

young girls whose lives are intertwined during and after WWII: an American "do-gooder," a Polish girl who suffers experimentation in a prison camp and a young female German doctor. This is a graphic piece and often difficult to read, but also one that opens the eyes of the reader to atrocities during the war. It's an important read, though not for the faint-of-heart.

People of the Book

by Geraldine Brooks

The reader is drawn back in time by this prolific journalist-turned-author, Geraldine Brooks. As in all her books, extensive and credible research is clear. This book traces the mystery of the Sarajevo *Haggadah* from 1996 back in time to 1480. Some readers may find this confusing, some challenging, and others quite enjoyable. Either way, this book offers answers to questions about the history and mystery of the *haggadah*.

The Zookeeper's Wife by Diane Ackerman

In 1939, the Warsaw Zoo was administered by Jan Zabinski. But on September 1, with the German invasion, the city was forever changed. This true account of perseverance, empathy and

bravery in the light of severe danger is a testimony to those who persevered during German occupation. The zookeeper's wife played a vital role in rescuing countless Jewish children from starvation, cruelty and death. Because the book is extracted directly from diary entries, it becomes an important documented source of history.

All Other Nights by Dara Horn

The Civil War is about to begin and so too the surprises and intricacies this book lays forth. The most astonishing piece of history, for one not familiar with details of the war, is the role that Jews played in supporting the Confederacy. If for this reason only, one learns that human conflicts of the past can continue to the present. If readers are not familiar with the name Judah Benjamin before the read, they will be astonished by the role of this man in American history.

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Sew Jewish

It has been said that, historically, quilters were not Jewish and Jews did not quilt. While there were notable exceptions to this axiom in the past, it is no longer true in the present. Jewish quilting has come of age. The *Observer* recently interviewed four very talented local quilters to learn more about their work.

Hanita Blair began quilting as a child, piecing simple doll quilts by hand. She began making usable bed quilts in 1973 as an art school graduate. “In those pre-internet days,” she notes, “quilting was a seat of the pants DIY enterprise unless you were embedded in a community with direct transmission. It was a Southern thing, and I was a displaced Southerner who was never going home again, so I had to teach myself.” **Rabbi Vicki Lieberman** likewise began when she was young. “I have been doing needle work since I was a child. My great-aunt was a finisher for a furrier in Manhattan starting in the 1940s and I think I got my love for sewing from the little items she would gift to us from her remnants. When I had my first pulpit, I received a call from a United Church of Christ reverend who wanted to bring her youth group to our Friday night service. I went to her office and she had this lovely quilt hanging. It wasn’t some mish-mash of old fabric from old clothes – it was art! I asked her if she would teach me how to quilt. She said no, so I learned on my own, and we’ve been best friends ever since, traveling the quilt scene together for over 25 years.”

For **Laura Lavine**, quilting was a family tradition. “My grandmother taught my mother to sew, and my mother taught me. My sister made clothes for my dolls and since I copied everything she did and sewing seemed to be in my DNA, I started learning. I made clothes for myself as a young teenager and continued on a limited basis throughout college but eventually lost interest. When I discovered quilting, it seemed easier than fitting garments so it was more appealing.” **Shirley Gnacik** started quilting about eleven years ago. She had retired and thought she would have time to pursue a new craft. It was another dimension to sewing, which she had done for many years. She took classes, bought books and watched YouTube videos.



Hanita Blair



Rabbi Vicki Lieberman



Laura Lavine



Shirley Gnacik

Shirley likes the social aspect of quilting. She joined a quilters guild where they do community projects together. “I have made quilts with my sister and my friends who had a project they wanted to make. I love the creativity of colors and patterns and seeing it all come together. When I travel, I look for different fabrics. In Alaska I found fabrics with red salmon. I made a table runner that we use when we have lox and bagels breakfasts with guests.”

Vicki likes the fact that quilting is forgiving. “Unlike clothing, if you have a seam out of place or a fabric turned wrong – it doesn’t matter. I don’t stress about any of it needing to be perfect. In fact, I prefer to start a quilt not knowing all the fabrics I’ll use or how big it’ll be or even what pattern I might add to a border. And if I run out of a fabric in the middle of a project, so what? I just find a substitute and you’d never know it wasn’t part of the original plan, because I don’t start with a complete plan.” Laura also appreciates the flexibility of quilting. “I’m the least creative person I know. I have literally no artistic talent. When I realized that I could cut fabric into pieces only to sew them back together

but in new ways, and not have to fit it as one would a garment, I had finally found something creative that I could do and enjoy. I won’t go so far, though, as to call myself a quilter. I’m really just a fabric-collecting, quilter wannabe.”

Hanita’s love of quilt-making involves other values, including community activism, making art, and frugality. “Overarching is the urge to wrap my loved ones in comfort, warmth, and beauty,” she says. She likes everything about quilting from the process to the result. “I like how it integrates physicality with the intellect and the artistic. I especially enjoy creating functional art with a little a. Planning, solving the puzzle of construction; colors, patterns, the feel of the fabric under my hand, the hum of my sewing machine, the portability of handwork, the meditative aspect of the work, soothing repetitive motions, sleeping under quilts, learning new techniques and helping other quilters, belonging to the quilting community, working solo, gifting warmth.”

A craft not traditionally seen as Jewish nonetheless has many Jewish qualities. “Every night in the bedtime *Sh’m’a* we ask

God to bless the work of our hands. *Eishes Chayil*, the woman of valor, works willingly with her hands, and makes for herself coverlets,” Hanita explains. “In the avoidance of graven images, in following the injunction against waste, in taking something from here and something from there, in the putting together of scattered shards, in the fixing of the world by blanketing people in warmth and caring, clothing the naked, in *hiddur hamitzvah*, making the necessary beautiful, quilt-making is essentially Jewish.”

The length of time to make a quilt varies. “It depends on the destiny of the quilt,” says Vicki. “Am I making it for a particular person? Then I have to audition the fabrics and that could take days or weeks. Will it be a wall quilt? Then not only is there a lot of auditioning fabrics – it is a lot more intricate piecing and ultimately quilting.” Shirley concurs, noting that “a quilting project can take a weekend or many months depending on the size, detail and my motivation.” Laura likewise finds that time loses meaning when quilting. “I get so immersed that I stay up until 3 or 4 in the morning and have to force myself to go to sleep.”

All four women make their quilts to be gifted to family, friends or charitable organizations. Giving them away seems to be very much part of the joy of their creation. All the quilters encourage others to try it. “There are so many wonderful entry points to quilting,” says Rabbi Lieberman. As long as you are willing to learn to sew with a $\frac{1}{4}$ seam, you are prepared! You can make quilts as simple as you’d like or very complicated and artsy. There is really no limit. Check out a local quilt shop for classes, inspiration, and materials.” Laura emphasizes the ease of quilting. “If you are not artistic but want to be creative in some way, quilting is a great outlet. I’ve also made some wonderful friends through quilting. We share photographs and encourage each other. Their work motivates me to learn more and branch out of my same old patterns. In addition, I don’t know where I’d be without YouTube. I watched the same video at least ten times to learn how to use 2 1/2” strips to bind a quilt so that you almost can’t tell where it begins or ends. If I can miter those corners, then anyone can!” The only caution, Shirley observes, is that “when you start quilting, it can become addicting. Every quilter laughs about the stash of fabrics they have hidden away for the next project.”

All you need is a straight stitch sewing machine, some cutting tools, and fabric. Start small and enjoy the journey.

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