

» G'mar Chatima Tova!

# Jewish Observer

of Central New York

A publication of the Jewish Federation of Central New York

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## Why Do We Pray?



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# October 2025

## From the Editor



Barbara Davis

Yom Kippur this year falls on October 1. Yom Kippur is the second most widely observed Jewish holiday (after Passover) and it is the day when Jews spend the most time in their shuls, synagogues or temples, immersed in prayer. But what does it mean when we pray? Do we believe in the power of prayer? There's a Jewish joke (Isn't there always a Jewish joke?) that illustrates this conundrum:

*Once in the old country, it hadn't rained for months. Hunger was setting in, and the villagers were getting desperate.*

*The Rabbi decreed that all the men should pray for rain on a nearby mountaintop.*

*They did so and... no rain.*

*They resolved to climb the mountain again the following day and bring their wives and children.*

*They did and... still no rain.*

*The following day they brought the old, the sick, and the babies.*

*Still no rain.*

*Next day, they brought along every chicken, goat, horse, and donkey in the village.*

*Still nothing.*

*The Rabbi raised his eyes to the sky and said, "Why, God?! Why don't you hear our prayers?!"*

*A voice from Heaven answered, "BECAUSE YOU DO NOT BELIEVE IN PRAYER!"*

*"Why do you say we don't believe?"*

**"BECAUSE NOBODY BROUGHT AN UMBRELLA!"**

Prayer is a nearly universal practice among religious traditions, a means of connecting with the divine, expressing gratitude, seeking guidance, or reflecting on life's mysteries. In Judaism, prayer serves all of these purposes—but with particular characteristics that set it apart from other faith traditions. Jewish prayer is rooted in history, structure, communal responsibility, and covenant. While many religions incorporate prayer into daily life, the Jewish approach is shaped by a distinctive worldview, language, and rhythm that reflects the Jewish people's unique relationship with God and one another.

So it seemed appropriate this month to delve into Jewish prayer. In 2025, Jewish leaders, writers, and thinkers increasingly called for a renewed emphasis on prayer, viewing it as both a personal lifeline and a communal obligation in times of crisis. The tragedies and challenges of recent years, especially the rise in antisemitism and the trauma of October 7, led to a surge in spiritual reflection. But has this translated into a measurable increase in Jewish prayer? The answer is complex. While the rhetoric surrounding the need for prayer has grown more intense and impassioned, empirical data suggests that actual prayer practices have not risen and may, in fact, have continued to decline.

In recent years, prominent voices in the Jewish world have urged communities to meet the moment with *tefillah*, *teshuvah*, and *tzedakah*. In an October 2024 JTA opinion piece, writer Alex Weisler argued for High Holiday services that "meet the moment" by offering space for grief, resilience, and renewed responsibility. Other commentators, such as Sara Lehmann, reflected on how

the emotional aftershocks of October 7 reinvigorated their personal connection to prayer, describing it as a spiritual lifeline and a source of stability. In spaces like the Western Wall and the Temple Mount, pilgrimage and group prayer have seen dramatic increases in attendance, suggesting a collective longing to draw closer to tradition.

But turning from narrative to numbers produces a different result. A Pew Research Center report released in early 2025 revealed that 58% of American Jews say they seldom or never pray outside of organized religious services, an increase from 45% in 2014. Only 22% reported praying daily, and just 31% said they pray weekly. These statistics point to a continued trend of disengagement from traditional religious practice. The fact is that the majority of American Jews do not pray.

Turning from the national to the local, we asked the rabbis of our four congregations "Why Do We Pray?" As always, their answers were thoughtful and incisive and are included in this issue. We also asked several students at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School and several congregants of our community synagogues why they pray. Their answers also were reflective and thoughtful. We asked Maggid Jim Brule of Temple Concord to review a new book for us, *The Potency of Prayer*. And then, because it is a new year and the 21st century and we are seeing artificial intelligence behind drone attacks, Israeli intelligence operations and even Chinese soccer, we asked Chat GPT to answer the question: Can AI pray? The answer: "AI can help you pray, but it can't pray itself—because it doesn't believe, doesn't feel, and doesn't reach beyond itself."

Not fully satisfied, we investigated a little further and wrote an article about praying with AI to accompany an essay by Michael Gordon on praying online. Extending the prayer concept, we also include an article about Rabbi Oren Steinitz's groundbreaking three volume Triennial Chumash and about an exciting community trip to Israel that is being planned and led by all four of our community's congregational rabbis. Prayer takes many forms.

At the threshold of 5786, a year that begins with marked political, economic, social and even meteorological turmoil, this moment in history is, for many, deeply unsettling. As we navigate a landscape increasingly defined by polarization, antisemitism—once considered fringe—is now disturbingly normalized. We watch as debates about Israel and Zionism too often give way to hostility toward Jews. The anxiety is real, and questions about our place in American society are once again being asked.

The American Jewish community is experiencing fragmentation and transition. Synagogues are less full and younger generations are asking whether our institutions – and even our values – speak to their lives. Even the natural world cries out, in scorching summers, uncontrollable fires, and devastating floods. Judaism teaches that we are stewards of creation, but the chaos in our environment somehow mirrors the disruption in our society.

Yom Kippur is a day of *teshuvah*, of turning. In this turbulent new year, may we have the courage to be honest with ourselves and generous with others. May we commit to building a Jewish life that is resilient, inclusive, and rooted in righteousness. And may the fast we undertake on Yom Kippur inspire us not only to seek forgiveness, but to walk in the ways of justice and kindness.

*G'mar chatimah tovah* — May you be sealed for goodness in the Book of Life.

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## MESSAGE FROM MARK SEGEL

*Federation President & CEO*



In my column last month, I set forth a five-point plan for my first year in my position as President & CEO of the Federation. All of these ideas fall under the rubric of Bringing Us Together. This month, I would like to address the first of these pillars: Youth Engagement and Leadership Development.

As the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Central New York, I'm often asked about the most critical challenges and opportunities facing our community. While there are many important issues, one stands out as the most vital for our long-term health and vitality: engaging our youth. The future of the Central New York Jewish

community isn't just about the here and now; it's about the next generation, and the one after that. It's about ensuring a vibrant, connected, and meaningful Jewish life for those who will lead us tomorrow.

Investing in youth engagement isn't a luxury—it's a necessity. We're living in a time of unprecedented social change, with young people facing unique pressures and challenges. From a mental health crisis to the rise of antisemitism, our teens and young adults need safe spaces where they can explore their identities, build supportive relationships, and find a sense of belonging. Our JCC, synagogues, and day school, and Hebrew school are uniquely positioned to provide these spaces. They offer a counterbalance to the isolating effects of modern life, creating a foundation of friendship and shared purpose.

A recent national study by the Jewish Federations of North America found that Jewish teens who consider their Jewish identity important report higher levels of overall well-being. This isn't a coincidence. When young people feel connected to something larger than themselves—to a rich history, a system of values, and a community that cares—they thrive. They develop a sense of resilience that helps them navigate the complexities of adolescence and young adulthood. In Greater Syracuse, we're fortunate to have incredible organizations like Syracuse Hillel and other local youth groups, which are already doing this vital work. They're creating environments where young people can be their authentic selves, grapple with difficult questions, and find their voice.

Our investment must be comprehensive, extending beyond just offering a handful of programs. It needs to be about building a culture of engagement that embraces young people at every stage of their lives. This starts in early childhood with our preschools and day schools, where the seeds of Jewish identity are first planted. It continues through supplementary schools and youth groups, where teens can form lasting bonds and discover the power of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) through social justice initiatives. It also extends to our college-aged students at Syracuse University, where Hillel provides a home away from home and a crucial link to Jewish life during a period of great transition.

But we can't rest on our laurels. To truly meet the needs of today's youth, we must be innovative and adaptable. This means listening to what young people are telling us they need and want. We need to create more opportunities for experiential learning, such as immersive trips to Israel, more summer camp participation, and community service projects. We must also be more intentional about nurturing Jewish Leadership among our young people, giving them a seat at the table and empowering them to shape the future of our community. This not only builds their skills but also instills a sense of ownership and responsibility.

The challenges facing our community are real, but so are our opportunities. By prioritizing and strategically investing in youth engagement, we are not just securing the future of our institutions; we are securing the future of the Jewish people in Central New York. We are making a promise to our children and grandchildren that Jewish life here will be a source of strength, joy, and meaning for generations to come.

I encourage every member of our community to join this effort. Support our local Jewish schools, camps, and youth programs. Volunteer as a mentor. Talk to the young people in your life about what being Jewish means to you. Share your stories and listen to theirs. The time for action is now. Let's work together to ensure that the next chapter of the Central New York Jewish community is our brightest yet.

# Honoring the Luminary Society

In every community, there are those whose quiet acts of generosity make everything possible. In ours, they are called the Luminary Society.

