

# THE STAR

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2017

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TEMPLE BETH TORAH, 130 MAIN STREET  
WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT



## Thanksgiving Reflection from Rabbi Seth

Thanksgiving. Mmm. Or should I say “Hmm...” Contentment or hesitation, pleasure or doubt? Fragrant kitchen smells, delicious food, the joys of family and company over for dinner and watching the Macy’s parade and football, or uncertainty over what to feel thankful about and skepticism regarding the very idea of an America where dreams of prosperity can reach fulfillment? It used to feel so uncomplicated, so easy. Right...?

When I was a child, people—those I knew, anyway—didn’t agonize over the subject or feel compelled to make calculations based on heightened sensitivity about this nation’s history of marginalizing social groups who don’t fit neatly into the paradigm of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. These days, on the contrary, every reaction is monitored, calibrated and carefully designed not to offend anyone and to include everyone, but this approach leads to more, not less, inter-group tension and conflict as well as to growing inner doubts relating to the value of one’s own identity. Respecting the fact that the Western European settlers achieved their success through genocide (against indigenous people of this continent) and slavery (forced upon imported Africans) increases the unsettling feeling, among a diminishing white, Christian plurality, of being surrounded by hostile foreigners. Jews don’t quite know where we fit in.

An irony in all of this is that Jews, who are perhaps the most anomalous element in the cultural mix, are the most responsible for generating traditions and symbolism on which the Thanksgiving holiday is based. The Pilgrims saw themselves as a New Israel, their trip across the ocean as the flight of Israelites escaping Egypt across the Red Sea, America as the Promised Land. The legendary first Thanksgiving dinner is modeled on our harvest festival of Sukkot.

Here in America, very few (including Jews) are aware of these historical-religious parallels. With whom should Jews identify? Are we white? (I don’t think of myself as such.) Are we Christian? (No way.)

Are we privileged in the way various minorities accuse white people of being? (I think the experience in America has weakened, not strengthened, Jewish religious and cultural identity.) Or should we identify with African and Native Americans, Latinos and other like-ourselves-not-quite-kosher-by-WASP-standards immigrant populations? (To do that would be, I believe, both self-indulgent and self-defeating: we have common cause with other oppressed peoples, but we are dangerously deluding ourselves if we allow their destiny to subsume our own.) Oh, it’s so complicated!

Maybe the solution is to identify with ourselves: to be ourselves. That would be a start, at least. How can we do so in a society that was designed for white Christians (e.g., Christmas is a national holiday, and employers and school administrators often look askance—still, in the second decade of the 21st century) when Jews demand their right to take time off for Passover and Yom Kippur). This is putting aside the even more tricky matter of how women (yeah, remember them—over one half of the human race?!) are supposed to fit into the paradigm of, and find validation in, any of these cultures: Christian, Jewish or secular.

For Jewish women, men and children, the challenge—with its ambiguities and discomforts—of being American and Jewish will continue for some time. Thanksgiving is not an affront to our Jewish identity and can even enhance our confidence in ourselves as Jewish people seeking to participate meaningfully in the land where our fortunes have led us. We have reason to be emphatically thankful for material blessings that we have received from our experience in this country. Yet, the fact that we are so blessed here doesn’t invalidate the difficult question of how to reclaim the spiritual core of our Jewishness without abandoning our identity as Americans.

Might that be a fitting topic for conversation as we sit around the Thanksgiving table this year?

# NEWS AND NOTES FROM TBT

## Winter Theatre of Jewish interest in Connecticut

There are several regional theatre offerings this winter season with Jewish themes.

### Hartford Stage's Seder

Performances concluded, great reviews

A retired typist for the Hungarian KGB visits her former workplace, now a museum devoted to Communist atrocities. She's aghast to find her picture on the museum's Wall of Murderers—even before she learns her estranged daughter works for the museum. As her family celebrates its first Seder, she relives the horrors that led to a lifetime of dark secrets. Inspired by a true story.

### Long-Wharf's *The Chosen*, *New Haven*

November 22 – December 17, 2017

Set against the backdrop of 1940s Brooklyn and the specter of war, Posner's adaptation of Chaim Potok's award-winning novel is a story of fathers and sons, tradition, modernity, and the difficult choices one must make to achieve understanding.

