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Jackson Congregation Embraced by Community as a Bat Mitzvah is Celebrated at Northminster Baptist Church



Beth Israel President Zach Shemper holds the Torah during the Jan. 16 service at Northminster Baptist Church. Credit: Larry Brook

By Larry Brook

This first appeared in Southern Jewish Life, reprinted with permission.

It isn't often that a Shabbat evening d'var Torah receives a standing ovation.

But at Northminster Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., where Beth Israel marked its first Shabbat following the devastating arson on Jan. 10, there was an air of determination "not just to survive, but to thrive."

At the Jan. 16 service, Ben Russell, the spiritual leader of Beth Israel and a current rabbinical student, said the focus of the weekend would be the bat mitzvah of Tamar Sharp, "a weekend of continuing our Jewish life without any pause." Nevertheless, with a sanctuary filled with Beth Israel members, as well as members of Northminster and representatives from several other area churches, some processing of the week needed to be done as a community.

Before the prayer for healing, Rus-

sell noted that the entire congregation should be on the list this week.

It was a vastly different setting than the previous Shabbat evening on Jan. 9, when the congregation held its board installation during services. Later that night, around 3 a.m., a fire was set in the lobby, destroying the library and offices, and sending soot and smoke throughout the building.

Stephen Spencer Pittman, 19, has been charged with arson on the state and federal levels, and the state indictment has already added the hate crimes enhancement.

Russell said "A few days ago, someone tried to wound us. Someone tried to destroy what we love. Someone tried to tell us that we do not belong in our own city. That being visibly Jewish is dangerous, that being proudly Jewish is a risk. That being a synagogue is an invitation for hatred. What they failed



Tamar Sharp carries the Torah through the sanctuary at her bat mitzvah. Credit: Larry Brook

to understand is that we are not made of wood and paper and shelves. We are made of Torah, memory, community, stubborn love, and 3,000 years of defiance."

He said "We are shaken, but we are not scared. We are wounded, but we are not weak. We are grieving, but we are

not giving up. Not now, not ever."

Russell charged the congregation with going a step further – "The cause surviving is not enough. We will not only survive, we will thrive. We will not only rebuild, we will expand. We will

(See Jackson Page 4)

The 12th Annual Morris and Mollye Fogelman International Jewish Film Festival is Well Underway

The 12th Annual Morris and Mollye Fogelman International Jewish Film Festival is well underway, having screened five of this year's eight films.

From the beginning on January 22, we've screened:

"The Ring," the Israeli Academy Award winning heart-warming dramady about three generations and the family history that reconnects them.

"Diane Warren: Relentless," a captivating, surprising and inspiring underdog story, providing audiences with a rarely seen glimpse behind one of the most successful and prolific songwriters of all time: Diane Warren. This film has just been nominated for an American Academy Award.

"Pink Lady," the story of Bati who appears to have the perfect life. But when her husband is blackmailed by a

gang and she discovers his secret affair, her world begins to unravel.

"Tatami," the first feature co-directed by Iranian & Israeli Filmmakers, and winner of four Israeli Academy Awards, is based on true events, following an Iranian female judoka and her coach Maryam, as they travel to the Judo World Championship, intent on bringing home Iran's first gold medal.

Finally, on Tuesday, February 10, at 7 p.m., the festival screened "No Name Restaurant," a heartwarming, culture-clash odyssey about an improbable friendship between a stranded Brooklyn Jew and an Arab nomad in the vast desert.

If you haven't been able to see any of these, it's not too late as there are still several exciting films to come!

On Thursday, February 12, at 7 p.m. "For The Living" will screen. This doc-

umentary is about the "Ride for the Living" a bike ride created by JCC Krakow, which goes from the Auschwitz Concentration Camp to JCC Krakow.

This screening will be attended by Producer Lisa Effress and a Q&A will follow the screening.

Admission to "For The Living" is FREE, thanks to the generosity of the screening's Community Partner, Facing History and Ourselves.

Sunday, February 15, at 2 p.m. is the rescheduled date for "The Stamp Thief," one of the two films that needed to be rescheduled due to the wintry weather.

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South is the Community Partner for "The Stamp Thief."

This film – told as part detective story, part heist film, part untold history – investigates a tale dating back to the

Holocaust: that a mysterious Nazi stole priceless stamp collections from concentration camp victims and buried the stolen stamps in a small town in Poland.

This year's festival closes with "The Property," on Thursday, February 19, at 7 p.m. This dramady centers on a grandmother and her granddaughter embarking on a journey to Poland to reclaim their family property seized during World War II.

The Community Partner for this film is the Memphis & Shelby County Film and Television Commission.

For more information, to watch trailers, or to get tickets visit jccmemphis.org/FilmFest or for more information contact Jonathan McCarter, program director for Cultural Arts, at jmccarter@jccmemphis.org or 901-259-9248. **HW**

My Teen Israel Experience



Jonah Siegel tubing with friends in Eilat.

Jonah Siegel is a junior at the Cooper Yeshiva High School for Boys. Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund provided him with a Teen Israel Experience grant to offset the costs of his B'nei Akiva Mach Hach Ba Aretz Israel program. All rising juniors and seniors are eligible for grants of up to \$3,000 to attend a recognized teen summer or semester program in Israel. Teen Israel Experience applications for Summer 2026 are open and can be accessed at Lemsky Endowment Fund | Jewish Community Partners (jcpmemphis.org)

By Jonah Siegel

When signing up for Bnei Akiva's Mach Hach summer program in Israel, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. Growing up in Memphis, Israel always felt like a world away. But through these five exciting weeks in Israel, I formed a deep connection with our Jewish homeland.