Each year, members of the Luminary Society—those who give \$6,000 or more to the Jewish Federation of Central New York's Annual Campaign—help fuel the essential work that sustains our Jewish present and strengthens our Jewish future. These generous donors are more than just contributors; they are the heartbeat of our community.



Their support ensures local Jewish education remains vibrant and accessible, sustains programs for seniors, funds scholarships for Jewish camps and trips to Israel and responds to urgent needs in Israel and around the world. Whether it's providing food to those in need, paying for security in times of danger, assisting people with disabilities or connecting our community in myriad ways, the reach of the Luminary Society is vast and profound.

On October 26, the Federation will say "thank you" to the Luminaries in a very special way. At the Syracuse Stage matinee performance of "The 39 Steps," Luminary Society members will be invited to a special

private reception where they will be recognized for their extraordinary commitment. Set against the backdrop of this clever and fast-paced theatrical experience, we will take a moment to honor something far more enduring than any performance: the power of human generosity.

Federation Campaign Chair Nan Fechner said it best: "Luminary donors don't just give. They lead. They set a standard for caring and commitment that elevates us all. They ensure that the Jewish community of Central New York doesn't just survive—it thrives."

In a time when our values, and our people, face growing challenges, it is the Luminaries who keep the lights on, the doors open, and the flame of Jewish continuity burning brightly. Their giving is not just measured in dollars, but in the lives touched, the stories written, and the future built together. Our sages taught: *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazez*—all Jews are responsible for one another. This sacred sense of mutual responsibility is the essence of the Luminary Society's mission.

To our Luminary Society, we say "Thank you." Thank you for supporting us, for investing in our shared mission, and for being the heart of our Jewish Central New York. This October, we celebrate you—not just for what you give, but for who you are.

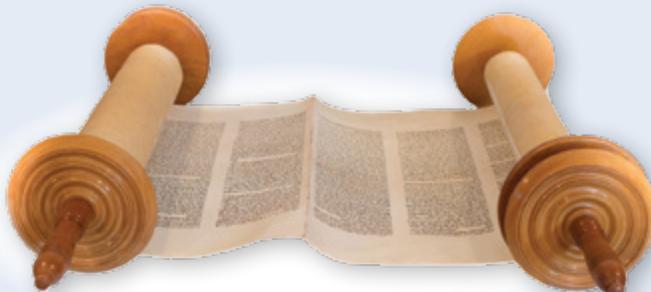
*Membership in the Luminary Society is always open. To become a Luminary, please contact Anick Sinclair at [asinclair@jewishfederationcny.org](mailto:asinclair@jewishfederationcny.org). We would love to celebrate you also.*

## ERRATA:

**Dr. Deborah Friedman and Scott Mackler are very generous supporters of the *Jewish Observer*. They were not included in the Honor Roll and the *JO* sincerely regrets the omission of their names.**

# Paying Attention to Prayer

by Rabbi Dr. Natan Levy, Campus Rabbi, Syracuse Hillel



Who is not shaken to the core by the intense cry of *Unatenah tokef* ("Let us speak of the awesomeness"), where we shout out to God on both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur: *Teshuva* (Repentance), *Tefila* (Prayer), and *Tzedakah* (giving to the poor) averts the harsh decree." It makes intuitive sense that repentance can transform our future by unlinking us to our past and our past habits. Rabbi Joseph Ber Soleivetchik taught that *teshuva* was cathartic. Quoting a Talmudic passage (*bTalmud Sanhadrin* 25b) he notes that even an inveterate pigeon-racing gambler could become a kosher court witness through *teshuva* just as soon as they would destroy their dovecots and, even alone in the dessert, never race birds again. *Teshuva* is the moment where we smash our own dovecots of old habits and choose healthy patterns of living, even alone where no one is watching. *Teshuva* is the paradigm shift of self by which we change our habits to change our destiny.

And *Tzedakah* too contains its own means to alter reality. Recent studies show that people who donate their time and money are happier and healthier. Other studies suggest that acts of charity may even confer a 'halo effect' that makes givers more attractive. *Tzedakah* averts the harsh decree right down to our biology. Our bodies are made more whole when we give of ourselves. We are, wonderfully, hard-wired to be kind to others.

And what of *Tefillah*, how do a few whispered moments before God in prayer really avert what's coming for us? The rabbis often used another word for prayer: *Avodah*, meaning service. This label links our prayer to the services of the Temple in Jerusalem. This service involved daily sacrifices of animals, grain, and oil that modulated the temple-cult rituals performed by the priests. When the temple was destroyed, the Talmudic sages morphed the services of animal slaughter into services of prayer. *Prima facie*, prayers bear little resemblance to the butchering and bbq'ing of a sheep. But on closer inspection, they do share a common trait. In a highland agrarian society, to take your sheep and wheat to the temple to be eaten by the priests and the poor was to sacrifice one's most valuable commodities. Flocks and

grain were the very source of wealth. In our own market-based society, to take oneself to the synagogue to pray is to sacrifice our most valuable commodity, our time. As Dean Brian Konkol pointed out to me, that is why they call it "paying attention." Our time, our full attention, is the most valuable element we can give away.

When we come together to pray, we are engaged in a great sacrifice of time. In effect, the act of prayer is a mimetic tool for attentiveness, for remaining fully engaged in the moment, to pray is to practice presence. And perhaps it is presence, through listening to our children, relating to our friends, turning to the stranger with their outstretched hands, all calling to us, seeking our attention, that averts the harshness of the decree. Not the decree against us, but the harsh decrees we may feel towards others. Perhaps it is the mirror neurons of our attentive and listening brains, those selfsame mirror neurons that engender feelings of love, that transform the narrow decrees we may hold against others into open vistas for a transformative new year. So while *Teshuva* removes the shackles of habits that no longer dignify us, and *Tzedakah* makes us healthier and prettier, it is through *Tefillah* that we exercise our capacity for presence and, perhaps, love.

# The Potency of Prayer

by Chaim Kramer

Reviewed by Maggid Jim Brulé



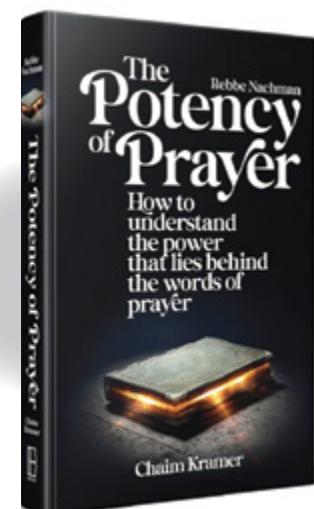
This substantial book is the result of significant effort and a truly creative soul. It is not for everyone: it adopts certain worldviews and theologies without question, along with a tightly constrained definition of "prayer." However, readers who share an appreciation of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov *zt"l* (and his disciple, Reb Noson *z"tl*), or who have an open mind and curiosity as to how to find the universe in a verse, will find this book an excellent reference worth hours of consideration.

As we learn in Kabbalah, the container is necessary to give shape and meaning to the contained. Without its banks, a river is just water spilled in every direction. The banks are what provide the river its shape and power.

So too with prayer, which Kramer has given the container of the Siddur. The reader — the traveler, the seeker — must accept this definition to fully appreciate the wisdom that has been collected here. Likewise, one must either accept or agree to playfully embrace the commentary, teachings, and *midrashim* of those who have illuminated the Written and Oral Torah, for in this embrace new insights can be achieved.

Finally, the notion that prayer is powerful — that the recitation of the Siddur in its proper fashion, at its proper times — is never questioned. What is presented is Kramer's best understanding of how to do that most effectively, how to bring full potency to those prayers.

Within this text you will find a thorough, clear, and well-organized weaving of commentary and wisdom. Each element of each prayer in the Siddur is carefully examined, elevated, and offered to us. However, the *halachah* of how and when to recite each prayer is not the main objective of the book. Instead, it is to lift the outer veils of these verses and allow the Light to shine a bit more brightly from beneath. Let me



give you an example of this process: Kramer addresses the question of why we cover our eyes when reciting the Sh'ma during *Shacharit*. He cites a riddle from the Zohar, the first line of which is *There is a beautiful maiden who has no eyes*, (Zohar II, 95a) Commentators identify this maiden as *Malkhut* (the *Shekhinah*), which the Kabbalah associates with Rachel. After exploring several interpretations that can be made from this, Kramer gives us Rebbe Nachman's understanding, which is to say that having no eyes refers to the questions which have answers that we cannot understand.

I find great beauty within the nuggets that are collected and assembled here. Much like Yitzhak Buxbaum's *zt"l* encyclopedic *Jewish Spiritual Practices*, this is a text into which you can drop yourself and, when approached with an open, curious heart, come away with new lights for the day.

