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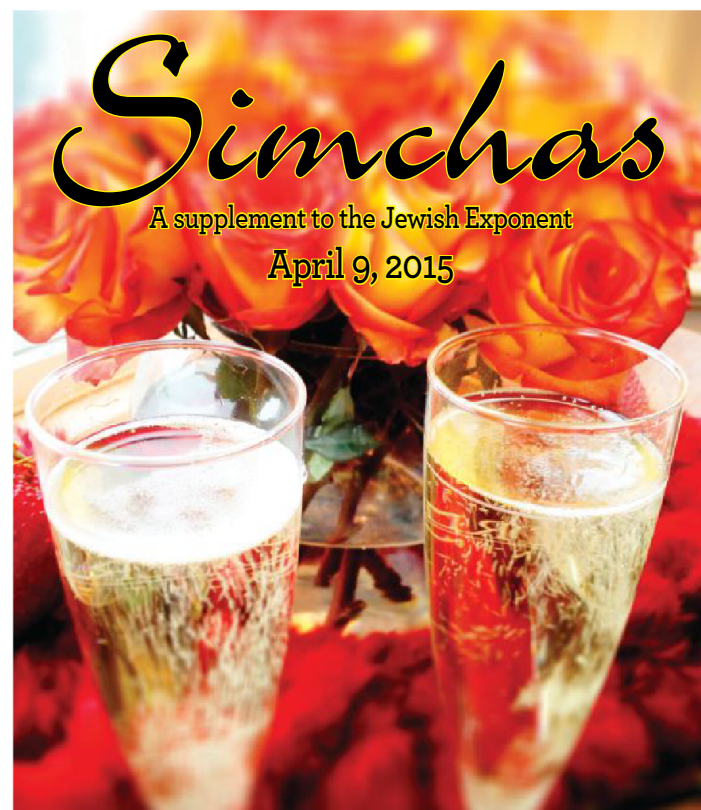


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A supplement to the Jewish Exponent

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To the Power of Three

A B'nai Mitzvah story that transcends faith, generations and community.

By Fredda Sacharow



If Mary Brodsky had merely adopted her triplet step-grandchildren after her husband and both of the children's parents died — *dayenu*.

If she had simply kept them grounded in the centuries-old religion of their mother and their grandfather — *dayenu*.

If the Catholic widow had taught herself enough about Judaism to organize a seder every year, complete with homemade gefilte fish, and to read the children a chapter from *My Little Dreidel* on each of the eight nights of Chanukah — *dayenu*.

If she had dropped the siblings off at Hebrew school every Sunday for years, and then driven three miles down the road to attend mass at St. Francis in Fairless Hills — *dayenu*.

But there's more, much more, in this saga of a faith that unites two religions, three generations and four people whose love for Judaism—and for one another — transcends blood ties.

It stars 12-year-old Madison, Zoe and Jonathan Kemp, who are prepping for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah later this month at Congregation Beth El in Yardley. It also stars the woman they call Mom-Mom: Mary Brodsky, widow of their maternal grandfather Jack Brodsky, who is raising the youngsters as Jews and making sure they get a proper Jewish education.

"We read in Proverbs about a woman of valor," says Rabbi Joshua Gruenberg, religious leader of Beth El. "I think it might have been written for Mary."

The triplets' father, Andrew Kemp, died in 2006 during a stay in the hospital for a ruptured colon. Their mother, Helena Brodsky Kemp, died two years later of an aortic aneurysm, a bulge in the section of the body's main artery that can burst and cause major bleeding.

Shortly before Helena's death, Mary Brodsky had been holding conversations with the entity she calls "The Big Guy." Feeling lonely and at loose ends three years after her husband passed away, she spoke to God from behind the wheel of



PHOTOS/STEVE STERN

Mary Brodsky (inset) has helped her three adopted step-grandchildren, (l-r) Madison, Jonathan and Zoe, reach the point of becoming B'nai Mitzvah later this month.

her car, confiding in him, "I need a purpose in life."

Later, when their newly orphaned status found Madison, Zoe and Jonathan in her care, Brodsky had one rueful thought: "I really should be careful

the world, or at least my little corner of it."

"Their mother taught them the Shema before they went to nursery school — they said it every night," Brodsky recalls. "One of the reasons I kept the children is that my husband would have wanted them to be raised Jewish."

And Jewish they most definitely are.

Reclining in his bed, flanked by his sisters and a stuffed Minion doll from the movie *Despicable Me* he's dubbed "Rabbi," Jonathan Kemp is holding court.

He's the baby of the threesome, temporarily sidelined while recovering from hip-repair surgery less than five weeks earlier — two months before the Big Day. He's explaining why it's so important to him to mount the bimah at Beth El to chant his share of Haftorah accompanying the Tazriah Metzarah Torah portion, the passages he's been learning for the past three-quarters of a year.

"Having a sense of being Jewish, that culture passed on to me by my mom, has made me a better person," Jonathan says, shifting slightly to get comfortable in the cast that encases his lower body from chest to foot.

"I want to pass that along to my kids someday.

what I wish for."

The triplets were 5. Mary Brodsky, a retired middle manager for the IRS, was about to become a first-time mother in her early 60s.

It wouldn't be easy — she knew that. Zoe was born with short heel cords and was in leg braces for many years. Jonathan, diagnosed early on with cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair.

But although Helena had a sister living in London who offered to take her nieces and nephew, Brodsky was determined to keep them in the home in which they'd grown up, observing the religion on which they'd been nurtured.

Before she died, Helena Kemp compiled a list she called "Eight Things I'm Passionate About": "HaShem, Madison, Zoe, Jonathan, Judaism, My Family, Learning, Tikkun Olam — healing

To the Power of Three

Continued from page 3

Being Jewish, to me, has changed my life around.”

Each of the Kemp children will recite a third of the Haftorah that Saturday morning, April 25. For Zoe, the highlight of the ceremony will be the sense of accomplishment she expects to feel for sticking it out over the months and years; for Madison, it's the feeling of having proven herself up to the task.

“There's also the aspect of having a Jewish community around us — that's what makes you feel more connected to God,” Zoe adds.

The seventh-graders at William Penn Middle School have also signed on for a B'nai Mitzvah project suggested by Beth El education director Karen Lewis: collecting toiletries and writing letters to Lone Soldiers, the young men and women from throughout the world who travel to Israel to serve in the Israel Defense Forces, leaving behind family, friends and loved ones.

The Bucks County synagogue has a personal connection to the project, Lewis notes: Elisa Mindlin, who has taught at Beth El over the years, is the sister of Michael Levin, a Lone Soldier who made aliyah from Newtown in 2002, and who died in battle in Lebanon in 2006.

But for now, Jonathan brings the talk back to the upcoming festivities, which will feature a catered luncheon donated by the synagogue.

“Standing in front of hundreds of people, I'm going to feel like I'm the last man on Earth. It's amaz-

ing to know how I've worked my butt off for this,” the newly minted teenager says, looking around at the adults at his bedside to make sure he's allowed to use that word in polite company.

Rabbi Gruenwald nods.Laughs. Then he notes that the Kemps' B'nai Mitzvah has blossomed into a community-wide celebration, a feel-good event that has touched many of the 318 families in the Conservative congregation.

“They've watched the kids grow up, and this is a family that serves as a great inspiration to us. It reminds us what the important things in life are,” says Gruenwald, whose tenure at the Bucks County synagogue has included officiating at the B'nai Mitzvah of another set of triplets two years ago.

