



The Menorah

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President's Column: Jeff Davidson

Should TI Use More Transliterations?

At our retreat this year, we focused on a number of ways to create a more inclusive community. One of the suggestions that emerged from the workshops was a call for more transliterated texts, including our prayer books.

In the interest of full disclosure, I must admit that my Hebrew is quite weak and although I study and read a great deal, it is almost all done in translation. Even so, I was surprised at this suggestion and I am not sure why.

Rabbi Seidel and I have had any number of discussions over the years about the possibility of study without adequate Hebrew. We disagree on this issue.

The Rabbi insists that a good knowledge of Hebrew is vital to an understanding of our texts. I am happy to leave the translation to a scholar like Prof. Alter and try to make my way through the text. I am not comfortable to speak for the Rabbi while he is away, but I think we both agree that some people in our community master the Hebrew and go on to lead rich study and liturgical lives, while others find different, but still rewarding, routes to textual study.

Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*

I am reminded of Philip Roth's fascinating 1993 book, *Operation Shylock*. It opens with an epigraph written in cursive Hebrew, *va'yivater Yaakov levado v'ye'vek ish imo ad alot hashahar*. This is quote from Genesis, in which Jacob wrestles with a strange figure all night.

Later in the novel, the main character, who may also be the author, discovers the epigraph written on a blackboard in the

room where he is a prisoner. He says:

"No foreign language could have been more foreign. The only feature of Hebrew that I could remember was that the lower dots and dashes were vowels and the upper markings generally consonants. Otherwise all memory of it had been extinguished.



"Perhaps they weren't even words. I would have felt no less stupid copying Chinese. All those hundreds of hours spent drawing those letters had disappeared without a trace, those hours might just as well have been a dream, and yet a dream in which I discovered everything that was forever thereafter to obsess my consciousness however much I might wish it otherwise."

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The Shame of Hebrew Illiteracy

The opposing point of view has been most eloquently expressed by Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of the *New Republic*, who has written extensively about the shame of American Jewry because of their lack of Hebrew knowledge.

One of the stranger lectures I ever attended was an evening at the Charles E Smith Jewish Day School when Wieseltier politely rebuked the parents, who were investing large amounts of their incomes on a Jewish education, about the poor state of Hebrew literacy.

(Continued on page 2)



President's Column (continued)

The ideas that came out of the retreat reflected a genuine wish to be part of a complex service that remains hidden for some of us. The use of a transliterated text may bridge that gap for some.

Ideally, education, such as learner's minyanim and classes in Hebrew and on the fundamentals of the *siddur*, would go a long way toward meeting the need for inclusion and understanding. I have asked the relevant committees and teachers to consider some of these alternatives in the near term. I'm sure that the rabbi will weigh in on this subject upon his return.

One synagogue that uses a transliterated siddur is Nevitot Shalom of Berkeley, CA. I was fortunate to meet with Rabbi Menachem Creditor, the congregation's rabbi

and author of *Siddur Tov Lehodot*, a transliterated siddur for Shabbat morning coordinated with Sim Shalom. His book contains a transliteration with instructions to the corresponding page of *Sim Shalom*.

As Rabbi Creditor told me, the book poses several problems, mostly related to the awkwardness of finding the corresponding page in the regular siddur. All in all, it is quite an impressive effort.

The Primacy of Hebrew

Rabbi Creditor would agree with Rabbi Seidel about the primacy of Hebrew in our liturgical and ritual life and would prefer that people use this volume as a transitional tool as they become more comfortable with Hebrew. The majority of his congregants use it this way, although some will always use it as their primary prayer book.

Rabbi Creditor asked me if we had binders with a guide to the service and some transliterations. I said we did. He related how people thought they were stigmatized by using these materials. The physical layout of his and our sanctuaries are quite different. The way these books could be displayed and offered for use in our two shuls would therefore never be the same.

I will give my copy of this siddur to the Ritual Committee to examine and consider. Anyone who wishes to purchase one can do so through Amazon. Perhaps someone who believes strongly in this type of aid will donate a number of volumes.

I have also asked the appropriate people to think about additional learning opportunities in Hebrew and the Shabbat services, and look forward to getting guidance from Rabbi Seidel on this issue. It seems clear that these books are not a complete answer to this question, but they may be a useful tool for some congregants.

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Family Ruach Shabbat, February 1

10:30am - K'tongregation (K-2nd grade)

10:30am - Junior Congregation (3rd-5th grade)

10:30am - Balcony Babka (7th & 8th grade)

11:10am - Tot Shabbat (0 - Pre K)

New Members

Jared Garelick

You've read about new TI members in *The Menorah* month after month. Now you have a chance to meet many of them, all at once.

At the **New Member Shabbat Morning Service, February 15**, many of the members who have joined in the past year will be present, introduced and honored by the TI community. You will have a chance to put faces to the names you have read in this column. Come and make them feel welcome. And if you speak French, you will especially want to meet this month's featured new members, in which les femmes both speak that belle langue.

Nina and David Schwartz

Nina, who grew up in the Toledo and Detroit area, has degrees from Michigan State University in both structural engineering and French. As often happens, her career went in a wholly different direction, into health insurance management consulting, in both the government and private sectors. She currently takes care of the family's two daughters, **Eva**, five and a half, and **Gigi**, four. Eva is in kindergarten at JPDS, and Gigi is in the Hebrew immersion program at Silver Spring Learning Center.

David is from Dallas, where his family has been for five generations, since the 1880s. Long interested in international affairs and politics, David has a Master's degree in public international law from the Fletcher School, and a JD from Harvard. He is now a partner at the law firm Thompson Hine, LLP, where he specializes in international trade issues, which involve a mix of litigation, lobbying, and regulatory compliance counseling.

Nina is a talented painter in oils and watercolors. David is a self-described slowing down distance runner, and has been a competitive Scrabble player. He is also on the board of the Jewish Social Service Agency of Greater Washington. The family, which had been members of another local synagogue, learned of TI in part by meeting Lifelong Learning Director Eitan Gutin on a playground. That makes Eitan the Magnet *Staff* Member of the Month.

Ariel Wolsztein and Karen Silberstein

Ari, originally from San Francisco, and Karen, a Bethesda native, met and lived in New York for some time, and now live in Chevy Chase. Ari has a PhD in philosophy, with special interest in the American pragmatist school and in capability theory -- at the intersection of philosophy, economics and politics -- made known by the economist

Amartya Sen. Ari is currently, among other things, serving as a long-term substitute teacher in Montgomery County, generally in English and social studies.

Karen, who has a PhD in French literature, works at a non-profit organization associated with the American Building Society, which works to attract and provide training in the building trades to different populations, such as returning veterans, released prisoners, and minorities. Ari and Karen's son, **Nathaniel**, who will be turning eight in February (happy birthday, Nat), is a student at Rock Creek Forest Elementary.

The family first came to TI to take Nathaniel to his karate lessons in the building. They know some other members as well, including their neighbors, the Jacobs family, and Danielle Glosser, who went to high school with Ari back in California. Ari and Karen are interested in politics and literature, as well as movies, cooking, and a wide variety of music. Welcome to this month's featured new members!

Funeral Practices Committee Always On-Call

Chaverim of the Funeral Practices Committee are on call to provide counsel and services to synagogue members and their dependents.