# Teaching Prayer is Creating Community

by Phyllis Zames

When I was a child, I did not like to pray. I didn't mind singing, but I was suspicious of the idea that God was listening to each and every one of us. As a shy little girl, I certainly didn't want to garner any attention by singing with any emotion or volume, even when encouraged by my parents and teachers. As I grew, I understood that prayer was actually for me, and that I could sing or read or pray silently, and that what matters most is that I reflect on my life, not that I pray a certain way.

I teach prayer to the entire student body at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School and we start the year by discussing and debating two main concepts: what is prayer, and why do we do it? The answers,

which we ask and answer questions about each week all year long, lead every student to develop their own answer to the question of how to pray. As soon as a student reminds everyone that the word in Hebrew for "to pray," *l'hitzalel*, means "to reflect," it doesn't take long for students to realize that the purpose of prayer is to meaningfully take time in our lives to pause and be thankful, or curious, or yearning. Students feel the peace that comes from being together, for a common purpose, by experiencing our SHDS prayer services with their peers.

If I ask the students why we pray, their responses are all over the place: it's fun! We want to say "Thank you!" We want



to ask for a favor! We want to be close to God! When I say, "Well, we could do that at home before we come to school; why do we pray together, here in this place?" they remember: we support one another. We are a community of human beings, each with our own talents and flaws, desires and stresses, and when we come together to pray, we accept all of that. We focus on ancient words to give meaning to our current experiences.

In my class, students sit with their study-

buddy groups — multi-age groupings led by a captain who is in fourth, fifth, or sixth grade — and the older students model and guide the younger students through our services. The services are led each week by a study-buddy group, who prepares the order, tunes, and leaders of each prayer the week before. Our students discuss how to make our services feel significant to the leaders as well as the congregation.

At the end of every service, we take five minutes to pay compliments to the study-buddy group that led the service. One of our first graders this year gave the same compliment every single week, and it didn't take long before the entire student body began reciting with her: "That was so much fun, I want to do it again!"



## The Unique Triennial Chumash Compiled by Rabbi Steinitz

by Sonali McIntyre

Last summer, I had the opportunity and privilege to edit a series of books. The series is filled with action, adventure, love, life, death, and compassion. The title? *The Triennial Chumash*.

Compiled by Rabbi Dr. Oren Steinitz, this series is the first of its kind. It clearly organizes and presents Torah readings in a user-friendly format. Each book in the three-volume series clearly delineates each week's reading. This makes it a more accessible, engaging, and practical resource for Torah study and *kri'at haTorah* (public reading) in communities following the triennial cycle, such as the Conservative Movement. Each volume of *The Triennial Chumash* corresponds to one of the three years in the cycle, ensuring easy reference and accurate reading.

But what is a triennial cycle? It is a division of the 54 parshiot (Torah portions) into thirds. According to Rabbi Paul Steinberg's article, "Why Jews Read Torah on a Yearly Cycle," a congregation can be reading within the same portion as those who follow the annual cycle, but



will only read one-third of each portion per year. In addition, this pattern enables the congregation to read from Genesis through Deuteronomy each year, providing for an annual celebration of Simchat Torah.

Rabbi Steinitz, of Congregation Beth Shalom-Chevra Shas commented, "Most Conservative synagogues, including CBS-CS and

TAY, have been using the triennial Torah cycle for decades. This is a practice meant to shorten the Shabbat Torah service and divide the weekly parshiot into smaller sections. This practice encourages more people to learn to chant Torah, as the shorter aliyot are easier to learn."

The series also accounts for double parshiot (like Vayakhel-Pekudei or Tazria-Metzora), as well as special maftirs for holidays and special occasions (for example Shabbat Shekalim or the Hanukkah Maftirs for Shabbat).

While editing these books, I had to follow carefully crafted guidelines to ensure their accuracy. These guidelines are clearly defined in "A Complete Triennial System for Reading the Torah," a paper written by Rabbi Richard Eisenberg, and adopted by the Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards of The Rabbinical Assembly in 1988 and emended in 1995.

"Despite the fact that the cycle has been used for so long, current Chumashim did not reflect this practice. For the first time, *The Triennial Chumash* presents the triennial aliyot in a clear fashion, allowing cantors, baalei kri'ah, gabbaim, and – perhaps mostly – b'nai mitzvah teachers and students, to focus solely on the readings of the week,

without having to "dig" those out of a standard Chumash," stated Rabbi Steinitz.

While working at Temple Adath Yeshurun, I had to learn the ins and outs of using a luach (a Jewish calendar that combines lunar and solar calculations) to properly list weekly readings and then find the correct page numbers in the *Etz Hayim Humash* to include on the program for Shabbat services. When I first started, I had to check with the rabbis to make sure I listed everything correctly, or I would have to check Hebcal.com to ensure I had the correct chapters and verses for any given parsha. This series is a game changer. The time saved by utilizing one book rather than multiple sources is invaluable, especially in organizations where staff size and capacity are sometimes limited. Each volume of the series has a durable hardcover, built for frequent use and longevity.

*The Triennial Chumash* is published by Hamotzi Press, an independent publisher specializing in innovative, high-quality Jewish content. ***The full set can be purchased at hamotzipress.com.***

# Why Do We Pray?

## Our Rabbis Answer the Question: Why Do We Pray?



Rabbi Evan Shore,  
*Shaarei Torah Orthodox  
Congregation of Syracuse*

Hashem has gifted every human being with the power of speech. Prayer, *Avodat HaLev*, the service of the heart, is our opportunity to use that gift in a most meaningful way: to connect personally with our Creator. Why wouldn't I take advantage of this sacred tool to speak with Hashem in heartfelt dialogue three times a day?

For me, prayer is where my spiritual and physical existence unite. When I pray with *kavannah* intention, purpose, and emotion, I feel elevated and whole. It is a moment to thank Hashem for the gift of life itself, to ask for healing and forgiveness, peace etc., and to express my deepest hopes.

Additionally, our rabbis in the Talmud teach the concept of *Tefillah b'makom korbanot*—that prayer takes the place of the sacrificial offerings that were brought in the times of the two Holy Temples in Jerusalem. The word *korban* is often translated as “sacrifice,” but a more accurate and meaningful translation is “that which brings one close.” In that spirit, prayer today serves as a powerful means through which I can draw closer to the Creator of the world.

But perhaps the most powerful aspect of *tefillah* is its collective nature. The very same words I recite are being said by countless Jews across the globe. There is something profoundly moving and uplifting in knowing that I am part of global prayer, all turning to Hashem in unity. There is truly nothing more exhilarating than that.



Rabbi Oren Steinitz,  
*Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas*

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (of blessed memory) once wrote: “Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, or mend a broken bridge, or rebuild a ruined city; but prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will.”

To me, prayer isn’t about asking for things. It’s about humility—acknowledging that some things are beyond our control. It’s about rhythm—an anchor in our day that reminds us to pause, no matter how busy or important we think we are.

But more than anything, prayer is about God-wrestling. The very name of our people—*Yisra’el*—means “one who wrestles with God.” Prayer is our chance to engage with mystery, to take our place in the conversation between the human and the Mystery of the Universe. It’s also our opportunity to remind God that relationships go both ways. If we’re doing our part—struggling to be the best version of ourselves that we can be—then we hope and expect that God is doing the same.

Loving God “with all our heart,” as the *Sh’mah* commands, means bringing our whole selves—including our frustration and disappointment—to the conversation. As Professor Avivah Zornberg writes, “Anger is part of any real, loving relationship.” Prayer is where we say: We know the world isn’t perfect; we know that life isn’t fair—and we may accept that, but it doesn’t mean we have to like it. Sometimes, prayer is as comforting as an old sweatshirt or a bowl of chicken soup. And sometimes, it’s our chance to say to God, “I’m not mad—I’m just disappointed.”



Rabbi Ilan Emanuel  
*Temple Concord*

Prayer is an act of talking to G-d. But, in practice, it can often feel like a one-sided conversation—we talk to G-d, but we can only hope that G-d is responding. In that sense, prayer is ultimately a matter of faith. But ingrained in the Hebrew word for prayer is a more down-to-earth answer. Grammatically, the verb “to pray” in Hebrew, *l’hitpalel*, is a reflexive verb. So while we may not be sure what effect prayer has on G-d, we can focus on what effect it has on us.

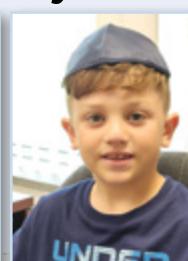
Prayer gives us a feeling of being part of something greater in facing the challenges of the world. In the face of overwhelming events, prayer does not magically fix the problems, but it reminds us we are not alone, and that connection to the divine and to community is essential to facing difficult times. And in reflecting the ideals, hopes, and aspirations of our people, prayer reminds us of what we should strive to be and what we can hope for in making the world a better place.

In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Prayer invites G-d’s presence to suffuse our spirits, G-d’s will to prevail in our lives. Prayer may not bring water to parched fields, nor mend a broken bridge, nor rebuild a ruined city. But prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, rebuild a weakened will.”



