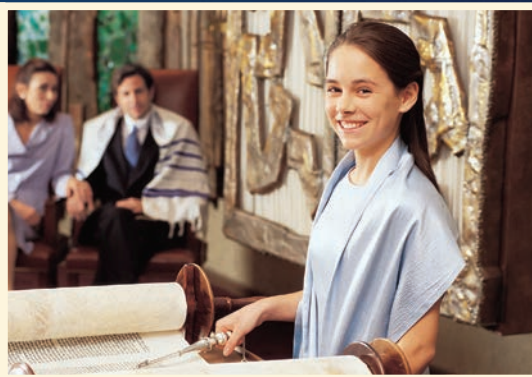


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In this issue

*The Do's and Don'ts of
Jewish Baby Naming..... 6*

*Why Hebrew School Students
Choose Confirmation 10*

Wedding Menus Evolve 12

*Shtick Is Staple at
Orthodox Weddings 14*

*Independent Clergy Find Place
in Community 16*

Playing in the Band..... 18

*A Second Chance to Make
a First Bat Mitzvah 21*

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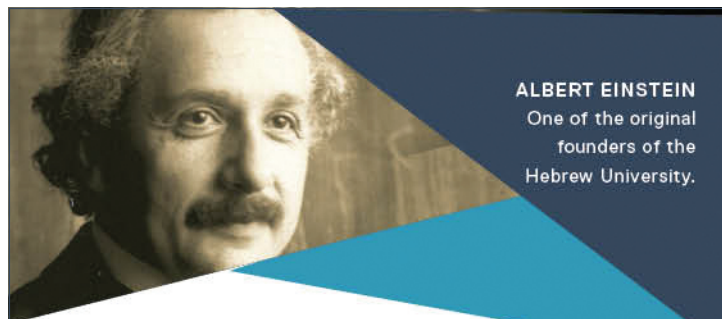
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The Do's and Don'ts of Jewish Baby Naming

ERIC SCHUCHT | JE STAFF

Baby naming can be one of the hardest tasks expectant parents undertake, but Jewish tradition can help.

Some practices for selecting a newborn's *kinnui*, or secular name, and their *shem kodesh*, or sacred or Hebrew name, date back generations. Other strategies come and go with the times. Regardless of the method, however, many experts in the Jewish community have advice to share.

One such naming expert is Cantor Mark Kushner. He has multiple decades of experience performing *brit milahs* and *simchat bats*. In that time, he estimated he's been involved in the naming of thousands of children.

Kushner said a name serves several functions according to Judaism. It describes a person's essence, provides identity and generational connection and begins the process of shaping a human being. He said a person's name can affect their personality and define them. It can influence behavior and provide a spiritual connection between the individual and his soul. Naming allows for creativity in the same vain of God's first task to Adam — that of naming every living thing.

When it comes to choosing a name, Kushner had three pieces of advice. The first is to pick a name before the child is born, as life can get hectic and time consuming once they arrive. The second is to take your time and select something meaningful, as it shouldn't be picked on a whim. The last suggestion is to pick something that parents like regardless of what relatives think. Receiving too much family input can lead people to struggle or doubt their choice.



▲ Cantor Mark Kushner holds Graham Salata, son of Elizabeth and Kyle Salata.

Courtesy of Cantor Mark Kushner

"When you endeavor to make everyone happy, you end up being unhappy," Kushner said.

Rabbi Robert Layman also has some words of wisdom on the topic. For two decades his column "Speaking of Names" was published in the *Jewish Exponent*, and he's previously served as religious leader of Beth Tikvah-B'nai Jeshurun in Erdenheim and as regional director of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

Layman spoke of the Ashkenazi tradition, according to which children are to be named after a deceased relative. The idea is it will lead the child to embody that person's better qualities and to help keep their memory alive. It's the same reasoning behind the Sephardic tradition, except they go the other way, instead naming their children after a living relative. But for many Jews, these rules aren't set in stone.

"There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to naming," Layman said. "And the only rule that I came across is that you don't name a person after an infamous person in the Bible."

For secular names, Layman encourages people to research the origin or meaning before picking it. He said it isn't appropriate for a Jewish person to have a name related to Christianity or paganism — names like Mary, Natalie or Christian.

"People use names without knowing the origin of them," Layman said. "I like to advise that people, especially young couples having children early on, that they should stay aware of their Jewish identity and pick a name that's going to be appropriate for a child that is going to be raised Jewish."

The rabbi encouraged the use of name guides for ideas. BabyNames.com is an online database of potential baby names with their origins. Jennifer Moss launched the site in 1996 and has authored two books on the art of baby naming.

Moss, who is Jewish, said her advice for couples is to not think of how the name affects them, but rather how it will affect the child. It's important to take into account whether the name will be a burden for the child. One example Moss gave is a common name using an alternate or creative spelling, which the child would have to constantly spell out for the rest of their life.

Another aspect to consider is if a name is obviously tease-able. Moss discouraged people from selecting names easy for other school children to make fun of or bully. And as that baby will one day be a grown adult, she said it's important to select a name appropriate for the child throughout their life.

"Make sure that the name can grow with your child because you're not just naming a baby — you're also naming an adult," Moss said. "Although Pixie might be cute for a toddler, can Pixie command a boardroom?"