In the event of a death, prior to contacting the funeral home, please contact one of the following chaverim, Rabbi Seidel, or the TI office (202-882-1605).

Shelly Heller	h: 301-942-1836 w: 202-242-6698
David (Judy) Cohen	h: 301-652-2872
Marcia Goldberg	h: 301-589-0352
Marcia Goggin	h: 301-593-8480 w: 301-754-1963

Personal Safety Training

Jevera Temsky

Tifereth Israel sponsored a personal safety training session on January 19. Twelve people attended the session, among them folks from Fabrangen, TI and the Shepherd Park tutoring project.

Viran Ranasinghe, also known as "Coach V," facilitated the session. Coach V is the director of Kaizen Karate and has been teaching karate classes at TI for children and adults

for the past eight years. He volunteered to conduct the training because he cares about the TI/ Shepherd Park community and wants to help people feel more confident and aware of their surroundings as they move about in the neighborhood.

The following are tips from Coach V for personal safety:



TI member Gigi Levin assists Coach V in demonstration

Avoid 'Thefts of Opportunity'. If you have something valuable, keep it close to you or leave it at home.

If you leave something in the car, lock it in the trunk or hide it under the seat. Thieves move quickly—don't make it easy for them to steal from you!

Be vocal! Report suspicious activity. At TI you can talk to one of the *shomrim* on Shabbat and you can always speak to a staff member.

Use common sense. Make a buddy system if you need to walk alone at night. If you have locks or alarm systems, use them. Follow your instincts – if a situation doesn't feel safe, use extra precautions.

Keep your private life private. Don't advertise your social plans, especially on social media. This includes turning off the GPS function on apps like Facebook and Twitter.

Change your habits. Thieves observe behavior patterns. So change things, like which lights you leave on when you go out, what route you walk to the subway, etc.

Jewish Origins of Superman & Batman

On Saturday, February 8, at 7:30 p.m., **Marc Tyler Nobelman** will present *The Jewish Creators of Superman and Batman*. Tickets are \$10 for TI members and \$15 for others, and include a visit to "Roz's Soda and Ice Cream Shoppe," where you will be treated to the drink and dessert of your choice.

Marc will discuss *Boys of Steel: The Creators of Superman*, his biography of **Jerry Siegel** and **Joe Shuster**, the two Jewish teens who dreamed up the world's first superhero, and his recently-published *Bill The Boy Wonder* about **Bill Finger**, the Jewish writer who was the secret co-creator of Batman.

Monday Night Minyan

Josh Furman

Starting Monday, February 3, we will begin holding weekly Monday night services at TI at 7:30 p.m., unless there is a shivah minyan in the community. I hope you will join us, whether you are coming to TI for a meeting, saying Mourner's *Kaddish*, or just looking for the comfort and camaraderie of a prayer community on Monday nights.

If you are interested in attending this minyan once a month or more, please let me know as soon as possible. I will circulate a sign-up

sheet via Google docs so we will know ahead of time if we have a minyan.

Additionally, there is still a possibility that we may also meet on Wednesday mornings at 7:15 a.m. However, to date I have not heard from enough committed people to make a Wednesday morning minyan viable.

If you would be willing to make a regular commitment to this minyan, please also let me know.

Lifelong Learning

Eitan Gutin

We would like to welcome **Ari Eckmann** to the Lifelong Learning staff as our new USY Advisor and as a classroom aide in the Himmelfarb School. Ari came to us after a year spent in Israel with Otzma, where he tutored Israeli school children in English as part of his program. He grew up in the area and is a graduate of JDS.

Himmelfarb School

We have been hearing over and over from parents in the Himmelfarb school how impressed they are with the **Hebrew skills** their children are developing. Nearly every week a parent approaches either the faculty or school leadership to inform us of just how much their child has learned.

Parents are also excited by how many **Tefilot** (prayers) the children are getting to experience through the school. In grades K-5 we begin every Sunday morning with our own special version of *Shaharit*.

Last year the students learned about and practiced the *Birkhot HaShahar*, the morning blessings. This year we are focusing on the *Ashrei*, and are already halfway through! Our *siddur* was translated and designed by Eitan Gutin, the Director of Lifelong learning. Email Eitan if you would like a copy.

This year, we also first released a **Himmelfarb School Tefilah CD**. This CD contains recordings of nearly every prayer our students use in classrooms, in Sunday *Shaharit*, and at our quarterly Family Services. Let Eitan know if you would like your own copy to enjoy at home, in the car, or in the gym.

We plan to open registration for the 2014/2015 school year as early as March. Watch your email for details.

USY Madrichim/MoED CITs

We are very excited to offer, for the first time, Madrichim/CIT training for TI's 9th-11th graders. The training is being provided through a partnership with the MoED Jewish Aftercare Program. Training begins on Wednesday, February 5, at 6:30 p.m.

The group will meet in the MoED space at Ohr Kodosh. Students who have already registered for the Chai school this year can register without any additional fees. Those families who would like to participate but who have not signed up for Chai should contact Eitan for further details.

Those who successfully complete the Madrichim/CIT program will be considered for paid roles in the Himmelfarb School and TI youth programs next school year.

TI Families

January was a fantastic month at TI for family programs:

The **Family Tu B'Shvat Seder**, led by Eitan Gutin, was attended by 40 parents and children. We celebrated the holiday with kiddush, fruits, and table activities based on TI's Rain Garden project.

Family Mitzvah Day on MLK weekend attracted a number of families. Our parents and kids made four blankets for Project Linus, sent over 50 PB&J sandwiches to Martha's Table, and packed 35 containers of dry soup mix that went to the Capital Area Food Bank. (See Mitzvah Day photos on next page).

Our upcoming family (and family friendly) programs include:

- **Family Ruach Shabbat** on February 1 and March 1.
- **Marc Tyler Nobleman** on February 8, who will discuss the secret (Jewish) creators of Superman and Batman.
- **Family Service** on March 8.

USY's Tzedakah Dinner

Our USY'ers invite the congregation to join them for the third annual Shabbat Dinner, on **Friday, February 21**. As usual, everyone at dinner will have the opportunity to make a pledge to USY's Tikun Olam Tzedakah Fund. Last year's dinner raised \$1600. We can't wait to see how generous everyone is this year!

Snider's Receipts

Do you shop at Snider's? If so, please deposit your receipts in the envelope on the bulletin board outside the TI office. Snider's will give 1% of the amount on collected receipts to our neighborhood school, Shepherd Elementary.

The receipts need to be processed in February, so find those 2013 receipts (and 2014, too) and turn them in today. Please do not cut off the date. All the receipts must be from the current year and we can't use receipts without dates. A TI Social Action Project.

Family Mitzvah Day, January 19, 2014



Adult Education

Jessica Weissman

We are roaring out of the January freeze with some terrific adult education classes and programs for February. More good stuff is coming in March and beyond – stay tuned.

Superheroes and Egg Creams

Did you know that Superman's creators were Jewish? Did you ever wonder why names on Krypton sound Biblical (Kal-El, Jor-El)? On February 8, **Mark Tyler Nobleman** will present his book *Boys of Steel, Superman's Jewish Creators*, with the answers to these and other questions. Stay afterward for a little soda-shoppe style nosh. Make sure to reserve your tickets soon.

