

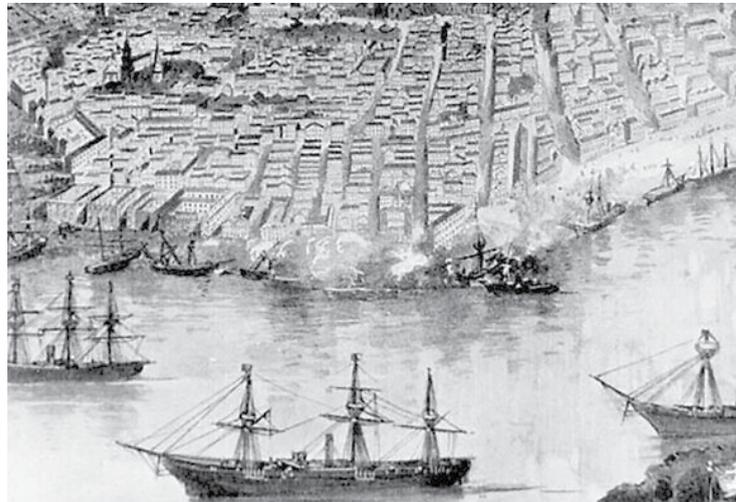


Remembering political pioneer Ruth Mandel
 Our Towns 4



New Jewish Center rabbi talks tradition, legacy, quality coffee
 Our Towns 6

Our Towns	4
Opinion	13
LifeCycle	17
Agenda	19
Touch of Torah	22
Exit Ramp	23



In the fall of 1861, New Orleans suffered many shortages, including a ritual object central to Sukkot. Rabbi Bernard Illowy improvised a solution. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

In the year of the plague: lessons from Civil War New Orleans

Halachic flexibility, then and now

Jerome A. Chanes
Special to NJJN

What if the coronavirus had struck the Jewish community, not on the eve of Pesach, but right before Sukkot?

How would we build a sukkah? And what about the “arba minim” — the “Four Species” of plants that are central to the holiday that commemorates the fall harvest and the Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the desert? (They are the lulav,

Coronavirus

etrog, hadasim, and aravot; in English, the palm branch, citron, myrtle, and willow branches.) “Taking” the Four Species, at least on the first day of Sukkot, is nothing less than a biblical obligation, and has been a deeply held and observed tradition for all branches of Judaism for many centuries. (Rabbinically, we extend enjoying the Four Species throughout the holiday.)

What would we do without our lulav and etrog?

In fact, we have been there before, coming face to face with the problem in New Orleans in the 1860s, when a series of events endangered the communal celebration of Sukkot.

In the Civil War, the Deep South city of New Orleans was, in fact — due to historical reasons not relevant to

Continued on page 9

Summer camp uncertainty

Reform camps pull the plug on 2020; others holding off ... for now

Stewart Ain
Special to NJJN

Johanna Ginsberg
NJJN Senior Writer

Like so many parents, Amir Goldstein, a West Orange father of three, said his family is anxiously waiting to learn whether camps will be permitted to open this summer. If they are, he plans to send his kids. But he’s not optimistic.

“It will be a big burden on parents and kids to not have that time away,” said Goldstein. His kids, ages 10, 14, and 15, were signed up for a combination of Camp Neshet of NJY Camps, Camp Moshava, and Achva East. His only contingency plan is to make use of his backyard. “It’s going to be a complete disaster, but at least I have a backyard.”

Many camps have already sent families letters explaining that because of the coronavirus they are awaiting government permission to open and to learn what restrictions, testing requirements, and guidelines will be imposed by the government and their own medical

Continued on page 10



Noam Goldstein of West Orange is hoping to return to the summer fun at Camp Neshet, affiliated with NJY Camps. PHOTO COURTESY GOLDSTEIN FAMILY

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Celebrate Israel's stats

Israel's population stands at nearly 9.2 million. The Central Bureau of Statistics released the figures in advance of Israel's Independence Day, or Yom Ha'Atzmaut, celebration, which took place this year on April 29.

Some 74 percent of the population is Jewish and 21 percent is Arab, according to the report.

The population of Israel was 806,000 at the time of the establishment of the state in 1948, according to the statistics bureau.

Since last year, some 180,000 babies were born and 44,000 people died. In addition, 32,000 immigrants have arrived in the country.

By 2040, Israel's population is estimated to reach 13.2 million, and by Israel's 100th Independence Day in 2048 the population is estimated at 15.2 million.

Meanwhile, according to the data, there are nearly 950,000 children under the age of 4 living in Israel and 50,000 people aged 90 and over. Children up to age 14 make up 28 percent of the population. — JTA



The air show from the 2019 Yom Ha'Atzmaut celebration. JACK GUEZ/GETTY IMAGES

Safe, mobile testing sites



A contact-free mobile testing station built by the IDF. NATI SHOHAT/FLASH90

In Israel, Covid-19 testing kiosks take samples without requiring staff to wear expensive and uncomfortable personal protective equipment.

The booths' design ensures complete separation between the subject and the test taker, even down to the air they breathe.

Dozens of these units were designed and manufactured by I.M. Segev Industries in collaboration with engineering and medical personnel at Maccabi Health Services, one of the four Israeli national health-maintenance organizations (HMO).

HMO members swipe their membership card on a reader attached to the booth so that results are reported directly to their electronic health record.

After the oral sample is taken with the worker's hands enveloped in rubber gloves attached to the unit, the gloves are disinfected. This allows a quick turn-around for the next test.

"This is groundbreaking work in the global war against the virus," said Dvora Hassid, head of Maccabi's central operations.

In addition, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Technology and Logistics Division created for Magen David Adom, Israel's disaster relief organization, a mobile lab containing six testing booths similar to those created by I.M. Segev for Maccabi.

Israel's Ministry of Defense is interested in producing its stand-alone units on a large scale. — ISRAEL21c

And let us say, 'good night'

Simmy Cohen has hardly read from the Torah since his bar mitzvah. When he's not working at his marketing job from his home in Queens, Cohen spends far more time these days reading children's books to his 13-month-old daughter.

But with a spark of comedic genius and perhaps a little quarantine-induced imagination, he put the two together in a video of himself reading — no, chanting — the classic Margaret Wise Brown picture book "Good-night Moon" set to the sing-song cantillation known as Torah trope.

Cohen hoped the video would resonate with other observant Jews whose access to live Torah readings ended when their synagogues closed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

But the video quickly found a broader audience, with over 40,000 views and several hundred retweets. Inspired by the original video, another Twitter user created his own version using the Sephardic and Moroccan vocalizations.

Cohen has followed his original production with "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom," another children's classic, with trope written by a friend from Twitter, Avi Schwartz.

Cohen said he was surprised by positive reactions from Jews spanning the religious and cultural spectrum. But in retrospect, he said, it's not shocking.

"I actually think people do miss the sound of leyning," or Torah reading, Cohen said. — JTA



Simmy Cohen chants children's books. TWITTER SCREENSHOT



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Our Towns

Ruth Mandel, champion of women in the political arena, dies at 81

Leader at Rutgers University valued 'power of democracy'

Jed Weisberger
NJJN Staff Writer

Soon after she started teaching English at Rutgers University in the early 1970s, Dr. Ruth Mandel heard rumblings about the formation of an academic center focused on women and politics. She jumped at the opportunity to volunteer and soon became the founding director of the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), serving at the helm from 1971-1994.

"Ruth really created a culture where there wasn't one," said Debbie Walsh, the CAWP director since 2001. "She wanted to make democracy better, and both increase and make others aware of women's roles in it." CAWP is



Ruth Mandel was director of Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute and its Center for American Women and Politics. PHOTO COURTESY MAUD MANDEL

part of the Eagleton Institute of Politics, a more-than-60-year-old institution at Rutgers University

which, according to its website, explores state and national politics through research, education, and

public service.

Mandel, a leader in her field, died April 11 of complications from ovarian cancer. She was 81.

Her daughter said Mandel's childhood experiences of fleeing Austria and becoming a refugee led to her deep devotion to politics.

"The whole experience shaped my mother's impression of the United States and made her aware of the power of democracy all her life," said Maud Mandel, president of Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., in a telephone interview with NJJN.

Ruth Mandel was born in Vienna in 1938. Her parents, Mechel and Lea (Schmelzer) Blumenstock, fled Nazi persecution in Austria on the S.S. St. Louis with

Continued on page 7

How Teaneck eased the grip of coronavirus

Rabbis and municipal leaders acted quickly to limit Covid-19's spread in a hard-hit township

Steve Lipman
Special to NJJN

As the coronavirus rampaged through the Modern Orthodox community of Westchester County's New Rochelle in early March, just 19 miles away in northern New Jersey two

Coronavirus

Jewish deputy mayors huddled with Bergen County rabbis in a hastily called meeting.

It was just after Purim in Teaneck. Elie Katz and Mark Schwartz were watching as the number of Covid-19 cases in their township, which includes a large Modern Orthodox community, spiked. They didn't want a repeat of New Rochelle, whose Young Israel synagogue was the early focal point for the spread of the disease in New York state.

"We learned from New Rochelle," Katz said. "We saw how serious this is."

The Rabbinical Council of Bergen County called the March 12 meeting on short notice, bringing together every local pulpit rabbi, medical expert, and political leader, including Katz and



Two members of the Teaneck Volunteer Ambulance Corps. "The disease has really affected us," a member says. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TEANECK VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE CORPS

Schwartz. Physicians described how devastating the disease could be, and local hospital officials forecast a likely shortfall in ventilators and a depletion of

other resources.

The rabbis immediately banned all public Jewish events, including synagogue and home-based prayer minyans,

shared Shabbat meals, shiva visits, and other joint activities or celebrations.

A few days later, Teaneck's mayor, Mohammed Hameeduddin, and township manager, Dean Kazinci, put into place similar social-distancing and quarantine measures, which many people saw as draconian.

Teaneck became one of the earliest municipalities in the country to take such sweeping steps. "We were the first," said Katz.

Teaneck, like many communities, is still in the grip of coronavirus. As of April 23, there were 932 "presumptive" cases of Covid-19 in the township of 40,000, up slightly over the previous week, and 71 people have died of the disease. The Wall Street Journal reported that the town had more cases per 100,000 people than New York City. And the town's heavily Jewish Teaneck Volunteer Ambulance Corps is still handling many more emergency calls than normal.

But the spread of the virus seems to be slowing.