When it comes to the kinds of names people are picking, Moss said there's been a trend toward less common or more unique



▲ Cantor Mark Kushner at a brit milah

Courtesy of Cantor Mark Kushner

ones. Old-fashioned names are coming back in style. Parents today have better access to learn of naming trends, so people try to avoid common or popular ones. And for inspiration, they're turning to their family trees.

On the female side, Moss said there's a trend of "old fashioned"

See [Naming](#), Page 8



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Naming

Continued from Page 7



Baby wearing a kippah that says Ephraim in Hebrew
Courtesy of Cantor Mark Kushner

names common a century ago popping up. Examples include Eleanor, Ruth and Miriam. For boys, she said biblical names are always popular, but in recent years less common picks are rising to the top. Instead of Michael, David and Benjamin, Moss said names like Caleb, Levi and Eljah are becoming more popular.

When it comes to secular names, Kushner said they come and go in popularity. But with the Hebrew names, "the good old names still remain good old names."

In 2018, the most popular names in the United States for boys were Jackson, Liam, Noah, Aiden and Caden, according to BabyCenter. For girls, the top five were Sophia, Olivia, Emma, Ava and Isabella.

In Israel, the most popular names for Jewish boys were David, Ariel, Noam, Lavie and Yosef, according to *Israel Hayom*. For Jewish girls it was Tamar, Maya, Abigail, Noa and Ayala. ❤️

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▲ Baby wearing a kippah that says Daniel in Hebrew
Courtesy of Cantor mark Kushner

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Why Hebrew School Students Choose Confirmation

SELAH MAYA ZIGHELBOIM | JE STAFF

Mia Schwartzberg grew up looking up at a photo of her father on a wall at Main Line Reform Temple.

That wall was filled with photos of confirmation students, and she knew that she wanted to get confirmed, too, and have her own photo join her father's. She imagined that, one day, her own children would be looking up at her.

Through confirmation, Jewish teens “confirm” their commitment to Jewish life. According to My Jewish Learning, the practice in Judaism originated from the Reform movement in the 19th century out of the belief that older teenagers were more mature and more prepared to take on that commitment.

Nowadays, students in Hebrew schools at many synagogues can choose to continue their education after their b'nai mitzvah. That continued education is often recognized at the end of their 10th-grade year, usually around Shavuot, with a confirmation ceremony.

Earlier this year, Schwartzberg, a student at Lower Merion High School, completed her 10th grade year at TheTribe, Main Line Reform Temple's high school program.

“After the time of my bat mitzvah, it wasn't really a question of whether I would go to confirmation class because, over the years, it has been an enjoyable experience, rather than being forced to go,” Schwartzberg said. “I enjoyed going to Hebrew school every week, so then when it became after my Bat Mitzvah, I figured, ‘Why not stay?’”

Her confirmation ceremony was a Friday evening service. Throughout, the students read essays or speeches they had prepared.

But her connection to her Judaism extends beyond her confirmation ceremony. She plans to continue her Jewish education at Main Line Reform Temple. Outside of synagogue, she is involved in BBYO and has joined Jewish Family and Children's Service new junior board.

Last year, she decided to attend Alexander Muss High School



▲ Mia Schwartzberg and her family at her confirmation ceremony
Courtesy of Mia Schwartzberg

in Israel, a study abroad program. Schwartzberg learned of the program through a friend and pursued the opportunity to get up close with the places mentioned in the Torah.

“Ever since I was little, my Jewish identity has been a big part of the things I do and how I live my life,” she said.

Leah Isayev, a Haverford High School student who goes to Temple Sholom in Broomall, explained that her confirmation ceremony was mostly like a regular service, with special recognition of the work the students had put in to get to this milestone, as well as speeches by the students.

“I really loved the community at my synagogue,” Isayev said, reflecting on why she decided to continue her Jewish education. “I really enjoyed Judaism itself. I just love the idea. The whole purpose is helping the community, just making the world a better place.”

It was less stressful than having a bat mitzvah, she said, because that coming-of-age ritual focuses on just one person, whereas she went through the confirmation ceremony with the rest of her class. There was also more work leading up to the bat mitzvah.

Despite that, she found the lessons leading up to her confirmation ceremony — where students learned about other religions and studied the Ten Commandments — more meaningful.

“I feel like I connected to the religion more, to see comparisons to other religions and what they believe,” Isayev said. “It made



▲ Leo Perlstein at the Western Wall

Courtesy of Leo Perlstein

me feel like I was practicing the right religion.”

At Temple Beth Hillel-Beth El in Wynnewood, Brandon Bowman went through his own confirmation ceremony a few months ago, too.

Temple Beth Hillel-Beth El is one of the four Conservative synagogues that partner with Lower Merion Area Hebrew High. The post-B’nai Mitzvah program offers a confirmation trip to Israel, and Bowman and some of his friends decided they would go on that trip together. His parents, he said, also didn’t give him much of a choice.

Bowman, a student at Radnor High School, had never enjoyed Hebrew school before, but LMAHH was different.

They learned about current events and the weekly Torah reading, Bowman said. High school programs usually offer more flexibility than programs for younger students, and LMAHH is no exception. The students got to choose what they wanted to spend the second part of the day learning. Bowman often chose to learn about Israel.

