

MHA/CYOS

Alumni and Friends



Issue 35

Highlighting
the graduating
classes of
2016-2020

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We mourn with great sorrow the recent passing of alumna

Anna Faye (Thomas) Kotkes (MHA '65, YOS '69), z"l.

We send our deepest condolences to her family: her husband, Ephraim Kotkes; her children, Herschel Kotkes, Aliza Gugenheim, Rivka Levine, Moshe Kotkes, Rafael Kotkes, Shira Silverstein, Yitzchak Kotkes and Dovid Kotkes; her grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and her siblings, **Ricki (Thomas) Krupp** (MHA '66, YOS '70), **Aaron Thomas** (MHA '68, YOS '71), **Ira Thomas** (MHA '70, YOS '74), **Deena Thomas** (MHA '76, YOS '80), **Beryl Thomas** (MHA '77, YOS '81) and **Josh Thomas** (MHA '83).

May they all be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem, and may Anna's memory always be a blessing to those who knew her

COVER PHOTO



In 2017, a group of FYOS students joined Baron Hirsch Congregation's delegation at the AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington, D.C.: (front row, from left) **Alexandra (Goldblatt) Niren** (FYOS '19), **Batya (Bosin) Ness** (MHA '14, FYOS '18), **Avigail (Bosin) Chowaiki** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), **Shayna (Kahane) Lesnoy** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), **Jone Skapino** (FYOS '18); (middle row, from left) **Ezra Somer** (FYOS '21), **Benjamin Mendelson** (MHA '17, FYOS '21), **Yishai Berendt** (MHA '14, FYOS '18), **Shlomo Bosin** (MHA '14, FYOS '18) and **Ezra Cooper** (MHA '15, FYOS '19); (back row, from left) chaperones Rabbi Dov Winston and Rabbi Binyamin Lehrfield of Baron Hirsch.

MISSED AN ISSUE?

ARCHIVES

All previous issues of our alumni publication are now conveniently available at mhacyos.org/alumni.

Joanne Kahane, alumni chair

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MESSAGE TO ALUMNI

Joanne Kahane, alumni committee chair

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Dear MHA/CYOS alumni and friends,



By the time you read this Pesach newsletter, you'll hopefully find yourselves in warm spring weather. But sitting at my computer to write this message in early February, I was listening to the sounds of cracking ice as workmen cleared my driveway. That's not a sound

we hear much in the South!

Though much of Memphis was shut down for almost two weeks under a blanket of ice, the MHA/CYOS — like "The Little Engine That Could" — kept chugging away with both online and in-person learning. Our faculty, students and parents were undeterred in making sure learning continued without unnecessary interruption. It's truly a beautiful thing about our community.

After school each day, several MHA students have enjoyed sledding down my driveway, onto a Laurie Lane totally covered with snow and ice. The child in me wished I could be out there with them; the adult in me didn't venture out of the house.



I want to express my gratitude to **Chani Karasik** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), an up-and-coming graphic designer, who kindly stepped in to help with the layout of this issue while Ruthie Rashkin (who normally volunteers to design our newsletter) was unavailable. Chani has done a beautiful job, and we greatly appreciate her time, effort and talents.

If you'll indulge me, I'd like to brag for a minute about our beloved school. In January, we learned that the College Board awarded the CYOS platinum distinction on its 2025 Advanced Placement (AP) School Honor Roll. Fewer than 7% of schools nationwide receive platinum status! In 2024, only 11 Tennessee high schools (out of 439 public schools and 216 private schools across the state) earned the platinum distinction. Based on this competitive ranking, CYOS is in the top 1% of schools in the state.

"Our students rise to academic challenge, and we're proud of them for choosing to stretch themselves through AP coursework," said Dr. Whitney Kennon, CYOS general studies principal. "AP courses ask students to think deeply, communicate clearly and engage seriously with ideas. These are habits of mind that prepare students not only for college, but for sustained intellectual growth well beyond high school."

As noted by Rabbi Dr. Gavriel Brown, our head of school, CYOS exceeded all criteria required for platinum distinction, including:

- Enabling 80% of the class of 2025 to take at least one AP course before graduation
- Supporting 50% of the class of 2025 in earning college credit through AP exam scores of 3 or higher

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MESSAGE TO ALUMNI

Joanne Kahane, alumni committee chair

- Creating opportunities for 15% of the class of 2025 to complete five AP courses across their high school years.

Kudos and *yasher koach* to our committed and talented faculty, as well as to our amazing students! They continue to prove that, when it comes to education, great things can come in small packages.

May Hashem allow us to continue shepping *nachas* (taking pride) from our incredible students and alumni for many years to come.

Chag kasher v'sameach — wishing you all a happy and kosher Pesach!

Joanne Kahane, alumni chair
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MESSAGE FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL

Rabbi Dr. Gavriel Brown

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Dear MHA/CYOS alumni and friends,



Pesach is **זמן חרותנו**, the time of our freedom. For many of us in the MHA/CYOS community, it's also a moment to reflect on how freedom often begins with foundations we did not choose and did not yet understand.

For those who grew up in religious households and attended Jewish schools, most of us did not arrive at Jewish life through choice. We arrived because someone brought us to school each morning and, while still half asleep, we were ushered into classrooms and led to davening to recite Hebrew words we didn't really understand. None of this felt like "choice" at the time. It felt like routine, expectation and, according to my mother, resistance. Only later — often much later — did we begin to recognize that those early structures were not limiting our freedom; they were preparing us to exercise it.

As adults, we like to imagine that our commitments are self-chosen, the result of careful reflection and independent judgment. But Pesach reminds us that the deepest commitments in our lives often begin on autopilot, as a **ירושה** (inheritance), before they become our own decisions. We're formed by classrooms we didn't have a choice stay in, by rituals we did not design and by halachic expectations that preceded our understanding. Over time, those inherited structures become the very tools that allow us to choose meaningfully for ourselves (and hopefully, pass on to the next generation).

What many experience first as inheritance and later as choice, a **בעל תשובה** (who returns to a Torah lifestyle) often encounters first as choice and only later as inheritance. In the end, though, all of us receive Judaism as a whole rather than à la carte, and only over time do we grow into choosing what we first received.

Am Yisrael leave Egypt with haste, with matzah on our backs and uncertainty ahead. But our *mesorah* (tradition) describes something famously startling about our arrival at Har Sinai. The Gemara (Shabbat 88a) teaches that Hashem held the mountain over us **כגיית**, like an overturned barrel, and demanded: Accept the Torah or be buried here. Yikes! The founding moment of Jewish covenant sounds less like a democratic assembly and more like cosmic waterboarding:

כפה עליהם הר כגיית ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה
מוטב ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם ויענו כל העם יחדיו נעשה
ונשמע

He held the mountain over them like a barrel and said: If you accept the Torah, good. If not, there will be your burial. And the people answered, "We will do and we will hear."

This image has been unsettling for generations of commentators and inquisitive high school students. Here's your choice: Take it or not. Except the "no" isn't really an option. It sits in tension with our proud declaration of **נעשה ונשמע**. This tension is also elemental to so much of our development. Human beings rarely choose their deepest commitments in calm conditions. We encounter them first, live inside them for a long time and only later decide whether those commitments are truly our own.