SHALEM – the SNAP Challenge

At **February 15's** SHALEM program, **Deena Dugan** and **Toby McFarland** will present the SNAP Challenge, where Tl'ers can learn what it is like to feed their families on \$4.50 per person per day, which is what SNAP (formerly food stamp) recipients are allocated.

The Big Read

What happens when Tl'ers read the same book together? No, I'm not thinking of the weekly *Parashah*. I'm thinking of the Big Read. This year we will read Letty Cottin Pogrebin's *How to be a Friend to a Friend Who's Sick*. She combines her own

experience of illness with sound advice for those who want to support sick friends and say the right things to them. We will discuss the book after kiddush on **February 22**. There are many copies of the book at local libraries, and it is available from bookstores and in electronic form.

A Beginner's Guide to Jewish History

Cynthia Peterman, an expert teacher of Jewish history, presents an introductory journey through Jewish history, moving in six weeks from ancient times to modern America. The class meets Wednesdays at 6:45 p.m., starting **February 26**.

Moving from Age-ing to Sage-ing®

Michele Sumka

What does it mean to you to be growing older? How can we make the most of the time we have left to us?

Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, one of the founders of Renewal Judaism, started contemplating these questions when he turned sixty, some 30 years ago. In his book, *Age-ing to Sage-ing®*, and in his courses on that topic, he addresses many of the questions and issues that those of us in the second half of our lives are facing.

One of Reb Zalman's basic premises is that becoming conscious of what we have done so far in our lives can help point us in the direction that will be most meaningful to us in this later stage. ALEPH, the Alliance for Jewish Renewal, offers a series of classes that lay out some of the practices that are useful for this process.

Over a year ago I began taking some of these classes, and now I'm enrolled in the ALEPH Sage-ing® Mentorship program. As a part of this program I'm offering an introductory class on Moving from Age-ing to Sage-ing®.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

This class is for those who are at a point in their lives where they have the time to reflect on the past and look ahead to the future. It will give participants the chance to discuss in a small group some of the blessings and challenges of this stage of life.

If you are intrigued by this prospect, I invite you to join a group of other adults who are interested in looking at where their lives have taken them, harvesting the wisdom they've acquired, and looking forward to their next steps.

This will be a small group, so that everyone can have time to speak. The classes will include a balance of lecture, whole-group discussion, guided meditation, journaling about selected topics, and discussion in pairs.

The classes are based on the work of Reb Zalman as well as concepts and methods developed later by others. Some of the other books that inform the exercises are: *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*, by Gene D Cohen; *Still Here*, by Ram Dass; and *Jewish Visions For Aging*, by Dayle Friedman.

This first class will meet during the day, at Tifereth Israel, on Monday afternoons from 2:00-4:00, starting Monday, February 3 and for the following three weeks, ending February 24. The cost for the series

(Continued on page 8)

Upcoming Friday Night Minyan Assignments

February 7

Eugene & Esther Herman
 Mitchell & Patti Herman
 Carolivia Herron
 James & Annie Hershberg
 Judith Herzog
 William & Nira Hodos
 Robert & Helen Hovis
 Hedy Howard
 Neil Hyman & Rachel Decter Hyman
 Anita Isicson
 David & Shana Jacobs
 Leonard Jewler & Andrea Rosen
 Harvey Kabaker & Andrea Kline
 Steven Kalish & Anita Bollt
 David Kass & Iris Amdur
 Joshua & Jennifer Kefer
 Kenneth Kellner & Nina Bronk
 Kellner

February 14

Rabbi Jason & Devora Kimelman- Block
 Alexandra Kincannon & Paul
 Moorehead
 Shemaya & Dori Klar
 Morris Klein & Naomi Freeman
 Roger Kohn
 Allan Kolker
 Edward Koren & Claudine
 Schweber
 Michael & Lisa Kraft
 Anita Kramer
 Joel Kramer & Adena Galinsky
 Joshua & Francesca Kranzberg
 David & Amy Kritz
 Richard Kruger & Naimah Weinberg
 Matthew Kunkin & Hilary Sachs
 Simcha Kuritzky

Susan Laden
 Alan Landay
 Robert Lande & Jeri Roth Lande

February 28

Alexander Laufer & Jennifer Siegel
 Laufer
 Dan & Ariel Lautman
 Adina & Refael Lav
 Michael & Iris Lav
 Mitchell Lazarus & Judith Shapiro
 Beverly Lehrer
 Elihu & Sheila Leifer
 Ken & Rachel Lemberg
 Shirley Levine
 Steve LeVine & Nuri Nurlybayeva
 Mark Lewis & Janet Nesse
 Dan Liebman & Lis Davis
 Kobi Lifshitz & Lisa Traiger
 Fred Lipschultz & Rabbi Diana Lynn
 John & Lynne List
 John Lister

March 7

Sean & Jara MacDermott
 Oscar & Amy Mann
 Stephen Marcus & Renee Matalon
 Joseph & Paula Martin
 Robert Mathis & Tali Stopak-Mathis
 David & Carla Matusow
 David & Diana Meyer
 Tobi McFarland
 David & Janice Mehler
 Alexander & Daniel Meitiv

Ethan Merlin & Joelle Novey
 David & Dana Mermelstein
 Sarah & Rachel Meytin
 Josephine Mickelson
 Michael & Barbara Milton
 Emily & Adil Moiduddin
 Jacob & Elaine Mondschein
 Ken Morris & Terri Zall
 Eli & Laura Muller
 Jerry & Sharon Muller

March 14

Jonah & Stephanie Murdock
 Myron Murdock
 Beth Naftalin
 Ray & Adele Natter
 Sheridan & Dana Neimark
 Michael H. New & Linda Turnowski
 Stephen Nelson & Leslie Goodman-
 Malamuth
 David Ogilvie & Miriam Lederer
 Lee & Hedy Ohringer
 Sarah Osborne
 Larry Paul & Joye Newman
 Perry & Fylis Peckham
 Daniel Pederson & Dafna Spear
 David Pelzer & Ellie Tiemann
 Melissa Perera
 Adam & Jessica Perlmutter
 Jeff & Cynthia Peterman
 Michael Pitch & Elaine Weiss
 Joshua Pitlick & Janet Blank
 Lisa Plotkin

Moving from Age-ing to Sage-ing® (continued)

is \$40 for members of TI, \$48 for non-members. I intend to run a second, evening, class in March for those who are not free during the day. After these two introductory classes, I plan to offer a class that will move on to more of the topics relating to planning the next steps in our lives.

My first career was in early childhood education; now that I am getting older I am focusing on the later stages of life. At first I didn't want to

admit that I am aging, and then my teacher, Rabbi Nadya Gross, with whom I studied Women's Wisdom, suggested that I might be interested in the Sage-ing program. She was right.

Program Gave Me Insights

When I took the first part of the Age-ing to Sage-ing® class, I found that it gave me valuable insights into my own aging process, and showed me

how important it is to have a group of peers with whom to discuss these issues.

Rabbi Devorah (Diana) Lynn, who is enrolled in the next ALEPH Sage-ing classes, will sit in on the class as my assistant. Please reply to me at msumka@gmail.com if you have questions about the class. To register for the class, please contact Sheri Blonder in the TI Office at TIAAdmin@Tifereth-Israel.org.