From the moment that I stepped off the plane, I knew this land was special. The views were spectacular, there was palpable energy, and our activities were unforgettable. We rode camels in the desert, and it felt like we had traveled back in time. Hiking was another highlight. Some hikes took us through the desert, where the view stretched on forever under the rising sun. Others were water hikes, where we splashed through streams and scrambled over rocks. I

loved the challenge of pushing myself and the feeling of accomplishment when we reached those incredible views.

Another highlight was the people. I was surrounded by 550 teens, all of us there to explore Israel. I connected immediately with many people and made some amazing friends. We sang songs, shared stories, stayed up way past curfew laughing, and encouraged each other on the toughest adventures. Those friendships made every experience much more meaningful.

In addition, Israeli food was on a whole new level. I was obsessed with the warm pita stuffed with falafel and hummus, as well as the spiced shawarma. Breakfast was also delicious and filling, with all the cheeses, eggs, and burekas (savory pastries).

The most powerful part of the trip was how deeply I connected with the land itself; before I went, I wasn't sure how strong that feeling would be. I'd always heard people say that Israel feels like home, but I didn't know if I'd feel the same way. Then I stood at the Kotel in Jerusalem, walked through those ancient streets, and watched the sun set over the skyline and something just clicked. I felt this mix of belonging and connection that I'd never experienced before.

Being in Israel showed me that being Jewish isn't just about today's wonderful Memphis community. It's about being part of something so much bigger. It is something that goes back thousands

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Feb. 13, 2026 / 26 Shevat, 57865:22 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. Feb. 14, 2026 / 27 Shevat, 5786 6:20 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Mishpatim Shekalim

of years and is still going strong today. In Israel, I felt my history come alive. It wasn't just stories anymore. It was real, and I was right there in the middle of it.

By the end of the trip, I knew I'd changed in ways I hadn't even expected. I left with a close bond to the land of Israel, my people, and my own identity. The adventures, friendships, food, and

the landscapes all came together to give me one of the most sensational experiences of my life. It was a turning point that I'll remember forever. I'm so glad that I went.

I am very grateful to the Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund for helping to make my Mach Hach trip to Israel possible. HW



Jonah with Jack Singer after Ishai Ribo concert near Tel Aviv.

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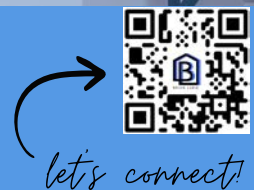


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New Screening Date: "The Stamp Thief" Sunday, Feb. 15, 2 pm

By Shoshana Cenker

Sunday, Feb. 15, at 2 p.m., is the re-scheduled showing of the "The Stamp Thief." The movie is part of the 12th annual Morris and Mollye Fogelman International Jewish Film Festival, which was a bit derailed due to the winter storm.

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South has partnered with the Memphis Jewish Community Center (MJCC) to present the "The Stamp Thief" screening.

"The Stamp Thief" is a gripping documentary that blends detective story, historical investigation, and heist-film suspense to uncover a little-known chapter of Holocaust history. The film explores a World War II story, when a mysterious Nazi is believed to have stolen priceless stamp collections from Jews sent to con-

centration camps and hidden them in a small town in Poland.

TV producer Gary Gilbert — best known for Seinfeld — sets out to uncover the truth and return the stolen stamps to their rightful owners. His audacious plan involves staging a fake movie production in Poland to gain access to key locations and individuals connected to the story. What follows is an "Argo"-like real-life adventure filled with unexpected twists, moral complexity and emotional stakes.

Running just over an hour and a half, "The Stamp Thief" is entertaining and deeply meaningful.

Tickets and additional festival information are available through the MJCC. **HW**

The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

Lunch is served at 11:30 a.m., and speakers and entertainment start at noon.

Monday, February 16

Speaker: Rabbi Cantor David Julian
Topic: Why Be Jewish?

Rabbi Julian's talks are always interesting, and you will probably learn something. Come for lunch at 11:30 a.m. and stay for the talk at 12 p.m.

Wednesday, February 18

Join us at 12 p.m. for the February MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Monthly Luncheon featuring Diana Stein.

Diana Stein has been playing piano professionally for about 30 years. Her repertoire includes standards, blues, jazz, ragtime, theater music, & some boogie-woogie! Her greatest pleasure is reaching out with music, and touching those who listen, or just making them feel happy. She enjoys having audiences sing with her or getting up to dance!

Entertainment is provided in partnership with Creative Aging. The luncheon is sponsored by Town Village Audubon Park.

The cost for the Monthly Luncheon is only \$5. The MJCC Bus is available for those that live near the MJCC for only \$2 roundtrip. RSVP by 12 p.m. on Tuesday, February 17 at 901-761-0810 or stop by the MJCC front desk.

Monday, February 23

Special Speaker: Elise Meyers

Declutter 1-2-3!! Tips on cleaning out the 'No Longer Needed Stuff' in your house!

Elise is always a popular speaker. Come learn how to "declutter" your house easily.



Diana Stein

Wednesday, February 25

Field Trip to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Join us for a field trip to St. Jude, which will include a special tour from one of the doctors on staff. Come learn more about this lifesaving institution and the amazing work they do for children with cancer.

Space on the bus is limited so don't wait to reserve your spot!

Only \$2 for the roundtrip bus from the MJCC.

To make a reservation, contact: Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator

901-259-9220
stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org
Steve's hours are Monday-Thursday, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Reservations may also be made through the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810. **HW**

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Jackson...

(Continued From Page 1)



Sophie Sharp Fetchko lights the Shabbat candles, with Student Rabbi Ben Russell Credit: Larry Brook

not only endure, we will lead. This is not the time to withdraw or to hide. This is not the time to shrink our footprint or lower our voice. This is the time to join together.”

