

The Star

Monthly newsletter from
Congregation Beth Elohim
in Acton, Massachusetts



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November 2022 • Cheshvan/Kislev 5783

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In this issue...

We're really excited about this issue of *The Star*. We start off with a wonderful interview with Rabbi David in which he shares his personal and professional journey to the rabbinate. Next we feature one of our unsung heroes: custodian Stan "the Man" McMiller. There's a piece about the Acton Food Pantry and how our High Holiday tradition of collecting groceries got started. The *People of Chelm* column contains a brand new challenge inspired by the recent Nobel prizes. And we close with an invitation to our readers to contribute to our December issue!

We hope you enjoy reading *The Star* as much as we enjoy putting it together.

Q+A with Rabbi David

We are honored to be able to share an exclusive interview with Rabbi David. Many of us have wanted to know more about the man who has stepped up on such short notice to lead us, pray with us, share with us and teach us. We appreciate the thoughtfulness and care that he has put into these answers.



When did you decide to be a rabbi? What was your college major and what else did you try first? If you couldn't be a rabbi, what would you want to be?

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a rabbi, even at times when I avoided acknowledging this fact. Growing up the son of a rabbi, I admired what my dad did, but always thought I would do something else. At college I majored in History and Jewish Studies and contemplated law school. After college, I had various jobs including head of Aquatics at camp Ramah and I worked in a pub for a few months in England. Quickly though, I decided I wanted to travel on my own to Israel, where I was able to connect with the country, Jewish history, and study for a year at an egalitarian yeshiva called Pardes. I also spent time with family members who had immigrated to Israel from India decades earlier. These were all formative and important experiences for me. I returned to New York for a Master's Degree in Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminar in New York, focusing on Day School education. While doing this degree, I interned at several synagogues and university Hillel organizations. I decided to stay on at JTS and study to become a rabbi. It felt like my calling and I knew intuitively that this was the direction I wanted to pursue.

Your family is from India, and yet you were born in Scotland. We hear that there is a cool story behind both your first and your last names. Do you still have relatives in India and do you get to visit them? We don't typically think of India as being a very Jewish place. What is it like for Jews in India?

Actually, there have been Jews in India for millennia. My father, Rabbi Sion David, is from Mumbai (formerly called Bombay) and is Bene Israel, one of three Indian Jewish communities. Historically, the Jewish communities lived peacefully within Indian society and integrated foods and many cultural practices into their daily lives. My father was the first Bene Israel Jew to become a rabbi. Following his ordination as a rabbi at Hebrew Union College, he served a three-year term at a synagogue in Scotland to fulfill one of the requirements of his fellowship. My sister and I were born there. Our family's original surname in India was "Shapurkar" meaning we originated in the village (kar) of Shapur. However, my grandfather wanted a last name that distinguished our family as Jewish, so he changed our last name to David. My parents wanted a name that started with *bet* (B) to honor my grandmother Batsheva, who didn't live to see my father become a rabbi, so they chose the name Braham, a shortened form of Abraham. My Hebrew name is 'Avraham'. My father was one of ten children in his family, all of whom eventually left India as the Jewish community dwindled, opting instead for destinations including Israel, the UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, The US,

Canada and even Dubai!

You can find an [article](#) about my son, Pukar, and I making *Shira* – an Indian version of Charoset. I was also proud to be mentioned in a list of [Jews by Color leading High Holiday Services](#) this year, which included a link to CBE.



Rabbi David and his son Pukar making Shira.

Can you describe a formative Social Action experience and how it has shaped you and your rabbinate?

In 2000, I took part in Seminary Summer, a program for a diverse group of seminarians and rabbinical students sponsored by the AFL-CIO. My assignment was to support a group of workers at the Lincoln Center who were trying to organize for equal pay and benefits. I canvassed the Upper West Side, speaking with clergy of various denominations, raising the profile of these workers and their plight. Our efforts culminated in a program where the workers spoke about their experiences at a church next door to Lincoln Center, which was very moving and eventually helped them achieve their goals. This formative experience taught me so much about the needs of workers and the

difference union representation can make in their lives.

