

Rabbi Amy Roth Visits Temple Israel as Scholar-in-Residence Marking 40 Years of Women Rabbis in Conservative Movement

by Miriam Kobliner

Rabbi Amy Roth, who spent eleven years as Temple Israel's Director of Congregational Schools, will return as Scholar-in-Residence for the weekend of December 19 to December 20, a Shabbat when we will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the ordination of the Conservative movement's first female rabbi, which occurred in 1985. That milestone came thirteen years after a group of young, well-educated women presented the Rabbinical Assembly with a call for the public affirmation of women's equality in all aspects of Jewish life, including that women be permitted and encouraged to become rabbis and cantors.

Starting with the ordination of one female rabbi in 1985, by 1997, there were 72 female members of the Rabbinical Assembly out of a total membership of almost 1,400, including several female rabbis in Israel and one in Latin America. By 2004, female rabbis accounted for about eleven percent of the total membership. As of 2020, female rabbis make up more than 20 percent of North American Conservative rabbis working in the field. Women have also become more prominent in the faculty, administration, and leadership of Jewish institutions. In May 2020, the Jewish Theological Seminary chose historian Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz as its eighth chancellor, the first female in its then 134-year history. (Dr. Schwartz will step down at the end of the 2025-2026 academic year.)

Ordained as a rabbi in 1990, five years after the first » *continued on page 13*

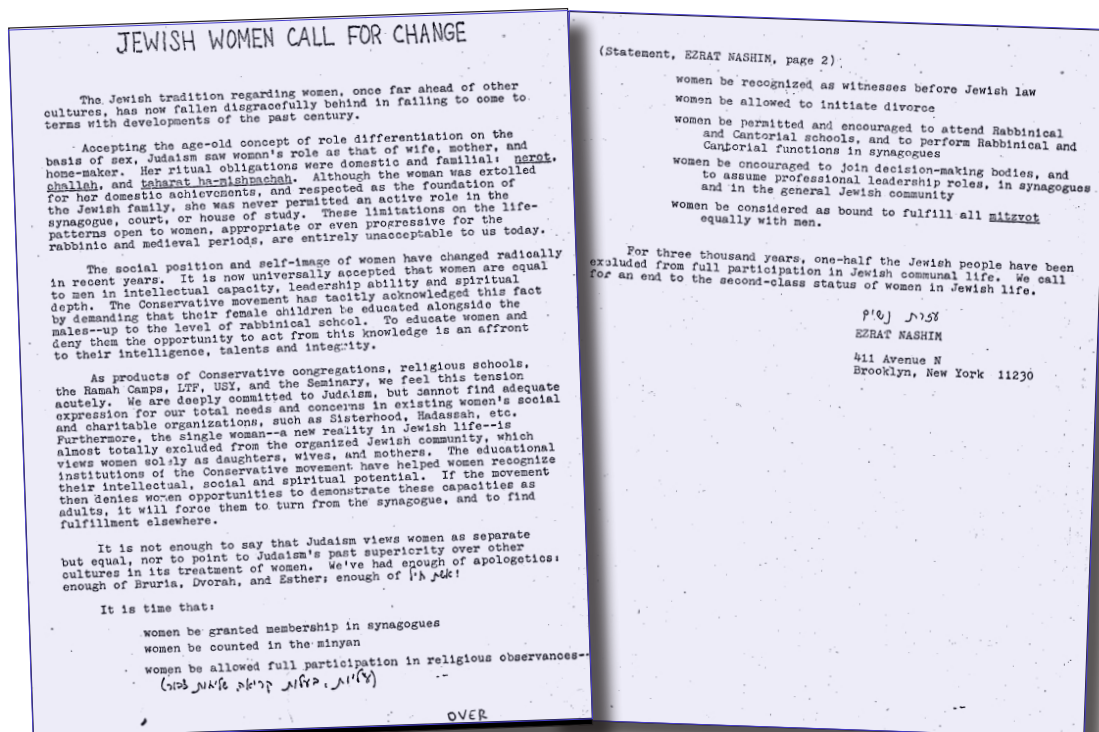


Photo left: Rabbi Amy Roth
Above: In 1972, Ezra Nashim, a group of young, well-educated women, presented the Rabbinical Assembly with a call for the public affirmation of women's equality in all aspects of Jewish life. They demanded that women be granted membership in synagogues, counted in a minyan, allowed full participation in religious observances, recognized as witnesses in Jewish law, and allowed to initiate divorce. They also demanded that women be permitted and encouraged to attend rabbinical and cantorial school and perform as rabbis and cantors in synagogues, encouraged to assume positions of leadership in the community, and considered bound to fulfill all the mitzvot equally with men.



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from the rabbi

Rabbi Howard Stecker

rabbistecker@tign.org



Bronnie Ware, an Australian songwriter and motivational speaker who has worked extensively in palliative care, identified five top regrets that people have at the end of their lives. The number one regret people have is not having been true to who they are. As she frames it, people often think, “I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.”

She writes, “When people realize that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honored even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made.”

“We cannot
be much use
to others if
we eclipse
our own
essence.”

Jewish tradition consistently stresses our obligations to others. We are urged to be mindful of our responsibilities to our family, our community, our people and humanity. In fact, we may regard any encouragement toward self-fulfillment as being antithetical to the overall Jewish emphasis on serving others’ needs.

However, our tradition most certainly emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and self-actualization. The entire process of *teshuvah*, repentance, which is a cornerstone of Jewish spiritual life, involves self-reflection. In his “Laws of Repentance,” Maimonides urges us to think deeply about our actions and personalities, with the goal of making appropriate changes as needed.

A nineteenth-century Hasidic thinker opined that Abraham’s journey was not merely a geographic one. When God tells Abraham *Lekh l’kha*, “start moving,” God is urging him to journey toward his *shoresh*, his root, his essence. In other words, God is asking Abraham to undertake a journey to the person he is meant to be and the life he is meant to live.

The two goals are not mutually exclusive. We can try to become our truest selves and also try to have the deepest impact on others. In fact, the more authentic we are to ourselves, the greater our impact on others will likely be. We cannot be much use to others if we eclipse our own essence.

In the aftermath of the introspection that we underwent during the High Holy Days, I ask us to evaluate ourselves in the following context. To what extent are we clear about the roles we want to play in our personal and professional lives? To what extent do we feel grounded as Jews, Americans, and citizens of the larger world?

