

Voice[★]

JULY/AUGUST 2025
TAMMUZ/AV/ELUL 5785
VOL. LXVII, NO. 7

published by TEMPLE ISRAEL of Great Neck



COMMUNITY @ TEMPLE ISRAEL



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ISRAEL**
of Great Neck

JOIN US FOR MINYAN

Monday through Friday mornings at 7:30 a.m.
Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m.
Sunday through Thursday evenings at 8:00 p.m.

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www.TIGN.org

from the rabbi

Rabbi Howard Stecker

rabbistecker@tign.org



That Which Unites Us

Poor Moses. His fellow Israelites complain to him incessantly and then his own brother and sister chime in. Aaron and Miriam tell God that they resent God's preferential treatment of Moses. After that, a quick sequence of events occurs. God strikes Miriam with a skin ailment. Aaron begs Moses to intervene. Moses prays for Miriam to be healed. God heals Miriam. And the people of Israel wait until she has fully healed to resume their journey.

This brief story in the Torah illustrates a universal theme. Often tragic circumstances help us to transcend our differences with

“Often tragic circumstances help us to transcend our differences.”

one another. Miriam's sickness touched Moses to his core, compelling him to pray on her behalf even though, moments earlier, she had been criticizing him.

When I visited Israel in July of 2023, the demonstrations against the government's proposed judiciary reforms were at their

peak as hundreds of thousands of Israelis gathered regularly throughout the country in protest. And yet, following October 7, even the most vociferous protestors joined the war effort against Hamas, temporarily setting aside their differences with Israel's leadership.

As the war wore on past the one-year mark, these differences resurfaced and others emerged, including bitter resentment

toward Haredi communities for refusing to serve in the Army. And then Israel attacked Iran, triggering an Iranian response that left Israelis vulnerable to missile barrages. Once again, Israelis rose above their differences in the face of a common threat.

Shortly after Israel attacked Iran, opposition leader Yair Lapid wrote, “When it comes to the security of the people of Israel in the face of our enemies, we are one people, with one mission. Our children will not live in fear of an Iranian nuclear bomb. Not today, not ever.”

We can all easily name a number of issues that divide us as American Jews. And yet, by and large, we are united in recognizing the rising incidents of antisemitism that come from the right and left and that affect Jews of all backgrounds and ideologies. Whether as a result of the weaponization of white supremacy or the call to globalize the intifada, Jews throughout the country are increasingly unsafe. It is sobering to realize that nothing we do, no ideology that we embrace, no denomination that we adhere to, can shield us from our growing vulnerability.

I surely wish that, even if there were no external threats, we would approach our differences more civilly and embrace our similarities more gratefully. Meanwhile, I am heartened to know that, when such threats do emerge, we tend to react like Moses and the ancient Israelites. We support one another. We pray for one another. And, on some core existential level, we commit to traveling forward together. ■

The Shoah Remembrance Committee Holocaust Book Club

welcomes everyone to join us for our upcoming book discussions

...

Monday, September 15 at 8:15 p.m.

Something Beautiful Happened: A Story of Survival and Courage in the Face of Evil
by Yvette Manassis Corporon

Monday, October 27 at 8:15 p.m.

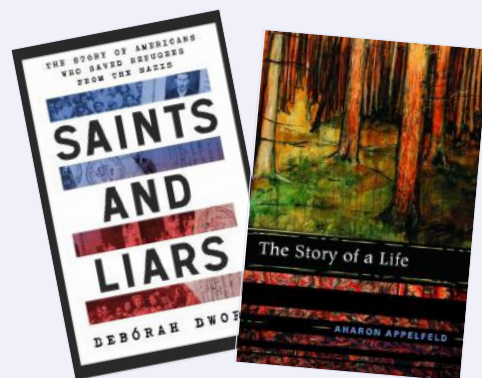
The Story of a Life
by Aharon Appelfeld

Monday, December 8 at 8:15 p.m.

One Good Thing
by Georgia Hunter

Monday, January 26 at 8:15 p.m.

Saints and Liars
by Deborah Dwork



Unity as Our Answer to Fear

Who would have thought? When my family fled Iran in 1979, leaving behind a proud and rich Jewish heritage in the face of a terrifying regime change, we arrived in America with hope. We found comfort in the promise of freedom, acceptance, and safety—a place where we could live openly as Jews. We built lives here. We built synagogues. We flourished.

But now, decades later, I find myself looking over my shoulder once again.

The rise in antisemitism in this country—and right here in New York—is not just troubling, it's heartbreaking. I never imagined that my children would be walking around their college campuses wondering if it's safe to wear a *Magen David* around their necks. I never thought I would be asking myself: Do I tuck mine in before entering a crowded subway car?

When do we speak up and when do we stay quiet? These are not questions any of us should have to ask. But these days, we ask them constantly.

It's not just the graffiti, the online hate, or the headlines about violence. It's the silence from people we thought were our allies. It's the social events that turn into political rallies. It's the fear that speaking up—just being visibly Jewish—might cost

“May our unity be our answer to fear. May our presence be louder than any hate. May we go forward together—heads high, hearts open.”

you a job, a grade, or a friend.

There is so much uncertainty. There is so much worry.

And yet, we are not powerless.

We can come together—not only in fear, but in strength. In unity. In purpose.

Let us fill our sanctuary with voices in prayer and learning. Let us lean into our traditions and draw courage from the generations that came before us. Let us make our presence known not by shouting back, but by building louder, stronger communities of Jewish joy, identity, and resilience.

This is what our synagogue stands for. We are not alone, even when we feel alone. We have each other. We are one another's strength.

Let's keep showing up. For *Shabbat*. For *minyan*. For learning. For one another. Let's remind our children that being Jewish is not something to hide—it's something to celebrate.

May our unity be our answer to fear. May our presence be louder than any hate. May we go forward together—heads high, hearts open. ■



from the president
Rachel Geula
president@tign.org

Elon Gilad, Hebrew Language Expert, Journalist and TikTok Influencer Visiting as our Scholar-In-Residence July 18th and 19th

Elon Gilad, a historian, journalist, Hebrew language expert and author, will be visiting Temple Israel on July 18th and 19th. He will speak at the Shabbat Dinner on Friday night and then present the sermon on Shabbat morning. After services on Saturday, he will present a Shabbat Talk. Details are on the website.