Chazal (our sages) resolve the tension by pointing to a second moment of acceptance:

קיימו וקבלו היהודים עליהם ועל זרעם דברי התורה הזאת
לקיים את ימי הפורים בזמניהם כאשר קיבלו כבר עליהם

*The Jews confirmed and accepted upon themselves
and their descendants the Torah's words, affirming
again what they had already received.*

The Gemara says that, centuries later, in the days of Achashverosh and the Purim story, *Am Yisrael* willingly reaffirmed the Torah. What began under the shadow of the mountain became a free commitment. Har Sinai established the framework. History and a big win over our enemies supplied the consent. Mazel tov. Now let's eat.

But Pesach lives inside that paradox. Before Har Sinai's **הר כגיית** comes Egypt, the opposite extreme. Egypt is the world without agency. Slavery removes the possibility of decision. The Torah describes redemption in a sequence of verbs:

לכן אמור לבני ישראל אני ה' והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלות
מצרים והצלתי אתכם מעבודתם וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה
ובשפטים גדלים

*Therefore say to Israel, "I am Hashem. I will take you
out from Egypt's burdens, rescue you from their labor
and redeem you with an outstretched arm."*

Am Yisrael does not choose liberation. We are carried out of Egypt: **והוצאתי ... והצלתי ... וגאלתי ... ולקחתי** is not collaborative language. These actions are done for us. We don't design the moment of *kabbalat haTorah* (receiving the Torah). We encounter it in all its terrifying and overwhelming qualities. Freedom begins as Hashem's unilateral rescue mission, complete with

unrivaled firepower and plagues. Only later does it become responsibility.

This sequence reflects something deeply familiar about human development.

Students, like *Am Yisrael*, rarely begin with choice. They do not choose their language, their earliest stories, their moral vocabulary or the rhythms of their community. They inherit them. They enter worlds already in motion. A child entering school does not deliberate about algebra, *tefillah* (prayer), grammar or recess rules. The child joins a community with established expectations and practices.

This isn't a defect in education; it's how education works. Schools provide stability before autonomy. They establish routines before reflection. They give students something reliable to stand inside while judgment and identity slowly develop. At the beginning, they need continuity more than optionality. Over time, students grow their capacity to choose.

Modern culture often assumes that more choice produces more freedom. Research suggests a more complicated relationship. In 2000, Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper conducted a now-widely cited behavioral economics experiment. In a California grocery store, shoppers encountered a tasting table displaying jars of jam. Sometimes the table offered six varieties, and other times it offered 24. While the larger display attracted more attention, the smaller display produced substantially more purchases.

Participants exposed to many options showed lower rates of decision making and lower satisfaction with their eventual selections. Researchers describe

this as “choice overload,” where increasing options raises cognitive demands and reduces the likelihood of commitment. Decision making gets harder as alternatives multiply, and individuals often defer or avoid decisions altogether.

This insight helps illuminate Har Sinai. *Am Yisrael* was not standing at the base of the mountain comparing religious systems or moral frameworks (though we’re told Hashem shopped around for more suitable nations). Our covenant arrived as structure before we could deliberate, argue and offer addendums to the contract (we so would, right?). A set framework can support commitment in ways that unlimited options cannot.

Think about how often our decisions depend on what’s already in front of us. In his book “Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness,” Nobel Prize-winning Prof. Richard Thaler explored how retirement plan participation rises dramatically when employees are enrolled automatically. When school lunches are arranged so fruit sits at eye level and dessert is harder to reach, children eat differently without anyone giving a speech about nutrition. When a teacher begins class with a *pasuk* (verse) already written on the board, students open their notebooks almost automatically. (Fine, he didn’t discover that one, but I see it all the time!) Thaler’s “choice architecture” shows that choice is seemingly still there, but the environment guides it. Structure does not remove agency.

Our Pesach seder reflects this wisdom. The night is highly structured. The order is fixed. The questions are scripted. The narrative is inherited, and we’ve stuck to the same story for 2,000 years:

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים ויוציאנו ה' אלקינו משם ביד
חזקה ובזרוע נטויה ואלמלא הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא אותנו
משם

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out with strength. Had the Holy One not taken us out, we would still be enslaved.

The child does not invent the story; the story shapes the child. Freedom grows through repetition before it grows through independent choice. When *Am Yisrael* left Egypt, we were not yet capable of sustaining autonomy. Har Sinai provided stability before independence.

Predictability allows risk taking. Shared expectations make intellectual exploration possible. When the environment is stable, attention can turn toward learning rather than negotiating every decision anew.

The Gemara’s claim that *Am Yisrael* accepted the Torah again in the days of Achashverosh captures the second stage of identity. The covenant becomes voluntary because the people have grown into it. Education hopes for the same transformation. A student who once followed rules because teachers required them eventually follows them because they make sense.

I find myself increasingly worried about this. In schools today, we often try to give students a stronger sense of ownership over their religious lives. The instinct is understandable. We want commitment to feel authentic, not coerced. We hope that if students experience Jewish practice as something they choose, rather than something imposed on them, they will carry it with them beyond school. We don’t want it to feel like *כפה עליהם הר כגיגית*, so we sometimes loosen

expectations. We allow students to opt out of being *chazzan* (prayer leader) or try not to push them to sing *zemirot* (songs) on a Shabbaton. We make participation in shared practices more negotiable than it once was. These decisions come from a place of care and a desire to keep students connected rather than alienated.

But that instinct can sometimes become counterproductive. Thaler's choice architecture named that: When we remove structure in the name of freedom, we don't remove influence. We replace intentional guidance with accidental guidance. Students are never shaped by nothing. They're shaped either by the expectations adults set or by the habits that form when expectations disappear. When participation becomes optional, students learn something else, even if no one says it out loud. The environment teaches either way.

But I also think about my own childhood and about many of yours. I didn't choose most of the early experiences that shaped me. I showed up because that's where my parents dropped me off each morning. Only in my twenties did those routines begin to make sense from the inside. I worry that when we remove too much structure too soon, we're asking students to make choices before they have the vocabulary to understand what they're choosing. Har Sinai comes before the days of Achashverosh. The covenant becomes voluntary only after it has first been lived. If we eliminate the mountain entirely, there may be nothing left to accept later.

For MHA/CYOS alumni, this idea feels especially familiar. Much of what shaped you began long before you could evaluate it. You entered classrooms, *tefillah* spaces and the Memphis Jewish community already in motion. You inherited language, practice and expectations that only later became meaningful through your own choices.

Every classroom participates in that process. Every seder reenacts it. Every child who inherits a story before fully understanding it stands in the same place as *Am Yisrael* at the base of the mountain. Pesach teaches that freedom is not the absence of limits; it's the ability to grow within them until they become our own.

Perhaps that's one of the gifts of an MHA/CYOS education. The structures that once felt simply given can, over time, become chosen. The mountain that once hung overhead becomes the mountain we learn to climb.

