



# THE CENTRE CALL

GERMANTOWN JEWISH CENTRE

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## Rabbi Rebecca Richman: A Re-Introduction

Two years ago, I sang at a Kol Zimrah service with Nina Peskin and Rabbi Zeff to conclude my internship as Student Rabbi at Germantown Jewish Centre. I remember a feeling of sweetness as I sang and as I taught that night. My internship challenged me in the best of ways, pushing me toward strength in *davening* (prayer) leadership, presence in pastoral care, creativity with teaching, and confidence in my learning. I had hoped to return to GJC again, but I never imagined I would be so blessed to return as clergy.

As I write this piece, I am just one week away from being ordained as a rabbi. As I reflect on my four years of rabbinical school, I know that my journey toward ordination began long before I started officially training. I grew up in Bethesda, MD, at Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation and as a camper, counselor, and staff member at Camp Havaya. I owe so much of my formation to my home and camp communities, both of which taught me that Judaism is meant to be thriving, spiritually-activated, and life-affirming.

I was blessed to study at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC), where my learning was rooted in a civilizational approach to Judaism and excellence in practical rabbinics. At RRC, I had the freedom to design much of my own learning. While in school, I trained to become a *soferet* (scribe), Hebrew calligrapher, *mashgichah* (kashrut supervisor), and *mikveh shomeret* (guide). I spent time learning at Hadar, Pardes, the Conservative Yeshiva, SVARA, and the Jewish Studio Project. In addition to my internship at GJC, I worked as a rabbinic intern at Brandeis University, completed a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, and participated in T'ruah's Year-in-Israel Fellowship. I was also the recipient of three Auerbach grants from RRC, which enabled me to explore Jewish storytelling and *beit midrash* learning. I have been deeply privileged to be part of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, which has allowed me to connect and learn with incredible emerging Jewish leaders.

My partner Josh and I moved to Philadelphia in 2015 after studying Hebrew in Haifa for five months and after a cross-

country bicycle tour of the United States. (I first met Rabbi Zeff in Haifa while he was on sabbatical.) Josh is a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned his Masters Degree in City and Regional Planning, and is pursuing his PhD in Urban Planning.

This past December, Josh and I welcomed sweet Netta Nissim into our lives. We are sleep-deprived but blissed out and in awe of this amazing new life. Netta will be starting at ECP this summer and continuing in the fall. We are beyond excited to become part of the ECP community.

In mid-July, I will begin my half-time position as Assistant Rabbi and Beit Midrash Director. It has been a joy to envision and build my dream job. I will be sharing morning *minyan* and Shabbat service leadership with Rabbi Zeff, helping to lead High Holiday services and programming, offering pastoral support, working with *b'nai mitzvah* students, scrolling Torahs, and supporting the Chesed Committee. I will also build a *beit midrash*, a house of learning, for our community.

We're going to call this new *beit midrash* "Koleinu Beit Midrash," or "Koleinu" for short. *Koleinu* means "our voice," and it represents the main mission of this communal learning space—we will create learning community that honors voices traditionally left out of the *beit midrash* and that also integrates different modalities of learning. We will have "traditional" text study and creative learning, beginner classes and advanced-level *shiurim* (lessons). We will have programs that are open to all and gatherings that are geared toward specific communities (queer community, people who are retired, parents, etc.). My hope is that Koleinu will be a space and community for learners of all backgrounds and skill levels to take a deep dive into text-based Jewish learning. If there are specific skills you want to build, topics or texts you want to learn, or ways of learning that excite you, please reach out so that I can help make this learning happen.

Thank you so much for all the ways you have already welcomed me into community. I am deeply honored to become one of your rabbis, and I so look forward to the journey together.

# SHABBAT & HOLIDAYS



## MAZAL TOV! IN CELEBRATION OF...

### July 5 & 6

- Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night service)
- Saturday services as Usual

### July 12 & 13

- Shabbat Together (Friday night service)
- Saturday services as Usual
- Family Retreat Potluck Picnic

### July 19 & 20

- Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night service)
- Charry Service: *Mazal tov to Jacob Laigaie, son of Brenda Laigaie z'l" & David Laigaie, on becoming Bar Mitzvah*

### July 26 & 27

- Shabbat in the Neighborhood (Friday night service)
- Saturday services as Usual

### August 2 (Rosh Hodesh Av) & 3

- Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night service)
- Saturday services as Usual

### August 9 & 10 (Erev Tish'ah b'Av)

- Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night service)
- Saturday services as Usual
- Family Retreat Potluck Picnic
- Erev Tish'ah b'Av Program & Service

### August 11 (Tish'ah b'Av)

- Tish'ah b'Av morning service
- Tish'ah b'Av Minha

### August 16 (Tu b'Av) & 17

- Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night service)
- Saturday services as Usual

### August 23 & 24

- Shabbat Together (Friday night service)
- Saturday services as Usual

### August 30 & 31 (Rosh Hodesh Elul)

- Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night service)
- Charry Service: *Mazal tov to Hadassah Weinmartin, daughter of Rabbi Nathan Martin & Abby Weinberg, on becoming Bat Mitzvah*

**Lillian Kunz**, daughter of Kenneth and Sarit Kunz, on becoming Bat Mitzvah

**Joel Fish**, on his 65th birthday

**Ezra Stern**, son of Richard Stern and Mindy Brown, on becoming Bar Mitzvah

**Dayle Friedman**, on receiving the Award for Outstanding Service from Neshama: National Association of Jewish Chaplains

**Norman and Leah Schwartz**, on the birth of their great-grandson, Yonatan Schwartz, son of Sara & Shlomo Zalman Schwartz and grandson of Tanya and Raphael Schwartz of Telz-Stone, Israel

**Aryeh Friedman**, on his special birthday

**Sara Engel**, on receiving her Masters in Jewish Studies from Gratz College

**Rabbi Rebecca Richman**, on graduating from RRC

**Rabbi Micah Weiss**, son-in-law of Betsy and Rabbi David Teutsch, on graduating from RRC

**Rabbi Ari Witkin**, on graduating from RRC

**Betsy and Rabbi David Teutsch**, on the birth of their grandsons, Eyal Or and Nadav Lev, sons of Nomi Teutsch and Micah Weiss

**Tamar Jacobson**, who read Torah for the first time

**Dena Lake**, who read Torah for the first time

**Sandy Meyer**, who read Torah for the first time

## IN MEMORIAM

**Debbie Roach**, sister of Wendy Weingarten

**Larry Garber**, brother of Marcy Fish

**Ronald Stone**, brother of Sandy Meyers

**Enid Videlock**, mother of Erik Videlock

**Carol Ann Blumenthal Klotz**, mother of Rabbi Myriam Klotz, mother-in-law of Rabbi Margot Stein, grandmother of Raffi

# THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by Denise S. Wolf



Confronting our mortality is uncomfortable. Planning for our own death can be awkward, even terrifying. But, as we all know, we need to have that sacred conversation, regardless of age, with ourselves, our loved ones, our Rabbi, and, perhaps even a lawyer or financial advisor. We need to think about end-of-life matters—desired legacy, living wills, advanced directives, funerals, burials, and estate distribution. We need to talk about dying.

