

# The Star

Bi-monthly newsletter from  
Congregation Beth Elohim  
in Acton, Massachusetts



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## March/April 2026 • Adar/Nisan/Iyyar 5786

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## In this issue...

*Welcome to March — and Purim! It's been a challenge to wrap up this issue against the backdrop of the current news. But please do not give this issue a pass. We have a treasure trove of wonderful pieces in this issue. We are grateful to our president, rabbi and others who have taken the time to contribute to this newsletter. Am Yisrael Chai!*

## Message from Our President

March 2026 –

Happy winter to my fellow congregants – except those of you who have escaped to warmer climates (no judgment!). I look out my window at well over a foot of snow in the driveway and I am reminded of years ago when snowfalls like the one we had this week were expected nearly every winter, or perhaps I'm dating myself. I can remember snow drifts blocking the doors of my childhood home and no-school days in front of the fireplace, and the TV, unless the power was out – again. I still have chilling memories of the *Blizzard of '78* when a walk to a store for milk or bread was a life-threatening experience because there were no clear

sidewalks and the only cars on the road were the ones buried in snow. Despite the hardship, or perhaps because of it, there was a side benefit of neighbors being more neighborly and strangers becoming friends as we braved the elements and shoveled the driveways together. Now when facing the prospect of a winter storm we hope the power stays on so we can still access Facebook to see how our friends are faring.



In other news, despite the snowy days, school and ELC cancellations, the synagogue fared well during January and February. Our Scholar in Residence program was a rousing success with nearly full houses for the three events. Rabbi Waldoks, an accomplished and renowned Jewish scholar, brought his great sense of humor to his presentations along with his knowledge. Who says learning has to be stuffy and dull?

The ELC had a huge change. The school was licensed for another two years, as we expected, thanks to the hard work of our director, Lyle, and brilliant teaching staff. What is new is that the ELC obtained separate certification for an infant program, ages 3 – 18 months! There was one classroom converted for up to seven infants, equipped with seven cribs and seven highchairs, and two new teachers certified in infant care. One child has already started and six more are due to join the class in the coming months, with many more families on the waiting list. The response to the infant program has been so overwhelming that it seems the demand for infant care in the area is great. Stay tuned for updates about the success of this new program.

As we begin March and look forward to spring, we welcome Purim with the ever-popular Megillah reading – and *Grogger-ritas!* - on March 2nd. Join your fellow congregants as they tell the story of Queen Esther and deliverance of the Jews from the wicked Haman (Booo). And the Purim Shpiel is back on March 8th followed by the Purim Carnival.

In addition to these March treats, there are so many more activities and events offered by Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Na'aseh and Adult Ed. Check your *Star-Lite* each week for details. ***Something's always cookin' at CBE!***

Linda

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## Rabbi David Shares His Recent Trip to Israel



This past January, I was honored to join a dozen colleagues for a Rabbinic Familiarization Trip to Israel with Makor Educational Journeys. Most of us have already spent significant time in Israel, but have never led a congregational trip and would like to do so. I have visited Israel a dozen times since the early 1990s and spent two years studying there. That said, every time I visit Israel, it is different. Even though I had visited since October 7th, things had changed. All of the living Hostages have been released, and the remains of Ran Givili, the last deceased hostage in Gaza, were returned to Israel shortly after my trip.

Our trip focused on Israel and all of its complexity, especially post-October 7th. I truly believe that the power of travel lies not in places, but in people. This is reflected in a famous poem by Yehuda Amichai:

*"Once I sat on the steps by a gate at David's Tower,  
I placed my two heavy baskets at my side. A group of tourists  
was standing around their guide and I became their target marker. "You see  
that man with the baskets? Just right of his head there's an arch  
from the Roman period. Just right of his head." "But he's moving, he's moving!"  
I said to myself: redemption will come only if their guide tells them,  
"You see that arch from the Roman period? It's not important: but next to it,  
left and down a bit, there sits a man who's bought fruit and vegetables for his family."  
– Tourists by Yehuda Amichai*

*Below, Rabbi David's "classmates", a lecture entitled "Post-Traumatic Growth" and Rabbi David with Jessica Steinberg of the Times of Israel "The Daily Briefing" podcast.*