Wishing you a *chag kasher ve'sameach* – a happy and kosher Pesach,

Rabbi Dr. Gavriel Brown
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND ALUMNI CHAIR

Community Responses

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We welcome your feedback on the alumni newsletter at alumni@mhacyos.org. Here are some of the responses we received to issue No. 34.

Yasher koach (kudos) on another beautifully laid-out and fun-to-read newsletter! Thank you for featuring me in the Spotlight article. It was so much fun reading all the comments and brought me back to a special time at the MHA. Be well.

-Chavi (Nayowitz) Katz, former MHA student and faculty

Thank you for the great Chanukah edition of the alumni newsletter. Joanne Kahane's message in particular was wonderfully written, engaging and insightful. This publication always brings back great memories of my time at MHA and why the school remains so special to me.

-Jan Starr (MHA '66)

This was such a beautiful issue! Congrats on putting this out, yet again! We are all deeply grateful for your efforts in keeping everyone connected and informed.

-Rabbi Dr. Gavriel Brown, MHA/CYOS head of school

Kudos on another wonderful newsletter. You are amazing!

-Emily (Evensky) Steinberg (MHA '63)

Thank you for another amazing edition of the alumni newsletter! I know you put your heart and soul into it. It's much appreciated, and I pass it on.

-Esther (Schwartzman) Braunstein (MHA '67, YOS '70)

You may soon have to change the name of the Alumni Reunite feature to Where in the World is **Judy (Yormark) Fruchthandler** (MHA '75, YOS '79)? She is everywhere!

-Peninah (Rebecca Steinberg) Simon (MHA '91)

Thanks for a wonderful newsletter once again. With regard to our production of "Fiddler on the Roof" (referenced on page 9), I still have the program we handed out! Your trivia question asked about Tevye's three daughters, but he has five. **Karen (Sigel) Futter** (MHA '78) played Shprintze, and I was the youngest daughter, Bielke. What great times those were!

-Devora (Kipper) Gradon (MHA '77, YOS '81)

Response from the editor and alumni chair:

Thank you, Devora. We know you appreciate how important accuracy is to us and are grateful for your help in achieving that goal.

I regret to share that my mother, Mrs. Joyce Casada, passed away on Jan. 26. The Hebrew Academy was such a large part of Mom's life. The lives she touched, and those that touched hers, during her years of teaching at the MHA were a major piece of her life accomplishments. She was so flattered by the [Spotlight feature](#) you published about her in 2022, and it meant so much to our family.

-Max Casada

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND ALUMNI CHAIR

Community Responses

Response from the editor and alumni chair:

Max, thank you for reaching out to let us know this sad news. We are so sorry for your loss and send our deepest condolences to your entire family. Your mother will always be a significant part of our school's history. She was such a special person, and we know her memory will be a blessing to all who knew her.

I attended Mrs. Casada's funeral, and the eulogies frequently mentioned how much she enjoyed working with the Hebrew Academy community. They also noted the alumni newsletter [Spotlight feature](#) about her and the beautiful letters she received from former students in honor of her 90th birthday in 2022. It was very meaningful.

-Shelby (Winestone) Baum (MHA '77)

Alumni who wish to send condolence messages to the Casada family may do so online at the bottom of the [obituary page](#).



In loving memory



As this issue was going to press, we learned of the passing of Mrs. Naomi Finkelstein z"l, at the age of 98.

Mrs. Finkelstein worked in the MHA office for 27 years, and it's nearly impossible to list the many roles she played in our school and community: receptionist, executive assistant, school nurse, principal (when needed), advisor, confidant, cheerleader, public relations coordinator, problem solver, dispenser of candy (that everyone knew she kept in her desk drawer), surrogate mother and grandmother to two generations of students — and most of all, beloved friend. She was the personification of the phrase, "To know her is to love

her." Those who were privileged to have had Mrs. Finkelstein in their lives are better people because of her.

For more on Mrs. Finkelstein's remarkable life, see her [obituary](#) and our spotlight article from [issue 6](#).

We send our deepest sympathies to her children: **Sam Finkelstein** (MHA '70), **Sara (Finkelstein) Schachter** (MHA '73, YOS '77) and **Rabbi David Finkelstein** (MHA '75). Messages of condolence for the Finkelstein family may be shared [online](#).

The world has surely lost a ray of sunshine. May the memory of Naomi Finkelstein always be a blessing.

TRIVIA ANSWERS

1996-2000

Thanks to everyone who sent in responses to the trivia questions featured in our [34th issue](#).

The winner of our trivia contest from that issue was **Elana (Sadetsky) Avis** (MHA '93, YOS '97), who got four out of 12 right answers.

After Pesach, Elana will receive a tin of tasty treats from [Ricki's Cookie Corner](#), owned and operated by **Ricki (Thomas) Krupp** (MHA '66, YOS '70).

Below are the answers to the trivia questions from issue 34. How many did you know?

1. What song did **Richard Lewis** (MHA '99, FYOS '03) coordinate at the end of every session in Mr. Bryce Embry's computer lab?
ANSWER: The University of Memphis fight song, "Go Tigers Go."
2. When **Yoni Freiden** (MHA '96, FYOS '00) famously said, "We shoulda won," to which basketball game was he referring?
ANSWER: The tier II semifinal game against Pittsburgh at the Yeshiva University Red Sarachek Basketball Tournament in 2000.
3. Which FYOS teacher is fondly remembered for bringing students kosher Christmas cookies?
ANSWER: The late Mrs. Karin Schmitt.
4. Who was maintenance man Mr. Marvin Tharnish's assistant during this era? (Hint: A famous book has the same name.)
ANSWER: Robert Rule.
5. Which student won the school geography bee in 1999?
ANSWER: **Yosef Blockman** (MHA '02).

6. Who directed the MHA's 1999 production of "The Parent Trap"?

ANSWER: **Chaya Sarah (Rose Zeitlin) Gold** (MHA '95, FYOS '99).

7. Which teacher from this era was known for bringing leftovers to school for her students to enjoy?

ANSWER: Mrs. **Chana (Anet Yaffe) Silver** (MHA '76, YOS '80).

8. Which students represented candidates George Bush, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot in the school's 1995 mock presidential debate?

ANSWER: **Josh Kahane** (MHA '93, FYOS '97), **Ariel (Grovetman) Weiner** (MHA '93) and **Dovid Schachter** (MHA '93, FYOS '97), respectively.

9. Which Shakespeare play did the MHA junior high students perform in 1995?

ANSWER: "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

10. Which MHA alumna and parent designed and built a decorative arch (pictured here) in the late 1990s that was used in first grade *siddur* presentations for many years?

ANSWER: **Diane (Bisno) Kaplan** (MHA '72).



THANK YOU

We express our deepest appreciation to all those who gave of their time to help us publish this issue. First, thank you to the staff at the MHA/CYOS, most especially Yocheved Naftel and Erica Stoltz. Additionally, thank you to the alumni and friends who assisted us by supplying photographs, identifying individuals in those pictures and providing historical background, trivia questions and more, including **David Cooper** (MHA '78, YOS '82), **Josh Kahane** (MHA '93, FYOS '97), **Elan Cooper** (MHA '13, FYOS '17), **Ezra Cooper** (MHA '15, FYOS '19), **Shuli Cohen** (FYOS '19) and **Shayna (Kahane) Lesnoy** (MHA '16, FYOS '20).