Judaism and our Germantown Jewish Centre community do not shy away from these conversations. While we often celebrate life with cheers of *L'hayim* (To life!) as we lift a glass of wine, the Days of Awe will soon be upon us. On our holiest day of Yom Kippur, we symbolically face death. Many of us wear a *Kittel* (a white garment traditionally used to clothe the dead), we fast, we recite the *Vidui* (confession) as we do before death, and, according to our prayers, it is determined “who will live and who will die.” During holidays, we recite the words of *Yizkor*, and at Shabbat and weekday services, mourners recite the *Mourner's Kaddish*, reminding us of the deaths in our personal and communal lives. Jewish tradition constantly reminds us that life is fragile.

GJC's Executive Committee and Board of Directors have also engaged in some of these difficult conversations. We have recently approved a new Funeral Policy to govern when funerals may take place in the GJC building. Historically, funeral services at GJC were limited to clergy and past presidents, though, on rare occasions, exceptions were made for a particular member. That has now changed. The new policy was conceived by one of our dedicated members, Patty Segal. In summer 2018, Patty approached me about creating a new policy on funerals that was more inclusive. Patty polled funeral practices at area synagogues, researched associated costs, drafted language for a policy and presented her findings to the Executive Committee. It did not take long for the Executive Committee, and Rabbi Zeff and Executive Director Nina Peskin, to appreciate the importance of enacting an egalitarian funeral policy for our community. The Board of Directors approved this policy with enthusiasm.

The policy reads:

Funeral services for members in good standing of Germantown Jewish Centre (GJC) may be held in the Charry Sanctuary at GJC provided that they do not conflict with other GJC events and activities. Scheduling of such services will be under the sole authority of the Rabbi. A donation of \$500 to GJC is recommended to cover office and maintenance staff costs.

This option may not appeal to everyone. Yet, for many, GJC has played such a central role in our daily lives, and is where many of our life cycle events (baby namings, *B'nai Mitzvah*, educational milestones, weddings) have taken place, and, as such, it provides the warmth, familiarity and sanctity that we desire when we face the end of life. In Patty's words, having funeral services at GJC “further deepens connections to the larger GJC family and provides comfort in an already known setting.”

As you and your family have these difficult conversations, GJC can support you. Rabbi Zeff is available for counseling and advice about planning for what is inevitable, having conversations with your family members and friends, and ensuring that your wishes will be carried out. He can also help guide you to resources for creating an “ethical will” that can allow you to transmit your values and what is most important to you to the generations that follow. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with him to have these conversations in a confidential, compassionate setting.

In thinking about what legacy you would like to leave on this earth, we would ask you to keep in mind the powerful ways you can affect the Jewish future at GJC through planned giving. If you are passionate about the synagogue and making sure that our values endure, please consider making a gift through a bequest in your will or trust. You can also make GJC part of your estate planning by adding GJC as a beneficiary designation on an IRA, pension fund, or life insurance policy. Keep in mind that legacy gifts are not just for the wealthy. They can be made in any amount, all equally important and appreciated. They can be your personal way to fulfill a spiritual ideal of *l'dor v'dor* (from generation to generation).

The language in a will to make a bequest is rather simple—  
I give \$\_\_\_\_\_ to Germantown Jewish Center for their unrestricted use.

Or, if there is a specific item you want to fund, such as an endowment, the language is—  
I give \$\_\_\_\_\_ to Germantown Jewish Centre to be used for the Centre's endowment.

An unrestricted, single bequest may be depleted in a relatively short period of time, whereas an endowment gift keeps on giving. A perpetual endowment echoes the Jewish tradition of planting trees for future generations. According to the Talmud, “Just as my ancestors planted for me, so too, will I plant for my children.” (Ta'anit 23b).

GJC stewards over a dozen specific endowment funds, along with a general endowment, gifted by beloved stakeholders in our communal history. Bequests have been made by the late Sid and Bunny Stein, Diane Spellman, Lillian Bregman, and Annette

(Continued on page 4)

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (continued)

and Henry Temin. Endowment funds have also been gifted by current members Barbara and Richard Menin, Jake and Linda Kriger, Ken and Susan Weiss, and Paul Minkoff. These restricted funds provide support for Israel programming, social action, the Granger and Charry Weekend programs, prayer books, camp scholarships, youth activities, assistance to elder members, religious school, and more.

Others have given to the very important general endowment fund, which is crucial to GJC's continued existence. Through the generosity of the late Anthony Arce, Jean Schwartz, as well as numerous other members who contributed to the GJC 60th and 75th Anniversary campaigns, the general endowment now provides steady funding for a significant percentage of our operating expenses.

If you have specific ideas for bequests, or questions about how to frame your bequest, Rabbi Zeff, Nina and I are available to discuss your wishes. The lay leadership and professional staff of GJC have a long history of careful stewardship of the funds placed in our

care and a track record of financial success. The Executive Committee has mandated yearly financial audits of GJC's finances, including its management of endowment funds, conducted by an independent, outside accounting firm, to ensure that we continue to deserve your trust in our financial management.

The *mitzvah* of legacy giving is both financial and emotional. You are standing up and standing out as a visionary of GJC to ensure its long-term viability and stability. Such generosity will always be remembered and cherished.

However you choose to have these sacred conversations about our mortality and our wishes for our legacy, and whatever choices you make, I urge you not to delay. Having these conversations and making these decisions, as difficult as they can be, can be a great comfort both to ourselves as we face the future and to our loved ones who will have the direction they need to make sure that what is most important to us lives beyond us and forms a legacy for future generations.

## MEMBER MEMORIES

by Deborah White

Dan and I first met 40 years ago at GJC, in room 207 on a rainy spring morning. Fast forward a little more than one year, and there we were again at GJC, celebrating our *Aufruf* in the Temin Canteen Room on a summer morning in July, with family, friends and our Minyan Masorti community. (Back then there was just one *Havurah*.) The room was filled with such energy, joy, and song. We were all MUCH younger then with full voices and abundant *ruah*.

What we remember so vividly is that after our *aliyah*, folks began clapping, singing "*siman tov and mazel tov*." Then someone took someone else's hand, and began a hora. That

person then took someone else's hand and soon there was a huge circle of dancing that exploded up the steps from the Canteen Room. From there, we went out the front door, down Ellet Street—the whole *Kahal*—dancing and singing all the way up to McCallum Street and back. It was such a glorious spontaneous experience that became the beginning of our lives together and in this beloved community.

Over these past 39 years, that Canteen Room holds so many memories for so many of us.

~ Deb White and Dan Piser



Dan and Deborah last month in Copenhagen.