Social Action at TI: Stephen Nelson The State of Jewish Social Activism

We Care



& Take Action

The present and future of Jewish social activism was the topic of this year's Social Action Shabbaton, held during Martin Luther King Holiday weekend on January 18. **Hadar Susskind**, an officer of Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice, discussed the issue during services.

After lunch, Susskind participated in a riveting one-hour discussion held in the Chapel, along with TI member **Rabbi Elizabeth Richman**, Program Director and Rabbi-in-Residence at Jews United for Justice. The panel was moderated by fellow TI member **Rabbi Jason Kimelman-Block**.

Susskind addressed how Jewish activism has changed since the civil rights movement. In particular, he noted that in the last 50 years more-established Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Federation, have become dependent on fewer, larger donors. As a result, they are more hesitant to support initiatives that might conflict with those donors' own political views.

Israel Crowds Out Other Issues

Another change, said Susskind, is the impact of the State of Israel. Susskind, who is a Sergeant First Class in the Israeli Defense Forces, emphasized that while Israel remains a very large priority for him, support for Israel in the Jewish policy and lobbying community has crowded domestic issues off the radar screen. This has happened even though polling shows that Israel does not currently rank as one of the most important political priorities for American Jews.

Susskind, whose group focuses primarily on federal and national issues, and Richman, whose group deals with issues in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, discussed a variety of initiatives, such as efforts to raise the minimum wage, immigration reform, and gay rights.

Much of the discussion focused on the unique history of Jewish activism for social issues affecting the larger community. Richman noted that the term "Judeo-Christian principles" disturbs her, because it overlooks the distinct Jewish history and experience, both in terms of Jews being an historically persecuted minority, and their longstanding focus on the rights of everyone.

Public Good Over Self-Interest

She pointed to the JUFJ's campaign to enact a modest tax hike on wealthy individuals in the District of Columbia as an example of the Jewish community prioritizing the public good over their own individual interests. To help convince a skeptical D.C. Council Member, JUFJ organized a meeting of Jewish residents, all of whom would be negatively affected by the tax hike, to convince this Council Member that the tax hike was in the best interest of the District.

The panel discussion featured a heavy dose of audience participation, as Rabbi Kimelman-Block took more than a dozen questions from the audience on such topics as the financial stress that many of the large, traditional Jewish groups are facing, synagogue participation in social action issues,

and even the shortcomings of the Affordable Care Act.

Once again, kudos to longtime TI Social Action leader, **Gene Herman**, for putting this provocative program together.

News Coverage of Xmas Meals Project

For the first time, TI was able to gain some publicity for its Xmas Meals Project.

Thanks to the hard work of **Susan Morse** and **Larry Baizer**, three local media outlets covered the project, helping raise public awareness of all the effort that goes into this initiative.

Both the Washington Post and the Washington Jewish Week featured articles interviewing both project participants and those served, while radio station WPFW (89.3 FM) interviewed coordinator **Martin Kessel** several days before December 25.

In addition to this great public recognition of the work of TI and Adat Shalom, TI has already received a request from the Social Action Committee at Ohr Kodesh to explain how to organize this kind of project.

Report on 2013 TI Xmas Lunch Project

Martin Kessel

The 2013 Xmas Luncheon Project was again highly successful, a collaborative effort involving over 160 volunteers from TI and Adat Shalom. I wanted to specifically mention the key people who helped make the project such a success.

Mona Berch took over ordering and distributing all non-perishable items. This is a major task. She established a storage procedure to easily find reusable supplies next Xmas.

Andrea Kline coordinated the donation, purchase and distribution of gifts (hats, gloves, scarves and small bags of toiletries) for every resident of each shelter.

Roz Kram handled ordering of all the perishable items required for cooking at TI.

Varda Fink coordinated the cooking of the stuffing. **Carolivia Herron** and her mother, **Georgia Herron** (approaching her 90th year!), coordinated the boiling and preparation of the yams.

Deena Dugan, Janet Nesse, Mark Lewis and **Sharon Cohen** prepared and delivered warmed Mac & Cheese.

Gene Herman purchased and transported 18 turkeys, which were deep-fried by **Ed Davis** and carved by Margie Odle, Ray and Rebecca Coleman, Arnie Revzin, Stan Grabia, Ed Stromberg, Earl Dotter and Deborah Stern.

Ricky and **Janey Harris** (cousins of Carolivia) prepared the cabbage which was delivered to all four shelters by **Andre Harris**.

Seth Glabman and **Mark Berch** warmed up the 24 aluminum trays of yams, stuffing and broccoli at TI early on Xmas morning, and delivered

those to the shelters. All the warmed food plus additional food items were picked up from TI and distributed to the shelters by **Mike** and **Iris Lav**, **Larry Greenfield**, **Arnie Revzin** and **Martin Kessel**.

Other participants in the cooking at TI included Lisa Traiger, Ivy Baer, Renee and Kazia Brachfeld, Vered Drazen, Ayelet Drazin, Brad Brooks-Rubin, Liana Brooks-Rubin, Eliav Brooks-Rubin, Adiv Brooks-Rubin, Rachel Meytin, Sarah Meytin, Coby Meytin, Ruthie Meytin and Julie Gordon.

A thank-you to **Elise Caplan**, Chair of Adat Shalom's Social Action Committee, for organizing the pies donated and delivered to each shelter by Adat Shalom volunteers.

Key to the success of the day were the work of our shelter captains: **Franca Brilliant** and **David (Judy) Cohen** (John Young); **Gail Robinson**, **Anastasia Robinson** and **Judi Berland** (Tubman); **Larry Baizer** (Open Door); and **Ted Berman** from Adat Shalom, with help from **Renee Brachfeld** (Adams Place).

For the first time, we incorporated entertainment at two of the shelters. Based on its success, we will expand this to all shelters next year, using the wealth of musical talent at TI and Adat Shalom.

Sam and **Max Heimowitz** offered a short tap dance routine at the Tubman Shelter. Thanks to parents **Dori Gellman** and **Mike Heimowitz** for enabling this.

Marine Chamber Orchestra cellist **Charlie Powers** (husband of shelter co-captain Anastasia Robinson) also entertained the Tubman residents with Xmas songs. **Mark Novak** led a sing-along at Adam's Place.

Susan Catler ran the invaluable on-line registration of volunteers. Financial donations by TI and Adat Shalom members totaled over \$2000. Adat Shalom also made a special \$500 donation.

Finally, we extend our thanks to **Jeff Peterman** for his excellent photos of all aspects of the food preparation and serving at the four shelters. Some of his photos appeared in last month's *Menorah*.

Over 60 volunteers, working in two shifts, did a great job. This year, for the first time, Adat Shalom volunteers participated at all four shelters. Once again, many children wrapped and distributed gifts for shelter residents. In addition to the captains, who were previously mentioned, participants at the shelters included:

Open Door: Stefan Gunther, Lisa Goldring, Sophia Gunther, Jennifer Kefer, Joshua Kefer, Bob Kefer, Maxine Kefer, Ari Kefer, Doron Kefer, Gene Herman, Esther Herman, Vered Drazen, Gail Phillips, Audrey Smith.

John Young Center: Seth Grimes, Ezra Grimes, Dana Mermelstein, Sarah Meytin, Rachel Meytin, Coby Meytin, Ruthie Meytin, Judy Cohen, Ed Stromberg, Seth Halper-Stromberg, Melissa Perera, Adam Perera.