Continued on page 8

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Five questions for Rabbi Elliot Schoenberg

Next month, Rabbi Elliot Schoenberg will begin a one-year term as interim rabbi at The Jewish Center (TJC) in Princeton. For the past three decades, he's been senior vice president and global director of rabbinic career advancement of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), the international professional association of Conservative rabbis. In that position he led the career development of rabbis in the movement and oversaw their job placements.

He has a varied educational background, including rabbinic ordination and a master's degree in Talmud from the Jewish Theological Seminary; he studied philosophy and chasidism at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; and is a N.Y.-state-trained disaster chaplain.

In addition, he's a fair-trade coffee aficionado who, before the Covid-19 pandemic, led coffee tours in New York City. He recently returned from an RA trip to Uganda, where he met with the Abuyadaya Jewish community and toured their many coffee farms.

Schoenberg is married to Rabbi Cathy Felix, spiritual leader of Temple Beth Am in Bayonne. They have three grown sons.

NJJN: What made you want to return to the pulpit after nearly 30 years away?

Rabbi Elliot Schoenberg: I began my career as a pulpit rabbi, spending a dozen fulfilling years in two pulpits in the Boston area (Temple Aliyah



in Needham and Temple Emanuel in Newton, Mass.). I actually was not looking to work for the RA, they approached me because they were seeking a "happy" pulpit rabbi. I loved my work for the RA, and now it feels like I am moving full circle, to end my career in the position I love best: the pulpit rabbinate.

The themes of my rabbinate have been teaching, counseling, and building relationships. I look forward to bringing those strengths to TJC.

NJJN: How will you preserve the legacy of TJC Rabbi Adam Feldman, who passed away in December, and what innovations do you plan to bring to the congregation?

ES: The role of the interim rabbi is not the same

as that of the permanent rabbi. I am not here to bring my agenda and my innovations. I am here to respect, appreciate, and articulate the strengths of the congregation. I think about the interim rabbis via a metaphor — rabbi as mirror. I reflect back to the congregational leadership what they say and do with greater clarity and perspective. I am a tool so they can see themselves better. The mark of my success is that they will find a successor to Rabbi Feldman who matches their strengths.

I knew Rabbi Feldman, and respected him. We often golfed together. Mine was the better short game and he was an excellent long-ball hitter. Together, we made a very good golfer. The loss of Rabbi Feldman is a great tragedy. Nothing can replace his warmth and caring for each individual member of the community. My role will be to listen to my congregants as they tell me their stories. Through storytelling and deep listening comes healing.

NJJN: How will you unite a congregation while programming and prayer remain virtual?

ES: In the middle of this pandemic, I will bring all of my experience, creativity, and energy to help the congregation chart a new path. This task will be a partnership with the staff and the talented lay leaders. We will experiment and see what works. This is a good time to take risks. We will learn together what works best.

NJJN: What is your favorite Jewish ritual?

ES: We are now in the Omer season, in which we count each day between the holiday of Pesach and the holiday of Shavuot. I like counting the Omer because: There is a blessing, it's brief, and it reminds me to focus on the joys of this day and this moment, to try not to worry about the larger issues just for this moment. Every day the Omer inspires me to think of something I give thanks for.

NJJN: What's Jewish about a good cup of joe?

ES: Quality coffee and ethical questions around the production of coffee are my passions. Over the last four months, I created a walking tour in Greenwich Village that traces the history and ethical concerns around coffee. Greenwich Village is the birthplace of espresso in America, and still contains many ethnic and high-quality coffee stores (plus it's a fun neighborhood for a walking tour.)

The history of coffee is a lens to examine our own ethical values. Coffee touches on slavery, feminist expression, political freedom, workers' rights, climate change, and so much more. When the pandemic ends, I look forward to sharing this adventure with my new community in Princeton. I love teaching in an informal setting, especially outdoors while drinking good coffee. I am anticipating exploring good coffee places in Mercer County. ■

Edited by NJJN Managing Editor Shira Vickar-Fox

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Mandel

Continued from page 4

9-month-old Ruth. Cuba and the United States denied entry to the more than 900 passengers and the ship eventually returned to Europe, but the Blumenstock family was among 288 people rescued by Great Britain. The family were refugees in England for nine years before gaining entry to the U.S. in 1947. Maud Mandel said her mother's family appreciated their good fortune, as 254 of the passengers who returned to Germany were murdered in the Shoah.

"My mother had no direct memories of the St. Louis, but it shaped our family history," she said.

Maud spent 20 years as a history and Judaic studies professor at Brown University in Providence, R.I., but her mother's professional life was focused on women in politics.

"She spent her whole career creating a political process for women," said Maud. "She was always at the center of that. She was a superstar in that area."

Ruth Mandel earned a bachelor's degree in English from Brooklyn College and a doctorate in American and English literature from the University of Connecticut in 1969. She met and married her first husband, Barrett Mandel,

while in graduate school, and Maud was born in 1967. They lived in Brooklyn but moved to Princeton when Ruth and Barrett began teaching at Rutgers University. (They divorced in 1974).

The Mandels were members of The Jewish Center (TJC) in Princeton, a Conservative congregation.

"Judaism mattered to my mother," said Maud, who celebrated her bat mitzvah and was married at TJC. She described her mother's connection as "more cultural than religious."

Ruth Mandel's teaching evolved into several esteemed leadership positions. Walsh of CAWP credits her with building the national prominence of the center, which has held large conferences from 1983 to 1991 for women elected to state legislatures. Discussions would include weighty topics such as abortion and sexual discrimination.

"Women in office hadn't discussed these issues in such a forum previously," said Walsh, who joined CAWP in 1981. "This was another [example] of Ruth creating new opportunities for women in politics."

She also established the center's "Election Watch," which promotes female candidates who have filed or are likely to file and run for public office. "Ruth was the person who created all of this," said Walsh. "It didn't exist before."

Mandel authored numerous publications about women's evolving political roles, including her 1981 groundbreaking book, "In the Running: The New Woman Candidate," which was the first extended account of women's experiences as candidates for political office.

She served as director of the Eagleton Institute from 1995 to 2019 and remained a senior scholar at CAWP until her death. From 1991-2006, Mandel held a presidential appointment to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, the governing board of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

And in addition to her accomplishments in academia, Maud said she was a "devoted mother and grandmother."

"Her integrity and leadership represented the best of Rutgers," Nancy Sinkoff, academic director of the university's Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, told NJJN.

Mandel is survived by her second husband Jeff Lucker; daughter Maud Mandel (Steve Simon); two grandchildren; and first husband Barrett Mandel of New York City.

Private services were held with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing. ■

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Shommer Shabbas

Teaneck

Continued from page 4

Just a few weeks ago, Teaneck was the hardest-hit municipality in the hardest-hit county in New Jersey, making it what Hameeduddin called Bergen County's "ground zero." As of April 23, the county reported 14,049 positive test results and 907 deaths.

As of April 23, the number of Teaneck residents diagnosed with coronavirus was 932, surpassed by nearby Hackensack's 1,051. "Our rate is tremendously going down," Schwartz said.

Kazinci said that Teaneck had seen a decrease in the growth of the number of people being diagnosed with the virus. Between March 9 and 21, he said, it took approximately 1.98 days for the number of new cases to double. From March 22 to April 16, it took 7.6 days.

Jacob Finkelstein, a veteran member of the Teaneck Volunteer Ambulance Corps, said he has witnessed a weakening of the disease's grip over a two-week period. Before the arrival of Covid-19, he said, the volunteers had handled an average of 12-15 emergency calls per day; at the height of the crisis, the number doubled; now it's down to 17-20 per day.

Finkelstein said the independent, privately supported ambulance corps has already exceeded this year's budget. And about half of the several dozen volunteer members are not on the job now because they or someone in their respective families was diagnosed with the disease. "It really has affected us."

Prominent local Jews who died from causes related to the coronavirus include Perry Rosenstein, 94, a longtime civic leader and philanthropist who founded the Puffin Foundation; Janice Preschel, 60, an activist who ran a food bank; and Deborah Price Nagler, 66, a Jewish educator and technology consultant to day schools.

Teaneck is diverse, however, with large African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American communities. "This is not a Jewish disease," said Katz, who served as mayor from 2006-08 and as acting mayor in 2016.

He said the high number of Teaneck residents who submitted to early testing — before most other New Jersey communities — made the extent of the disease there appear even more dire. "We scared people enough to go get tested early. I think we were the most vocal — we brought more attention [to the importance of testing]. Now the rest of the world is following."

The ongoing pandemic has had a vis-



Though the number of calls the Teaneck Volunteer Ambulance Corps answers is now finally falling, the emergencies are still far more than normal.

ible effect on the town. Shabbat mornings, when sidewalks and side streets are usually crowded with people headed to synagogue, are quiet. Parks are closed. Holy Name Medical Center has converted its pediatric unit into an isolation ward for coronavirus patients, half of its Emergency Department is an isolation ward for PUIs ("patients under investigation"), and the hospital reached out to its longtime competitor, Hackensack University Medical Center, for help.

But conditions are improving. "We're doing OK," said Rabbi Kenny Schiowitz, president of the Rabbinical Council.

Angry residents

The life-saving decision of the Rabbinical Council in March was not an automatic call.

Rabbi Larry Rothwachs of Congregation Beth Aaron in Teaneck told JTA that he had entered the post-Purim meeting with his rabbinical colleagues with one set of ideas about how his community should respond to Covid-19, and exited a few hours later with another: He was sure that drastically curtailing Jewish traditions and rules would be crucial to stem the spread of the deadly disease.

"I don't think everybody was on the same page coming in. I was not on the page I am at right now," the rabbi said. "By the time that we left, I do think there was an overwhelming consensus."

Nevertheless, Katz, who became one of the public faces of the town's overnight shutdown, said he was the object of intense criticism from the Jewish community as well as the general community for his role in curtailing Teaneck activities. Members of the general community were upset that their businesses were closed, Katz said. Jews were upset that their worship services and simchas were cancelled.

"Not everyone was in favor of closing down the houses of worship," he told NJJN. "I was yelled at by people — very angry, irate residents."

Schwartz said he also met criticism from Teaneck residents, as did Schiowitz for the Rabbinical Council's decision.

Now Katz and Schwartz are being hailed for their foresight.

The complaints largely stopped once the gravity of the coronavirus threat became apparent, Katz and Schwartz said. People are "appreciative," Katz added.

"It was a brave move" by the rabbis and politicians, said Dr. Zvi Marans, a pediatric cardiologist who has lived in Teaneck since 1989. He said the proactive actions by the Rabbinical Council and the township, and the concurrent urging of residents to be tested for the virus, likely prevented the numbers of people who contracted the disease and died from it from rising even further. "It was super-effective," he said. "They saved

tens of lives — maybe even more."