TRIVIA QUESTIONS 2016-2020

Regardless of when you graduated, have some fun with these trivia questions!

Send your answers to joannekahane111@gmail.com. The person who gets the most answers correct (or in the case of a tie, the earliest respondent) will win a tin of Ricki's Cookies, made by **Ricki (Thomas) Krupp** (MHA '66, YOS '70). Good luck!



1. What question did **Jeffrey Owen** (FYOS '17) ask every visiting yeshiva representative during their promotional session?
2. Which alumnus wrote a song to the tune of "Hallelujah" and sang it at the 2016 CYHSB Steak Dinner?
3. Which FYOS sophomore was the go-to commentator for the Cooper Macs' basketball home games broadcast on Facebook Live in 2016-2017?
4. Which beloved member of the FYOS class of 2019 was frequently injured on school trips (canoeing, skiing and boating, etc.)?
5. Which teacher came to school during his paternity leave to give students a take-home math test?
6. Which Netflix show did the girls from the 2019 bridge math class obsess over? (Hint: It was the first user-interactive Netflix show.)
7. Which alumna was known for her "save the unicorn" campaign?
8. Why did **Hugh (Freiden) Gordon** (MHA '72, YOS '76) receive the Community Service Award at the MHA's annual banquet in 2017?
9. Which teacher from this era was known for saying, "Bells should be ringing, lights should be flashing"?
10. Which teacher (pictured here) was unfortunately swarmed by hornets and received multiple stings during the GMSG fall trip in 2018?



As Pesach approaches, many of the themes, messages and ideas relating to the *chag* (holiday) come rushing back into our collective consciousness. However, this year something else caught my eye — something which is of particular importance to me and Moshes everywhere.

The Pesach story classically begins at the beginning of *Shemos* (I know about “*arami oveid avi*,” but this is a correct approach, as evidenced by “The Prince of Egypt”) with the story of the decree against the Jewish baby boys. One escapes, is floated down the river and is found by the daughter of Pharaoh. After the discovery of the child and his subsequent rearing in Pharaoh’s palace, she calls him Moshe, as the *pasuk* (verse) says (*Shemos* 2:10):

וַיַּגְדֵּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבָאֶהוּ לְבֵת-פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי-לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן-הַמַּיִם מָשִׁיתִהוּ

When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moshe, explaining, “I drew him out of the water.”

The *pasuk* seems to explain the reason behind the name Moshe receives: that he was drawn out of the water. However, Pharaoh’s daughter should have been a native speaker of the Egyptian language, not Hebrew. So, was Moshe his name in Hebrew or in Egyptian? And how does that relate to the fact that the Torah says his name comes from the word **משיתו**?

Rashi quotes Menachem Ibn Saruq, who explains that **משיתו** comes from the *shoresh* (root) **מוש** — like **לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפִּיךָ**, meaning the Torah should not be removed from your lips. In this way, the *pasuk* is saying that Moshe’s name comes from the fact that he was removed from the water.

However, Rashi himself explains that **משיתו** means to take out, coming from the *shoresh* **משה**.

Though they differ slightly, both Rashi and Menachem Ibn Saruq seem to agree that **משה** is a Hebrew word (or at least a *shoresh* that has a Hebrew cognate). Also, neither explains how Pharaoh’s daughter knew Hebrew or asks why she would give him a Hebrew name if he was being raised as an Egyptian.

The Ibn Ezra argues that Moshe’s name is actually Egyptian but was translated into Hebrew. In Egyptian, his name was Muniom, as it says in various Egyptian and Greek texts. However, he still thinks that Pharaoh’s daughter either learned the language or asked one of the Jews how to translate the name.

This opinion seems to match what’s found in the Ramban (*Bereishis* 41:45). There, he claims that Tzafnas Pa’aneich, the name given to Yosef by Pharaoh, is a Hebrew phrase and says that Moshe is as well. Instead of Muniom, as the Ibn Ezra has it, he records it as Munios. He explains that the names don’t stay consistent because the people of each society change them to what’s more comfortable for them.

The Daas Zekeinim, on the other hand, gives another answer. He says Pharaoh’s daughter learned Hebrew from the Jewish maidservants — the same way that Pharaoh knew Hebrew and called Yosef Tzafnas Pa’aneich.

The Abarbanel argues on the Ramban and Ibn Ezra, siding with the Daas Zekeinim. He says they would have to say that all names in Tanach have the potential to be translated from an original language. This would mean that it’s possible the original names

were not actually in Hebrew, and that Hebrew was not necessarily the original language or the language in which the world was created. The Abarbanel argues that names are never translated from one language to another (take Onkeles, for example). Names may be altered because of the way other languages pronounce words (such as Yaakov to Jakov to Jakob to Jacob), but never because of a translation.

The Sforno takes a very different approach. He says that Moshe means to save and to take out those who are in trouble. He thinks the name Moshe is a reference to Moshe's future ability to lead the Jewish people out of harm's way. While it's true that he was pulled out of the water when he was in danger, it was only so he could save others. This assumes some amount of *ruach ha'kodesh* (prophetic inspiration) and *hashgacha* (divine providence) in Moshe's name and how it is phrased.

The Ohr Hachaim takes a different angle, pointing out that, in the case of Moshe, the order is backwards as compared to other naming events in Tanach. Everywhere else, the reason for the name comes before the actual naming, not after. He offers a possibility that Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah had *ruach ha'kodesh*, so they could say the reason before the name, but that Pharaoh's daughter did not. However, Hashem still put the name Moshe in her mouth, and then she came up with the reason afterward. Alternatively, he suggests that she was attempting to hide that she took Moshe from the river and saved a Jew, which led to her people's downfall; therefore, she decided to say the name only, and the Torah explains why she named him that without her saying it out loud.

The Tur quotes Rabbi Yosef Kimchi, who says it would have been fit grammatically to call him Mashui, but Pharaoh's daughter didn't know how to conjugate Hebrew verbs properly. This mistake, he claims, was actually Hashem arranging that his name would be Moshe to refer to the fact that he was the one who pulled the Jews out of Egypt. This assumes not only that Moshe is Hebrew, but also was chosen through *hashgacha*.

The Chizkuni quotes a *midrash* saying that she converted and learned Hebrew. She called him Moshe to ensure he remembered where he came from and that he was Jewish. This option assumes that Pharaoh's daughter had a religious agenda here because she too was Jewish. It also means she was actively attempting to save Moshe — not merely out of compassion or desire to have a baby, but because she wanted a savior for the Jews. This also would explain how Moshe knew he was Jewish when he grew up.

The Chizkuni also provides an alternative approach: Pharaoh's daughter didn't know Hebrew, and it was really Moshe's mother, Yocheved, who gave him his name because she knew he would take the Jews out of Egypt. When Pharaoh's daughter asked what it meant, she responded that it meant to take out. Pharaoh's daughter concluded that it was because of him being pulled out of the water.

