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Jewish Observer

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JEWISH SPIRITUALITY



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August 2024

From the Editor



Barbara Davis

Both *Tisha b'Av*, the saddest day of the Jewish calendar and *Tu b'Av*, the Jewish day of love, fall during the month of August 2024. But neither of these holidays is the theme of this issue of the JO. Instead, our theme is Jewish spirituality. What is Jewish spirituality? And why haven't you heard more about it?

According to Chabad.org, "Judaism has a body and a soul. The two dance in harmony, in a wondrous union of seeming opposites. The soul finds expression through its embrace of the body, and the body comes alive through its fusion with the soul. We call the body of Judaism *halachah*. Literally, that means 'the way'—the way we live, the things we do, the things we are careful not to do. We call the soul of Judaism *kabbalah*, the hidden wisdom, inner Torah and yet more names. All refer to the same tradition, a tree of life with ancient roots that has grown organically throughout many ages, Judaism has a body and a soul, and they work in harmony to ignite the Divine spark within and let it shine. nurtured by the insights of many sages, men and women who wrestled with the angels and with their own souls, struggling to grasp the inner meaning of that which they received from their teachers, until light flashed from above, raising them to a place of clarity, of new insights and guidance they could pass on to their students after them."

According to *My Jewish Learning*, "What then makes Jewish spirituality Jewish spirituality? Here are three answers. First, and most obviously, it utilizes Jewish tools and topics for spiritual practice. One could have a lovely spiritual experience lighting candles on Thursday night, but lighting them on Friday night grounds the experience in Jewish folkways, Jewish community, and the Jewish calendar. For me personally, that deepens the experience....Second, Jewish spirituality has some distinctive characteristics. Unlike some popular forms of meditation, for example, it tends to affirm and incorporate a wide range of emotional experience. The Buddha sits in equanimity; the Hasid dances with the ups and downs of life. And unlike monastic asceticism, which has only rarely occurred in Jewish communities, most Jewish spirituality embraces the sensual world of eating, dancing, having sex, and so on....Finally, Jewish spirituality is inevitably tied to ethics and social life. Even when the spiritual experience is personal, what comes afterward is social. Judaism is a householder religion, tied to family, community, and society. Ultimately, Jewish spirituality comes down from the mountaintop, back from the experience of the sublime. As Heschel described so eloquently, that is where Judaism begins."

It has been noted that young Jews today are more likely to be spiritual than religious. For generations, being a well-educated Jew ostensibly meant knowing the contents of Jewish texts and methods for interpreting them, being able to read and understand the Hebrew language for the sake of prayer and scholarship and having a sense of the Jewish past. Overall, formal Jewish learning in schools and youth activities mostly served to augment or reinforce Jewish observance and Jewish life in the home, community and synagogue. Over the course of the past century, however, it became increasingly less likely that most Jews adhered to the dictates of Jewish law, lived observantly Jewish lives, attended synagogue regularly, lived in identifiably Jewish communities or learned the traditional Jewish canon. In the United States, synagogue affiliation and membership have dropped precipitously, supplementary education is more than ever an enterprise terminating at bar/bat mitzvah and intermarriage rates exceed 50%. Bifurcation of Jewish communities into Orthodox and non-Orthodox (United States) or Orthodox and secular (Israel) has grown and has led to increased disparities between Jewishly educated/engaged and Jewishly uneducated/unengaged Jews.

The distinctive aspects of 21st century living exert a powerful influence on the contemporary American Jewish community. Technology, social media, pluralism, globalism, openness to new ideas and new experiences, and especially the total mainstreaming of Jews on the American scene, all offer opportunities to alter the fabric of Jewish life. "In the 21st century," writes Benjamin M. Jacobs, "Judaism, Jewish life, Jewish peoplehood, the Jewish state, Jewish identity—indeed, almost all facets of the Jewish experience—are in a postmodern, post-denominational, post-ethnic, post-Zionist, post-diaspora, or what we may simply call a 'post-everything' age. In the post-everything age, Jewish identity is fluid, contested, and complicated, while the outlook for Jewish continuity is unsettled at best. Longstanding conceptions of what it means to be Jewish, let alone a 'good Jew,' are being challenged by new emphases on individualism alongside a declining sense of collective identity."

Taking stock of these trends, Rabbi Sid Schwarz observed that "the ethnic/survivalist agenda, which drove the Jewish communal agenda for the fifty years following the end of WWII, has run its course." He noted that "one of the reasons that the current Jewish organizational agenda does not draw many younger Jews is because its premise is the Jew as persecuted outsider. Younger Jews today are the consummate insiders, enjoying a level of success and power unimagined a generation ago. This is a generation that is ready to 'give back.'"

Educator Jonathan Woocher has written that, as a result of intermarriage, adoptions and other factors, American Jews are more diverse than ever before. Further, American Jews have shared in the trends of American culture as a whole, which have been marked by a more individualistic approach to religion that reflects personal values and a sense of authenticity, as well as a gradual disengagement from traditional institutions and authorities. He pointed out that Jewishness now competes and combines with a variety of other aspects of identity. Changing attitudes toward Israel and its symbolic importance in Jewish life have problematized Jewish education on Israel, particularly today.

Given these factors and the fact that Judaism is really all about asking questions, it seemed timely to devote an issue to the theme of Jewish spirituality. We hope that our JO readership, whose generous support we most gratefully acknowledge in this issue, will find the topic compelling and engaging.

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From the Jewish Federation of CNY President/CEO



Michael Balanoff

The State of the Federation 2024, delivered at the 2024 Annual Meeting

The year 5784 began on September 15, 2024. Less than a month later, the Jewish world as we knew it was shattered by the horrendous attack on Israel committed by Hamas. Hamas's actions set off a chain of events that have made it clear to Jews around the world that we are not as safe as we may have thought we were.

But there is one thing that Hamas, and those who wish harm to the Jewish people, were not counting on, and that is that we are all now October 8 Jews. Some of us were previously disengaged Jews who had left Judaism behind; others had never practiced at all. Some of us were ardent supporters of Israel but have now had their faith in the Jewish State shaken. Others are newly empowered Jews who are warriors for our people.

For the Federation, 5784 was both a year of significant achievement and a year of significant sorrow. We saw a rise in antisemitism, locally, nationally and globally. We saw divisions within our community, politically, generationally, nationally, globally. We saw anxiety, depression, stress, anger, hostility, fear and grief. We saw our college campuses overtaken by encampments. We saw friendship and families rent by opposing points of view.

And it is not over. The war continues. The hostages, those who are still alive, are still captive. There is no plan for what will happen if or when Hamas is destroyed. Israel has lost the PR battle in this conflict and it will take decades for the country to recover physically, emotionally and economically.

This was not a year of business as usual, but we still had to do business as usual. Our community, the Jewish community in general and Israel in particular counts on Federation, on our community, on our donors, for support.

And we provided that support. We sent over one and a half million dollars to Israel, to Magen David Adom, to the Friends of the IDF and to the Jewish Federations of North America. We also raised over one million dollars to support our local community's agencies. We supported both formal and informal Jewish education for our children and teens. We held events that brought hundreds of members of our community together in solidarity to celebrate being Jewish: 800 people for our Community Chanukah Dinner, 300 people for the

Yom haShoah commemoration, 600 people for Yom HaAtzmaut.

We sponsored programs for young families: Winter Havdallahs, Summer Shabbats, Camp Zeke. We sponsored programs for adults: Reverse Tashlich, a Reading & Discussion Group about Rescue During the Holocaust; the Sunday Cinema Series, The Butterfly Project, Cinco de mayo, the Food Pantry and the Hebrew Interest Free Loan Program. We provided over \$100,000 for collaborative community projects through the Philip L. Holstein Community Program Fund: 3GNY, Hillel Greek Unity Shabbat, Veterans Day at the Jewish Home, the Butterfly Project, a Jewish Pride Program at the Epstein School, scholar- and author- in- residence programs at the Day School, Temple Concord and Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas, Gardening for Tikun Olam, Bring the Fair to the Park and many others.

Our security budget has tripled over the past several years. We now spend \$90,000 annually, not only providing security for events we sponsor but providing block grants and High Holiday stipends to our community's synagogues to help them offset these expenses. Our security program is a model for the nation. Our partnerships with local law enforcement and our advocacy work to secure security funding offer another layer of protection against antisemitic threats.

We have worked diligently to combat antisemitism. This is not a new area for Federation but we have stepped up our game this year. Among our proudest achievements was a handbook of resources for fighting antisemitism that we distributed to the members of InterFaith Works and all of our area schools.

Federation is in constant touch with civic and political leaders, school and university leaders, religious leaders, the media. Much of this work goes on behind the scenes. You may not see what we do, but you should know that we are always working to deal with antisemitic incidents wherever they occur, whether

it be Wegmans, a school, a workplace or a neighborhood.