### The Goodspeed's *Rags: An American Musical*, *Haddam*

October 6-December 10, 2017

Fresh from Ellis Island, a young mother and her son search for a new life and a sense of home as the 20th century beckons. The streets of Manhattan's Lower East Side may not be paved with gold, but they echo with the music of opportunity, optimism and hope. A ravishing score by the songwriters of *Wicked* and *Annie* colors a sweeping saga of America's immigrant past.

## You say Hanukkah, I say Chanukah

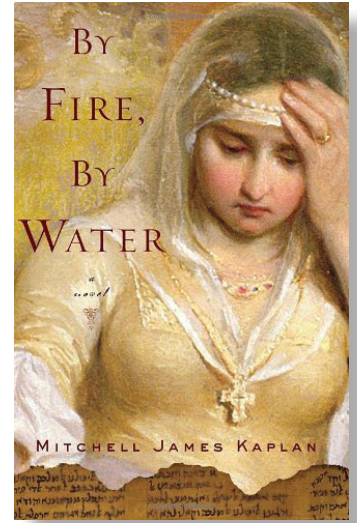
This year Hanukkah runs from the evening of December 12th (first candles) through December 20th. **SAVE THE DATE** Our annual TBT Chanukah Latke Party will be celebrated Sunday December 17 from 11:00 to 1:00. A dairy lunch with latkes, egg salad, tuna salad and desserts will be served. Hope to see all of our TBT families there!! Cost is \$7.50 per person, \$20.00 max per family. You need to RSVP by December 11th, after that the costs will be \$8.50 per person and \$30.00 per family. Also we need volunteers to set-up and clean up! **Please RSVP** to Sallyanne at 860-828-3377 or by email at [batsps53@gmail.com](mailto:batsps53@gmail.com). Please make checks out to TBT and mail them to Sallyanne at 105 Sunmeadow Drive, East Berlin, CT, 06023.

# TBT Book Club

The next TBT Book Club selection will be by *Fire by Water*, written by Mitchell James Kaplan. Please plan to join us for a lively discussion of this moving book on December 14 at 3PM at TBT.

*Here is a recent review by Deborah Schoeneman published by The Jewish Book Council.*

*“Luis de Santangel is a converso, chancellor, investor, and friend to King Ferdinand in 15th century Spain. After the murder of the First Chief Inquisitor of Aragon unleashes the fury of the Inquisition upon the Jewish people and all conversos, Santangel learns that one of his friends is about to meet his demise. As this horrific process ensues, Santangel meets a pious monk, a Jewish woman to whom he is attracted, the explorer Cristobal Colon (Christopher Columbus), and others who lead him to explore his abandoned Jewish faith. Kaplan depicts many of his characters, including General Tomas de Torquemada, beyond simplistic stereotypes. In **By Fire, By Water** sincerest motives are questioned, weakened, strengthened, and defied until the “mob rule” of terror spins out of control, leaving all to mourn, remember, question, defy, deepen, and celebrate the precious gift of faith held at such an appalling cost.”*



You can contact **Cecile Brofin** ([cecile\\_brofin@yahoo.com](mailto:cecile_brofin@yahoo.com)) for further information.



## Religious School Calendar

Nov 5, 12, 19, (thanksgiving)  
Dec 3, 10 17 (christmas), (new years)  
Jan 7, (MLK), 21, 28  
Feb 4, 11 (presidents weekend), 25  
Mar 4, 11, 18, 25  
Apr (Passover), (spring break), (spring Break), 22, 29  
May 6, (mother’s day), (Shavuot), (memorial day weekend)  
June 3, 10 -last day

## Religious School Challah Schedule

### November

5 Rose  
12 Sondik  
19 Evans

### December

3 Rice  
10 Rose  
17 Sondik



## Tower Leaked Again in That Bad Storm

A torrential rainstorm caused foyer ceiling tiles to crash down again after we thought we had the problem licked. We had the roofer back and though leaks can be difficult to isolate we will keep on trying. Roofer has located a possible source at the top of the right front pillar and will create a cover patch and seal and caulk that area. Here's hopin'.

## Social Hall Floor Maintenance

Our floor in the social hall will be repaired and refinished the week of Thanksgiving. Please continue to treat it delicately by removing your shoes before stepping on it, particularly in the winter, to preserve the finish.