The Shadal (Rabbi Shlomo Dovid Luzzatto from 19th century Italy) thinks Moshe is a combination of the terms *mo*, meaning water, and *she*, meaning to be saved. Therefore, his name means to be saved from water. He claims this was a common name for anyone who was saved from water, not just Moshe Rabbeinu. The Shadal loosely bases his explanation on Philo's book, "On the Life of Moses." There, the

1st century historian, who wrote mostly in Greek, outlines Moshe's entire lifetime as he understood it. He says in the first chapter: "Since he had been taken up from the water, the princess gave him a name derived from this, and called him Moses, for Möu is the Egyptian word for water." (The Malbim actually quotes Philo as well and agrees with him).

In "The Antiquities of the Jews," Josephus makes the connection between *mo* and *she* to mean saved from water. He writes in 2:9: "Hereupon it was that Thermuthis imposed this name Mouses upon him, from what had happened when he was put into the river; for the Egyptians call water by the name of Mo, and such as are saved out of it, by the name of Uses: so by putting these two words together, they imposed this name upon him."

The Haamek Davar says it was an Egyptian word meaning child, and because he was a prince, he was called "the kid." When Pharaoh's daughter says it was because she pulled him out of the water, the point is that she saved him and became his parent.

In summary, there are various explanations for what Moshe's name means. While some, like the Ibn Ezra, suggest it's an Egyptian name, others insist it was a Jewish name — either through Yocheved naming him or Pharaoh's daughter knowing enough Hebrew to name him. Either way, I hope this exploration into Moshe's name enlightens your Pesach.

I wish everyone a *chag kasher v'sameach*!

Moshe Davidovics (MHA '17, FYOS '21) studied at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh and is completing a degree in biology at Yeshiva University this year. He plans to pursue a medical degree after spending some time learning Torah at the Rabbi Isaac Elchonon Rabbinical Seminary (RIETS).





ENGAGEMENTS/ WEDDINGS:

Mazel tov to:

Ranelle (Evensky) Kibel (MHA '66, YOS '70) of Baltimore, Maryland, who recently celebrated at the weddings of three grandchildren. On Dec. 24, Mordechai Polsky, a son of Yitzchak and Devorah (Kibel) Polsky of Baltimore, married Nechama Birnbaum in Lakewood, New Jersey. Motti Dzialoszynski, a son of Ezriel and Deena (Kibel) Dzialoszynski of Miami, Florida, married Yael Feldberg Jan. 6. in Brooklyn, New York. On March 17, Yael Kibel, a daughter of Leila and Moshe Kibel of Cincinnati, Ohio, married Zacharia Belsky (a great-grandson of Yeshiva of the South founder Rabbi Meir Belsky, z'l) in Lakewood. All three couples are making their home in Israel. Mordechai, Motti and Yael are also grandchildren of **Rabbi Nechemiah (Harry) Kibel, z'l** (MHA '65, YOS '69).

Janet and **Paul Katz** (MHA '78) of Memphis on the engagement of their daughter Jamie to Zach Sloman.

Rina and **Rabbi Dov Emerson** (MHA '91) of Bergenfield, New

Jersey, on the engagement of their son Yehuda to Arieli Mahler. The couple is planning a June 15 wedding in New Jersey, and will live in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City. Mazel tov also to the groom's grandparents, Donny Emerson and **Laurie Cooper** (MHA '65) of Memphis.

Gershon and **Deena (Katz) Yarmush** (MHA '94, FYOS '97) of Boca Raton, Florida, on the upcoming weddings of two of their sons. Yonah will marry Rashi Bell April 15 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and they plan to live in Israel for the first year of their marriage. On May 27, Ezra will marry Ellie Teichman in Brooklyn, and they plan to live in the New York area. Mazel tov also to the grandparents: **Ronnie Katz** (MHA '70, YOS '74) of Netanya, Israel; Chavi (Nayowitz) Katz (former MHA faculty) of Jerusalem; and **Rabbi Yehoshua** (YOS '71) and **Tova (Therese Hochdorf) Yarmush** (YOS '73) of Spring Valley, New York.

Grant Parker (MHA '12) on his engagement to Margot Cohen. The couple is planning a Nov. 15 wedding in Tarrytown, New York, and will live in New York City.

Mazel tov also to the groom's parents, Allison and **Keith Parker** (MHA '76) of Memphis.

Emma Wruble (MHA '20, FYOS '24) — daughter of **Gary** (MHA '77, YOS '81) and **Dena (Rosenberg) Wruble** (MHA '84, YOS '88) of Memphis — and **Dovid Reuven Wogan** (MHA '19, FYOS '23) — son of Sarah Bracha and **Jonathan Wogan** (MHA '94) of Memphis — on their engagement. The couple will get married June 21 at Memphis's Baron Hirsch Synagogue and plan to live in Far Rockaway, New York. Mazel tov also to the bride's grandparents, Frances and **Herschel Rosenberg** (MHA '60) of Memphis.

BIRTHS:

Mazel tov to:

Paul and **Jill (Wender) Friedman** (MHA '73, YOS '77) of Riverdale, New York, on the Jan. 10 birth of granddaughter Millie Zelda, to parents Zoe and Josh Block of New York City.

Aileen and **Pace Cooper** (MHA '77, YOS '81) of Memphis, who recently welcomed three new granddaughters. Ellin and **Jeremy**



Cooper (MHA '08, FYOS '12) of New York City gave children Ariel and Lielle a little sister with the Jan. 29 birth of Kineret Noa. On Feb. 9, Anna and **Dylan Cooper** (MHA '09, FYOS '13) of New York celebrated the birth of Adeline Belle. And on Jan. 7, Kira and **Elan Cooper** (MHA '13, FYOS '17) of New York City became parents with the arrival of Josephine Bea.

Jeff and **Sara (Cherny) Mond** (MHA '02) of Scarsdale, New York, on the Dec. 30 arrival of son Shiloh Jude. Mazel tov also to big brothers Caleb and Oliver.

Jamie and **Zachary Wender** (MHA '03) of New York City on the Jan. 19 birth of their first child, son Blake Stanley. His middle name is a tribute to his great-grandfather, longtime MHA supporter Stanley Wender, z'l. Mazel tov also to grandparents Penina (former MHA faculty member and administrator) and **Elliot Wender** (MHA '79, YOS '83) of Memphis.

Alex and **Davida (Graber) Loizias** (MHA '03, FYOS '07) of

Springfield, New Jersey, on the Jan. 8 birth of son Michael Avery, making Anna a big sister. He is named for his great-grandfather, longtime MHA supporter and past-president Marlin Graber, z'l. Mazel tov also to grandparents Tova and **Roy Graber** (MHA '76, YOS '80) of Memphis.

Eric and **Brittany (Baum) Lindenfeld** (MHA '04) of New York City on the Jan. 23 birth of daughter Peyton Tillaya, making Abe a big brother. Mazel tov also to grandparents **Lee** (MHA '74) and **Shelby (Winestone) Baum** (MHA '77) of Memphis.