We collaborate regularly with people in the general community as well as the Jewish community. We know we need allies in the fight to end hate, not only for us but for all victims of hate and violence. Le Moyne and the Federation jointly applied to bring the U.S. Holocaust Museum's exhibit "America and the Holocaust" to town and sponsored a reading and discussion group entitled "Righteous Among the Nations" about rescue during the Holocaust.

Our Yom HaShoah Committee has incorporated a very meaningful community essay/art program into our annual Holocaust commemoration which reaches out to local school districts to help them understand the terrible consequences of antisemitism. At Yom haShoah we honored six local upstanders who spoke out in support of our Jewish community when antisemitism reared its ugly head.

Federation has provided food for people living in low-income housing. We are sponsoring free scooters at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo for people with mobility issues who need assistance. We engage with the larger community to remind people that we are not separate, different, "the other." We are Americans just like them, and when we stand with and for others, they will stand with us.

Caring for our community is the most important thing Federation does and it is your support of the Federation's campaign that powers our vital work. Your support enables us to protect our community, so we can live freely as Jews. Your support enables us to instill Jewish pride in our children and our teens and cultivate Jewish leadership for the next generation through Federation programs like the Teen Taste of Israel, Teen Funders, NexGen and Hillel. And we could not do all of this without the support of the Foundation and its devoted supporters.

October 7 is a day that will never be forgotten, but working together as October 8 Jews, we will continue to meet the challenges we encounter and ensure strong, safe and meaningful Jewish tomorrows.

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An Afternoon of Appreciation at the Zoo

It was a beautiful summery day to celebrate a very successful Federation campaign. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo was the perfect venue for families and friends to gather, schmooze and visit the animals, the ele-twins and the dragons that leapt out when least expected. Community members of all ages enjoyed the blue grass and “new acoustic” music of the Cadleys, picnicked near the gazebo, painted butterflies for the Butterfly Project and had a relaxing afternoon seeing old friends and making new ones. Campaign chair Nan Fechtner thanked the community for donating to the campaign, noting that “it’s so great to have the young families involved so that the Jewish community will continue to be vibrant for our children.” She also noted the Federation’s commitment to inclusion through its funding of three scooters, which are available at no charge to visitors with mobility issues.



Photographs courtesy of Rebekah Tanner, Ora Jezer, Diana Koester and the Jewish Observer.

Finding God

by Rabbi Irvin Beigel

On *Tisha b'Av*, we mourn for the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem and for the ensuing periods of Jewish exile. The rabbis offered comfort and assurance that God is still in our midst. "Rabbi Hiyya bar Ami said in the name of Ulla: "Since the Temple [the resting place of the Divine Presence in this world] was destroyed, the only place that the Holy One, praised be He, has in His world is the 4 cubits of *halacha* (law)." (Babylonian Talmud *Berachot* 8a) At first glance, this statement is difficult to understand. If God is everywhere, how could His Presence be contained within the Holy Temple? How much more so is it hard to understand how God can be contained within 4 cubits (approximately 6 to 7 feet). The rabbis were not suggesting that the Divine Presence could be confined within either the Temple or the 4 cubits where *halacha* is studied. They were suggesting that we felt God's Presence most intensely in the Temple precincts. Now that we have no Temple, we can only have that intense experience of God, that connection to our Creator, through the study and observance of the law.

Abraham Joshua Heschel was a spiritual guide to many. He recognized that we need meaning and purpose in our lives. Meaning, purpose and desire to feel connected to God are the core of our quest for spirituality. Heschel writes about the conflict between contemporary thinking and the Jewish approach. He writes that modern man cannot understand that "religions and law are inseparable." In Heschel's words, "To the modern mind, religion is a state of the soul, inwardness; feeling rather than obedience, faith rather than action, spiritual rather than concrete." [Quotations from Heschel are from "Religion and Law" published in *Between God and Man*, edited by Fritz A. Rothschild]



Heschel teaches us that conscience may prevent wrongdoing, but it is tradition and law that show us direction. It is law that commands the means that will help us achieve the desired ends. It is not the prevailing winds in our world that can be our guide. Sometimes those winds align with values of our Torah and tradition, and sometimes they do not. The Torah reminds us many times that we are to have compassion for the stranger and for those in need because we were strangers in Egypt. The Torah was unique in the ancient world (and perhaps in the modern world) in obligating us to care for the underdog. Today, some argue that a court must favor the poor and oppressed. Rabbi Cary Kozberg notes that the Torah requires that neither rich nor poor be favored. All are equal in the eyes of the law.

The *kedusha* prayer recited with the congregation declares, "We will sanctify Your Name in the world as they (the angels) sanctify it in the heavens above." We commit to honoring God in this world by elevating our everyday activities in this world. While Judaism sanctifies that which is otherwise ordinary, the secular world takes that which is holy and reduces it to the ordinary and the routine. Divine speech created the world. Human speech is a sacred gift. That gift is desecrated when vulgar language has become acceptable in private and in public discourse. Heschel tells us that Judaism is not a "cult...of ceremonies." It is a system of values, concretized in law, through which we can find meaning and closeness to God.

On this *Tisha b'Av*, let us seek comfort and hope from our faith and our law which are inseparable.

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» BOOK REVIEW

Here All Along, Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life—in Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There)

Reviewed by Angela Locke

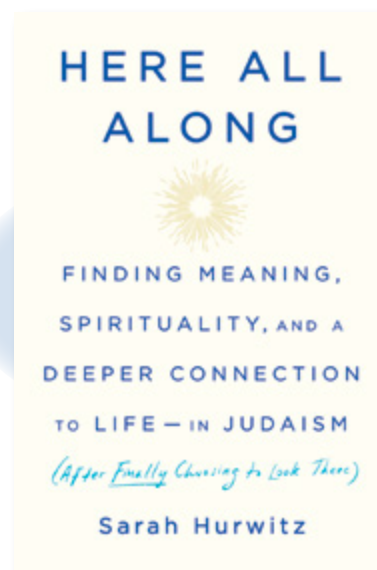
Sarah Hurwitz doesn't mince words. In the introduction to her book *Here All Along, Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life—in Judaism (After Finally Choosing to Look There)*, she states, "All American Jews are Jews of choice—and many of us are choosing to opt out." Citing a Pew Research Center study, she expresses her concern about the "Jew of no religion," reflecting on her own journey, her own *teshuvah*, to what she calls the "beating heart" of Judaism: its depth, its mind-blowing relevance, even to our confused and

fractured modern lives, its ability to bring us into relationship with God.

Rejecting Judaism is not what Sarah Hurwitz did. She ignored it. Once she became bat mitzvah and well into her adult life, Hurwitz's interaction with Judaism was what it is for many of us: twice a year synagogue visits, eye-rolling at the difficulty of Hebrew and the perceived emptiness of the Hebrew prayers and treating our children to what Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman calls

"pediatric Judaism."

Hurwitz worked as a White House speechwriter for President and Michelle Obama. A change in personal circumstances inspired her to take an Introduction to Judaism class, followed by a multi-year journey of Jewish study. The structure of her book mirrors her process. "Only once I had some familiarity with Judaism's key holy text, the Torah, and understood how Jews have [interpreted and reinterpreted it]



people for a...relationship, rescued them from slavery, and gave them a mission: to create a society...the very opposite of Egypt, one based on the belief that we are all created in the Divine image—all infinitely worthy, fundamentally equal, and totally unique."

If you are yearning for a relationship with God, Chapter 3, *Freeing God From "His" Human-Shaped Cage in the Sky*, might be the most important chapter in the book. Created in our own image, instead of the reverse, the old, bearded man looking down from the heavens and punishing or rewarding us, seemingly arbitrarily, doesn't exactly call out to most moderns. Hurwitz wants us to consider approaching God emotionally and experientially rather than theologically.

We want our religion to speak to us and to fit into our lives. But this forces questions: is this self-interest another indication of creating God in *our* image? Reject the bearded father in the sky, but re-form "Him" as a universal light or a rainbow or an oak tree? Is it a malady of our time that we rebel against any theological demands placed on us? The point of Hurwitz's book is to encourage engagement with *Judaism*. She fulfills that purpose well, but I wonder if, in the end, she is uneasy parting company with her new-age contemporaries.

for thousands of years, could I begin to appreciate the life-changing insights Judaism has to offer."

Hurwitz speaks most pointedly to those who consider themselves "cultural Jews" or "ethnic Jews" or even "social justice Jews." Deconstructing those terms, she asserts, "These are incomplete notions of what Judaism is—notions that focus on one aspect while ignoring everything else." She aims to kindle the *pintele yid* in each of us, that "spark of Jewishness" that will not stop nagging us or be extinguished. Her book aims to make the never-ending task of learning about (or relearning) Judaism easier. Hurwitz says "the story of the Torah in a nutshell" is: "God chose a powerless

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Jesse Lipson

A Dose of Judaism for Stress Reduction?

by Michael Gordon, Ph.D.