Being Our Truest Selves

I recently finished a biography of U.S. President Harry Truman, a man whose integrity I admire. By no means were all of his decisions unanimously acclaimed. However, he is an example of someone whose personal self-awareness served as the foundation for his interactions with others.

Let’s not wait until the end of our lives to wonder if we had the courage to live with sufficient authenticity. Let’s decide, today, that we are going to journey toward our *shoreshim*, our roots, our essence. We deserve that, and so does everyone around us. ■

Mazal Tov to...

LINDA AND GARRY STARK

on the birth of their granddaughter, Amalya Genia Levy,
daughter of Rebecca and Asaf Levy

ELLEN AND MARTIN DOMNITCH

on the birth of their granddaughter, Layla Ann Domnitch

LISA AND ANDREW WEST

on the engagement of their daughter, Samantha West
to Joshua Meisner
and on the engagement of their son, Zacahary West
to Marisa Joachim

WENDY MAYER AND SCOTT SMITH

on the wedding of their child, Jordan Ian Smith
to Daphne Shoshana Joyce Brands

FARZAN AND TARANEH SHIRAZI

on the wedding of their son, Jason Hakim, to Jennifer Kindman

DANA AND SASI ELYA

on the birth of their son, Liam Isaac Elya

FRAN AND MARC LANGSNER

on the birth of their granddaughter, Ruth Quinn Langsner,
daughter of Elizabeth and Adam Langsner

LORI AND PETER OPPENHEIMER

on the birth of their granddaughter, Netta Margalit Baskin,
daughter of Zoe and Jeremy Baskin

DANA AND RICHARD WEBER

on the birth of their granddaughter, Skylar Eden Weber,
daughter of Marissa and Jason Weber

DAVID KHORSHAD AND VIDA OHEBSHALOM

on the birth of their granddaughter, Lily Orly Khorshad

LORI AND PAUL FREUDMAN

on the engagement of their son,
Benjamin Freudman to Erica DeMichie

FARNAZ AND SHAHRAM DELAFRAZ

on the engagement of their son,
Eric Delafraz to Devorah Anayati

PERRY TREBATCH

on the birth of his grandson, Samuel Lev Trebatch,
son of Melissa and Steven Trebatch

Your Voice in Our Hazzan Search

from the president
Rachel Geula

president@tign.org



As we begin the search for our next *hazzan*, we acknowledge the range of deeply held convictions present within our community regarding this transition. These varied perspectives are natural at this juncture and reflect the passion and deep personal commitment each member holds for the future of our spiritual home. We value this diversity of voice and recognize that our collective investment is the true source of our strength as a synagogue community.

To help guide this process, we are forming a search committee that will reflect the diversity of our congregation. We also want to hear directly from you. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) has helped us prepare a brief, three-minute survey to gather your input.

Your responses will be shared with the search committee to ensure that every voice is heard. We may not all agree, but by listening to one another, we will gain a clearer understanding of

what truly matters to Temple Israel and the qualities we seek in our next *hazzan*.

As you reflect, think about how a hazzan can uplift prayer, inspire learning, celebrate life-cycle moments, nurture families, teach across generations, and strengthen our shared sense of community.

CONGREGATIONAL INPUT: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1. A hazzan brings many skills to their position. For you, what skills are most important for a hazzan to bring to the table?**
- 2. Educational opportunities are important to our congregation and community. What educational opportunities would you like to see added to our offerings — from babies to mature adults?**
- 3. In three years, what positive changes would you like to see in our community as a result of our new hazzan?**

This search is more than a process — it is an opportunity to think together about the future of Temple Israel and how we continue to grow and strengthen our congregation. With care and respect, we can ensure that our next *hazzan* helps guide that future with clarity and purpose.

The following link will guide you to the online version of the survey: tign.org/hazzansurvey

If you prefer, a paper version of the survey is available in the Temple office and on the tables outside the Sanctuary. Kindly have your responses to us by December 1st. ■

Temple Israel of Great Neck
Men's Club

Vodka & Latkes

Monday
December 15th
7:30 P.M.



Interested in Rejuvenation Project Updates?

The latest information
can be found on our website at:
<https://www.tign.org/rejuvenation/>

SEEKING VAN DONATION

Temple Israel is in need of a reliable cargo or passenger van to help our team transport items, such as chairs for a *shiva* home or other synagogue needs.

If you are able to donate a van or know someone who can help, please reach out to Jamey Kohn, our Executive Director, by phone at (516) 482-7800 or by email at jkohn@tign.org.



from the rabbi

Rabbi Daniel Schweber

rabbischweber@tign.org



There is an anecdote in the Talmud where a Roman woman asks Rabbi Yose, the son of Chalafta, "How many days did it take your God to create the world?" Rabbi Yose answers "Six." "And what has God been doing since then?" "Making matches. This man to that woman, this woman to that man." The Roman woman replies with surprise: "Is that all? Why anyone can do that!" Rabbi Yossi retorts, "It may seem easy to you, but for God making a good match is as difficult as parting the Red Sea."

The film "Bruce Almighty" with Morgan Freeman, Jim Carey and Jennifer Aniston also explores the question of what God does 'all day.'

On a simple level, one could expect God to be rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, performing miracles and answering prayers.

This is not the case. Humans have free will. God does not perform biblical-style miracles and what does answering prayers mean?

Imagine a pitcher and a batter in a baseball game. The pitcher prays for a strike out and the batter for a homerun. Which prayer does God answer? Prayers benefit the person offering the prayer by helping them to focus and do their best.

The holiday of Hanukkah is approaching. Indeed the holiday celebrates miracles including the oil lasting for eight days. Ask yourself "What are Hanukkah's enduring lessons?" In 2025, no one would expect a small cruse of oil to last eight days.

There are more nuanced lessons to miracles and to prayer.

"...exploring the question of what God does 'all day'... and what 'answering prayers' means."

Humans are the Miracle Makers Now

We are humans living in a human corporeal world. And even in this finite world, the rare, the difficult and the uncommon can happen thanks to human action.

I believe human success stories are the true miracles. Examples include battling through an illness, recovering from addiction, and achieving success after difficulty. And on a national level, the creation, building and maintenance of a strong State of Israel is also a miracle. Like the Hanukkah battle, Israel has always been outnumbered and yet prevailed.

The holiday of Hanukkah gives us faith even when faced with tough odds. When things look dark, like the winter season, the lights of the menorah give us hope and strength.

One of my favorite Hanukkah songs is more popular in Israel than the U.S., but it is starting to catch on.