Mr. Gilad explores the deep connections between language, history, and culture. As a journalist, he writes a weekly etymology column for *Haaretz* where he uncovers the fascinating stories behind Hebrew words, bridging ancient texts with modern usage. Some of his recent articles include “Who Wrote the Passover Haggadah?” and “From Scripture to Sea: The Revival of Hebrew Fish Names.” He is the author of the book *The Secret History of Judaism*, a book that challenges common narratives and brings a fresh perspective on Jewish history.

Elon Gilad earned a Master's degree in Language and Literature at Tel Aviv University. Previously, he had earned a Bachelor's

degree in Philosophy and Political Science there.

In an effort to make Jewish history and Hebrew accessible to a wide audience, Elon Gilad creates engaging social media content on Hebrew and Jewish history. His work spans scholarship, storytelling and media, making complex issues both insightful and engaging.

Rabbi Schweber was first made aware of Elon Gilad on TikTok. (A screenshot from one of his TikTok videos is shown at right.) Many of Elon's short videos describe how modern Hebrew words are inspired by often obscure Talmudic or Biblical words and idioms, which is something of interest to Rabbi Schweber. ■



from the rabbi

Rabbi Daniel Schweber

rabbischweber@tign.org



When the concentration camps were liberated, many vowed “never again.” General Eisenhower was prescient and asked for a camera crew to document the horror. He knew the world would quickly forget the inhumanity of the *Shoah*.

Eisenhower was correct. As the Billy Joel song states, “the fire kept burning.” There was Korea, then Vietnam, and the Cambodia Killing Fields. There were the race riots, apartheid and oppressive regimes on every continent.

“[Elie Wiesel encouraged us to] speak up and live life with gratitude. Every breath we take is an act of grace from God. We need to shine God’s light and love on the world through our actions.”

Billy Joel’s song “We Didn’t Start the Fire” ends at 1989 with Tiananmen Square and the fall of Berlin wall. Would the end of the Cold War bring peace in our lifetime?

The band Fall Out Boy released an updated version in 2023. The fire kept burning including the Oklahoma City bombing, Columbine, 9/11, the Afghan war and the Boston Marathon bombing.

The chorus goes “We didn’t start the fire, it was always burning, since the world’s been turning...No, we didn’t light it, but we tried to fight it.”

The fire of human suffering is inextinguishable. Can we do anything to mitigate human suffering and injustice in our world? And if we can’t fix the world much, how do we move on with daily life?

In his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize speech, a prize he won for his trailblazing efforts in Holocaust education, Elie Wiesel, z’l had an answer. He described how his survival deputized him to speak up in the memories of those who didn’t survive, especially the children. He taught that the opposite of love isn’t hatred; it’s apathy. And that even in the complicated world of national sovereignty and terrorism, we must speak up.

Wiesel even brought up the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. 1986 was the PLO’s terrorism heyday after Munich and the Lebanon war. He emphasized that terrorism and violence are NEVER the answer.

Wiesel made it clear we won’t be able to end the suffering. Does Wiesel then despair? No. He said we must speak up and live life with gratitude. Every breath we take is an act of grace from God. We need to shine God’s light and love on the world

Elie Wiesel Taught Us How to Cope with Hatred

through our actions.

Sure, fire can be destructive. We also need fire to live. Fire warms, feeds and nurtures. The *ner tamid*—the eternal flame—burns in all of our synagogues.

We cannot despair. We cannot have apathy. We must fight the fire of hatred and stoke the warming fires of love. Hopefully, the fires of love will spread enough to improve the world—even if just a little bit.

Take each moment, each day of grace and move through the world with love. ■

Scholar-in-Residence
ELON GILAD
Historian, Journalist, Hebrew Language Expert, and Author



Friday, July 18th
Services & Shabbat Dinner

Saturday, July 19th
Sermon & Shabbat Talk

TEMPLE ISRAEL OF GREAT NECK

MEN’S CLUB OF TEMPLE ISRAEL OF GREAT NECK

encourages you to join us for some football (and tailgating)



PANTHERS VS. JETS
METLIFE STADIUM
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19

DETAILS COMING SOON • MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The Inspirations Behind the Establishment of the Peticha Fund

by Rebecca Sassouni

The Board of Trustees of Temple Israel of Great Neck recently voted on a resolution to approve the establishment of a new synagogue fund: “The *Peticha* Blossom Women’s and Girls’ Education Fund.” *Peticha* translates to “introduction.” It also refers to opening.

This fund was established by my husband, Sassan, and me in memory of our grandmothers, z’l, Ashraf Ben Levy Chadi, Hakimeh Moallem, Dowlat Sassouni, and Malek Berookhim Yousefzadeh; and in the merits of our mothers—Soosan Moallem Sassouni and Madeline Chadi Yousefzadeh—and our children: Sophie Sassouni Zucker, Cyrus, Leila, and Emma Sassouni.

The Peticha Fund was officially announced by Rabbi Stecker and Temple Israel President Rachel Geula on Shavuot on the *yahrzeit*, *sal* of Malek Berookhim Yousefzadeh. Malek Khanom was a person of renown whose oral Torah still influences the interpretations and lived experiences of the written Torah of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and many more to this day. By establishing this new fund, we hope to make the teaching of both oral and written traditions possible for future generations of Temple Israel families.

Over the decades of our family’s involvement at Temple Israel, we have been gratified to call the synagogue our touchstone for some of our deepest friendships and most meaningful encounters in the broader Great Neck community. The sparks of these interactions occurred in Morah Ronnie’s Tot Shabbat, Michael Sloyer’s Junior Congregation, the Beth HaGan, the Religious School, and the Youth House; while serving on the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee; as well as being active with the Israel Affairs Committee, journal dinner dance committees, Religious School Education Committee, Ritual Committee, Finance Committee, Men’s Club, selection committees, Midnight Runs, during multiple Israel trips, the Adult *B’nai Mitzvah* Class, North Shore Action, the peninsula-wide Great Neck *Shabbat* Project, during *kiddush*, in the pews, the parking lot, or a plethora of events we have availed ourselves of by attending, chairing or supporting. Too many to itemize. This is a good problem!