While going back to Pharaoh there have been those who try to intimidate the Jewish people, Jewish history is not about being victims, he said. “It is a history of builders, of resisters, of people who take ashes and create institutions, who take trauma and create prayer, who take fear and create children named Hayim, life.”

He urged the congregants to not “stand quietly on the sidelines of our own story.” He urged, “stand tall. Be proud, be present, link arms, join committees, commit to minyan, sing loudly, learn Torah, help rebuild, and refuse to let anyone else define our future. Because our story is not finished, and we are not alone. And this community will not only survive, it will thrive.”

The evening’s other standing ovation came toward the end of the service, when Jackson Mayor John Horhn was introduced. He arrived shortly after the service began and stayed through the reception.

As everyone arrived for the Shabbat evening service on Jan. 16, Northminster Senior Pastor Scott Dickison stood in the lobby, welcoming the Beth Israel congregants. He said Northminster considers Beth Israel “as our closest friends in Jackson” since the church was founded in 1967 and was invited to use the previous Beth Israel building as its first home.

“We are grateful to be able to stand with them in this really difficult time,” Dickison said. “We told them they are welcome here for as long as would be helpful, and we mean that. But I think the main thing is just to know that they have a place.”

In the sanctuary, a large organ dominates the back wall of the pulpit, something which Russell joked Beth Israel pianist Tim Moak “isn’t allowed to touch.”

In front of the low pulpit was a table covered with a white cloth, where the candles were lit on Shabbat evening by Sharp’s daughter, Sophie Sharp Fetchko, followed by Sharp’s husband, Peter, doing the kiddush.

That table was also used for reading the Torah on Shabbat morning. A four-foot Star of David painted silver was

leaning against the front of the table, a counterpoint to the 12-foot polished wooden cross hanging on the back wall to the right side of the organ.

After the service began with the singing of “Yedid Nefesh,” Sarah Thomas, Beth Israel’s first vice president, read a message from Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, sending “the love of our entire Reform movement, over 820 congregations with more than 2 million souls throughout North America, who are with you in spirit tonight.” He said it was “incredibly inspiring” that Northminster had opened its doors to Beth Israel.

Jacobs spoke about the ninth plague, darkness, that the Egyptians “did not share the distress of another group who were their neighbors. They were involved in the darkness of prejudice, hatred, and indifference.” In contrast, the Israelites had light in their homes. “We think of all of you and know that there is much light in your midst,” he said. “We pray that you continue to bask in the light of community, in the light of solidarity, and the light of hope for better days ahead.”

He also offered a special blessing for Sharp, as “holy moments like tomorrow’s bat mitzvah bring joy to this entire congregation as you affirm that living lives of Jewish commitment is what this congregation is all about.”

He also referenced King Weekend, saying “let us remember that the antisemitism is not the only form of racism coursing through our world,” and King “taught us that darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that. So together, let’s banish the darkness.”

Though the Torah reading would be the next morning during the bat mitzvah ceremony, given that two Torahs were destroyed in the fire, Russell said “it is important for us to see the Torah in our midst,” and led a Torah procession through the church sanctuary that evening, as congregants sang a succession of songs.

With two of the congregation’s Torahs destroyed in the library ark, and the other five in the sanctuary damaged by smoke, Beth Israel is using a scroll from B’nai Israel in Hattiesburg. Before the scroll was “returned to the ark” – placed on a Torah stand and covered with a tallit – Beth Israel President Zach Shemper



Beth Israel, a week after the fire. Credit: Larry Brook

was holding it. Shemper, who has Hattiesburg roots, said that Torah is special to him because it was dedicated to his grandmother.

The prayer books that Beth Israel will be using for the near future also came from Hattiesburg and Temple Israel in Memphis. The reception after services came mostly from members of Touro Synagogue in New Orleans – and included a hefty supply of king cake, which disappeared quickly.

Shemper said that as he walked through the sanctuary during the Torah procession, he had tears in his eyes – not necessarily from what the congregation has been enduring, but “tears of happiness from what’s come out of it” through the community response. “We’ve been reached out to by probably 10 to 12 different churches to offer their place of worship. They’ve said to me specifically, you know, our house of worship is your place of worship. Tell us your needs, and we will accommodate you.”

He added, “when what was done to us was to put us down, to tell us that we’re not wanted. The city, all of us, all of you, had done the exact opposite. You know, you not only said, we do want you, but you want to see the longevity of the Jews in Jackson... it means a tremendous amount.”

The church’s bells, which could be faintly heard in the sanctuary, provided a couple of subtle interfaith moments. The 7 p.m. bells began at the end of the silent part of the Amidah, followed immediately by “Yihyu L’ratzon,” “may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable.” The next morning, the 11 a.m. bells began during an English reading after Barchu, and the Shema began just after the bells concluded.

During the weekend, Russell wore a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles kippah and acknowledged it might not be the most solemn in his collection. But he highlighted the character named Raphael. “A good Hebrew name,” he said, which means “God heals.”

He also said that when he headed off to rabbinical school for the first time, he liked to have something from Beth Israel with him, so he took a tallit from the library. Putting it on for the service, he said that it was likely the only remaining tallit from there, unless others had “slipped out of the synagogue” over the past months or years.

Though the fire was barely mentioned

on Shabbat morning, a poignant reminder of the circumstances was found poking out from behind a hymnal a few rows back, no doubt left there the evening before. It was a bat mitzvah program that had been left in one of the books from Hattiesburg, for Sarah Bernstein. The date of the ceremony was January 10, 2026.

Beth Israel member Arty Finkelberg, while passing out books to those entering the sanctuary, pointed out his nametag, where he had a sticker changing the name of the congregation to Bethminster.