*Banu choshech legareh, beyadeinu or va'esh.
Kol echad hu or katan, vechulanu or eitan.
Surah choshech, hal'ah sh'chor!
Surah mipnei ha'or!*

In English, it is:

We came to drive away the darkness/in our hands is light and fire.
Everyone's a small light, and all of us are a firm light.
Fight darkness, move back the blackness!
Fight because of the light!

Wishing all of you a *Chag Urim Sameach* - Happy Festival of Lights! ■

Temple Israel Supports the Schechter School with a Presence at Their Annual Golf Outing



A Trip to Broadway to See Comedian Jeff Ross



Remembering Rachel Mathless, Former Beth HaGan Director

by Miriam Kobliner

Beth HaGan families, alumni, staff, and Temple Israel members were saddened to learn that Rachel Mathless, who led our Beth HaGan Early Childhood Center for 24 years, had passed away on Simchat Torah.

The daughter of a rabbi, Rachel spent her adult life raising her five children (Aron, Miriam, Mendy, Souchie and Shulie), earning two Master's degrees, and teaching at various Jewish schools. After the untimely death of her husband, Reb Nachman Aryeh Mathless, a Yale librarian, Rachel applied for the job of Director of Beth HaGan and, of course, was hired.

In an email announcing her passing, the leadership of Temple Israel said, "Rachel brought enormous expertise and dedication to every aspect of her work including mentoring teachers, guiding parents and, above all, lovingly overseeing the education of each of the many hundreds of students entrusted to her care. Her relentless advocacy for the educational, emotional, and spiritual needs of her children was incredibly inspirational. Among many other things, we will always remember her leading Friday morning *oneg* with unlimited spirit. Her leadership helped shape the *neshamot*, the precious souls, of generations of children, and for that we are deeply grateful."

When asked many years ago about her career in early childhood education, Rachel responded, "Early childhood [education] is my passion. Seeing and experiencing the world through the eyes of a two- or three-year-old child every day is positively exhilarating. Watching the children develop emotionally, socially, intellectually, and Judaically generates a daily personal as well as professional satisfaction. Realizing the importance of the foundation we set in place for the future generation is an awesome and thrilling responsibility."

Rachel Mathless spent her adult life raising her own children and having a positive impact on the lives of thousands of other children. In her professional life, she earned a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education and another in Educational Leadership. Over the course of her career, she worked as a preschool teacher at Southern Connecticut Hebrew Academy, while also working with severely developmentally delayed children at a group home in Yalesville, Connecticut. She worked as the Chair of the Curriculum Committee at Torah Academy in Cleveland, Ohio, before becoming the Director of Early Childhood Education at Southern Connecticut Hebrew Academy. Then, she came to Temple Israel of Great Neck.

Recalling Rachel Mathless' warmth, Nicole Idelson, a Beth HaGan parent, commented, "I remember when I was first touring the school for my first child, walking through the halls with Rachel. She knew every child's name. She would stop and say hello to them and they too would stop and say hello back. It sounds like such a small detail, but we toured many schools and this was a genuine connection that we soon learned about firsthand."

Yve Fouladi, Beth HaGan's Director, shared:

"For 24 years, Rachel Mathless z"l led Beth HaGan with warmth, integrity, and a profound belief in the sacredness of early childhood education. I was fortunate to be part of 17 of those years, the last of which were filled with her mentorship, encouragement, clarity, and love as I prepared to follow in her footsteps. Rachel saw children as curious, capable, and deserving of deep respect, and she built a school culture that safeguarded their emotional, educational, and spiritual growth. Beth HaGan families still enjoy the creative traditions Rachel shaped, from the Torah Science and Literary Art Fairs to her joyful *oneg* singing which still echoes in our halls. I feel truly grateful to have witnessed her in action — nurturing teachers, supporting families, and bringing heartfelt meaning to every aspect of school life — all of which continues to guide me in my role as Director."

Connie Reichman, Temple Israel's Director of Education, reflected on Rachel's legacy and creativity:

"No program at Beth HaGan embodies the spirit and talent of Rachel more than the annual Torah Science Fair. This unique event reflects her vision of blending a love of Judaism with an appreciation for science and the beauty of God's world. The first time I witnessed it, I was floored by the children's depth of knowledge, curiosity, and creativity. It was Rachel's guidance and encouragement that brought this extraordinary program to life."

Maxine Yeroshalmi, who served as PTA president of Beth HaGan, also shared some memories:

"I made the decision to send my firstborn to Beth HaGan after meeting Rachel. From that moment, I knew this was where my children belonged. She always wanted the very best for our children, and I'm proud to say that all four of mine graduated from Beth HaGan. When I took on the role of PTA president, I spent countless hours in the school and in her office. During that time, our relationship grew far beyond that of a director and parent. Rachel became » [continued on page 18](#)



Photo above: Rachel Mathless with Maxine Yeroshalmi, a Beth HaGan parent who served as PTA President for a period of time.

Bear Witness to the Truth of October 7th: The Legacy of Omer Neutra

by Veronica Lurvey

It is so important that we create opportunities to hear the stories of the survivors of the October 7th attack, just as we make sure to share the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. We listen and we vow Never Again. On October 12th, Doron Steinbrecher, one of the freed Israeli hostages held by Hamas, was scheduled to speak at Temple Israel. In an intimate conversation with Rabbi Stecker, she would bear witness to her experiences as a hostage held for 471 days.

Several days before the event was to take place, we heard the wonderful news that all hostages were to be freed. Doron and her sister boarded the first available flight back to Israel, to greet the returning hostages.

Since then, we have watched the emotional reunions of the remaining living hostages with their families. Slowly, Hamas has also been releasing the remains of hostages who died on October 7th or during their captivity, including Omer Neutra, whose body was buried in Israel on November 7th.

As a personal friend of the Neutra family, I have been invited to say a few words about Omer's legacy. Since Omer is no longer with us, he leaves behind his family, his friends, and his community to bear witness for him.

The Legacy of Omer Neutra

My husband and I first met the Neutra family through our children, at the Schechter School of Long Island. Our younger sons are good friends, and our older son and Omer graduated high school together. We knew Omer as a young man who could be goofy but was also focused. Omer made his own hummus, and it was good. He smiled a lot. He had an innate ability to connect with people, and we are grateful that his friendship helped our son transition into a new grade in high school.