"I do not recall anything of this nature taking place," Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American-Jewish history at Brandeis University, told JTA. "This kind of organized statement by a central body, telling every Orthodox synagogue to shut down, that I do not recall seeing."

Rabbis from outside communities have approached Teaneck's rabbis in recent weeks for advice about taking similar steps.

Katz has taken part in weekly, inspirational phone messages that are offered by clergy of various faiths.

Schwartz said he heard the other day from a member of a family whose son had spent a year studying for his upcoming bar mitzvah. No guests can be invited to the now small-scale event.

That is difficult, the young man's father said. "It's also difficult to sit shiva," Schwartz said. ■

Steve Lipman is a staff writer for The New York Jewish Week, NJJN's sister publication. He can be reached at steve@jewishweek.org.

NJJN Deputy Managing Editor Lori Silberman Brauner contributed reporting.

AJC Central New Jersey online programs with legislators, diplomats

AJC CENTRAL NEW JERSEY remains committed to vital advocacy work with "Advocacy Anywhere Powered by AJC Central New Jersey." Advocacy Anywhere is a new platform that enables people to engage with AJC's leading experts and advocacy opportunities from wherever they are with content specifically tailored to the interests of the Central N.J. Jewish community.

"Technology has brought world leaders and experts into my home," said Lori Feldstein of Princeton, AJC Central New Jersey president. "The rich content, while always touching on the impact of Covid-19, brings a much-needed break from the 24-hour coronavirus news cycle and shows me how our work fighting anti-Semitism, advocating for Israel, and promoting democratic values here and across the globe goes on."

On Monday, May 11, at 3 p.m., AJC Central New Jersey will host U.S. Rep. Andy Kim (D-Dist. 3) to discuss growing anti-Semitism and anti-Asian bias in the age of Covid-19 as part of the Garden State Against Hate series. Rabbi David Levy, director of AJC New Jersey, will engage Kim in a dialogue about what our elected officials have been doing to fight this alarming spread and what more can be done.

On Wednesday, May 13, at 3 p.m., the New Jersey Hindu-Jewish Coalition will partner with AJC Central New Jersey in hosting a diplomatic briefing with Sandeep Chakravorty, consul general of India in New York. The consul general will discuss India's response to Covid-19, and how its ongoing relationship with Israel is impactful for Israel and New Jersey.

To register for Advocacy Anywhere programs and join the AJC Central New Jersey mailing list, please email newjersey@ajc.org. To learn more, visit ajc.org/advocacyanywhere.

Lessons

Continued from page 1

this story — a northern city. For that reason, all communications between it and northern cities were cut off. Shortages abounded.

As Sukkot neared in 1861, there was not one etrog to be found in the city. There were plenty of hadasim, aravot, lulavim — all indigenous to the southern soil — but no indigenous etrogim that would pass halachic muster, and none that could be imported. For the Jews of New Orleans, and especially for their rabbis, it was a crisis.

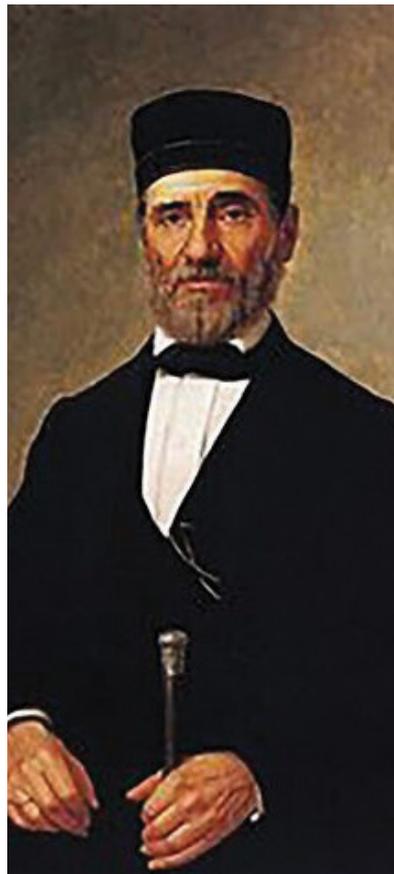
The rabbi of the community was Bernard Illoy, a talmid chacham (rabbinic scholar). A native of Bohemia, Illoy had arrived in the United States around 1850 and taken up the New Orleans pulpit in 1861. Contemporary reports indicate that he was immediately successful in his ministry and understood well the nature of his American-Jewish community.

Illoy's response to the etrog crisis was straightforward: Take the lulav in hand, he said, and use a lemon — but without a bracha, the required blessing. Illoy was concerned, legitimately, about the possible loss of a beloved ritual, even for a year. Would people, especially the young, forget about the etrog? Using the lemon, even though the substitute was not acceptable under rabbinic law, was the answer.

And it worked. For Jews in the Big Easy, Illoy's approach ensured that the etrog would not be forgotten.

A century-and-a-half later, we have our own crisis. Yes, it's vastly different qualitatively and in scope, but a disaster that, among other things, tests our rabbinic leadership. And it does so across denominational lines. Our rabbis are called upon to develop creative and courageous solutions to a myriad of halachic dilemmas resulting from the pandemic and the social distancing rules, and indeed isolation, that it has forced upon society.

We have models from Jewish history for responding to extreme situations. In the depths of the cholera epidemic of 1848, a disaster that devastated much of



Rabbi Bernard Illoy WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Eastern Europe, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter made kiddush and ate on Yom Kippur morning in front of the synagogue in Vilna. Salanter, one of the great 19th-century rabbinic leaders but then a young rabbi, knew that fasting would put lives in danger. And he understood that it would be a desecration of Judaism if Jews died by observing the fast. He appeared to be acting on the Jewish principle of "pikuach nefesh," which mandates that the preservation of life supersedes all other religious obligations. Salanter took his lumps for his action, but it was the right thing to do.

The Holocaust, of course, forced similar agonizing decisions on the rabbis who were serving beleaguered communities throughout Eastern Europe. The visionary Rabbi Ephraim Oshry of Kaunas, Lithuania, author of "The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry," comes to mind. With Jewish life all but ground to a halt because of the Nazis, he and other rabbis wrote numerous responsa (rabbinic answers to halachic questions) on the broadest conceivable range of issues affecting traditional Jewish life. They preserved Jewish lives and preserved Judaism.

Our rabbis, especially in leadership positions across denomi-

national lines, are doing a good job in responding to our current crisis. But there is still much for them to learn from the New Orleans experience. Rabbinic leadership ought to ponder ways to be more flexible — indeed to relax certain strictures — within halachic parameters. In particular this would apply to situations that are by nature public events: providing a minyan for the se'udat mitzvah (festive meal) during a brit milah, saying Kaddish, and other group-related activities for which there is already rabbinic writing on "remote" participation. Other situations include certain matters related to Shabbat observance, and, of course, the mikvah, the Jewish ritual bath, crucial to the lifecycle of traditionally observant families. The list is endless.

A step in this direction was

the controversial decision by a group of Orthodox municipal chief rabbis in Israel to permit Zoom conferencing — under certain restrictions — of Pesach seders in order to allow families separated by the pandemic to connect with one another during this "sha'at ha-d'chak" — a halachic construct for addressing times of emergency. The Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly has likewise put forth a more lenient position permitting remote minyanim.

Where are our Rabbi Illoy, Rav Salanter, Rav Oshry? We are finding them in our midst. ■

Jerome A. Chanes is the author of four books and numerous articles on Jewish public affairs and history. He is working on a book about 100 years of Israeli theater.



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Camp

Continued from page 1

committees. And late last week, as first reported by JTA, the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) announced that all Reform summer camps, including Camp Harlam in Pennsylvania, would be cancelled for the upcoming summer. Conservative Camp Ramah Darom in Georgia, according to the same report, will be closed as well.

Still, most others told families they are preparing to open.

“Regardless of external circumstances, we are moving forward with our priority, as always, of protecting the health and safety of our community members,” according to a letter from Camp Ramah in the Berkshires.

Doron Krakow, president and CEO of the JCC Association of North America, which represents 150 Jewish day camps and 25 overnight camps with 100,000 campers and staff, spoke to NJJN before the URJ announced its decision to close for the summer. He said he expects “the first decisions will be bellwethers for the field.”

“Camps are working closely with their medical advisory committees, and those whose summer seasons start early will be compelled to make decisions and we’ll hear of deferred openings,” he said. “I would not be surprised to hear announcements that affect the entire summer. It’s possible there will be announcements about delays and



Last week the Union for Reform Judaism announced that all of its camps, including Camp Harlam in Pennsylvania (above), will remain closed for summer 2020. PHOTO COURTESY URJ CAMP HARLAM

potential cancellations.”

Krakow added that the “calculus is different for day camps that work week-to-week, and those that run on the grounds of the JCCs have a relatively short lead time. I heard some execs say they could operate camps with 48 hours’ notice.”

But the novel coronavirus is threatening to derail, curtail, or at the very least restrict camp activities this year. JCC Abrams Camps, a day camp in East Windsor that is a beneficiary of the Jewish Federa-

tion of Princeton Mercer Bucks, has yet to announce a decision for 2020. When reached by text, executive director Wendy Soos wrote that she was “unable to share any additional news other than the JCC Abrams Camps is planning vigilantly and remain hopeful for our 60th summer.”

If camps are allowed to open, one parent said she fully expects to have to sign a waiver saying she will not sue should her child contract Covid-19.

“At this point, there are more

questions than answers,” said Janet Fliegelman, interim executive director of NJY Camps. “But we are planning for camp. That’s what our staff is doing, and that’s what we’ve shared with families.” Part of that planning, she said, involves evaluating every piece of the camp program, deciding what will work and what may need to be changed. It also includes planning for different scenarios, such as a late opening and reducing the number of campers. Like everyone else, she’s hopeful, and said the camp is even receiving some new inquiries from families not already signed up.

While some parents, like Goldstein, expressed their intentions to send their children if camps open, others are more cautious. Erika Handler of Scotch Plains, whose two daughters, ages 8 and almost 11, are signed up for NJY Camps’ Nah-Jee-Wah, said she would need to evaluate certain safety measures, like whether intercamp games are cancelled, whether campers are staggered so they aren’t piled on top of each other, what the camper-to-counselor ratio is, what counselors are doing on their days off (are they confined to the camp?), and what medical staff will be on premises through the summer. Still, she said, “Every night, I say a little prayer” that it will open.

The Centers for Disease Control



A cabin at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires, a sleepaway camp affiliated with the Conservative movement.