When I was younger, being Jewish had mostly to do with membership in a community with a shared history, set of traditions and challenges. I'm not sure I ever truly believed past childhood that there was a god in heaven pulling strings or angels bent on smiting me if I transgressed.

It was more about being part of an intrepid and generally obsessive band of fellow travelers eager to achieve, raise a tightly-bound family and deal kindly with others, if at all possible. I appreciated the holidays, not so much for their theological import but because it meant being with people I loved, or at least enjoyed. They marked the passage of time, reminded me about those things that were most important in my life, and kept me busy cooking food that was certain to be familiar and comforting. And I appreciated that the music was always evocative and soothing.

Not having much of a philosophical bent, that's about as far as I took my Jewishness: I was a proud member of a tribe with an admirable if not perilous history who liked to get together weekly and, every few months, enjoy a party with good eats.

Now in my seventies, I've come to broaden how I regard our religion, and religions more generally. It started when I began to write a book about my younger brother. David is limited in his understanding of most things, and certainly the theological underpinnings of Judaism. But he is the most devout Jew I know, hardly ever missing a *minyan*, a Shabbat service or a Jewish holiday, no matter how minor (last spring he called to wish me a happy *Lag BaOmer*). He helps along with services at the two synagogues he belongs to and volunteers daily at the Jewish nursing home. He is an ever-present participant in all things Jewish.

Given his intellectual limitations, it's obvious to me why being observant has been so important to him. Above all, it serves as a ready-made and well-defined infrastructure for his life. He's all about having a schedule, keeping busy and being around others. What better way for someone like him to achieve those ends than by heartily engaging in religious practice? For someone who might be otherwise daunted by filling his time and organizing his life, being a practicing Jew provides him a beacon of direction and a consistent source of activity, comfort and joy.

An inveterate reductionist, I began to wonder whether religion doesn't serve that



same purpose for most of us, regardless of our abilities (or lack thereof). Sure, we can debate the meaning of prayers, the lessons of a *parsha* and distinctions amongst traditions. But isn't a hearty dose of stress relief what most of us achieve when we pray or even when we surround ourselves with birds of our feather? To what extent is religion what humans practice, at least in part, to keep our anxiety in check and our mood above water?

The unmistakable trend in evidence-based mental health treatment nowadays is to include Eastern-style components of the sort usually associated with Buddhist practices. The field is moving on from just offering medications and/or talk therapies to now incorporating "mindfulness" exercises (that is, meditation, yoga, and breathing techniques). The idea is that we can promote a sense of well-being if we learn ways to "stay in the moment" rather than allow regrets about the past or worries about the future to intrude.

Incidentally, one method for keeping in the moment is to keep busy. The idea is that you can distract yourself from negative thoughts by engaging in activities that are productive and engrossing. It has long been a staple in the pantry of therapist suggestions for treating mood problems.

Organized religions, by their nature, certainly incorporate these Buddhist-style elements. What is prayer if not a carefully engineered opportunity for meditation and spirituality? Don't our rabbis strive to offer a setting where congregants can regularly and easily step back from the

stresses of their daily lives? By instituting mantra-like repetitions of prayers, by chanting soulful and ancient melodies, by organizing people's lives around shared religious events, by promoting daily ritual observance ripe for engendering mindfulness--aren't our clergy construing an environment that a Buddhist might recognize?

The other day I was surprised when I came across the term "JewBu" (for Jewish Buddhist). I learned that others were way ahead of me when it came to seeing a nexus between the two traditions. I mentioned the expression to a learned friend who warned me against pursuing that connection for fear of it being considered provocative and heretical.

But another wise friend explained why "JewBu" should not be considered blasphemous: followers of Buddhism don't acknowledge a supreme god or deity. They instead focus on achieving enlightenment and a state of inner peace and wisdom. It seems you can strive for nirvana and still adhere fully to our faith. As you will read in Rabbi Steinitz's article below, those two goals might be one and the same.

My intent here is not to pitch participation in organized religion or even private prayer as a surefire cure for anxiety and depression. But, for some of us, acknowledging the Zen-like aspects of our traditions might offer an accessible and well-established platform for reducing stress in our lives.

Jewish Mindfulness

by Rabbi Oren Steinitz

Michael Gordon's wise words reveal an unfortunate truth: many of us grew up with the axiom that Judaism has very little to offer us when it comes to spirituality. The aftermath of the Holocaust made our parents and grandparents determined to follow what Rabbi Dr. Emil Ludwig Fackenheim famously called "The 614th Commandment": "Thou shalt not hand Hitler posthumous victories." If Jewish people give up on their heritage, their religion, their identity—he claimed—we are essentially doing Hitler's work for him. Thus, so many of us grew up with the thought that one must remain Jewishly involved because we owe this to our ancestors. In fact, the vast majority of Jewish Americans claim that the most central component of their Jewish identity involves remembering the Holocaust.

While this is obviously an admirable and important cause, I would argue that our focus on survival is a double-edged sword. We may have convinced ourselves and our children that Judaism is important, but if it is only important to us because it *was* important to our ancestors, Judaism risks becoming a museum rather than a living tradition. If we focus too much on memory, are we forgetting the richness and the beauty of Judaism itself? This is especially true for the spiritual aspect of our tradition. Just notice the language that we use for our observance. We talk about "attending services" rather than "participating in" or—Heaven forbid—"praying." We have gotten used to religion being something that we do by rote (if we do it at all), because "that's what Jews do." Not because it is meaningful, not because it has any real value, but because we do not want to be the last link in the chain of tradition.

With this reality in mind, are we really surprised at the number of spiritually minded Jews who decided to look for a spiritual path not in the synagogue, but in Zen Buddhist gatherings and Hindu temples? Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi z"l, the founder of the Jewish Renewal movement, recalls that when he worked as a professor at Naropa University, his father passed away and he needed to say Kaddish daily. He knew that the best way to gather enough Jews for a minyan was to go to the university's department of Buddhist Studies, where he would sure find "all the Rosenbergs and Finkelsteins." The sad part of this funny anecdote is that if "the Rosenbergs and Finkelsteins" would have looked more carefully within our Jewish texts and tradition, they would have been able to find the same spirituality that they felt they could only find in Eastern traditions.

Sacred Silence

by Sherry Chayat

I believe that everyone, whether observant or agnostic, a seeker outside the tradition or a secular humanist, has a yearning for meaning, for wholeness. Sometimes it comes as a deep-seated question, such as, What is my life for? How can I find a sense of ease, of peace? Who am I, really? Often such questions are ignored or sidelined amid everyday activities, obligations and responsibilities.

Shabbat is an invitation to listen to that questioning, that yearning. But sometimes words get in the way. What happens when we let them go? The *Amidah*, typically recited silently, can be a time to experience sacred silence: just standing, just being enveloped in the mystery, the silence of wordless prayer.

There's a relevant commentary in *Siddur Lev Shalem*: "Life is a mystery. How did we come to be, here and now?"

What is the meaning of our lives? What are we to make of the circumstances of our lives—our joys, our sadness? When we begin to pray, we first of all acknowledge that mystery....Prayer, in talmudic thought, is quintessentially silent prayer. In prayer, we simultaneously plumb the unspoken depths of our lives and place ourselves before the silence of the universe...."

Uniting with silent prayer, recitations and psalms, Hebrew tropes and melodies,

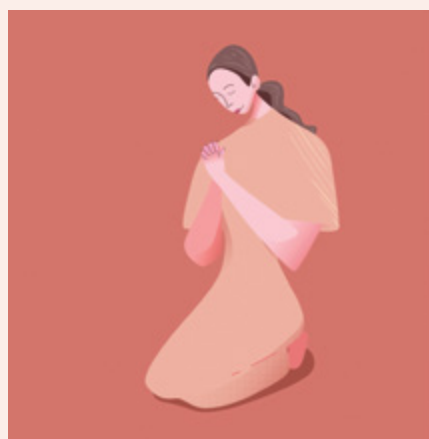
encountering certain situations. Instead, he turned to Zen Buddhism and embraced a Mindfulness practice. However, as God obviously has a great sense of humor, the young man fell in love with a young Orthodox Jewish woman... When they began dating, the man was once again irritated by the woman constantly seeking opportunities to recite all sorts of blessings. "Here we go with the obsessive-compulsive rituals again!" he thought... But then he was hit by a realization. What does the practice of reciting blessings over foods, events and experiences (like seeing a rainbow, or hearing good news) offer us? Is this not simply "being intensely aware of what you are sensing and feeling at the moment?" Is it not a form of Mindfulness? The same can be said for the Buddhist practice of chanting, for instance, which is very similar to the Hassidic practice of singing *niggunim*—wordless melodies. Does repeating the syllable "Om" make you "Spiritual" but singing "yay dai dai" make you "religious"?