“I think I'm leading America in terms of triplets being Bar Mitzvahed,” the rabbi quips.

Even before Helena Kemp died, the family was active in Beth El life, Lewis remembers; the children were about 4 or 5 when she joined. Since then, administrators and members of the congregation have embraced Zoe, Madison and Jonathan as their own.

It was Lewis who helped design the Bar/Bat Mitzvah invitation that has each of the triplet's smiling faces on the cover, which members of the synagogue's USY chapter stuffed into envelopes at 3 a.m. on an early March Sunday morning during a weekend sleepover.

It was his fellow students who sent Jonathan

“Rabbi,” the jaunty yellow Minion doll sporting a turquoise kippah and the scrawled signatures of his pals, and it was their parents who delivered home-cooked meals to the home in the immediate aftermath of his surgery so his Mom-Mom could attend to his other needs.

Many of the congregants will crowd into Beth El's sanctuary next month when the triplets mark their formal passage into Jewish adulthood.

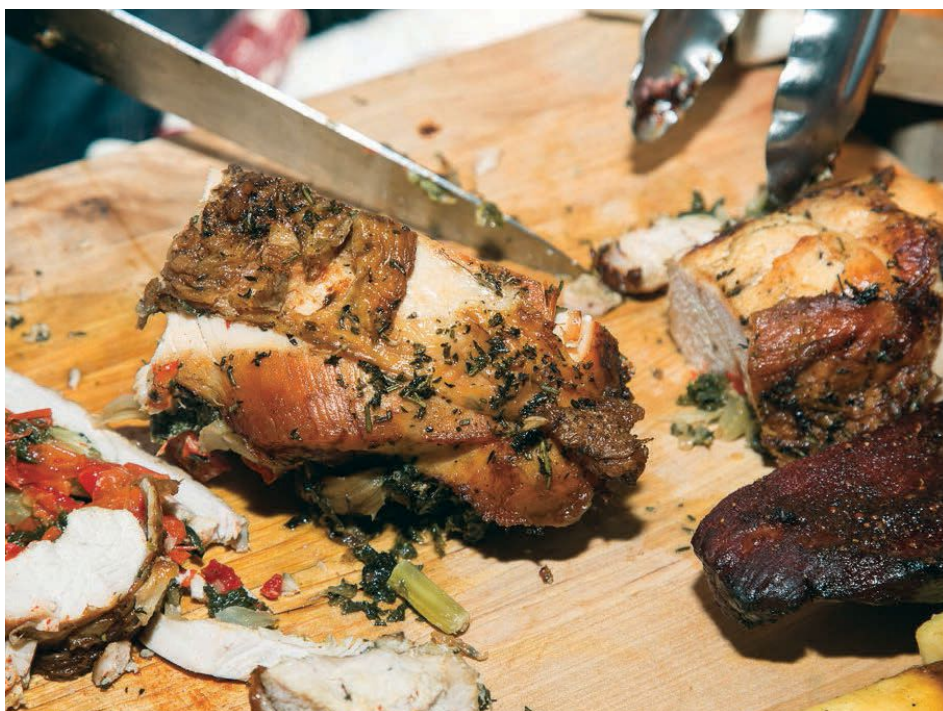
Brodsky, who acknowledges that her grasp of Hebrew isn't stellar, will recite the Shehecheyanu prayer three times — once for each celebrant — thanking God for allowing them all to reach this day.

She'll be thinking of her late husband that day, and how pleased he'd be that another generation of Jews had been successfully launched. She'll be marveling over how the congregation has so generously adopted her family, much as she had adopted Zoe, Madison and Jonathan.

But mostly, she says, she'll be hoping that the months of training provide a solid grounding as the triplets chant on the bimah that morning.

“If they get through their Torah portions, I will be the proudest person in that room,” Mary Brodsky says quietly. “They have been studying so hard — I will be holding my breath the whole time.”

Fredda Sacharow is a frequent contributor to Special Sections.



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Preparing for a Special Needs Bar/Bat Mitzvah By Rabbi Margot Stein

My son, a high-functioning child with autism, did not speak until he was 4 years old and is only now, in seventh grade, learning to read independently. Yet he chanted from the Torah, recited the Shema, helped lead the service, and delivered a d'var Torah that was unique in several important ways. He was thrilled, and so were we.

How can you make your child's celebration equally memorable?

1. Know your child and make accommodations accordingly. Do not hesitate to ask your rabbi to work with you on this. If your child is as outgoing as our son is, and can handle a lot of guests, fine. If she is fearful of crowds or has performance anxiety, keep it intimate. While we are close with our synagogue rabbi, we also asked Rabbi Zev Baram from the Philly Friendship Circle to be a spiritual mentor for our son, since the Barams' work with the special needs community has taught our son much about what it means to be Jewish.

2. Choose a time and place where you have more control. A big sanctuary with two B'nai Mitzvah each week is probably not going to be the right setting if you want to bend rules and develop an individualized event. We chose a mincha, or afternoon, service beginning an hour before sundown on Saturday afternoon and culminating with Havdalah. It's a beautiful time of day, and one that has fewer requirements in terms of the liturgy but does include a Torah service (be sure to calculate the correct reading based on the following week's parsha).

3. Determine how your child learns best. Is she a natural mimic? Can he read with ease? Would a

kinesthetic, hands-on approach be more effective? I can't tell you how helpful it is to work with a qualified tutor who is able to develop a multi-sensory plan. Rabbi Michelle Greenfield brought Alef-Bet games, developed a reward system to motivate learning, created an enlarged notebook of the appropriate pages from the prayer book, used highlighters and other visual cues, and created a visual schedule of each week's tutoring session. As parents, we also made recordings, built rewards into his week for practicing, and made arrangements with his special needs camp to continue his tutoring over the summer.

4. Don't be afraid to veer off the beaten path — and get help from others along the way. As the weeks went by, we realized our son would not be able to deliver a traditional D'dar Torah. So we asked a beloved adult friend to help. Together, they prepared the story, decided what was important about it and designed a conversation that elicited the points they wanted to make. On the big day, this friend gently guided him through their foam core note cards, asking questions and elaborating here and there. Our son's natural talkativeness and preference for relational experiences shone through.

5. Do some things that are just plain fun. In our case, announcing the page numbers seemed to fit the bill (the rabbi whispered them in his ear and he repeated them aloud). One boy wrote a song for his d'var Torah and sang it with his dad, with the whole congregation joining in on the choruses. If your child has a special interest, build that into the service in some way.

6. Plan the reception with as much support as you need and in a way that works for you. In our case, we wanted the dinner to follow right downstairs for the easiest possible transition. With 15 classmates with a range of special needs in attendance, we also invited a parent chaperone (both parents, if we knew them or had socialized with them), plus we hired two teenaged girls to help the kids dance and follow directions for games on the dance floor. Work with your bandleader or DJ to make the whole party as easygoing and kid-friendly as possible, or skip the music if your child dislikes loud noise.

7. Do a Mitzvah Project. Sometimes we let kids with special needs off the hook when it comes to helping others. I think this can be a mistake; all kids feel better about themselves when they are helping others. Choose a project that is attainable for your child, and support her every step of the way. Our son wanted to help animals (which integrated perfectly with his study of Noah and the Ark). We were lucky to find Sam's Hope, which packs donated food and delivers it to food pantries, shut-ins, and others who cannot keep their pets at home without food support.

8. Delegate someone to troubleshoot logistics once the service begins. Your job is to sit up front, surrounded by loved ones and enjoy every second as it unfolds!