After the Covid 19 pandemic, as the clergy and Board of Trustees tried mightily to bring congregants back “in person,” I asked Rabbi Stecker to begin teaching Torah on a weekly basis again. I asked him to remember girls and women like me.

In 1983, when I became a *bat mitzvah* in Douglaston, Queens I didn’t yet realize that I was part of much wider “revolutions” from which my wise parents tried to shield me: Without fanfare, my parents insistently supported intellectual capacity, rigor, and independence by ensuring that my Jewish education matched my secular education. My parents provided me a very participatory *Shabbat* morning on a *bimah* for my *bat mitzvah*, as well as a large *bat mitzvah* celebration at a catering hall, and a private bus to an admission-only public school in Manhattan.

I would realize later, as an adult, that 1983 was a historical cusp.

For Iranian Jews who had undergone a revolution in a faraway country, the Revolution was utter upheaval. At the same time, Conservative Jews in America were including women and girls more fully. For me, as a *bat mitzvah* girl and the only Persian girl in my Hebrew school, it meant my parents and our congregation supported my Jewish education.

Sassan’s family celebrated his *bar mitzvah* in Iran. Four years later, they fled as refugees to America fearing he would be conscripted to the Iran-Iraq War, following the overthrow of the Shah.

A generation has passed. As parents of three adult daughters and an adult son, we understand the historical importance of those years as the USCJ

now celebrates forty years since the ordination of women by the Conservative movement.

In 2022, without fanfare, Rabbi Stecker and Rabbi Schweber began a weekly *parshah HaShavuah* class every Tuesday night. Women and men gather to do Biblical study, again, every week at Temple Israel. This is perhaps the only place in Great Neck where this occurs. (Not incidentally, Temple Israel was the first place in Great Neck to welcome a *minyán* of Iraqi-Persian immigrants to use the Blue Room during Rabbi Waxman’s tenure. The group went on to establish the gym *minyán* at Great Neck

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The Sassouni Family with Rabbi Stecker. Standing, left to right: Emma, Rebecca, Cyrus, Sassan, Rabbi Howard Stecker, Sophie, and Leila.

Summer Plans in Israel Cut Short, Then a Long Journey Home: Our College-Age Members Share Their Stories

Several college students who grew up at Temple Israel were on Birthright trips when the Israel-Iran conflict began. All arrived home safely from Israel. Among them were Amanda Putter, Alex Geula, and Julia Weinreich, who agreed to share their stories about their experiences.

Julia and Amanda were both in Israel on different Birthright trips, both of which were to be followed by Onward internships. While Amanda was able to complete both her Birthright trip and her internship at an Israeli recruiting company in Tel Aviv, the sirens started several hours later, which cancelled plans she had to stay in Israel for a month afterward.

After her Birthright trip, Julia was able to complete just one week at her internship with Datarails, a tech company where she was doing marketing, before it had to end, cut short due to the bombings.

Alex was in Israel for a Birthright trip which was cut short by two days.

All three left Israel by cruise ship to Cyprus, departing from Ashdod, a port city 20 miles south of Tel Aviv. Alex boarded a cruise ship on June 17 and was able to get a flight from Cyprus to Tampa, Florida, then another flight home to New York. Although on different Birthright trips, Julia and Amanda boarded the same cruise ship on June 20; Julia came home via Germany and Amanda came home via Paris, France, finally arriving home on June 22.

Friendships formed on the Birthright trips helped build a sense of community, which was needed to get through the difficulties.

Following are the stories that Amanda, Alex and Julia wanted to share about their experiences.

Amanda Putter - in her own words

During the early days of the 12-day War, I had one of those moments that remind you just how tightly fear and beauty can coexist.

It was an ordinary evening at the Dan Panorama Hotel in Tel Aviv—until it wasn't. The sirens wailed their familiar but still jarring call, and everyone on the sixth floor moved quickly and quietly into the bomb shelter. It was hot. Crowded. A mix of tourists and Israelis sat shoulder to shoulder.

The bomb shelter itself was nothing fancy—just a concrete room like many others throughout the country. But that night, it held a small and unexpected miracle.

Among the crowd was a young college student from the

University of Central Florida. He carried with him a guitar case over his shoulder. I don't know what compelled him to bring it—maybe instinct, maybe habit, maybe hope. But he sat down without a word, tuned the strings quietly, and began to play.

First came the soft notes of John Mayer's "Slow Dancing in a Burning Room." His fingers moved slowly, intentionally, not to perform but to soothe. Slowly, the murmurs of worry dimmed. A few people leaned back against the walls. You could feel people starting to breathe easier.

Then came "Layla," stripped of its usual electric rush, reimagined into something quieter, more intimate. The room, still thick with heat and uncertainty, began to feel lighter. I

looked around and saw strangers smiling at each other. Some mouthed the lyrics. For a few minutes, we weren't just people sheltering from rockets—we were a community, grounded by a moment of shared humanity.

I left the shelter feeling shaken, but also deeply moved. In a place that so often holds both vulnerability and strength, it was music that reminded us: even in darkness, even underground, there is light to be found. And sometimes, it comes with six strings and a quiet courage to share it.

Alex Geula - as told in conversation

Alex Geula was on the eighth day of a ten-day Birthright trip when Israel began bombing Iran. It was a Thursday night, with a visit to the Kotel and walking around the shuk in Jerusalem on the planned Birthright itinerary for the next day, a Friday. Instead, the last two days of the itinerary were cancelled and Alex's Birthright group spent much of the next few days in an underground shelter for safety. They were fortunate that they were in Jerusalem and not in Tel Aviv at the time of the bombing.