“Before my bar mitzvah, I did not want to go to Hebrew school at all,” Bowman said. “Then after my bar mitzvah, I was still kind of the same until



▲ Leah Isayev and her mother

Photo courtesy of Leah Isayev



▲ Brandon Bowman (left) and his friends at the Western Wall

Photo courtesy of Brandon Bowman

I started LMAHH. LMAHH was pretty interesting. It wasn’t really traditional. ... When I got to LMAHH, the rabbis and the people in charge there knew that a teenager doesn’t want to come in Sunday morning ... so they really had a good lesson plan. They really benefited us, motivating us to come and enjoy our time there.”

Bowman now sits on the board of his BBYO chapter and is working to start a Jewish students club at his high school.

Leo Perlstein, a 10th grader at Harriton High School, is just beginning his own confirmation year at Har Zion Temple, also through LMAHH. Both his older sisters continued their Jewish education after their b’not mitzvah, and he recognized that there was more to learn about Judaism beyond his bar mitzvah.

But, for him, the point isn’t confirmation itself. He just sees that as a part of his larger Jewish education.

“I’m always going to continue my Judaism wherever I go and keep it with me,” Perlstein said. “It’s good to be part of that community and good to continue being Jewish.” ♥

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JESSE BERNSTEIN | JE STAFF

When Jeff Kalinsky started at Betty the Caterer 27 years ago, there were certain truths about clients' weddings, events and what they wanted to eat.

Weddings would likely be black tie; the meals were typically three-course and served at the table. The bride's mother was the one who held the greatest decision making power of the final menu.

That was just how it was.

Quicker than you can whisk an empty dumpling platter back to the kitchen for a refill, client demands have changed, Kalinsky said. From presentation to unique dietary needs, the elements of a catered wedding reception are in a new era.

"It's not like it's just a carving station with corned beef and turkey anymore," Kalinsky said.

The most obvious changes in wedding menus and catering service that Kalinsky and others have noticed are fairly easy to guess.

The problem of dietary restrictions, from nut allergies to vegan diets to gluten issues — alongside the occupational hazard of kashrut, of course — has come to a position of much greater prominence for kosher caterers in recent years.

Betty the Caterer, Kalinsky said, has "totally eliminated" the presence of nuts in its in-house bakery, and the days of a beef-only slider bar are in the past. Today, alongside beef and chicken options, vegetarian simcha-goers can expect to find more in the way of portobello mushroom and black bean burgers. And pescatarians needn't feel left out, Kalinsky said. They do salmon, too.

The biggest challenges in that arena have come in the form of the gluten-free event, of which Kalinsky is relieved to have only done at a few bar and bat mitzvahs.

"It's not the easiest thing in the world to accomplish, but we did it," he said.

Another major shift in menu creation that he's noticed:

The bride's voice seems to have grown in recent years, by his observation. Whereas brides in their early 20s would typically cede control of the menu creation process to their mothers, the brides he works with now are typically older, a little more self-assured and taking on the task themselves.

Difficult as it may be to adjust to communal shifts, Kalinsky said, that's just the name of the game.

"You have to keep up with what's happening in the communities," he said. "If you can't adapt to what your client wants, they're going to find it somewhere else."

Leslie Rosen can certainly sympathize with that.

Her company — Leslie Rosen Catering — wasn't even kosher when she began 46 years ago. She was previously a teacher of young children, and it wasn't even until her son was born that she began to decorate cakes for clients. In the early '90s, Rabbi Marshall Maltzman at Temple Beth Hillel-Beth El in Wynnewood proposed that she ditch her old model and become a kosher caterer. In fact, Maltzman allowed her use

of the synagogue kitchen, and asked that she cater his daughter's wedding.

That is all a long way of saying: She's no stranger to the big change required of a kosher catering company in 2019. One of those changes is the somewhat shrunken scale of the meals she's asked to provide.

"Today's generation, they do not want these big, over-the-top meals," she said.

Rosen stresses that this trend could simply be an idiosyncrasy of her own clientele. But by and large, she said, her wedding clients have started to favor, in far greater numbers, casual, relaxed food to go along with a casual, relaxed setting. This actually plays to her strengths as a caterer, Rosen believes; hors d'oeuvres,



▲ A soup offering from Betty the Caterer

Courtesy of Betty the Caterer



▲ A typical offering from Kosher Catering Philadelphia
Photo by Daniel Israel

unconventionally arranged in atypical serving surfaces (think repurposed paper clip holders), are her specialty.

"It is very important to me, always, with anything I did, that everything had to look as good as it tasted," Rosen said. "People eat with their eyes first, and I always wanted it to be really creative, whatever menu I did."

Eye-catching as she tries to be, there are also little tricks to use. Pigs in a blanket — or, in the parlance of kosher caterers, "miniature hot dogs wrapped in puff pastry" — can be presented on a bed of wheatgrass, for example. It's not an ostentatious presentation, but it's the kind of creativity clients increasingly expect.

The "kosher world often moves a little bit slower than the regular world" when it comes to these catering innovations, Rosen said, but those gaps are closing.