After graduation, Omer deferred his acceptance to SUNY Binghamton to spend a gap year in Israel, which he then extended. The grandchild of Holocaust survivors, Omer felt strongly that he should "show his love to Israel in action and not just words." His upbringing, plus his time in Israel, had

created a bond so strong that instead of returning to attend college when his gap year was up, he chose to stay in Israel and serve in the IDF with his peers. There, he rose through the ranks, and on October 7th, he was a tank platoon commander stationed close to the Gaza border.

Omer gravitated toward and excelled in group efforts. He chose team sports: basketball, soccer and volleyball. He was active in USY. He went to Israel, where he not only joined the IDF, but chose the tank brigade. In each of these endeavors, he naturally rose to a leadership position, whether as team captain, regional president, or commander.

Video footage from October 7th shows terrorists pulling Omer out of a smoking tank damaged by explosives, wounded. This video gave his parents hope that he

remained alive after abduction. They held on to this hope for a year, only to be informed that Omer had succumbed to his wounds, likely that first day. Only one of the four in his tank crew survived.

Omer's parents, Orna and Ronen, have carried on his legacy through their tireless advocacy for the release of all the hostages. They have led with a » [continued on page 12](#)



Below the leadership quote with Omer Neutra's photo, the other photos are, clockwise from top: Run for Their Lives in Central Park, with Omer's family in the front; the Neutras with Omer's former classmates before the dedication of a basketball court in a local park; Veronica Lurvey (in yellow) with Orna, Ronen and Daniel Neutra in Washington, DC, advocating for the release of the hostages.

Neat, Sweet & Petite: The Addams Family meets the TIGN Players Family

by Ron Klempner

In 2023, there was *Fiddler on the Roof*, the Temple Israel Players returning from the COVID break with a heartfelt and acclaimed production of its favorite show. In 2024, they were off *Into the Woods*, taking on the complex and challenging music and lyrics of the great Stephen Sondheim. In 2025, they turned to the Torah for the stirring story and memorable melodies of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

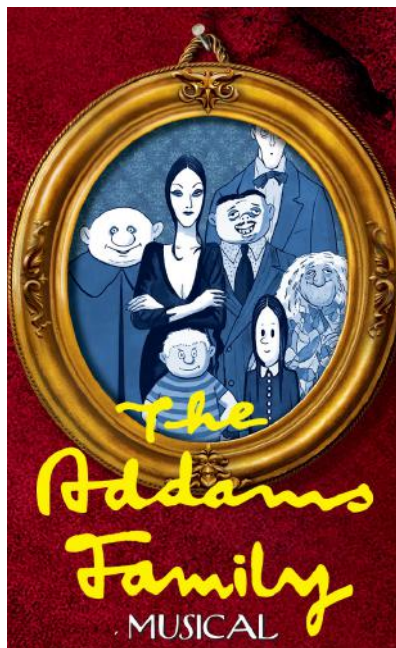
Now in 2026, they are raising the bar... and the dead.

At a creepy, kooky and well-attended reveal in the Pine Room on October 22, The Players' directors and producers announced they're gonna pay a call on *The Addams Family* for their 2026 musical production. An open call has been declared by The Players' leaders for all interested members of the Temple Israel congregation to come and join their mysterious and spooky clan.

Stage and Musical Directors JoJo Conley and Chris McKee are dying for fresh blood. Auditions are set for the evenings of Monday, November 17 and Tuesday, November 18, with select callbacks on Wednesday, November 19. The Players are looking for men, women, boys and ghouls (ages 8 to 88+) to take part both on and behind the stage, either as performers, stage crew, costume designers, or anything else. Rehearsals begin Monday, December 1, with performances on Saturday night, March 14 and Sunday afternoon, March 15.

Like Gomez, Morticia, Uncle Fester, Wednesday, Pugsley, Lurch, Grandma, and Thing, The Players are themselves a family. Their members support each other through triumphs and challenges in their personal and professional lives, all

while sharing the joy of creating a high-spirited musical production that brings great value to the Temple Israel and local communities. A quality musical theater troupe is indeed a rare gem in the synagogue world, and producers Debbie Volk, Mark Putter, Alex Schoen and Ron Klempner hope more congregants join to help carry on the tradition started by founder Eileen Putterman z"l and others almost half a century ago. They promise that if you come and see 'um, you'll find that they really are a scre-um.



As to the show itself, *The Addams Family* musical was a real audience favorite on Broadway, running for more than 750 performances in the early 2010s with the iconic Nathan Lane starring as Gomez Addams and Bebe Neuwirth playing his wife Morticia. *The Chicago Tribune* said the show is "built for old-fashioned fun," which is likely the reason it has proved an enduring hit in youth and community theater productions and has played in more than three dozen countries. The CEO of Theatrical Rights Worldwide, which licenses the show, calls it "our best seller by volume of production."

The Addams Family has a long history, created originally in 1938 by Charles Addams, an American cartoonist who created approximately 150 cartoons featuring the eccentric family for *The New Yorker* over a 50-year period. It was not until 1964 when the TV series was developed that the family members were given names. The musical, nominated for two Tony Awards, was written by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice — two Jews from Brooklyn and Queens — who also wrote the book for the musical *Jersey Boys*. Brickman had previously served as the head writer for Johnny Carson, and with collaborator Woody Allen shared the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay for *Annie Hall*.

When brainstorming ideas for the overall appearance of the show, the creators turned to the character of Uncle Fester for inspiration, asking themselves, "If Fester was going to do a Broadway show, what kind of Broadway show would he do?" They described the result as "an off-beat take on 19th Century Gothic."

The Players' creators — its producers and directors — describe the expected result of their production this year to be an off-beat experience of joy and laughter for both their audience and The Players themselves. Now is the time for anyone who has thought about coming out and joining the cast to do so. Just put a witch's shawl on, a broomstick you can crawl on, come out and pay a call on, The Players family. ■

"THE ADDAMS FAMILY" AUDITIONS

Monday, November 17 & Tuesday, November 18

Select callbacks on Wednesday, November 19

for more information, including:

- details about how to prepare for your audition
- how to sign up for an audition

go to : <https://tinyurl.com/TIGN-Players-Auditions-2026>

Twenty-two Years and Thirty-one Questions for Rabbi Stecker

by Paul Schwartz

Since December 2003, Rabbi Howard Stecker has served as the Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel. In that time, so many congregants have learned so much about him. But not everything. The *Voice* pulls the curtain back for a detailed yet quirky look at the religious leader at 108 Mill Road.

