

JCOGS Bulletin

JEWISH COMMUNITY OF GREATER STOWE

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Mary Estelle's rendering of JCOGS services in 2020

The wisdom of deeds

From our rabbi



For close to 2000 years, the Jewish literary tradition was predominantly framed around the interpretation of sacred text. Original canonical, holy texts of our tradition were only printed alongside contemporary interpreters who used those texts as launching pads for creative meaning-making. In this way, the tradition was sustained for future generations to pick up the mantle where the previous generation left off. Here, I offer such a midrashic rabbinic-style of interpretation, through the sacred words of Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Ancestors 3:17:

The 1st century CE Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah is recorded to have said: "Where there is no Torah, there is no right conduct." Learning is whatever it takes to open your eyes and heart. While we may not be steeped in the depths of daily Torah study, continuous learning and personal growth can lead to proper behaviour. This is like the Talmudic expression: "Is study greater or is action greater?... Study is greater, as study leads to action" (Kiddushin 40b).

At JCOGS, we weekly learn the roots of our tradition – through our meditation class, Friday services, and even at our board meetings. This foundation leads us to act, such as our partnership with Capstone Community Action and their Fuel Your Neighbor campaign, including raising \$6000 with our fellow VT Jews to help warm our neighbours in the coldest months.

Azariah continues: "Where there is no right conduct, there is no Torah." When we see missing ethics in our own actions and in those of others, this is due to a stunted capacity for learning. Where society fails, our Prophets would remind us, it is because of a lack of understanding the plight of those most marginalized. Yet, these moments themselves can be moments for growth, if we have the right teachers and guides to challenge us gently.

In our own community, when we partner with the Racial Equity Alliance of Lamoille (REAL), we are drawing on the forces of our greatest Prophets, such as Isaiah, who said: "For truth has fallen in the streets, and equity cannot enter." Our Prophets used Torah truth to remind us of the profound inequities a society must unlearn.

Azariah further says: "Where there is no bread, there is no Torah." Wisdom is rooted in physical sustenance. Azariah implies: We are rooted to this world. Body. Breath. Beating heart. We must embrace this world.

When we support the Lamoille Community House, we help provide the most basic necessities: a warm roof over head and food on the table. That simple act is one of ancient wisdom. And also leads to further wisdom as we learn best practices from the experts in the field and from those most affected.

Yet, Azariah also says: "Where there is no Torah, there is no bread." From ground to plate, physical sustenance is based on spiritual grounding. Growing crops requires wisdom, ingenuity, and creativity. Only a grounded, intelligent person can take a tiny seed through pests, drought or floods, harvest, grinding, and baking, all the way to the Shabbat dinner table, a journey that requires great faith. The most profoundly spiritual people I have ever met have been farmers, not by coincidence.

Pirkei Avot 3:17

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר, אם אין תורה, אם אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה. אם אין חכמה, אין יראָה. אם אין יראָה, אין חכמה. אם אין בינה, אין דעת. אם אין דעת, אין בינה. אם אין קמח, אין תורה. אם אין תורה, אין קמח. הוא היה אומר, כל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מרבין ושרשיו מעטין, והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על פניו, שנאמר (ירמיה יז) והיה כערער בערבה ולא יראָה כי יבוא טוב ושכן חררים במדבר ארץ מלחה ולא תשב. אבל כל שמעשיו מרבין מחכמתו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מעטין ושרשיו מרבין, שאפלו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו, שנאמר והיה כעץ שתול על מים ועל יובל ישלח שרשיו ולא יראָה כי יבא חם, והיה עלהו רענן, ובשנת בצרת לא ידאג, ולא ימיש מעשות פרי:

Perhaps this is why every fall, we seek that spiritual connection by gleaning the fields as our Biblical ancestors once did to donate the produce to those most in need. And our JCOGS Green Team plans to build a garden on our property this spring to sow the seeds of grounded wisdom.