Michael Gordon wonders if it is "provocative and heretical" to look for spiritual answers in Eastern traditions. I am not sure if I know enough about Buddhism to figure out if there are Halakhically problematic aspects in them. (Is it a worship of other deities or more of a philosophy, like many "JuBus" claim? I really do not know.) But I would advise any spiritual seeker to start by looking closer to home. You may be surprised at what you may find there.



A classic example is the ever-so-popular concept of Mindfulness—a type of meditation common in Buddhist and Hindu practice, which involves "being intensely aware of what you are sensing and feeling at the moment, without interpretation or judgement." Mental health practitioners sing the technique's praises and show plenty of evidence of how effective it is when it comes to treating anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and even hypertension. But do we really have to look elsewhere to find this concept, or was it—in the words of author Sarah Hurwitz—here all along?

My teacher, Rabbi Marcia Prager, tells a story about a man she knew, who grew up in an Orthodox household and angrily left Judaism as a young man, as he could not find any value in what he described as "obsessive-compulsive rituals." He was particularly peeved by the religious requirement to say a blessing before consuming any type of food or when



we can plumb the depths and open to unbounded presence. The voice of Adonai is often spoken of as thunderous, shattering, majestic, yet the prophet Elijah, in his revelation at Sinai, experienced it as the still, small voice that is always present. When, in prayer, we "place ourselves before the silence of the universe" we, too, may hear the voice of God, at times thunderous, at times subtle and still.

Abraham Joshua Heschel urged us to "to transform our lives into prayers." To do this is to become vessels of kindness, rather than self-absorbed creatures driven by egotistical demands. It requires courage to see the ways in which our personal belief system revolves around the idols of I, Me, and Mine, creating suffering for ourselves and others. It's not easy to move from ego-centric concerns to living with awareness and compassion. Paying attention to the questions that arise when we stop chasing our tails is essential. The questions open us up, unlock the long-imprisoned heart.

That's the reason so many include meditation as a foundational practice: we have to sit down and shut up. We have to get out of our own way. At first, it seems impossible. Thoughts and emotions crowd in, past situations come to the fore, anxieties about the future take over,

and we're anywhere but here. What then? We simply exhale. We return to the breath, remembering the last line of Psalm 150: "Let every breath be praise of God." It's like learning an instrument; the more we do it, the more natural it becomes, and we realize that there's no need for evaluation and judgment; we can simply let go and let God in.

As a child experiencing a painful chapter in my life, I found solace in sitting very still, hands together, under a big tree. I don't know how I knew to do this, but as I sat there, the smothering emotions of anger, misery and grief evaporated. I felt the small "I" disappear and I became one with the source of being. I repeated this whenever my sense of injustice and sorrow threatened to engulf me. The more I did this natural, unnamed meditation, the more I became aware of the suffering of others. I recognized that my ability to help needed to come from a place of clarity and insight, not from views and opinions generated by fear, anger and delusion.

It's an ongoing project to see one's flaws and change habits, to notice when we're acting selfishly, and to return: *teshuvah*, as we resolve to do during the High Holy Days. In truth, every day is a holy day; every day is an opportunity to look within and return to the source of being. I love the story about the Hasidic master, Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, who startled his students by asking, "Where is God's dwelling place?" Some answered that it is in heaven. Some said that no human can know. Menahem Mendel then said, "It is wherever we will let God in."

Sherry Chayat is an authorized Zen Master and an award-winning writer and editor.



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Jewish Kids and Spirituality

The Pew Research Center's study of Jewish Americans, conducted in 2020, determined that "three-quarters of U.S. Jews say they believe in God or some spiritual force in the universe, including 26% who say they believe in 'God as described in the Bible' and about twice as many (50%) who believe in some other spiritual force. Belief in God is more widespread among Jews by religion than among Jews of no religion. But even among Jews by religion, 14% say they do not believe in any higher power or spiritual force. 44% of Jews of no religion say they do not believe in any higher power.

In this context, a recent book, *Jewish Spiritual Parenting*, acquires relevance. "Jewish spiritual parenting is raising children to have a sense that they are part of something greater and deeper, and to connect with everybody and everything with gratitude, joy and kindness," says Rabbi Paul Kipnes who, with his wife Michelle November, is the author of this guide to "Wisdom, Activities, Rituals and Prayers for Raising Children with Spiritual Balance and Emotional Wholeness."

The book is divided into sections based on specific Jewish concepts and practices such as *shutafut*, *kedoshim tiheyu*, *b'tzelem Elohim*, *shmirat haguf*, *davar acher*, *gemilut chasadim* and *simcha* (partnership, you shall be holy, in the image of God, caring for our body, another thing/alternatives, acts of lovingkindness, joy.) For the latter concept, Kipnes and November describe 14 different types of joy, to illustrate how joy lies "at the center of Jewish life." The fourteen (you will have to read the book to see how they are defined) are *simcha*, *chedva*, *ditza*, *gila*, *hana'a*, *nachas*, *osher*, *ora*, *pitzcha*, *ranan*, *rina*, *sasson*, *t'rua* and *tzahala*. The authors declare that "if we find our involvement with Judaism -- its rituals, celebrations, and customs -- to be burdensome and heavy, we have made a mistake. Jewish life is meant to be an expression of joyous living." Kipnes and November seek to enable parents to become "partners with God" in transforming children "into compassionate, loving human beings." Their book provides guidance for this partnership.

Of particular interest, since 46% of Jewish adults ages 18-29 are in interfaith marriages and so many Jewish children are raised in interfaith homes, is the section devoted to grandparenting in an interfaith context. In interfaith families, "parents do a delicate dance with and around religion," say Kipnes and November. They advise grandparents to "remember that the grandchild's parents, including the non-Jewish spouse or partner, determine the religious identity of the child." They recommend that Jewish grandparents "make sure your words and actions support this principle by showing respect for the parents' choices." They offer specific tips and advice regarding the grandparental role, including writing out your ideas for sharing



your Jewish identity with your grandchild children, pre-planning Jewish experiences, giving the gift of Jewish books, making your home a Jewish space, teaching by example and practicing what you preach.

The book ends with many specific activities for celebrating holidays, everyday events and various rituals, all with the goal of infusing them with joy. Kipnes and November emphasize that "the blessings of parenthood are infinite" and say that "we place joy and happiness among our most important Jewish spiritual parenting goals.

Because children's understanding of God varies with their age and religious traditions, the *JO* decided to do an informal poll of some Jewish children's thoughts about God. Visiting the Syracuse Hebrew Day School one morning, we asked students from kindergarten through fifth grade what they thought about God. While two older students were not convinced of God's existence, younger students had stronger convictions. "He's the strongest thing in existence, and he has the power of everything." "He's evolving. Definitely confusing. It fills my mind." "He's not a person. He's the creator of the world." "He's kind." "To me, to pray to God makes me feel special and to be a Jewish person." "He's watching over us and making sure we do good things and protecting us." "God is God and there is nothing else that can meet the expectations of God." "He's the best in the entire world." "He's the king of the universe." "God is everything. He created the world." "He helps us." "He keeps us safe." Clearly, this is a subject to which they had given some thought (although several did acknowledge having no views on the topic). Unscientific though the survey was, the responses were in line with research that shows that young children tend to have similar ideas about God, distinguishing God from humans, attributing more supernatural psychological properties than physical ones to him (never her) and appreciating divine omnipotence, omniscience and control of their lives.

Hitbodedut: An Ancient Practice for the 21st Century

We live in an age of hyper-contact. Email is too slow for us; instant messaging is passé. We use Meta, Tiktok, Instagram. We text and we tweet. But are we truly communicating in those 140 characters? What can we possibly be saying to our 1,845 friends or sharing with those millions of online followers? Who are we reaching with our blogposts? And how do we deal with the trolls? Connection in the Age of Communication, The Era of Information Overload, the Age of Post-Truth and Fake News, and the Universe of Social Media is more challenging than ever. Do we really get a chance to express ourselves adequately and wholeheartedly? And who, besides Alexa and Siri, is out there listening?

Hitbodedut is a centuries-old Jewish practice of self-seclusion, popularized by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. *Hitbodedut* can be practiced anywhere, but its preferred setting is a natural one. "When a person meditates in the fields, all the grasses join in his prayer and increase its effectiveness and power," Rabbi Nachman wrote. It may be the most transcendent form of communication ever.