What was the reaction when you told your parents “I want to be a rabbi?” It was in college and they both said they were proud of me. But they also were a little bit concerned that I would end up moving all over the country. My mother, this was when I was in Rabbinical school, she said to me, because she had a great sense of humor, “When my friends ask me what you’re doing, if I say the words ‘rabbinical school’ very quickly, some of them think I said ‘medical school.’” That was my mother.

Do you have a ‘Welcome to being a Rabbi’ moment? Probably the first time that somebody complained to me about the kiddush. They complained to me about the tuna at the kiddush at my first job. “It’s too watery, it needs more mayonnaise.” See, I placed out of tuna training because they thought I could handle it. It turns out I could have used the training.

If you were not a rabbi, you would be...? Two possibilities. A professor of English Literature or the guy who plays piano in the atrium at Nordstrom.



Neilah ends, the shofar blows, your first morsel of food is...? I actually like smoked fish at that time. Eggs sometimes. The other thing, orange juice, but I never learn because it’s very acidic. Never smart. My stomach hurts, my throat hurts. It is actually a very bad thing to do.

Favorite food? I really do like a nice crispy piece of salmon.

Guilty pleasure favorite food? Spare ribs. Nachos, with like everything piled on. Do Buffalo wings have cheese on

them? No? So good, wings are good. Anything fried. Fried chicken, mozzarella sticks, I could go on. I like food.

What song will people be surprised is on your playlist? “Rock Lobster” by the B-52s. 1970s punk. “Respect” by Aretha Franklin. Classic rock, Fleetwood Mac, Simon and Garfunkel. My kids have gotten me into Fleet Foxes. Mumford & Sons. And then tons of classical music that wouldn’t surprise you. Also, Billy Joel and James Taylor.

What is your favorite classical piece? *Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony*. I used to just kind of dance around my dorm room pretending to conduct it.

Best sermon you ever gave? I gave a sermon once about fear and about crossing the Golden Gate Bridge and I think people really related to that. It had to do with facing my fears, our fears. I have a fear of heights, so I spoke about that.



A sermon that flopped? There was one that I gave and people who weren’t even there heard about it and said “I heard it was a problem.” The people who came back and said ‘I heard it was bad’ heard from people who didn’t like it.

Best Rabbi Joke? Rabbi, priest and a minister are golfing. The people in front of them are taking forever at each hole, they’re losing patience. They call the owner over and the owner explains to them that it’s a group of blind people that like to come regularly. And so the priest feels terrible and he says “I’m going to give charity for having been so angry at people who clearly have a particular disability.” And the minister says “I’m going to give a sermon about not judging situations.” And the Rabbi says to the owner “Why can’t you just ask them to golf at night?”



Favorite restaurant? I like Chattanooga actually. I also like

Cheburechnaya, a Bukharian place in Forest Hills.

What was your “Welcome to being a father” moment? I was very young, I was 25. The first soiled diaper in the hospital and one of the nurses looked at me and said “It’s your turn.”

Your “Welcome to being a grandfather” moment? I think actually seeing my son in the hospital afterwards and realizing that this guy who I helped to raise was now responsible for his own child. It was very moving. It was very emotional. It was really about my own son, Daniel, in the position of being a father. Since then it has been wonderful, especially now that my grandson talks. He was here for Simchat Torah and he is just like “Saba, sit.” So, okay. I’ll sit. His name is Luca. He’s two.

If you could meet one person in history who would it be? I want to meet John Adams. He has integrity, he’s curmudgeonly, witty and managed to do the right thing without caring who he upset. He defended the British in the Boston Massacre and somebody said “How can you do that?” and he said “Facts are stubborn things.” I use that line all the time.

If you could ask Moses one question...? Did you ever come to terms with not being able to enter the Promised Land?

Three dinner guests? This is just so who I am but I want John Donne. I’d like to have Golda Meir at dinner. And definitely Mozart. Somebody’s got to entertain.

Okay, have to ask... why John Donne? I wrote my senior thesis on John Donne and when I went to St. Paul’s Cathedral, Deanna and I went there and I took a photo next to him. This is absolutely not interesting to 99 percent of the people, it’s really not. But he was a brilliant theologian, he was a pastor and he also wrote about everything. He wrote about love and sex and death and just a brilliant use of language.

Favorite movie? “The Producers.”

Favorite TV show? I really liked “All in the Family.” They tackled some of the most complicated issues and I thought that was really pretty amazing.



Favorite actor? Dustin Hoffman.

Favorite actress? I feel so old when I say this. Anne Bancroft.

Only the rabbi of Temple Israel would know this... How challenging it is to give out honors on the High Holidays. You have to know who’s cousins with who and who’s this and who’s that. And what does it mean in different cultural groups within the synagogue.

Best thing about being a rabbi? You have a window into people’s lives that very few other people have.

Worst thing about being a rabbi? Just the extent and depth of people’s

expectations. I would say it’s the most challenging thing. And falling off the bimah. There’s always that danger. When one of my sons was really little, he asked me, “Aren’t you afraid to fall off the *bimah*?”

Favorite holiday? I love Sukkot. I love being outside. I love the smell of the etrog. I love celebrating nature. There’s like a relief after Yom Kippur and it doesn’t have that awesomeness and that stress, so it’s great.



Favorite prayer? I like the prayer *Hayom* at the end of the holidays. Strengthen us today. I like it because it forces us to really be in this moment. We’re all together, right now, today, it’s gonna be okay.

Is there somewhere you want to visit that you never have? I think I’d like to go to Tibet. I’m very interested in

comparative religion. And North Africa.

You play piano. Billy Joel is the Piano Man. What are you? I’m Piano Guy. The kids in our preschool call me Piano Guy sometimes when they see me. Or they call me Shabbat Guy because I sing songs about Shabbat.

Best advice to a couple about to be married? Figure out how to deal with your disagreements. I ask them all to share with me a time when they disagreed and then how did they handle it. And then I say “unless you’re going to marry yourself, which is not legal, yet, you have to figure out how to deal with each other when you see things differently.”