JCC Abrams Camps in East Windsor has yet to announce its opening, but executive director Wendy Soos said they are “planning vigilantly and remain hopeful for our 60th summer.” PHOTO FROM JCCABRAMSCAMPS.ORG

and Prevention (CDC) is expected to publish guidelines for summer camp operations. A draft copy reportedly calls for camps in states that are in phase one of the Trump administration’s reopening plan to be restricted to the children of essential workers. Those in phase two would be permitted to serve only children who live in the local area. And states in phase three would be restricted to those from limited transmission areas.

But Jeremy Fingerman, CEO of the Foundation for Jewish Camps, stressed in a statement that those are just draft suggestions that might only apply to day camps.

“Our most pressing challenges are for overnight camps because of the lead time required, and we do not yet have any information on the CDC guidelines for overnight camps.”

In addition, it is not known what phase New York state or New Jersey will be in when camps are slated to open, said Susi Lupert, executive director of the American Camp Association of New York and New Jersey. (There are no Jewish overnight camps located in New Jersey.)

“These are just guidelines and have nothing to do with the Department of Health licensing of camps,” she said. “We’re talking about something 60 days away; the world has changed in the last 30 days. That’s a long time. We believe that if the infection rate goes down as it has been there is hope we can see summer camps happen. I believe they will be able to open in some capacity.”

Two-thirds of overnight camps in the Northeast are scheduled to open on June 30 or later, according to Fingerman, giving them “another three or four weeks before they have to make a final call. The American Camp Association has been working with the CDC” and it is expected to operationalize the guidelines for camps.

Once they both issue guidelines, it would be up to the states to review them and “come out with certain mandates by mid-May that would say here is how to do camp this summer,” said Yoni Stadlin, founding director of Eden Village Camp, a Jewish farm-to-table sleepaway camp with locations in New York and California. “And those mandates might dictate to camps whether to open or not.”

Logistical difficulties, such as getting travel permits and U.S. visas, may prevent Jewish

camps from hosting Israeli shlichim or emissaries who, in partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel, come to the U.S. to serve as a central resource to increase campers’ Jewish identities

and connections to Israel. Helene Drobenare Horwitz, executive director of Young Judaea Sprout Lake Camps, said their camps usually host 35 to 40 shlichim each year. She said she is “still optimistic for some sort of [camp this] summer. We’re not giving up. Nobody wants it more than us. We would move heaven and earth to make this happen because we all understand that for everyone’s mental, emotional, and social health, we all need it.”

On the whole, stressed Rabbi Mitchell Cohen, national director of Camp Ramah, “summer camps are very healthy places — outdoors and away from technology and filled with people who are at low risk for the virus, assuming we screen out those who are at high risk.” ■

Jginsberg@njewishnews.com

Stewart Ain is a staff writer for The New York Jewish Week, NJJN’s sister publication.

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Editorial

What we need to fight hate

April 27 was already going to be a somber day on the Jewish calendar. This year it coincided with the start of Yom HaZikaron, Israel's Memorial Day, when the country pauses to remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for defending Jewish lives and sovereignty.

But the day was also the one-year anniversary of the deadly synagogue shooting in Poway, Calif., when a 19-year-old gunman shot and killed a worshipper inside Chabad of Poway and injured the rabbi. Last week, neighbors there and Jews around the world remembered Lori Gilbert-Kaye, 60, a loving wife and mother for whom the Chabad was a second home. Like the massacre at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue seven months earlier, the Poway shooting left American Jews feeling vulnerable in ways they hadn't perhaps in decades, despite the documented rise of anti-Semitic rhetoric online. By invading synagogues, the shooters struck at the heart of the Jewish communal and spiritual enterprise, our literal sanctuaries for expressing who we are as a people.

Of course, the Poway shooting wasn't the end of it. Last year saw the deadly attacks in Jersey City and Monsey, N.Y.; a rash of assaults on the streets of New York's charedi Orthodox neighborhoods; and the return of anti-Semitic rhetoric as a tool for various global despots. In a recent survey by the Anti-Defamation League, 54 percent of American Jews say they either experienced or witnessed an anti-Semitic incident over the past five years. One in five say they have been the target of anti-Semitic comments; a similar proportion say a synagogue or institution they are associated with was vandalized or targeted.

To be sure, American Jews as a whole feel distinctly safe and secure. Jewish life here flourishes in so many ways. But the fear and vulnerability are real,

as was demonstrated by the tens of thousands who marched in the "No Fear" rally over the Brooklyn Bridge in January.

Marches are symbolic. To fight the scourge of anti-Semitism, action is essential. The ADL and other Jewish groups are urging Congress to pass the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act, which would boost federal reporting on domestic terrorism threats and provide training and resources to state and local law enforcement. Former Vice President and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden marked the Poway anniversary, according to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, with a three-point plan to counter anti-Semitism and other forms of hate. It would increase Department of Homeland Security funding for securing nonprofit institutions, beef up federal prosecution for hate crimes, and examine the broader societal contexts in which hate flourishes, from social media and technology platforms to the ways troubled people with toxic ideas slip through the cracks of our mental health system.

Biden is running for president, of course, and he blames President Donald Trump for allowing a climate of intolerance to endure. But the fight against anti-Semitism and hate needs to be above partisanship. We need general agreement that anti-Semitism must be fought on the right and the left. We need funding to make our institutions safe and legislation to give law enforcement the tools they need to track, pursue, and prosecute hate-mongers. No matter where you sit on the political spectrum, demand that your candidate stand up to hate.

And remember, too, that even at our most vulnerable, the Jewish community has allies. The victims and survivors of Poway and Pittsburgh were flooded with messages and gestures of support from people, politicians, and clergy of all races and creeds. Stuck for the moment in our relative isolation, we can't forget all the connections among good people. ■

Letters to the Editor

The essence of a cook

As a Winnipegger, I will say that Shira Vickar-Fox captured the essence of cookbook author Norene Gilletz and many of my feelings and connections to her ("Recipes for life: Canadian cookbook author's food nurtured generations," April 7).

Gilletz autographed my copy of the "yellow cookbook," telling me to cherish the memories of food and family. So I did, and I do. I use that book all the time and I often emailed Gilletz for comments and questions and to stay in touch. We will all feel her void.

Alissa Podheiser Anzarut
Via njewishnews.com

I cried and laughed when I read "Recipes for Life"; it truly hit home for me.

My mother moved from New York to Toronto in 1972 where two of my siblings and I were born before we made aliyah. I cannot imagine her kitchen and growing up without "The Pleasures of your Food Processor," "Micro Ways," and later in life, "MealLeaniYumm!" and "Healthy Helpings." In fact, I don't know one Toronto kitchen or cook (and many in Israel) without one of Norene Gilletz's cookbooks.

The part that especially hit home for me in the tribute was about the Passover rolls. These are a staple in our home and it would not be Passover without a batch of rolls made fresh every morning, starting with the afternoon before the seder when my mother always makes a batch for lunch to get us through until the seder feast.

My mother made sure that my sister and I had our own copies of "The Pleasures of your Food Processor" and gave us each a copy at our bridal showers so that our kitchens would be complete.

Thank you for this beautiful tribute to a very special Canadian chef and cookbook author.

Rachel Binder
New York, N.Y.

'Missing' mother

I read Abby Meth Kanter's "Denied memories" (Exit Ramp, April 7) in astonishment. The story of her "missing" grandmother reminded me of my husband's "missing mother."

Following World War II, she died in a DP camp at the young age of 37. Three months later, father and son (my husband) sailed to America.

Within the year, my father-in-law married another Holocaust survivor who had been in Paris during the war. Yiddish was their first language, but French was also spoken. My husband's stepmother had a large family and he gained aunts, uncles, and many cousins, but unfortu-

nately his mother was never mentioned. Her memory was not being extinguished *on purpose*, it was just that life — school, Torah learning, forming a new family unit — continued under difficult economic conditions.

What was done *on purpose* was not telling the grandchildren that my husband's stepmother was not their "real" grandmother. One Shabbat, as we were sitting around the table, my 11-year-old son asked my husband, "How come you and zeyde speak Yiddish and bubbe speaks French?" It was time to tell them and we did.

I was never comfortable with the secret but did not want to disagree with my father-in-law, and my husband was willing to acquiesce. The fear was that the grandchildren would respect their grandmother less if they knew she was not their "real" one.

The years have passed and I am happy to relate that my mother-in-law's memory is very much alive. My son has become very interested in genealogy and has done extensive research into her lineage.

This past year brought two wonderful examples of "m'dor l'dor," from generation to generation. One of my daughter's sons interviewed his grandfather for "Names Not Numbers," a Holocaust documentary project.

Her older son was a counselor in Camp HASC. One of his campers lives in Munich, Germany, where his father is a Chabad shaliach. This compassionate rabbi went to my mother-in-law's grave and sent us photos of the headstone.

As Meth Kanter so aptly said, "the beloved young wife and mother" is being remembered and we, the grandparents, are committed to telling our grandchildren "the rich, including painful, stories of our family."

Shelly Mohl
Fort Lee

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NJJN reserves the right to edit letters for length, clarity, content, and accuracy.

Counting up one day at a time

Rabbi Avi S. Olitzky
Special to NJJN



We as a society have a predisposition to counting down: days left until school ends, seconds until the ball in Times Square drops on New Year's Eve, shopping days until Christmas, and so on. But doing so can be challenging for our psyche. Counting down creates tension, and as we approach the target moment, anxiety builds. Sometimes this anxiety manifests as enthusiasm and excitement. Other times it manifests as despair and an inability to experience any other emotions.

The negative effects of such a countdown are amplified when the timing is inaccurate, such as when the ball stayed up a few seconds past midnight of the new year. Pending excitement became the exact opposite: an absolute letdown.

Today we find ourselves in a decline — emotionally, financially, socially — and no one knows when this will all become “better.” Each state has different guidelines, each person their own moral and ethical safety code. Might it be better to count “20 days left until the Stay at Home order is lifted?” No — it raises false hopes and ignores the process.

And this process can be positive. We sometimes forget that even amidst the loss, we benefit greatly from a pause like this. Time with family, a decline in over-schooling, an unprecedented coming together of community — so much is to be gleaned from this unprecedented situation if we are present, if we can focus on the moment instead of looking forward to the end. Rather than counting down, we ought to be counting up.