A major theme of the trip was the complexity and diversity of Israel today, seen in those who call Israel home. We visited *Shaharit*, an organization building a new social partnership among all of Israel's communities. During our visit, a panel spoke to us with representatives from key segments of Israeli society. Dr. Eilon Schwartz, the organization's founder, described falling in love with the Israel of the 1970s, a time when music, culture, and politics were shaped by secular Ashkenazi elites. It was the time of the Kibbutz and secular, Ashkenazi culture. However, Eilon reflected that today, this Israel is largely gone. It's still what we teach, but we must update the curriculum for today's reality. In Israel now, no one group dominates, and all must learn tolerance and build a shared future.

By contrast, Israel also looks different from America. On the panel were an Orthodox man who served in the army, a Palestinian Christian Israeli citizen, a Haredi woman from a mixed Arab/Jewish city, and a secular LGBTQ woman activist from Tel Aviv. While Conservative and Reform Jews exist in Israel, they were not represented on the panel. Jews with beliefs like ours are a smaller group in Israeli society. With patience and skill, this and other organizations nurture dialogue across political, religious, and national lines. We were encouraged, "Don't be afraid to teach about the complexity of this place!" Even the Palestinian and LGBTQ activist spoke warmly of a Haredi man they both met through the

organization. At this and other organizations we visited that promote a shared future for Israel's diverse communities, the emphasis was on building relationships across differences.



Even among many archaeological sites and natural wonders, people make Israel special. I love its diversity. Yossi Yichyas, member of the rapid response team that fought to defend Nir Oz on October 7th, gave us a tour of the Kibbutz. With the exception of Holocaust survivors, I have never met someone who faced so much adversity. His mother and sister-in-law were taken hostage on Oct. 7. He killed three terrorists who chased him with automatic rifles and grenades while protecting his family. His family lived next door to the Bibas family and were best friends. Despite this, Yossi was upbeat and embraced his friends from the Kibbutz and us. Yossi, who is of Ethiopian ancestry and has dreadlocks, spoke of the Kibbutz's diversity, with people from all over the world. He welcomed us, Americans, as family. We felt part of his story and the Jewish people's story.

*Yossi Yichyas, member of the rapid response team that fought to defend Nir Oz on October 7th,*



I also appreciated the diversity among Jewish people in Israel. We met people of all religious backgrounds, from secular to everything in between. On, a young bartender who survived fleeing the Nova site after being shot, shared his harrowing story. Roy Goldenberg, who

works at [Tikkun Olam Makers](#), develops affordable tools for people with disabilities, including wheelchairs for toddlers, 3D-printed limbs, and specialized surfboards for disabled soldiers. They also partner with Palestinians and have an office in Ramallah.

Encounters with Israel's Christian and Palestinian Muslim communities enriched my experience. We had a special audience with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Theophilos III, at his palace, and visited notable Christian quarter shops, including Kanafe and Coffee and Jafar, a famous Palestinian sweet shop. I purchased spices from a 14th-generation Jerusalem resident and offered a healing prayer at Ezrat Yisrael, the section of the Kotel open for egalitarian davening.

*In the old city, a spice seller in the Christian Quarter. His Beatitude Theophilos III, Rabbi Davd at the Kotel.*



I have heard many of you speak about how meaningful past CBE trips to Israel with Rabbi Mintz were. After a more than decade-long hiatus, I hope to again hold a CBE trip to Israel, so you can meet some of these amazing people and learn more about the complexity and beauty of this place. Please let me know if you are interested, and I will have more opportunities to talk about this exciting possibility in the months ahead.

*Tel Aviv at sunset.*



## Introducing New Members Lisa Lustiger and Demetre Koukouves

One of our favorite features in *The Star* has been to introduce new members to the community. We are thrilled that new members Lisa Lustiger and Demetre Koukouves are sharing a little bit about themselves with us. (In the photo below are proud parents Demetre and Lisa following the recent Bris of their son Georgie at CBE).



**What were you looking for when you joined CBE?**

After moving from Scottsdale to Leominster, I deeply missed my Jewish friends. To me, Judaism is not only a religion, but a culture. As an interfaith couple, my husband and I also wanted to find a community that accepted both of us and made us feel welcome!