If someone asked a Temple Israel congregant “What is Rabbi Stecker like?” what would you hope they would say? Thoughtful. Respectful. Honest. Concerned. That’s a good start. ■

IN MEMORIAM

Temple Israel extends condolences to the families of:

ALICE GOLDSTEIN

wife of Morris Goldstein z'l'
father of Beth Goldstein and Eric Goldstein
and sister of Nancy Kass

DAVID ALBERT

husband of Marcy Albert
father of Benjamin Albert and Nathan Albert
brother of Helen Albert and Susan Albert-Daisak
uncle of Amy, Jessica, Hannah, and Sarah
and esteemed member of Temple Israel

SHAMSI YOUSEFZADEH ARZANIPOUR

sister of Mahin Mahfar
grandmother of Negin Abdekalmi
and aunt of Rouben Mahfar, Benhour Mahfar, Jacqueline Harounian, Janet Esagoff,
Rebecca Sassouni, and Jennifer Khoda

RACHEL MATHLESS

served as Director of our Beth HaGan Preschool for 24 years

TOUBA VICTORY

mother of Shahla Pourmoradi, Mina Peykar, Nora Victory, Roya Emrani, and Ebi Victory
grandmother of Omid Pourmoradi, Bitá Hendizadeh, Navid Pourmoradi, Joanna Eshaghoff,
Danny Erieh, Jonny Peykar, Dustin Emrani, Ashley Emrani Weiner, Monica Horowitz,
Nicole Victory, Lauren Victory, and Alex Victory

May their memories be for a blessing.

Beth HaGan Starts the New Year with Exploration and Learning

by Yve Fouladi

Although this year's holidays left us with more days out of school in October than in, it's truly remarkable how much the children have accomplished. Only a short time ago, we were focused on helping everyone transition smoothly into their classrooms and learn daily routines; now, we have a school full of adorable High Holy Day experts! I am filled with immense gratitude for each year, this past season, and our children. We are so rich in community and Jewish tradition, and in my opinion, there is no more special time in our calendar. It is a season of beginnings, connection, and meaning - from Rosh Hashana to Simhat Torah. And just as we catch our breath from the business of so many *chagim*, our students eagerly lean into fuller weeks of learning, exploration, and *Parsha*-inspired experiences to grow by.

Our main hallway has become a truly wonderful space for added learning, celebration, and fun. This Beth HaGan center is where we rotate hands-on displays that connect to what the children are learning. Starting in late September, the children loved visiting our High Holy Days sensory tables whether during parent dropoff or pickup, or during the day with their classes - first exploring woven beehives, toy bees, apples, different types of honey and honeycombs and toy shofars; the following week visiting a large Jonah and the Whale display with a water table for "*tashlich*" using dissolving paper in place of bread crumbs for an in-school *tashlich* experience; and finally, a child-sized *sukkah* surrounded by two fall-themed sensory tables filled with autumn fruits and vegetables, toy lulav sets, pinecones, and fall leaves.

We were proud to take part in planning and celebrating the second annual Sukkah Fall Festival, which was very well attended by Beth HaGan families. Many of our families also joined the Simhat Torah Young Children's Service with Connie Reichman, our Director of Congregational Schools, and we've begun planning a series of Beth HaGan-centered *Shabbat* experiences - including a Friday night dinner, a *Shabbat* celebration with scarves for every child.

Last month, we held our second annual Beresheit Program, where each class rotated through the multipurpose room, transformed into an interactive, sensory journey through the Six Days of Creation. The experience began with a light show and mini flashlights for use in a "dark and light" Day 1 area; and continued with six more extra-large, each-day-of-creation art displays accompanied by shaving cream cloud and water tables and numerous sensory bins for each day filled with dirt, flowers, leaves, feathers, water with fish, and plastic animals; a sun, moon and stars inspired jumping game, and for day six large funhouse-type distorted exploration mirrors and various play figures - all ending in an awesome "Day of Rest" Shabbat sing-along and dance party celebration with scarves for every child.

Recently, the Beth HaGan PTA sponsored a fantastic Noah's Ark event featuring a visit (in the parking lot) from the Long Island Petting Zoo, an animal dance » [continued on page 18](#)



Religious School: Highlights from the High Holy Days

by Connie Reichman



The High Holy Days were full of joyful learning and celebration at our Religious School!

Students practiced the sounds of the shofar, dipped apples in honey (and other sweet toppings!), and created beautiful wooden pomegranate decorations and honey dishes to welcome a sweet new year.

On Sukkot, the weather cooperated just long enough for every class to say the bracha for sitting in the sukkah and to take turns shaking the lulav and etrog.

Our Sukkot Festival was a huge success! We joined together with Beth HaGan and Gahalet for a fun-filled day of music and dancing, crafts, clowns, face painting, balloon animals—and, of course, plenty of pizza!

It was wonderful to celebrate together as a community and kick off the school year with so much joy and connection. ■



B'NAI/B'NOT MITZVAH IN OUR TEMPLE ISRAEL FAMILY

JACK MURPHY will be called to the Torah as a *bar mitzvah* on November 15. He is the son of Jennifer Murphy and Patrick Murphy and the grandson of Temple Israel members Arlene and Melvyn Feuerman. Jack is an eighth grade student at Great Neck South Middle School. Jack is a 1964 NY World's Fair enthusiast. He enjoys watching classic films and listening to classic jazz. He enjoys visiting museums, exploring architecture and design, and is a world traveler. He plans to attend Youth House next year and would like to visit Israel in the future.



ETHAN COHEN will be called to the Torah as a *bar mitzvah* on December 6. He is the son of Lillian Rokhsar-Cohen and Jason Cohen and Izabella Rozenfeld z"l and the grandson of Temple Israel members Guity and Anoushiravan Rokhsar. Ethan has a brother, Noah Nerayoff, 15, and two sisters, Charlotte Nerayoff, 17, and Daniela Cohen, 6. Ethan is a seventh grade student at Great Neck North Middle School where he performs in the Chorus. Ethan also plays basketball, tennis and ping pong, and is an avid collector of sports cards. He is currently a student in the Youth House. He looks forward to visiting Israel in the future.



CELINE AMINZADEH will be called to the Torah as a *bat mitzvah* on December 13. She is the daughter of Mersedeh and Farid Aminzadeh and has a brother, Ryan, 22, and a sister, Ashley, 20. Celine is a seventh grade student at Great Neck North Middle School where she plays the viola and is on the basketball team. She also does gymnastics. She plans to attend Youth House next year and looks forward to visiting Israel in the future.



OMER NEUTRA, *continued from page 6*

unifying message that has been amplified within the US and worldwide: The release of hostages must be a priority.

Within the US, the Neutras campaigned for the release of all the hostages, but they also had to educate American governmental officials about the eight American hostages. They often stood side by side with the other American-Israeli families, including the parents of Hersh Goldberg-Polin and Itay Chen, because they were stronger together. You may have seen the yellow ribbon with the names of the eight American hostages surrounding it, which became a sort of emblem for this campaign. No American hostages remain in Gaza, but only three returned alive.