# Here's Helene's Tale From a Busy Year

It all begins with a thought! Helene Rosenblatt had been thinking "there must be another way" to put together a top notch group that would not be committed to an "every week" rehearsal. Thinking over her experiences of over 50 years, what led to the success or failure of various groups? The issues revolved around commitment and attendance. For example, Helene was involved with the Connecticut Recorder Orchestra for a year and loved its sense of community, the way people self-regulated parts, etc. After one year of struggling to make weekly rehearsals in Waterbury after a ten hour work day in Groton that ended for Helene. So was there a way, she wondered that the numbers of fine flutists in Connecticut could bring together something on a high performance level with fewer rehearsals and very good preparation. Out of this thought process came an inquiry email to a few colleague flutists in July of 2016. The reception was overwhelmingly positive. August 2016 was the first Founders meeting. A name was chosen and the Connecticut Flute Orchestra (CTFO) was born.

We went on to invite other like minded and professional level Connecticut flutists to join. After a few meetings and lots of emails and notices, we had over 20 willing and very able flutists on piccolo, Eb flute, C Flute, Alto Flute, Bass Flute, Contrabass Flute and SubContra Bass Flute. Now we needed a program, music, performance hall, conductor. Just about 1 year later – the an-



nouncement the Connecticut Flute Orchestra (CTFO) would preform its Premier concert at Crowell Hall at Wesleyan University. With much thanks to Composer and Faculty Member Neely Bruce, and Wesleyan University and CTFO members Peter Standaart, Heather Segmaier, former staff Sarah Bouchard we were on our way to a first concert. Nadya Potemkina who is an Adjunct Professor and all around wonderful conductor and musician rounded out our personnel needs as our Conductor for the first performance. The date was set, September 17, 2017 6 PM. We scheduled 3 rehearsals – only the last one with everyone. Helene appeared on SEC-TV (and also some other Community TV stations in the Hartford area) [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFCPaf7BT2ToMOG-Pf4brydA/videos?disable\\_polymer=1](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFCPaf7BT2ToMOG-Pf4brydA/videos?disable_polymer=1) and also on WESU radio <https://archive.org/details/RiverValleyRhythms09-14-2017> prior to the concert. The big day came, all too fast, with many details to coordinate. The concert was a great success ending with a standing ovation! Lots of work, but a good outcome. Helene began the work for the next concert see our Facebook page <https://archive.org/details/RiverValleyRhythms09-14-2017> or website <http://ctfluteorchestra.site> for more information



# WHAT'S UP AROUND OLD WETHERSFIELD

by Carol Gershenson, *The Star's* town reporter

Ever wish for a unique spot for coffee or lunch in Old Wethersfield? Heirloom Market at Comstock Ferre may be your answer. The wood interior radiates a rustic vibe. Add in scattered old sofas and tables and you get a sprawling space to kick back in. Spiro and Julia Koulouris lease the cafe/bakery/grocery/seed store. Per the Hartford Courant, "their vision goes well beyond stocking...local and organic products". They whip up healthy juice blends, coffees, and smoothies. As a lactose intolerant person myself, I was happy to indulge in their wholesome banana peanut



butter cocoa espresso almond milk smoothie. They serve breakfast, lunch, and bakery goodies. Heirloom Market is a funky place to chat with friends or curl up with a book. Offerings appeal to vegans, vegetarians, GF'ers and omnivores. (Heirloom Market at Comstock Ferre, 263 Main Street, Wethersfield, CT, (860) 257-2790, [info@heirloommkt.com](mailto:info@heirloommkt.com) (Open Tuesday through Sunday)



## Meriden Muslims

Our friends from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community would like to visit TBT once again. They will be joining us on Friday, January 19th. Please come and join us in praying with them and welcoming them to our congregation.