Rabbi Margot Stein is a graduate of RRC, where she currently teaches prayer and liturgy to rabbinical students. She is a board member of Jewish Learning Venture and consultant to the agency's Whole Community Inclusion initiative.

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In the Name of the Daughter

The brit bat offers a myriad of ways to celebrate a Jewish baby girl's birth.

By Hilary Danailova



hat my tiny daughter lacked in pounds and ounces, she more than made up for in syllables.

The name I bestowed on my diminutive newborn was Zelda Zorina Ognianova Danailova — a substantial moniker indeed. Obviously, I like the letter Z; Ognianova, in her father's Bulgarian culture, is the patronymic, meaning "daughter of Ognian." And Danailova is the feminine form of our Slavic family name.

But it became apparent that those 14 syllables were not enough. Zelda would also need a Hebrew name, my mother decreed, and she should receive it the way I had received my own — in a Jewish naming ceremony.

"We all stood around the living room with friends and family," my mother recalled, "and your father and I talked about our hopes and wishes for you, and how we felt about having a child, and the symbolism and meaning of the names we chose."

Hopes? Meanings? The prospect of talking about my feelings at all, much less in front of other people, makes me want to crawl under a sofa and hide.

But more than that, it was the nebulousness of feminine ritual that left me confused. I yearned for a script to follow — an advantage enjoyed by parents of boys; everyone knows you perform a bris on the eighth day of life, at which point the baby receives his Hebrew name in exchange for his foreskin. Because there is no similar halachic prescription for welcoming a girl, and because the entire ritual — commonly referred to as simchat bat or brit bat — is a relatively recent practice, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by options.

As I talked to parents and clergy, however, it became clear that many view those options as a plus. "It affords us a lot of creativity," said Rabbi Eric Yanoff of Adath Israel, a Conservative synagogue in Merion

Station. "There is a huge treasure trove of meaningful traditions developed by people over time. So let's assume the tradition has something to offer, and not be afraid to innovate."

I learned that American girl-naming ceremonies fall into two categories. One is roughly what my parents did — a private gathering of friends and family, often at home but sometimes in a synagogue event space, wherein the new parents speak about the meaning of the baby's name. Generally, an officiant — a rabbi or layperson — recites Hebrew naming blessings, followed by toasts and a reception.

The more traditional approach, which is standard in Orthodox communities, involves the parents bringing the baby to synagogue for the first Torah reading day following her birth; during the service, the rabbi announces the baby's arrival and Hebrew name and invites the father — or in egalitarian rites, both parents — for an aliyah. Afterward, it is common for the family to sponsor a Kiddush, when the entire community joins in celebration of its newest member.

Two schools of thought also compete on the timing of a brit bat. Some parents are happy to take advantage of the flexibility afforded by not having to adhere to the eighth-day edict, and baby girls are commonly named anytime during their first year — or even beyond. But other Jewish parents feel strongly about honoring their daughters in a way that mirrors, as closely as possible, the welcome given to a son.

"What was most important was egalitarianism in this part of the life cycle," Rabbi Michael Ramberg of Philadelphia, who is now the campus rabbi at Ursinus College, recalled of his daughter Pina's ceremony. "The fact that such a big deal is made of naming for boys made us want to do that for our daughter."

At the time of her naming, Ramberg was still at rabbinical

college, so he was exposed to plenty of potential naming rites — some of which, he told me, were "physically intrusive" in ways intended to reference male circumcision. "You hear some wacky ideas in rabbinical school," Ramberg acknowledged.

I explored some of the less-wacky ideas at the Reconstructionist website Ritualwell.org, which Ramberg and several others recommended for inspiration. (Another popular reference is Anita Diamant's *The New Jewish Baby Book*.) Reflecting on rituals that ranged from the touchy-feely to the gender-neutral to the specifically feminine, I realized I wanted a ceremony that emphasized Zelda's role as the newest in a matriarchal line of Jewish women — I am Jewish on my mother's side — rather than an approximation of the male rite.

But such impulses are deeply personal. In the end, Ramberg gathered some 30 family members, friends and rabbis-in-training for a Sunday service in a small sanctuary at Mishkan Shalom, a Philadelphia Reconstructionist synagogue. The congregation's rabbi performed a ceremony that incorporated candlesticks used by Pina's great-grandmother Hasha, whose name Pina received as a Hebrew appellation.

The core of Pina's ceremony was a ritual foot-washing. "There's a symbolic meaning to water, and references to foot-washing from the Torah, to enter the covenant," Ramberg explained.

Foot-washing is one of several rituals adopted by parents seeking physical gestures that feel meaningful, timeless — and allusive, in some way, to the corporeal-spiritual connection implicit in circumcision, which

represents human covenant with the Divine.

Yanoff described how he holds the baby girl up to the Torah and touches her

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Sarah Shifra Shoshana Sharon Shayna Shira Talia Tamar
Tikva Tova Tziviva Tzviya Uriella Vered Yakova Yael
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foot to the scrolls, saying something like, “You are touching the Torah; may it touch you and inform you all the days of your life.” The young rabbi has thought hard about physical acts that provide that kind of indelible spectacle for witnesses: “I try for ritual moments.”

One he also likes involves swaddling the baby in a tallit that may have belonged to a beloved family member. “They are literally wrapping the baby in the tallit of someone meaningful,” he said. “It’s a 30-second moment, but it’s that visual impact.”

Another popular ritual involves handing the baby a mezuzah, perhaps the one destined for the baby’s nursery door. Babies, especially older ones, will inevitably put it in their mouths, providing the image of the baby “kissing” the mezuzah.

“You don’t have to just take out,” Yanoff noted, referring to the unassailable rite at the center of male naming, which is obviously not possible for girls. “You can also put things in.”

Or as Rabbi Jill Maderer observed, in an unconscious double entendre: “Obviously there’s a big missing piece to the girls’ experience. But other than that, the prayers are the same, the experience is the same.”

For Maderer, who is a rabbi at Congregation Rodeph Sholom, egalitarianism was the driving principle behind her daughter’s eighth-day brit bat, which was led by her sister. “I decided that if I was in a huge rush for my son, I wanted to do the same thing for my daughter,” she explained.

Maderer opted to have the rite at home, with only immediate family, for the same reason many people either keep it simple or wait awhile: “I wasn’t feeling up to entertaining a large group just a week after giving birth,” she said.

A more personal ritual also proved satisfying for Heather Stecker of Bryn Mawr, whose second daughter, Leila Morgan, was named in a private ceremony conducted by Yanoff. Whereas her first daughter, Belle Rose, had been named during a Saturday service, for Leila’s naming the Steckers gathered about 20 people in a small room at Adath Israel, wrapping the baby in a tallit that had belonged to her grandfather.

In addition to discussing their

naming choices, Stecker and her husband talked about praying for their babies’ arrivals — an allusion to the fertility challenges they had overcome. “It was very moving and very intimate,” Stecker explained, “and not something you can do in a sanctuary with 100 people. We wanted the focus to be on our family, not on whoever was being Bar Mitzvah that day.”

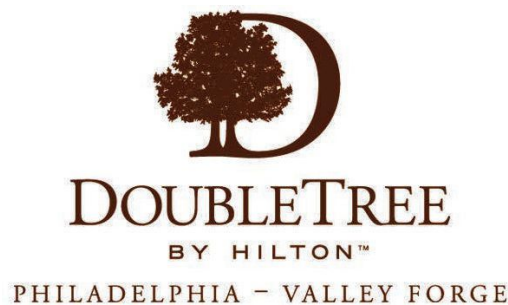
For Ilana Ehrlich, a Philadelphia lawyer, egalitarianism was so important that — hewing to the tradition for male children — she and her husband, Adam, declined to share their daughters’ names before their synagogue rituals, which occurred within days of the respective births. “As a mother of girls, in some ways that’s the closest you’re going to get to a bris,” explained Ehrlich. Also, given their preferred timing, the synagogue service was “a very simple way to do a naming.”