Azariah also asks: "One whose wisdom exceeds her deeds, to what may she be compared? To a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few, so that when the wind comes, it uproots it and overturns it. One whose deeds exceed her wisdom, to what may she be compared? To a tree whose branches are few but roots are many, so that even if all the winds in the world come and blow upon it, they cannot move it out of its place."

Wisdom will only get you so far. Your own thinking and feelings (i.e., perceived wisdom) may distract or even upend a life of good deeds. Step into the world of action. Good deeds make us who we are. When found in books or social media posts, values are merely words.

Our values are rooted when they are acted out. When we provide socks across the state to those lacking, feet warmed in the cold of winter, spiritual and communal practice is grounded. The continuous doing of good deeds roots a person in who they are, such that no winds can topple them.

At JCOGS, we are building a rooted community that will be sustained for decades to come by continuous growth, learning, and right action. We know both the bread and the Torah. We study and we do good deeds. We are balancing budgets and building community, learning Torah and out in the community making a difference, synchronously. Because each has its place, each interconnected in symbiosis. Putting values into action is based on a rich, evolving tradition of learning and righteous thought with roots that run millenia old.

Rav brachot, many blessings for physical and spiritual sustenance, and continuous growth and learning.

Rabbi David

Looking forward

From our president



Dear JCOGS Community,

It is a fortunate synagogue that has a strong successor waiting in the wings when a president completes their time in office. We are that fortunate synagogue.



Throughout this pandemic, when other organizations have seen a crisis in leadership, JCOGS has seen a blossoming. Six community members joined the board in 2020, and they have all proven thoughtful, collaborative, and hardworking. Our officers are dedicated and – along with our committee chairs – bring a wide array of skills to running JCOGS.

Two and a half years ago, when Ron Feinstein stepped down as president, Emily was there to carry the torch forward. What an incredible and intense two and a half years it has been.

Now, the time has come to transition again, and in Steve Levine we have the future of our leadership. He has the trust and support of the board, and he is eager to continue to safeguard our financial future.

Throughout this Bulletin, you will see much about our financial sustainability. For the past three years, we have been reliant upon a grant to cover the cost of our director of family and youth education. In the coming two years, that support will be reduced

by half, and then it will cease altogether. In addition, we have been reliant upon a major donor whose support also will taper off in the coming years.

This means the time has come for us to stand on our own two feet if we want to sustain the quality education center and full-time rabbi. In this issue, you will see an offer to encourage joining our *L'dor vaDor* Society, a group of people who commit to including JCOGS in their wills. We hope you will join that group and help make sure JCOGS is supported for generations to come. Step up and sign the pledge.

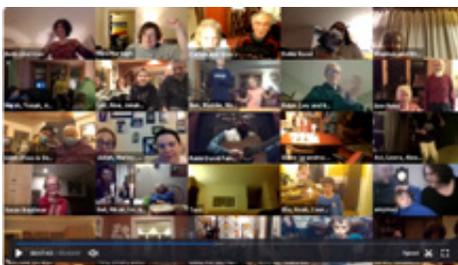
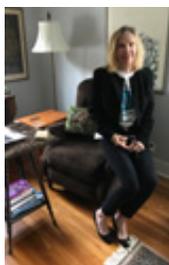
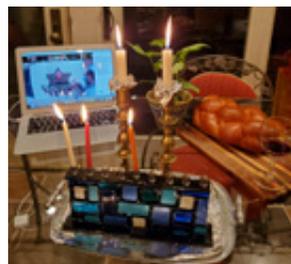
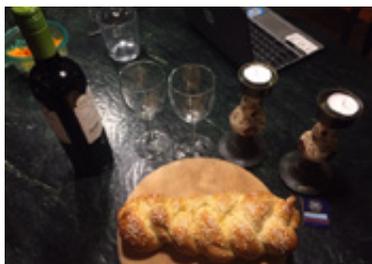
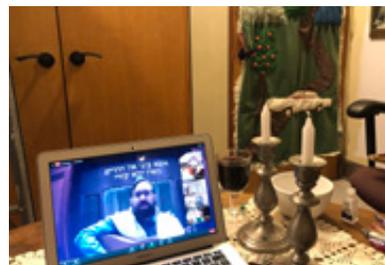
In addition, the board has voted to raise dues modestly in July for the coming year to lessen the gap between dues and the cost of running JCOGS. We will continue a robust financial aid program for those who cannot afford dues, and our March appeal will focus on our financial aid.