The service unfolded much as any adult bat mitzvah ceremony would. At the conclusion of her d’var Torah, Sharp said two weeks earlier she had written “how lucky am I to be in one of my favorite places surrounded by my favorite people?”

“So much has changed in the two weeks since I wrote those words... And yet today, I can say, how lucky am I, and how lucky is our congregation, to be welcomed by Northminster Church, to have a temporary home, as we rebuild and heal,” she said. “The greater Jackson community has been incredibly loving and supportive during this difficult time.”

She was reminded of an English prayer that is often said at Shabbat services: “Standing on the parted shores of history, we still believe what we were taught. Before ever we stood at Sinai’s foot, that wherever we go, it is eternally Egypt, that there is a better place, a promised land, that the winding way to that promise passes through the wilderness. That there is no way to get from here to there, except by joining hands and marching together.”

Sharp concluded, “We have rejoined hands with Northminster, and with so many others, as we rebuild our home.”

The congregation also held a Havdalah service at the Holocaust memorial, located outdoors behind Beth Israel. It was not damaged.

A regional gathering, “Honoring Beth Israel: A Shabbat of Jewish Life and Resilience in the South,” was planned for Jan. 31 at the Reform movement’s Henry S. Jacobs Camp, located about 45 minutes south of Jackson.

Larry Brook is the publisher and editor of *Southern Jewish Life Magazine*, which is a reader-supported publication. To receive new posts and support his work, consider becoming a free or paid subscriber at sjlmag.com. **HW**



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A special project by
Memphis Jewish HOME & REHAB

In 2027, Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab (MJHR) will celebrate 100 years of serving patients. In honor of this accomplishment and all the people who made it possible, we are telling 100 of their stories. Over the next two years, we will publish 100 Stories for 100 Years – a weekly column spotlighting resident, staff, and lay leader stories with the Home from throughout our history. This week, we are sharing words from one of our past presidents and one of the original MJHR Golf Tournament Chairs, Mark Halperin.

Meet Mark Halperin



Mark Halperin

By Shoshana Center

MJHR: Tell us about yourself (hometown, education, family, hobbies, career).

I was born in Chicago, and we moved to Memphis for my dad's job in 1959, when I was 10. I graduated from MUS, then went to the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. I was in the Naval Air Reserve for about a year, before graduating from UT in 1972.

After graduation, I started working for Boyle Investment Company – I'll have been with the firm for 53 years this February. I've enjoyed being active in the community, serving on boards and as president at Temple Israel, the Union



Mark Halperin and Steve Wishnia volunteer at the MJHR Annual Golf Tournament.

for Reform Judaism's board, founding board member of Triumph Bank, and, of course, on MJHR's board and a past president.

MJHR: How did you become connected to MJHR?

My connection with the Home started back in the early 90s, when the new location was about to be built in Cordova. I thought my experience in real estate development business might be useful. I eventually ended up on the MJHR board and later became president. I've

made wonderful friends from the Home. MJHR is a wonderful institution with great professional leadership. The executive director, Bobby Meadows, is one of a kind, a special guy. He has his heart in the Home's mission.

MJHR: Share your favorite MJHR story.

Every now and then I get a call from someone who needs help getting into the Home – they ask if I can be a referral. I had a friend whose wife had broken her leg, and she had other health

issues – she was at Baptist Hospital, it was a really sad story. Around 4 p.m. the same day, I called Bobby and told him about her. Bobby said he'd look into it. The next day, I called Bobby for an update. He said he'd just left her room, to which I responded, "Oh, you're at Baptist?" Bobby replied, "No, we moved her into the Home around 10 p.m. last night." That kind of dedication shows how Bobby feels about the people that the Home is trying to help.

MJHR: What do you wish for the future 100 years of the organization?

I hope it's able to survive in a pretty complicated environment and continues to do so much good for so many people. I think it's amazing how infrequently you hear anything negative about the Home. It's a pretty amazing place.

MJHR: Anything else you'd like to share about the Home?

I'm so pleased that I've had the opportunity to try and help such an amazing institution, staff and residents.

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Hundreds of Israelis Try to Enter Gaza During Resettlement Rally

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Hundreds of Israelis attempted to cross into the Gaza Strip last Thursday evening during a rally in support of Jewish resettlement of the enclave, with some entering the buffer zone, the Israel Defense Forces said.

The attempt to breach the border fence took place during an event organized by the Nachala Settlement Movement, which works to develop Israeli outposts in Judea and Samaria and has recently promoted plans to resettle Gaza’s former Jewish communities.

The protest, held under the slogan “We will not surrender to Trump’s dictates: No to an international Gaza, yes to a Jewish Gaza,” saw some 1,500 activists march toward the Strip with the goal of planting trees.

“During the past few hours, hundreds of Israeli civilians have attempted to approach the fence in an area designated as a closed military zone and prohibited to civilian entry,” the IDF said.

(See Gaza Page 9)



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Connecting the Dots: The Power of Aggregation

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors

Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com • fa.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael-stein

To have less stress and more confidence about the future, taking the time to review account statements is helpful. But it can be even more meaningful to have a single place where you can see the total picture of all of your assets and liabilities — and how it may fluctuate over time. Building a comprehensive account summary or net worth statement can make it easier to connect the dots. As more dots are connected, you get a more meaningful picture and see a clearer, more actionable path.

As individuals build wealth, it becomes more challenging to keep track of one's overall financial picture. There will likely be household cash accounts, investment accounts, retirement plans, real estate, loans, and a number of credit cards. Executives may have stock options and other equity-based benefits that vest over time, and deferred compensation plans. Business owners often have multiple entities related to their core business, along with real estate holdings connected to the business. You may have private investments as well.