While the Shabbat service can strike some parents as a less-personal setting, for families like the Ehrlichs — who are involved with Minyan Tikvah in Center City — it may be the most haimish way to celebrate. “We wanted to give everyone in our community a chance to know at the same time what we were naming, and why,” Ehrlich said.

The Ehrlichs named their second daughter at Ilana Ehrlich’s parents’ shul, Germantown Jewish Centre, “so I got to celebrate it with people who watched me grow up, which was a lovely way to welcome a child into a community,” Ehrlich said.

The Ehrlichs made the deliberate choice to give their children one set of names for English and Hebrew use. I had always wondered about the logic of our myriad unused monikers; nobody has used my own Hebrew name, Sara Tzvia, since my Bat Mitzvah in 1989. So the idea that little Gabriela Yael and Noa Reva Ehrlich would feel a meaningful connection to the names they hear in shul seemed profoundly refreshing.

I discovered that in choosing Hebrew names, Jewish parents are increasingly venturing beyond classics like Yitzhak and Chaya to modern choices like Netanya and Ayelet — and even to Yiddish borrowings. But meaning remains important. According to every parent



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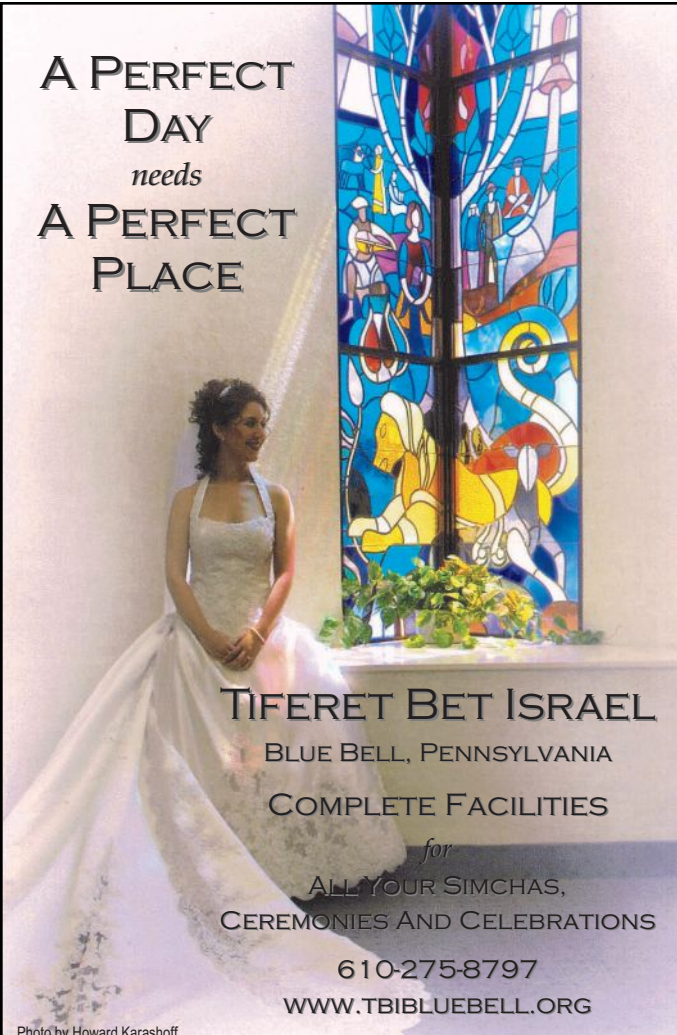
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In the Name of the Daughter

Continued from page 7

and Jewish website I consulted, the assignment of a name to a Jewish child carries enormous spiritual and metaphysical weight. For Ehrlich, that meant choosing biblical names of “kind of unconventional women,” she explained. “That was a fun and interesting way to name daughters.”

Mindy Rubinlicht-Torban of Horsham told me how she struggled to adapt two family names — Efraim and Velvel — into a Hebrew name for her daughter Julia, now 2 years old. She settled on Effi Ziva; Effi is a Yiddish nickname, and Ziva is the feminine form of Zev, which — like Velvel — translate to “wolf.”

So maybe the Yiddish “Zelda” would pass muster, I thought, though I’d need a second name to honor family members. Rubinlicht-Torban also eased my anxiety over another factor that has delayed Zelda’s ritual: the reality that since her birth, our family has been in geographical transition. With her father and I splitting our time between both coasts — and having lived abroad for several years before that — we sorely lack the communal or congregational roots that suddenly feel so crucial.

As it happens, the Rubinlicht-Torbans were also unaffiliated. “I said, ‘I don’t want some rabbi I have no connection with naming my child,’” recounted Rubinlicht-Torban, who has found community in on-line forums such as jkidphilly.org. Instead, she asked a Jewish neighbor with whom they shared Shabbat

dinners to officiate at her parents’ home.

The friends planned a service that incorporated Jewish blessings, poems and responsive readings into a booklet for guests. “We got everyone involved in blessing the baby,” Rubinlicht-Torban recalled. “And we had this person we loved and respected, an example of how we wanted to lead our Jewish lives down the road, naming our daughter. It was just the most beautiful, personal, intimate experience.”

Julia’s naming took place about eight weeks after her birth — but in the course of researching this piece, I heard about plenty of namings for girls old enough to walk to the bimah and eat the bagels afterward. I stopped feeling like a bad Jewish mother for not having named my almost-toddler yet.

Because as Yanoff reminded me, it’s never really too late. He recalled a woman he once coached in an adult B’nai Mitzvah class, a retiree who had been raised without any Jewish ritual at all. When the day came for the woman’s Bat Mitzvah, he included a special naming blessing — the one his septuagenarian pupil had never received as a baby.

And technically speaking, there is nothing wrong with that. “It’s the best part about having a girl,” Mindy Rubinlicht-Torban told me. “You really can do whatever you like.”

Hilary Danailova is currently winnowing her way through possible Hebrew names for her daughter.

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Good for What Veils Them

*It's time to uncover the latest trends
in bridal headwear.*

By Hilary Danailova

In the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, there comes a moment when the groom gently lifts the bride's diaphanous veil, revealing the face of his beloved — a gesture that recalls the biblical matriarch Rebecca, who covered her face with a handkerchief when marrying Isaac. The veiling ceremony, known as *bedeken*, alludes to both the married woman's physical modesty and the emphasis on spiritual, rather than physical, beauty in the eyes of her groom.

Modesty and spiritual connection will have to find their metaphors elsewhere for many of today's brides, however. For modern-day Rebecas, that handkerchief is more likely to be a garland of dahlias, a birdcage-style fascinator, or even a sparkly crystal headband, as bridal headwear

half ago to cater to what she describes as “a little less traditional, creative, DIY bride.”

“We’re seeing lots of floral-looking hair vines that have some sparkle — something to give the brides a little glitz but also feels more natural, not so overpowering to wear,” Kaplin added.

At Philadelphia Bridal Company, a midprice salon, Ashley Erin Corbett is seeing brides who want “an ethereal, nymph-like effect,” she said. It’s a less studied, girlier look than in previous eras — “think of the Anthropologie customer.”