# GJC THANKS OUR NEDIV LEV AND ROSH PINAH MEMBERS

"A gift from generous hearts"  
(Exodus 25:2)

Within the GJC community, we are fortunate to have a growing number of members who give above and beyond, year after year. Nediv Lev, comprised of our pillar members, provides a backbone to the GJC community, and their commitment enables the *shul* to provide for the needs of all our members. We especially thank the following members for helping our *shul* continue to offer the highest possible level of education, religious, and social programming:

**Marcy & Dan Bacine**  
**Jane & Richard Baron**  
**Peninah & Albert Berdugo**  
**Harold Berger**  
**Linda & Jake Kriger**  
**Chris & Steve Levin**  
**Barbara & Dick Menin**  
**Paul Minkoff**  
**Martha & Chuck Schleifer**  
**Allyson & David Schwartz**  
**Denise Scott Brown**  
**Dveera Segal & Brad Bridge**  
**Patty & Steve Segal**  
**Stefanie & Alex Seldin**  
**Elise Singer & Don Perelman**  
**Joan N. Stern**

\* \* \* \* \*

"The humblest of stones has become the chief cornerstone."  
['Rosh Pinah'] (Psalm 118:22)

GJC expresses its deep gratitude for the generous support of its congregants who have chosen the Rosh Pinah (Cornerstone) level of membership. Their contribution provides crucial support, enabling us to serve the entire GJC community. We cannot adequately thank the following members for their commitment to Germantown Jewish Centre:

**Marta & Chip Becker**  
**Michael Beer**  
**Sarah Braun & Shai Gluskin**  
**Evelyn Eskin & David Major**  
**Rachel Falkove & Michael Masch**  
**Helen & Michael Feinberg**  
**Dayle Friedman & David Ferleger**  
**The Hahn & Weiss Family**  
**Myra & Gert Jacobsohn**  
**Barbara Jaffe & Howard Langer**  
**Hillary & Judd Kruger Levingston**  
**Cyrilla Rosen**  
**Jessica & Mathieu Shapiro**  
**Beth Stearman**  
**Betsy & David Teutsch**  
**Denise Wolf & Paul Rudick**

For information on joining one of these giving circles, please contact Nina Peskin at [director@germantownjewishcentre.org](mailto:director@germantownjewishcentre.org).

# HIGH HOLY DAYS NEWS



## PAPERLESS E-TICKETS

*We're continuing our efforts to "green" the High Holy Days!*

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In an effort to continue finding ways to lessen Germantown Jewish Centre's environmental footprint, GJC is cutting down on our paper use. A number of years ago, we moved to e-communications to distribute our annual High Holy Days information, and now we look to do the same with our High Holy Days ticket mailing.

- GJC will no longer send paper High Holy Days tickets. Tickets will be sent by special e-vite, using Paperless Post.
- If you currently receive only hard copy communications from GJC, you will receive paper tickets as usual.
- We understand that some of our members will still want to receive a paper ticket. If you would like to receive a paper ticket, please contact Rebecca Paquet at [administrative@germantownjewishcentre.org](mailto:administrative@germantownjewishcentre.org) or 215-844-1507 x14 no later than August 16.
- We look forward to seeing you for High Holy Days 5780!

## HIGH HOLY DAYS CHILDCARE & KIDS' PROGRAMMING NOTIFICATION

It is the policy of GJC that all children must be fully immunized in order to participate in childcare programs at GJC. We ask that those who use our childcare services on Shabbat and holidays respect this policy. Please note the following information in regards to using High Holy Days childcare & children's programming at Germantown Jewish Centre.

- **ALL children must be pre-registered and GJC must have a current copy of their immunizations records.**
- **You must submit the child's immunization records at the time of registering for High Holy Days childcare and kids' programming, or the child will not be registered.**
- **If your child is enrolled in ECP, and you have submitted a current copy of their immunization record, you do NOT have to resubmit the records when you register for High Holy Days childcare.**
- **If your child is enrolled in the Religious School, and you have submitted a current copy of their immunization record, you do NOT have to resubmit the records when you register for High Holy Days kids' programming.**
- **Registration for High Holy Days childcare & kids' programming will begin mid-July.**



**THE LITTLE SHOP** is open all summer and we have a great inventory of jewelry, hostess gifts, serving ware, Judaica, wine, toys, and books for your home, special occasion, or to just treat yourself!

*Think of The Little Shop whenever you need gifts!*



### • SUMMER STORE HOURS •

**June 12 – September 6 • Wednesdays & Fridays 12:00 – 5:00 PM**

Contact Connie Katz or Marcy Bacine, who can accommodate any Little Shop purchases you might want outside of store hours.

### **JULY and AUGUST** Specials

10% off all items in the store!

(PLUS 10% off during our Early Bird Special hours, Wed & Fri 12:00-3:00 PM)

**YOU PERFORM A MITZVAH** when buying at The Little Shop; all profits support GJC programs.

\*\* Normal discount exclusions are books, wine, mezuzah scrolls and tefillin. \*\*

## THANK YOU

Germantown Jewish Centre extends thanks and gratitude to the

### **Wolfe Family Foundation**

for generously supporting and making our programming possible.

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

The Gordon – Walinsky, King & Schram Families

by Linda Kriger



Nina Gordon and Lou Walinsky (center) with their children and grandchildren

Nina Gordon and Lou Walinsky's home is with in three blocks of the homes of their two daughters, two sons-in-law and five grandchildren. Together they exemplify a close and loving three-generation family.

Nina and Lou both grew up in observant Jewish Conservative homes; they joined GJC in 1986 and both of their daughters became *Bat Mitzvah* here. Nina said that although her father, grandfather and great-grandparents were observant, "it was my mother and maternal grandmother who created a home-centered, *haimish* (warm) Jewish life for me."

"Getting married and having children put me on a spiritual journey I've been on ever since. I'd drop my girls off at Hebrew School and then go to classes at GJC, where I continue in my studies. In 2008, I became *Bat Mitzvah* with a group of women after studying two years with Rabbi Fredi Cooper." Six years ago, Nina and another group of adults began studying under Emilie Passow and Rabbi Marsha Friedman.

Lou teaches and performs jazz piano, working in solo and ensemble settings. Over the past two decades, he has pursued a piano project called *Piano Works*. It involves creating and performing solo piano arrangements of songs from the Great American Songbook and beyond, and Lou has produced two solo albums of these original arrangements. When the second one came out last year, he performed at an album release concert at Settlement Music School in Germantown. Lou is now setting up additional solo concerts in other venues.

Lou's musical work has brought him a diverse range of students and settings—elders, music/story/movement programs for children, children in Philadelphia elementary and middle schools. He performs in all kinds of venues—from seedy bars to DC's

Kennedy Center. "My main goal with all of this is to try to get to the soul of the music and to communicate it to others," he said. Lou and his family are strong supporters of Israel. He belongs to the ZOA and has recently become a member of the GJC Israel Committee.

Nina was born in New York City. "I'm glad I grew up there and that now I am a Philadelphian," she said. "I went to Queens College and taught in Harlem for three years. It was a difficult job, but urban education has been a true calling. In 1969, through the encouragement of my former education professor, I decided to relocate to Philadelphia. He and his wife invited me to a party in Elkins Park and Lou was playing the piano. We were introduced, and the rest is history." They married the next year and lived in New York while Lou was attending Dalcroze School of Music.

Nina, who retired from teaching art and ceramics in the Philadelphia schools in 2008, serves as chair of Building Beautiful, a committee of Women of GJC. In the early 1990's, Nina taught art in the GJC Hebrew School and every fall, for more than 20 years, she has conducted bowl-making workshops with the GJC religious school for the annual Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network *Empty Bowl Dinner*. Her art is visible elsewhere as well. "A number of years ago," she said, "Nina Peskin asked me to beautify the sukkah," Nina said. "My daughter Sonia and a wonderful group of GJC women created appliqued panels."

Nina and Lou's older daughter Naomi attended Central High School, the University of Pittsburgh and Drexel Medical School. She is a family doctor and medical director at Maria de Los Santos Health Center in North Philadelphia. She champions the program *Reach Out and Read* at her clinic, and is always taking used books for use in the clinic waiting and exam rooms. (Contact her anytime at [naomigw@gmail.com](mailto:naomigw@gmail.com) for donations.) She met her husband, Gary King, at a friend's wedding near the end of her medical residency in California. "It was love at third sight," she said, with a smile.