Our board is amazing, and we have strong volunteerism and leadership. We have systems in place to support growth in membership and programming when we are finally able to meet in person again. It will come down to all of us to make sure we can continue to foster Jewish life in north-central Vermont.

All our best,

Emily Rosenbaum
Steve Levine (incoming president)

How we did services for most of 2020.



Board of Trustees

- Sadie Ellner, youth member
- Candace Elmquist, treasurer
- Lis Erickson, children's education
- Rabbi David Fainsilber
- Ron Feinstein, emeritus
- Lynne Gedanken, vice president
- Sarah Ibson, secretary
- Nancy Krakower, emeritus
- Erica Laxer, youth intern
- Steve Levine, president
- Beth Liberman, ex officio
- Steve Lichtenstein, emeritus
- Emily Rosenbaum, past president
- Hersh Schwartz, building and finance
- Debby Sherman, membership
- Irwin Tauben, president CFJCOGS
- Aron Temkin, ritual
- Amy Wenger, tikkun olam
- Cyndy Wyatt, vice president

Carole and Steve Lichtenstein

“I’m home.”

Sixty-four years ago, when Steve Lichtenstein was at NYU Law School, some friends invited him over for dinner. They gave him two phone numbers. “These are two numbers,” they told him. “But you’ll like this one better.”

That number belonged to a young woman, not quite 21 years old, who was living with her parents, as one did in those days. Steve called and invited her to a party. “I didn’t know him or anyone at the party,” Carole recalls. So she told him she was busy – “which I probably was” – and invited him to come out the following weekend.

“He came out and knocked on the door. And he always says to me that I was wearing a red dress, but it was coral. We went for a walk. We never stopped talking and talking and talking. And we fell madly in love with each other the first time we met.”

Steve went back to Manhattan and said to his roommate: “I just met the girl I’m going to marry.” What did Carole say to herself? “I’m home.”

They soon married. “In those days,” Carole remarks, “in order to be together like we wanted to be together, you had to be married.”

She goes on: “I was a little kooky in those days. Maybe I still am.”

Four decades (give or take) later, they were in Stowe, having just finished dinner at the Green Mountain Inn. They saw a sign advertising Shabbat services. “And we said, ‘I didn’t know anyone else was Jewish here.’” From that point forward, Carole and Steve have remained committed to JCOGS, even before it had a name.

Today, Carole and Steve are founding members of our L’Dor vaDor Society, having included JCOGS in their estate planning.

“We both love JCOGS because it’s so inclusive,” Carole explains. “I don’t care who you are, what religion you were before you joined JCOGS, what religion your spouse is, I don’t care what color your skin is. We welcome everyone. LGBTQ welcome. I love that. I feel that’s the right way to be for a Jewish organization.”

And, of course, “We love our rabbi. He’s so darling. He’s adorable. He’s very knowledgeable. His music is interesting, exciting, and fun. He makes Friday nights fun. His family is adorable. What else can I say?” she asks.

This is why they have chosen to put JCOGS into



Carole and Steve Lichtenstein, all those years ago.

their will, to ensure there is a foundation of support for the next generation. “We just want this organization to go on and on.”

Anyone who has ever seen Carole and Steve at Friday night services knows their love remains strong, and they light up JCOGS with its glow.