Like her colleagues, Corbett sells a lot of headbands and wreaths these days; many incorporate metal flowers or vines, Swarovski crystals or sheer organza ribbons, even feathers.

What’s driving the trend appears to be the growing popularity of weddings that take place outdoors or in rustic settings. Whereas ballrooms were once

headbands with trailing ribbons, soft headbands that go across the foreheads and “viney, organic” headbands that give a halo effect. “It’s the boho feel — hair down, parted in the middle with a loose wave,” Perry said. “I have a lot of brides getting married on farms, with long tables and Mason jars, and they like a messy, undone look.” Even in a barn, Perry noted, sparkly crystal accents in the hair keep the look bridal — not milkmaid.

“There’s a definite move away from the stiff, formal aesthetic,” said Jennie Love, owner of Love ‘n Fresh Flowers in Chestnut Hill. “Everyone’s embracing a more natural, earthy style.” Love’s business has evolved from selling flowers at farmers’ markets to doing flowers for weddings to creating floral headpieces for eco-chic brides — the ultimate in local, seasonal and sustainable fashion.

“The fresh hair flowers started maybe four years ago in a big way, and it has definitely gotten more and more popular,” said Love. And it’s not just the boho brides anymore, she added: “At first it was for laid-back, outdoor weddings, but now it can be any type of wedding.”



has evolved from the demure veil to a range of expressive accessories.

“That princess tiara, with big crystals and a poufy veil, is not feeling as modern,” observed Ivy Kaplin, owner of Lovely Bride Philadelphia.

Instead, as a survey of local bridal experts revealed, contemporary brides are overwhelmingly seeking a rustic look that’s right in step with today’s green ethos. Organic: it’s not just for arugula anymore.

In fact, “organic” was a word that came up again and again to describe the favored look for 2015 weddings — along with “ethereal,” “soft” and, of course, “natural.”

“Today’s brides are looking for a softer style, something more organic-looking,” said Kaplin, who opened the Philadelphia outpost of Lovely Bride a year and a

half ago to cater to what she describes as “a little less traditional, creative, DIY bride.”

“The most popular place we always hear about is the Horticulture Center” in Fairmount Park, said Kaplin. “In Philadelphia there are a lot of great arboretums and outdoor venues that give much more of this natural feel for a bride who wants something that isn’t as formal, but is still beautiful.”

At the upscale boutique Elizabeth Johns in Ardmore, bridal consultant Erika Perry sells ornate crystal

While some are happy with silk or metal floral accents, “most girls who want flowers do want real flowers,” Kaplin said. Fresh blossoms are also a way to add a note of color; brides who would never don a purple veil will usually match their hair flowers to their bouquets or bridesmaids’ dresses.

Wearable blooms are possibly the most striking trend in bridalwear — which might seem surprising, given how

Wedding headpieces from (l-r) Maria Elena; Pronovias; Jennifer Behr; Jenny Packham; and Love ‘n Fresh Flowers

Continued on page 12

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Good for What Veils Them

Continued from page 9

wedding pieces tend to be cherished as heirlooms to pass on. You can't do that if your chignon is accented with ranunculus.

"There's some beauty in the fact that it's just for one day," explained Love, who said the most-requested blossoms also include dahlias and lisianthus. "It makes the wedding day all the more special."

Not every bride feels that way, of course. Many are embracing a vintage aesthetic, inspired by *Downton Abbey* and by a desire for things that feel meaningful and authentic. So-called birdcage, Russian, or fingertip veils — the flirty piece of netting that covers just the

eyes or the top half of the bride's face, attached to a fascinator or comb — have become ubiquitous on the wedding aisle.

So are headpieces that repurpose sentimental items like a grandmother's jewelry or veil. "They might take an old brooch or something that had been in the family, and incorporate it into their hair," said Janice Martin, owner of the eponymous Ardmore couture shop where she has designed custom bridalwear for 25 years.

Unlike the more ornate headpieces of yesteryear, many of today's headbands, jeweled combs and discreetly sparkly hairclips can be worn again, said Pattie Lamantilla, who owns the Wedding Shoppe in Wayne, where affluent brides spend an average of \$5,000 on the gown alone. "Some of these hair jewels can be converted to a brooch," added Lamantilla, "so that you can have your own heirloom from your wedding."

Headpieces — which typically cost in the low to mid-three figures — aren't generally associated with well-known labels, the way gowns are. An exception, said Lamantilla, is a vintage-inspired line by Jenny Packham, the London designer who became a celebrity thanks to her most famous client, Kate Middleton. (Middleton herself, the glamorous duchess of Cambridge, is credited with popularizing a more conservative wedding look, bringing back sleeves and lace.) "The new headbands are really thin, so the wire is hidden, and it looks like the little brooch or the crystals are just floating in your hair," Lamantilla explained.

With all the new options, whither the veil? The most essentially bridal of vestments, it is the single article of clothing that — at least in contemporary America — is worn exclusively by brides. And veils remain the choice of roughly half of them, according to salespeople.

"A lot of Jewish brides definitely will wear a veil, because it becomes a part of the service when the groom lifts the blusher," noted Lamantilla, using the industry term for a sheer, chin-length face veil. But according to Reena Spicehandler, the visiting rabbi at Philadelphia's German-

town Jewish Centre, the Jewish veiling ceremony is custom rather than law — so while tradition-minded Jewish brides often want veils, it's not obligatory.

Rabbi Spicehandler herself went veil-free as a bride. "I wore flowers in my hair," she recalled with a laugh. "It was 1973."

Today's veils are likely to be lace — and to drape gently from the nape of the neck, rather than poufing out from the crown of the head. "Veils are softer, straighter and less voluminous," said Kaplan. "Brides want something that breathes in the wind." And while long trains call for longer veils, there is no dominant length right now; brides are choosing everything from the Russian veil — which hits at the bridge of the nose — to the full-length sweep that gets pinned up so the bride can dance at the reception.

With so much focus on the headwear, modern brides are eschewing necklaces and earrings to keep the look refined. "They do hair jewelry instead of large earrings," said Lamantilla, "and the other accessory might be a jeweled belt or a sash." Hairstyles also tend to be simple — soft chignons, French twists — in keeping with the preference for a natural aesthetic.

And aside from those brightly hued flowers, brides still overwhelmingly opt for a classic, subdued palette: ivory, cream, blush, although Janice Martin recently dyed silk flowers in turquoise and hot pink for a headpiece to match a custom wedding gown, she recalled.

"I'm also developing a line of fiberoptic and LED headwear for the Japanese market," said Martin. The gadget-mad Japanese, she explained, "do a lot more with technology in their everyday clothing," so it was only a matter of time before high-tech made it into bridalwear.

But fiberoptic hairclips seem unlikely to make headway — pun intended — with the natural-and-organic crowd. "Honestly," Martin said, "I don't see it coming to this country anytime soon."

Hilary Danailova is a fan of accessorizing whenever possible.

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By
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Last December, surrounded by relatives who held up the bright blue family chupah, Amy and Micah Kagan were married under that symbolic cloth — adding their own gold-embroidered leaf to that of six other couples on the chupah's family tree. Twenty-five people watched the traditional Jewish ceremony, which Rabbi Eric Yanoff performed in Philadelphia so that elderly grandparents could easily attend.

A month later, a crowd of 110 gathered near the slopes at a mountaintop ski lodge in Park City, Utah for a second Jewish wedding that reflected the couple's passion for winter sports. But instead of having the rabbi intone the seven traditional wedding blessings, the Kagans assigned seven friends and family members to recite their own interpretations of the prayers.