Gary, born and raised in American Samoa, attended American University in Washington, DC, where he received a Bachelor's Degree in political science. He then went to Boston and studied at the Berkeley College of Music. "Through mutual friends, Naomi and I connected briefly in passing on my way out to California," he recalled. Three years later, they met again at a wedding in California and dated long distance for a year. Naomi moved to California in 2009 and they married in 2010, in Rose Valley, PA.

"There was one Jew growing up in Samoa and he came from a family of Florida newspaper publishers that bought the newspaper my father had previously owned," Gary said. "My second introduction to Jewish culture and religion was with a close friend in college from Lower Merion. He made *aliyah* and now lives on the West Bank. For our wedding, my family came up from the islands and we had a combination Jewish-Samoan



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT (continued)

wedding. We had a rabbi who led a Jewish ceremony with a *bedek en* (betrothal), a *Huppah* (canopy) made by Nina and Sonia, a *ketubah* (marriage certificate) made by Sonia, and a Samoan money dance. The *Huppah* incorporated Samoan fabric."

Gary and Naomi now have three children who attend ECP and the religious school. Half of Gary's work time is devoted as a composer for music libraries that provide stock music for commercials, films and TV. He's also a singer and piano player in ensembles. His other work is for the Mt. Airy Community Development Corporation, where Gary serves as the Literacy and Schools coordinator, which supports six Mt. Airy public schools. He coordinates the Reading Captains program. (Contact him at [gary.s.king@gmail.com](mailto:gary.s.king@gmail.com) if you're interested in volunteering.) "When our oldest daughter was an infant, we came back to Mt. Airy to be close to family," Naomi said. "Gary grew up in a village in a communal society. He appreciates living in a village and sacrificing to be close to family."

This year, Naomi was on the GJC Family Retreat committee. Gary served on the search committee for ECP director, and the search committee for Director of Lifelong Learning. He also participated in the Hiddush group with Rabbi Zeff. "Many of our close friends go to GJC, ECP and the family retreat," Gary said. "We're grateful to be a part of this thriving community."

Sonia Gordon-Walinsky grew up in Germantown, and moved with her parents to Mt. Airy while attending Central High School. "I wanted to be a Rabbi," she said. "When I was 10, I started asking my parents to take me to synagogue. I had so many role models of rabbis in all the minyanim, especially Rabbi Devora Bartnoff, z"l." Cantor Sheldon Levin and Rabbi Lenny Gordon encouraged her to lead Torah and Musaf services frequently in the Charry Sanctuary and to read Torah. "Lenny recommended the Jewish Theological Seminary/Columbia University," she said, "and after a year of traveling between high school and college, I went there."

Sonia met her husband, Mordechai Schram during Sukkot at B'nai Jeshurun (BJ) synagogue in New York, where he grew up. At the time, Mordechai was a cantorial student and working as the musical director of StorahTelling as well as serving as a *shaliah tzibbur* (service leader) at BJ. After graduating from the HL Miller Cantorial School at JTS, Mordechai went on to serve congregations of many denominations, including the West End Synagogue, NYC (Reconstructionist), Little Neck Jewish Center, Queens (Conservative), Rodeph Sholom, Tampa (Conservative), and Congregation Kol Israel, Brooklyn (Orthodox). They married in 2006.

"My career path is a reflection of my own spiritual journey. At this time, Mt. Airy feels like the perfect place to be a part of the full spectrum Judaism happening here." Mordechai, a fourth generation hazzan, also has a passion for Middle Eastern Music. "I began playing Doumbek when I was 6 years old. My mom would take my sister and me to a Greenwich Village nightclub called the

Cafe Feenjon. I was introduced to Greek, Turkish, French, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, Balkan, Russian and of course Israeli and Yiddish music." Mordechai has studied doumbek with some of the greatest players from Morocco, Israel (with Turkish influences), Armenia and Macedonia. "Each of them had such a different playing style, and I incorporate a bit of each style into my playing."

Sonia is a largely self-taught calligrapher. While in college, she learned Hebrew calligraphy from a two-page article in the *Jewish Catalog* and later studied English calligraphy in New York City.

After encountering the tradition of "the Name *Pasuk*"—a verse from *Tanakh* (the Bible) that begins and ends with the first and last letters of one's name—Sonia decided to represent this tradition visually. "West End Synagogue loved the idea and started commissioning me to create a unique piece of artwork for each Bar and Bat Mitzvah student," she said, "and they've continued to do so for more than 16 years."

Mordechai's mother, Peninnah Schram, commissioned Sonia to create a piece for a friend for a special birthday. Her father commissioned her to create an Eyshet Hayil ("A Woman of Valor," a portion of Proverbs that a man may say on Friday night to honor his wife) for her mother. "The commissions keep coming and it is fulfilling work," Sonia said.

Before moving to Mt. Airy with their two sons in January, Mordechai and Sonia lived at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, CT. For almost five years, Mordechai served as Head of Kashrut, Director of Food Services, and Executive Chef. "Moving up to Isabella Freedman to run the kitchen was a singular life experience," he said. "We lived on an organic farm and were at the epicenter of the full spectrum of Judaism in the Northeast. I have always had a deep love for food and cooking, but it was in 1996, during my year in Israel for cantorial school, when my love of food and cooking really blossomed. I had just become a vegan and I was spending as much time in the shuk and studying cooking as I was in the classroom studying music and Torah. For me, food, music and spirituality are all really connected."

Sonia and Mordechai relocated to Philadelphia to be close to family. Having attended GJC services for 18 years when visiting Nina and Lou, they decided that GJC and Minyan Masorti in particular would be a good fit. "Here we can deepen our existing roots," Sonia said. "It's very special to reconnect with so many friends at GJC and to make new friends. I feel connected to all three minyanim, as well as P'nai Or and Chabad. It's a very rich Jewish community and I appreciate all of the styles of observance and practice."

Sonia and Mordechai are pursuing their passions in art, music, and food in Philly and happy to find vibrant scenes for all three right here in Mt. Airy.

# WOMEN OF GJC

by Sandy Meyer & Vilma Lieberman, Co-Presidents

Our last event of the season, the Torah Fund Brunch, was held on May 5. Even though it was a rainy spring day, it was still bright and lovely at the beautiful home of Elise Singer and Don Perelman. Our sincere thanks to Elise and Don for opening their home to WGJC for this event. This year's honoree, Yona Diamond Dansky, is a past president of WGJC, a longtime member of GJC, and a tireless worker for the synagogue community. Her husband Howard, daughter Mia, son-in-law Dan, and grandsons Judah and Zev joined in the celebration. Yona spoke eloquently of her journey to becoming committed to Judaism, to GJC in particular, and to the GJC community that has enveloped her and her family.

Elaine Culbertson, a friend and colleague of Yona, spoke on "Making Connections: How Family Stories Help Us Teach About the Holocaust." She spoke movingly about her family's experience with the Holocaust, showing video of her late mother chronicling her experience in concentration camps, which reminded us all that we need to continue to tell these stories to the next generation so they can be vigilant in promoting freedom of religious expression for all people.