This experience motivated me to research Jewish text and *teshuvot* (religious responsa) on worker rights, which led to my long-standing focus on the practical applications of Jewish texts and their relevance on contemporary issues.

You have done so much with interfaith couples and Jews by choice. What drove you to that work? What are you most proud of? Can you tell us about your work with the Jewish Discovery Institute? Do you have any ideas or plans involving the interfaith couples and families at CBE?

My work with the Jewish Discovery Institute (JDI) began when I was called to serve on a *Beit Din*, a group of three rabbis who supervise the completion of a conversion. I was deeply moved by the stories of their Jewish journeys, and eventually I was hired as JDI's director. Established in the 1960s, JDI was established as a program for those wanting to learn about Judaism and, if they chose, pursue conversion. Our flagship course is called "Pathways to Judaism", a 20 session course that provides an in-depth introduction to Judaism and a foundation for conversion for those who are interested. Since 2007, I have had the joy of being part of over 500 conversions, or affirmations, of people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

I have also been deeply moved by my work with interfaith couples, and the vital role they play in our Jewish community. In 2019, I was chosen by 18 Doors (Formerly Interfaith Family) to be part of their first class of Rukin Family Rabbinic Fellows. The goal of the fellowship is to create a community of practice to make the organized Jewish world more welcoming of interfaith couples. As part of this fellowship, I led several workshops and classes for diverse groups of interfaith couples.

I'd love to hear from interfaith couples at CBE what type of programming would speak to them, and if they would like to build that programming together. From the religious school to the ritual committee, I would want to gain feedback from members of our community who are not themselves Jewish about our programs, and to encourage them to serve on committees. CBE has a tradition of interfaith inclusion, which is one of the major things that attracted me to this community.

What are the rewards and challenges of having a multi-cultural family?

I think my family represents growing diversity within the Jewish community. Many of us are Jewish *and* something else. It may sometimes be a challenge, but it is possible to be fully Jewish while also embracing the other parts of our cultural heritage. Even though the American Jewish world of 2022 is much more diverse than it was 25 years ago, it is still far too common for Jews of color to experience questioning of their Jewish identity. To learn more, I recommend reading [*Beyond the Count*](#), an important study on the lived experiences of Jews of Color published by the [*Jews of Color*](#) initiative in 2021.

Editor's note: Rabbi David may be reached at rabbidavid@bethelohim.org

Behind the scenes with "Stan the Man"

We are very excited to feature one of CBE's unsung heroes this month. "Stan the Man" is

Congregation Beth Elohim's beloved Building Custodian. Our facility has a very unique and demanding set of needs between the Preschool, Religious School, general upkeep and frequent services and events. Stan works tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that our building is always clean, set-up as needed and is ready for our use. He regularly goes above and beyond doing extra thoughtful cleaning touches around the property. We are very grateful for and lucky to have him work with us. Please enjoy the following interview with Stan to learn more about this most helpful and interesting individual who plays an important part in the upkeep of our community. The next time you see Stan, be sure to give him a big thank you.