On Monday, two days after they were scheduled to go home, the Birthright group was relocated from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea where they would stay at a hotel with 14 other Birthright groups. Birthright staff members gave the Birthright participants a choice — get on a cruise ship that was heading to Cyprus or sign a release saying that they would stay in



Israel and would release Birthright of any liability.

The Birthright participants travelled from the Dead Sea to Ashdod Port near Tel Aviv. From there, they took a 22-hour cruise to Cyprus. Alex was surprised to see that the cruise ship had all of the amenities of a typical cruise ship — including restaurants, a gym, a casino, and swimming pools. From what Alex could tell, the passengers were mostly Birthright participants, some volunteers, Israelis, and Israeli diplomats, all wanting to leave Israel for safety.

When the ship arrived in Cyprus, about one quarter of the Birthright participants, including Alex, went directly to the airport and took a chartered plane to Tampa, Florida, a flight that the Florida state government helped arrange. From Tampa, Alex took a plane home to New York. The Birthright participants who weren't on the chartered flight took commercial flights home over the next few days, some from other cities in Europe. For Alex, the most stressful part of the entire experience was getting home from Cyprus on the chartered plane. It seemed a bit disorganized with poor communication from the crew on Eastern Airlines, an airline that Alex hadn't heard of before.

When asked whether this entire experience from the time in the shelter in Jerusalem to getting on the cruise ship added to the sense of community among the Birthright participants, Alex responded, "it brought us much closer together as a group. We knew that leaning on one another would make the experience much more enjoyable."

Julia Weinreich - in her own words

I was so excited. Two months in Israel sounded like a dream.

I arrived in Israel on a Birthright trip that would last ten days, with a plan to visit with Israeli relatives after that for a week before beginning my Onward internship.

On the Birthright trip, I made new friends, and enjoyed the sights of Israel that become more and more beautiful every time I see them. During those ten days, we experienced one siren, the first real one that I have heard. (I say "real" because I have heard the siren on Yom HaZikaron, but, of course, in that case, we weren't in a state of emergency.)

Following Birthright, I stayed with my family in Hod Hasharon, and experienced my first siren independently. I went to the shelter, stayed for ten minutes, and life went on, as I thought "that didn't seem too bad." There were two more sirens during the week that I stayed with family. Same procedure each time: notification on the phone ten minutes before, siren, shelter ten minutes, and life went on.

At the end of the week, I moved into an apartment in Tel Aviv to begin my Onward internship program. About a week later, at about 2 A.M. as I was heading down the stairs after visiting with friends in the building next door, the long siren was heard, this time without the typical app notification preceding

it. I didn't know where the shelter was in that building. I ran back up to my friends' apartment, knocked, and together we walked to the basement, which was the shelter. We stood there for 30 minutes, clueless, until we saw the news. The siren was a warning to Israel that their attacks had begun on Iran and that things would get tense, essentially saying prepare to be in the shelter for long periods in the coming hours or days. My friends and I went in and out of the shelter, running back and forth from the convenience store, stocking up on water bottles twice the size of my head and snacks.

It was such an uncertain time. I got calls from my family and friends in Israel offering for me to come and stay with them. I decided to stay with my program until the morning, as I didn't know how this part of the war would progress and didn't want to put myself or my family in danger.

The next morning, I got picked up by family friends who also lived in Hod Hasharon, 25 minutes from Tel Aviv. I stayed with them for about four nights and, every night, a siren went off. I would be in my pajamas running to the shelter, half asleep, delirious, hearing "boom, boom, boom," not knowing whether the sound was a missile hitting someone's home or of the Iron Dome in the sky over you.

The scariest night was when a bomb struck Petach Tikvah, a city about seven miles (a 15-minute drive) away from Hod Hasharon. That night, we heard a boom so loudly the house shook, and though I tried to keep my composure, I was terrified. You hear it, you feel it, and you don't know if your

house, the neighbor's house, or your family's house is next.

After staying with my family friends, my program insisted that I go back to the apartment to pack up the rest of my things and meet them at a hotel at the Dead Sea.

Upon arriving at the hotel, we put on our bathing suits and headed to the pool. I stayed in the hotel for about five nights, with time spent in the shelter on two of those nights. It didn't feel as brutal. In a large building like that, you don't even hear the siren unless you are outside.

Thankfully, we had
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Be Out There and Speak Up: Lessons Learned at a Sisterhood Event

by Toby Katz, Program Chair of Sisterhood, Temple Israel of Great Neck

Be out there and speak up. This was the message of the Sisterhood program on June 9th called “Deborah, Hulda and Judith – A Judge, A Prophet, a Spy – What Would They Say to Us Today?” The guest speaker was Rabbi Margie Cella, author of *Hindsight is 2020: Torah Lessons from a Turbulent Time*. Rabbi Cella spoke about how these three biblical heroines (functioning in very non-traditional roles – or were they?) saved Judaism and the Jewish people in ancient Israel.

Deborah (Judges 4,5) was a judge in Israel. When the Canaanites attacked, she answered the call and became Commander-in-Chief of the army, leading her general, Barak to victory against the enemy forces. Another woman, Yael, killed the enemy general, Sisera, securing the Israelite victory.

Hulda (Kings 22: 14-28, 2 Chronicles 22-28), a Prophet, and a contemporary of Jeremiah, authenticated the scroll of Deuteronomy discovered in the Temple during the reign of King Josiah.

Once the scroll was read, the people realized that they had abandoned Judaism and God’s Commandments, and Hulda

was instrumental in enabling King Josiah’s religious revival and return to Torah law. (Some scholars believe Hulda actually wrote the book of Deuteronomy.)

Judith (Book of Judith) may not have been an historical figure. Nevertheless, her story is one of great personal courage against all odds. Her village, Bethulia, guarded the road to Jerusalem. It was under siege by the Assyrian army paving the way for an attack on Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. They cut off the water supply to Bethulia. The men of the village wanted to surrender, but Judith said “no!” She had her own plan to defeat the Assyrian army. Judith went to the enemy camp, pretended to ask for asylum, and captivated the enemy general, Holofernes, with her charm and beauty.

One night, she got him drunk and when he passed out, she beheaded him with his own sword and took his head back to Bethulia.