On June 16, Women of GJC and Men's Club held our annual joint Installation of new board members. Women of GJC's slate of officers for 2019-20 reflects the diversity of GJC. There are

Board Members from each of the minyanim and women of varying ages—

Co-Presidents: Linda Cherkas and Vilma Lieberman

Vice-Presidents:

Youth Outreach: Debbie Fishman and Lynne Kotranski

Membership: Peninah Berdugo and Susan Weiss

Program: Nan Myers

Fundraising: Marilyn Silberstein

Treasurer: Rhonda Mandel

Financial Secretary: Joan Stern

Recording Secretary: Sylvia Lifschitz

Technical Secretary: Hideko Secrest

Corresponding Secretary: Rebekah Krantz

We encourage all to participate in WGJC events and programs. Please do not hesitate to suggest new ideas for programming to our Presidents, Vilma Lieberman and Linda Cherkas. Look for the August mailing with calendar information and opportunities to participate in WGJC. We look forward to another year of camaraderie and service within the GJC community.



## WOMEN OF GJC (continued)



## SUMMER ISRAELI DANCING

**Wednesdays at 10 AM**  
**July 10, 17, 24, 31 • August 7, 14**

Taught by experienced dance teacher, Grant Shulman, GJC's Israeli dance group welcomes dancers of all ages and levels. Each session begins with 45 minutes of beginner dances, followed by instruction, review, open dancing, and requests with increasing levels of difficulty. GJC's dance group is proud to be friendly and inclusive.

**For more information, contact Tamar Magdovitz at**  
***[tarmagdovitz@gmail.com](mailto:tarmagdovitz@gmail.com)***



# NEWS FROM THE MEN'S CLUB

## Built in Stages

by Dick Menin, President

In April, architect and GJC member Sherman Aronson spoke about the architectural evolution of the synagogue. As many of you know, the current school building was built several years before the sanctuary section. Beginning a good Jewish education was felt to take precedence over a worship space—an investment in the future. If you walk through the stairwell connecting the Charry Sanctuary to the school building and leading to the Israel Garden, you'll notice the difference between the facing walls.

Like GJC, relationships are also built in stages. People come to the *shul* for any number of reasons. Some for a place to start their children's education, others for a site to go to on holidays, or Shabbat. Others come to foster their own spiritual or educational needs. Over time these goals often blend into each other.

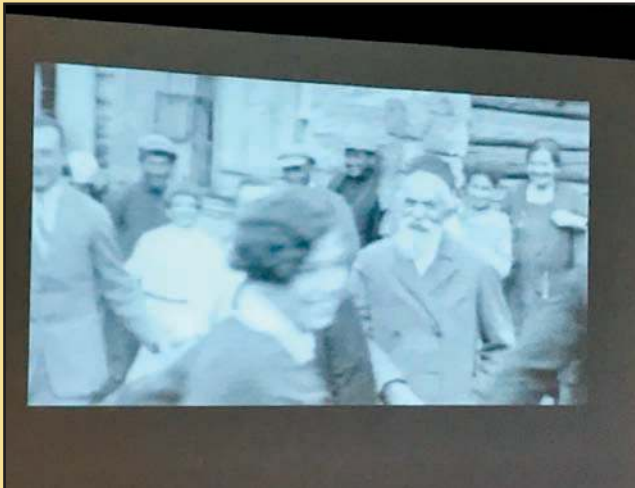
None of this is ever done alone. Judaism places a premium on interpersonal action, as in requiring a *minyan* for certain prayers, or the sense of community a post-service *kiddush* fosters. The

function of the Men's Club is simply to help develop friendships among people who share a sense of common values. We have frequent "food related" programs to do this.

The summer is a time of vacations, so formal programs often hibernate then. We will, however, get together for informal meals. Check your email for announcements.

Because of vacations, the Jewish Relief Agency, with whom we work monthly to get food parcels out to those in the community who are in need, is often short of volunteers. We start mid-morning in their facility near the Northeast Airport boxing and delivering the non-perishables all over the region. Any help is appreciated. If you can participate, please contact Jim Meyer at [jrm@meyeroneagle.com](mailto:jrm@meyeroneagle.com), or me, Dick Menin, at [meninr@einstein.edu](mailto:meninr@einstein.edu). The summer dates are July 14, August 4, and September 15.

Our next planned event will be Scotch in the Sukkah—watch for details in the fall. Meanwhile, have a great summer.



A few frames from the film *Hava Nagila*, which was shown recently by Men's Club.





# NEW LANGUAGE FOR THE GABBAI RISHON

## *Calling people to the Torah in a gender-inclusive way*

*Below is an article by Rabbi Zeff.*

### Aliyot to the Torah

The tradition of honoring people by calling them up to the Torah to say blessings over the Torah on behalf of the congregation--known as an *aliyah* ("going up")--is an ancient one, and as such was, for centuries, exclusively gendered as male. For example:

יַעֲמֹד . . . . . ראשון

YA'AMOD .....RISHON

Let **him** stand.....the first [male called to the Torah]!

In the last 50 years in which women began to be called up to the Torah in egalitarian services, different grammatical forms were used to call a woman to the Torah. For example:

תַּעֲמֹד . . . . . ראשונה

TA'AMOD .....RISHONAH

Let **her** stand.....the first [female called to the Torah]!

In our current context, in which a) individuals and groups of various genders are called to the Torah, and b) gender non-binary individuals and groups are called to the Torah, these gendered formulations are problematic. First, they require the Gabbai Rishon (who calls people up to the Torah) to master many different Hebrew grammatical forms of address (male, female, plural male, plural female) with which they may be unfamiliar. Second, and more seriously, they require the Gabbai Rishon to identify the gender of each person as they come up to the Torah, without knowing how that person identifies themselves.

In order to address these issues, I propose two changes: 1) using a non-gendered form to call people up to the Torah that remains the same for all who are called, and 2) referring consistently to the **action** being performed by the person rather than to the person. This makes it so that the Gabbai Rishon does not need to identify (or potentially misidentify) anyone's gender, and the forms the same for all. For example:

נָא לַעֲמֹד . . . . . לְעִלְיָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה

NA LA'AMOD .....LA'ALIYAH HA-RISHONAH

Please stand.....for the first coming-up [to the Torah]!

The same approach is proposed for the last Torah reading read, the **MAFTIR** ("closing") Torah reading:

נָא לַעֲמֹד . . . . . לְמִפְטִיר

NA LA'AMOD .....LA-MAFTIR

Please stand.....for the closing [reading of the Torah]!

When a person celebrating their arrival at the age of mitzvot is called up to the Torah for the **MAFTIR** aliyah, gendered honorifics are often attached to them, which are similarly problematic. Instead, I propose following the same principle of referring to the **action** and the **occasion**, rather than to the person, to avoid focusing on gender. For example:

נָא לַעֲמֹד, נָא לַעֲמֹד, נָא לַעֲמֹד. . . . .  
בְּיוֹם הַגָּעָה לְמִצְוֹת בְּחֻזֵּק וּבְאוֹשֶׁר וְכְבוֹד  
לְמִפְטִיר

# NEW LANGUAGE FOR THE GABBAI RISHON

## *Calling people to the Torah in a gender-inclusive way*

*Below is an article by Rabbi Zeff.*

NA LA'AMOD, NA LA'AMOD, NA LA'AMOD .....  
BA-YOM HAGA'AH LA-MITZVOT B'HIZUK UVA-OSHER V'CHAVOD LA-MAFTIR  
Please stand, please stand, please stand.....  
on the day of arriving at the age of mitzvot, with strength, joy, and honor  
for the closing [reading of the Torah]!