Daniel Israel has owned his catering company, Kosher Catering Philadelphia, for just three years. But even he's seen marked changes in that short period.

The Northeast Philadelphia native spent time working at the now-closed Deux Chemineés when he was still in high school, and worked as a *mashgiach* and chef for a few years. In his three years as the head chef of his catering outfit, he's noticed that customers who may have once shelled out for caterers to come in from Lakewood, New Jersey and New York are going with more affordable options. Additionally, for events where just a few of the guests keep kosher, clients seem to increasingly opt for a few sealed kosher meals to be arranged, rather than an entirely kosher event.

Changes or not, Israel still follows his true north.

"I'm in it to make good food," he said. ♥

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Shtick Is Staple at Orthodox Weddings

JESSE BERNSTEIN | JE STAFF

A brielle Fuerst's good friends, to her delight, were married just a few months ago. Leading up to the wedding, they asked her if she might be interested in putting on a little performance during the reception, something to entertain them and to jazz up the crowd.

Fuerst knew right away what she would do.

"I could do a weapons demo, if y'all think that's cool," she told them.

And so, at the wedding of her two friends, Fuerst, a martial arts and self-defense trainer, combined a nunchuck demonstration with an impromptu dance routine.

Though the content of the performance was certainly unusual, there's nothing out of the ordinary in the practice itself. The wedding shtick, as its known, is a staple of Orthodox Jewish weddings.

"It was really fun," Fuerst said.

This shtick is distinct from the typical use of the Yiddish word, meaning a comedic sketch. The wedding shtick is derived from a Talmudic source, as these things tend to be. From MyJewishLearning.com:

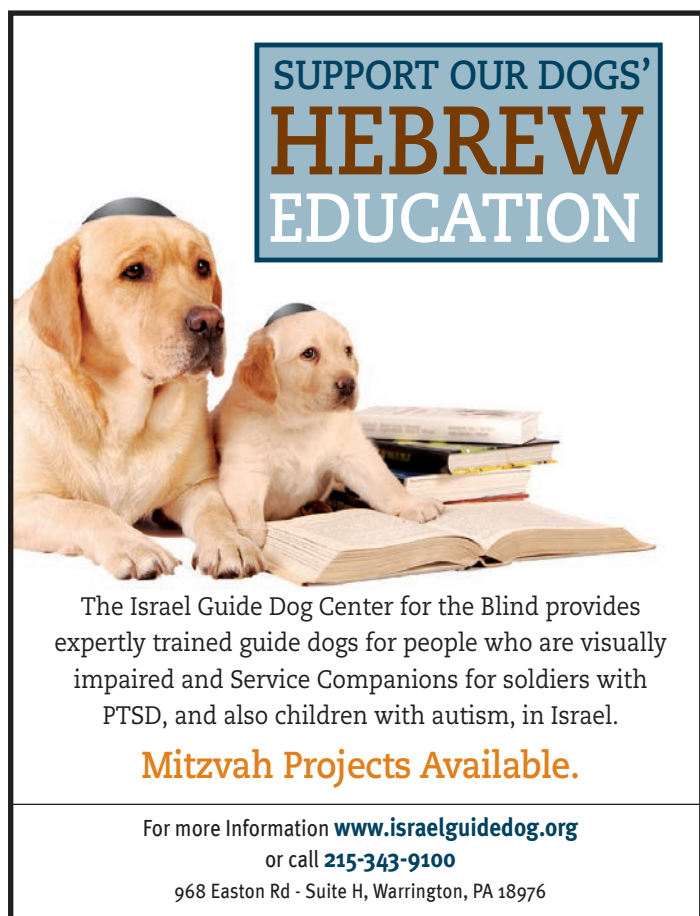
"The shtick custom, it seems, derives from the Talmud's mandate to dance and rejoice for a bride on her wedding night. Just what does this entail? The Talmud gives some examples, including Rabbi Shmuel b. Rav (Yitzhak) who juggled myrtle branches at weddings, and Rabbi Acha, who would hoist the bride up onto his shoulders and carry her around."

For Estee Ellis, performing the wedding shtick is a way to transcend buttoned-up strictures of a formal wedding party, and to express something ineffable about the relationship between the bride and groom and the performer.

"It's a really exciting way to celebrate and perform aspects that are more personal," Ellis said.

At a typical shtick, Ellis said, the couple will appear beneath an arch of arms made by guests, just as a warmup. For her own performance for close friends and family, she'll repurpose college T-shirts from the bride and groom's alma maters, a practice that she said is fairly typical.

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▲ Estee Ellis performs a wedding shtick

Courtesy of CJ Studios

Ellis and her friend do a medley from *Fiddler on the Roof* as they danced with felt bottles velcroed to their heads, in reference to the now-married couple's love of sitting on the roof.

Back when she was a student at Torah Academy, Ellis often performed comic roles in the musical productions, which has prepared her for the spectacle she makes of herself as part of the shtick. But it's all worth it for the newlyweds' enjoyment, she said. And if performing the shtick on your own sounds daunting, have no fear.

"The best kind of shtick," Ellis said, "is the kind where you can invite other people to create it also."

Melissa Meyers first heard about wedding shtick after she became more religious in college. She's come to love the tailor-made fun of it, the joy it brings to a wedding party.