**How does CBE help you connect to your Judaism?** CBE was really supportive when I had my son 4 months ago! I was so disorganized when planning the *Bris*. Rabbi David went out of his way to accommodate us, moving things around and being so kind and gracious! The service helped me feel so much more connected to my Judaism, and was a beautiful way to introduce our son to the religion and culture.

**What are some of the most fulfilling parts about being a member for you and/or other family members?** I had a lot of fun participating in the Sisterhood group and my husband is looking forward to joining the Brotherhood soon! We think it is amazing that CBE has different social groups, truly making it feel not just a synagogue, but a community!

**What are your favorite programs or services offered by CBE?** I would say the different social groups and the themed shabbats. There really is something for everyone!

**Have you participated in classes or volunteering? Tell us about memorable experiences that you have had at CBE.** I attended a murder mystery party with the Sisterhood at CBE. I loved that it was 80's themed, and that I got to dress up for it. Everyone was really nice and I had a really great time!

**What would you be excited to have CBE offer in the future?** We are really excited to attend some family events with our son! We can't wait to bring him to CBE and have him grow up in this community.

## George Morton Participates in a Memorable 2025 Israel Ride



In October 2025, George Morton participated in the 18th and final Israel Ride. For those not familiar with the Israel Ride, it has, since 2003 been a yearly fundraising event for the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies ([arava.org](http://arava.org)) based at Kibbutz Ketura, in Israel.

The Institute, since its founding in 1996, has "brought together nearly 1,800 Palestinian, Jordanian, Israeli, and international students to meet the Middle East's environmental challenges with innovative peace-building solutions and ensure a sustainable future for the region."

Over a university-accredited semester (or a full year), a roughly equal number of Israeli Jewish, Arab (Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Moroccan) and other international students live, eat and study together. Through classes, holiday celebrations, trips, dialogue sessions, and more, students get to know each other as individuals, beyond the stereotypes and they engage in transformative dialogue work. Its efforts to reach across cultural and political divides has been a model and an inspiration – especially in the aftermath of October 7, 2023.

The Ride itself is a bike ride from Jerusalem to Eilat. There are tracks for different levels of ability. Over the years, participants from CBE – Jennifer Friedman and Leann Shamash were the first, followed by Julie Kozhukhin, Matt Liebman and George Morton.



After George's first Ride in 2015, he says, he was so moved by the mission, work, and people associated with the Arava Institute that he decided to participate in every Ride thereafter. Sadly, the Rides in 2020 and 2021 were cancelled due to Covid and those in 2023 and 2024 were cancelled due to the war. The Ride resumed in 2025 – but this also marked the end of this event – as the volunteer organizers made the difficult decision to "retire" after leading it for over 20 years. While the Ride has ended, there will be other opportunities organized by the [Friends of the Arava Institute](#) to visit and learn about Arava.

For George, this trip was especially moving. The group visited the Nova Music site and heard from border area kibbutzniks. They also learned about Arava's post-war initiative, "Jumpstarting Hope" — which delivers aid to Gaza in the form of shelter, water generators, sewage treatment, and food.

George says that if you travel to Israel, try to visit Arava and meet some of the truly inspirational staff, students and alumni. It has accomplished amazing things, not least of which is building relationships and trust among Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians, and Americans.

To learn more visit [arava.org](http://arava.org). And to support the Institute, you may visit [this page](#) to donate directly to the Friends of the Arava Institute.

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## A Shout-out to Creative Hamantaschen



We haven't been able to resist sharing hamantaschen recipes -- both traditional and non-traditional — each year around Purim. This year, two spirit-themed recipes turned up on a site called "What Jew Wanna Eat". At left are [Aperol Spritz-inspired cookies](#). Also offered are [Guinness/Chocolate Bourbon cookies with Bailey's drizzle](#), which may just be too much for our taste -- but may be perfect for yours. More creative recipes abound on [JewishBoston.com](#)

## The People of Chelm Want to Know...



*For years the "People of Chelm" column has challenged The Star readers with questions drawn from the long and rich history of Jews and Judaism. We are delighted to continue this tradition, with thanks to Bob Ferrara, Waky and Matt Liebman.*

*Illustration by Maurice Sendak.*

Spring is no longer far off and with spring comes baseball – and softball. Beth Elohim's renowned softball team begins practicing in a few short weeks and this coming season will be seeking their third league championship in the last four years! For the Red Sox, we simply hope this season will be more successful than last year's when they finished in the middle of the American League East, five games out. The first question draws upon Boston connections to baseball history. The second is inspired by another rite of spring – Purim!