Momi and **Ezra Kaplan** (MHA '04, FYOS '08) of Givat Shmuel, Israel, on the Dec. 20 birth of son Michael Oz. Mazel tov also to big brothers Ben, Isaac and Ari and grandparents Jonathan and **Abbe (Seiger) Kaplan** (MHA '71) of Memphis.

Barr and **Elana (Ehrenkranz) Solnik** (MHA '04, FYOS '08) of Tel Aviv, Israel, who on Dec. 8 welcomed daughter Naaleh Ruth. Mazel tov also to siblings Noa and Shiloh and grandparents **Bart**

(YOS '77) and **Cindy (Cooper) Ehrenkranz** (MHA '76, YOS '80) of Memphis.

Jorge and **Elisa (Barrack) Castillo** (MHA '06) of Atlanta, Georgia, on the Dec. 14 birth of their first child, son Rafael Ilan. Mazel tov also to grandparents Jon and **Cindy (Califf) Barrack** (MHA '75) of Memphis.

Alex and **Naomi (Samberg) Vainer** (MHA '07, FYOS '11) of Brooklyn on the Dec. 22 birth of daughter Esther Chasya. Mazel tov also to siblings Yehuda, Yosef Chaim, Meir Eliyahu and Malka and to grandparents (and former MHA faculty members) Cantor Aryeh and Adina Samberg of Memphis.

Michal and **Benjamin Wachtel** (FYOS '13) of Memphis on the Jan. 29 birth of son Leo Israel. Mazel tov also to siblings Skylar and Robby, grandparents Jonathan and **Sarah (Fink) Wachtel** (MHA '88, YOS '92) of Beit Shemesh, Israel, and great-grandmother **Gerry (Margolin Fink) Platsky** (MHA '59) of Jerusalem.

Azi and **Jamie (Levy) Farr** (MHA '11, FYOS '15) of Los Angeles, California, on the Dec. 10 birth of their first child, son Max.

Nomi and **Ezra Somer** (FYOS '21) of Jerusalem, Israel, who became parents with the March 4 arrival of son Dov Eliyahu.

BNEI/BNOT MITZVAH:

Mazel tov to:

Eliezer and **Sarah (Harris) Bauer** (FYOS '96) of Memphis on the March 14 bar mitzvah of their son Shmuel, a seventh grader at MHA.

Julia and **Dovid Schachter** (MHA '93, FYOS '97) of Savannah, Georgia, on their son Leo becoming a bar mitzvah Feb. 7. Mazel tov also to grandparents Mendy and **Marilyn (Weinreich) Schachter** (MHA '71, YOS '75) of Cleveland, Ohio.

Stephanie and **Jeremy Weiser** (MHA '94) of Memphis on the March 7 bar mitzvah of their son, Noah.

Gershon and **Deena (Katz) Yarmush** (MHA '94, FYOS '97) on their daughter Hadar's recent

bat mitzvah. Mazel tov also to grandparents **Ronnie Katz** (MHA '70, YOS '74), Chavi (Nayowitz) Katz and **Rabbi Yehoshua** (YOS '71) and **Tova (Therese Hochdorf) Yarmush** (YOS '73).

Deborah and **Beryl Joffre** (MHA '98, FYOS '02) of Houston, Texas, on their son Nate becoming a bar mitzvah Feb. 21. The bar mitzvah boy is a grandson of **Michael Joffre** (MHA '69) of Cleveland, Ohio, and former MHA kitchen manager Linda Joffre z'l.

MAZEL TOV!

Send us your alumni news for the next issue at alumni@mhacyos.org.



THE MHA/FYOS CLASSES OF 2016-2020

Where are they now?

'12

David Silbermann (MHA '12, FYOS '16) lives in Memphis and works as a guitar/bass instructor and guitar tech apprentice. He also performs in the band Fearless Dave and the Tsunamis with **Lavi Tsuna** (MHA '08, FYOS '12), and the group will soon be releasing new music.

'16

"I have a lot of great memories from school, especially hanging out with my friends," Silbermann said. "Most memorable was probably watching **Eli Osdoba** (MHA '09, FYOS '13) hit a game-winning shot at the Yeshiva University Sarachek basketball tournament." Among his favorite teachers was Mr. Dana Vaughn.

Silbermann's message to his classmates? "Hit me up if you're in Memphis! I'd love to reconnect."



Cooper family

Elan Cooper (MHA '13, FYOS '17) a son of alumnus **Pace Cooper** (MHA '77, YOS '81), lives in New York City with his wife, Kira. They welcomed their first child, daughter Josephine, in January. He works as a software engineer for Capital One. He remains grateful for the many friendships he built during his time at our school.

'13

'17

'13

'17

Eliana (Schlesinger) Hornstein (MHA '13, FYOS '17), daughter of alumna **Linda (Ostrow) Schlesinger** (MHA '74), lives in Beit Shemesh, Israel, with her husband and two children, ages 1 and 3. She teaches at a women's seminary and works as a doula and childbirth educator.

"My favorite memories are from our girls' school trips and shabbatons," Hornstein said. "Hours of rafting in stagnant water, hiking with Rabbi Uriel



Schlesinger-Hornstein family

Lubetski and his son Yitzi, rodeo, boating, random hotels — all the classic GMSG bonding and *achdut* (togetherness)."

Her favorite elementary school teacher was Mrs. Lisa Luiken. She credits her wonderful Judaic studies teachers in high school with contributing to the teacher she is today: Mrs. Liora Wittlin, Mrs. Melissa Perl, Mrs. Amy Stein, Mrs. Leora Klein and Mrs. Malka Harris.

Evan Rosenthal (FYOS '17) recently purchased a home in Memphis and works as a property manager in nearby Mississippi. This past summer, he proudly endowed a scholarship with

'17



Rosenthal (right) at an AEPI event

the Jewish fraternity Alpha Epsilon Pi in honor and memory of his grandfather. "The scholarship is open to any undergraduate member majoring in computer science or an engineering-related field. I encourage those who fit the criteria to apply," he said.

Rosenthal has many fond memories of his time at the CYHSB and appreciates the impact of those years on his life. "From the steak dinners to the *chesed* trips, the school nurtured my love of technology, giving back and Judaism. It did this through rigorous coursework, world-class teachers and a committed community that went above and beyond. They helped shape me into the person I am today."

'15

'19

Ezra Cooper (MHA '15, FYOS '19) lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and teaches at SAR in the Riverdale area of the Bronx. He is also applying to dental school.

"Working at SAR, I've seen first-hand the benefits and conveniences of being part of a large Jewish school and community. But it's also helped me better appreciate my own schooling experience at the MHA/FYOS — small class sizes, connectedness across grades, abundant leadership opportunities and strong teacher-student relationships," Cooper said. "Many of the factors perceived as challenges in the 'out-of-town' schooling experience are actually part of what make our school so special."

Among his favorite school memories are participating in the junior varsity basketball tournament in Flatbush during his freshman and sophomore years, the solar eclipse trip and the annual boating trip.