The enemy troops were demoralized by the death of their commander and deserted. Judith was hailed as a hero in Bethulia. She saved Jerusalem and the Temple.

All three spoke up when others were silent. All three

were out there when others stayed safely at home. This is a powerful lesson for all of us in today’s turbulent times. ■



Photo: Some of the attendees posed for a photo with the guest speaker, Rabbi Margie Cella (second from left, to the right of Toby Katz).

SUPA Conversational Hebrew Wraps Up First Year at Temple Israel

by Connie Reichman, Director of Schools

This year marked the successful launch of SUPA (Syracuse University Project Advance) Conversational Hebrew at Temple Israel, led by the passionate and dedicated Ms. Kessar. Aimed at high school juniors and seniors, the four credit college course offered an immersive introduction to modern Hebrew, equipping students with the skills to read, write, speak, and understand the language at a foundational level.

The curriculum covered essential grammar concepts, including present tense verb conjugation,

noun/adjective agreement, gender identification, as well as the use of prefixes, suffixes, and numbers. Alongside

language instruction, students engaged with Israeli culture, deepening their connection to the modern Jewish experience.

Throughout the year, the class transformed into a cohesive and enthusiastic learning community, demonstrating both academic growth and a strong bond with one another—and with the Hebrew language. ■



Summer Plans In Israel Cut Short,
continued from page 7

the alerts on our phones, and the hotel had a sound system where they announced for everyone to meet in the shelter when there was a siren. Staying at the hotel felt like a false reality; so many Birthright groups gathered over there; it felt like a college spring break trip.

At the moment, it was a feeling of being unbothered and disconnected from the reality of the situation. On a Friday morning, we left for Cyprus on a cruise ship, with all the amenities of a typical cruise, all while being escorted out of Israeli waters by the Navy. It was insane.

From Cyprus, I boarded a flight to Germany, then another to Newark Airport, arriving home on Sunday evening. I made it home just in time to get ready to go to a *bat mitzvah* of a girl I had babysat over the years, whose family was like a second family to me; it felt like fate that I made it in time.

During the candle lighting, the *bat mitzvah* lit a candle for the hostages, the soldiers fighting, and the whole situation occurring today. In that moment, I started to sob. It hit me.

During my time in Israel, I met friends of my cousin who were my age and quickly became friends of mine as well. All of them were in the army, doing their part. I was sitting at a *bat mitzvah*, enjoying life. I fled Israel on a cruise ship while my family and friends were still in Israel, living and fighting for the beautiful country I was so blessed to be able to visit. I felt sad and at a loss for what to do for a country I so deeply love. I feel that texting and calling people in Israel is not enough; I'm yearning to go back and do my part in some capacity.

This experience taught me so much about the history between Iran and Israel, about the true reality Israelis have to face, and how you should never take anything for granted because it can be ripped away from you so very quickly. My story isn't meant to perpetuate fear; it's meant to highlight that every second of life matters. Make memories, have fun, laugh, smile, hug your loved ones, whether you live in the United States or Israel. *Hashem* has a plan for all of us and I am sure he would want us to do it all with a positive foot forward. ■

In Memoriam

Temple Israel extends condolences to the families of:

ALAN SOLOMON

husband of Varda Solomon
father of Keren Solomon and Daniel Solomon
grandfather of Lila, Sabrina, and Joshua
esteemed member of Temple Israel

DAVID ZIELENZIGER

brother of Michael Zielenziger
esteemed member of Temple Israel

EDWARD COHEN

father of Dara Koza and Pamela Klein
grandfather of Grant and Eitan Koza and Jacob and Molly Klein
husband of Alice Cohen

ARLENE KURFURST

mother of Susan Tillem and Jocelyn Leonard
grandmother of Courtney Gessin, Marissa Wolfson,
Brandon Leonard, and Andrew Leonard
great-grandmother of Jordan, Alexander, Margaux,
Aiden, Cameron, Ryan and Zachary
mother-in-law of Jonathan Tillem, Paul Leonard, and Kathy Mackay

ELAINE PARIS DUNCKLEY

wife of William (Bill) Dunckley
mother of Jason Paris, Gail (Paris) Schwartz, and Michael Paris
esteemed member of Temple Israel

ABRAHAM YACHBES

father of Jack Yachbes and Linda Yachbes
grandfather of Eric, Olivia, Eitan and Noa

ELIYAHOU SHAMASH

uncle of Hazzan Brian Shamash
husband of Dalal Shamash
father of Ruth, Tamar, Arie, and Yegal
grandfather and great-grandfather to many

BURTON BARNETT

husband of Geraldine Dicostanzo
father of Ellen Barnett

NORMAN DOCTOR

husband of Naomi Doctor, z"l
father of Danielle Doctor Spitzer and Samantha Doctor Levine
grandfather of Haley Spitzer and Gabby Levine

May their memories be for a blessing.

MINYAN

join us in the morning or in the evening
in person or on TIGN Zoom
schedule on front cover of Voice, on website, and in weekly emails

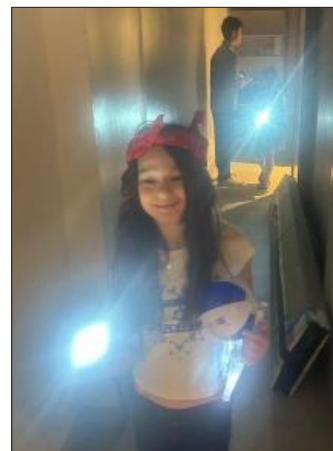
YOM HA'ATZMAUT IN THE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL Experiencing Yerushalayim: A Journey Through History and Heritage

by Connie Reichman, Director of Schools

As part of our theme this year, students immersed themselves in the history and spirit of *Yerushalayim* through a variety of meaningful hands-on activities. They climbed the ramparts of the Old City walls, explored the fascinating tunnels behind the Kotel, and wrote personal notes to place in the Kotel, just as visitors do in Jerusalem.