“I thank God every day for bringing me to this man,” Carole says. “This is a man with a golden soul. He still is loving and affectionate and ‘What can I do to help you?’ and tucks me into bed at night. I am blessed. If I say that to him, he says he’s blessed. We are, we are blessed, we always say to each other: ‘I love you. I love you.’ I don’t know how you could not.”



From One Generation To Another

Our promise today for your pledge for tomorrow

By Marcie Scudder

One of my most powerful memories of skiing in Stowe was Christmas Day. On that day, we had the whole mountain to ourselves. We believed it our little secret gift. We thought ourselves special. Others did not.

Among that blur of childhood memories is that of knowing that although the mountain was welcoming, not everyone was. There were clubs where we Jews were not invited. There were signs outside hotels loudly declaring: "No Jews Allowed."

I was a child. My father loved and lived to ski. Thinking back, we could have skied anywhere. He chose this magical place, in spite of knowing that with a name like "Abramowitz" there were places we could not go.

We rented our first house when I was nine years old. As serendipity would have it, the owners were one of the few Jewish residents here in town. Immediately, there was a connection. A familiar mezuzah on the doorpost. A menorah sitting on the mantle. And candlesticks set aside for Shabbat.

Even at that young age, I wondered what it might have been like to be the *onlies*... the ones who did it differently... the ones who weren't quite welcome but who still called Stowe home.

Eventually, and many years later, my mother uprooted and chose to make herself a new life here. A Holocaust survivor, coming from a large and tightly-knit Montreal Jewish community – she knew that in order to thrive... to feel safe...to grow, she'd need to plant roots. And those roots were in the form



Roselle Abramowitz with her eight grandchildren.

of a place in which Jews could congregate and gather. Determined to make Stowe her home, she, along with others, began the arduous process of planting the seeds that were the beginnings of JCOGS. A Jewish Community Center for all of Stowe and its surrounds.

A foundation was poured. Floors and walls and a roof took form. A religious leader and rabbi were hired. Jewish people began to openly gather and connect. Children were educated in a tradition that we know is our duty to pass on. *L'dor vador*. From one generation to another. No Jewish family need ever do it alone again.

And - here I am. *Hineini*. I, too, have now made this magical place in these mountains my home. My mother lived and died here. My daughter was married here. My grandchildren have celebrated their *mikvot* here in my pond. In some bizarre and unexpected way – I've been handed this torch. I honor this gift. I will carry it on.

It's for this reason that we've committed ourselves to the *L'dor vaDor* Society. We have a duty to nurture what my mother and her generation began. We have a responsibility to the many generations that follow, ensuring they will never be the *onlies*.

My husband Bill and I are moved that JCOGS has launched a *L'dor vaDor* Society, that the board is working proactively to

ensure my mother's legacy of a Jewish home in north-central Vermont. We believe so strongly in the importance of legacy giving that we are making this promise:

For every person who pledges to include JCOGS in their will, we will make a donation to the JCOGS annual fund to say "thank you." All you have to do is call JCOGS or go on the website to find the pledge form. As soon as you have signed a pledge to support JCOGS with a gift in your estate, we will donate \$180 to support JCOGS programs today.

\$180 because this is ten times *chai*. *Chai* is life. A pledge and promise to support the Jewish education and life of our children and our children's children, so they can thrive, feel safe, and grow.

This is our gift of thanks. Thank you for honoring my mother's work and a community's vision. Without those who came before us, JCOGS would not be here for us today. Thank you for embodying *l'dor vador*. From one generation to another.

Contact JCOGS, whether by phone (253-1800), email (jcogs@jcogs.org), or on the website (jcogs.org). Fill in the form, pledge that you will write JCOGS into your will.

So no Jewish family need ever do it alone again.



Marcie and Bill with two of their grandchildren, Lotte and Ruby.