### Lifting and wrapping the scroll

Similar issues arise when calling two people up to a) lift the Torah scroll so that the congregation can see the writing, and b) re-wrap the scroll in its mantle. The traditional terms used were exclusively gendered as male:

יַעֲמֹד הַמַּגְבִּיחַ  
יַעֲמֹד הַגּוֹלֵל

YA'AMOD HA-MAGBIYAH  
YA'AMOD HA-GOLEL  
Let **him** stand, the [male] lifter  
Let **him** stand, the [male] wrapper

In egalitarian congregations, the Gabbai Rishon will sometimes adjust by using gendered female forms when a woman is called up for these honors:

תַּעֲמֹד הַמַּגְבִּיחָה  
תַּעֲמֹד הַגּוֹלֵלָת

TA'AMOD HA-MAGBIHAH  
TA'AMOD HA-GOLELET  
Let **her** stand, the [female] lifter  
Let **her** stand, the [female] wrapper

This similarly requires the Gabbai Rishon to both 1) know both gendered forms, and 2) identify the gender of the person called up for this honor. Again, I propose the same approach of concentrating on the **action** rather than on the person so as to avoid gendered forms:

נֹא לַעֲמֹד לְהַגְבִּיחַ וּלְגַלֵּל

NA LA'AMOD L'HAGBAHAH ULI-G'LILAH  
Please stand for the lifting and wrapping [of the Torah]

\* \* \* \* \*

May all feel welcome and included as they are called to take honors surrounding the Torah.

עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותמכיה מאשר  
דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום

'ETZ HAYIM HI LA-MAHAZIKIM BAH V'TOMCHEIHAH M'USHAR  
D'RACHEIHAH DARCHEI NO'AM V'CHOL N'TIVOTEIHAH SHALOM  
It is a Tree of Life to all who hold it fast, and its supporters are happy  
Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all of its paths are peace



# GJC's EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM (ECP)

## The Adventures of "Floating" Through the ECP

by Tina Easley

...When you think of floating one would think of the sea...ahhhh...

...I float on my feet throughout the day at the ECP. I am sure I exceed my daily steps!

A typical morning at ECP begins with greetings and warm smiles from our director, Michelle, from parents, from staff and of course, the children. Being a floater I have various responsibilities, the first of which is being in the classroom whenever / wherever needed. I also schedule additional substitutes, help cover staff breaks, pop in the classroom for storytelling, games or just simply to interact with the children. I also LOVE decorating the bulletin boards that represent the amazing fun we have each and every day in the ECP!

The atmosphere is always nurturing and safe for the children, thanks to our incredible ECP Staff. It couldn't be done without them! I am pleased to be part of such a positive team!

Happy Floating!



Tina Easley, ECP Floater staff

## DID YOU KNOW?

ECP is a special place for young children from 6 months through 5 years of age and for their families. Through the lens of Jewish culture and tradition, our children learn about themselves and the world around them in a program which emphasizes learning through doing. The Early Childhood Program nurtures and respects individuality, while encouraging the children to develop a sense of community and friendship. The preschool follows the yearly cycle of the Jewish holidays. Jewish culture, traditions, and values are woven into our curriculum. Through Mitzvot (commandments), Tzedakah (charity), and Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), the children learn to respect themselves, others and the world they live in. We are committed to teaching and promoting respect and understanding of all persons. GJC's Early Childhood Program is open to all!



## PLANNED GIVING & NER TAMID

*Remembering Germantown Jewish Centre in your will, a trust, or retirement asset is a meaningful way to ensure that your commitment to our community continues to help our synagogue thrive for generations to come. For more information on how you can include GJC in your estate plans, please contact Nina Peskin at 215-844-1507 x12.*

# WHAT'S THE POINT

by Susan Weiss

Many years ago while in Saturday Shabbat service I noticed during *hagbah* (lifting the Torah before it is wrapped) that a couple of people pointed to the Torah with their pinky finger wrapped in *tallit* fringe. The following weeks, I observed several more joining in. It is now not uncommon to see many in the congregation raise their little finger wrapped in fringe and point to the Torah during *hagbah* reciting *V'zot ha Torah*. "This is the Torah that Moses placed before the Israelites by the commandments of God through the hand of Moses." I never saw it done in the synagogue I grew up in and it was definitely not done as a group at GJC when I first started attending services. So what's all the pointing? Is there a meaning behind it or is this a strange group phenomenon? He/she does it so I will do it, also?

I let my fingers do the walking to find some reading on the subject, and found that there is a great deal of information about pointing in general. There are various, acceptable and not so acceptable cultural norms about pointing. Here's one interesting piece of trivia: Disney employees are taught to use a two-finger point. They are instructed to use their middle and index fingers. Apparently this is a nod to Walt Disney who used to smoke while he walked the grounds. He would point, holding a cigarette between his two fingers. Who knew?

So what's the *halachic* source about pointing at the Torah? There is none. An early reference to pointing is mentioned by Rabbi Yaakov Culi, who wrote the Ladino Tanakh commentary, *Me'am Lorez*, in the 1700's. Rabbi Culi mentioned he observed this pointing custom in a Sephardic service. There are some sources that say *Ashkenazim* bow (some say before, some after) during *hagbah*. In some Sephardic synagogues *hagbah* is done before the reading to show the congregation to emphasize that this is the source of the reading. This was verified when I asked a friend, who grew up in Morocco, what his

experience was with this. He said they never pointed, but confirmed that *hagbah* was performed before the reading. According to Rabbi Zeff, the ancient rabbis interpreted the word, "this," as written in the Torah as part of a physical action of demonstration, as if God pointed the Torah out to Moses. Is it possible this tradition is to emphasis that physical action? "There it is!" "That's the Torah!" Are we reenacting that moment between God and Moses when God pointed out the Torah? Or, are we highlighting the source of the reading? "This is the source of the reading!" "These are the words."

Next time you are in services look around. Like the iconic opening pointing scene in the TV Superman series, we at GJC have become a group of *hagbah* pointers, but we don't ask, "Is it a bird? Is it a plane?"

We are definite about what it is.

**Vzot haTorah asher sam Moshe lifney benai Yisrael al pi Adonai b'yad Moshe.**

(Deuteronomy 4:44, Numbers 4:37,45 adapted)

Of course, there are many translations and lots of commentary on this sentence. Here are two.

This is the Torah that Moses placed before the Israelites by the commandments of God through the hand of Moses.

This is the Torah placed before the People Israel, to fulfill the word of God.

\* \* \* \* \*

One additional note: I've also noticed early pointing training. Parents of young children often point the Torah out when the Ark is opened. "There it is!"



# NEWS FROM HAZAK (55+ programming)

by Helen Feinberg & Coleman Poses, Co-Chairs

Our program year concluded in June with two wonderful events. On June 2nd, HAZAK and WGJC co-sponsored a talk, "Sex and Consent: Ethical Issues with Intimacy in Aging," led by Dr. Ken Weiss and Rabbi Dayle Friedman. We learned about the legal, ethical, physical, and emotional issues that can arise when people lose the capacity for decision-making, become frailer and/or more emotionally charged, but are still alive in all senses of the word. Dr. Weiss is a forensic psychiatrist who holds the Robert Sadoff Chair of Forensic Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. Rabbi Friedman is a nationally recognized expert on Jewish aging. Her most recent book is *Jewish Wisdom for Growing Older: Finding Your Grit and Grace Beyond Midlife*.