Adam's Place: Mark Novak, Renee Brachfeld, Kaziah Brachfeld, Bob Saks, Loretta Vitale Saks, Elizabeth Leff, Mark Verschell, Ben Verschell, Susan Catler.

Tubman Center: Judi Berland, Anastasia Robinson, Ira Forman, Jacob Forman, Hannah Forman, Rueben Forman, Varda Fink, Elana Fink, Julie Gordon, Karen Beiley, Eric Fingerhut, Adam Fingerhut, Jordan Fingerhut.

Kol Nashim

Ruth Shapiro



As you'll read below, Kol Nashim schedules ongoing as well as one-time events. We provide social, educational and mitzvah programming for TI. When you join Kol Nashim with your annual donation of \$25, you are supporting the voice of women at TI in all our various activities.

The 9-member KN board welcomes participation at all levels, from helping with a single event to serving on the board. Join KN at our Mimosas and Mingling brunch (see below) and receive *four months of free KN membership* (your membership will run through June 2015).

Women Rabbis of TI

Kol Nashim is delighted to sponsor a series of Sunday morning sessions this winter and spring given by the women Rabbis of TI. Our series began with **Avis Miller's** well-received talk about Hanukkah songs. Our next presenter was **Devorah Lynn**, who spoke to large group about ways to make the Amidah less cerebral and more centered in our hearts and souls.

The series will continue at 10:15 a.m. on **March 23** in the Mollie L. Berch Library, with **Jane Berman** speaking

Proverbs Class

The on-going Proverbs class, taught by **Barbara White**, will meet at her home on February 3, but will return to TI for the final two sessions on February 10 and 24. New members are welcome to join the class. Please let Barbara know if you plan to do so, at bmwhite@erols.com.

on *Shema Yisrael: The Art of Listening*. Explore through Talmudic text and personal experience, the healing dynamic between patient and visitor. On **June 1**, **Sarah Meytin**, will discuss *Creating Safe Spaces* in the Jewish Community for LGBTQ Youth.

Game Night

Kol Nashim and the Men's Club sponsored TI's annual Game Night on January 11. It was extremely successful, attended by well over 70 people, including young children, teens and adults. It was difficult to get them to leave at the end of the evening!

An Intro to Bridge lesson was taught to two tables of people. There was also a Mah Jongg table, a poker table, a table for those who preferred to knit or crochet, as well as many other groups of game players.

Mimosas and Mingling

Extend your TI family through a Kol Nashim-sponsored brunch on **Sunday, February 23**, beginning at 10:15 a.m. in the Mollie L. Berch Library. All TI women are invited to share mimosas and snacks. This will be a great time to meet other TI women, chat and visit with friends, and share ideas for KN activities and involvement. Please RSVP to Knsalon@Tifereth-Israel.org, or to the TI office.

Book Club

The Kol Nashim book club, open to all TI members, meets at different book club members' homes on the third Tuesday of each month. The last meeting was on January 28, where there was a lively discussion of *Wartime Lies*, by Louis Begley. Books to be read during the coming

months were also selected at this meeting. The next book to be read, on **February 18**, will be announced soon. Please RSVP to KNBook@Tifereth-Israel.org.

Knitting and Crocheting

The knitting group creates community among the knitters and crocheters of TI. We share patterns, stories and ideas, as well as knit for others in need. If you don't know how to knit or crochet, they are happy to teach you. The group began meeting again on January 8, and will meet on the second Wednesday of the month from 7:00-8:30 p.m. Check the TI calendar for any changes. To participate, please contact **Andrea Kline** at andreakline@yahoo.com.

Rosenwald Film

TI members may recall that the 2011 Social Action Shabbaton focused on the Rosenwald Schools. The panel included author **Stephanie Deutsch**, **Ralph Eubanks** (a Rosenwald school student), **Erika Scott** (Rosenwald's grand-daughter) and film-maker **Aviva Kempner**.

At the time Kempner was working on a film about the schools. The film, *Rosenwald Schools*, has now been completed, and will be shown Thursday February 13, at 7:30 p.m. at the Takoma Park community center. The movie is free.

Nayes un Mekhayes for TI'ers

Barbara Raimondo

There Will Be a Quiz

Lester and **Judith Turner** announce the arrival of **Batya Turner Fein**, the daughter of **Martha** and **Neil**, on Saturday, January 11. Batya, who is now living in Highland Park, NJ, is the cousin of **Miriam**, **Nathan**, **Samson**, and **Benjamin**, and the niece of **Allison** and **Daniel Turner**. She is Martha and Neil's first child, and Les and Judith's seventh grandchild. Wisely, she arrived just over a week early, in time for the *Menorah* deadline. Fein family is doing ...fine.

Brenda Footer and **Rabbi Sarah Meytin** have been selected as two of 18 national participants in this year's

Yom HaShoah

TI's 2014 Yom HaShoah commemoration will be held on April 27, 2014. This year, we will honor WWII liberators who served in the European Theatre.

There will also be a guest speaker and readings from memoirs of liberators from Library of Congress and other documents. As always, we will hold a Vigil where we will read the names of some of the 6 million.

We particularly want to honor the members of our TI families who were part of the US liberation and rescue forces, but we need your help. If you have a relative who served in the European Theatre, or any correspondence, photos, or other documents, please contact Cynthia Peterman cynp25@gmail.com.

cohort of the Jewish Early Childhood Education Leadership Institute (JECCEL). JECCEL is a collaboration of Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union, and Bank Street College of Education.

Two Men and a Truck

Shelley Sturman, the National Gallery of Art's senior conservator, recently moved a Chagall mosaic from Georgetown to the NGA. Read all about it at washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums.

Elizabeth Weber Handwerker presented a paper on "Occupational Concentration, Wages, and Growing Wage Inequality" at the annual meeting of the American Economic Association.

New York, New York

Alan Landay visited his niece, **Dyanna**, and her husband, **Promodh**, in the Big Apple in early January. It was a wonderful visit and they did a number of fun things in a short time: sledding, running in Prospect Park (dodging frozen raindrops), eating birthday barbeque, sight-seeing in the Lower East Side (highly recommending the Tenement Museum), and sandwiching at the famous Katz's Deli. Alan reportedly loved the five-degree temp and 30-mph wind!

Sad News

Solomon Flum, father of TI member, **Judah Flum (Lisa Itkin)**, and grandfather of **Alexander** and **Michael Flum**, died in January. The service was held in New York.

Tirza Freeman, mother of TI member, **Naomi Freeman (Morris Klein)**, and **Eva Freeman**, and

grandmother of **Abigail** and **Marnie Klein** and **Holly** and **Laurel Black**, died on January 4, at age 86, in Albany, NY. The funeral was held in New Jersey. In a happy memory, she was thrilled to know that Abby would be spending the summer in Israel.

Our condolences go out to families and loved ones.

And now for the meaning of last month's word, *escapade*: "a usually adventurous action that runs counter to approved or conventional conduct" (Merriam-Webster Online).

Thanks to all who sent me news, sent me to others who sent me news, or otherwise helped sniff it out. Please send information about for next time to baraimondo@gmail.com, with "Nayes un Mekhayes" in the heading, or to P.O. Box 466, Washington Grove, MD 20880. This brings to a close a succinct edition of Nayes un Mekhayes for TI'ers.