Hitbodedut allows for unstructured, spontaneous and individualized prayer and meditation, a pouring out of one's heart to God. In an age when most Jews feel disconnected from their past, their institutions, their communities, their rituals and their culture, perhaps this ancient rite offers a way to reconnect—not just with God, but with themselves. Prayer originated when people poured out their hearts before God in their own words and their own language, prior to the establishment of set prayers in rabbinic times. Perhaps the 21st century is a time to return to our Jewish roots, to seek to reestablish our personal connection to a higher power, unmediated by structure or stricture, ritual or rite. Research has shown a significant positive relationship between personal prayer and perceived purpose in life. Personal prayer has been shown to be even more effective than synagogue or church attendance. Perhaps this is because personal prayer—done at night, done in solitude, done in nature, done in quiet—allows truly meaningful communication to occur.

Perhaps when everyone is on overload from the inputs of their smartphones, laptops, earbuds and twitterfeeds, it is important to take time out, to retreat to a place of seclusion and quiet and to practice what Rabbi Nachman preached: "It is good to begin your *hitbodedut* by saying: 'Start anew every day. If yesterday was good, I hope that today will be better. If yesterday wasn't the way it should have been, today is a new beginning and it will be good.'" Those are some of the most meaningful 140 characters one can ever find.

NCJW 49th Annual Hannah G. Solomon Award to Anick Sinclair

The National Council of Jewish Women, Greater Syracuse Section will present the 2024 Hannah G. Solomon Award to Anick Sinclair at a brunch on Sunday, September 22, 2024, at the Sam Pomeranz Jewish Community Center.

The Hannah G. Solomon Award is a national award presented by individual sections of NCJW. This is the 49th year of the Syracuse Hannah G. Solomon Award. The award is named for the founder of NCJW and is given to women who have demonstrated exceptional service to both the Jewish community and the community at large.

Anick Sinclair is from London and moved to Syracuse ten years ago. In the United Kingdom, she worked in marketing and copywriting and had her own baking company. Anick, her husband Jay and their three sons are members of Shaarei Torah Orthodox Congregation of Syracuse and have been actively involved in many aspects of the local community since they arrived. Anick is chair of the board of the Rabbi Jacob Epstein School of Jewish Studies and sits on the JCC board of directors. She was a member of the board of the Jewish Federation of Central New York, chaired the 2023 Campaign, created the Luminary Society, and, as a member of the Federation's *Yom HaShoah* committee, brought the Yellow Candle project to Central New York. Anick is now the Campaign Development Officer at the Federation, a role that allows her to form strong relationships and make a positive difference in the Jewish community and beyond.

Invitations will be mailed in August. The September issue of the Jewish Observer will have more information.



Lions of Judah Provide Red Bag of Courage to Israel

Israel's emergency medical services, Magen David Adom, responds to nearly five million emergency calls a year and transports more than 700,000 patients to hospitals. Magen David Adom's teams of paramedics carry Red Bags of Courage, equipped with an adult bone gun, tube regulator, asherman valve, shears, laryngoscope kit, vygon and scalpel, bandages, oxygen masks, syringes, gloves and critical medications. As they rush to an emergency, the Red Bag holds all of the essential supplies needed to save a life. With funds from two projects, last summer's Milk Bank fund and this spring's Fashion Show, the CNY pride of Lions raised enough money to donate an iconic Red Bag of Courage to Magen David Adom.



Remembering Dr. Alan Goldberg

As he was about to retire from Syracuse University's School of Education in 2006, Alan Goldberg was asked to head a new SU program in Holocaust education. As the first coordinator of the Spector Warren Fellowship program for Future Educators, Alan delved into the field enthusiastically, reading, learning and making connections. He grew and nurtured the program, secured funds to sustain it and found scholars who not only presented material but engaged with students. Finding



the right people was one of Alan's strengths. "If you don't connect with people, you can't make a difference in the world," he said. Although he has beamed widely read in the literature of the Holocaust, he did not see himself as an expert. "It's not simply learning about the Holocaust," he explained, "My job is to make sure students engage."

Alan's work impacted not only the Warren fellows and scholars, but all those who engaged with him in the study of the Holocaust. The Holocaust Museum in Houston recognized his leadership as director of the Spector/Warren Fellowship by naming the education library in the Boniuk Center for the Future of Holocaust, Human Rights and Genocide Studies in his honor. He was honored by InterFaith Works as a person who "advocated for equity, educated youth, broke barriers, crossed divides and advanced the community through innovative programs and projects."

Alan also chaired the Federation's *Yom HaShoah* Commemoration committee and annually organized a solemn and meaningful program. Alan emphasized that "memory without action does not honor those who perished. We owe them a commitment to stand up against intolerance and injustice everywhere, always cherishing the dignity of every human being." Alan believed that we as a community and society have come a long way toward preventing history from repeating, but that there is still much work to do toward tolerance, respect and understanding. He shall be sorely missed.

Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum 80th Anniversary

The Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum is holding a special series of events from August 2 to 4, marking the 80th anniversary of the arrival of nearly 1,000 European Holocaust refugees at Fort Ontario in Oswego. The Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter was the only shelter for Holocaust victims in the United States during World War II. It opened its doors on August 5, 1944, welcoming 982 Holocaust refugees as part of a special initiative led by President Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. These refugees, selected for their potential to contribute to the camp's operations, embarked on a challenging two-week journey aboard the USS Henry Gibbs, arriving to a bittersweet reception marked by both freedom and confinement. Despite initial hardships, the refugees integrated into the Oswego community, forging bonds that transcended barriers of fear and prejudice. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to the camp highlighted the significance of this unique sanctuary.

Events open to the public will take place on August 3 according to the following schedule:

11 am to 4:30 pm: Free admission to Safe Haven, including short tours of refugee sites.

1 to 4 pm: Conversations with authors at the Lake Ontario Event and Conference Center.

1 to 2 pm: Local author Anne Allen will sign her book *Holocaust Refugees in Oswego: From Nazi Europe to Lake Ontario*.

2 to 3 pm: Fort Ontario Site Manager Paul Lear will present a history of Fort Ontario and the Emergency Refugee Shelter.

3 to 4:30 pm: Historian Rebecca Erbeling invites refugee families to share their stories.

5:30 to 8 pm: 80th Anniversary Commemoration Buffet Dinner and Speakers Event at the Lake Ontario Event and Conference Center. Reservations required. Membership with Safe Haven is required to attend.

Founded in 1989, the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the history of the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter. The museum, located in the old Army Guardhouse on the Fort Ontario Military Reservation National Register District, opened to the public on October 6, 2002. It features exhibits, artifacts, photographs, artwork and videos related to the shelter.

For sponsorship opportunities or to make a bequest, please contact Judy Rapaport at jcrap53@gmail.com. For more information, visit www.safehavenmuseum.com.

Jewish Pitch a Friend: A Fun Twist on Modern Dating

by Yolanda Febles

Finding a good date these days can feel like searching for a needle in a haystack. Between endless swiping, awkward small talk and lackluster coffee dates, the struggle is real for singles these days, says CBS-CS's Arel Moodie, reflecting on the complaints he hears from his single friends. That's why, when the idea of a unique dating event, Jewish Pitch a Friend at CBS-CS was brought to Arel's attention, he decided to help organize it. Jewish Pitch a Friend is designed to help Jewish singles find a potential match through the voices of those who know them best.



The concept is simple: friends and family members create a 3-5 minute PowerPoint presentation highlighting why their single friend is a catch. This event, set against the backdrop of *Tu B'Av*, the Jewish holiday of love, offers a fun, low-pressure way to meet new people and maybe even find a *b'shert* (destiny or soulmate).

Presenters take turns pitching with slides, similar to a work PowerPoint presentation, sharing their friends' best qualities with photos, videos, entertaining stories and fun facts to a mostly single audience. Instead of the pressure of self-promotion, participants can relax and allow their loved ones to do the talking for them. At the end of the evening, any singles interested in a pitched participant can exchange contact information.

Attendees will also have an opportunity to enjoy delicious appetizers, mingle and make connections. Jewish Pitch a Friend is inclusive and welcoming, open to all singles over 21, and LGBTQIA+ friendly. It's not just for those looking for love; friends and family members are encouraged to attend and support their friends.

Jewish Pitch a Friend is scheduled for August 18 at CBS-CS. To learn more information, including how to apply to present and how to RSVP, visit www.tinyurl.com/jewishpitchafriend.