In a creative twist, students competed to build replicas of the Tower of David and dove into the rich history of Jerusalem and its iconic gates. They marched through Jaffa Gate, took part in a map activity to identify key locations across Israel, and strengthened their teamwork skills on an army-style obstacle course led by our Israeli *ShinShin*.

Adding a touch of environmental awareness and national pride, students also created an Israeli flag out of recycled materials. The experience brought learning to life and left students with lasting memories—they had a fantastic time! ■



As the school year came to a close, the halls of the Beth HaGan Early Childhood Center were filled with the echoes of laughter, growth, and love that defined the past ten months. From first-day jitters to countless celebrations to proud goodbyes, our children blossomed into more confident, curious, and capable versions of themselves, shaped by discovery, creativity, and deepening connections to one another.

At Beth HaGan, children feel loved, trusted, and empowered, and when given the freedom to lead, they respond with joy, imagination, and purpose.

Since children learn best through active play and multisensory exploration, teachers created immersive experiences for our Yom Ha'Atzmaut unit in early May, helping to build a connection to our homeland and its central place in our Jewish identity. Each day, the children marched with their teachers, singing Hebrew songs led by Music Specialist Morah Ronit, and proudly displayed the creative posters, streamers, hats, flags, and artwork they made to mark this special occasion. They learned Israeli dances, made passports and received airline tickets to board our very own "El Al plane," enjoyed falafel, shopped at a shuk, played at a pretend beach, explored with Dead Sea mud, listened to stories in Hebrew, visited a Bedouin tent, squeezed fresh orange juice, created mosaic art, and prayed at the Kotel - all while dancing along to the latest Israeli music.

We closed out the school year by welcoming Beth HaGan's incoming families into our community with singing, smiles, and warmth for our final *Shabbat* celebration. It was a beautiful reminder of one of the many things that makes Beth HaGan so special—*Shabbat*—and we look forward to more joyful celebrations with our new friends in the weeks and months ahead.

The spirit of joyful growth didn't stop when the school year

Celebrating a Joyful Year and Looking Ahead at Beth HaGan

by Yve Fouladi, Director,
Beth HaGan Early Childhood Center

ended on June 20th; it continued just a few days later when our fun-filled summer program launched without missing a beat! These summer months are not a pause from learning, but a continuation of it... filled with water play, music, art, outdoor exploration, plenty of laughter, and more *Shabbat* celebrations.

Even as we embrace the sunshine and play of summer, we're already looking ahead with excitement to the fall. Enrollment is growing, and so is our school. We're opening new classrooms to welcome even more children, not simply to increase numbers, but to expand the spirit and heart of our center. With each new family, we strengthen our commitment to building a nurturing Jewish environment where children are seen, heard,

and celebrated; and where they feel a strong connection to their Jewish community.

This successful year could not have been possible without the support and partnership of so many. I am deeply grateful to our supportive clergy, Rabbi Stecker, Hazzan Shamash, and Rabbi Schweber; to Susan Brustein, Connie, and Nathalie; our extraordinary teachers; our wonderful maintenance staff; Jerry and his security team of watchful eyes; to Cynthia Bassalali and our devoted PTA leaders and parents; and most of all, to our remarkable, smart and ever-evolving Beth HaGan children, who filled this year with

meaning, growth, and joy. As my first year at Beth HaGan, it has been a truly special journey, and I'm so proud of what we've all built together.

At Beth HaGan, we look forward to not only educating our children, but continuing to learn from them, grow with them, and to celebrate the unique spark each one brings. I am honored to do this meaningful work in partnership with our Temple Israel family.

Here's to a summer filled with joy and a new school year ahead, full of wonder, growth, and countless moments to cherish. ■



Congregation Thanks Kiddush Sponsors

Appreciation is expressed by the Temple Israel officers and Board of Trustees to members who have generously sponsored and enhanced the Sabbath *kiddush*.

A contribution towards the *kiddush* on April 26 was made by Adrienne and Liel Hollander in honor of the *bat mitzvah* of their daughter Brooke, which took place in Israel.

The congregational *kiddush* on May 3 was sponsored by Shahnaz Goldman in memory of her father, Rouhollah Monasebian. A contribution towards the *kiddush* was made by Rebecca and Sassan Sassouni in honor of Sophia Sassouni Zucker, Leila Sassouni and Emma Sassouni, and the return of *Shabbat Kol Isha* under the outstanding leadership of our teacher, Rahel Musleah.

A contribution towards the *kiddush* on May 10 was made by Martha Hirsch on the occasion of the *yahrzeits* of her parents, Maria and Santiago Galdames.

The congregational *kiddush* on May 17 was sponsored by Shahram Homapour on the the occasion of the end of the *sheloshim* mourning period for his wife, Sima Mahfar Homapour. Contributions toward the *kiddush* were made by Karina and Babak Hakakian in honor of the *bar mitzvah* of their son, Max, and by Vivian and Yuval Brash on the occasion of the *yahrzeit* of Vivian's mother, Camille Katz.

Contributions toward the *kiddush* on May 24 were made by Nicole and Gary Mazer in honor of the *bar mitzvah* of son, Brandon, and by Rozalin and Michael Wise in honor of the *bat mitzvah* of daughter, Aliza, and by Kathrin Zelouf on the occasion of the *yahrzeit* of husband, Yousef Zelouf.

A contribution towards the *kiddush* on June 2 was made by Rebecca and Sassan Sassouni in honor of the establishment of the Peticha Blossom Women's & Girls' Education Fund at Temple Israel which is designated, with love, by Rebecca and Sassan Sassouni toward the text-based education of girls and women of Temple Israel of Great Neck in the memory and merit of our cherished grandmothers, mothers, daughters, and son.

Contributions toward the *kiddush* on June 14 were made by Iris and Charles Adler in honor of their 60th wedding anniversary, and by Isabelle Nazarian on the occasion of *yahrzeit* of her father, Nadab Melamed.