**QUESTION #1:** The Red Sox have already played several Grapefruit League baseball games down in Fort Myers, Florida. Most hardy Boston fans know that the Bambino, Babe Ruth, arguably the **greatest** player of all time (with the possible exception of Ted Williams), was traded by the Red Sox after the 1919 season and went on to a magnificent career with the hated Yankees. Fewer fans are aware that Ruth also finished his playing days here, with the Boston Braves in 1935. But how many know that arguably the **smartest** baseball player also played for a Boston team? Moe Berg was the son of Jewish immigrants and his career, like Ruth's, was larger than life. What position did Berg play? What Ivy League schools did he attend? What were his other professions? If you do not know the answer to these questions, please find very dedicated, old-time fans and ask them. The amazing story they will tell you is true.

**QUESTION #2:** This March we celebrate the joyous festival of Purim. Purim Shpiel returns to CBE with a crazy musical on Sunday, March 8. As most of us know, Purim's excesses are a

celebration of the victory of Mordecai and Esther over the wicked Haman and his plot to eliminate the Jews. This story takes place in the fifth century BCE during the Babylonian Exile and is set in the court of the Persian king Ahasuerus. The Bible's Book of Esther records this destruction of Haman. This book is one of the "Five Scrolls". Each of the five is written on its own scroll, which is read in its entirety each year during the appropriate holiday service.

Can you match the other four scrolls – Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations – with the holiday on which it is recited? The holiday choices are Passover, Shavuot, the Ninth of Av (Tisha b'Av), and Sukkot.

## Kvell Korner — Looking for Your News!!!

We are truly blessed to share in the simchas of our CBE families!

### Bat Mitzvah of Eden Chenail

*On February 7, Eden Chenail celebrated becoming a Bat Mitzvah at CBE. Below: Eden in the library and on the bima; Eden flanked by sister Nora, cousins Liat and Aaron, and brother Noah. Nora holding the Torah (and sporting some great footwear); the Chenail family: Gregg, Nora, Eden, Eva and Noah. Mazel tov, Eden!*





### **One Family (the Friedmans) — Two Engagements!**

Linda and Denis Friedman happily announce the engagements of not one but **two** Friedman granddaughters: Amelia to Aaron Silverstein and Lily to Sam Broth!

Amelia and Aaron live in Weehawken, New Jersey and work in New York. They met on line and became engaged on January 9. Their wedding will be New Year's Eve 2026. Lily and Sam live and work in New York. They met at Tulane University in New Orleans where they will be married March, 2027. They became engaged on December 6.

Below, left to right: Aaron Silverstein, Amelia Friedman, Lily Friedman, Sam Broth.



Have a simcha to share? Write to [communications@bethelohim.org](mailto:communications@bethelohim.org) and we will include it in our next issue!

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## What's happening at CBE this month?

Visit our [online calendar](#) for up-to-the-minute programming.

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## Donations

The congregation thanks our members, their relatives and friends, and the larger community for recent donations to CBE either online or by check. If you do not see your donation, please look for it in our next donations email or issue of *The Star*, or contact [communications@bethelohim.org](mailto:communications@bethelohim.org).

### **Adult Education Fund**

Matthew Liebman & Amy Michelson / In support of the Adult Education Scholar-in-Residence Shabbat dinner

### **Amy Naparstek Israel Scholarship Fund**

Andrea Harris / In honor of Barbara Levison

David & Chips Naparstek / In honor of Amelia Friedman and Aaron Silverstein, with congratulations on their engagement

### **Chesed Fund**

Dan & Shelley Klein / In memory of Shelley Klein's mom, Ruth Kassman

### **Choir Fund**

David & Chips Naparstek / In honor of Judy Kramer, with best wishes for a speedy and complete recovery