Rabbi Moshe Saks,  
*Temple Adath Yeshurun*

Prayer, for me, is both a physical and emotional experience. The images that my brain conjures up while I’m “davening” put me in touch with the past, present and future. I know that this sounds a little crazy, but I was very much influenced by my early days in Israel (in the 70s) with a group of Bobover Hasidim with whom I davened regularly. The three times I “daven” daily are the highlights of my day.



## SHDS Students Answer the Question: Why Do We Pray?

Sixth grader Yetta said that when she prays, “I think about the words. I think about the meaning. It can be personal. You can pour yourself out.” Eliana, a 5th grader, said, “I pray to strengthen my connection to God and to my community.” Fourth grader Ben said that “prayer is an important part of Judaism and I really want to make sure that I’m respectful to the religion and to God Himself.” Third grader Aria, proud of the fact that her family “loves being Jewish,” says that when she prays, “I feel like I’m closer to God.” Second grader Cason affirmed that “we pray to thank HaShem for what He does for us.” First grader Amit had a different but very beautiful perspective: “I pray to keep peace in the world.”



## Some Congregants Answer the Question: Why Do We Pray?



**Pamela Stern**, a member of Temple Concord, answers: "Prayer is a personal act of faith in God. It is a way for me to connect with God on a personal level in regard to my thoughts, feelings, and needs. Prayer has provided me solace during challenging times and provided me guidance and support. Prayer has also been a way for me to be more introspective and reflect on events in my life. It provides a path to align my life with spiritual goals and to strengthen my faith and Jewish identity. I especially value praying in my synagogue which enhances my sense of belonging to the Jewish community."

**Jonathan Levine** of Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas wrote: "When I was a child, it was the music of prayer that hooked me first. The voices of the choir on Rosh Hashanah, emerging as they did from the hidden loft above the bimah, might as well have been angels from heaven."

And who couldn't be moved when the sanctuary, usually populated with a few dozen, swelled to a thousand, all of whom joined together in one swell of sound for the kaddish before musaf on the High Holidays? When I grew into a young man, I convinced myself that I was praying in order to re-align myself with the perfection of ideals that we ascribe to God: justice and righteousness, compassion and mercy. I felt that working through the liturgy helped me see that my workaday concerns were not necessarily the ones that merited my biggest effort, but rather that focusing on higher ideals could help me be the best me. Though I haven't given up on those pulls to prayer, in middle age I find a different aspect of prayer most appealing. I notice that my worries and fears are hardly changed from those of the authors of antiquity whose words we find in the siddur. We live our entire lives suspended by a thread, such that if one inner valve fails to open or close, we could be snuffed out in an instant. The anonymous writer of the blessing 'u'mafli la'asot' felt this centuries ago. How comforting to know that this insecurity of mine has been shared by generations of Jews. Likewise the prayer recited each morning that begins, "Master of the Universe! We plead before you not because of any merit of ours, but rather on Your great mercy." In my youth, I used to think people got what they deserved, but then I had children. Now I know that blessings come out of all proportion to anything we have somehow earned. I recognize echoes of my own fortune in this prayer, and I hear the prayer's words coaxing me to live in a way that reflects this gratitude, and with sympathy for those whose wheels of fortune have taken an extra half-turn.



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# Praying On-line



By Michael Gordon, Ph.D.

My big box schul might have officially lost an in-house presence as I have become thoroughly enamored with on-line davening. Although I feel guilty about it, the benefits for me have been palpable and compelling. Suddenly I find services more accessible, spiritually uplifting, and alluring.

Some of my preference arises from sheer convenience. No dressing up in a suit and tie. No rushing through dinner to make Kol-Nidre on time. No struggle to find parking. No concerns

about security. No need for masks. No hard folding chairs. No hassle of any sort.

When the service starts, I sit in my recliner (often clad in a t-shirt and gym shorts), turn on the wide-screen TV, and log into my virtual service of choice. It's just me, my wife, and our little dog, Claire.

I can hear the proceedings perfectly, see the pdf of the prayer book on my iPad without the assistance of cheaters, and think about the content without distraction. For me, it's a comfortable, user-friendly experience that quickly puts me into a religious frame of mind.

Being a virtual congregant allows me to be more focused and attentive to the service. Nobody's chattering about who's wearing what, moaning about the sanctuary being too hot or cold, commenting on the rabbi's sermon, or complaining about one thing or another. I also don't miss our religion's approach to calisthenics, with all those calls for rising up and sitting down throughout the service.

Another reason I'm attracted to virtual prayer has to do with production values. Some of these on-line services are simply magnificent. The one we've come to settle on, Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City, doesn't have just a cantor; it has an entire music department that funds and creates arrangements and compositions. This schul takes their music seriously.

What most fascinates me is how they manage to produce and televise a service at the level of a Broadway musical and somehow keep it heimish and intimate. The cantor at this synagogue has a world-class voice, is backed up by professional choruses, bands, and an orchestra, but seems never to descend into showmanship. Maybe part of it is that his children (and others in the congregation) are often part of the proceedings. Regardless, for someone who once considered any music beyond a cantor's solo voice as more performative than personal, I often find myself in awe.

The on-line rabbis (and perhaps rabbis more generally nowadays) are especially focused on making our religion relevant

to people struggling with the challenges of modern life. They seem to see part of their role as the congregation's chief therapist (and, sometimes, primary patient). The rabbi at Park Avenue doesn't seem to regard himself as authority figures solely intent on conveying knowledge and biblical lessons to his flock. What I pick up from him is a sense of humility, intellectual curiosity, and good humor. He's delivered unusually well-written, psychologically minded sermons on inclusion, dealing with our imperfections, managing grief, and striving for a more meaningful life. I find them refreshing, consequential, and engrossing.

I realize that my goals for attending services might be different from yours. I'm not looking for a social experience where I rekindle acquaintances or revel in the bosom of the synagogue's community. I have other opportunities for those connections.

For me, it's more about seeking out moments when I can transcend the hassles, worries, disappointments, and challenges of my everyday life, if only for a while. I find it comforting to have a scheduled time when I can conveniently put stresses aside, connect to our tradition, ponder issues I wouldn't normally entertain, gaze at the blessings before me, and let sweet memories flow. I don't log in as often as I should, but I appreciate the experience when I do.

Does this mean I'm done with paying temple dues? Not at all. I want to support all that synagogues provide our community, from education to a place for celebrations. Plus, I don't think anyone has perfected digital interment quite yet.

I just prefer to observe some of our traditions remotely and in peace.

# Praying with Artificial Intelligence

It was inevitable. We use Siri, Alexa, Waze, self-driving cars, Gemini, Grok and Claude. Eventually there had to be AI prayer. The website is [WriteMeAPrayer.com](http://WriteMeAPrayer.com) and it is "A Prayer Generator powered by the latest AI technology." The instructions on the webpage are simple. One answers the following questions:

**What is the topic of this prayer?**

Ex: Good health

**Who is this prayer for? (optional)**

Ex: John Doe

**What language would you like the prayer to be in? (optional)**

Ex: English

A caveat follows: "I understand WriteMeAPrayer.com provides AI-generated written prayers for entertainment purposes only. I agree to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy."

Entering the terms "forgiveness on Yom Kippur," "myself" and "English," and pushing the blue button resulted in the word "Success!" appearing in seconds, followed by another caution: "Be sure and copy your prayer below. WriteMeAPrayer.com does not save or store new prayers that are generated."

With privacy assured, here's the result:

**Dear God,**

*On this sacred day of Yom Kippur, I come to you with a humble heart and a sincere desire for forgiveness. I know that I have made mistakes and hurt others, and for that, I ask for your forgiveness.*

*Help me to let go of any grudges or resentment I may be holding onto. Guide me towards true repentance and grant me the strength to seek forgiveness from those I have wronged.*

*Please help me to forgive myself for my own mistakes and shortcomings. Let me not be burdened by guilt or regret, but instead, use them as lessons for growth and change.*

*Teach me the true meaning of forgiveness, to release anger and bitterness and replace it with understanding and compassion.*

*As I enter this holy day, I pray for your mercy and guidance. May I find peace within myself and with others through the power of forgiveness.*

**Amen.**

And now the Big Question: Is This Prayer Genuine?

Aish.com says no: "Despite impressive capabilities, AI lacks the intangible spark that defines a soulful existence, making it distinct from a genuinely Jewish identity." In an *eJP* article entitled "Man versus Machine,"

Rabbi Joshua Fixler says that while AI can do a great many tasks, it cannot replicate prayer because "prayer holds space for the yearnings of our hearts and sorrows of our lives. In communal prayer, we can comfort and be comforted, find strength and offer support. On every page of the prayer book there are new, breathtaking metaphors for human existence. Prayer invites us into mystery, inspiration and gratitude, all deeply human traits." In an article in *Moment* magazine, Rabbi Gilah Langner likewise rejects AI prayer: "AI empowers individuals, but it will atomize our spiritual lives. Judaism goes in the other direction, continually pushing us toward relationship—into a *minyan*; into a *kahal*, or congregation; into *Klal Yisrael*, the collective Jewish people. It may be true what they say: 'Two Jews, three opinions.' But that's where our strength lies, as long as we're engaged in the messy business of talking with one another, not just with our computers."