Contributions toward the *kiddush* on June 21 were made by Ronen and Tal Sarraf in honor of the *bar mitzvah* of their son, Nathan, and by Raeann and Ashley Nemiroff in honor of Ashley's 83rd birthday. ■

Mazel Tov to

BROOKE WEST & JOSHUA GOLDFEDER
on the birth of their daughter,
Olivia James Goldfeder

ANNE & ALLAN GOLDFEDER
on the birth of their granddaughter,
Olivia James Goldfeder

SHIRLEY GOLDFEDER
on the birth of her great-granddaughter,
Olivia James Goldfeder

MIRIAM & KENNETH KOBLINER
on the engagement of their son,
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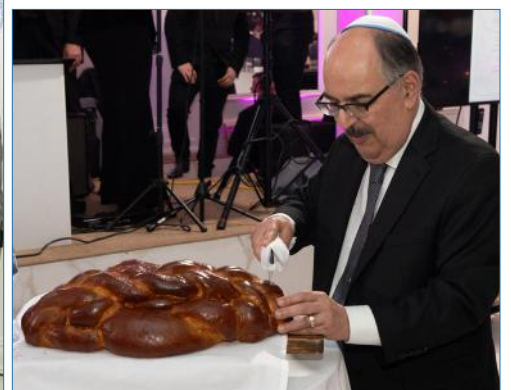
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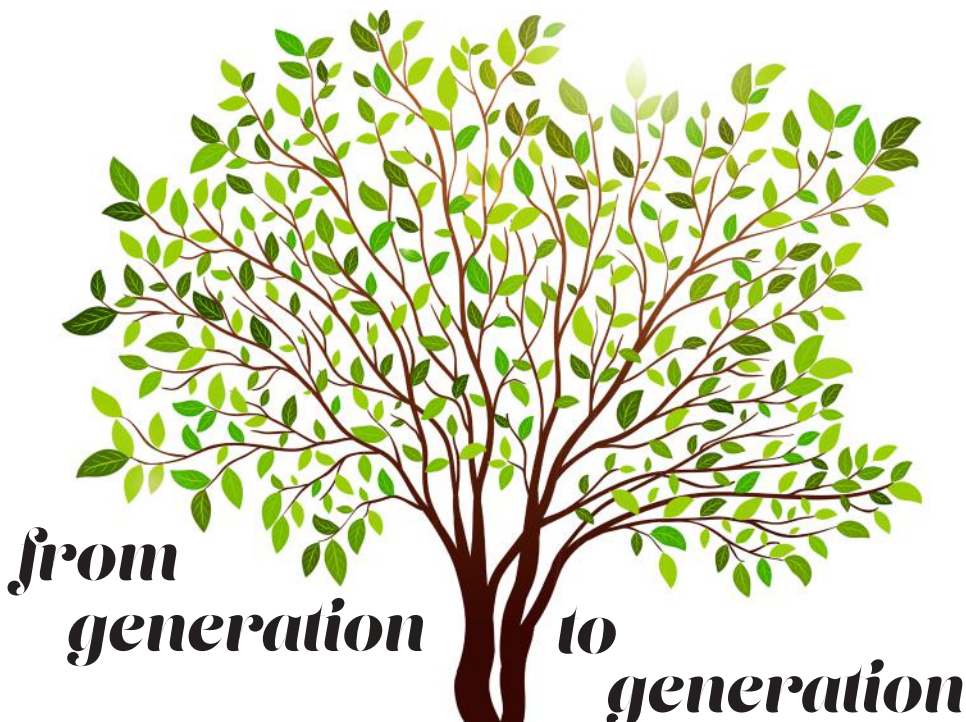
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In appreciation of:

Rabbi Stecker for officiating at funeral
for Judith Brash and leading a *minyan*
during the *shiva* period

YUVAL AND VIVIAN BRASH

Rabbi Stecker for officiating at the
wedding of their daughter, Alessia, to
Tyler

DAVID AND CLAUDIA GRUNBERGER

Rabbi Stecker for the endearing words
said at minyan for Judith Brash

DAVID AND RANDY NAVO

Rabbi Stecker's kindness and support
during the illness of her husband, Alan,
and for officiating at his funeral

VARDA SOLOMON

In honor of:

Rabbi Stecker for officiating at the
unveiling of their mother, Helene Fried
WENDY FRIED AND THE
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Alan Solomon

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Hazzan Shamash for the endearing
words said at *minyan* for Judith Brash

DAVID AND RANDY NAVO

Hazzan Shamash's support and caring
during the *shiva* for her husband, Alan
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family's cherished grandmothers,
mothers, daughters and son
SASSAN AND REBECCA SASSOUNI

Contribution:

SHIRLEY GOLDFEDER

YAD B'YAD

In appreciation of:

Karen Ashkenase for her kindness,
thoughtfulness and support during
shiva for my husband, Alan
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Rabbi Schweber for the endearing
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Hilbert and Jaqueline Eshaghpour for
their kindness and consideration by
providing lavish dinners for the night of
Shavuot over the years
Michael Sloyer's dedication, motivation,
and humbleness reading Torah weekly
for many years at Temple Israel
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In memory of:

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Synagogue, which became the Ahavat Shalom and Beth Hadassah congregations.) In 2025, these are things to celebrate.

In 2010, while our children were still enrolled in the Temple Israel schools, and I was both a member of the Temple Israel Executive Committee and chair of the Religious School Education Committee, another congregant and I approached Cantor Frieder (Temple Israel's cantor at the time) and Rabbi Stecker with the idea to teach women to lead the *Shabbat* services in the style of the well-established Men's Club *Shabbat*. The clergy were receptive. Cantor Frieder taught many women to lead parts of the service very capably. For several years, Temple Israel members enjoyed successive cycles of *Shabbat Kol Ishah*, *Shabbat HaGever*, and *Shabbat Koleinu* (women, men, and together, respectively).

Shabbat Kol Ishah came back in a big way in May 2025. My daughters and I were overjoyed to be part of it along with my sister, niece, cousin and friends. Seventy women and girls, ranging from elementary school age to octogenarian, participated in group learning for six months. We learned with Rahel Musleah—a consummate teacher—and with one another's encouragement. From the moment the services concluded, participants yearned to reconvene, with others asking to join classes, too.