One particular memory stands out in his mind: "On the way back from the annual boat trip in May of my junior year, I sat in the front seat of the old school van and served as Rabbi Yonason Gersten's chief navigator. Thankfully, Rabbi Gersten had printed handy MapQuest directions for the ride home. A strong thunderstorm rolled through, and it was then that Rabbi Gersten showed me the power of RainX water repellent. We didn't have to use windshield wipers once on the drive home!"



Cooper (right) with his favorite teacher, Rabbi Refael Azugi, in Israel

Shuli Cohen (FYOS '19) came to Memphis from her hometown of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, to attend the GMSG. She now lives in Toronto, Ontario, and works as an early child educator. "As a lead preschool teacher, I plan the classroom program and support children's learning each day. Working with kids feels like what I was meant to do, and I'm grateful to be part of their early years," she said.

'19

Though she and her five siblings are dispersed between Toronto, Baltimore and Israel, and her parents still live in Winnipeg, they all remain close. "My parents always knew we'd each find our own way and supported us as we built our lives in different places. Even with the distance, family is always at the center of my life."

Cohen cherishes her high school yearbook, which she calls "a work of art" and the memories it conjures. "I still look through it and laugh at the quote page," she said. She also still remembers regularly convincing Dr. Whitney Kennon to allow her and her classmates to "quickly, quickly, quickly run to Dunkin for coffee in between classes."



Cohen family

Among her favorite teachers at our school were Mrs. Sandy Gersten and Mr. Scott McCann. "Both had a huge impact on me and made school a place I genuinely loved being," she said.

"My time in Memphis was absolutely my favorite part of my school years," Cohen said. "I'm still deeply grateful I had the chance to be there and to be part of a community where I truly felt supported and loved."

Want to connect with other MHA/CYOS alumni?

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK!



CYHSB Macs defeat alumni at 2026 Irby and Bernice Cooper Alumni Basketball Game



ALUMNI TEAM: (back row, from left) **Justin Wruble** (MHA '09, FYOS '13), **Avi Katz** (MHA '11, FYOS '15) and his son **Ahron**, **JoJo Ardestani** (MHA '21, FYOS '25), **Aidan Kahane** (MHA '19), **Hershel Krupp** (MHA '97), **Asher Silberman** (MHA '09, FYOS '13), **Hugh (Freiden) Gordon** (MHA '72, YOS '76), **Jon Wogan** (MHA '94), Coach **Pace Cooper** (MHA '77, YOS '81), **Josh Kahane** (MHA '93, FYOS '97), **Richard Lewis** (MHA '99, FYOS '03) and his son **Joseph**, **JJ Kampf** (MHA '13, FYOS '17), **Benjamin Kampf** (MHA '10, FYOS '14), **Yoni Freiden** (MHA '96, FYOS '00), **Mike Stein** (MHA '68, YOS '72), **Benjamin Siegel** (MHA '18, FYOS '22), **Jason Schubert** (MHA '17, FYOS '21); (middle row, from left) **Benjamin Mendelson** (MHA '17, FYOS '21) and **Moshe Davidovics** (MHA '17, FYOS '21).

COOPER MACS: (middle row, from left) Coaches **David Winestone** (MHA '74) and **Kobi Pinto**; (front row, from left) **Jonah Siegel** (MHA '23), **Jack Kampf** (MHA '22), **Ben Freiden** (MHA '22), **Tzvi Bleier**, **Daniel Kahane** (MHA '23), **Gavi Lichter** (MHA '23), **Eli Weisfogel** (MHA '23), **Benjy Schubert** (MHA '25) and **Ilan Lennon** (MHA '23).

Freezing temperatures did not dissuade our loyal fans from packing the MHA's Moss Gym on Saturday evening, Jan. 17, for the 34th Annual Irby and Bernice Cooper Alumni Basketball Game.

As has become the tradition, spirits were high, the food was delicious, laughter was abounding and the game between the CYHSB varsity Macs and the alumni team was fun and exciting. Although the game remained close for the full four quarters, the Macs led throughout and ultimately triumphed over the alumni team 84-72.

GENERATION TO GENERATION

This year, we had the honor of watching two alumni grandfathers face off against their grandsons on the varsity team.





Mike Stein (MHA '68, YOS '72) and his grandson **Eli Weisfogel** (MHA '23).

"Playing in the Alumni Game with my grandfather was legendary. I was shocked he agreed to do it and felt really excited that he actually played! Being on the court with him was so awesome. He didn't know how to guard me and it was the funniest thing. But it meant the world to me that he was there. Thank you, Pace Cooper, for allowing my grandfather to start so I could be a starter, too." -**Eli Weisfogel**



Hugh (Freiden) Gordon (MHA '72, YOS '76, far right) with son **Yoni Freiden** (MHA '96, FYOS '00, far left) and grandson **Ben Freiden** (MHA '22).

"The alumni game has been played 34 times, but only twice in its history have three generations taken the court — and both times, it was the Freiden family. Dozens of rosters, countless players — and still just one family proving that talent, tradition and loyalty truly run in the blood. It was an emotional moment, seeing my past, present and future all share the same court. Next goal: Suiting up with Ben and my dad and all three of us lining up against my other son, Max, in about 10 years, with Hashem's help!" -**Yoni Freiden**

SIBLING RIVALRY

It's become more common in recent years to see brothers facing off against each other in the Alumni Game. These "brother challenges" add a whole new dimension to the game and leave some parents wondering which team to cheer for.



Brothers (from left) **Benjamin** (MHA '18, FYOS '22) and **Jonah Siegel** (MHA '23), **Jason** (MHA '17, FYOS '21) and **Benjy Schubert** (MHA '25) and **Aidan** (MHA '19) and **Daniel Kahane** (MHA '23).

"It was a super fun time reconnecting with old friends and classmates while also getting to compete against the current team, especially my younger brother Benjy and his friends." -**Jason Schubert**



Brothers (from left) **Asher** (MHA '09, FYOS '13) and **David Silberman** (MHA '12, FYOS '16) have been a consistent and invaluable presence on the alumni team in recent years.



Brothers (from left) **Benjamin** (MHA '10, FYOS '14), **Jack** (MHA '22) and **JJ Kampf** (MHA '13, FYOS '17).

MORE FUN AND GAMES

To add to the excitement and engagement of the evening, MHA Athletic Director Kobi Pinto conducts challenges that take place between quarters and at halftime. His skills challenge requires proficiency at both dribbling and shooting.



Coach Pinto and girls' skills challenge winner Adi Yablon.



Coach Pinto and boys' skills challenge winner (for the second consecutive year) Ezra VanderWalde.

During halftime, the crowd was treated to an exciting and close shooting stars competition. For the third year in a row, the Kahane family team emerged victorious.



Josh Kahane (MHA '93, FYOS '97, second from left) with sons **Aidan** (MHA '19, far left) and **Daniel** (MHA '23), along with Coach Pinto.

The final challenge of the night was the three-point competition, and **Richard Lewis** (MHA '99, FYOS '03) took the trophy for the third consecutive year.



Richard Lewis (MHA '99, FYOS '03) with son Joseph and the three-point competition trophy.

All in all, the 34th Annual Irby and Bernice Cooper Alumni Basketball Game was a wonderful evening that will be remembered for a long time. We look forward to having many more alumni join us at next year's game!