Geddes Federal Celebrates 75 Years of Serving the Community

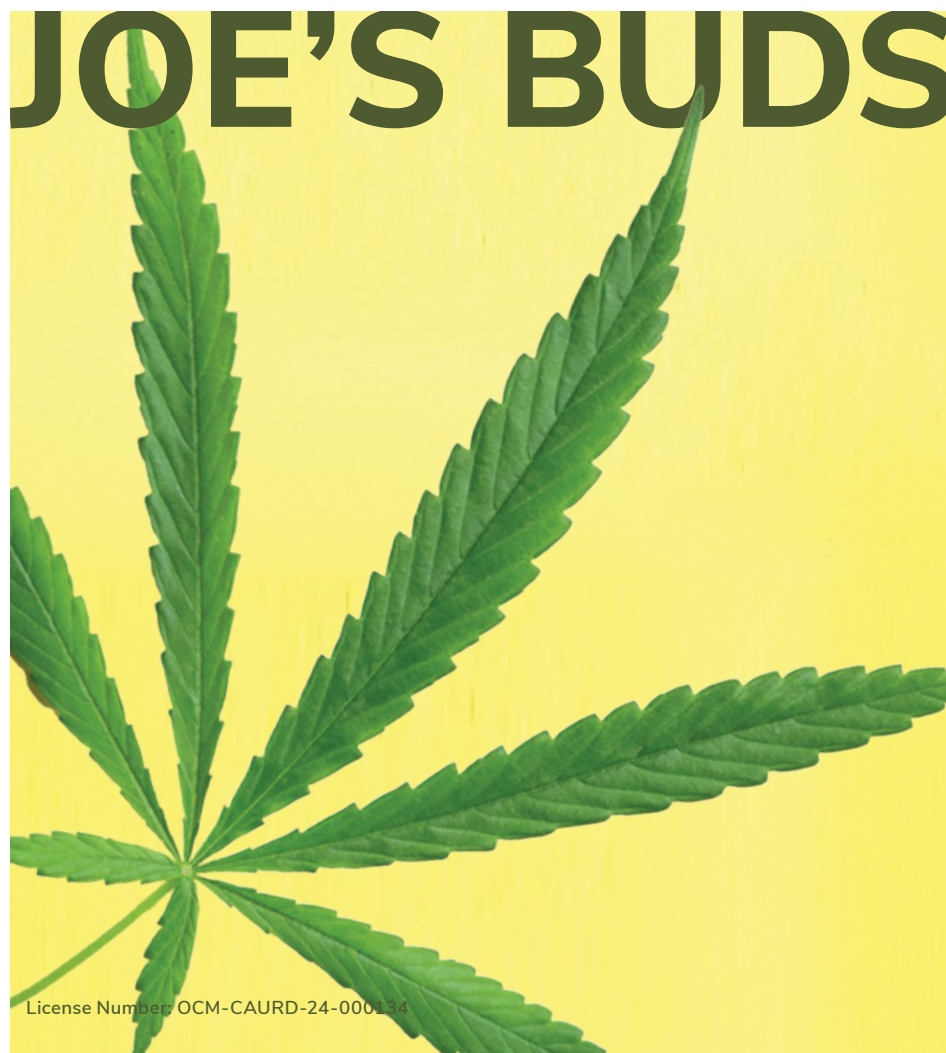
Geddes Savings and Loan Association opened its doors on April 13, 1949 at 1705 Milton Avenue in Solvay with \$36,000 in assets. Its president was Daniel F. Mathews. Seventy-five years later, Geddes Federal has locations in Westvale Plaza in Syracuse and Limestone Commons in Manlius and over \$651 million in assets. Daniel F. Mathews III, its current board chair, says, "We continue to embrace and invest in the communities we serve and look forward to continuing to do so for another 75 years."



Geddes contributes to the community in which they live and work every day. Their employees are active in numerous not-for-profit activities and serve on boards that have impacted many lives over the years. Geddes has been a loyal advertiser in the *Jewish Observer*. Rabbi Rapoport, director of Chabad of CNY and a long-time customer of Geddes, says, "I have had a relationship with Geddes Federal for over 30 years, both as the director of Chabad and as a personal customer. From my first contact with Geddes to my continued association over these many years, I have had the pleasure of working with incredible people. They care about you as a person and go out of their way to help you."

Geddes president Brian DuMond stated, "As we celebrate our 75th Anniversary I am forever grateful to our customers, our employees and board of directors who have contributed to our success and made us who we are today. The future for Geddes Savings and Loan Association continues to be strong, and we are committed to remaining uniquely local."

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Mulchathon at Menorah Park



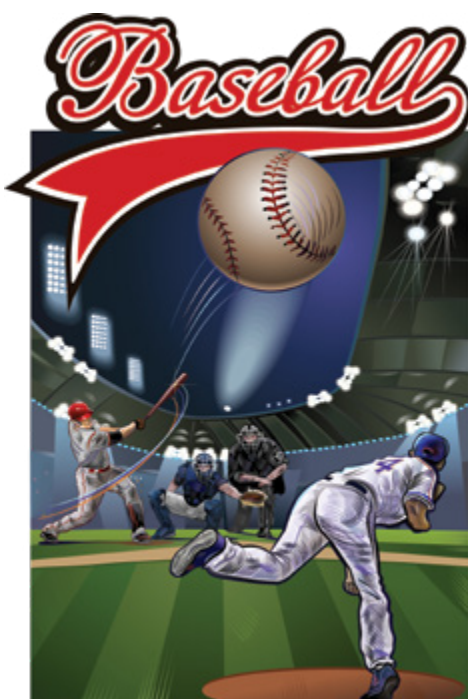
Dr. Joby Swerdlow and Friends, extraordinary gardeners, held a mulchathon at the Butterfly/Pollinator Garden being created at Menorah Park as part of the Federation's Holstein-funded Butterfly Project in association with the Syracuse Hebrew Day School. The two-inch-deep mulch encircled bluestem goldenrods, catnip, redbud and native grasses. The garden, where a hummingbird was recently spotted, contains perennials and tall zinnias Joby grew from seed. Monardas and zinnias are starting to develop flower buds and verbenas bonariensis will soon be planted next to the zinnias to serve as butterfly magnets. Joby noted that Mother Nature provided a few catnip and native aster or erygium seedlings to the mix, maybe "planted" by birds flying overhead.

Let's Play Ball!

by Sonali McIntyre

Baseball is a time-honored pastime, a way to bring people together, an experience of fun and excitement. Temple Concord and Temple Adath Yeshurun are pleased to partner to host Baseball Night on Tuesday, August 6. The Syracuse Mets face off against the Worcester Red Sox at 6:30 pm at NBT Bank Stadium. The group will be on the 3rd base patio.

Temple Concord and Temple Adath Yeshurun recently began sharing space at 450 Kimber Road. Baseball Night is one of many events the two shuls look forward to hosting together as friends and neighbors. Diane Sacks, executive director of Temple Concord, commented, "Baseball Night is always a fun social gathering which we, at Temple Concord, look forward to attending every year. This year, the event is jointly hosted by Temple Concord and our neighbors and friends, Temple Adath Yeshurun. We, at Temple Concord, are looking forward to meeting more of our



TAY friends. We're all part of the Syracuse community and it will be great to get to know one another. We are excited to have this opportunity to come together and have fun!"

All are welcome to participate in Baseball Night. Tickets are \$45 for ages 13 and older; \$20 for ages 6 to 12; and \$10 for ages 3 to 5. Cost includes admission to the game, as well as dinner, snacks, water, and soda. Registration is required by August 1. **To register, visit <https://www.templeconcord.org/event/tc--syracuse-mets-vs-worcester-red-sox.html>.**

Hava Nagrilla BBQ and Shabbat Service

by Sonali McIntyre

Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas, Temple Adath Yeshurun and Temple Concord are excited to join together for an end of summer meal and evening service—*Hava Nagrilla BBQ and Kabbalat Shabbat Service*. The event will be on Friday, August 23, at 450 Kimber Road, Syracuse. Dinner will be served at 6:00 pm. The musical Kabbalat Shabbat service begins at 6:45 pm and will be led by the clergy from all three congregations—Cantor Kari Eglash, Rabbi Ilan Emanuel, Cantor Esa Jaffe, Rabbi Moshe Saks and Rabbi Oren Steinitz.

Alicia Gross, executive director of Temple Adath Yeshurun, commented, "We are excited to host all three temples for Hava Nagrilla for the first time since 2018. We look forward to sharing a delicious dinner and what will no doubt be an uplifting experience led by all of the clergy."

The menu will be burgers, hot dogs, salt potatoes, corn on the cob, coleslaw and more. Vegetarian options will be available as well. The community is invited to participate in this event. Registration is required. The event costs \$10 per person, \$36 maximum per household, and no charge for children 5 and younger.



To register, please visit www.adath.org/hava-nagrilla by Tuesday, August 20. For more information, contact the Temple Office at 315-445-0002 or email info@adath.org.



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Youth Athletics at the JCC

by Carlett Spike

The JCC's exciting Youth Athletics program offers children the opportunity to enjoy a fun-filled fall. These classes provide numerous benefits, from improving health and fitness to forming new social connections. Classes are open to the entire community and begin Monday, September 9. Classes cater to children from preschool age through school age, and convenient before-class care options are available. Transportation is also available for children in the F-M schools, all public schools within the Jamesville-DeWitt school district, and the Ed Smith School. "Sports offer children incredibly valuable lessons and opportunities to grow," said Sherri Lamanna, director of gymnastics, dance and physical education for the Early Childhood Development Program (ECDP). "It helps them develop organization skills, teaches them how to stick to schedules, fosters sportsmanship and so much more."