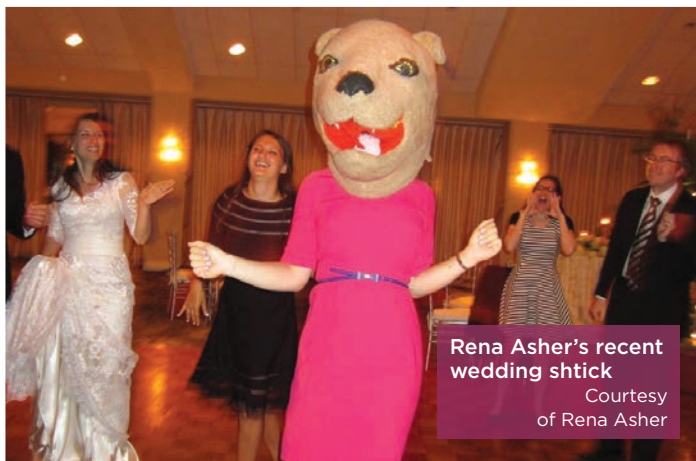
She's seen friends who do more or less the same performance at every wedding, and as fun as that is — who doesn't want to see someone eat fire in a hotel ballroom? — she tries to personalize her own performances.

When a medical school friend was married, she and other classmates dressed up like other friends and co-workers, and acted out the frenzy of a hospital when a patient has a heart attack.

Wedding shtick was always a part of Rena Asher's Jewish world. But now that she's reached the age when friends are getting married, her connection to the practice has deepened. Rowdy dancing and costumes are typical of her experience of the shtick, but she recently had the opportunity to do something new.

Asher had seen former Akiba Hebrew Academy classmates don the school's cougar mascot costume, but only recently got to put on the costume herself. Though she only put on the head, there are more weddings, and perhaps more of the costume, to come. ♥

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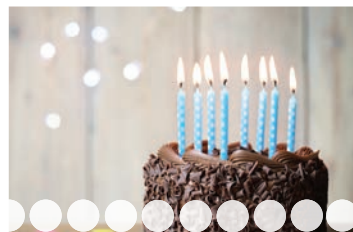
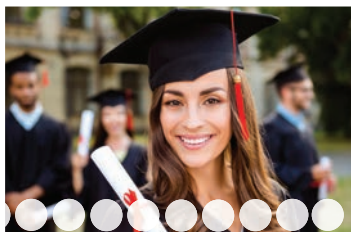
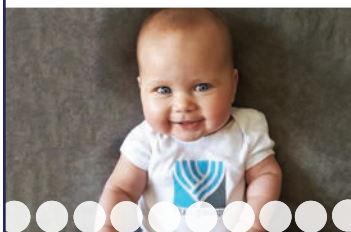
Rena Asher's recent wedding shtick
Courtesy of Rena Asher



Melissa Meyers (center) taking part in a wedding shtick
Courtesy of Melissa Meyers

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Independent Clergy Find Place in Community

ERIC SCHUCHT | JE STAFF

It's fairly typical for a rabbi to seek out a congregation to call home. But for some, a pulpit rabbinate isn't for them.

Greater Philadelphia is full of clergy who are independent, working as freelance entrepreneurs. These rabbis and cantors officiate life cycle services for the unaffiliated and fill in for others when unavailable. Whether by choice or happenstance, this career path allows for a sense of freedom and flexibility.

"I like to think I have all of the joys of being a pulpit rabbi and never have to show up at a board meeting," Rabbi David Levin said.

He decided to go the independent route after struggling to find openings at area synagogues. Typical jobs involve filling in for other rabbis at ceremonies like weddings, funerals and memorial services. Unlike a congregational rabbi, Levin will adjust his services to the needs of his clients, whether Conservative, Reform, Renewal or anything in between. His intention isn't to compete with or replace congregational rabbis, but to work in cooperation as a part of the same team.

"It's not a zero-sum game where my winning means the congregational rabbi loses a member. But it's an opportunity for me to give a positive experience to that person and invite them into considering community in a more traditional format," Levin said. "So I'm working with my friends in the pulpit, and ultimately we're all working together in service of the Jewish people. And as long as I keep that as my North Star, then I can walk in and out of a synagogue and feel like I'm doing something positive for all of us."

Levin said a lot of his clients come as referrals from other rabbis. Others, like Rabbi Lynnnda Targan, more actively advertise their services on personal websites or in *The Guide to Jewish Greater Philadelphia*. She sought out a freelance rabbinate believing it to be a better fit. Targan said she enjoys the ability to better control her schedule.

"When you're a pulpit rabbi, sometimes you have to make choices that are very difficult to make," Targan said. "As a community rabbi, I'm a little bit more in charge of my time and space, and that's working for me."

It's common for funeral homes to send unaffiliated Jewish families toward Levin and Targan to perform rites. Other clients will seek out a rabbi specifically, like Rabbi Rayzel Raphael. She got into that line of work after serving as rabbinic director of the Interfaith Family Support Network JFCS in Philadelphia for about 12 years. When the position was eliminated, she began a private practice.

"I really loved the work, and so I wanted to figure out how to keep doing this," Raphael said. "It came out of a passion for the work and the necessity to make a living."