It is of no surprise then that Jewish tradition teaches that, in general, we should do just that. Presently, the Jewish community finds itself in a semi-mourning period casually referred to as the Sefirah — the Counting. Deuteronomy

16:9 details a commandment to count the sheaf (Omer) offering, for seven weeks, from the second night of Passover until the festival of Shavuot (which this year begins on the evening of May 28). Though the ancient Temple no longer exists, we still symbolically count the Omer each night.

However, we count up — “Today is the first day of the Omer,” “Today is the second day of the Omer,” and so on until the 49th day. If we were to begin by saying, “Today there are seven weeks to go,” we might become disheartened by focusing on the whole instead of the particular. Time would seem not to move quickly enough, and we would grow impatient, for example waiting for the restrictions to end or Shavuot to begin. In addition, it could feel anti-climactic. We at last reach the final moment — and then what?

Counting up challenges us to focus on each step, every moment building on the previous one.

We should still set goals, but the goals should not be the focus of every moment; the focus should be the moment itself.

Continuous Zoom meetings at all hours, shepherding emailed school assignments, canceled travel, furloughs — they all make us yearn for an end. For the ancient Israelites, this period between Passover and Shavuot was to be a spiritual transition from oppressed slaves to free people, from Pharaoh's Egypt to revelation

at Mount Sinai. But as the end was nebulous, they focused on each moment. How much more meaningful could we experience this time if we focused on the small victories, the nows? What if we dismissed the future for the time being and embraced the present and all that comes with it?

The alternative is pushing time ahead, and when we do that we lose all that comes with it: the more relaxed family meals, the board game tournaments and chalk art, the slower-paced walks in the neighborhood, the free virtual concerts, the time with the kids, the regular conversations (albeit virtually) with extended family and friends. We miss it all.

What if we celebrate one more day “distanced,” one more day surviving, one more day doing the best we can? Would that not help us last until a new normal is revealed?

Yes, many of our workplaces are shuttered and the economy is crashing, and it may seem unrealistic not to worry about the future. But it may be as simple as repackaging that anxiety. Count up. Don't focus on the end of the count. Focus on the counting. Focus on the living. Focus on the now.

You can do this. We can do this. One more day. ■

Rabbi Avi S. Olitzky, who grew up in South Brunswick, is a senior rabbi at Beth El Synagogue in St. Louis Park, Minn.



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Turns out sometimes you *can* go home again

A last-minute save and unprecedented circumstances leads to going back to where it all started

Gabe Kahn
NJJN Editor



Garden State of Mind

NEWTON, Mass. — Before we get started I need to get something off my chest: Almost two years ago I wrote a column lamenting my parents' decision to put their house, my childhood home, on the market ("When a house is no longer a home," njewishnews.com). It was a heart-wrenching decision for them, but the snowbirds couldn't justify the financial costs of owning a large house that they only lived in a few months a year. I took it hard:

"As I sit at the same desk where I wrote countless high school term papers, I do so in the knowledge that these may be the last words I ever type here. The very thought is devastating."

Well, a funny thing happened on the way to the realtor's office. My parents realized that they could recoup their expenses by renting out the apartment adjacent to our house that they had built for my grandmother to live in during her final years. Seemingly out of the blue a lovely couple looking to downsize showed up and signed a lease, and our home was saved at the last moment, like the ending of "The Brady Bunch Movie," an intentionally campy and underrated film that I'm sure none of you have seen and all of you should.

So to everyone who wrote in sharing their empathy and kind words, I offer a mea culpa for misleading you.

I bring this up not just for the sake of easing my guilty conscience, but

because at this moment I am once again sitting at the same desk where I wrote countless high school term papers. It's true: When the going got tough, I got out of Dodge.

Gotta say that leaving was surreal. It felt like that scene in a movie where the hero stands and watches the neighbors frantically shoving their families into a stuffed car and fleeing their homes upon news reports of an impending natural disaster or alien invasion. Except in this iteration, I was the scared neighbor. That even in my own imagination I wasn't the hero is probably as good an indication as there is of my mixed feelings. The hardest part was waving goodbye to my neighbors who, standing at a safe distance, watched us go as we wished them luck, all of us hoping we would be reunited in the near future, but not knowing when — or chas v'shalom if — we would see each other again.

Let me back up a minute. As the crisis got progressively, and then exponentially, worse in the tri-state area, several of our kids' classmates and their families fled to remote summer houses upstate. Halevai, would that it were so, that we had a large house of our own to escape to, the four of us thought as we elbowed each other for enough space to move around our cramped apartment. Then it occurred to me that we did.

The snowbirds are still in Delray Beach, Fla. — and are likely stuck there for the foreseeable future — so we weren't at risk of infecting them, or vice versa, and other than their tenants in the separate apartment, their house in Massachusetts was vacant. With our kids' classes online for the rest of the school year, and my wife and I working remotely, we could be anywhere in the world as long as we have a decent internet connection.

Knowing that we'd be staying for an indefinite period of time I packed the car with everything we could fit, scrimping on clothes because we wouldn't be going out much, and going heavy on sports equipment in anticipation of using my parents' expansive backyard. There was also a heavy emphasis on technology — multiple laptops and the tower for

my desktop; iPads and Kindles for the kids to do their virtual classes — and so they would stop asking for a snack every few minutes; and a Roku to enable my parents' TV to stream Netflix, Hulu, HBO, etc.

Upon arrival we would be following a mandatory 14-day quarantine, and as delivery slots were few and far between for both kosher and regular supermarkets, we couldn't assume that we'd be able to get food right away. This was an added complication, because as we were leaving on the Sunday before Passover we had to strike a delicate balance between bringing enough chametz to last us the next four days, and enough kosher-for-Passover food, which we initially purchased under the presumption that we would be spending the holiday at home.

The highways were deserted, so for once the drive was relatively quick and painless. Other than needing to make a few adjustments to the boiler and turning the heat, which had been at my parents' preferred temperature, down approximately 40 degrees to a more bearable 72, the house was ready to use right away. The kids, forced to share a room for the last six years, immediately set about claiming "their" respective rooms, my son clearly taking perverse pleasure at watching me cringe after the ungrateful twerp called my old living space his own.

And just like that we settled in and we're making a go of it until it's time to go back, whenever that is.

I don't know if this house will always be a home, to my nuclear family or to my parents, but it is today, once again providing the shelter and comfort it gave me for decades. For now it is absent the people who always made it special, but at least I'm filling it up with a new generation of Kahns to eat at the dinner table, play ping pong on Shabbat afternoon, run around screaming until they break something delicate — no mom, it hasn't happened yet but it will, so just accept it — and to live unremarkably in decidedly remarkable times. ■

Contact Gabe Kahn via email: gkahn@njewishnews.com, or Twitter: [@sgabekahn](https://twitter.com/sgabekahn).

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Take a lesson from the British: Save Jewish newspapers

Gary Rosenblatt
Special to NJJN

My initiation into the world of Jewish journalism took place 50 years ago when I stumbled into a job reporting for the New York office of The Jewish Chronicle of London (The JC), the granddaddy of Jewish newspapers and an institution among British Jews since 1841.

Reading recent reports of the imminent demise of The JC, the world's oldest Jewish newspaper — and its apparent last-minute rescue — got me thinking about my gradual transition back then from a would-be academic to a career journalist. Those memories have taken on more poignancy of late, given the almost-death of The JC, the closure a few weeks ago of the Canadian Jewish News, and the deeply uncertain future of Jewish journalism in the U.S. at a time when it is needed most.

But more of that later.

I knew little about The JC's proud history back in 1970. I was a graduate student in American literature, newly married, and eager for part-time work. Fortunately, I was introduced to Richard Jaffe, a warm and elegant veteran journalist who had covered Eastern Europe after World War II and was the United Nations correspondent for The JC. He hired me for two days a week, and over the next couple of years, with Dick as my mentor, I covered a wide range of stories about Jewish life in New York. Along the way my interest in dark humor in the writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne — my planned master's thesis — waned as my curiosity about how the Jewish community functioned, and sometimes didn't, waxed.

Each week Dick would communicate with the home office in London by telex, proposing various stories. The editors there would respond up or down, and if it was a go, tell us a preferred story length — usually short — as in, "Send 250 words on synagogue de-facing." They seemed to prefer what I came to think of as Jewish exotica rather than in-depth reporting. I remember being surprised at how enthused the home editors were over a story I proposed on gangs in Brooklyn who were stealing streimlich (fur hats) off the heads of chasidim and selling the fur. I thought the editors would ask for a news brief, but I was wrong. "Send up to 1,000 words, possible Page 1," the cable read, as best I remember.

The JC was more than a newspaper in those days. It was the bridge that connected Jews throughout Britain. With a large and thoroughly professional staff, The JC filled its pages with deep reporting on British-Jewish life and the Mideast, as well as a lively opinion section and glossy supplements on



**Between
the Lines**

everything from literature to fashion.

Part of the reason for the JC's financial as well as editorial success was that, given that the majority of British Jews lived in the London area, the paper served both a national and local audience. The social pages were a major source of income, with people from around the country paying to publish announcements of bar mitzvahs, weddings, and obituaries.

Dick Jaffe was a patient and generous editor, allowing me to take on some meatier stories at times: A phony "rabbi" performing interfaith marriages; UN debates on the Mideast conflict; and a bitter battle between Jewish and other minority groups over a major Queens housing project. I enjoyed most of the assignments, but I sometimes lacked the grit required for a hardened reporter. When a young Jewish man

**Jewish media should
serve as 'a watchdog over
the Jewish community
and as a purveyor
of truth. And we run the
risk of having neither.'**

hanged himself in Central Park after receiving a draft notice that would have sent him to Vietnam, I was assigned to visit the shiva house in Brooklyn and interview family members. But I couldn't bring myself to go. Instead, I called the house and was relieved after being told the family didn't want to talk to the press.

In addition to his JC post, Dick was also associate editor of The Jewish Week-American Examiner, then a small-circulation, privately owned New York paper that later evolved into today's New York Jewish Week. Thanks in part to his help and encouragement, I became assistant editor of The Jewish Week in 1972, and have remained in the field ever since, still passionate about the vital role a Jewish newspaper can play in the life of a community.

That message is getting increased attention these

days. Speaking at a recent Forward-sponsored webinar on the perilous state of Jewish journalism today, Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University said the role of Jewish journalism is "to shape and maintain community." He added that Jewish media should serve as "a watchdog over the Jewish community and as a purveyor of truth. And we run the risk of having neither."

That's because, like media organizations everywhere, community Jewish newspapers have endured a steep decrease in advertising amidst an internet culture where readers, and especially younger people, are used to getting their news instantly and for free. And that was before the coronavirus cratered the national economy.