# TWO WAYS YOU CAN DONATE TO TBT

## GOLDEN BOOK

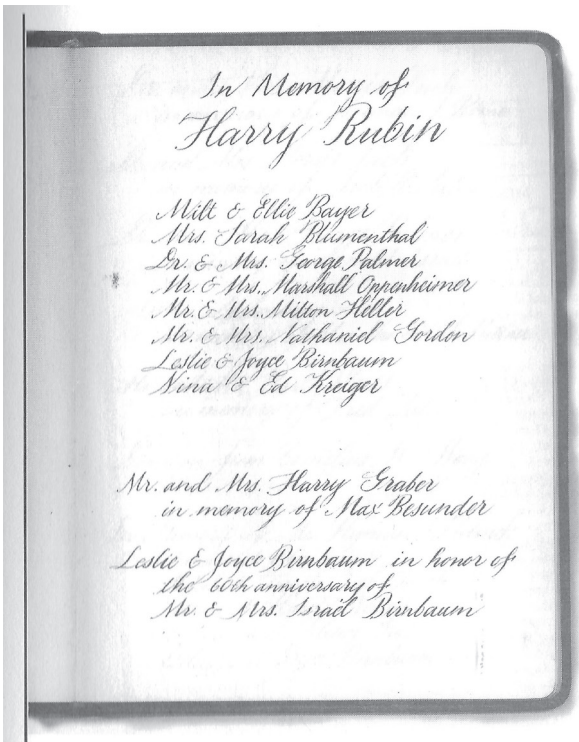
A general all-purpose fund for ongoing repairs and maintenance. We will update details in the next Star!

## TREE OF LIFE

The Tree of Life is on the west wall of the Social Hall. Family members friends can make dedications or remembrances, ranging from individual leaves to branches.

This is a page from our 50th anniversary souvenir program.

The sentiments remain the same although there no longer is a Felicia Fund.



The Tree of Life represents the Torah and the Jewish people. The imagery: The tree is situated on a hill. Leaves are larger than life to permit inscriptions. At the top of each branch are three special leaves that represent the composition of the Jewish people...the Kohanim, the Levites and the Israelites. Branches are interlocked symbolizing unity and form a seven-branched menorah which symbolizes the days of the week. The seven roots of the tree trace Jewish origins representing the three patriarchs and four matriarchs of Israel - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sara, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.

Members, loved ones and friends of Temple Beth Torah are afforded several options to make donations in celebration of a simcha, in memory of a loved one or in honor or recognition of an individual or memorable event. The Tree of Life, located in our vestry, provides a range of dedication and remembrance opportunities, ranging from individual leaves to branches.

In addition, individuals may donate a Siddur, and a suitably inscribed bookplate will be placed in the prayer book in recognition of the donation. The TBT Golden Book is an all-purpose fund set up to accept donations to the synagogue for any purpose. Finally, the Felicia B. Shpall Memorial Fund has been established to accept donations in memory of our beloved spiritual leader; funds collected will be used to provide a permanent memorial, or memorials.





*The Methodist Church - Wethersfield*

ISRAELI AWARD

# Natalie Portman Honored With 'Jewish Nobel Prize'

By **JOSEF FEDERMAN**

Associated Press

**N**atalie Portman has been awarded Israel's 2018 Genesis Prize in recognition of her commitment to social causes and deep connection to her Jewish and Israeli roots, organizers of the prize announced on Tuesday.

The \$1 million award, known as "the Jewish Nobel Prize," is granted each year to a person recognized as an inspiration to the next generation of Jews through professional achievement and commitment to Jewish values.

The Oscar-winning actress said she was "deeply touched and humbled" by the recognition.

"I am proud of my Israeli roots and Jewish heritage. They are crucial parts of who I am," she said in a statement released by the organizers. She said she would use the prize money to "make a difference in the lives of women in Israel and beyond."

Portman was born in Israel and moved to the United States as a young girl, evolving from a child actress into a widely acclaimed A-list star. She won the 2011 Best Actress

Academy Award for her work in "Black Swan," and in 2015, she directed and starred in "Tale of Love and Darkness," a Hebrew-language film made in Israel based on an Amos Oz novel.

The Genesis Prize noted Portman's social activism in areas such as gender equality, combatting poverty, microfinance and animal rights.