Movie Night Schedule

February 16: *Shalom Aleichem: Laughing in the Darkness*, 2011 [note date change].

March 9: *Footnote*, 2011.

March 30: *The Jazz Singer*, 1927, + selected shorts.

April 27: *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust*, 2004.

Each showing is free (food is \$4), begins at 7:30 p.m., and is followed by a short discussion.

Book Review: Bernie Shleien *My Promised Land* by Ari Shavit

Three books on Israel have recently become available to American readers: Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*; Yossi Klein Halevi's *Like Dreamers: The Story of the Israeli Paratroopers Who Reunited Jerusalem and Divided a Nation* (which I reviewed in the December *Menorah*); and Anita Shapira's *Israel: A History*.

Judging by the response of the American media, Shavit's book received the most attention, probably because American Jewry, according to a recent Pew research poll, views Israel as it views itself, secular, liberal and democratic. Ari Shavit and the newspaper *Haaretz*, where he is a columnist, have a similar place in Israel's political spectrum.

Book Is Partly Autobiographical

My Promised Land follows the development of Zionism and its settlement of the land through the personal history of Shavit's own family. He traces their presence in the land back to the end of the 19th century. In this sense, his book appears autobiographical. However, many portions of the book derive from op-ed pieces based on friendships and interviews with Israeli and Palestinian cultural and political leaders.

Difference From Other Two Books

By contrast, Halevi's book is the work of an independent reporter and is based on interviews with seven Israeli paratroopers. It is in a sense seven biographies beginning when the men were about 20 years of age in 1967. As noted in my prior review, religious and pro-settlement philosophy also plays a notable role in *Like Dreamers*.

Shapira is a professional historian, and her *Israel: A History* won the National Jewish Book Award for 2012. I will offer a review of this book in a subsequent issue of *The Menorah*.

Ruth R. Wisse, a professor of Yiddish and comparative literature at Harvard, wrote a negative review of both the Shavit and Halevi books in the December 2013 issue of *Mosaic* magazine, entitled "Their Tragic Land."

"The Triumph and the Tragedy," the subtitle of Shavit's book, promises a balanced account of Israeli history. There have been many books and articles on the triumph of Zionism, and how it revitalized the Hebrew language and the Jewish people. It reached its zenith with the UN resolution of 1947. The UN recognized the Jewish population of Palestine as an entity with the elements of an independent country, and divided Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states.

Shavit Doesn't Replot Old Ground

Since that time many books have noted Israel's achievements in science, agriculture, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, computer science and military weaponry. Shavit's book assumes the reader knows all this and that it needs no repetition.

Instead, the book concentrates on the character and morality of Israel as a nation. Shavit is beset by an existential fear. He feels from the very beginning Zionism's philosophy has denied the presence of an indigenous population living in Palestine. The land of Israel was considered empty when in fact it was not. (In the early 20th century there

were about 500,000 Arabs in Palestine.)

Although Herzl recognized the presence of the Arab population in *Old New Land* (his utopian novel written after *The Jewish State*), he assumed that Jewish immigration would lift the lives of all the inhabitants of the land. The early settlements were generally on land purchased from absentee Ottomans or Arabs and the land was farmed by tenant farmers or serf-like peasants whose families indeed may have lived in Palestine for generations.

Zionism's goal was always to possess the land, but, by increasing Palestine's productivity and commerce, it brought in more Arabs from surrounding countries. The early settlements were utopian, and, where they could, cooperated with the surrounding Palestinian population. Shavit recognizes this, but still considers such attempts as part of a colonial enterprise.

A Policy of Expulsion?

He blames the expulsion of Palestinians during the 1948 war on a purposeful policy of removal. His prime example is the expulsion of the Palestinian population of Lydda. It is among his most damning accusations. His narrative in this case is disputed by a researcher, Ale Safian, cited by Ruth Wisse. She writes:

"Safian deconstructs Shavit's inflamed portrait to establish the following: the Arab inhabitants of Lydda first surrendered to Jewish soldiers and then, having retracted their surrender when it seemed that Jordanian forces had gained the upper hand, went about killing and

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My Promised Land (continued)

mutilating Israeli fighters....Once the town was secured, the Israelis let the Arabs leave, something both sides recognized would never have happened had victory gone the other way.”

Shavit faults the Israeli establishment for encouraging and continuing the policy of seizure of Arab lands and at the same time faults Peace Now for not recognizing that Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) might be turned into a base for attacks against Israel, as the Gaza experience proved. To me, the question is whether the unremitting hostility of the surrounding Arab populations is based on differing religious, cultural and historical narratives and on a sense of victimhood, or on Israeli policies, or both.

Rise of Shas Party

Shavit believes the prejudice of Ashkenazi Israelis against those of Sephardic descent gave rise to the Sephardic religious party, Shas, which, after many years of political and cultural activities, succeeded in becoming a formidable political force and contributed to a blending of

Askenazi and Sephardic streams of Judaism. Sephardim were generally religious, but not supporters of the religious settlers movement.

Two Promising Developments

Shavit writes about two other phenomena that he presents as hopeful. While Israel's successful turn toward a capitalistic society has brought with it a rightward political trend and a disparity of income between the rich and the poor, squeezing the middle class, it has also produced, in response, the country's own "occupy" movement and the formation of the centrist Yesh Atid party.

He also illuminates the secular scene with its all-night discos filled with straight, homosexual, lesbian, and transgender patrons just out to have a good time. Filled with drugs, music, and mayhem, it is on a par with Amsterdam and Berlin. He views it as a positive response to the constant turmoil and stress.

Shavit fears that Israel's victories are temporary and that concentric circles of Palestinian, Arab and Islamic

hostility may overcome it. A defense against this calamity is a high level of readiness and a nuclear capability. But this deterrent, which has worked for 50 years, is presently threatened by Iran.

Past and Present Nuclear Threats

Iraq, Libya, and Syria all had programs to develop a nuclear weapon. Iraq's and Syria's reactors were destroyed by Israel. Iran has spent at least 20 years on a similar endeavor. Shavit notes that by early 2014 Iran will have everything it needs for such a weapon and will present an existential threat to Israel. The United States convinced Libya to abandon its efforts, but Iran has expended a much greater human, material, and monetary effort to obtain a nuclear weapon.

This review cannot adequately describe the depth and range of *My Promised Land*. If you are a supporter of Israel, read this book. Better, read all three of these books. If you thought you knew it all, you didn't.

Himmelfarb School Snow Day Policies

In the event Himmelfarb School classes are canceled or delayed due to inclement weather TI will post an announcement on radio station WTOP and send an electronic message (e.g., a post to the TI Facebook page, email list, or a text message) to school families.

If **both** DC and Montgomery County schools are **closed** or **close early** we will be closed as well.

If **both** systems are **open, even with a delay**, we will hold classes as scheduled.

If **only one** school system is closed we will make an independent decision and publicize if we are closed.

All decisions will be made by **8:00 a.m. on Sundays** and **3 p.m. on Wednesdays**.

It is likely that decisions on Wednesdays will be made much earlier than 3 p.m.

When in doubt please call the synagogue office at 202-882-1605.