It seemed appropriate to give the final word to Rebbe.IO, "the world's most advanced AI rabbi." Here is his response: "The sincerity and genuineness of a prayer are deeply rooted in the intent and *kavanah* (concentration and intention) of the person offering it. In Jewish thought, the essence of prayer is the connection and communication between the individual and Hashem. An AI can generate text that resembles prayer, but it lacks the personal intent and spiritual yearning that characterize genuine prayer. The Talmud teaches us that *Rachmana liba ba'i* – 'The Merciful One desires the heart' (Sanhedrin 106b). This means that what truly matters in prayer is the heartfelt intention and devotion of the person praying. While AI can assist in creating beautiful and meaningful words, the genuine aspect of prayer comes from the human heart and soul. If someone uses AI-generated text as inspiration and imbues it with their own *kavanah*, it can certainly enhance their prayer experience. However, the true connection with Hashem is something deeply personal and cannot be fully replicated by technology."

Rebbe IO concludes his response with the words: "May your prayers always be heartfelt and meaningful!"

# Jewish Education Celebration 2025

Jewish Education Celebration 2025 was a joyful event marking the 65th anniversary of the Syracuse Hebrew Day School. The three-hour celebration, co-hosted by SHDS and the JCC, with support from the Jewish Federation of Central New York, brought together families, educators, alumni, and community members for an afternoon that truly embodied the spirit of Jewish learning and togetherness. From inflatable slides to storytelling, Hebrew games to heartfelt alumni reunions, the program offered something for everyone—and delivered in style. In what was surely a first in the Jewish community's history, Rabbis Ilan Emanuel, Evan Shore and Oren Steinitz displayed tremendous good nature and bravery as they participated in a "Dunk the Rabbi" game.

Educational workshops engaged children, parents, and grandparents alike. Young families loved the playful "Alef-Bet Adventure" Hebrew literacy workshop, while the "Songs of Our People" session had voices ringing out in joyous harmony with Cantor Esa Jaffe. At "My Israel Art," students of all ages created colorful drawings, murals, and collages that expressed what Israel means to them and the storytelling corner captivated audiences with Jewish tales told by seasoned teachers and Magid Jim Brule, sparking imagination and reflection.

As summer drew to a close, kids ran happily between the inflatables and the giant waterslide, while families posed for keepsake photos at the booth, alumni caught up on old times and everyone enjoyed an al fresco dinner.

Phyllis Zames, who helped organize the event, said, "The greatest success of Jewish Education Celebration 2025 was the way it brought institutions together. The collaboration of SHDS, the JCC, synagogue religious schools, and the Syracuse Community Hebrew School demonstrated the strength of Jewish learning across Central New York. Jewish Education Celebration 2025 was more than an anniversary party—it was a community milestone, planting seeds for the future of Jewish life and learning in Syracuse."

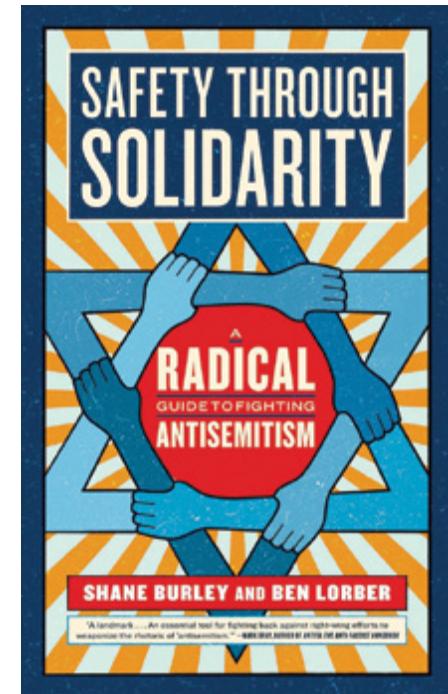


# Temple Concord Announces 2025-6 Author Series

by Sally F. Cutler

Jewish history, the Holocaust, and timely Jewish issues: all will be featured in Temple Concord's 2025-6 Author Series. Held virtually, these talks present authors of newly published books of Jewish interest, at no charge, to the entire community. Talks begin at 7:30 pm. Registration is through the calendar at [www.templeconcord.org](http://www.templeconcord.org) or by calling 315-475-9952.

On November 6, authors Shane Burley and Ben Lorber will discuss their important book *Safety Through Solidarity: A Radical Guide for Fighting Antisemitism*. These two activist journalists present a progressive, intersectional approach to the vital question: What can we do about antisemitism? *Kirkus Review* notes, "Rather than excluding Muslims, Christians, and rightists...the authors aim for a better strategy by 'forming alliances across differences, building bridges not walls, and striving alongside others for a future free from inequality, exploitation, and oppression in all its forms.'"



Upcoming in the Author Series are *Rivonia's Children: Nelson Mandela's White Comrades and Their Legacy* by Glenn Frankel (January 8, 2026); *How to Share an Egg: A True Story of Hunger, Love and Plenty* by Bonny Reichert (February 5, 2026); and *Rabbi Brian's Highly Unorthodox Gospel: A Modern Guide to Compassion, Kindness, and Love* by Rabbi Brian Zachary Mayer (March 12, 2026).

In addition, in collaboration with The Jewish Genealogical Society of Central New York, the series will present author Janette Silverman discussing her book *Stories They Never Told Us*, on January 11, 2026, at 1:45 pm. Silverman is renowned for her work in Jewish genealogical research, which she has pursued for nearly 35 years.

Temple Concord's Author Series, part of the Regina F. Goldenberg Cultural Series, is made possible through the Jewish Book Council and is supported by the Jewish Federation of Central New York.

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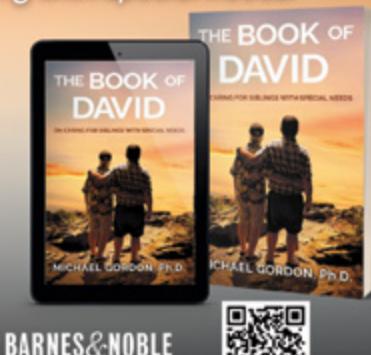
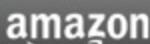
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# From Syracuse to the Soul of Israel: A Sacred Journey Together

As 5785 drew to a close, Rabbi Moshe Saks of Temple Adath Yeshurun made the following announcement: "Israel has been in the news every day and in our thoughts, as well. We all hope that a resolution to Gaza will soon present itself. I believe that it is now more important and crucial than ever to visit Israel sometime during the year of 5786 (2025-6). To that end, I am pleased to announce something specific that will not only strengthen our ties to the Jewish homeland but educate us as well. I am happy to announce a Syracuse trip to Israel, which will be led by the rabbis of each of our congregations, to be held during the middle of February (school break) 2026. This has not been done in a number of years, and we're long overdue."

The trip will take place February 16-24, 2026 and will be led by Rabbis Emanuel of Temple Concord, Saks of Temple Adath Yeshurun, Shore of Shaarei Torah Orthodox Congregation of Syracuse and Steinitz of Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas. "The last Syracuse mission to Israel, six years ago, united 36 community members for an unforgettable journey," said Rabbi Shore. "The upcoming Israel trip has two goals: to bring our Jewish community together on a meaningful mission to Israel, and to show Israel that Jews in America stand firmly by its side — a true win-win for everyone."

Rabbi Saks said that "the trip is open to all — first timers, those who have visited before, singles, couples, and families with children. The itinerary looks to be wonderful, and the cost will not be prohibitive. We will have (of course) a certified tour guide, and in addition, my wife Meira, who has lived in Israel, and speaks fluent Hebrew, will be accompanying me on the trip." He said that there is no limit on the number of people who will be able to come and

that, in fact, at least 10-15 people from Temple Adath have already committed to going on the trip. "This will be the experience of a lifetime," he declared.

Temple Concord's Rabbi Ilan Emanuel said, "This will be an amazing opportunity to connect with Israel and to get to know the real Israel behind the headlines. And it is a great testament to how special this community is that all the congregations are going together, learning from each other as we experience Israel as one Central NY community." Rabbi Oren Steinitz, of Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas, added, "The fact that all four rabbis, from three different denominations, are co-leading this trip, is a real testament to how special the Syracuse community is. Participants will have a unique opportunity to experience Israel from a variety of different perspectives and spend valuable time building community while exploring the Holy Land."

Federation President & CEO Mark Segel said, "The Federation is pleased to support the rabbis' mission by covering the cost of all four rabbis to participate at



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no cost of their own. Helping community members have an Israel experience is one of the most important things the Jewish Federation does. We know that nearly everyone who visits Israel on an organized mission comes back with a renewed respect and love for the Jewish homeland. Sending folks to Israel in the current environment also demonstrates

our unwavering support for the country. Am Yisrael Chai!"