It is often said that Jews are "People of the Book." The gift of Torah, and the cyclical written and oral traditions of exegesis, which we celebrate on Shavuot, is surely a precious gift! Ours is a language-based, written tradition—no matter which continent of the diaspora our forebears hailed from originally. As adults, Jews turn to portals for learning for as many reasons as there are lived experiences, some out of curiosity, others in grief, or joy. *Vive la difference!*

In March 2024, I was fortunate to observe the 40th anniversary of my *bat mitzvah*. It coincided with the week of my return from a solidarity mission to Israel organized by the JNF Jewish National Fund and the IAJF Iranian American Jewish Federation. I was able to mark the sacredness of our safe return home, with a *minyan*, our clergy, a *gomel* blessing, a reading from the Torah, along with others from the mission, and a *seudah* my family was grateful to sponsor upon my safe return from Israel. There is simply no other *bimah* in Great Neck which allows family, friends, and fellow travelers to sanctify time in this manner daily, weekly, monthly, and annually than at Temple Israel!

Our own family's love for Israel is at once deeply personal and, at the same time, universally rooted in the prayers of our daily texts and the Torah. We have celebrated every lifecycle event in Israel, *BH*. Please God, we will continue. Sassan's family built a synagogue in Jerusalem named for Dowlat and Yousef Sassouni and Rebecca's grandparents' resting place is at Har Hemenukhot. Rabbis Stecker, Adelson, and Roth have each been part of our Israel journeys to Robinson's Arch. Our lives are structured to yearn unabashedly for Zion as our forebears

before us. We are proud that our children followed this path by choice, too.

Particularly after October 7, 2023, we believe Jews and our allies are, almost daily, repeatedly awakening as if from a nightmare to the consequences of dozing in a generational stupor of apathy and ignorance which allowed antisemitism to fester. It is said that nature abhors a vacuum. In this case, the vacuum allowed empty blood libels to be repeated virally against Jews and Israel.

We established the Peticha Fund because, in our opinion, it is time to fund girls' and women's learning, under the aegis of Rabbi Stecker as our *mara d'atra* (Aramaic for "master of the place.") The fund is established because girls and boys cannot fund themselves as minors, nor do they often know where to start.

We feel it is incumbent on us to do our part to fill the gaps of knowledge, education and programming just as our grandparents, parents, and congregations did for us and our families: Wise, capable, literate girls and women will raise tomorrow's Jewish families with their partners, as well as lead in other realms.

Our own mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers were each married in their teens, each one becoming wise, knowledgeable, and formidable in her own right, along with her spouse. This, in turn, influenced their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and countless others.

In 2025, daughters and sons in Great Neck have choices far beyond those available to our forebears. It is awesome to have choice!

Having had the privilege to serve in various capacities, whether as the Parent Liaison on the Reimagine Leadership Team Task Force, a USCJ Sulam for Leaders Coordinator, the sole woman on Temple Israel's Executive Committee for two years, and the first Persian woman to be elected to serve on the Executive Committee of the synagogue, I am acutely aware of the importance of legacy; we must always strive not to be the "first" or the "only," but, also, not to be the last. We must ensure paths for others to follow the *derekh*, too. Only Temple Israel continues to provide a path for girls' and women's learning with boys and men in Great Neck, *betzelem elohim*, in the image of our Creator.

We pray that more generous donations to the Peticha Fund will allow many more girls, women, and families to continue to learn and love to read, to study, to engage, and to grapple joyfully with Torah, Jewish texts, and Israel at Temple Israel of Great Neck for generations to come. ■

Rebecca Sassouni is currently Of Counsel to a family law firm in Carle Place as an attorney and mediator in private practice. She was also recently ordained as a rabbi. Sassouni currently serves in her third term elected to the Great Neck Public Schools Board of Education and as an officer of SHAI Sephardic Heritage Alliance, Inc.

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D'var Torah

D'var Torah summaries written by Rabbi Marim D. Charry can be found on the Temple Israel website:

<https://www.tign.org/learn/dvrai-torah/>

A printed booklet of the D'var Torah summaries is available by calling the Temple Israel office.

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MATOT-MASEI • July 26
DEVARIM • August 2
VAETCHANAN • August 9
EIKEV • August 16
RE'EH • August 23
SHOFTIM • August 30
KI TEITZEI • September 6
KI TAVO • September 13

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Temple Israel Voice (USPS #078-740) is published monthly by Temple Israel of Great Neck at 108 Old Mill Road, Great Neck, NY 11023. Periodicals postage paid at Great Neck, NY 11021. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Temple Israel Voice, 108 Old Mill Road, Great Neck, NY 11023. Subscription: \$5.00 per annum.

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Looking ahead to the High Holy Days...

Please complete and return the questionnaire about seating for the High Holy Days so we can plan accordingly.

Questions? Contact Jamey Kohn, Executive Director, by email at jkohn@tign.org or by telephone at (516) 482-7800

Events are being added. For more details and updated information, check weekly emails and www.tign.org.

Join us for these events:

Scholar-in-Residence Elon Gilad • Friday, July 18 • Services @ 6:30 P.M. • Dinner @ 7:15 P.M. (RSVP required)

Scholar-in-Residence Elon Gilad • Saturday, July 19 @ 9:15 A.M. followed by Shabbat Talk

Canada's Fight on Antisemitism: An Insider's View with Anthony Housefather, a Jewish member of Canada's Parliament

Friday, July 25 • Services @ 6:30 p.m. • Discussion @ 7 p.m. • Dinner @ 8 p.m. (RSVP required)

Board, Card, and Tile Game Group • Wednesdays, beginning July 30 @ 10 a.m.

Tish'ah Be'Av Services • Saturday, August 2 - Sunday, August 3 • refer to schedule on page 19 of this issue of the Voice

Rosh HaHaHa Comedy Night • Thursday, August 7 @ 7 p.m. • Temple Beth-El of Great Neck

And join us weekly for:

Israeli Folk Dance Class • Torah Study with the Rabbis • Advanced History Seminar • Schmooze with Some Jews on Zoom

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Upcoming Events