Roots and branches

Growing with the Olam Chesed Education Center

Beth Liberman, director of family and youth education

"I'm squirming a lot less than I used to," says Joe, whose family started coming to JCOGS eleven years ago. "Now I'm really paying attention and I want to learn about the history, where this all comes from. I can read Hebrew like crazy, but now I want to know what it means." Joe is part of our most deeply rooted b'nai mitzvah class ever. The current class is almost entirely kids who have come up through the ranks, as most of these twelve year olds have been in Olam Chesed at least two years and a third came in before the age of nine. Joe started coming to JCOGS when he was just over a year old; now he is preparing for his bar mitzvah in the spring.

Families like Joe's are what JCOGS education is all about. His sister, Sadie, has fond memories of running around the sanctuary surrounded by adults and listening to a beloved rabbi when she would come with her father to Friday night services. Now, Sadie sits on the board of trustees as the youth member. "I like being able to make decisions. To be heard. I care about this place," she says.

We have been growing Olam Chesed from the ground up, building roots with our youngest kids, so that their branches may flourish for years to come. If we only fill them with knowledge, it will not grab hold; instead, we must plant seeds of love, connection to ancestral tradition, and belonging to community. This year as we explore the theme of *mitzvot* in Olam Chesed, we are challenging our students to see their place in the world and know they have an impact.

Olam Chesed children grow into their Judaism. "This cohort of Mitzvah students has had the advantage of a long relationship with Jewish education at JCOGS and it really shows," says Amy Rosenthal, our Mitzvah! coordinator. "They are prepared, curious and engaged in their Mitzvah ceremony prep. I attribute that to their experience as Olam Chesed students during their run-up to this year in Mitzvah."

A few years ago, we had no teen program. As we grew, students completed Hebrew school yet wanted to keep their connections to JCOGS alive. We began our Ateed program, which takes youths from their b'nai mitzvah through high school, ensuring that there is continuity and agency as the youth become more independent and socially engaged.

We know that engaged teens begin as engaged children, and we structure our Kinderlach and Geshet programs with the intention to educate future Jewish adults. Hart and Jennifer joined JCOGS last year after searching for a Jewish community following their relocation to Vermont. "We are practicing Jews so [joining a synagogue] was a given. Judaism is such



Maddie and Ben light up their ice menorah for the Olam Chesed Fire & Ice celebration.

Jews are bound together through collective memory, shared ritual, and perpetuating ancient tradition. The Torah is referred to as the "tree of life," because it gives us roots that run deep, grasping onto a foundation of love, while spreading its branches of engagement with the wider community. New research shows that trees are neither independent nor competitive for resources; they are deeply interconnected and support one another. Like our JCOGS community.

a big part of who we are, an identity.” They appreciate how family-oriented JCOGS is (even if it is a bit “hippie”), and how vibrant for a rural shul. “In order to raise a Jewish family the whole family needs to be involved,” they say. “We really want to immerse them in Judaism.” Their daughter Etya does somersaults during Zoom Shabbat and they hope to see that enthusiastic engagement translate into teenaged questioning and independence, with a strong Jewish foundation that informs her and her new brother’s explorations of the world.