A detailed description of the trip appears in the accompanying graphic, which includes a QR code for complete details about cost, accommodations, itinerary, etc. Registration is open now and closes on November 17.

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# JD School Officials Meet With Local Leaders to Discuss Antisemitism

The Federation, in partnership with End Antisemitism Now (EAN) and the Pomeranz Jewish Community Center (JCC) invited Stefanie Singer, Laurie M. Tisch Education Director at the Anti-Defamation League of New York/New Jersey, to meet with high level administrators from the Jamesville-DeWitt school district. The purpose of the meeting, according to EAN founder Brian Raphael, was “to address the concerning rise in antisemitic incidents and foster a safer more inclusive environment for Jewish students.”

Federation President & CEO Mark Segel reported that “I am incredibly encouraged by the open dialogue and shared commitment we’ve seen from the Jamesville-DeWitt School District. This collaboration is a crucial step in ensuring that our schools are safe and welcoming for all students, and it demonstrates that by working together, we can effectively combat antisemitism and create more inclusive communities.”

JCC Executive Director Marci Erlebacher said, “We are thrilled with the success and openness we have experienced with the Jamesville-Dewitt School District. It is our hope that other districts can follow suit especially during these challenging times of a rise in antisemitism.”

Miriam Elman, chair of the Federation’s Community Relations Committee, said,

“Senior leaders at J-D continue to demonstrate that they are committed to supporting the Jewish community in their schools and to ensuring thriving learning environments in which antisemitism has no place. We are grateful to the ADL for facilitating this recent training and look forward to bringing similar informative workshops and resources to other local K-12 school administrators and educators in the near future.”

Raphael concluded, “We are proud to report that the meeting was met with incredible support and thoughtful engagement from the school district’s leadership. The administrators expressed a clear commitment to taking meaningful steps forward and the feedback from the session was overwhelmingly positive. This is just the beginning. We will continue to work closely with JD schools and other districts in our region to ensure that education training and awareness remain at the forefront of this critical issue.”

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# Affinity for Fiber Arts: CBS-CS weaves connections thru knitting, quilting, and more

by Yolanda Febles

The quiet sound of knitting needles mixes with conversation at Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas on the last Sunday of each month. Yarn in many colors spills from tote bags, taking shape as scarves, hats, and quilts. Members of the CBS-CS Fiber Arts Group gather to work on projects, share ideas, and spend time together.



The group began a year ago as part of an initiative to bring members together through shared interests. These "affinity" groups are designed to give people an easy way to connect beyond services or formal programs. What started as a casual meet-up has grown into a mix of regular attendees and occasional visitors. Many who now spend hours together each month had rarely spoken before. Sitting side by side, they have found common ground and conversations that cross generations and backgrounds within the congregation and community.

Members bring a variety of fiber art projects, including knitting, crocheting, needlepoint, quilting, sewing, and stitching. Seniors often help younger participants with a new stitch or technique, and sometimes it is the other way around. A pre-teen boy who attends with his mother guided a new knitter in starting a project while another participant helped an older member re-learn to knit.

Stories from the group include both the personal and the practical. That same pre-teen, when told a member was knitting a hat for her son, suggested the son should make his own. A request to repair a knitted hat inspired the creation of a new one. Conversations have touched on tattoos, knitting tools, sports, health topics, and synagogue history.

"This group is low-key and fun and people can bring whatever they are working on or have a question about," one member said. "I genuinely enjoy sitting and talking with the people who come and seeing what they are working on."

Plans are underway for new affinity groups such as baking and outdoor nature walks. The next Fiber Arts meeting is October 26 at 12:30 pm at CBS-CS, and anyone with an interest in fiber arts is welcome to attend. **For more information, email [admin@cbcs.org](mailto:admin@cbcs.org).**

## HADASHOT TOVOT

GOOD NEWS!

GOOD NEWS!

GOOD NEWS!

An enlightening and informative presentation by Israeli Brigadier General Asaf Vardi, sponsored by Jack Lyon, was held at Shaarei Torah Orthodox Congregation of Syracuse, to update Friends of the IDF on the current situation in the Middle East. General Asaf Vardi recently retired from the military after nearly three decades of service. In his final position, he served as Israel's Deputy Defense Attaché and Air & Space Force Attaché to the United States. In this capacity, he acted as the Israel Defense Forces' liaison to the U.S. Air Force, Space Force, Navy and Marine Corps Aviation, Army Aviation and Air National Guard, as well as the Deputy Defense Attaché representing Israel's Ministry of Defense. Following the outbreak of the war on October 7th, General Vardi was appointed as the Israeli Senior National Representative to U.S Central Command (CENTCOM), where he coordinated between the IDF Headquarters and U.S. military leadership on all operational matters required during the conflict.



Ken Frieden, B.G. Rudolph Professor of Judaic Studies at Syracuse University, premiered his "Ten Tone Poems for Clarinet and Piano, composed after October 7th," at the JCC. The pieces were hauntingly beautiful.



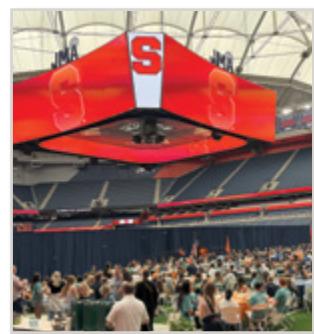
The Tzofim Israeli Scouts Caravan brought ruach, friendship and music to the JCC for the 40th year to a most appreciative audience.



**Shepping nachas** is a Yiddish phrase that means to take great pride and pleasure, especially in the accomplishments of loved ones. It implies a feeling of deep satisfaction and joy derived from the success or good qualities of someone close to you. The word nachas itself comes from the Hebrew word nachat meaning "contentment" or "peace."

The phrase came to mind one Monday evening at a JCC Senior Dinner when two delightful gentlemen appeared at a guest table and offered to assist in any way possible. Isaac and Benjamin Bloom have been volunteering at the senior dinners for quite a while. This was Isaac's third year and Benj's second. Their mom Jodi says that "they really enjoy their time with the seniors. They were both very close with my grandma who passed away several years ago... so it's a really great fit for them." In addition to helping out at the JCC, the boys hosted their 5th annual, "Thank You First Responders" BBQ lunch at their home in August. Jodi explained that "Benjamin came up with this idea when he noticed the amount of disrespectful treatment of police and first responders five years ago and wanted to do something constructive about it. The boys plan, shop and organize the event each year and it is always well-attended and greatly appreciated by our first responders."

Hillel is the world's largest, most inclusive Jewish campus organization, providing meaningful experiences to hundreds of thousands of Jewish college and university students each year. Syracuse Hillel's FreshFest, the largest such program in the United States, annually invites hundreds of new SU students to move into their residence halls early, participate in two days of activities that help them get acclimated to campus and pair with returning student mentors, who represent a wide variety of majors, have lived in almost every residence hall, hail from across the country, and are incredibly involved in the Orange community.





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## NCJW Brings File of Life to 1,000 Syracuse Households

This summer, the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), Greater Syracuse Section, launched an ambitious campaign to bring File of Life, a simple yet powerful medical information tool, into the homes of 1,000 Syracuse residents. Their goal: to ensure that every household has vital medical information available to first responders during an emergency, when seconds can mean everything.

What Is File of Life? It's a red magnet, a sheet of paper, and a small plastic sleeve. But in a moment of crisis, File for Life can speak when a patient can't. The file contains essential information: medications, allergies, emergency contacts, chronic conditions, and preferred hospitals. Designed to be placed on the refrigerator or inside a front-door envelope, it gives EMTs, firefighters, and emergency room personnel immediate insight into a person's medical background, which is especially crucial for older adults, people living alone, and those with complex health histories.

"In a medical emergency, even five minutes of delay can be catastrophic," said Fran Berg, NCJW's president and the project's originators. "We heard from first responders



across Syracuse who told us that they often arrive at homes and have no way of knowing whether a person is diabetic, taking blood thinners, or has dementia. We knew we had to act."

The NCJW team began with outreach to the JCC, Menorah Park, InterFaith Works, hospitals, synagogues, churches and community organizations to distribute File for Life packets and to ensure that recipients understood how to complete them. The form includes name, date of birth, emergency contact information, primary care doctor and any specialists, medications and dosages, allergies and existing health conditions, insurance information and preferred hospital.

Though NCJW's campaign is practical, it carries a deeper message: no one should be invisible in an emergency. "Our Jewish values teach us to act in ways that uphold the sanctity of life — *pikuach nefesh*," said Berg. "This project is one small but deeply meaningful way we can fulfill that."