Juniper St. Collection

The next Juniper St collection is **linens** for **A Wider Circle**. They would like:

- towels
- sheet sets
- blankets and comforters

Everything should be in good condition, with no rips or stains. All sizes are OK.

Please place your contributions in the basket in the Juniper St lobby.

The Demise of Conservative Judaism? Frank Solomon

At a Friday night Shabbat service in Vero Beach, Florida, Temple Beth Shalom, the only synagogue in town, was half filled. A projector beamed a transliteration of the prayers onto the wall over the ark. The rabbi read one verse from the Torah and talked about what it meant for Jews. The cantor strummed her guitar and strained to get the congregation to sing prayers with *kavanah*.

Most of those at the service were middle-aged men and women. Most of the men were intermarried. Not one of the dozen members of the defunct local Conservative synagogue, Congregation B'nai Emet, was present. B'nai Emet merged with Beth Shalom a few years ago because of dwindling membership, and now holds a Conservative Shabbat morning service twice a month. Most of the time there are not enough people to make a minyan.

Conservative Synagogues Closing

All over the country, because of declining membership, Conservative synagogues are closing, merging with Reform temples and moving into other types of house of worship to share expenses. Others rent out space to stay in the black.

In Wantagh, N.Y., two Conservative congregations merged in 2007. In Smithtown, Suffolk County, N.Y., Temple Beth Shalom sold its building to a church in order to continue to use the building rent-free for five years. B'nai Jeshurun in New York has been holding services in a church for many years.

In the D.C. area, Beth Torah in Hyattsville suffered from the departure of Jews from Prince George's County and shared facilities

with a church for two decades before shutting last year. As Jews left Takoma Park and Langley Park, Temple Israel merged with Beth Tikvat to form Tikvat Israel. Shaare Tefila followed the Jewish migration from Silver Spring, to Olney.

These developments confirm the findings of the recent Pew Research Center survey of U.S. Jews that the Conservative movement is experiencing serious decline in membership and is the denominational home today of only 18 percent of American Jews. Reflecting this membership decline, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's congregational arm, reported a budget deficit of more than \$5 million in 2011 and 2012.

Gordis Sounds the Death Knell

Daniel Gordis, chair of the core curriculum at Shalem College, sounded the death knell in "Requiem for a Movement" in the November *Jewish Review of Books*. He called the Conservative movement "irrelevant" for those who want the vigor of Jewish traditional living, and lacking in "deep existential and spiritual seriousness."

Gordis argued that Conservative Judaism never was the halakhic Judaism that its leaders claimed it to be nor the "dynamic Judaism" that they said would prevent American Jewish life's slide into the abyss. In short, Gordis said Conservative Judaism has lost its *raison d'être*.

While Gordis claims Conservative Judaism lost its soul on its way to providing an alternative to Orthodox Judaism, Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the Central Conference of American

Rabbis (Reform), asserts, in a letter to *The Jewish Post*, that no matter what the Conservative leadership does, the movement is doomed.

Menitoff says that if the Conservative leadership "capitulates" regarding the core difference between Reform and Conservative Judaism, "it will be essentially obliterating the need for its existence." On the other hand, if the Conservative leadership "stands firm" with its current practice and direction, members would vote with their feet, as they have in hundreds of Conservative synagogues that have closed their doors across the country.

The Pew survey sent out such shock waves that the United Synagogue devoted its recent Centennial conference to retooling Conservative Judaism. While some leaders echoed Gordis' thesis that Conservatives have "corrupted" Judaism and urged them not to "compromise," others called for action that would make the movement more palatable to the needs of the changing demographics of American Jewry, including action on interfaith couples and same-sex marriages.

Some Shuls Are Growing

To be sure, some Conservative shuls are witnessing an increase in membership. Rabbis report their younger families show a resurging interest in Jewish rituals and holiday celebrations and their Hebrew school enrollment is increasing. But while some Conservative shuls, such as Tifereth Israel, are growing, they are far outnumbered by those in decline.

Moreover, the majority of Conservative offspring are exposed

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The Demise of Conservative Judaism? (continued)

to a trendy secular culture. Many committed Jews doubt that children growing up in a world without the daily commitment to practicing *mitzvot* could sustain themselves as Jews when they get married, let alone sustain the Jewish world.

Orthodox Movement Increasing

Meanwhile, other experts say American Judaism isn't declining, but is actually increasing because of the growing numbers within the Orthodox ranks. Some say that Jews who yearn for the vigor, beauty and meaning of a Jewish life can find them in Orthodox Judaism, which has been chipping away at both Conservative and Reform. Aiding this growth is the Orthodox emphasis on families (with high birth rates), high-quality day schools, and warm and welcoming environment. Some point to Ohev Shalom across from TI as an example.

860 miles north of Vero Beach, in Kemp Mill, the Silver Spring Chabad had a full house for its Friday night Shabbat service at the rabbi's abode, filled with young couples and children. They *davened* and sang loudly and joyfully and delved into a heated discussion with the rabbi. Few would question what Orthodox Judaism means to them.

Orthodox Attract the Committed

This seems evident: Jews who want more out of their Jewish life flock to Orthodox shuls; those who want token Judaism join Reform temples. Meanwhile, some Jewish leaders say that the Orthodox are drawing away the best and brightest minds from the other two movements and that liberal-minded, observant Jews often find homes in the Modern Orthodox world, such as the Kemp Mill Synagogue.

According to the Pew study, four percent of those raised Conservative are now Orthodox and 30 percent are now Reform. Many of the four percent who became Orthodox may be the most serious, best educated and most committed Conservative Jews, the ones that the Conservative movement could ill-afford to lose.

Looking at the members at Beth Shalom in Vero Beach, it seems that most of the 30 percent who moved to the Reform movement were Jews who intermarried and/or didn't bother to make their homes or rear their children Jewish, content to be cultural Jews who skim Jewish rituals now and then.

Fundamentalism Untenable

To many Conservative Jews, Orthodox notions about the nature of revelation and fundamentalist traditions and practices are untenable. The vast majority of American Jews reject such fundamentalism, and living a vigorous Jewish life, as sheer inconvenience. They assimilate, intermarry and join Reform temples, or give up Judaism altogether.

According to Gordis, the Conservatives' attempt to create a middle ground never worked because, he argues, at its core, religious Judaism needs halakhic traditions and fundamentalism to inspire those who can live with it to make the sacrifices in time and money and the lifestyle necessary to keep the religion alive.

Immigrant Nostalgia

In *Conservative Judaism* (1955) and *Lakeville* (1967), the American Jewish sociologist Marshall Sklare documented that Conservative synagogues from the 1920s through the 1970s were largely founded by

immigrants who wanted a place that would reflect the Jewish traditionalism they remembered from growing up in Europe while being free to do what they wanted the rest of the time. The problem is that when their children or grandchildren came of age, they did not have the nostalgia of their parents or grandparents from Europe, and so they either moved to an Orthodox experience or to a Reform temple, or they just intermarried and gave up Judaism to become "just an American."

Conservatives Seek Community

For those Jews who stayed in Conservative shuls, most attend services not because of a legally binding obligation, but because they wanted a connection to their people, to transcendence, to a collective Jewish memory. However, given the multicultural, multiethnic, "we are one world" view in an increasingly secular society, many in the millennium generation think those who believe in religion are anachronistic or extremists.