So gathering financial information and documents from different sources can become a bit of a chore.

How do successful people do this?

Don't get overly complicated. Build something that works for you. Remember that the goal is to see the big picture, not to focus on the microscopic details.

Let technology do some of the work for you. Many credit cards offer very useful spending summaries. And increasingly, financial institutions are offering account aggregation tools that make it easier to see all your accounts, even at various institutions, in one place. After you take a little bit of time to set this up, you don't need to wait for a monthly statement or quarterly review to get a broader view of your finances. In many cases, values are updated regularly, so you can get a current picture any time it's convenient for you to go online or check in on mobile.

Work with an experienced professional. An investment plan and net worth statement can form a "foundation built from facts" that may enable really good (if not always easy) conversations about spending, values, choices, and things to look forward to.

If I feel pretty sure that I am doing okay, why do all this extra work?

One reason is that having good metrics appears to be a hallmark of good performance. For example: successful business owner or executives can quickly tell you the key metrics that they watch to know how their business is doing. Athletes measure their training (and their rest) so that they will know whether they are progressing toward performance goals.

Another reason is, there is a payoff. We generally have more confidence when we know how we're doing. Uncertainty, on the other hand, is likely to increase anxiety and stress.

Building a net worth statement is not an end in itself. But developing this positive habit can lead to lifelong benefits by providing a starting point for meaningful conversations about what we

want our money to accomplish.

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OBITUARIES



Bettye Ann Levy Berlin

Bettye Ann Levy Berlin of Germantown, Tennessee, passed away peacefully at Baptist Reynolds Hospice House on Thursday, January 22, 2026, at the age of 79. She is survived by her husband, Neal Berlin, daughter Jessica Berlin and granddaughter Rayna Berlin. She was predeceased by her parents, Jacques and Roslyn Levy; aunts and uncles Manuel Applebaum, Milton and Myra Applebaum and Karl Applebaum of Vicksburg, Miss., of blessed memory.

Bettye pursued her education in Speech Pathology, earning a Bachelor of Science degree from Louisiana State University and a Master of Science from Vanderbilt University. Her professional journey began in Broward County, Fla., and continued to New York University Medical Center, before she established her career in Memphis, Tenn. Over a span of more than 50 years, she served as a Speech Pathologist in Memphis City Schools, Desoto County Schools, and Porter Leath HeadStart Program, ultimately retiring in 2021. After retiring, Bettye remained active in her passions, which included traveling, engaging with the arts, and volunteering with organizations such as The Memphis Zoo, The Orpheum Theater, Germantown Performing Arts Center, MIFA Toys for Tots, Hadassah, Memphis Jewish Federation and Bornblum Jewish Community School. She cherished spending quality time with her family, friends and former colleagues. Bettye will be remembered for her dedication to improving the world through her various contributions and her unwavering passion for service.

Services were held in the Levy-Cooper Chapel at the Temple Israel Cemetery in Memphis, Tenn. on Feb. 5.

Donations in her memory may be sent to the following organizations: The Memphis Zoo (www.memphiszoo.org), Hadassah (<https://donate.hadassah.org/secure/donate-hadassah>), The Orpheum Theatre Group (<https://secure.qgiv.com/for/otg/>), Henry S Jacobs Camp (<https://jacobscamp.org/>). **HW**



Shirley Roberts

Shirley Roberts, 93, of Memphis, Tennessee, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, January 28, 2026, after a brief illness. Born in Memphis in 1932 to Leo and Gertrude Goldberger, Shirley lived a life defined by unconditional love, quiet grace, and an irreplaceable joy that touched everyone who knew her. Her father, Leo, founded The Hebrew Watchman in 1925 and her brother, Herman, later became the editor-in-chief.

At 18, Shirley married the love of her life, Ted Roberts, beginning a devoted partnership that would span nearly 70 years. Together they lived throughout the United States, spending eight memorable months in Israel in 1971. For the last 48 years, Shirley called Huntsville, Alabama, home, returning to her beloved Memphis four months before her passing.

At 50, Shirley pursued a new calling, earning her nursing degree from Calhoun Community College. She became an extraordinary nurse – a colleague wrote a poem about her entitled “The Angel on the Floor.” Those in her care experienced what her family had always known: her giving heart and intense kindness.

Shirley was legendary for her hospitality. She loved a party. When it was a celebration, she often designed and chose the centerpieces, the table runners, and the quality of food and drink. But what made any gathering special was simply her presence. She was “the hostess with the mostest,” her warmth filling every room she passed through.

A woman of remarkable beauty inside and out, Shirley possessed a joy for living that belied her unassuming nature. There was a holiness about Shirley. She exuded goodness. Her integrity was absolute – she simply could not tell a lie.

After Ted’s passing, she embraced her final years with characteristic gratitude, finding joy in mahjong, swimming, walking, and being present with her family. A friend wrote: “I loved Shirley, as did everyone who ever met her.” Shirley served with love and dedication at two Huntsville synagogues: Etz Chayim and Chabad of Huntsville. She was preceded in death by her husband, Ted, her son, Bruce, and her sister, Dotty (Harold). She is survived by her brother, Herman (Bobbie); her children, Joe (Jennifer), Russell (Sharon) and Lisa (Shawn Wood); eight grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren. As her family said in farewell: “We could never love you as much as you loved us. That simply wouldn’t be possible. But we will miss you more than you can know.” Wherever she is now, may the food be superb, the centerpieces magnificent, and the love overflowing.

Donations in memory of Shirley Roberts can be made to Chabad of Huntsville and Etz Chayim Synagogue both in Huntsville, Ala. **HW**

A 50-Year Waltz, and Counting



Editor’s note: This story by Ted Roberts is being reprinted in memory of his wife, Shirley Roberts.