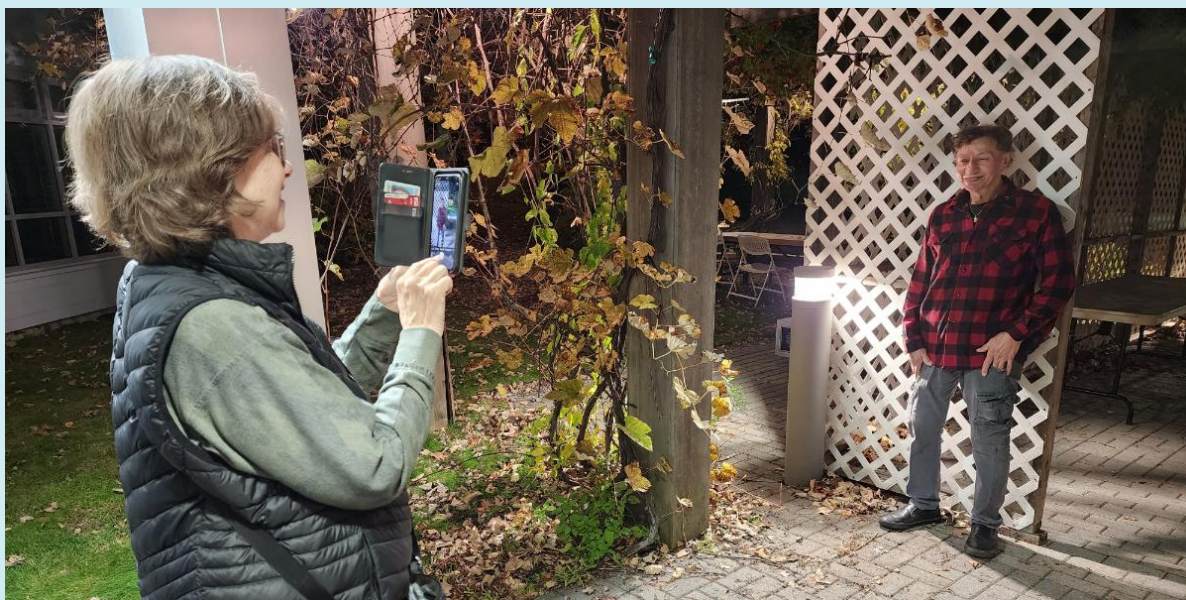


When did you start taking care of our building??

I started working at CBE in October 2017. In fact, it is now my 5th anniversary working at CBE.

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Did you grow up in Massachusetts or have you lived elsewhere?

I was born in Neu Isenburg, Germany. My full name is Stan McMiller. My two older brothers were born in Germany too. My family moved around a lot. We relocated to Kansas where my parents had another son. We lived in Kansas and different places in the U.S. for a few years. Then we moved to Stansted, England. My sister and younger brother were born in Stansted. We were a large family of 8! From England we came back to the United States. We moved to Massachusetts when I was 16. I have been here since.



CBE Communications team members Lauren Solomon and Rick Green caught up with Stan to take photos for this piece. Here Rick caught Lauren photographing Sam. Thanks also to team member Gary Budiansky who conducted this interview a few days earlier.

Thank you for keeping our building so beautiful. How is one person able to do that? What's your secret?

My secret? My secret is that I am a very active person and I love to dance and I love music. When I am working in the building I sometimes practice my dance steps. When no one is around, I can play the radio. The thing that I enjoy most in my life is dancing. Working as your custodian is actually very compatible with what I love to do.

We understand that you are an accomplished dancer. Please tell us more! What kind of dancing do you do? When did you start and what got you interested? Can you be seen performing? Do you have any other interests you'd like to tell us about?

I've been dancing all of my life. I enjoy freestyle dancing such as salsa or cha-cha. You will find me at night clubs in Fitchburg and surrounding towns in the evenings when I am off from work. Often I'm the first one dancing on the floor. I get other patrons out of their chairs to get up and dance. The club management likes that. When there is a dance competition, I often come in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place. I have a set of dance costumes that I wear to the clubs. I choreograph music, too.

I used to travel as far as Boston to go to clubs, but my work schedule no longer allows me to travel far from this area. I remember going to clubs on Landsdowne Street where I used to be able to do body surfing over the crowd on the dance floor. I don't do that anymore.

Many of us in the congregation never get to meet you or see you at work. If someone wanted to say hi, when would they usually find you at the synagogue?

I love to meet people. I start work at about 8 PM on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. I arrive at 9PM on Wednesday. Please feel free to stop in and say hello.