A lot of the weddings she officiates are for unaffiliated or interfaith couples. Some are coming from out of town for a destination wedding and don't know where else to turn.

Raphael said many want the option to pick and choose which Jewish traditions they embrace and how they'll express them. For one wedding the couple asked her not to have any mention of God. Targan has had a similar experience when serving the unaffiliated. She said some people who aren't religious will request to have a Jewish wedding as their deceased parent would have wanted.

Others desire something more straight to the point.

"Short and sweet is often what they'll say to me," Targan said.

Being a cantor, Hazzan Naomi Hirsch has had a different experience than others in the independent circuit. She first got into freelancing as a means to support herself by teaching Hebrew, bar mitzvah lessons, singing instructions to rabbinic students and rabbis who want to perform *nusach*. From there, she branched off into performing other rituals. Hirsch said her goal when serving the unaffiliated is to act as a bridge to



▲ Rabbi Rayzel Raphael performing a wedding

Courtesy of Rabbi Rayzel Raphael

Jewish heritage and get people more involved in Jewish life.

"It is important for people to celebrate life cycle events in community, but the world has changed and belonging to a congregation, while still an important foundation of Jewish observance and practice, isn't always possible for people," Hirsch said. "It's important to reach out to people who are unaffiliated, allow them to have community, and it often does lead them to affiliate."

Levin, Targan and Raphael all expressed a desire to encourage the unaffiliated to affiliate. They see their services as a means for people to connect to the broader Jewish community.

"My goal is to always make people feel welcomed in the Jewish community," Raphael said. "And for those who have interfaith families, they don't always feel connected to a congregation. So I do weddings to be that friendly face of Judaism that welcomes them in so perhaps somewhere down the road that they would consider affiliation."

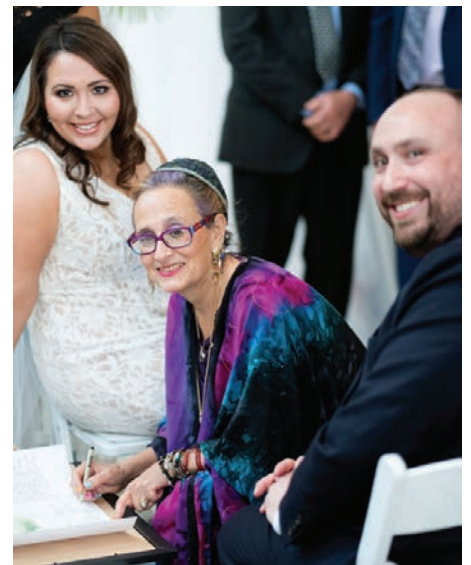
For many, freelancing is a balancing act because it can't fully support them financially. It isn't always a steady income, so those who pursue it often supplement it with other work. Or, as Levin puts it, "cobbling together one's rabbinate."



▲ Rabbi Lynnda Targan at the wedding of Steven Sclarow and Lori Buzgone
Photo by Larry Targan



▲ Rabbi Lynnda Targan at the wedding of Heather Sanislo and Eric Lubowitz
Photo by Lynda Berry



▲ Rabbi Rayzel Raphael
Courtesy of Rabbi Rayzel Raphael

Raphael works part time at Darkaynu in Warrington and is a musical performer, having produced several religious-themed albums. Targan has taught in the graduate program at the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School at Gratz College and has conducted workshops and writes; she is working on a book. Levin lectures and leads classes.

On the other hand, freelancing allows for interesting and unique experiences. Targan once was flown to France to officiate a wedding. Another time, she officiated a surprise wedding where no one but the

bride and groom knew. Both Raphael and Hirsch have worked on cruise ships performing High Holiday services. Experiences like those are part of what motivates clergy to pursue an independent rabbinate.

“We all have to create our own lives, and to create a life of service. This is the best way that I know how to do that for myself and the community,” Targan said. “By and large, I’m living a life of service, and this is the way I chose to serve.” ❤️

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PLAYING IN THE BAND

MATT SILVER | JE STAFF

When I was young, really young, I only wanted to be a bandleader. As a preschooler at Temple Sinai in Dresher, I used to hand out my father's business cards and book my classmates' bar and bat mitzvahs.

My paternal grandparents encouraged me to sing *Fiddler on the Roof* medleys in public places, and by encouraged I mean my grandmother would bribe me with pickles she'd take from Jack's Deli in the Northeast, wrap in a napkin and stick in her purse in anticipation of this bribery scheme. I loved pickles.

As a toddler, I would show up to contemporaries' birthday parties and ask the attending adult straight away, "Will there be any Jewish music here?" If the answer was no, I was out of there. It's taken years of introspection, but I've come to realize this was not my fault.

My first job was working for my father, who, for the better part of my childhood, was a bandleader — or, put more crudely, a wedding singer.

My job was to lug the band's equipment. The official job title was schlepper. He employed a minyan's worth of schleppers over the years. Some were strong, none looked it; some smelled, all looked like they would. Some drank, some smoked, some were suspected of being high (never substantiated). All were Jewish. (I'm not sure if that was just coincidence or because Jewish kids were more likely to understand the meaning of the word schlepper and, thus, their role). And all were overworked and underpaid, by their own unique interpretations of supply and demand.