By Ted Roberts

It was only a Junior Congregation Dance at Beth El Emeth Synagogue. But in Memphis, Tennessee, on a Saturday night in 1946, what choices did a 16-year-old have except for the picture show. And if you liked popcorn with your movie, an evening at the Rialto Palace could set you back 25 cents. The Synagogue Dance was free.

But Betty Grable and Ty Power awaited us at the Rialto Palace. The Junior Congregation Dance, on the other hand, featured Rhea Mendel and Marsha Klodkin with a supporting cast of the Sunday School graduating class. I’d seen that show. Then I reminded myself that alongside the dance floor, there’d be a short oilcloth covered table with plates of sticky donuts and sugar cookies. The equivalent of free popcorn. Whatta bargain. So, I went to the dance in the synagogue basement.

Good idea. Because, besides Mendel and Klodkin and the crowd of extras who had overindulged for years on sugar cookies, there was a new star in the constellation of cuties that moved and grooved on the synagogue circuit. And as the poet says, she was a dove with dove’s eyes.

Around, between, and behind the Sunday School graduating class, I watched her cautiously. I was so stunned by this newcomer that every platitude known to smitten suitors leaped into my consciousness all at once, headed by “Where have YOU been!!” This was the evening star peeping between the clouds of the Sunday School graduating class.

But nothing about our first meeting would have inspired Jackie Collins or Danielle Steele. It was more of a Louisa May Alcott moment. There was the usual third grade dialogue, which was beneath us since we were almost in high school and should have done better.

“Hi.”

“Hello.”

“Wanta dance?”

“I guess.”

Not exactly zingy. But my radar screen lit up and my heart shrieked, TARGET! TARGET! TARGET! Easy does it, I thought. Be the patient tortoise who won the gold: not the herky jerky hare.

I remember trying to impress her with my maturity and adult conventionality by remarking that the dance floor was slippery; because only an hour ago the basement floor, which we called the social hall floor, had been the dining room floor. And it still retained smidgens of pastrami droppings.

“Gotta be careful, you could slip and turn your ankle,” I remarked. (Forty years later I made her the same speech about getting out of the tub – only this time I worried about her hip.)

Six or seven couples glided across that treacherous oily floor. The juke box watched and churned out hymns to romantic love, not lust. Inside, we bubbled like an agitated fifth of champagne. But the culture alchemized lust into something mildly civilized: like the Hoover Dam tames that rampaging river into a force that lights our lamps.

So we danced carefully, under the baleful eyes of armies of chaperones. Only two dance forms were available to us: the hi-speed frenetic jitterbug, definitely not for lovers or talkers; and the walk-to-the-music-around-the dance-floor. Great for lovers, because it allowed hand holding and back touching. It was also OK to let your eyes flame with passion – if you knew how to do it without looking goofy. The walk-to-the-music was my choice since it also allowed me to show off my conversational skills about slippery dance floors and other hot topics that fascinated the young ladies of the synagogue circuit.

The two-armed torso clutch was only practiced in dimly lit dives. Definitely out. After all this was the synagogue basement.

Looking back 50 years to that dance in the basement of the Beth El Emeth Synagogue, I marvel. I was wise beyond my years. Somehow, I knew this was a marathon not a 100-yard dash. We’ve danced demurely now for more than half a century. May it continue.

The syndicated humor of Ted, the Scribbler on the roof, has appeared in newspapers around the U.S., on National Public Radio, and numerous websites. HW

Gaza...

(Continued From Page 7)

“Several civilians crossed into the buffer zone separating the territory of the State of Israel from the Gaza Strip,” it stated, adding that “IDF troops dispatched to the scene detained the civilians and returned them safely.

“The civilians were transferred into Israel Police custody,” the army said.

The IDF stressed that approaching the border remains “dangerous and disrupts security forces’ activities.” It also condemned “activities that diverts the attention of commanders and soldiers from defensive missions and thwarting terrorism.”

The Nachala Movement wrote in a Facebook post that “large groups marched from multiple points along the Gaza border with the aim of converging for tree-planting in the area of the community of Nisanit” in the northern tip of the Strip, which was uprooted as part of the 2005 disengagement.

“Gaza belongs exclusively to the peo-

ple of Israel!” the post concluded.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich on Jan. 19 called for Jerusalem to “storm Gaza” and rebuild Jewish communities there, warning Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to shy away from the move.

“It’s either us or them – full Israeli control, the destruction of Hamas and permanent Israeli settlement,” the Religious Zionism Party leader said.

Smotrich attacked U.S. President Donald Trump’s proposals for Gaza, calling the plans “bad for the State of Israel” and urging their reversal.

In May 2024, Netanyahu ruled out plans for civilians to return to Gaza.

“If you mean resettling Gaza ..., it was never in the cards, and I said so openly,” he stated in an interview with CNN.

“Some of my constituents are not happy about it, but that’s my position,” he added. **HW**

SCRIBBLER ON THE ROOF

By Ted Roberts

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Amid Critical Doctor Shortage, Israel Launches International Program to Bring 2,000 Physicians By 2029

By Larry Luxner

(JTA) – Originally from Montreal, she knew making the move would require some adjustments. Her Hebrew skills needed work, she was aware physician salaries in Israel differ from those in North America and she assumed navigating Israeli bureaucracy would take time.

But when Keller-Baruch, 29, immigrated recently after finishing her residency at the University of Missouri, she received assistance that smoothed the path to getting credentialed in Israel and quickly finding a job in the Emergency Department at Ichilov Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center.

She’s also had some amazing experiences she never could have imagined in her native Canada. In mid-October last year, Keller-Baruch’s ER team was part of the welcoming committee that received many of the 20 Israeli hostages upon their release after two years in Hamas captivity in Gaza.