Please consider making a [donation](#) to the General Fund in Stan's honor to thank him for all his work sustaining our building.



Stan showed off some of his signature moves in the community court.



Stan then partnered with Lauren for some impromptu pairs dancing. (Lauren: "I'm a novice. He kept me on my toes!")



If you noticed that our sukkah looked extra bright and clean this year, it was thanks to Stan who hand scrubbed all the lattice work!

CBE delivers — again! — to the Acton Food Pantry

Congregation Beth Elohim recently completed its 5783 High Holidays Food Drive. Food collected on Yom Kippur was delivered to the Acton Food Pantry. We



asked Rick Silverman to tell us about the Acton Food Pantry and how we have been supporting them with our food collection program.

What is the Acton Food Pantry? What is the community that they serve and, in general, who takes advantage of their services?

The Acton Food Pantry has been providing food to residents-in-need in Acton, MA and surrounding towns since 1984. Acton Community Supper and Food Pantry, Inc. is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization established in 1984 to help alleviate food-insecurity in Acton and its contiguous towns — Boxborough, Concord, Carlisle, Littleton, Maynard, Stow and Westford.

Clients receive a 4-day supply of food which they choose from Acton Food Pantry shelves. This allotment includes canned goods, staples, meat, eggs, dairy products, bread, and fresh fruit and vegetables. The Pantry also provides baby food, formula, and diapers to those with babies in their household and other basic household products to all families (when these products are available in the pantry).

How much was Congregation Beth Elohim able to supply in groceries this year? Was it a success?

This year, Don Hoban made 2 trips to the pantry with 124 bags of non perishable items. Acton Food Pantry posted a very nice thank-you on their [Facebook Page](#) and on their [website](#).

For how long has CBE been contributing to the Food Pantry?

Approximately 15 years ago, Laura Kelmar initiated the idea of having a regular High Holiday Food Drive to benefit the Acton Food Pantry. She was serving as VP of Education at that time. Laura was good friends with the director of the Pantry.. Currently, Na'aseh takes responsibility for the High Holiday Food Drive.

Is there anything else that readers should know about the Acton Food Pantry?

Our congregation collected \$1400 in donations as a gift to Acton Food Pantry in Spring/ Summer 2022. In their thank you letter to us, they mentioned that in their previous fiscal year they serviced 962 local households with 425,000 pounds of food. They are a great organization for our synagogue to continue to support.



Acton Community Supper and Food Pantry

October 20 at 2:57 PM · 🌐

...

A huge THANK YOU to [Congregation Beth Elohim](#) for their amazing annual High Holidays food drive, providing almost 1,000 lbs of food for Acton Food Pantry! Our heartfelt thanks to this wonderful congregation for all their ongoing support. Truly awesome! 🙏



What's up at the CBE Early Learning Center



Waky reading "Sadie's Sukkah Breakfast" to the Kofim class in the CBE sukkah!

The Kofim class proudly displays their personal sukkahs in the "Kofim Museum"!



The Zebrot class "sukkah board"

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 abundant thanks to Bob Ferrara and Waky.

Illustration by Maurice Sendak.

QUESTION: In the past few weeks, the Nobel Prizes were once again announced in each of the Prize's six categories. One of our congregants, Sue Abrams, shared some delightful statistics about these most prestigious of all science-oriented awards. As recently as 2017, Nobel Prizes have been awarded to 902 individuals, of whom 203 or 22.5% were Jewish. This is quite a feat since Jews comprise less than one-half of one percent of the world's population. Thus, the percentage of Jewish Nobel laureates is about 112.5 times or 11,250% above average. Sadly, we have no Nobel Laureates among our Beth Elohim congregation. However, our co-President Jaymi Formaggio's husband Joe worked for Art McDonald, who received a Nobel Prize in Physics in 2015 for discovering that neutrinos – those tiny little subatomic particles - actually have mass.