▲ From left: Ken Silver, Eddie Bruce, Susan Moses and Joey Roberts
Courtesy of Ken Silver

My younger brother and I both worked dozens and dozens of dates as schleppers. If you wanted the job done fast, call Jon Silver; if you wanted the job done right, call Matt. My brother recently told me, air of lamentation in his voice, that he still believes this to be the crucial distinction that characterizes us. I'd rather have his penchant for economy and his vocal range (he maintains a side gig as "San Diego's Sinatra").

My father, back when you might've known him, was Kenny Silver the bandleader. To friends and family these days, it's Ken, or Dad, or the Silver Dragon; it's only Kenny to my mother when she doesn't like him. And to those he serves now, it's Principal Silver.

Principal Silver, much like Kenny Silver, is affable, thoughtful and funny-on-the-goofy-side-of-funny. He's a guy parents like and an elementary school principal that little children don't fear. Which is really impressive considering how childhood often perceives its first official authority figures.

He's a musician by training, sensibility and temperament, if not prodigious talent and Carnegie Hall-level dedication to practice. At 28 (in the late '70s), he became one of the youngest school administrators in the state of Pennsylvania, before abandoning his post in the Abington School District a year later to play music with his Philadelphia-area party band full time. This did not thrill his in-laws.

The Ken Silver Orchestra became the hottest band on Philadelphia's tony party circuit for the better part of the next 20 years. Weddings, bar mitzvahs, lavish corporate soirees. The bacchanalia of the Main Line country club scene, every big charity ball from Philly up to Manhattan



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and down to Baltimore.

He played for politicians: Mayor Goode, Mayor Street, Mayor Rendell, Gov. Rendell, Baroness Thatcher, Vice President Gore, and President Clinton on a rainy night at the Locust Club, where the legendarily charismatic president, eyeing my father's Selmer Mark VI tenor saxophone from across the room (the president knew his saxophones), walked over, waited until the song was finished, extended his hand and said, in the manner of all the most gifted clerics and politicians, "Nice to see you again, Kenny."

At his peak, my father was playing about 120 dates a year. This lasted from the mid-'70s to the late '90s.

When casino gaming was legalized in Atlantic City, musicians thought they'd have it good forever. And my dad certainly did for a while. He undercarded for Frank Sinatra and Paul Anka at high-roller affairs; he once played Jackie Mason's sham wedding at the Sands. It was all during the time when Steve Wynn and Donald Trump built shiny monuments to late-'80s excess that no one could've imagined sitting empty and corroded and emblematic of the most forlorn resort town three decades hence.

But this was never my father's world, not really. No doubt he had a bandleader's high-wattage smile and employed it readily, almost indiscriminately, in a way that made it more an accessory than the manifestation of an emotion. And, yes, he did drive a Mercedes, and, maybe, while pulling it into a gig at, say, The Ritz-Carlton, he might pull up next to the valet station and insouciantly toss the keys to the valet as if to communicate that this world of opulent luxury was commonplace.

But this was not the true Ken Silver. It wasn't an act, because an act implies something underhanded or deceitful, which wouldn't



See Band, Page 20

▲ Ken Silver and President Clinton

Courtesy of Ken Silver



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▲ From left: Ken Silver, Jason Long, Joe McAnally and President Clinton
Courtesy of Ken Silver

be on the mark. This was salesmanship, affecting the demeanor the clients found most attractive. Is there an appreciable difference in the quality of a wedding band with five horns instead of four, with three female vocalists instead of two, with or without a break-dancer? Not really, but if you can quell anxiety about the quality of the product by adding empty calories, why not?

It's easy to see this as unscrupulous or morally compromising. What the righteous don't understand is that there's a difference between being unscrupulous and what the kids today call "getting yours" in a business where loyalty is fickle, success fleeting and musicianship often beside the point. Because, even in the most civilized of times, the talent is often seen as well-dressed, well-paid help.

But it wasn't cynicism as much as fatigue that prompted my father's career pivot back to public education.

In the spring of 1996, the company my dad founded, The Entertainment Group, folded.

DJs were hot and more economical and didn't complain (or complained less) if the clients refused to feed them. Ask a musician of a certain age if he thinks a DJ is an artist, and then set aside a good half-hour and make sure you've got access to a comfortable chair and nowhere else to be.

The rise of affordable automated music notwithstanding, the musical trends had passed my father by. He didn't have the will or want to keep up. He had two young sons and was more interested in coaching Little League and being down the shore during wedding season, playing tennis and riding his bike.

He thought about whether he could go the rest of his life without again perceiving the myriad nauseous qualities of hotel kitchens after midnight, or the dangers that lurk in loading docks at 2:30 a.m. — dangers like prehistorically sized city rats who appear as though they've evolved to fight back against cats.

He decided he could go without and, to this day, he sees weddings as right up there with laws and sausages on that list of things you don't want to see being made.

The memories of his career as a very minor, hyperlocal celebrity are vivid, though after two decades as a school principal, they seem remote, another lifetime ago.

As for me, my mother thinks I still want to be a bandleader — this is her rationale for why I didn't want to be a lawyer after getting a law degree.