Sarna said he feared the community will only realize the depth of its loss when Jewish newspapers go out of business.

Andres Spokoiny, the president and CEO of the Jewish Funders Network, agreed, asserting that if Jewish newspapers are no longer around to serve as "the American Jewish public square" for dialogue and debate, the result will be more extremism and an even greater divide among us. Spokoiny said part of his role today is to highlight to foundations and major donors the importance of independent Jewish newspapers in "our Jewish eco-system," as necessary as day schools, camps, and human services.

I hope our community hears these messages and sees the closure of Canada's 60-year-old national Jewish newspaper and the drama playing out in England over The JC as serious warning signals. And time for action.

The group that rescued The JC last month said they viewed the enterprise not as "a commercial venture but as a community asset." The consortium is establishing a charitable trust to control the paper and allow it to remain "a vital pillar of communal life," it said in a statement.

The Jewish Week Media Group, parent company of The Jewish Week and NJJN, has made no secret of its financial crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic. It was heartening and deeply gratifying to see that more than 500 readers have responded to the papers' appeals for support, which has helped raise much-needed funds in recent weeks.

But far more is needed to ensure the survival and sustainability of the newspapers serving the largest Jewish communities in the world. As American journalism has seen the business model collapse and give way to a philanthropic model, it is time for our communal leaders — foundations, federations, and major donors — to step up, or face a community missing the bridge that can span our increasingly deep divisions. ■

Gary Rosenblatt is editor at large at The New York Jewish Week, NJJN's sister publication. He can be reached at Gary@jewishweek.org.

Shoah museums telling a multicultural story

Holocaust educators now stressing connections with the harsh experiences of other ethnic groups

Steve Lipman
Special to NJJN

HOUSTON — In this sprawling, increasingly Hispanic city, the only “fully bilingual” Holocaust museum in the country recently hosted Dolores Huerta, the 89-year-old cofounder with Cesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers Union.

A few hours up Interstate 45, the newly expanded Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum shines a light not only on the murder of Jews during the Shoah but also on the mistreatment of Native Americans and atrocities committed in China, Cambodia, and Rwanda.

And half a world away in Johannesburg, South Africa, when leaders of a newly opened Holocaust and



The Holocaust Museum Houston, which opened in 1996. PHOTOS COURTESY HMH

genocide center wanted to mount an exhibit about the Rwandan genocide, local Holocaust survivors balked. “They didn’t make a connection with our own [Jewish] history,” the institution’s director, Tali Nates, told NJJN in a telephone interview. “It took time to explain.”

Making that connection increasingly explicit — between the Holocaust and the mistreatment of farm workers and Native Americans, the cruelties of the slave trade and apartheid, and other genocides the world over — is the hallmark of the new Holocaust museum.

Kelly Zuniga, CEO of the Holocaust Museum Houston, which reopened last year after a \$34 million expansion and reorientation, explained the new multicultural, inclusionary, and intersectional approach of institutions like hers.

In a recent interview with NJJN at the museum, she said, “By examining the history of the Holocaust and establishing connections to modern-day society — whether it be the rising tide of anti-Semitism or hate crimes against targeted groups — we can begin to think critically about the role we play in society and how our individual and collective choices impact others.”

Seventy-five years after the liberation of Auschwitz, Holocaust education is being transformed from Texas to New York, and it is reaching new audiences in a demographically changing nation.

“Holocaust education is the foundation of our museum,” Zuniga said. “And while we are committed to educating the public about this history, it is crucial to consider how the themes and lessons of the Holocaust remain relevant in our lives today.”

To that end, all of the exhibition panels in the Houston museum contain text in English and Spanish. There are Spanish-speaking docents, the videos have Spanish subtitles, and the modest gift shop offers many books in Spanish.

In Albuquerque, Leon Natker, executive director of the New Mexico Holocaust Museum, leads an institution that presents exhibits on slavery and the Rwandan and Armenian genocide. He told NJJN that a show on the Native American experience is in the planning stages. “Our mission always included [education about] acts of bigotry and genocide beyond the Holocaust,” he said. “It not only doesn’t diminish the uniqueness of the Holocaust — if anything, it sets it apart as possibly the greatest example of man’s inhumanity to man ever documented.”

This sense of inclusion in Holocaust museums around the country “is inevitable — it’s necessary,” said Menachem Rosensaft, a son of Holocaust survivors who is active in activities related to the so-called Second Generation. By ignoring the tragedies of other groups, “We’re building a wall against ourselves,” he said. “If we don’t care about other people’s suffering and tragedies, how can we expect other people to care about ours?”

Part of this shift can be attributed to a rise in anti-Semitism and hate crimes against other minority groups in the United States and abroad over the last few years. A growing number of Holocaust museums are redefining

Continued on page 22

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Obituaries

Herbert Young

Herbert Young, 85, of Ewing died April 12, 2020. He was the son of the late Doris and Jacob Young of Trenton.

After graduating from college Mr. Young worked for the Mercer County Board of Social Services as a supervisor of income maintenance. He also served as the deputy coordinator of welfare services for the NJ Office of Emergency Management. He retired in March 1992.

He was a lifetime member of the Citizens Rifle and Revolver Club of New Jersey. He was a contributor to the Fraternal Order of Police of Hamilton Township, Lodge #20.

He was a member of Ahavath Israel and Adath Israel synagogues, and was active at Hamilton Township Senior Center.

Predeceased by his wife of 29 years, Ella, and a brother, Maxim (Laura) Young of Willingboro, he is survived by two nieces, Cheri (Barry) Chalofsky of Lawrenceville and Julie Young of Wilmington, Del.; a nephew, Jeffrey (Tudy) Cohen of Charlotte Courthouse, Va.; five great-nieces and -nephews; and two great-great-nieces and -nephews.

Graveside services were held at People of Truth Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to American Heart Association, American Cancer Society (Mercer County Unit), Deborah Hospital Foundation, Adath Israel Congregation, or Greenwood House.

Ephrium Hodes

Ephrium G. Hodes, 94, of West Windsor died March 31, 2020. Born in Elizabeth, he resided in Linden and Roselle before moving to West Windsor 20 years ago.

Mr. Hodes taught history and law at Woodbridge High School for 34 years.

He attended Rutgers University in Newark and earned a master's degree in social studies.

He was a U.S. Army veteran who served as a Private First Class during World War II.

He served as president of the Woodbridge Federation of Teachers and was past chancellor of Linden Lodge #2 Knights of Pythias.

He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Charlotte; his son, Marc; and his daughter, Kara Hodes-Wechsler (Jay Wechsler).

Private services were held April 2 with arrangements by Mount Sinai Memorial Chapels, East Brunswick. Memorial contributions may be made to Greenwood Hospice, 25 Scotch Road, Suite I, Ewing, N.J. 08628; or Chabad of the Windsors, 1302 Windsor Edinburg Road, West Windsor Township, N.J. 08550.

Anne Freedman

Anne L. Freedman, 92, of Princeton died April 2,

2020. Born in Brooklyn, she resided in Princeton for the past 55 years.

After purchasing Kooltronic, Inc., an enclosure cooling manufacturer, with her late husband, Gerald, in 1970, Mrs. Freedman soon joined the company full-time and enjoyed a long career primarily managing the manufacturing side of the family-owned business.

She was a graduate of New York University.

She was a patron of the arts and supported many causes, Jewish organizations in particular. She was a longtime member of Adath Israel Congregation in Lawrenceville and The Jewish Center in Princeton.

Predeceased by her husband, she is survived by her daughter, Debbie Freedman (Avi Paradise); her son, Barry (Bobbi) Freedman; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Private graveside services were held with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing. Memorial contributions may be made to The Leon Siskowitz Cultural Fund at Adath Israel Congregation, Lawrenceville, or The Jess and Marion Epstein Lunch-and-Learn Fund at The Jewish Center, Princeton.

Dana Blowstein

Dana M. Blowstein, 37, of Robbinsville died April 2, 2020.

Ms. Blowstein is survived by her son, Jackson Danger Kietzman; her mother, Barbara Horn; her father, Alan Blowstein; and a brother, Andrew Blowstein.

Private graveside services were held April 7 with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing.

Frank Landau

Frank J. Landau, 102, of Columbus died April 1, 2020.

Predeceased by his daughter, Arleen Uretsky, Mr. Landau is survived by his wife, Roslyn, and his son, Gary.

Private services were held April 3 with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing.

Harold Berger

Harold Berger, 92, of Ewing died April 9, 2020.

Continued on next page

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Continued from previous page

Born in the Bronx, he was a longtime New Jersey resident, living in New Milford, Lawrenceville, Monroe Township, and most recently at Abrams Assisted Living Residence of Greenwood House in Ewing.

Dr. Berger worked for American Cyanamid Company for 37 years as a research parasitologist in discovery and development of animal health products before retiring in 1991.

He graduated from New York University with a Ph.D. in parasitology.

He enlisted in the Army and became a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division.

He was a former men's club president and board member of Congregation Brothers of Israel.

He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Arlene; his daughter, Sheryl (Joseph) Punia; two sons, James (Michelle) and Lawrence (Fern); seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

A private burial was held with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing, with a celebration of his life to be held at a later date. Memorial contributions may be made to Greenwood House or The Wounded Warrior Project.

John Schafer

John Schafer, 100, of Trenton died April 11, 2020. He grew up in Trenton.

Mr. Schafer graduated from the Peddie School, where he was a member of the wrestling and swim teams. He attended the University of Pennsylvania before serving in the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) from 1942 to 1945. He was awarded the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign, the World War II Victory, the American Campaign, and the Good Conduct medals. More recently, Gov. Chris Christie presented him with the Distinguished Service Medal for distinguished meritorious service in ground operations during World War II in the Asiatic Pacific Theater of Operations.

After the war, he continued his father's legacy in the furniture business. Over his career he owned and operated six furniture stores, three in Trenton and three in Pennsylvania: Lancaster, York, and Carlisle. He also assisted his sons in going on to own their own stores. He worked until the age of 92 in his favorite and last remaining furniture store, Home Furniture, located on North Broad Street in Trenton, which had been built by his father in 1925.

He was an active member of Har Sinai Temple for over 50 years, where he donated land for the temple's expansion.

His favorite pastime was golf. He was a member of Greenacres Country Club for over 50 years and won dozens of tournaments.

Predeceased by his former wives Margery and Edith and a daughter-in-law, Harriet, he is survived by four sons, Edward of Old Bridge, William of East Brunswick, Gordon, and Jay; daughters-in-law Joy, Sarah, and Amy; 10 grandchildren; many great-grandchildren; and his second wife, Rose.