## Who adopted who?

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## Voices of Refuge: New Musical Work Honors Women of Safe Haven

The only official sanctuary for Holocaust refugees in the United States was not in New York City or Washington, D.C., but in the small upstate town of Oswego. Behind the barbed wire of Fort Ontario, nearly 1,000 people fleeing Nazi terror found temporary safety during World War II. This December, their voices—especially the women's, so often overshadowed—will rise again in "We Go On, Oswego," a sweeping multimedia vocal project created by Nazareth University music professor and Finger Lakes Opera board member Katie Hannigan, who has devoted her sabbatical to bringing their stories to the stage.

Blending the haunting beauty of vocal performance with rich storytelling and historical depth, "We Go On, Oswego" brings together ten acclaimed composers and four nationally celebrated librettists to create ten original English-language art songs. The production will also incorporate narration in Italian and German—with subtitles—honoring the multilingual, multicultural legacy of the women who lived through this extraordinary experience.

The musical narratives focus on those who passed through the gates of Fort Ontario in 1944, particularly the women whose lives were changed forever, as well as their courageous guardian, Ruth Gruber—the fearless young journalist and humanitarian who escorted nearly 1,000 refugees from war-torn Europe to the safety of upstate New York.

"This project is about giving a platform to stories that have not had enough space in the historical imagination," said Hannigan. "It's not just a concert. It's an act of remembrance and resilience."

The lineup of talent behind "We Go On, Oswego" reads like a masterclass in contemporary classical music and opera. The librettists—Pulitzer Prize-winner Mark Campbell, Caitlin Vincent, Jessica Murphy Moo, and GianLuca Faragalli—bring literary nuance and lyrical poignancy to each piece. Meanwhile, an eclectic group of composers including John Musto, Lori Laitman, Jodi Goble, Maria Thompson Corley, Kurt Erickson, Carla Lucero, and others infuse the work with a sonic tapestry that ranges from American Songbook and jazz to bold, modern classical styles.

Taking the stage are some of today's most exciting vocal artists: mezzo-soprano Hannigan herself, the acclaimed baritone Joshua Conyers, Jason Garia-Kakuk, and Sofia Mains—each bringing regional or national prominence. They will be joined by pianists Kevin Nitsch and Brock Tjosvold, whose artistry will guide audiences through this deeply human journey.

The world premiere is scheduled for Thursday, December 4 at 7:30 pm in Beston Hall at Nazareth University. A pre-concert talk at 7 pm, hosted by WXXI's Mona Seghatoleslami, will offer context and insight into the creation and impact of the work. The event is free and open to the public, with particular outreach to students, Holocaust survivors and their families, scholars, and members of the Jewish community.

Following its premiere, "We Go On, Oswego" will be published as a professional anthology by NewMusic Shelf, offering a valuable new resource for advanced and professional singers. Hannigan envisions the project evolving into a full chamber opera, with the hope that it will travel, educate, and touch audiences far beyond its Oswego roots.

Beyond its artistic aspirations, Hannigan sees the project as a call to empathy and civic engagement. "Music can do more than entertain," she said. "It can educate, advocate, and open hearts."



## RISE is going to Ukraine



*RISE*, the rock musical by Central New York composer Josh Hershfield is going to be produced in Ukraine this fall. *RISE* tells the story of a group of Jewish women resistance fighters during the Holocaust who wage an uprising against the Nazi regime. It is based on the true stories of the *kashariyot*, or couriers, young Jewish women who disguised themselves as Aryans and traveled through Nazi territory, smuggling food, messages, and weapons to the underground resistance movements. *RISE* uses the ultimate music of rebellion to showcase the ultimate acts of resistance and its performance in Ukraine has a very special poignancy at this time.

Limmud is a unique volunteer-led six-day celebration of Jewish life, learning and culture, where Jews from all over the world and across different communities come together to explore different ideas, learn from each other and have fun. *RISE* will be performed at the Limmud Conference in Lviv, Ukraine from October 31 to November 2 in partnership with Project *Kesher*, a Jewish women's organization dedicated to empowering women leaders in Ukraine and globally. *Kesher* is a Hebrew word that means 'connection' and shares the same root *kashariyot*. Limmud organizers stress that "Limmud is more than a conference. This is a space without patterns. There are no boundaries here on age, experience or religion level. There's always room for those who seek the real."

"We are honored to be connected to Project *Kesher*, honored to be performing for the Limmud conference, and honored to be bringing the story of *RISE* to the Jewish community of Ukraine," said Josh. "In this time of conflict and war, it is our connectedness to one another that we lean on the most."

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## Move, Groove, and Improve with JCC's Fall Fitness Lineup

by Ashley Schmitz

The JCC has a wide variety of classes and programs to jumpstart a new fitness routine or keep the momentum going this fall. There's something for everyone to stay motivated and active and achieve fitness goals.

*Some of the JCC's top fitness options are:*

### Personal Training

The JCC's personal trainers create customized workout plans designed to match each client's unique goals and needs. Members can choose from 30- or 60-minute one-on-one sessions with a comprehensive variety of programming, including weight training, high intensity interval training, small group training, or explore the popular Pilates Reformer. Personal training at the JCC guarantees a mind-body workout to help people take control of their health and wellness. *For more information, contact Will Masiclat at [wmasiclat@jccsyr.org](mailto:wmasiclat@jccsyr.org) or 315-445-2360 x144.*



### Tap Dancing

The JCC's Neulander Family Sports & Fitness Center brings back its lively Tap Dance program with instructors Shannon Tompkins and longtime tap veteran Barry Shulman. Open to ages 12 and up, classes begin October 21 with advanced sessions on Tuesdays and beginner/intermediate classes on Wednesdays. Seasoned dancers and first-time tappers enjoy "New York City" style instruction from two accomplished professionals for just \$10 per session. Their motto: "If you can count, you can tap." *For more information, contact Nick Finlayson at [nfinlayson@jccsyr.org](mailto:nfinlayson@jccsyr.org) or 315-445-2360 x140.*

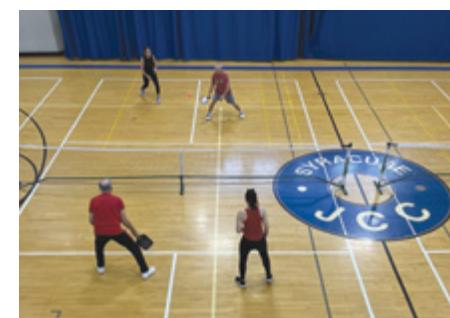


### Group Fitness

Tap Dancing is just one of the JCC's many group fitness classes. Others include TRX, Bootcamp, Cardio Drumming, Move & Groove, NIA, Pilates, Yoga, Gentle Cardio Strength & Balance, Tai Chi, Cognitive Games, Group Cycle, and Line Dancing. *Learn more about the JCC's gym offerings and schedule at [jccsyr.org/fitness](http://jccsyr.org/fitness)*

### Pickleball

Participants can serve up some friendly competition this fall with pickleball at the JCC. With both indoor and outdoor courts, all skill levels can enjoy pickleball rain or shine. Indoor courts are available for open play on Tuesdays & Wednesdays from 6pm to 9pm as well as Sundays from 12:30 pm - 2:30pm. Members have early access on Sundays from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm and can also play outdoor pickleball any day, any time, weather permitting. *For more information, contact Sherri Lamanna at [slamanna@jccsyr.org](mailto:slamanna@jccsyr.org) or 315-445-2360 x126.*



# SyraCrusin' Travel Camp: Creating Memories

by Amy Bisnett and Pamela Ranieri

Many years ago, the team at JCC Camp Romano recognized a growing gap: What about summer programming for those “in-between” years? Campers who were aging out of traditional school-age programs still needed guidance, structure, and meaningful social interaction during the summer months. These tweens and early teens were entering a stage where independence was blossoming, yet they continued to benefit from supervised environments filled with fun, challenge, and community.

Too often, this age group is left to their own devices, literally and figuratively. Without a place to go or a reason to disconnect, many teens spend their summers indoors, isolated behind screens, and missing out on the joys of outdoor play, group bonding, and new experiences. That wasn’t the summer the JCC, or their parents, envisioned for them. Thus, SyraCrusin’ Travel Camp was born.

Designed specifically for campers entering grades 7 through 10, this unique and beloved program offers an adventurous, enriching alternative to traditional day camps. Rather than staying in one location, SyraCrusin’ campers travel daily to destinations across Central New York, exploring new places, trying a wide variety of activities, and building friendships through shared adventures.

Each week is carefully curated to include a balanced mix of destinations: a day at an outdoor beach or park, a day at an amusement or water park, plus outings to museums, nature centers, bowling alleys, mini golf courses, sporting events, ropes courses, and more. Every week is



different, and over the course of the five-week program, campers visit 25 distinct field trip locations. Registration is also flexible; whether campers want to join for one week or all five, no matter how long they stay, they’re in for a summer to remember.

At the heart of SyraCrusin’ is its strong sense of community. The group is always a blend of familiar faces: campers who have grown up at the JCC and newcomers from across Central New York and beyond. The program fosters an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels welcome.