On June 18, we took a fascinating tour of William Penn's Philadelphia with Elise Bromberg, long-time GJC member, as tour guide. She has developed a special tour called "The Holy Experiment: William Penn's Philadelphia—Challenging Intolerance in the 1660s." We went to several sites—The Quaker Meeting House, Mikveh Israel synagogue, an Anglican church, a Catholic church, Welcome Park and the Liberty Bell, to learn the commonalities and their relationship is to William Penn's philosophy.

At this writing, HAZAK is planning a trip to the Woodmere Museum to see the Annual Juried Exhibition on a weekday in August. Details will be forthcoming.

Finally, in response to our recent survey about the HAZAK Book Group, we are changing the meeting time from morning to afternoon, at least for the summer months, to see if more people will be able to attend. The next meeting will be Wednesday, July 10, at 2:00 pm, when we will be discussing *The Weight of Ink* by Rachel Kadish.

Have a wonderful summer.

## DID YOU KNOW?

HAZAK programs are planned for those age 55+, and are geared to reflect both common interests and get us to "stretch" to try new activities as well. Our well-attended book group meets monthly all year long. HAZAK also sponsors book talks by local authors, as well as speakers on topics of particular importance to our interests, and several times a year we show great films. We also take day trips to cultural and natural sites in the area, often to places members have never been. HAZAK is for all of us to stay connected to GJC and to each other: to venture out and experience parts of our city we haven't seen before, to read, learn and talk together, to keep us strong. We hope you will join us. Membership is \$10/year.

## PRIDE 2019

by Donna Tartasky



It has been almost thirty-four years since my younger brother, Paul, died of AIDS. I hardly talk about him, though my twin brother and I sometimes reminisce. My brother was "out of the closet" since he was a young adult. When Paul died, it was nothing short of a *shonda* to acknowledge a family member had AIDS. My father, born in Eastern Europe, called gays "fags," yet he helped care for Paul. My mother, who was much more accepting, would tell friends he had brain cancer. That was the language used in early 1980s to describe homosexuality and those who died from AIDS.

At the time, I was a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing and was told to keep quiet about the fact that my brother died of AIDS. I walked around

somewhat numb for about a year. Then Rock Hudson passed away and we started to hear more and more about AIDS. Someone from *The Jewish Exponent* wanted to interview me the year after Paul died, but the rabbi at the synagogue I attended at the time advised against this. I did not do it, and I regret that decision.

Thirty-four years later, I have not forgotten Paul. I chose to volunteer and be a greeter on Shabbat this year during the Pride weekend. Since I am writing this before the weekend, I cannot write about my experience of being a greeter. I am sure I will meet lots of nice people; a few who might actually have AIDS. Unlike the early 80s, none of us have to worry about catching it from casual contact. Although we have come a long way, we still have a long way to go in accepting LGBTQ people.





**GJC extends much love and gratitude to:**

Andrea Jacobs, Maria Pulzetti, Jakob Slifker, Yoel Solis,  
Rabbi Robert Tabak, and countless others who  
are LGBTQ+, allies, and advocates

Michael Beer, for generously supporting  
Friday Night PRIDE and PRIDE Shabbat

The Harold & Renee Berger Family Engagement  
Endowment for making Friday Night Pride JAM possible

Connie & Sam Katz, for sponsoring the rainbow balloon arch

Rivkah Walton, for sharing photographs of the event

Grow & Behold Kosher Pastured Meats for donating  
hamburgers and hotdogs for the Sh'BBQ

The Men's Club & Women of GJC, and the many  
volunteers who gave their time, energy, and support

Kate Lawn, Teena Robinson & Rebecca Pacquet  
for the extraordinary job they did on this event

The Wolfe Family Foundation, for their support  
in all GJC programming







# GJC ALUMNI

## Report from a GJC Alumnus

by Stephen Tobias

How lovely of GJC to ask me to report on “My Life Since Germantown.” Congratulations on keeping the connections alive!

I retired from my career and then left Philadelphia in November of 2012. My wife Rebecca had died two years earlier, during Passover, 2010. I have especially fond memories of the GJC community from the time of her illness and loss. I am deeply grateful for the way in which you were there with us each step of the way, as Rebecca approached and finally went through that door that she could only go through alone.

The summer following her loss, I felt I had to get out of town and be alone with my soul, so I packed up my car and headed west to California where our son, Jake, lives. For this trip, the sixth time I’ve crossed the continent by car, I chose to go through Canada, which was exactly what I needed: solitude and North America. I visited my Canadian cousins, David in Peterborough, Ontario, and his mother, Hilah, and her daughter, Sarah, on their ranches near Pincher Creek, Alberta.

Our son, Jake, has lived in here Oakland, California, since 1996. Our son, Zach, who has lived in Madrid since 2003, joined us that summer for his annual visit. Then he and I shared the road (and quite a few campsites) back to Philadelphia along the northern US route.

After a year of mourning, I accessed JDate to look for someone. I had only one hope in mind—to meet someone, fall in love, and live happily ever after. I was a little panicky in the face of the gap Rebecca had left inside of me. Online dating for me was frustrating, stressful, and humiliating—maybe nine or ten disappointments for each decent date; maybe a dozen dates before there was any spark at all. I’m more realistic now, more comfortable with being alone.

I did meet a woman who, unfortunately, turned out not to be truly available. She hadn’t let go of her commitment to her “separated” husband, which I learned only after becoming crazy about her. The frustration became unbearable over the course of a year of seeing each other; to break the affair I had to get away.

I’d long held the fantasy of living abroad, reaching for mastery of a new language, seeing a new culture with the beginner’s mind of a foreigner. I’d been learning Spanish for many years, and for “historical reasons,” one might say, I chose Bolivia, and rather than selecting the capital city, which is too high in altitude to breathe, too hectic, I took myself off to Cochabamba.



Steve Tobias giving a Pesach blessing to his son Jake, who is giving a blessing to his son, Arthur.

Stated mildly, Bolivia, where strangers are often viewed with suspicion, was not the place for me to fill the gap. After I’d spent five months there, my grandson Arthur was born and with great relief, I pulled up my Bolivian stakes, archived my lessons learned, and came to live here in Oakland, in 2013.

My sister and her husband have been living nearby for many years. In 2015, my granddaughter Rebecca was born here, and now I am able to spend a fair amount of time with my beautiful family.

I also get to live in California, which I *love*, and in the Bay Area, which I love even more, despite the degradation brought by filthy silicon lucre.

Over the years, I've also been visiting our son, Zach, each year in Madrid. One day back in 2011, he told me of one of his students I might want to meet, which I did. Her name is Pilar, and as we came to know each other, we found each other increasingly *a gusto*, comfy together. So we took a chance, took a two-week trip to South India together, and when that was done, we decided to become a kind of a couple.

A companion six thousand miles away wasn't exactly my idea of "living happily ever after." I still wish for proximity and intimacy, but this is working out just fine despite the limits. Pilar is very special. I go to Spain for two or three months each year, and she comes here for a month or two. We've now done some serious traveling together, and we share some basic values and mutual interests, including those of perfecting our knowledge of each other's language and civilization. Our conversations shift back and forth between English and Spanish, with French doing duty when one can't explain a word to the other. We are becoming increasingly bicultural, and increasingly *a gusto* in this unconventional relationship. For the times when she is not here, I've carved out a pretty good round of activities.