Given peer pressure to conform, distaste of ethnic distinctions, a desire to avoid being branded Jewish and to be "irreligiously cool," it is difficult to explain to our children, in Gordis' words, "why marrying another Jew matters, how a home rooted in Jewish ritual is enriching, and why Jewish literacy still matter in a world in which there are no barriers to Jews' participating in the broader culture."

It is just as hard to answer their question, "Why should I stay as a Jew?" when they don't see any need for religion and when they see being Jewish as the kind of "clannishness" they don't want, regardless of whether Conservative Judaism is dying or not.

Is Israel Actually a “Jewish State”?

Mark Berch

This concludes the discussion, which began with “What Does ‘Jewish State’ Mean?” in the January issue of The Menorah.

The question “Is Israel actually a ‘Jewish State’?” on one level seems fatuous. That Israel is a Jewish State (JS) is the consensus view of Israelis, and enshrined into law. “If Israel looks like a Jewish state and acts like a Jewish state”, as Shlomo Avineri put it, shouldn’t that dispose of the question?

But it might not be that simple. The assertion might be aspirational rather than actualized. And sometimes, nations deceive themselves. It wouldn’t surprise me if most Americans felt that we have the best health system in the world.

“Jewish” Is Not in Israel’s Name

Unlike, for example, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Israel does not have the religion in its official name. Ordinarily, this would be inconsequential, but Israel is presently insisting on Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish State, and diplomatic recognition is normally in terms of a nation’s formal name, not its asserted identity.

More significantly, Israel has no formally-designated state (or official) religion(s). Such designations are fairly common; some countries have three or four.

Critics have questioned how Israel can call itself a Jewish State if it cannot even decide who is a Jew. Israel makes two separate determinations of who is Jewish; these don’t always coincide. Still, Asher Schechter argues, “Israel can be defined as a Jewish state, however Jews are defined.”

As I wrote last month, Israelis have several different definitions for what is meant by a JS. Whether Israel is or is not a JS will to some degree depend on which definition you alight on.

If JS is understood from a religious perspective, there are two problems. Tamar Elad-Appelbaum, vice president of Israel’s Masorti Rabbinical Assembly, argues Israel “is not yet a Jewish state” because it does not provide full religious freedom to its Jews. As journalist David Landau put it, “the official state religion of the Jewish state, in effect, is not Judaism, with its confusing pluralism, but exclusively Jewish Orthodoxy....If you live in Israel, you have to accept this upshot; that is what democracy and the rule of law are about.”

On the other end of the spectrum, some argue that Israel cannot be a JS because it does things contrary to Judaism. *Haredim* point to plans to draft students out of *yeshivot*, and the inclusion of women in military roles in the IDF. Others say a Jewish state could not countenance violations of Jewish law seen, for example, in allowing state-run TV to broadcast and businesses to operate on Shabbat, permitting the sale of bread on Passover, and paying for ordinary abortions.

A State of the Jewish People?

Perhaps the single most common formulation of the JS is as the (nation -) state of the Jewish people.

Avi Dichter’s extensively-discussed 2011 Knesset bill would amend Israel’s Basic Law to change the definition of Israel from “a Jewish and democratic state” to “the state of the Jewish people,” with the addendum that “the State of Israel has a

democratic regime.” Prime Minister Netanyahu, in his landmark 2009 Bar-Ilan speech expressing his willingness to accept a Palestinian state, explicitly said that “the Jewish state” meant “the nation state of the Jewish people”.

Since then he has repeatedly said that wording, “nation state of the Jewish people,” was an “essential condition” (or similar language) for a peace agreement. Many other Israeli politicians and commentators use just this wording. Support for this understanding can be found in Israel’s Declaration of Independence.

Prime Minister of All Jews?

But if this were true, then, logically, Netanyahu would be the prime minister of Jews wherever they live. And indeed, there is ample reason to think that this is exactly how Netanyahu sees things. When he addressed a joint session of the US Congress on May 24, 2011, he said, “I speak on behalf of the Jewish people.” On Meet the Press, September 16, 2012, host David Gregory referred to him as “the leader of the Jewish people”. Netanyahu did not correct him or even demur.

Is this actually true? Is Netanyahu really the leader of the Jewish people or only the leader of a country? I believe that most Diaspora Jews, even if they approve of his leadership of the Israeli government, would not consider him to be the leader of Diaspora Jewry. And if he isn’t, then it’s hard to make the case for “nation state of the Jewish people”.

To get around this problem, alternative wordings have been proposed. Chemi Shalev, for example, uses “... of Jews who

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February Highlights at Tifereth Israel

February 3, 10, 24	Monday Learn & Lunch <i>Parashat HaShavuah</i> , 11 a.m.; Lunch, 12 noon
February 3, 10, 17	Book of Proverbs, Barbara White (last three of six sessions)
February 8	<i>The Jewish Creators of Superman and Batman</i> , Marc Tyler Nobelman, 7:30 p.m.
February 15	New Member Shabbat, 9 a.m. SHALEM, Deenah Dugan and Tony McFarland
February 18	Kol Nashim Book Club, 7:30 p.m., book/venue TBD
February 16	Movie Night, <i>Shalom Aleichem: Laughing in the Darkness</i>, 7:30 p.m.
February 21	USY Tzedakah Dinner

Is Israel Actually a “Jewish State”? (continued)

choose to live in it.” Such formulations are far less common than the unlimited “... Jewish people”. But this qualification presents its own problem. Israel has an enormous diaspora. An estimated 900,000 Israelis live in North America alone. Is Israel not the state of these people?

It is easier to make the case that Israel is a JS if this means that Jewish culture is the dominant culture, or that Israel is the state where Jews have the automatic right to become citizens, two formulations I mentioned previously. But so far as I can tell, Israelis (and American Jews) normally have a much broader view of the term.

It is thus clear that no matter which of the more common notions of JS is employed, there are significant grounds to question whether Israel is really a Jewish State.

I wanted to close with some personal observations.

Israel Has Not Defined “Jewish State”

People have significantly different ideas of the practical meaning of “Israel is a Jewish State,” arising from the fact that Israel has not defined it. In my view, it takes real chutzpah to insist that the Palestinians ratify that Israel is a JS when the Knesset has proved unable to put down, on paper, what that term actually means -- what the Palestinians would be signing onto.

Bernard Avishai says, “a democratic state, by definition, is a state of its citizens. It can *only* be a state of its citizens.” I agree 100% with that.

Many Israelis, though, oppose the very idea that Israel, as a JS, is a state of its citizens. This I cannot

accept. Germany is a state of its citizens, as is Russia, and the proportion of ethnic Germans in Germany, and ethnic Russians in Russia, is about the same as Jews in Israel. If they can be the state of their citizens, so can Israel.

In principle, Israel could be both a state of its citizens, and a Jewish State. But Israel has not (yet) found a formula to do that, and many Israelis do not want Israel to be both, rejecting one or the other.

Being both requires clarity as to what “Jewish state” entails. As Lahav Harkov has noted, crafting a basic law “truly cementing Israel’s status as a Jewish state” requires establishing the “relative weights of equality, as opposed to Jewishness.” The Israeli public, and the Knesset in particular, have not settled on that balance. I sincerely hope they can.

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