Edwina & George Goodhue / In memory of Lynda Joy Cohen

Lauren Solomon / In memory of beloved choir-mates (and soulmates) Bob Grappel and Lynda Joy Cohen

### **General Fund**

Alan & Peggy Berko / In memory of Doris Rafkin Shub, Paul Berko, and Lorraine Berko on the occasion of their yahrzeits

Dan & Courtney Carp / In support of the Erev Purim Dinner

Don Hoban & Marcy Epstein Hoban / In support of the Erev Purim Dinner

Jessica Rosenblatt & Taylor Curtis / In support of the Erev Purim Dinner

Joseph & Rosalie Oliveri / In support of the Erev Purim Dinner

Judy Kronwasser

Lauren Solomon / In support of the Erev Purim Dinner

Michael Biales & Sarah Coletti / In memory of Edward Kaplan, father of Melissa Kaplan Morse

Shelley & Dan Klein

### **Rabbi Lewis Mintz Fund**

Dan & Shelley Klein / In memory of Shelley Klein's father, Leonard Kassman

David & Chips Naparstek / In appreciation of the Scholar-in-Residence weekend

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## **The People of Chelm Want to Know...**

### **ANSWERS TO QUESTION POSED ABOVE:**

**ANSWER #1:** Moe Berg was a backup catcher for most of his fifteen-year major league career. From the mid-1920s through 1939, he played with the Chicago White Sox, Cleveland Indians, Washington Senators, and - in the final four years –Tom Yawkey's Boston Red Sox. Though his baseball achievements were quite modest, his intellectual and professional achievements were not. He was a 1923 Princeton graduate, received a second degree from Columbia Law School, and also studied at the Sorbonne in France. Though he was a first-rate linguist and attorney, Moe is most renowned for his role as a spy. Berg went to Japan in the early 1930s with the likes of Ruth and Gehrig on an all-star traveling team. In fact, Berg was assigned to take espionage photos. During WWII, he became one of America's most important atomic spies, gathering vital information on top German scientists. He had a great talent for languages and it was claimed that he learned Japanese in two weeks. However, the baseball pundits countered that "He can speak 12 languages but can't hit in any of them". True, his lifetime average was a paltry .243, but he excelled in other aspects of the game.

Senator's Manager Clark Griffith called him "the best handler of pitchers in the league" and he was a fine defensive catcher, breaking an American League record with 117 consecutive full games without an error in the 1932-33 seasons. In 2019, the film "The Spy Behind Home Plate" about Moe's remarkable career was released. Details about the film are available at <https://spybehindhomeplate.org/>.

**ANSWER #2:** Five of the books of Ketuvim (the Writings) share with the Five Books of Moses (the Torah) the distinction of being read completely during the synagogue service each year. These books are traditionally called the five scrolls (megillot) since each is written on its own scroll. Thus we hear "the whole megillah" on the customary holiday for each. After the Book of Esther is read on Purim, the next scroll, the Song of Songs with its sensuous love poems, is recited on Passover. Then comes the Book of Ruth, the story of the first Jewish convert, on Shavuot. This is followed by the Book of Lamentations, which is read on Tisha b'Av when we lament the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. And finally on Sukkot, the Book of Ecclesiastes complete the cycle of the reading of the five scrolls.

## Resources

CBE's [Chesed Committee](#) | Contact us in a time of need

[18 Doors](#) (formerly InterfaithFamily of Greater Boston)

[Anti-Defamation League incident reporting](#)

[CJP \(Combined Jewish Philanthropies\)](#)

[CJP SeniorDirect](#)

[Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life](#)

[Hadassah of Nashoba Valley Facebook](#)

[Hebrew College events](#)

[Jewish Bereavement Support Group](#)

[JewishBoston.com](#)

[Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston](#)

[Jewish Family Service of Metrowest](#)

[Keshet](#) | A national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life

[Mayyim Hayyim](#) | [Living Waters Community Mikveh](#)

[Oneinfifty.org](#) | BRCA awareness, education, and support

[Yad Chessed](#) | Emergency financial assistance to Jewish individuals and families in need

[Yerusha.com](#) | A Website for Older Childless Jews

Visit the [Resources](#) page on our website for our complete resource list.

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Congregation Beth Elohim | 133 Prospect Street | Acton, MA 01720 US

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