I'm feeling my age increasingly (just turning 75), so one of my major hobbies now is seeing doctors, undergoing procedures, doing lots of physical therapy, losing weight, trying my best under the circumstances. I'll spare you a full organ recital; suffice it to say I have nothing grave, but aging is not for babies.

I've done a number of OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) courses at Berkeley; I find classes a little academically thin, but quite stimulating. I attend a weekly singing workshop—a bunch of us "geezer" who get together to learn materials, harmonize and learn something of "bel canto." Choral singing is pretty new to me, but what a joy!

I have a number of friends, some of them from forty-something years ago when Rebecca and I lived in the Bay Area and raised children here—fewer friends than in Mt. Airy, but some of my best of all.

The 2016 election, in hindsight probably inevitable, was a big shock for me as for everybody else I know, so I've become more politically active than ever. I go to meetings of the Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club, which has an extremely engaged and knowledgeable membership. After all, this is probably the most

committed, politically progressive community in the whole United States; it's one of the things I really love about living in California.

The Wellstone Club linked me with Indivisible Berkeley; we went into California's Central Valley many weekends last spring and summer to push turnout for Josh Harder, who is now his district's Democratic congressman. One weekend I also helped the people in Carson City, Nevada, elect their new senator, Jacky Rosen. It's kind of fun to know that she began her political career by being elected president of her synagogue.

Other activities here include the Bay Area chapter of Antioch College Alumni Association, an exceptional group of people (we're called "Antiochians") who are organizing and paying for the resurrection of this exceptional and progressive college, which closed down in 2008. Antioch is now about to graduate its fourth class since forming as a brand new accredited institution. I've made good Bay Area friends of Antiochians, only a few of whom I knew before graduating fifty-three years ago.

One thing I'm doing less than ever is Jewish life. I'm not a member of a Bay Area shul, and for affiliation, I have an associate membership at GJC. I take weekly Hebrew lessons with Max Weinryb (whom Dorshei Derekh members may know because he spends Passover with Philadelphia family and davens at DD when he's in town). He's an amazing scholar; we're going through Nehama Leibowitz's Torah commentary in Hebrew. It offers long quotes from Jewish scholars from the ages, so we're learning all the varieties of Hebrew.

My other Jewish activities include keeping a pretty liberal version of *kashrut*, attending High Holy Day services—sometimes at the Orthodox shul where I was Treasurer back in the early 80's, or at Minyan Daphna, which comes closest to Minyan Masorti (maybe the 70's version, with a very young membership).

Part of my Jewish disengagement comes from my feelings about the activities of the State of Israel, because of my outrage. I've long been skeptical of the claim that Israel "doesn't have a negotiating partner," but it was the June 2014 attack on Gaza that finally pushed me across a certain line. I'm reluctant to scream "BDS" from the rooftops, but I'm attracted to the argument that Israel needs to feel serious pressure to halt its brutal and unjust occupation.

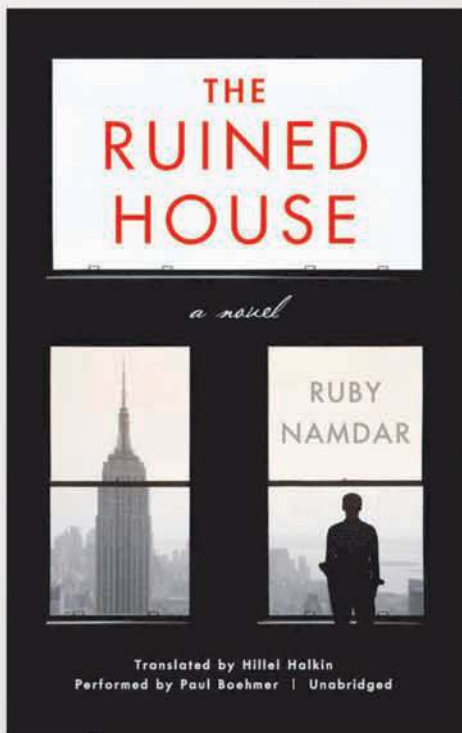
Despite all this, I feel extremely Jewish.

Thank you all for being, still today, my "home" Jewish community.



# ONE BOOK, ONE GJC

Germantown Jewish Centre invites you to participate  
in an extraordinary author event.



## ONE BOOK, ONE GJC: The Ruined House

The winner of the Sapir Prize, Israel's highest literary award, Ruby Namdar's *The Ruined House* follows Andrew P. Cohen, a professor of comparative culture at New York University, who is at the zenith of his life. Admired by his students and published in prestigious literary magazines, he is about to receive a coveted promotion—the crowning achievement of an enviable career. He is on excellent terms with Linda, his ex-wife, and his two daughters adore him. His girlfriend, Ann Lee, a former student half his age, offers lively companionship. A man of elevated taste, education, and culture, he is a model of urbanity and success.

But the manicured surface of his world begins to crack when strange and inexplicable visions involving an ancient religious ritual take hold of his mind and upend his seemingly serene existence. Interspersed throughout the novel are pages from an ancient Talmudic text, harking back to the imagined golden age of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Hidden in the small letters of this frenzied, semi-opaque

“other” narrative lies the mysterious key to understanding the drama of Andrew's life.

Mesmerizing and unsettling, *The Ruined House* unfolds over the course of one year, as Andrew's world unravels and he is forced to question all his beliefs. Steeped in the tradition of the greatest Jewish American novels, Namdar's brilliant debut captures the privilege and pedantry of New York intellectual life in the opening years of the twenty-first century. In sumptuous and incantatory prose, Namdar spins a nuanced and provocative tale of materialism, tradition, faith, and the search for meaning in contemporary culture.

GJC's Little Shop is offering a special pre-event discount on “*The Ruined House*.” The books are available to purchase starting in July in the Little Shop (cash/check/card) or in the GJC office (cash/check) for \$13.50. Books will be available to purchase at the event for \$17.00.

## SAVE THE DATE

*Israel Programming @ GJC, the Men's Club, HAZAK, and Women of GJC present*

### Ruby Namdar: The Ruined House

**Author Discussion & Book Signing**

**Sunday, October 27 at 10 AM**

Ruby Namdar was born and raised in Jerusalem to a family of Iranian-Jewish heritage. His first book, *Haviv*, won The Ministry of Culture's Award for Best First Publication. His novel *The Ruined House* has won the Sapir Prize, Israel's most prestigious literary award. He currently lives in New York City and teaches Jewish literature, focusing on Biblical and Talmudic narrative.



# TODAH RABBAH!

## CONTRIBUTIONS from MARCH 2019–MAY 2019

Sincere thanks and appreciation to those who remember to honor their friends and loved ones through their generous contributions.

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		in appreciation of Ari Witkin, for his service to GJC and good luck to him and Liz (and baby Witkin) in Detroit
		in memory of Enid Videlock, mother of Erik Videlock
		in memory of Ronald Stone, brother of Sandy Meyer
		in memory of Larry Garber, brother of Marcy Fish
		in memory of Mollie Needleman, grandmother of Mitchell Berk
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If you are interested in writing for The Centre Call, we would love to hear your ideas! Please contact Kate Lawn at [program@germantownjewishcentre.org](mailto:program@germantownjewishcentre.org). The deadline for every issue is the 1st of the previous month.



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