“It was very emotional for all of us,” she recalled. “Our job in the ER unit was to receive and stabilize them before sending them to their private rooms in the ICU. Even though it was brief, it was such an honor to be part of this moment we had all been holding our breath

for.”

Keller-Baruch is among more than 1,000 doctors who have immigrated to Israel since the launch, in 2024, of the International Medical Aliyah Program (IMAP) — a joint effort headed by Nefesh B’Nefesh in partnership with Israel’s Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, the Ministry of the Negev, Galilee and National Resilience, and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

The program aims to bring 2,000 doctors to Israel by 2029 to help relieve the country’s increasingly dire physician shortage, with support from the Marcus Foundation, the Gottesman Fund, Jewish Federations of North America, the Azrieli Foundation and the Arison Foundation.

Israel’s physician scarcity is due to a number of factors: the retirement of Russian doctors who immigrated to Israel en masse in the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union, a decision by the Israeli medical establishment to stop accepting medical degrees from various institutions in Eastern Europe as well as the limited number of seats in Israeli medical schools, according to Tony Gelbart, co-founder and chairman of Nefesh B’Nefesh.

“Israel never fully adjusted for this,

resulting in a bottleneck in residency and internship positions,” said Tony Gelbart, whose organization facilitates Aliyah from North America. “The convergence of these factors is creating an impending crisis.”

The International Medical Aliyah Program is bringing accredited physicians to Israel by helping speed their credentialing process and easing their immigration with concierge-style services.

For many physicians, the process begins in their home countries at MedEx fairs, where they can get answers to all their questions about accreditation and immigration, meet with prospective Israeli healthcare employers and get an expedited path through the paperwork.

“Physicians interested in aliyah arrive with their diplomas and certifications in hand, some still in frames, and are licensed on the spot,” Gelbart said. “Rather than landing in Israel and waiting nine months for paperwork and processing, physicians complete the licensing process prior to aliyah. Upon arrival, they receive citizenship and, within a week, are able to practice.”

The International Medical Aliyah Program also aims to help doctors find jobs and homes in Israel’s periphery,

where the physician shortage is even more severe.

Dr. Vladimir Belkin from Yekaterinburg, a city in Russia’s Ural region, came to Israel with his wife, Anastasia, also a doctor, in August 2023. Despite having a doctorate in neurology, he chose to do a four-year residency in physical rehabilitation medicine at Beersheva’s Soroka Hospital.

The timing was propitious, as the need for rehabilitation services in Israel skyrocketed in the wake of the Oct. 7 war. In June, the war arrived at Belkin’s own hospital, when his building sustained a direct hit from an Iranian ballistic missile.

“Our department was on the first floor, and most injuries were on higher floors,” Belkin said. “It was a miracle none of our patients were hurt.”

Despite the tumult, Belkin, 34, says he is thankful to be in Israel.

“I think it was the right decision because it led to changes that were good for me and my family,” he said.

Keller-Baruch echoed that sentiment.

“Israel has always felt like a home away from home,” she said. “I’m extremely grateful for being able to do the job that I love in a country known

(See **Doctor** Page 11)

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Your Health Nurse Practitioner vs. Physician-How to Make It Work in Today’s Healthcare

By Cindy Katz, DNP

When I began my career as a nurse practitioner over 20 years ago, a lot of time was spent educating both patients and physician colleagues about the scope and function of the NP within the clinical setting – particularly in primary care. At that time, the NP role was still emerging in many practices, and clarification was often necessary to establish expectations and workflows.

Today, nurse practitioners are highly visible, well-integrated members of the healthcare workforce and play a critical role in delivering timely, evidence-based care in today’s rapidly evolving healthcare environment.

With rising patient demand, persistent clinician shortages, and growing medical complexity, the collaborative relationship between nurse practitioners and physicians (MD/DO) has become one of the most frequently discussed – and most important – partnerships in the evolving field of medicine.

The key question is no longer whether NPs belong in patient care settings, but how this partnership can function most effectively to optimize patient outcomes.

Understanding the Training Pathways

Physicians complete a pathway that includes:

- Four years of medical school
 - Three to seven or more years of residency and fellowship training
 - Thousands of supervised clinical hours across multiple specialties
- Nurse practitioners complete a pathway that includes:
- Registered nursing education and licensure
 - Graduate-level education at the master’s, post-master’s, or doctoral level
 - Clinical training with an emphasis

on patient-centered care, prevention, health promotion, and chronic disease management

While the training models differ, both are designed to prepare clinicians for safe, competent practice within defined scopes of responsibility.

Scope of Practice: Why It Varies

The nurse practitioner’s scope of practice is regulated at the state level. Some states grant full practice authority, while others require physician supervision or formal collaborative agreements.

Physicians, in contrast, practice under a nationally standardized scope of licensure.

The Role of the Nurse Practitioner in Patient Care

- Preventive care, health screenings, and annual wellness visits
- Diagnosis, treatment, and management of acute and chronic illnesses
- Patient education, lifestyle modification counseling, and risk reduction
- Expanded access to care, particularly in underserved and rural communities

Patients experience the greatest benefit when:

Clinicians practice within the scope of their education, training, and licensure

The healthcare team prioritizes clear and consistent communication, ensuring safe and coordinated care, especially for complex patients.

The Bottom Line

The future of healthcare is built on strong physician-nurse practitioner collaboration. At its best, this model is not about replacing physicians or limiting the role of nurse practitioners – it is about leveraging the complementary strengths of both professions to meet the growing demands in the practice of medicine. **HW**

Music, Meaning and Middle East Insights: Dr. Eli Sperling, Scholar-in-Residence, at Beth Sholom, Feb. 20-21



“Through looking at the songs and, more importantly, the story behind them and the individuals and institutions that spread them, we get to see how Zionism became core to who we are as Jews,” says Eli Sperling, Ph.D.