"We wanted a modern take on the Jewish wedding ceremony," Amy Kagan explained of their idiosyncratic nuptials. "And both rabbis helped us achieve that. Everyone really hit it out of the park. It was moving and meaningful and heartfelt."

The Kagans are part of a generational trend toward highly personalized, distinctive wedding ceremonies. As the focus of matrimony has shifted from cementing communal status to celebrating the union of two individuals, Jewish weddings have become more individualized as well, with quirky touches that reflect a couple's passions and priorities.

So along with vows on mountaintops — "I always dreamed of skiing down the mountain in my wedding dress," confided Amy Kagan — brides and grooms today might decorate a ketubah with pictures from Camp Ramah; recite poems that reflect a shared love of the Spanish Golden Age; or incorporate sentimental artifacts into the ceremony, from a family ring to a grandfather's tallit.

"Many couples want to personalize the wedding, to make it more meaningful, so that it speaks to them," observed Rabbi David Straus of Main Line Reform Temple in Wynnewood. He views it as part of a larger phenomenon — "the privatization of Jewish life-cycle events," as he described it. Witness the growing number of Bar Mitzvahs that take place at hotels



It was snow problem for Amy and Micah Kagan to hold a second wedding ceremony in Park City, Utah.

During the ceremony, friends read texts that the bride and groom had secretly selected that made each think of the other; Hoffman's came from the novel *The Portrait of a Lady*, while Putzer's was from the writings of a physicist.

Another special decision was the reading of their ketubah out loud during the ceremony — an increasingly popular, and visible, inclusion for what was traditionally a legal marriage contract that was signed out of sight of the guests. "We wanted to share it with everybody," explained Hoffman.

Perhaps no single item symbolizes the personalization trend more than the ketubah, which has evolved into a distinctive, artistic expression of a couple's love. Chances are good that you've never seen your grandparents' ketubah — but if you have Jewish friends who were married in recent decades, you will likely have noticed a colorfully illustrated, Semitic-language parchment on prominent display.

"There was always the tradition of the ketubah, but a generation ago, it was just that legal document," explained Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer, author of *The Creative Jewish Wedding Book* and an officiant with Journeys of the Heart, a Philadelphia agency that provides interfaith clergy. "In the Orthodox world, it still is. But in the progressive Jewish world, it's become more of a spiritual document — the idea of having artwork that you and your partner choose together."

Writing their own ketubah was a profound bonding experience for Kaplan-Mayer and her husband, a Jewish Buddhist, who married in 2001. "It was the heart of our ceremony," Kaplan-Mayer recalled. "We wrote our own commitment to each other, and my husband used some language from the Buddhist tradition in his part," with each reading aloud during the ceremony.

Over the years, Kaplan-Mayer has guided numerous couples as they plan ceremonies that, like her own, embrace the details that make each partnership unique. She has stood by while grooms recited Bruce Springsteen lyrics, coached brides through the Song of Songs, and helped find love poems from sources as

with hired clergy, or in exotic destinations

abroad with only family present. "And weddings, certainly in the liberal community, have become not communal but private affairs," Straus noted.

That may reflect both our highly individualistic society and the evolution of marriage from social obligation to lifestyle choice. But when it comes to tying the knot, most seem to agree with Straus: "I think whatever you do to make it personal, more meaningful and more intentional for you, the better," he said.

When Spencer Hoffman and Adam Putzer, a Manhattan couple, got married in Philadelphia last October, they designed a printed program that — along with explanations of the ceremony for non-Jewish guests — included a picture of their family tree. "That way every guest could see where we come from," Hoffman said, adding that an Irish branch of her family converted from Catholicism. "Especially for our parents' friends or extended family who don't know us, they got a better sense of who we are."

diverse as Edna St. Vincent Millay and Robert Fulghum.

And in Kaplan-Mayer's opinion, it is the Internet — particularly the blogosphere — that has transformed wedding planning, inviting Jewish brides and grooms to consider a universe of options. Whereas couples once had to trek to a Judaica shop to find a decorated ketubah, for instance, "now you can look online at five or 10 different artist websites and see what's out there," she said.

Such innovation is less acceptable in the Orthodox community, according to Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch of Mekor Habracha, a Center City Orthodox congregation. He said an Orthodox ketubah must contain the original Aramaic text — no Hebrew, English or poetry, as is commonly found on those of non-Orthodox or secular couples — and the witnesses who sign it must be observant Jewish males.

"My approach, when I'm asked to perform a wedding, is to balance the elements," Rabbi Hirsch explained. "There are certain elements that are not compromisable. For example, the ring ceremony — that has to be done exactly cor-

rectly, because that's what makes the marriage."

The seven blessings, also at the core of Jewish ritual, are one of the components most likely to be personalized in non-Orthodox weddings. Some couples opt to write their own interpretations; have the blessings recited in both Hebrew and English translation; or, most popular of all, to assign people to read the blessings as a way of participating in the ceremony, as the Kagans did.

At Old York Road Temple-Beth Am in Abington, Rabbi Robert Leib gives seven numbered cards containing "short, concise, non-literal" English translations of the blessings to each set of potential spouses. "It's up to them to select seven individuals, and it adds another flavor, as it were, to the ceremony," he said.

But it is the chupah — the wedding canopy — that is at once the most iconic and most customizable piece of a Jewish wedding. Be it of cloth, floral garlands or other materials that have personal significance, the chupah hangs over the bride and groom as a metaphor for the Jewish home they will build

together. It was that symbolism that led Sara Kunzman and David Baumgarten — Philadelphians who are sorting through traditions for their interfaith wedding — to settle first on a chupah: "We both really thought, the chupah is a nice visual element," Kunzman said.

Kaplan-Mayer, who has seen chupahs made out of Shabbat tablecloths or from quilts with contributions from many friends, said the wedding canopy is the most popular of Jewish traditions. In addition to its creative potential, "especially for the Jewish grandparents, there's something about the visual symbolism that really resonates," she said.

Rabbi Leib has officiated under chupahs that wove threads from a grandfather's tallit, and his couples are also increasingly likely to use old family jewelry for the ring exchange. "It's something very beautiful and meaningful to incorporate these generational Jewish ritual objects into the ceremony," he said. The emphasis on family bonds also lends emotional weight to a ritual that — though private rather than communal — is still about the union of families.

Kunzman and Baumgarten,

whose wedding will take place in June, have already decided to honor both her Presbyterian side and his Jewish heritage with a unity candle ritual, employing candlesticks from her own family and the set used at Baumgarten's sister's wedding. "We've been researching heirlooms and concentrating on what we can do to meld the two families together," Kunzman explained.

Many observers trace the creativity trend in weddings to the 1970s, when the feminist movement prompted Jews from across the spectrum to take a closer, more critical look at the ancient institution of marriage — an institution whose gender roles had been strictly codified for centuries.

"Women started reclaiming and re-imagining ritual," said Kaplan-Mayer. "Before the 1970s, women really weren't consulted in the creation of Jewish ritual. When women started bringing their creative energy to ritual, change happened. And that's been the trajectory."

That movement has effected change among the Orthodox as well. For example, Mekor Habracha's Hirsch has married couples in which the woman seeks a more

prominent role than might be traditional, and he seeks to accommodate that desire within halachah, or Jewish law.

While the blessings must be recited by men in the Orthodox rite, for instance, a woman might follow the man's blessing with a recited translation, he said. And although Jewish law does not allow for a two-way ring exchange — as many egalitarian-minded Jews seek today — some couples choose to have the woman present her groom's ring with a recited blessing at another point in the ceremony.