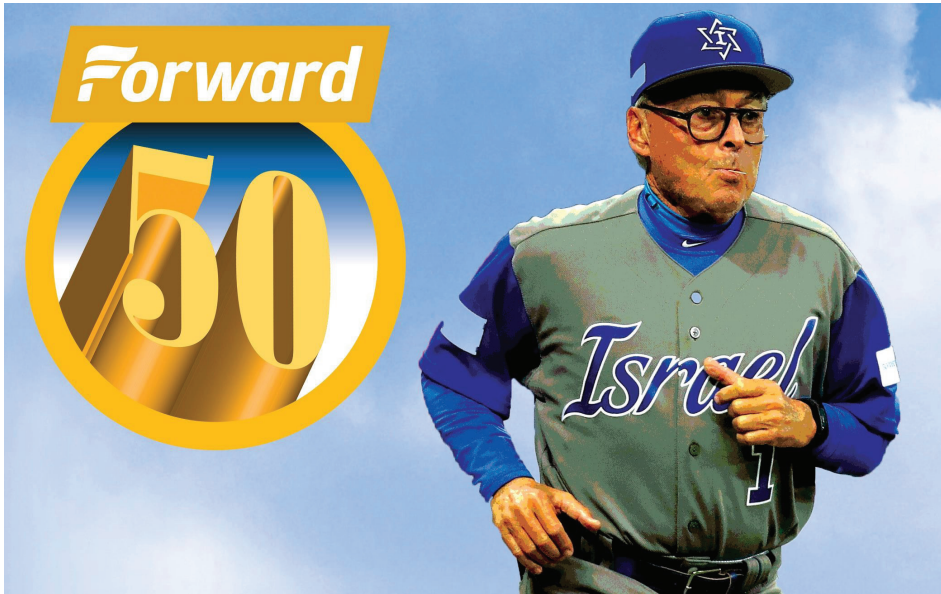
"She exemplifies the core traits of the Jewish character and values of the Jewish people — persistence and hard work, pursuit of excellence, intellectual curiosity, and a heartfelt desire to contribute to make the world a better place," said Stan Polovets, co-founder and chairman of the prize's foundation. He called her a "role model" for millions of young Jews worldwide.

The foundation said Portman's award money would go to a number of women's causes, promoting education, economic advancement, health and political participation. It said a "significant portion" of the funds would advance women's equality in Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to present the award to Portman at a ceremony in Jerusalem next June.

# Jerry Weinstein Led Israel's Baseball Team To Unforgettable Upset Victories

**FROM THE FORWARD:** March Madness, the NCAA college basketball tournament, is known for heroic underdogs pulling off shocking upsets. But for Jewish fans of the national pastime, the World Baseball Classic this past March featured madness on a whole new level, thanks to the exploits of Team Israel and its manager, Jerry Weinstein.



Weinstein, a 73-year-old baseball lifer who **also manages the Double-A Hartford Yard Goats**, ran a team almost solely comprising American Jewish minor leaguers. Acknowledging that baseball is not exactly Israel's most popular sport, he told reporters, "I think that by playing in this [tournament] and do-

ing well that we enlighten people's awareness."

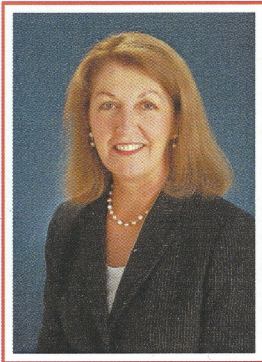
Israel, ranked 41st in the world, pulled off a string of victories against some of the best teams on earth, including South Korea, Chinese Taipei and Cuba.

"It feels like the World Series, but only bigger," Weinstein said.

Although their Cinderella run came to an end with a loss to Japan, Weinstein and the Team Israel athletes not only impressed scouts looking for call-ups, but also strengthened their Jewish identities.

"It's so special for all the players," pitcher Shlomo Lipetz told ABC News. "They feel this kind of connection being Jewish, this connection of playing for Israel."

After one season, Jerry Weinstein, is moving on, planning to assume another role in the Rockies organization next season.



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# TBT OFFICERS 2017-2018

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Kathi Mag

Carol Gershenson

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Corresponding Secretary: Kathi Mag

Financial Secretary: Sallyanne Scott

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Board of Education: Barbara Checknoff

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Gardening: Kathi Mag

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Ways and Means Chair: Judy Gold

Ways and Means Committee: Rhoda London and Helene Rosenblatt

Receiving phone calls: Rhoda London

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Kathi Mag: conduct board meetings

Trustee: Susan James

High Holiday Committee:

Rabbi Seth Riemer

Barbara Checknoff

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Nominating Chair: Cecile Bronfin

Miscellaneous: Phil Lohman and Ralph Horowitz