Tweens and teens at this age crave autonomy but still need guidance. SyraCrusin’ hits the sweet spot: structured independence. With a dedicated team of counselors and staff, campers have the freedom to explore while remaining safely supervised and supported. They’re encouraged to try new things, step outside their comfort zones, and navigate social situations in a positive, respectful environment.



This summer, one standout counselor was Braden McVicker, a current college student and longtime member of the JCC community. Braden began attending camp as a child and was once a SyraCrusin’ camper himself.

“This camp is truly a special experience where we can all get together, enjoy being with each other, and do so many exciting activities throughout the summer,” Braden said. “I made some of my closest friendships during my time as a camper here, and it’s amazing to now be on the other side helping to

create those same memories for a new generation.” Braden’s story is just one of many that show SyraCrusin’s lasting impact, not just for one summer, but for years to come.

Each year, the program continues to grow in popularity, with many weeks filling quickly. Families love the flexible sign-up options, and campers look forward to the ever-changing schedule and the chance to reconnect with friends or make brand-new ones. It’s the perfect combination of adventure, community, and summer fun.

Whether a teen is a returning camper or brand new to the JCC, SyraCrusin’ Travel Camp offers an unforgettable summer filled with discovery, laughter, and friendship.

To learn more about the JCC’s Summer Camp and SyraCrusin’, email [camp@jccsyr.org](mailto:camp@jccsyr.org) or call 315-445-2360. Registration for Summer 2026 opens March 2 — it’s never too early to start dreaming of summer!

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BONNIE H. MCCABE  
AUGUST 3, 2025

Bonnie H. McCabe, born April 8, 1951, passed away peacefully at home on Sunday, August 3, 2025 after a courageous battle with cancer. She left the world after spending her final days with her husband, John, her sons Brian and David, her dogs, Abby and Zoe and a loving community of friends who brought enormous comfort to her in the final stages of life.



Raised in Scarsdale, New York, Bonnie attended the University of Rochester, where she met her husband of nearly fifty years, John. She taught math at Fayetteville-Manlius High School and, even after leaving the classroom to start a family, never gave up her love of teaching. She continued to educate and mentor through tutoring and the Community Learning and Information Center (CLIC) in Manlius, which she founded.

Anyone following Bonnie's Facebook page knew the joy she found in everyday life. She travelled the world, preferably by cruise ship, and was quick to meet new people and share the tales of her travels with her Facebook community. Her family will miss those posts but will forever delight in their memory. As she experienced new things and different cultures, especially on

her travels, she found enormous joy in the world around her. Back at home, she was an exceptional host, regularly entertaining friends and throwing parties at her house in Cazenovia. There could never be too many people at a party she threw.

Bonnie found enormous satisfaction in her work throughout the community. She was devoted to the Advocates for Upstate Medical University, the Food Pantry of Madison County (Caz Cares) and the Temple Society of Concord Food Pantry, the A Better Chance (ABC) Program in Manlius, the Cazenovia Garden Club, and many other groups. Early on, she was active in the Fayetteville-Manlius Parent-Teacher Association – much to the dismay of her children at the time, although they embraced her community spirit later in life. She lovingly and enthusiastically

organized a weekly sewing group to make pillowcases for people in the hospital, at the Rescue Mission, at Ronald McDonald House, through Sleep in Heavenly Peace, and elsewhere. Over the years, their pillowcases brought comfort to more than 28,000 people. Suffice it to say that if you needed a helping hand, Bonnie was there to selflessly lend one.

She also loved music of all types. After many years of neglect, she dusted off her childhood violin and organized a string quartet which practiced every week at her home, even during the dark days of COVID. They were always willing to share their music with others at community and charity events. She was also an active participant in the New Horizons community orchestra.

Bonnie was an avid fan of Syracuse basketball, eventually earning the nickname Coach Bonheim for her armchair coaching of the team. In time, she would come to adopt the moniker as her Instagram handle. Although she never loved anyone more fiercely than she loved her family, Gerry McNamara of the 2003 Syracuse Championship squad came close.

On earth, she leaves behind a family grateful for her boundless, unconditional love – although unprepared to deal with the food that remains in the pantry and freezer. She was adored, if sometimes agitated by, her husband John and her sons Brian and David. She also leaves behind a brother, Ron, a daughter-in-law, Jill, and two grandchildren who lit up her life, Connor and Charlotte. Wherever she goes next, she joins her eldest son, Kevin, and her parents, Carol and Ben, who predeceased her.

Donations in Bonnie's memory can be directed to CazCares (cazcares.org), or the Cazenovia Garden Club (PO Box 54, Cazenovia, NY 13035).

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SHELDON KALL  
AUGUST 3, 2025

Sheldon Kall, 93, passed away peacefully at home on August 3, 2025. Born on September 8, 1931, he was a lifelong resident of Syracuse. Sheldon earned his accounting degree in 1957 from LeMoyne College, and his law degree in 1960 from Syracuse University. He married his wife Mateele Kall in 1965. They were partners in every sense of the word—raising three children while also working together for over 50 years.



Sheldon and Mateele were the founding trustees of the Pomeranz, Shankman, Martin Charitable Foundation. Under their capable guidance, it has funded Central New York Jewish agencies for more than 20 years and will continue to do so. Sheldon and Mateele were honored with the Kovod Gadol award from the JCC in recognition of their dedication to the Jewish Community. They were the first people to receive the President's Award from Temple Society of Concord.

Sheldon was predeceased by his parents, Ralph and Dorothy Kall, his brothers Harold and Larry Kall, and his beloved wife Mateele, to whom he was married to for 57 years until her death in 2023.

He is survived by his children Deborah (Joseph) Schaal, Jacquelyn (Steven) Miron, and Matthew (Naomi) Kall; Grandchildren Jimmy(Elizabeth) and Danny (Shay) Miron; Rachel, Sophie and Abby Schaal; and Hannah and Lucy Kall; and many nieces, nephews and cousins. He loved spending time with his grandchildren.

Sheldon was a devoted Syracuse Orange fan, an avid runner, and a huge supporter of Jewish causes in Central New York. He spent his career as an attorney and CPA helping people in the community. He loved the law and continued working at Kall & Reilly until shortly before his death.

Contributions in his memory may be made to the Jewish Community Foundation of Central New York or to Hospice of Central New York.

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JUDITH EVE RICE  
AUGUST 7, 2025

Judith Eve Rice (Cynkus) born August 1, 1939 in Syracuse passed away peacefully surrounded by family in Torrance, CA on August 7, 2025 at the age of 86.



GEORGE BORNSTEIN  
AUGUST 8, 2025



George Bornstein, 99, of DeWitt, passed away peacefully at home on August 8, 2025. He was born in Brighton, MA on June 7, 1926 and moved with his family to Syracuse during his early teens. George served in the US Navy on the USS Duluth during the close of WWII, and thanks to the GI bill attended Syracuse University, graduating with a Bachelor of Architecture degree.

His many designs for private homes and industrial buildings can still be found throughout the greater Syracuse area. He also served for many years on the DeWitt Planning Board. He was predeceased by his wife of 62 years, Virginia (Jini) Bornstein and brother Abraham (Sonny) Bornstein.

George is survived by his six children Keith, Daryl, Gail (Jack), Dean, Tracey (Chi Hui), and Bridgette (Jay), three grandchildren: Kody (Nicole), Max, and Quinn, and two great-grandchildren, Natalie and Laurel.

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Judith, daughter of Janet and Michael Cynkus, is survived by her son Zev and daughter-in-law and Aren Rice of Lansdale, PA and her two grandchildren, Dylan and Will Rice. Her brother Joe Cynkus and his life partner Sigal Golan, his three daughters Karni, Mayan and Ayala and their husbands and six grandchildren all reside in Northern Israel. Her cousins on both the Cynkus and Schwartz side live throughout the United States, from the East Coast to the West Coast, Indiana to Colorado and Texas. Her family is also in Argentina, The Netherlands and France.

Judith, a Syracuse graduate, bled Orange and Blue. She moved west to California and began her teaching career in 1962, retiring happily in 2002. Her mentorship through words and actions have helped numerous other teachers as they began their teaching careers. Her impact on her students lasted well past their time in her classroom.

Judith is also being remembered by her friends and colleagues at various organizations throughout the California area. Her dedication and voice are being remembered by multiple synagogues and choir members in California, with her name said in remembrance by friends, family and all of those she touched across the country and by her family around the world.

Judith loved her family, her friends and was a strong independent and deeply religious woman. She could be found walking at the beach, researching her family's history tirelessly, enjoying a good meal at any of her favorite restaurants or knitting a scarf or quilt.

As she says in her book, *And Now, It's My Turn*, her gift to her family in 2007, "Thank you for your part in my life. I wish you and families joy and blessings of good health and love. Love, Judie."

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