The rest of us non-Laureates can try some educated guesses to match the Jewish laureates listed in the first column below with the category of their Nobel Prize listed in the second column.

NOBEL LAUREATE	NOBEL PRIZE CATEGORY

Henry Kissinger	Physiology or Medicine
Andrea Ghez	Physics
Robert Horvitz	Literature
Arthur Ashkin	Economics
Bob Dylan	Peace
Ben Bernanke	Chemistry

Ponder your response – and find the answer further along in this email.!

Lifecycle and milestone events in our community



Rachelle Horwitz-Martin and Rob Martin are delighted to announce the birth of their daughter, Aliza Carrie Martin, on Wednesday, October 19th at 2:07PM, weighing 5 lb 14 oz. Everyone is healthy, and Eli is thrilled to be a big brother!



Mazel Tov to Isabella Ruth Blumberg — and to her parents Emily and Michael and her sister Ellie. Isabella became a Bat Mitzvah on Saturday, October 22, 2022 and did an

amazing job on the Bimah!



Has your family celebrated a recent simcha or milestone? Send us a photo along with a caption (limited to 80 words) so we can include your simcha in our next newsletter. Email communications@bethelohim.org.

Contribute to the December issue of *The Star* with your family's stories!



Does your family have a favorite menorah? Does it have a story behind it? Was it passed down through generations? Or found in a closet? If you have a menorah with a story to tell, send us a photo and a brief paragraph about it, and we'll feature it in our December issue!

What's happening at CBE this month?

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

Donations

The congregation thanks our members, their relatives and friends, and the larger community for donations received during the month of October. If you do not see your donation, please look for it in our next newsletter, or contact communications@bethelohim.org.

Adult Education Fund

Ellen Valade / In memory of Albert E. Valade Jr.

Paul Linet / In honor of Waky becoming a Bubbie

Alex Young Social Action Fund

Ellen Valade

Amy Naparstek Israel Scholarship Fund

Ellen Valade

Freddy & Doris Goldstein / In memory of Tina Kaplan, wife of David, mother of Robby and Adam

Cantorial Fund

Chuck & Lauren Pollak / To thank Cantor Sarra for everything she does and all the work she put into making High Holiday services so special

Ed & Nancy Kleiman / In memory of Ed's brother Philip's yahrzeit

Ellen Valade

Chesed Fund

Lauren Solomon / In honor of the wedding of Shoshana Zuckerman and Joe Williams

Ellen Valade

Choir Fund

Ellen Valade

Mark & Ellen Koretz / In loving memory of Tina Kaplan

Ronni Kenger / In memory of George Thomas, father of Henry Thomas

Chips & David Naparstek / In memory of Arielle Sokol, sister of Ethan Sokol

Ed & Nancy Kleiman / In honor of Judy Kramer and the choir for enhancing our High Holiday worship with such beautiful music and prayer

Chuck & Lauren Pollak / In recognition of all the wonderful work the choir has done to enhance our High Holiday services. Thank you!

Suzanne & Herman Kabakoff / In memory of Aileen (*Chaya Leah*) Hammerman

Cindi & Rick Silverman / In memory of George Williams Thomas, beloved father of Henry Thomas and father-in-law of Jai Gluckman Thomas

Dan & Shelley Klein / In memory of Arielle Sokol

Lauren Solomon / In memory of Arielle Sokol, beloved sister of Ethan Sokol, with deepest condolences

Lauren Solomon / In memory of George Williams Thomas, beloved father of Henry Thomas and father-in-law of Jai Gluckman Thomas

Freddy & Doris Goldstein / In memory of Aileen (*Chaya Leah*) Hammerman, mother of Shelley Green

General Fund

Eva Jakob / In gratitude for meaningful High Holiday services

CBE Brotherhood / To help defray the cost of the replacement cooler

Chips & David Naparstek / In memory of Therese Gibes, mother of Rita Grossman

Chuck & Lauren Pollak / To thank so many people who gave so much of themselves to make High Holiday services run so smoothly. People like Leslie Knight, George Morton, Jess Rosenblatt, Stacey Briggs, Arye Hess, the ENTIRE Comms team, etc. The list goes on and on.....