Some of these contemporary touches might end up as traditions of their own. The personalized family chupah, for instance, has been popular for more than a generation now — and the one Main Line Reform's Straus created for his own wedding, which took place decades ago, has been shared by many couples since. "My mother-in-law embroiders the names of each couple who uses it," he said. "We've been fortunate not to have to take too many names out."

Hilary Danailova is a frequent contributor to Special Sections.



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On the Event Horizon

*Receptions are more entertaining than ever;
here are a few reasons why.*

By Beth D'Addono



Philadelphia master wedding consultant Lynda Barness thought she'd seen it all. Until her clients Shelby Zitelman and Dan Stamm proposed the idea of a silent disco for their June wedding. It was a first for Barness, of I DO Wedding Consulting in Philadelphia.

"I still love surprises, and Shelby and Dan had one at their wedding that I had never seen before," she marveled. The couple got married at the Abington Art Center last June and they decided to contain the noise *and* have fun in a new way. So, they hired Silent Storm, a company that supplied 200 wireless headsets and transmitters for the 7-10 p.m. after-party.

"For the after-party, there were two — yes, two — separate DJs,

and the guests could listen to the DJ and music of their choice through the headsets and dance to the music. But if you were standing in the room, all you could hear was the chatter of guests talking and no music. This would be great for a wedding in a township with a noise ordinance, too!"

"Yeah the headphones are an awesome, easy and inexpensive gadget to add to any affair," said Zitelman. "We'd experienced the headphones at a music festival and wanted to recreate the amazing experience for our wedding."

Once again, technology grabs the headlines.

Whether you're planning a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, wedding or corporate event, there's no dodging the high-tech bullet. Depending on the occasion, tech can be in the spotlight, or on the down low, but it's always going to factor. Even if you want low-tech, there are some fun developments on the social and corporate scene that can add a sense of Right Now to your next Big Day.

Social Media — Yes or No?

According to a survey by Wedding Paper Divas, the average nuptials guest shared 22 wedding-related photos to social media sites, and four in 10 recent wedding guests reported a specific hashtag was provided and social sharing was encouraged for the event. The company's etiquette maven, Amber Harrison, advises thinking before you post. "Be very thoughtful and deliberate about what and when you choose to post. When in doubt, hold off. Nothing will be harmed by waiting a few hours, or even days, to post that photo."

There's no right or wrong approach to social media for a special occasion or event, but the reality is that attendees need to know how the host feels. In the case of weddings, Harrison says that "it's important for the engaged couple to establish the tone and make a decision about what best suits them, so they can clearly communicate those wishes to guests along the way." If the hosts are all about the share, then the simplest thing to do

Chandelier winch and wedding cake at Cescaphe



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is create a unique hashtag for use on social media channels such as Twitter or Instagram, and inform your guests to utilize it. That way you can also track the great photos they'll capture, too.

WedPics

Who doesn't remember Pepsi shaking up Super Bowl XLVII with its crowdsourcing campaign that invited fans to upload a photo of themselves recreating a daily pose by Beyonce? The photos were all in one place where anyone and everyone could view them. This technology isn't just limited to a big corporate marketing gimmick; it's here for everybody. WedPics is an app that brings the same crowdsourcing idea to wedding guests. Available for the iPhone and Android

Center is a big wow, a place to take visitors and kids for a dose of Philly cool. Get your own version of that wall at your party or event with the help of PSAV, a technology provider with locations from Philly to L.A. and the Virgin Islands. Think of the wall as a large iPad, with custom videos, maps, logos, games and slide shows. Use a live feed, put guests in the spotlight in the moment, and turn up the wattage on your next big shindig.

Fantasy Realized

Bar and Bat Mitzvah parties are more engaging than ever. One hot trend in this department include TV-show themes – think *Walking Dead* or *Game of Thrones*, according to party planner Marla Mace, whose company, Party Poopers,



A 2LifeTalent DJ gets this Bar Mitzvah party started.

phones, the app allows high-def sharing between social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook or Pinterest, and in one click, the bride (or anyone with admin rights) can download all the pictures or send them to Facebook, creating an instant photo book.

Turn That Cake Upside Down

Joe Volpe heard about the hanging chandelier wedding cake created by Butter End Cakery for the California wedding of *Big Bang Theory* star Kaley Cuoco, and he was inspired. Working with Jennifer Roach, Cescaphe's award-winning cake artisan, Volpe added a winch to the newly renovated Cescaphe Ballroom to ensure stability and maneuvering. Voila! A chandelier cake done up in icing, roses and crystal swags is lowered from the ceiling. Smack-dab at the intersection of delicious and drama, the chandelier wedding cake sure does jump-start the cutting of the cake.

Interactive Video Wall

The video wall at the Comcast

plans elaborate Bar and Bat Mitzvahs in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Adventure and involvement are popular, she added, ranging from circus arts stations to scavenger hunt boot camp and laser tag. Karaoke, always fun, is bigger than ever these days.

Long Live the Selfie

Do you have social media fatigue? Consider following the advice of the party pros at 2LifeTalent in Philly and bring on a social media concierge to manage it all for you. This person will be your go-to for assisting guests with hashtags, taking pictures with a designated phone throughout the night and more. Also trending: video DJs who can mix music videos and live feed for a truly real-time party. These visuals, when synced perfectly in line with the audio, puts technology in the spotlight to give your special day an extra wow.

Beth D'Addono is a frequent contributor to Special Sections.

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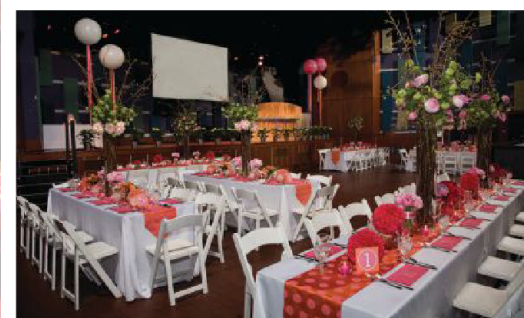
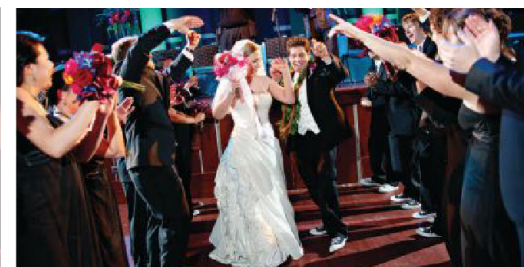
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The sun shines on Lake Kinneret in Tiberias

By Deborah Fineblum Schabb

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fter Bernie and Yonah Miriam Schulman's wedding in 2004, the Baltimore couple took off for their dream honeymoon—in Israel.

"We couldn't imagine being anywhere else," Bernie says a decade later. "And with the natural beauty, the feeling of being in a Jewish country with Hebrew all around us, and the people, too, the entire experience turned out to be even more amazing than we'd imagined. We couldn't have planned it."

As a matter of fact, they didn't.

The couple flew into Ben Gurion Airport, rented a car and took off, letting the trip evolve spontaneously. After three weeks, they'd floated in two inches of water in the Dead Sea, reached the peak of Masada just as the sun was peeking over the mountain, communed with ibex at Ein Gedi and much more.

In 1999, Josh Tolub and Tabitha May-Tolub took a similar newlywed journey, an adventure they can still enjoy thanks to the video camera they received as a wedding present. "We wanted to record everything we saw for my mother-in-law, who'd never been there," says Josh.