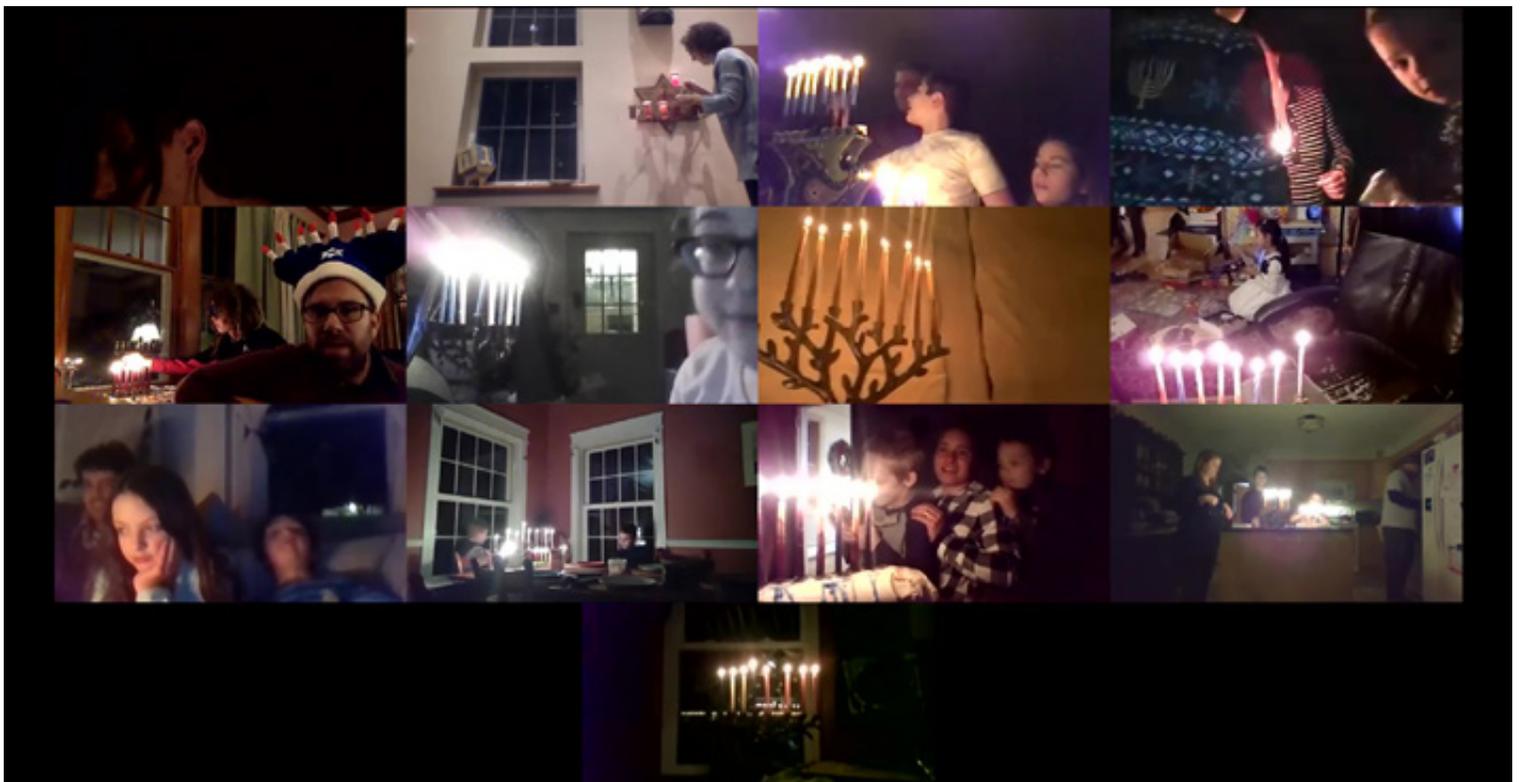
Etya and her brother are growing roots that will support lifelong learning and questioning, holding fast to their traditions while reaching far and wide into the world. This is a basic tenet of Judaism: begin as early as one can, and also celebrate inquiry and study whenever it begins. Quest and continuity sustain us. One of the greatest rabbis, Rabbi Akiva, started to study only when he was 40 years old. Jewish tradition and educational theory would have us understand that learning early is not the only way to become engaged, and that there are many places to sink roots into our traditions.

For Sadie and Joe’s parents, Sarah and Israel, JCOGS has been a deep source of community and connection. They were intentional in their choice to move to Lamoille County, near Jewish community. “We get back what we give and we wanted that for our children as well,” they explain. Israel served on the board for a number of years and Sarah is a constant presence at JCOGS’s potlucks and master builder of the sukkah each year. “I will *definitely* be sending my kids to Hebrew school one day,” Sadie declares as our chat about her family’s connection to JCOGS comes to a close. “I think it’s awesome to learn another language. And it’s nice to know I can share my holidays and stuff with other Jews, like my teacher. We kind of speak the same language.”