The world has seemed different since October 7th. The slaughter and celebration on October 7th exposed the danger that Jews face worldwide. Antisemitism continues to increase, and as the Anti-Zionist movement gains new allies, it often feeds outright, sometimes deadly, antisemitism.

Right now, we have no choice but to stand together for our safety. This involves fighting against antisemitism and for the security and legitimacy of Israel. The Neutras have shown us that a unifying message brings us together in this struggle. The American Jewish Committee has offered critical support to the hostage families over the past two years. AJC has a long history fighting antisemitism and supporting Israel, and they do so in a nonpartisan manner. Their approach is well suited for the needs of today.

My heart breaks for the Neutras every day, but I know the world was a better place with him in it, although he was here for too short of a time.

Omer's legacy teaches us that being a part of a community is to be a part of something greater than ourselves. We are *am Israel*. We are a team united by communal goals. We meet these goals by playing to each other's strengths. As I think of Omer's legacy, I pray that we may always find leaders like Omer who will take the lead in such a way that makes everyone stronger.

May Omer's memory be a blessing. ■

Veronica Lurvey serves on the Regional Board of AJC Long Island and will be recognized for her advocacy at the AJC LI 55th Annual Meeting on December 1, 2025.

RABBI AMY ROTH SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE WEEKEND, *continued from front page*

female rabbi was ordained by the Conservative movement, Rabbi Roth will speak about her experiences during Friday evening services, a Friday night *Shabbat* dinner, during *Shabbat* morning services, and during a *Shabbat* Talk following *kiddush*.

During her weekend *Shabbat* visit at Temple Israel, Rabbi Roth will discuss her own journey as a woman ordained within the first few years when being a female rabbi was even a possibility. For the purposes of this article, Rabbi Roth gave a brief summary of her path.

If it had not been possible to be ordained as a Conservative rabbi, Rabbi Roth likely would have pursued her passion for Jewish education in a more conventional way with a Master's degree in Jewish Education. (During rabbinical school, Rabbi Roth also earned her Master's in Jewish Education.) Immediately after graduating from Barnard College — which was before the Conservative Movement had approved women's ordination — she spent a year in Israel studying Jewish texts. Upon her return to New York, she took a job in public relations, but her heart and head led her to apply to the graduate school at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) to pursue a Master's.

Although women could be ordained as rabbis in the Conservative Movement beginning in 1985, whether they would be hired by a Conservative synagogue was another story. The job market was challenging; there were Conservative synagogues that were not yet even egalitarian in terms of women counting a *minyan*, leading *davening* and getting *aliyot*. But even many egalitarian Conservative synagogues were not yet interviewing female candidates. As Rabbi Roth explains, "it was all so new; [female rabbis] were a novelty, which was not what we wanted to be." When she was ordained in 1990, Rabbi Roth was pregnant with her second child and was only looking to be employed part-time for a few years. This meant that she didn't experience the same challenges that newly-ordained female rabbis seeking full-time employment faced.

Rabbi Roth's career path as a Jewish educator started with a part-time teaching position at Solomon Schechter while she was a student at JTS. As a newly-ordained rabbi and young mother, she spent several years balancing

family with teaching courses at the local JCC, eight years as the coordinator/instructor of the adult *b'nai mitzvah* class at a synagogue in Rockland County, and as the part-time Jewish Enrichment Coordinator at the YCC of Bergen County. During many summers, she was on the education and advising staff of Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. For twelve years, Rabbi Roth was the full-time Associate Director for Camp Ramah before becoming the Director of Congregational Schools at Temple Israel, a role she held for eleven years, from 2012 to 2023.

When asked about the changes she has seen for women in Conservative Judaism over the past 40 years, both for female rabbis and for Conservative Jewish women in general, Rabbi Roth said that "egalitarianism in Conservative congregations has become the norm and therefore young girls grow up without any consciousness of a Jewish world in which they are not educated and given the same skills as boys. And for this generation of young people (in the Conservative world), there is no preconceived notion that a rabbi is a male, and that female rabbis are the exception. There are now so many of us, that in many (mostly Conservative) settings, the gender of the rabbi is not considered; it is almost an afterthought. We present to the world as rabbis who are preachers, pastoral counselors, educators and scholars."

Rabbi Roth's visit is sponsored by the Peticha Fund, a fund whose goal is to promote the study of Jewish texts, Torah and Israel by girls, women and families at Temple Israel. The fund was established by Rebecca and Sassan Sassouni in memory of their grandmothers, in the merits of their mothers — Soosan Moallem Sassouni and Madeline Chadi Yousefzadeh — and their children: Sophie Sassouni Zucker, Cyrus, Leila, and Emma Sassouni.

Details about Rabbi Roth's visit and the Scholar-in-Residence weekend will be posted to tign.org, and announced in our weekly emails beginning in the next couple of weeks. ■



**BETWEEN
THE
STONE
AND THE
FLOWER**
The Duality of the Conversos



**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23
8 P.M.**

followed by a virtual Q&A with
Genie Milgrom, the movie's subject.

Free for Temple Israel members
Non-members: \$5 per person
Snacks and beverages will be served.
RSVP required.



**Shoah Remembrance Committee
BOOK DISCUSSION**

**Monday,
December 15
8:15 P.M.**

led by
**Rabbi
Schweber**



**ONE GOOD
THING**
A NOVEL
**GEORGIA
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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
WE WERE THE LUCKY ONES

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from
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Rabbi Stecker for officiating at the baby naming of our granddaughter, Scarlett

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Rabbi Stecker for officiating at their grandson's *bris*

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Rosh Hashanah

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The baby naming of Scarlett Brash

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The baby naming of Alexandra Mavridis
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The baby naming of their
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Kol Isha 5786: Rosh Hodesh

women
gathering together
to learn,
grow in spirit,
and create community



**Led by Rahel Musleah
Meets on Sundays at 10 A.M.
Next meeting:
Sunday, November 16th
Check emails for future dates**

Jews and the News

**with Rabbi Stecker
Tuesday, November 18th
Tuesday, December 2nd
Tuesday, December 16th
2 P.M. to 3 P.M.**



**Wednesday, November 12th
Wednesday, November 19th
Wednesday, December 10th
8:00 p.m. – 9:15 p.m.
Members: \$10/person
Non-members: \$20/person**

RACHEL MATHLESS, *continued from page 5*

my friend, my mentor, and someone I often turned to for guidance. With my family living in California, I didn't have anyone nearby, but Rachel filled that space. She was like a mother to me, always offering wisdom, comfort, and care. Some of my fondest memories are of *Shabbat Oneg* on Fridays, hearing Rachel sing, watching her hand the microphone to the children so they could participate with such pride and joy. Those moments captured who she was — warm, nurturing, and deeply connected to every child. If I was going through a difficult time, she went out of her way to check on me, to make sure I was okay. Rachel was smart, strong, and a true woman of faith. She brought so much light, love, and Judaism into the school, and her presence made it the special place it is today. I love her deeply and miss her dearly.”