First Parish Church of Stow and Acton / With thanks for hosting them at our Shabbat service!

Gerson Stutman Memorial Beautification Fund

Ellen Valade

High Holiday Appeal

Chips & David Naparstek

George & Lauren Morton

Robert Brown & Hope Davis

Alan Berko & Peggy Flaherty Berko

Les & Judy Kramer

Ina & Malcolm Burdine / In memory of our parents William & Dorothy Hyman and Isadore & Ada Burdine

Sue Abrams

Allan & Ellen Krueger

Barbara Fishman

David Baumritter & Kerry Chartier

Lauren Solomon

Dan & Shelley Klein / With grateful thanks to all who made this High Holiday season so special

Bob & Deena Ferrara

The Rosenman Family

Laura & Dan Kelmar

Michelle & Chris Siegert

Ellen Valade

Library Fund

Emily & Michael Blumberg / In honor of Waky becoming a Bubbe to Lila Naomi Foley!

Na'aseh Social Justice Fund

David & Sari Kelly / For support of the Afghan family

Ellen Valade

Rabbi Lewis Mintz Fund

Freddy & Doris Goldstein / In loving memory of Carl Rosenkopt, father of Doris Goldstein and grandfather of Carri, Alicia, and Emily. In loving memory of Minnie Goldstein, mother of Freddy

The People of Chelm Want to Know...

ANSWER TO QUESTION POSED ABOVE: You should be congratulated for getting any of these. Here are the Laureates, the Nobel Prize category of their award, and the year it was awarded. One tricky angle, there was no Chemistry winner, but there were two Physics awardees in the list.

Henry Kissinger – Peace 1973 – worked as US Secretary of State to bring about a cease-fire in the Vietnam War. No less than three Israeli heads of state have been given the Peace Prize – Menachem Begin (1978), Shimon Peres (1994), and Yitzak Rabin (1994).

Andrea Ghez – Physics 2020 - became the fourth woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for collaborating on the discovery of a supermassive compact object (i.e., a black hole) in the Milky Way's galactic center. She is a 1987 MIT graduate and her role model was her high school chemistry teacher.

Robert Horvitz – Physiology or Medicine 2002 – is a 1968 MIT grad and current MIT professor who received the award for “discoveries concerning genetic regulation of organ development and programmed cell death”. His primary research subjects were not zombies but nematode worms!

Arthur Ashkin – Physics 2018 – is the oldest person – at 96 years of age - to receive a Nobel Prize in 2018 for his invention of "optical tweezers", which have revolutionized eye surgery. The Nobel committee does not award posthumous prizes.

Bob Dylan – Literature 2016 – the famous, iconoclastic American singer-songwriter was awarded his prize "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition".

Ben Bernanke – Economics 2022 – was awarded for “research on banks and financial crises”. Ben was chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve during the economic and financial-sector crisis of 2008-2009, an economic collapse that could have been much worse. Ben received his PhD in Economics at MIT in 1979.

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](#)

[Hadassah of Northern New England](#)

[Hebrew College](#)

[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](#)

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

[Synagogue Council of Massachusetts](#)

[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.

Feedback/get in touch with us!

Let us know what you think!

Do you like the new format? What about the content? If there is an individual or effort you'd like to see featured, please let us know!

Please also don't hesitate to let us know if you had any issues with downloading, reading, or if you had any issues accessing your email version of *The Star*.

For all of the above, please write to communications@bethelohim.org.

Until next time,

The Star editorial and design team —

Gary Budiansky, Maida Fund, Rick Green, Beth Schrager, Lauren Solomon, Shoshana Zuckerman

Visit us at www.bethelohim.org



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