Youth Athletics offerings include:

Gymnastics: Children of all levels are welcome to learn the foundations of gymnastics, including floor, beam, bar, and vault. For more advanced gymnasts, the JCC also offers Team/Pre-Team Gymnastics which athletes are required to try out for or gain approval from a coach to join. The team competes against other local programs.

Ninja Warrior: Like the popular competition show,

Ninja Warrior classes put children's skills to the test through the JCC's obstacle course. Participants will work on their strength, agility and problem-solving by jumping, swinging, climbing and more.

Karate: Children will kick into action in this program by learning the beginning ranks of CNY Karate Goju Ryu style. Offering a mix of hard and soft techniques, these karate classes



allow children to work on their fine motor skills and self-discipline.

Dance Program: Children of all ages can choose from a variety of dance classes including ballet, tap, jazz and pre-ballet, for the youngest dancers. Dance classes allow children to express themselves in a unique way while working on flexibility, strength and coordination.

Tumbling Tots: Tumbling Tots is the JCC's pre-gymnastics class for 3-year-olds. Children learn the basics of beam, bars and tumble tracks.

Rookie Sports: Fun and sportsmanship are at the center of Rookie Sports. Children enhance their fine motor skills by practicing throwing, catching, kicking and running.

For more on Youth Athletics, contact Sherri Lamanna at slamanna@jccsy.org or 315-445-2040 x126.

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JCC Holds 161st Annual Meeting and Gala

by Erin Hart

The Jewish community came out in record-breaking numbers for the Sam Pomeranz Jewish Community Center of Syracuse as they held their 161st Annual Meeting and Gala presented by the Wladis Family. More than 250 community members gathered at the historical Palladian Hall on Sunday, June 2 in support of the JCC and to honor those who have been longtime supporters of the JCC and the greater Jewish community in Syracuse.

“Palladian Hall is absolutely breathtaking,” says JCC Executive Director, Marci Erlebacher. “The room looked beautiful, and we have received nothing but positive feedback on this new venue. We will definitely be back in the future.”

The day began in the upper mezzanine overlooking the main ballroom. Guests were offered the opportunity to mingle while enjoying an assortment of appetizers and cocktails. Brunch was later served on the main floor of Palladian Hall by Essen New York Deli of Brooklyn. Yitzy and his team served up an amazing spread, offering everything one could think of in a true New York City Deli Experience.

Upon the conclusion of brunch, the business portion of the meeting began. The JCC recognized all outgoing committee members, new officers to the board were sworn in, and six community members – Kathleen Davis, Cantor Esa and Chaim Jaffe, Ellen and Howard Weinstein and Leah Goldberg – were honored for their service, dedication and contributions to the JCC. The JCC continued the tradition of a video highlighting this year’s honorees. This year’s video presentation was directed by Stephen Long of Upstate Down Video Productions.

Kathleen Davis received this year’s Kovod award, which signifies honor and importance and is given to a community member who has taken an active and outstanding role in events and programs. Kathleen has been an avid volunteer and supporter at the JCC since joining the board in 2017. She has devoted much of her time these past few years to serving on various committees within the organization and developed strong bonds within the community.

Cantor Esa and Chaim Jaffe received the Kovod Gadol award, which means great honor, and is given to community members who demonstrate extraordinary commitment, energy and loyalty to the JCC and the greater community. Cantor Esa and Chaim have been longtime and active supporters of the greater

Jewish community. Both have played pivotal roles within the JCC and greater Jewish community being involved with many different organizations as well as Temple Adath Yeshurun. They have both demonstrated a tremendous amount of leadership and support over the years.

Ellen and Howard Weinstein received this year’s Hall of Fame award, which is given to individuals who have dedicated themselves to the Syracuse Jewish community and to the advancement of the JCC. Ellen and Howard have been an integral part of the Jewish community in Syracuse since they moved here in 1978. They are both active with many organizations, both Jewish and

non-Jewish. They have a passion for being involved in all aspects of Judaism and have devoted their time to the entire Jewish community in Syracuse.

Leah Goldberg received the final award of the afternoon, the Leslie Award. The Leslie Award recognizes a younger up-and-coming professional within the local Jewish community for their outstanding commitment and service to the JCC and the local community, qualities which the award’s namesake, Leslie London Neulander, personified through her many volunteer pursuits. Leah serves on many different committees planning various events and activities for the

entire community. “She has a passion and dedication to the Jewish community that is unparalleled and we are looking forward to many more great things in the future,” said Marci Erlebacher.

Erlebacher noted that “the JCC’s Annual Meeting & Gala is the organization’s largest fundraiser of the year. Without this event and without the generosity of our community we would not be able to award as many scholarships as we do each year. We thank you tremendously for your support.”

For the complete album of images from this year’s event, please visit jccsy.org/gala.



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Soldiers, Farms, Bomb Shelters, Guns, Remember, Unforgivable

by Jef Snider

I spent a week in Israel as a volunteer helping to fix up some of the damage from October 7. I worked one morning at Kibbutz Sufa, south of Sderot and right across the border from Rafah. The first thing I noticed as our group walked from the minibus to the kibbutz was the sound of explosions. We were very close to Rafah. The consensus was that we were listening to artillery fire. Helicopters were seen overhead. Later, rapid fire small arms were heard. We ignored it all and just did our work, but the explosions continued all day on that first day.

As I traveled south, I saw many soldiers. I was in a war zone. My first impressions came as I exited the train at Ashkelon. At least two thirds of the passengers were soldiers, returning to duty after Shabbat or just reporting for duty. Men and women of all races and skin tones, many carrying their M16s, flooded from the train. They were mostly young, and some very young. Looking at the faces, it was obvious—Israel is a multi-racial country. Jews are not white.

I saw farmland on both sides from the train to Ashkelon and then the bus to Sderot. I was told that 70% of Israel's agricultural products come from the area south of Tel Aviv and east of Gaza. I believe it. We saw fields and orchards everywhere we went. I wonder who is going to do the labor on these farms now that Arabs from Gaza are no longer available as workers? Do Arabs farm? I was told by one person that Arabs don't farm; it is not a part of their culture. I was told that there were no farms in Gaza, not even a vegetable garden. Is this one reason why they are totally dependent on outside aid? Can this be true? I don't know. What is known to be true is that when the Israelis left Gaza in 2005, they left farms and greenhouses behind. The greenhouses were destroyed by jubilant Arabs celebrating the Israeli withdrawal. They were never rebuilt.

Our group was supported by the organization *Livnot U'Lehibanot* which means "To Build and To Rebuild." We were needed to do some real work. The first kibbutz we visited had been attacked by terrorists and then occupied as a base by the army. Our work cleaning up the kindergarten and other school properties was necessary so that returning kibbutz members would find their school ready to go.

Seeing bomb shelters everywhere, at

every bus stop, in every home and on practically every street in Sderot told me that the people here have been living under the threat of missile attacks for years. At most, residents would have a few seconds of warning before missiles hit. Israel should never have allowed this situation to exist here or in the north in the first place. What a way to live. I saw bomb shelters on children's playgrounds doing double duty as playground attractions. The residents of the kibbutzim attacked near Gaza have truly been terrorized and traumatized. In that sense, Hamas succeeded in a way which cannot be denied. Many people are not comfortable returning to their homes. Three people I met told me, "The army has failed us. I no longer trust the army." The people of Israel are still incredibly proud of their army, but they realize that the army and all their high-tech protections have not been enough to prevent disaster. Real protection will come with a destruction of Hamas and a restart of the relationship with Palestinians and their descendants.

More than one Israeli I met from the area near Gaza planned to keep guns in the house when they return. In the past, Israelis have lived with reassurances from the Army: "We will be there. We will protect you." On October 7 they learned that handguns are no protection from men armed with high powered weapons, and the army may not get there fast enough. With the failure of that protection, more Israelis are looking to protect themselves. In the elevator one morning at a hotel in Tel Aviv, a man and his wife got



on the elevator in their bathing suits. The man carried an M16 on a strap across his back. Another man walked by me on the way to breakfast. His handgun was visible tucked into his pants. Why do I react so calmly to these people carrying weapons here in Israel but not in the United States? I do not feel threatened. In fact, I feel safer. I have to think about the difference at home, where I would not tolerate openly carried firearms by civilians.

Our group stayed in a private home in Sderot. Shiran, the owner of the home, cannot stand to live there anymore. She lost her best friend in a horrible, violent and brutal manner on October 7: the woman was shot down in front of her 7-year-old daughter. The young girl and her sister had to hide in a car from the terrorists for hours until they could be rescued. Once rescued and safe, the 7-year-old told her grandmother, "Don't try to look for mommy. She is dead. I saw it." Shiran told us, "I am broken." Listening to her, I could hear her depression and her PTSD. It was hard to watch.