If I could be paid in pickles from Jack's Delicatessen, I'd get the band back together. ♥

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A Second Chance to Make a First Bat Mitzvah

MATT SILVER | JE STAFF

The phrase adult bar or bat mitzvah, if not an apparent contradiction in terms, reads with some incongruity. Why would you need a bar or bat mitzvah if you're already an adult?

In a more technical sense, how could you already be an adult without having had a bar mitzvah? Questions like these might twist even Maimonides' brain into an advanced yoga pose. But, as a practical matter, there are myriad reasons why a Jewish adult might have not gone through the holy rite of passage as a young man or woman. The more interesting question might be: Why would they want one?

What motivates adults balancing jobs, kids, mortgages — what compels them to seek this knowledge, attain this milestone that comes with no tangible reward (one would have to think the adult bar and bat mitzvah's gift purse typically pales in comparison to the 13-year-olds)?

According to Rabbi Howard Cove, now the rabbi of Beiteinu Synagogue, who has led several bat mitzvah classes for adult women at both Temple Sinai in Dresher and Congregation Kol Emet in Yardley, there are several reasons, especially for Jewish



▲ 1994 Temple Sinai adult Bat Mitzvah class

women of a certain age.

For younger women, Cove suggests, women in their 40s with kids of their own approaching bar and bat mitzvah age, what it's often about (at least in the beginning) is being a good role model, modeling for their children that Jewish learning and Jewish customs are important parts of individual life and an important part of family life.

But for the slightly older bat mitzvah, it's often about something more personal.

"You have to remember that the Torah often wasn't accessible to girls," said Cove, referring to women in their 60s, 70s and beyond whom he has tutored.

See [Bat Mitzvah](#), Page 22



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Bat Mitzvah

Continued from Page 21

"They could do Haftarah, but they could not do Torah, and so with some of these women it was 'I was never allowed. I couldn't do what I'm [now] preparing to do for my adult bat mitzvah.'"

In other situations, women who have studied with Rabbi Cove later in life say they were given the option of having bat mitzvahs as girls but instead chose celebrations like Sweet 16s, eschewing the heavy time commitment of bat mitzvah study at a time in their lives when Judaism wasn't as important to their sense of self as it would become.

"And some women," Cove said, "just loved to learn. They were very bright, they had careers, and they wanted to learn more about their own faith, their own religion and their own Judaism."

Unique to all adult b'nai mitzvah, regardless of gender, is an exercise of free will and, often with that, an increased level of accountability.

Unlike your average adolescent approaching bar or bat mitzvah age, who may, more often than not, take the idea of a bar or bat mitzvah — and the compulsory nature of the attendant preparation — for granted, adults enter into the process completely of their own volition, eyes fully open to a time commitment that might span anywhere from 10 months to two years.

This actually makes for a process that's a little less stringent and regimented than what you may remember from your own bar or bat mitzvah preparations.

"At the beginning of the process in each case, we never established a date for the bat mitzvah," Cove added. "We went six months, we went eight months, we saw where the progress was, and then we decided, OK, six months from now, a year from now, we'll have a date."

"It was kinda cool," Cove continued.

"We were learning for learning's sake at the beginning, with the knowledge that ultimately it would lead to a bar or bat mitzvah, but we didn't put the pressure on the group, or on me, to decide, 'OK, we've got 10 months from start to finish.'"

It's this kind of latitude that the student of conventional bar or bat mitzvah age might benefit from but very rarely has as a luxury.

"The process grew organically (with the adults), and that's a lot different from how it usually goes (with the kids)."

Organic or not, there's always that fear of being up there on



▲ From left: Vicki Rubenstein, Debbie Mendelson, Marcie Cohn and Debra Cohen
Photo courtesy of Judy Silver

the bimah, on that religious equivalent of a pitcher's mound, essentially all alone, yad in hand, looking down at these foreign marks on an ancient page ... and just blanking.

This kind of unadulterated terror transcends age, which just goes to show maturity and fear of public speaking are by no means mutually exclusive concepts. It's even reasonable to surmise that, for many, the dread of public speaking actually gets more acute with age.

School-age kids, like it or not, have to give reports and presentations in class all the time. But, depending on one's profession as an adult, one's public speaking chops, not to mention nerve, can atrophy.

That may be why, more than anything else, Cove thinks it's pride in conquering that fear and standing before their community, chanting Torah and leading the service, that becomes the most lasting memory for many of his adult bat mitzvah students.

"The fact that these women in their 40s, 50s, and 70s get up in front of the congregation, when they've never before had an opportunity to do this ... these are the memories they take with them that excite them to this day."

Loath to admit favoring one demographic cohort over another, Cove concedes that it does feel different to work with the adult groups and see them succeed.

"There is a recognizable, heightened sense of joy and accomplishment for me to have a group of adults finish the process, as opposed to me just standing with an individual child."

Of the adult classes Cove's shepherded all the way to bat mitzvah, there's a special kind of pride: "I was proud as a peacock to be able to introduce these women to the congregation."

Over the years, Cove has lost touch with some but kept up with several of his bat mitzvah groups' alums.

"I know if they thought about it, (the bat mitzvah) would be one of the top five to 10 accomplishments in their lives, which is pretty cool." ♥

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