Private graveside services were held April 14 with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial

Chapel, Ewing. Memorial contributions may be made to National Museum of American Jewish Military History.

Seymour Nowicki

Seymour S. Nowicki, 73, of Washington Crossing, Pa., died April 12, 2020. Born in Marktobendorf, Germany, in 1946, he was the son of Holocaust survivors from Poland. He came to the United States at age three.

Mr. Nowicki graduated from Trenton State College with a bachelor's degree in Speech Arts/English Education. He also received his master's degree from Temple University in Public Address.

He was employed by the Trenton Public School District from 1968 to 1985. He taught English at Trenton High School, and coached the forensics team and the girls' softball team for many years. He later served as the language arts coordinator for the entire school district.

In 1985, Seymour changed careers and began working at Merrill Lynch as a financial adviser. He rose to the rank of vice president before retiring in 2013.

He coached his son's and daughter's soccer and baseball/softball teams, and enjoyed travel.

He was an active member of Congregation Brothers of Israel since 1973, serving as a member of the board of trustees, the executive board, and the education and ways and means committees. In recent years, he became a member of the activities committee at Traditions in Washington Crossing.

He is survived by his wife of almost 50 years, Donna (Berkofsky); his son, Garren (Wendy); his daughter, Jill (Ramsey) Shockley; and four grandchildren.

Private services were held with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing. Memorial contributions may be made to the Seymour S. Nowicki Fund at Congregation Brothers of Israel, Newtown, Pa.

Rose Friedman

Rose C. Friedman, 94, of Ewing died April 15, 2020.

Passionate about politics, in her younger years Mrs. Friedman was an active member of the Civic Democratic Club in the Bronx and a regular poll worker on election days. She continued voting by mail after becoming a resident of Greenwood House, where she was also known for ordering meals for those residents at her dining room table who could not do so for themselves and taking wheelchair-bound residents back to their rooms.

She is survived by her daughter, Debbie (Jeff) Kirschenbaum; her son, Charles (Randi); a brother, Irving Saltzman of Boynton Beach, Fla.; and four grandchildren.

Private services were held April 17 with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing.

Adam Henschel

Adam Steven Henschel, 66, of Princeton died April 17, 2020.

Predeceased by his parents, Leonard and Judith Henschel, he is survived by a sister, Laurel Eve Henschel.

Private services were held April 22 with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing. Memorial contributions may be made to Greenwood House or Chabad of Mercer County-Princeton.

Rudolph Loewenstein

Rudolph J. Loewenstein, 98, of Ewing died April 20, 2020. Born in Berlin, he was a resident of Ewing for 71 years.

Mr. Loewenstein was the proprietor of a fruit and vegetable company before becoming a meat inspector for the State of New Jersey and then the U.S. Department of Agriculture, where he worked for 21 years before retiring.

He was a U.S. Army veteran serving in World War II.

He was the former president of Adath Israel Congregation and chairman of the ritual committee. He was honored twice as Man of the Year by the congregation.

He served as chairman of Meals on Wheels at Greenwood House and was honored there with the May Medoff award.

Predeceased by his wife, Clara Weis Loewenstein; his daughter, Judith Halpern; and daughter-in-law, Janee Loewenstein, he is survived by his son, Alan; a son-in-law, Howard Halpern; five grandchildren; and a great-grandchild.

Private services were held April 22 with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing. Memorial contributions may be made to Adath Israel Congregation or Greenwood House.

Sheila Friedman

Sheila G. Friedman, 83, of Ewing died April 22, 2020. Born in Brooklyn, she was a former resident of East Windsor and Monroe Township.

Mrs. Friedman was a legal secretary for over 20 years with the firm of Lowell and Curran before retiring.

She graduated from New York City Community College of Applied Arts and Sciences in 1956.

Predeceased by her husband, Lionel, she is survived by two sons, Steven and Paul (Jen); her daughter, Stephanie Solarski; a sister, Maxine Wald; five grandchildren; and five great-granddaughters.

Private services were held April 27 with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing. Memorial contributions may be made to Greenwood House, Ewing.

Julia Cohen

Julia B. Cohen, 96, of Ewing died April 26, 2020.

Predeceased by her sister, Dorothy Tankel, Ms. Cohen is survived by a nephew, Kenneth (Elizabeth) Tankel.

Private services were held with arrangements by Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, Ewing.

Agenda

Due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, most synagogues and organizations have cancelled all in-person activities for the rest of the spring. Some are offering online learning opportunities or plan to reschedule. Please email calendar@njewishnews.com with online events open to the community.

Adath Israel Congregation, Lawrenceville, continues to hold programs and events online through Zoom.

Morning Minyan on Zoom is held Mondays and Thursdays at 7.

“Ripped from the Headlines,” a discussion of Jewish takes on current events, will be held with Rabbi Benjamin Adler on Thursday, May 7, at 10:30 a.m.

Sharing Shabbat, a Kabbalat Shabbat service and interactive teaching led by Adler and Hazzan Arthur Katlin, will be held Fridays, May 8, 15, and 22, at 5:30 p.m. using the Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat evening service in the Sim Shalom siddur for Shabbat and Festivals.

A Rabbi’s Tisch will follow Shabbat services at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, May 8.

A Virtual Lag b’Omer Bonfire will be held Monday, May 11, at 7 p.m.

Torah on Tap, an evening of schmoozing, Torah, and drinks (BYO) with Rabbi Adler, will be held Thursday, May 14, at 7:30 p.m.

Havdalah Together will be held on Zoom Saturdays, May 16, at 8:55 p.m.; May 23 at 9 p.m.; and May 30 at 9:05 p.m.

“Adath’s Got Talent” will be held Sunday, May 17, at 6 p.m.

A Tikkun Leil Shavuot Study Session will be held Thursday, May 28, at 7 p.m.

For more information or to receive Zoom invitations, contact 609-896-4977 or rabbiadler@adathisraelnj.org.

College book awards

Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Mercer is offering need-based book awards to college-bound Jewish students who reside in the Princeton Mercer Bucks community and surrounding areas. Students must be accepted and enrolled in a college or university for the fall 2020 semester.

Applications for the 2020 Book Awards are due by June 1. Contact Lara Livne at lara@foundation-jewish.org.

Chabad of Robbinsville and Hamilton will offer a four-week mini-series, “Cultivating Character: The Ethics of Owner-

ship,” exploring Jewish wisdom on life, morality, and character development, beginning Tuesday, May 5, at 8 p.m. To RSVP, email rabbichaiton@gmail.com.

Emergency funds

Jewish Community COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund of Greater Mercer will provide financial support to the federation’s partner agencies and synagogues who are serving vulnerable community members.

All donations will be matched dollar-for-dollar up to the first \$50,000 raised. Go to jewishpmb.givingfuel.com/covid-19.

Greenwood House in Ewing has opened a COVID-19 Emergency to ensure the health and safety of its senior residents, caregivers, and staff. The fund will provide additional personal protective equipment; efforts to sanitize surfaces and high-touch areas on an aggressive schedule; and enhance activity programming for residents.

For more information, please contact Neil Wise, Director of Development, nwise@greenwoodhouse.org or 609-883-5391, ext. 380, or go to greenwoodhouse.org/node/101.

Memorial scholarship

The Dr. Esther Wollin Memorial Scholarship Fund offers a scholarship opportunity for Jewish female students who reside in the Princeton Mercer Bucks community. Eligibility is for Jewish female full-time students who will or are already attending Rutgers University and raised by their Jewish mother in a single-parent household.

Applications must be submitted by June 1. Visit JFCSonline.org or contact Joyce at 609-987-8100 or JoyceW@JFCSonline.org.

The following national and international organizations are offering various online resources:

American Jewish Committee (AJC) has been holding online Advocacy Anywhere sessions on Facebook. In addition, AJC’s New Jersey office is supplementing the national webinars with local ones featuring guests such

as the consul general of Greece, the director of the governor’s New Jersey-Israel Commission, and the director of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

To register for webinars, visit ajc.org/advocacyanywhere.

Jewish Teens Thrive (jewishteensthive.org), a project of the **Jewish Teen Education & Engagement Funder Collaborative**, aspires to support parents and Jewish educators with skills, tools, and resources to build teens’ resilience and help them thrive. With May serving as National Mental Health Awareness Month, “Collective Compassion” (collectivecompassion2020.com) will offer dozens of experiences to draw on the power of Jewish creativity, culture, learning, and values to support teens.

National Museum of American Jewish History will celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month with online conversations with historians on May 7, 14, 21, and 27. For more information, visit JewishAmericanHeritage.org.

PJ Library, a nationwide program that sends Jewish books to young families, will hold a webinar on Wednesday, May 6, “Talking with Children about Death and Loss in the Age of Coronavirus,” at 3:30 p.m. To register, go to bit.ly/3bHUHip.

Camp Zeke in Lakewood, Pa., will hold a Digital Open House with Camp Zeke’s director Isaac Mamaysky on Sunday, May 17, at noon. RSVP to questions@campzeke.org with parent’s name and camper’s age/grade.

Go to campzeke.org/virtual-programs-spring-2020 for a schedule of online events or contact questions@campzeke.org or 212-913-9783.

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research will conduct its annual Uriel Weinreich Summer Program in Yiddish Language, Literature, and Culture online via Zoom for summer 2020 (June 29-Aug. 7). The deadline for submitting applications and financial aid requests has been extended to May 29.

For more information, go to summerprogram.yivo.org.

Gallery



LEGACY STORY — As a gesture of gratitude for the 600+ Promises (legacy commitments) received to date by local synagogues, agencies, and educational organizations, the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Mercer has presented all legacy donors, including Marsha and Eliot Freeman, longtime volunteers in the Princeton Jewish community (pictured here with their family), with “My Legacy Story,” a booklet that provides an opportunity for donors to reflect on their own life stories. For more information, contact Amy Zacks at 609-524-4374 or amy@foundationjewish.org.



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Federation provides free Jewish books to families each month through the PJ Library program, in partnership with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

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The needs from the COVID-19 Crisis continue to grow. We made great strides, but our job is not done.

The Jewish Federation brought community leaders together and created the **Jewish Community COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund of Greater Mercer**.

This unified community-wide fund, coordinated by Federation, provides direct support to the urgent local needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- **Health:** Costs of essential medical services and equipment have grown dramatically.
- **Education and Social Services:** Needs for education, counseling and social services increased.
- **Economic Assistance:** Those impacted by unemployment, furloughs, and fixed-income challenges require greater financial assistance.
- **Food Insecurity:** Requests for food assistance increased exponentially.