In Kinderlach & Gesher, our monthly Shabbat morning programs for families with young children, we explore Judaism through holidays and values. In Olam Chesed, our weekly Jewish education program for elementary aged students, we learn Hebrew through play and prayer, delve into holiday rituals, engage in creativity and discussion, and encourage inquiry-based learning, a Jewish tradition of thousands of years. In Mitzvah!, a cohort of students prepares for the celebration of entering Jewish adulthood. They support and challenge one another (and their teachers) and build relationships among themselves and with *Am Yisrael*, the Jewish people. Ateed, our growing teen program, ushers young Jewish adults into leadership roles and builds their relationship with *tikkun olam*.



Rabbi David waiting to throw our doors open sometime in 2021.



Hanukkah over Zoom

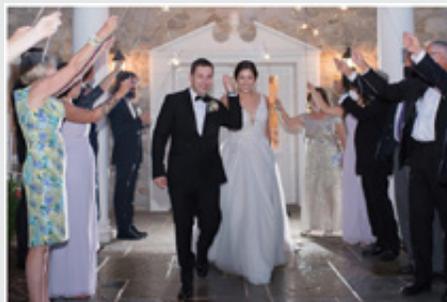
Mazel tov to:



Margie and Howard Dananberg on the birth of their grandson, Joaquin Morris, to parents Geoffrey and Thiara on December 20, 2020.

Judi Meirowitz Tischler and Art Tischler on the birth of their granddaughter, Sassonya, to parents Eliana and Lev on May 20, 2020, and their grandson, Jack, to parents Ben and Julie on October 21, 2020.

Steven Levine and Judith Wine on the marriage of his daughter, Mallory Levine, to Jason Bram on May 2, 2020.



Karen and Paul Stewart on the marriage of their son Jason Stewart to Sarah Strausser on August 1, 2020.

Sad News Announcements

Robin Singer z"l, beloved mother of Zachary and Jacob, daughter of Carol, sister of Maia and Lori, passed away on Tuesday, June 30 (8 Tammuz)

Robert Deckelbaum z"l, beloved brother and brother-in-law of Barbara and Mervin Brown, passed away on Friday, July 3 (11 Tammuz)

Michael Scott Cohen z"l, beloved brother-in-law to Marcie and Bill Scudder, passed away on Sunday, July 5 (13 Tammuz)

Peretz Snir z"l, beloved stepfather and stepfather-in-law of Moni and Beth Liberman and grandfather of Celia, passed away on Friday, July 24 (3 Av)

Victor Shulimson z"l, beloved brother and brother-in-law of Mitzi and Hillel Becker, passed away on Thursday, August 6 (16 Av)

Claire Erstein z"l, beloved mother and mother-in-law of Barbara and Bob Bauman passed away on Tuesday, September 8 (19 Elul)

Glenn Danziger z"l, beloved father of Jill and Amy, passed away on Thursday, September 10 (21 Elul)

Harvey Maron z"l, beloved father and father-in-law of Marlene Maron and Michael Zacharias, passed away on Sunday, November 29 (13 Kislev)

May their memories forever be a blessing.

Mitzvah celebrations!



Joseph Ellner
May 15
Bamidbar



Tzedek Fishman
May 22
Beha'alotcha



Noa Ibson &
Scarlett Epstein
May 29
Beha'alotcha



Rebecca Rosenbaum
June 12
Chukat



Emma Schaffer
June 26
Balak



Olivia Slen
July 3
Pinchas



Gavin & Lily Murphy
July 10
Matot-Masei



Eliana Kalichstein
November 28, 2020
Vayeitzei