Israelis will not forget what happened.

In a very Jewish expression of the reaction to trauma, Israelis have begun to memorialize the events of October 7, starting with the small individual memorials which dot the roads along the border with Gaza. The memorial at the site of the Nova Festival where over 350 people were killed is good example of memorializing the victims. Planting a tree for each person who was killed was a beautiful idea. That memorial is combined with a compassion and concern for the hostages that is powerfully displayed as well. A tree for each person who was killed. The trees will grow into a grove. Another memorial. The sign out front said, "The Burnt Vehicles Compound consists of 1,560 vehicles evacuated from the Gaza Envelope's roads and communities in the weeks following the surprise attack on the morning of Simchat Torah, October 7, 2023." What we saw there was visible proof of what happened. A sign read, "Remember!"

Workers used to come from Gaza into Israel to make money. They had jobs. They got medical care. I asked the director of first response services at Moshav Yahimi: "Will you ever accept Arab workers here again?" His answer, "No. Never. Not even one. What they did was unforgivable."

Dr. Jeffrey Snider is a retired internist living in Jamesville.

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ALAN DAVID GOLDBERG

June 1, 2024

Alan David Goldberg, 90, died on June 1 at Inova Hospital in Alexandria, VA. Born in Hartford, CT on December 14, 1933 to Herman and Helen Goldberg, he had been a resident of Syracuse since 1967. He was a graduate of Yale and received a master's degree from Wesleyan University and his PhD from Michigan State University. Alan was a respected professor of counseling and counselor education at Syracuse University until retiring.

He was a lifetime member of Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas. He was a member of the board of the Jewish Federation of Central New York, an honoree of Interfaith Works, a member of the board of Safe Haven, former president of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision and he spearheaded the creation of the Holocaust and Genocide Education initiative at Syracuse University, which included the Spector-Warren Fellowship for future educators. Alan was honored to have received the Esther and Joseph Roth Community Leadership award and the Federation President's award for dedicated service to the Jewish community.

His beloved wife Dottie passed away in March of 2020. His family includes his children Lisa (David) Willsey, Cindi Goldberg and Adam Goldberg and grandchildren Jeffrey, Daniel, and Mitchell.

Contributions in Alan's memory may be made to the congregation, the Genocide Studies Program at Syracuse University or The Spector Family Holocaust Education Fund and Spector-Warren Fellowship at Syracuse University.

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AARON BEN EZRA

June 5, 2024

Aaron Ben Ezra, age 70, passed away at his home in Canastota on June 5, after years struggling with serious health problems.

Born in Philadelphia, PA, April 15, 1954, Aaron was the eldest of three children born to Hilda Fisher Ben Ezra and Isaac Ben Ezra. Aaron was raised in Levittown, PA and attended Neshaminy High School. The following year, he traveled throughout much of Europe and lived on a kibbutz in Israel. Upon his return to the U.S., he attended the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and SUNY-Binghamton. Aaron then moved to Syracuse. Over 48 years, he made his home in Syracuse, Dewitt, Cazenovia, Earlville and Canastota.

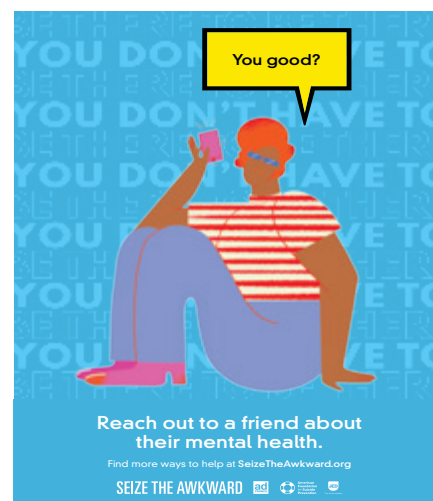
Aaron worked in retail, social services and insurance sales over his lifetime. He enjoyed playing his guitars, listening to music, swimming, walking in nature, following domestic and international news, socializing and celebrating the Jewish holidays with friends and fellow congregants. He participated in Orthodox Jewish religious services. He loved living in small, quiet communities and taking long rides in the countryside.

Aaron is survived by his sister Amy Ben Ezra and her husband Farnsworth Lobenstine, his sister Lucille Ben Ezra, nephews David and Alex and nieces Lev and Sara, several cousins and several longtime friends. He was predeceased by his parents Isaac and Hilda Ben Ezra; maternal grandparents Louis and Sara Fisher, paternal grandparents Victor and Bella Ben Ezra and dear friends Eric Gould, Dan Hirschbach and Bernhard Kramarsky.

While Aaron had many struggles throughout his life, he was an intelligent, kind and gentle soul who was generous to others during hard times. He had deep friendships that endured for many years. He loved sending beautiful Shabbos greetings and artwork to friends and family, as well as gifts of honey for Rosh Hashanah.

The family would like to thank Joel Friedman of Birnbaum Funeral Service, Rabbi Rapoport of Chabad Lubavitch and Kimberly Cellini of Stoneleigh Apartments for their kind and expert help during this difficult time.

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DANIEL SZAFRAN

June 7, 2024

Daniel Szafran passed away peacefully at his home in Canton on June 7 with his family by his side. He had survived World War II and the Holocaust, surviving Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen and the Death March. He emigrated to Palestine and fought in Israel's War of Independence and in the Sinai Campaign of 1956.

He married Simona Dulzer in 1953. Zvi was born in 1955 and Drorit in 1957. They came to the United States in 1959 and lived in Syracuse, where he worked at several jobs, the last at Greyhound as a master mechanic. When Zvi became President at SUNY Canton, Daniel and Simona would stay in Canton the warmer half of the year, going to Las Vegas in the winter. One of their proudest moments was when they danced at Zvi's inauguration. Another came when Daniel was awarded a Doctorate by Touro University, Nevada, honoris causa.

After his beloved Simona passed away, Daniel came to Canton, where he lived with Zvi and Jill for the past five years or so. Daniel was an extraordinary man, full of love and compassion despite all he had gone through. He spoke all over the country about his experiences, loved playing and watching basketball and was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather and friend. His son said, "Aba, you're together at peace with your beloved Simona and Mark now. We'll miss you until we are rejoined when our time comes."

The traditional prayer for those who passed away is El Malei Rachamim, God Full of Mercy:

God who is full of mercy and dwells on high, provide a true rest on the wings of the Divine Presence amongst the holy and pure ones who shine as brightly as the brilliance of the sky to the soul of Daniel Szafran who has gone on to his eternity, the Garden of Eden will be his resting place. We beseech the Merciful One to shade him forever with divine wings, and to bind his soul up in the bonds of life. The Lord is his heritage, and he shall rest peacefully on his bed. And let us say, Amen.

Contributions in Daniel's memory may be made to the Simona Szafran fund at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School or to the Mark Szafran Endowment at SUNY Canton.

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KATHERINE A. SCOTT

June 16, 2024

Katherine A. Scott, 66, of Baldwinsville, NY passed away peacefully surrounded by her family on Sunday, June 16. Katherine was born in Miami, FL to Edward A. and Audrey R. (Roubicek) Stern.

Kathy worked with the Onondaga County Department of Social Services for 42 years. She was a member of Temple Concord and a devoted volunteer with On Point for College. Kathy loved everything about nature, especially time spent in her beautiful gardens and sunsets over the ocean. She was predeceased by her father, Edward A. Stern.

Surviving to cherish Kathy's memory are her husband, John M. Scott of 42 years; three daughters, Sarah (Sean) Beck of Baldwinsville, NY, Laura Scott of Syracuse, NY and Julia Scott of Syracuse, NY; a sister, Susan Stern of Charlotte, NC; her mother, Audrey R. Stern of Michigan; three grandchildren, Hannah, Julian and Coen; her entire cherished Scott family and several close friends she considered family.

Contributions may be made to On Point for College, Education Services, 448 West Onondaga St., Syracuse, NY 13202.



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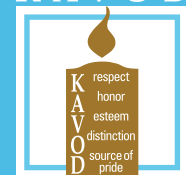
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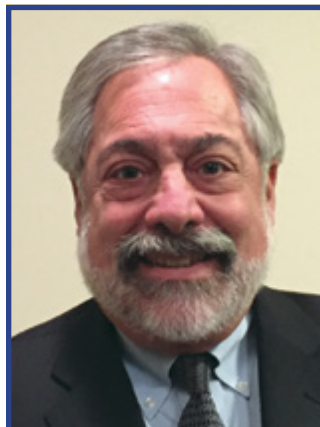
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For more information, please contact Michael Balanoff
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