In fact, Israel is a popular honeymoon destination for newlyweds from all over the world. Just look online for honeymoon packages for a sampling of the offerings, ranging from back-to-nature backpacking tours to five-star opulence.

Traditional Jewish couples stay pretty close to home after their weddings for a week's worth of sheva brachot (celebratory meals) with family and friends. Nevertheless, these couples often wish to take a few days away before getting down to the business of being married.

The 10-day honeymoon of Josh Tolub and Tabitha May-Tolub in Israel also served as an introduction to Jewish life. As an initially interfaith couple (Tabitha has long since converted to Judaism), they shared the transformative experience of enjoying the Jewish state together.

"It was a wonderful place for a honeymoon," says Josh, whose family now resides in the Boston area. "It was a true emotional high, going to the Kotel, walking around Ben Yehuda Street, eating kosher Kentucky Fried Chicken, and seeing it all through [Tabitha's] eyes and the wonderful emotions of her first time in Israel."

A new program makes it even easier for couples to experience the magic of an Israeli honeymoon. This spring, Honeymoon Israel is sending pilot trips of newlyweds on heavily subsidized nine-day honeymoons. Honeymoon Israel's co-CEO, Avi Rubel, says the chance to honeymoon in the Jewish state is "an opportunity to take people out of their normal atmosphere and give them a Jewish experience."

However they are able to get there, opportunities abound for newly minted couples to celebrate in Israel and unwind from the wedding hoopla. Here is a sampling of 10:

For art lovers and mystics: Tzfat

It can also be Tsfat, Zefat, Zfat, Safad, Safes, Safet, or Safed. But however you spell it, this ancient northern city is elevated enough to command majestic views in every direction: from the Golan to Mt. Meron to Lebanon, Tiberias and the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee). For couples seeking to kick off their marriage on a spiritual high, Tzfat is also home to the mystical Jewish tradition of Kabbalah. In fact, tradition has it that the Messiah will come from Tzfat on his way to Jerusalem. Mystic Rabbi Yitzhak Luria (1534-1572), known as Ha-Ari HaKadosh or the Arizal, is among the greats buried in Tzfat's Old Cemetery, and Zohar author Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (100-160) is buried in nearby Meron.

For water babies: Tiberias

Perched on the shores of Lake Kinneret, Tiberias gives honeymooners a chance to warm up nearly year-round, in sharp contrast to the bracing air of Tzfat, a short ride to the north. Here one can enjoy water sports and a marina along the extensive waterfront, ancient

architecture, and historical and religious sites. Moshe ben Maimon (aka Maimonides or the Rambam) and other giants of Jewish thought are buried here.

For history buffs: Caesarea

Standing in the ruins of the Hellenistic and Crusader periods — when Caesarea was a port city and, for many years, the capital of Israel — might be practically the closest thing to time travel. Caesarea was named for Augustus Caesar and was a gift to him from King Herod, complete with a huge port and a thriving metropolis. In addition to a birds-eye view of 2,300 years of history, Caesarea also offers such modern attractions as golf courses, deep-sea diving, live music, an art museum, horse racing and a large national park.

For nature lovers: Israel National Trail

The Israel National Trail invites hikers to traverse the country from south to north, from the Gulf of Aqaba in Eilat all the way to Dan, near the Lebanese border. The trail, which measures some 620 miles and takes a decidedly scenic path through the country, was the creation of journalist Avraham Tamir who, having hiked the Appalachian Trail, decided Israel needed its own national trail to show off its natural beauty. The trail was officially opened in 1995.

For wine aficionados: Zichron Ya'akov

You don't need to love wine to honeymoon in Zichron Ya'akov, but it certainly helps. Blessed with the golden sunshine to facilitate grape growing, Zichron was established at the tip of the Carmel mountain range in 1882 with the help of Baron Edmond de Roth-

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schild, the Jewish philanthropist who supported many of Israel's early communities.

Visitors will find a town rich in history (during World War I, it was home to the underground that helped the British defeat the occupying Turks), the Museum of the First Aliyah, quaint crafts shops and eateries, architectural gems and some of the finest winery tours in Israel.

For city slickers: Tel Aviv

Tel Aviv is Israel's undisputed economic, retail and cultural epicenter. Honeymooners will find theater, a never-ending nightlife, crafts shows, architectural delights (including the world's best specimens of Bauhaus architecture from the 1930s), a lively, outdoor shuk (market), live music, art galleries and some of the country's finest restaurants.

In addition, the pristine white Mediterranean beaches provide a dramatic contrast to the skyscrapers just feet away. Nearby, Old Jaffa combines old and new in a decidedly hip and entertaining fashion.

For heart specialists: Jerusalem

Conquerors have fought and died for Jerusalem for thousands of years, but they never vanquished its eternal beauty and splendor. The Kotel (Western Wall) and its Old City neighborhood welcome some 10 million visitors a year. Other attractions include theater, music, synagogues and yeshivas, architectural tours, historical sites, a world-famous shuk and countless ancient sites.

What's more, getting around the city has never been easier thanks to a modern, sleek and fast light-rail system. One must-see: the Rake-



A resort on the Dead Sea

vet (Hebrew for train), a popular walking and cycling path through the German Colony that has risen from the wreckage of a deserted train track.

For rest-and-relaxation seekers: the Dead Sea

The lowest spot on Earth, the Dead Sea may be the highest for honeymooners. Couples can wash away the stress of the wedding with therapeutic mud. Located roughly 1,300 feet below sea level, the Dead Sea is the world's saltiest body of water. The salt has eased the pain of thousands who come annually to take in its healing properties. But why is it called the Dead Sea? The high salt content would kill any life form that attempted to survive in these waters.

For stargazers: Mitzpe Ramon

There's something so romantic about lying on your back on a sleeping bag and having the entire Milky Way arrayed before you. This is the magic of the Ramon Crater at Mitzpe Ramon, where the absence of city lights means that

stars are dazzlingly bright to the eye. If you don't mind sleeping on mattresses alongside a chorus of snoring strangers, there are Bedouin tents nearby to stay in at a low cost. Besides providing your own private light show, Mitzpe Ramon offers Jeep, bicycle and camel tours, rappelling, an array of desert animals and historical sites.

For sun-seekers: Eilat

Head south and when you can't go any farther without swimming, you've hit Eilat. Called the "window on the Red Sea," Eilat is Israel's premier resort town, complete with scuba diving (the coral reefs are gorgeous), water skiing, world-class bird-watching, boating and sizzling nightlife.

Thanks to its balmy climate (it rains an average of six days a year), Eilat attracts sunbathers year-round. Look for a busy port and an under-water aquarium, along with land-based activities that include rappelling on steep cliffs, desert hikes and mountain biking.

This article is provided by JNS.org.



Views from the mountains to the sea in Eilat

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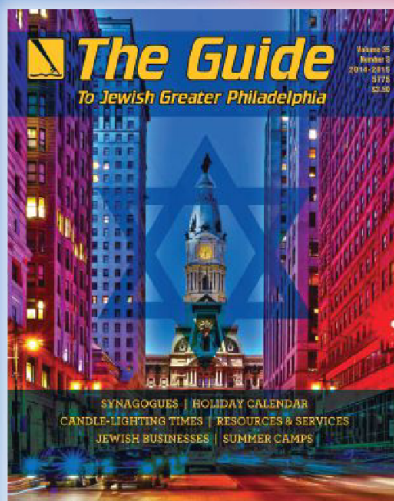
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