Temple Israel Vice President Lisa Goodwin's three sons — now in their twenties — all attended Beth HaGan in the early part of Rachel's tenure as Director. Lisa remembers Rachel fondly, saying “Rachel Mathless was a gem! She knew my three sons as individuals and understood how to relate to each one of them separately. She offered gentle guidance and encouragement and infused their Beth HaGan days with warmth and a love for Jewish traditions and values.”

Rachel Mathless is survived by her children — Aron Mathless, Miriam Abrams, Rabbi Mendy Mathless, Souchie Kievman, and Shulie Mathless; many grandchildren; and her siblings — Malkie Katz, Dreizel Kaploun, Rabbi Yossi Hecht, Shani Fellig, and Rabbi Sheya Hecht. She was predeceased by her husband, Reb Nachman Aryeh Mathless, and her sister, Sima Zeilengold.

There will be a memorial service for Rachel Mathless, hosted by her family, at Temple Israel of Great Neck on Wednesday, November 19 at 7:45 P.M. Details to follow. ■

BETH HAGAN, *continued from page 10*

party with adorable animal masks and bubbles on the back patio, and take-home gifts of felt animal masks and mini bubble bottles for every child. We also decorated the school hallway with a wooden ark and “two-by-two” pairs of plush animals (all donated by Beth HaGan parents) for the children to climb into and play with, in keeping with our child-friendly *Parashat* Noah theme and hands-on teaching philosophy.

Lastly, our in-school Hebrew enrichment, early morning drop-off, and after-school enrichment programs are underway. We're currently running five after-school classes: two sports sessions with Apex Sports, Hebrew, cooking, and indoor gym - all classes that enrich our children, and provide families with a longer school day - something many truly appreciate. ■

Torah Portion of the Week Through the Lens of Commentators

with Rabbi Schweber
8:15 p.m.

Tuesday, November 11 • Tuesday, November 18
Monday, November 24 • Tuesday, December 16

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 September 13 was made by Audrey Kent-Itzkowitz and Eric Itzkowitz on the occasion of the *yahrzeit* of Eric's father, Benjamin Itzkowitz.

A contribution towards the *kiddush* on September 20 was made by Yuval and Vivian Brash in honor of the baby naming of their granddaughter, Scarlett Faye Brash.

Contributions toward the *kiddush* on September 27 were made by Taraneh Shirazi and David Hakim, in honor of the *auf ruf* of their son, Jason Hakim, stepson of Farzan Shirazi, and Jennifer Kindman, daughter of Gloria Kindman and Jerry Kindman, z'l' and stepdaughter of Ethan Horwitz; Rachel and Geoffrey Epstein in honor of the *auf ruf* of their daughter, Debbie Epstein, and Derek Kahn, son of Debra and David Kahn; and by David Khorshad and Vida Ohebshalom on the birth of their granddaughter.

A contribution towards the *kiddush* on October 11 was made by Helen Shirazi and Philip Marvidis in honor of the baby naming of their daughter, Alexandra Marvidis.

A contribution towards the *kiddush* on October 18 was made by Iris and Charles Adler for Charles' second *bar mitzvah*.

The congregational *kiddush* on October 25 was sponsored by Elle and Michael Becker in honor of the *bat mitzvah* of their daughter, Lilyanna.

Contributions toward the *kiddush* on November 1 were made by Fanny and Alfred Narotzky in honor of Alfred's 95th birthday; and by Lori Stein Freudman and Paul Freudman in honor of the *auf ruf* of their son, Benjamin Freudman, and Erica DeMichiel. ■

JOSH KOBLINER

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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.

CHAYEI SARA • November 15

TOLDOT • November 22

VAYETZEI • November 29

VAYISHLACH • December 6

VAYESHEV • December 13

MIKETZ • December 20

VAYIGASH • December 27

VAYECHI • January 3



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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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Upcoming Events • Upcoming Events

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

Torah Portion of the Week Through the Lens of Commentators with Rabbi Schweber • Tuesday, November 11 @ 8:15 P.M.

New Year... New You: Torah Yoga Workshop with Pia Shlomo • Wednesday, November 12 @ 8 P.M.

Auditions for The Addams Family, The Players Spring Musical • Monday, November 17 @ 6:30 P.M. - 10 P.M.

Auditions for The Addams Family, The Players Spring Musical • Tuesday, November 18 @ 7 P.M. - 10 P.M.

Torah Portion of the Week Through the Lens of Commentators with Rabbi Schweber • Tuesday, November 18 @ 8:15 P.M.

Callbacks for The Addams Family, The Players Spring Musical • Wednesday, November 19 @ 7 P.M. - 10 P.M.

New Year... New You: Torah Yoga Workshop with Pia Shlomo • Wednesday, November 19 @ 8 P.M.

Film: "Between the Stone and the Flower" followed by virtual Q&A with Genie Milgrom • Sunday, November 23 @ 7 P.M.

Torah Portion of the Week Through the Lens of Commentators with Rabbi Schweber • Monday, November 24 @ 8:15 P.M.

New Year... New You: Torah Yoga Workshop with Pia Shlomo • Wednesday, December 3 @ 8 P.M.

Film: "Who Will Write Our History?" • Sunday, December 7 @ 7 P.M.

Religious School & Congregational Shabbat Service & Dinner • Friday, December 12 @ 6 P.M.

Jazzukah! A Hanukkah Concert & Dinner • Sunday, December 14 @ 4:30 P.M.

Book Discussion: One Good Thing by Georgia Hunter sponsored by the Shoah Remembrance Committee

Monday, December 15 @ 8:15 P.M.

Torah Portion of the Week Through the Lens of Commentators with Rabbi Schweber • Tuesday, December 16 @ 8:15 P.M.

Congregational Shabbat Service & Dinner • Friday, December 19 @ 6 P.M.

Film: "Defiance" • Sunday, January 4 @ 7 P.M.

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