Thanks to the immediate support of many donors, we surpassed \$100,000, including a \$50,000 match by the Jewish Federation of Princeton Mercer Bucks.

Grant applications from beneficiary agencies, synagogues and other Jewish institutions are being reviewed by the Grant Committee and allocation of available funds is in process.

We appointed a cross-section of Jewish communal leaders to serve on the Grant Committee for the Emergency Response Fund: Co-Chairs Eliot Freeman and Lisa Tobias and Committee Members Adele Agin, Judy Axelrod, Skip Berman, Dan Brent, Susan Falcon, Harold Heft, Dan Herscovici, and Don Leibowitz. They will be joined ex-officio by Rabbi Ben Adler, Chair of the Mercer County Board of Rabbis. The committee will be staffed by Jewish communal professionals Mark Merkovitz and Linda Meisel.

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**The Talmud says: Kol Yisrael Arevim Zeh L'Zeh
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The mission of the Jewish Federation of Princeton Mercer Bucks is to preserve, secure, and strengthen Jewish life and values in our community, the State of Israel, and throughout the world.

The mitzvah of a proper burial

Emor

Leviticus 21:1-24:23

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Dead. Unburied. Abandoned. Forgotten. What can be a worse fate? I once read a very moving novel by Joseph Roth, “The Radetzky March,” about the events immediately preceding World War I and the fate of those who were caught up in the chaos of the opening days of that war.

I was drawn to this book because it deals, in part, with the Jews of Galicia and the effect that World War I had upon them. Both my paternal and maternal great-grandparents were caught up in the events of those times, and I wished to learn more about those events, if only from a fictional account.

I found the book informative and troubling, but the single event recorded in it that had the most impact on me was a description of the novel’s hero, a combatant in the initial outbreak of the battle and gunfire. At one point, as he was fleeing for safety, he encountered the corpse of one of his fellows. Rather than pass this corpse by, he chose to drag the corpse to a nearby graveyard, dig a shallow grave with his bayonet, and bury the poor man.

Although the hero of this story was not a Jew, he was acting in accordance with a supreme Jewish value. At great personal risk, he buried a “met mitzvah,” an abandoned corpse with no one else

present to bury it. Our Torah insists that giving such a corpse the dignity of a proper burial is a mitzvah, one which takes priority over almost any other good deed.

The source for this mitzvah is in this week’s Torah portion, Emor, where we read of the strict prohibition upon kohanim, members of the priestly caste, to come into contact with the dead. Exceptions are made for the kohen’s parents, children, siblings, and spouse.

An exception is also made for the met mitzvah. Should the kohen encounter an abandoned corpse, and no one else is available to bury it, he is commanded to ignore the prohibition against contact with the dead, and he must bury that corpse himself.

This is the meaning of the phrase in the very first verse of our parsha, “... he shall not defile himself for any dead person among his people...” (Leviticus 21:1). Paraphrasing Rashi’s words here: “When the dead man is among his people, the kohen cannot defile himself, but when the dead man is not among his people, i.e., there is no one else to bury him, then the prohibition does not apply.”

Our tradition is unusually sensitive to the sanctity of the human body. A proper Jewish burial is the last chesed shel emet (kindness of truth) that one can perform for another.

It is this important Jewish value that has led Jewish communities throughout the ages to do all that they could to recover the bodies of those of our brethren who perished in prisons, on battlefields, or in

tragic natural disasters.

I must note a poignant incident in our history, an incident which culminated in the recovery of two metei mitzvah. Part of the narrative of these two heroes is recounted in the book “The Deed” by Gerold Frank. It is the story of two boys, Eliahu Bet Zouri and Eliahu Hakim, who gave their lives to assassinate a high British official, based in Egypt, whose policies threatened to block Jewish immigration into what was then Palestine. They succeeded in assassinating the official, but were tried and hanged for their efforts, and buried near Cairo in 1945.

But they were never forgotten. In 1975, the State of Israel exchanged 20 Arab prisoners for the bodies of these two young men and reburied them in heroes’ graves upon Mount Herzl.

In recovering their bodies and eventually affording them an appropriate Jewish burial, the Israeli government was adhering to the teaching of this week’s Torah portion. They saw to it that these metei mitzvah were buried properly.

Even at this moment, the remains of several Israel soldiers are unrecovered and are held by our enemies. These soldiers are metei mitzvah in every sense of that phrase. They performed great mitzvot in their military service, and bringing them home for a proper burial is the least we can do to honor their memories.

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb is executive vice president emeritus of the Orthodox Union.

Our Towns

Museums

Continued from page 16

their missions to deal with the contemporary ramifications of prejudice as well as the Shoah’s historical aspects.

“We all have greater multicultural sensitivities,” said Holocaust authority Michael Berenbaum, citing books by Jewish authors that include or concentrate on non-Jewish victims of the Third Reich.

‘Not far away’

In Manhattan, subtle shifts are taking place at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in Battery Park City. The current, ambitious show, “Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away,” highlights the death camp experiences of such non-Jewish victims as Gypsies, Poles, Jehovah’s Witnesses, people of color, and LGBT people.

“Over the years, the museum has presented programs, for example, on the Armenian and Rwandan genocides, Nazi persecution of gay men and the contemporary fight for equality, and multiple programs on the rise of white nationalism,” said Joshua Mack, the museum’s vice president for marketing. In a sign of its “commitment to social justice,” Mack said, the museum recently presented an online concert marking International Roma Day.

The museum is also beginning to focus more fully on



Students on a docent-led tour of the Holocaust Museum Houston.

anti-Semitism in the wake of the attacks in Pittsburgh, Jersey City, and Monsey, N.Y., its new CEO, Jack Kliger, told NJJN recently. As part of New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s response to the uptick in anti-Semitism, the museum is hosting tours of its facility for eighth- and 10th-grade public school students from the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg, Crown Heights, and Borough Park; the “Never Again” message, but now with a contemporary urgency, is reaching a new generation of non-Jews.

Not everyone is on board with the more inclusionary approach, reflecting a debate that has taken place in recent years. Steven Katz, former director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), is a strong advocate of

emphasizing the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Katz, founding director of the Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies at Boston University and author of “The Holocaust in Historical Context” (1994), said he objects to the “new field of genocide studies [that] has been successful in promoting the idea that the Holocaust is one among many genocides in history.”

Another former director of the USHMM, Walter Reich, has also objected to what he called the urge by museums to dilute the uniqueness of the Holocaust and to “hitch Jewish experience” to universal lessons about “intolerance.” “But intolerance isn’t what animated Hitler to murder the Jews,” he wrote in an essay in the online magazine Mosaic. “[W]hat animated him was a vicious form of anti-Semitism.”

Recognizing other tragedies emphasizes the unique nature of the Shoah and does not weaken its memory, countered Berenbaum, the one-time project director of the USHMM. “When uniqueness is irrefutable, analogies need not be feared, since they cannot be mistaken for equivalents,” he said. “Only by understanding the fate of other groups, detailing where it paralleled Jewish treatment and, more importantly, where it differed, can the distinctive nature of Jewish fate be historically demonstrated.” ■

Steve Lipman is a staff writer for The New York Jewish Week, NJJN’s sister publication.

ExitRamp

Does anybody know what time it is?

Merri Ukraincik
NJNJ Contributing
Writer



Close to Home

At first glance, life seems to be unfolding as it normally does this time of year. The seder plate is back in the storage cabinet, the tulips are in bloom, and we've swapped boxes of matzah for yeasty bagels by the dozen. But really nothing is normal in this Twilight Zone of corona lockdown, not even the annual Counting of the Omer.

Each night for seven weeks, we recite a blessing and a simple formula — for example, *Today is nine days, which is one week and two days of the Omer* — to sanctify the passage of time between Passover and Shavuot. The trajectory between the two holidays, like our biblical wandering in the desert, gives us the chance to prepare ourselves spiritually for the gift of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Every year, I drop the ball before we even start counting on the second night of Passover. But my husband, determined to see the Omer through to the end, usually counts in synagogue after the evening prayer service. With the building shuttered for several weeks already, he has been reciting the blessing in our den instead, where he is isolating because of his ongoing Covid-19 exposure as a physician. Days into the

current Omer cycle, this floor plan suddenly made me want to share in his counting. Now I call down to him nightly, “Have you Omered?” I’m grateful when I keep him from forgetting.

It is striking to me that I remember the Omer at all, when it could well take me a full minute to recall the current day of the week, unless it is the date of a hard-won food delivery or Shabbat. Also, I misplaced my calendar, having set it aside before Passover, though what does it matter when my appointments have all been cancelled?

Perhaps this lost sense of time also accounts for my new investment in Omer-counting. The process provides structure and clarity. But mostly, there is something reassuring in its defined length — a fixed 49 days — as we face a quarantine of uncertain duration. Not that I’m kvetching. We have a Torah obligation to preserve life above all. Better safe indoors than sorry.

If we’ve perhaps gotten some sleep and are in a state of mind to look for them, there are insights and lessons to take away from this experience, especially about our need to loosen the control we think we have on the course of our lives. But the worry, the exhaustion, and the many emotions running amok at full intensity may make it impossible for us to see them right now.

Each of us is struggling, and managing, in our own way. Our other challenges do not brake or even slow down for a public health crisis. Rather, it is on us to figure out how they will coexist with the corollaries of a pandemic — the close quarters and disruption in routine, and our anxieties about our jobs, finances, and very lives.

I am usually glass half-full, and there are indeed moments that are easy, teeming with gratitude, laughter, and memories in the making. But there are others that are rougher for our hearts to bear. It is then that I let The Shirelles croon in my head, “Mama said there will be days like this.” Indeed, both the upbeat, hopeful ones and those that make us feel we cannot hold out a minute longer.

The final chapter of the Torah describes a heart-wrenching scene that keeps replaying in my mind. God tells Moses, the beloved prophet who led us out from Egypt, that he may not enter the Land of Israel with his people. Moses pleads with Him — *Let me cross. Let me see it.* But his prayer is only partially answered when God offers him a panoramic view of the Promised Land from the distance of the mountain.

As I gaze out my window, Moses’ longing resonates. For now, I can only wonder when we will re-enter our world — picking up our lives, seeing family and friends, and returning to work, school, and shul. On the day I write this, it has been 44 days, which is six weeks and two days of my family’s corona lockdown. But this is a marathon, not a sprint, and I know that the main thing — the only thing — is to make it safely across. ■

Merri Ukraincik of Edison is a regular contributor to NJNJ. Follow her at merriukraincik.com.

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