Beth Sholom Synagogue will welcome Eli Sperling, Ph.D., a distinguished American scholar of the politics, social dynamics and culture of Israel and the Middle East, as Scholar-in-Residence on Friday, February 20 and Saturday, February 21. Currently the Israel Institute Teaching Fellow at

the University of Georgia’s Department of International Affairs, Dr. Sperling also spends time outside the classroom as a “public scholar who engages with Jewish American communities and talks about Israel and the Middle East,” he says. His goal: helping American Jews make sense of the headlines flooding out of Israel and the region.

A warm and engaging scholar who has traveled extensively throughout the Middle East, Dr. Sperling earned a doctorate in philosophy at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and a master’s degree in Middle Eastern history from Tel Aviv University, where he graduated Magna Cum Laude. He served as the Senior Academic Research Coordinator at Emory University’s Institute for the Study of Modern Israel and as a guest professor at Emory’s Tam Institute for Jewish Studies. He also taught and conducted research as a postdoctoral associate at Duke University’s Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and Center for Jewish Studies.

A musician himself (he played in a Tel Aviv rock band, among other musical pursuits), Dr. Sperling will also discuss his book, “Singing the Land: Hebrew

Music and Early Zionism in America” (University of Michigan Press 2024), an insightful exploration of how Israeli music helped to forge a relationship between American Jews with the Zionist movement before Israeli statehood in 1948.

Says Rabbi Sammy Rosenbaum, the spiritual leader of Beth Sholom, “We are delighted to welcome Dr. Sperling to our congregation to teach us about his research, his insights and his vast knowledge of Israel and the region. As a musician and lover of Jewish history, I find his book a fascinating perspective on the songs I grew up singing at Jewish summer camp and in youth group.”

Dr. Sperling explains: “Music is a really important and illustrative lens to understand greater social and political movements all over the world.” His book, he says, shows music’s role in the evolution of American Jewish attitudes toward Zionism. “Music was particularly powerful as the folk songs...came to the United States and began a very early and widespread mechanism for American Jews to participate in Hebrew Zionist culture in some way.”

He adds that “Through looking at the

songs and, more importantly, the story behind them and the individuals and institutions that spread them, we get to see how Zionism became core to who we are as Jews.”

Dr. Sperling will lead three sessions at Beth Sholom:

Behind the Headlines: What’s Really Happening in Israel?

Dr. Sperling will explain what is happening in Israeli politics and social movements and why discussing Israel feels so fraught. Coffee and desserts will be served.

Singing the Land: Lunch & Learn

Dr. Sperling will focus on the compelling research behind his book, “Singing the Land: Hebrew Music and Early Zionism in America.”

Middle East Deep Dive

A discussion of Gaza, Iran, U.S. foreign policy normalization, and a geopolitical snapshot of the region. Cocktails and snacks are available for adults 21+.

The Scholar-in-Residence weekend is generously supported by the Hallie Cohen and Cindy Sotto Annual Scholar-in-Residence Fund. For more information, please visit <https://bit.ly/SholomScholar>. **HW**

Doctor...

(Continued From Page 10)

not just for innovation but also compassion.”

Fellow Canadian doctor Osnat Steiman moved to Israel in January 2024. A geriatrician, she works at Ichilov’s rehabilitation center, helping mostly elderly patients recover from falls, brain bleeds and other traumatic injuries.

Steiman, 42, said that moving to Israel had been a lifelong goal.

“I had a strong Zionist upbringing. My mother’s Israeli, and it was always part of the plan to come back to Israel,” Steiman said. “Of course, there are always some frustrations, but that’s everywhere. In spite of everything going on here, I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

Although Nefesh B’Nefesh generally focuses exclusively on immigrants from North America, its work for the International Medical Aliyah Program is global. In recent months, the organization has held MedEx events in New Jersey, Los Angeles, Paris, London, Buenos Aires, Sydney and Melbourne. In November last year, MedEx launched in Canada, with more than 500 attendees in Toronto and Montreal.

At such events, doctors often sit for interviews with representatives of major Israeli hospitals, including Ichilov, Hadassah, Rambam, Kaplan and Galilee Medical Center, as well as Israel’s four health maintenance organizations.

Anesthesiologist Eugene Rappaport, 59, moved to Israel in June 2024 from Manhattan Beach, California, where he worked with patients undergoing heart and lung surgery. Now he works for Assuta, Israel’s leading private hospital network. He earns less than he did in California, but Rappaport says it’s worth it.

“My aliyah was not driven by money, but purely my desire to be a part of Israel and the joy I take in caring for our people,” Rappaport said.

Steiman said that doctors who move to Israel should speak serviceable Hebrew, be prepared financially and find a strong support system. The International Medical Aliyah Program can help with all those elements and ease the daunting administrative side of things.

“There’s a lot of bureaucracy, but the second I made my application through Nefesh B’Nefesh, they reached out to me,” Steiman said. “It was a very smooth landing. Overall, it’s been positive.”

Asked if she has any advice for physicians considering aliyah, Keller-Baruch said, “Don’t be afraid to make the jump. Despite all the hardships we’ve experienced, these terrible things will only help us grow back stronger.”

This article was sponsored by and produced in partnership with Nefesh B’Nefesh, which in cooperation with Israel’s Ministry of Aliyah, The Jewish Agency, KKL and JNF-USA is minimizing the professional, logistical and social obstacles of aliyah, and has brought over 75,000 olim from North America for two decades. This article was produced by JTA’s native content team. **HW**

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