2026 MHA/CYOS scholarship banquet to honor Tova and Roy Graber



Our school's 2026 scholarship banquet will pay tribute to Tova and **Roy Graber** (MHA '76, YOS '80), who are not only dedicated volunteers and generous supporters, but also represent links in the long chain of Margolin and Graber family members who have been instrumental to the school throughout its history. Roy and Tova have continued the beautiful traditions established by Roy's parents, Evelyn and Marlin Graber, z'l, who sustained the school during its early years and played a pivotal role in building Jewish Memphis. Roy and Tova are also the proud parents of four alumnae: **Gila (Graber) Livi** (MHA '99, FYOS '03), **Sheera (Graber) Moskowitz** (MHA '01, FYOS '05), **Davida (Graber) Loizias** (MHA '03, FYOS '07) and **Eliana (Graber) Abittan** (MHA '05, FYOS '09).

Enabling the school to provide a top-notch Jewish and general studies education to the children of our community has always been a top priority in the Grabers' lives. Tova is a past-president of the parent-teacher association (PTA), and Roy is a past-president of the board of trustees.

When Roy was president of the board in 2001, he wrote: "In the book of Genesis, we learn that when Shem went to visit Abraham, he brought him bread and wine. Why? What can we learn from these two

items? One explanation is that bread is better in its freshest state, when it is newer, and wine is better aged and matured. The school embodies both of these traits. We're on the cutting edge in science, math and technology, and at the same time we preserve and continue the heritage of our past."

The Grabers are widely known for their commitment to the Memphis Jewish community. When Tova was PTA president in 1996, she wrote: "Our sage Hillel said, 'Do not separate yourself from the community.' The community holds a very important place in Judaism. The Jewish nation — not just one individual — received the Torah. It is through interrelations and collective activity that we became a holy people. Hillel believed all individuals should keep in step with their community. No one should be referred to as 'me' or 'them'; it should be 'we' and 'us.' All of Israel is responsible for one another, and so too here in Memphis, Tennessee. I hope and pray that, as a community, we take this responsibility and bring our school to heights that have never been reached. We will then continue to grow from within and without, and flourish for the sake of our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and future generations to come."

More information on the 2026 scholarship banquet honoring the Grabers will be posted online at mhacyos.org/journal by May 1. Please watch the site for details regarding the date, time and location of the banquet, as well as opportunities to make reservations and place tribute ads in the journal. All proceeds from the banquet will help to fund educational scholarships for MHA/CYOS students.

We look forward to seeing robust participation from our alumni in this critical fundraiser and hope you'll join us in thanking the Grabers for all they've done for our school.



SPOTLIGHT FEATURE

Moreh Shimshon Soleman

Making Hebrew accessible to
students of all ages



In 2008, MHA leadership was looking to enhance the school's Hebrew language program. A professional contact of incoming head of school Rabbi Dr. Gil Perl introduced him to Moreh Shimshon Soleman, a master teacher then living in Montreal who was ready to bring his enthusiasm and talents to another school community. That fateful connection sparked the beginning of Moreh Shimshon's 17-year tenure at our school and resulted in a lasting impact on hundreds of students.

Born into a large Iranian family in Israel, Shimshon served as a paramedic during the Yom Kippur War. Though he initially considered a career in medicine, he ultimately decided teaching was the right path for him. While studying education and criminology in university, he met Swiss native Yehudit, and they married less than a year later. Early in their marriage, they served as dorm parents for nearly 300 students at Bar Ilan University. Drawing on his dual degree, Moreh Shimshon also worked with Israeli law enforcement to conduct drug prevention programs in high schools and advocate for at-risk youth.

A couple of years later, they sought opportunities to teach abroad. Working through the Jewish Agency, the Solemans moved to Stamford, Connecticut, to join the faculty at Bi-Cultural Hebrew Academy. There, they implemented a new Hebrew language curriculum developed in Canada called Tel Sela (which later became Tal Am). After three years in Connecticut, they briefly returned to Israel and then learned of an opening for Hebrew language educators at the Noam School in Zurich — not far from where Yehudit's parents lived. What was

supposed to be a three-year sojourn in Switzerland lasted 18 years.

In addition to their teaching responsibilities at Noam, the Solemans also started an after-school Torah program for teens, opened a Jewish bookstore called Morasha, and developed Tel Sela-based curricular materials that were adopted by many other Jewish schools across Europe.

The Solemans then relocated to Montreal for several years, to meet the complex educational needs of one of their six children. After the child's graduation from high school, the family was ready for their next adventure; destiny and Jewish connections ultimately brought them to Memphis.



Moreh Shimshon in his element, teaching MHA second graders about Rosh Hashanah in 2023.

Alongside Morah Yehudit, Moreh Shimshon worked tirelessly to bring a culture of spoken Hebrew to the MHA and to instill in his students a passion for Hebrew language, Jewish tradition and the state of Israel. Throughout his tenure, he led many

holiday-themed productions, shared his love of cooking Israeli food, developed a Hebrew-language curriculum for our high schools, and taught students of all ages classic Hebrew songs.



Moreh Shimshon (back row, center) with the second graders following their Pesach play in 2025.

"When I first got to the school, I encountered some fear and apprehension about Hebrew immersion," Moreh Shimshon said. "I wanted to remove the fear. I started to change the culture by teaching Hebrew songs to the kindergarteners. If you know a song by heart, it belongs to you forever, and this was very important to me. When I'd see the kindergarteners' parents at synagogue, they'd proudly tell me how their children sing joyfully in Hebrew. That's how it began. From there, the kids started to speak more fluent Hebrew, because they went to first grade without fear. The kids who came all the way up through our school know Hebrew very well, and that's a great success."

"The Hebrew words I remember learning from Morah Shimshon in fourth grade are **יבשה**, **ים** and **מסרד** (dry land, sea and office)," said **Eliana (Schlesinger) Hornstein** (MHA '13, FYOS '17). "Everyone in my class will understand! He also taught me how to make amazing meatballs. I still use his recipe today."



Moreh Shimshon in the Purim spirit in 2016.

"I was fortunate to have Moreh Shimshon as my teacher in middle and high school," said **Ezra Cooper** (MHA '15, FYOS '19). "He was and remains one of my favorite teachers. From the monthly Rosh Chodesh jam sessions to the countless biographies of Zionist legends we studied, he was an excellent teacher. Among my favorite songs that I learned from Moreh Shimshon are **קום והתהלך בארץ**, **גלגל ענק**, and **לא בחיל ולא בכח**. Though sometimes tough on the exterior, he loved his students. I always felt like he was one of my biggest fans and really wanted to see me succeed."



*Morah Shimshon with student **Eitan Braverman** (MHA '24) and his Hebrew poem about fall in 2023.*

"Though I wasn't in Moreh Shimshon's class, he always remembered my name and asked me in the hallway how I was doing," said **Shuli Cohen** (MHA '19). "I'd try to answer in *Ivrit* (though my Hebrew was pretty basic) but sometimes used incorrect pronouns. He'd kindly correct me and make me answer again the right way. Everyone who wasn't in his class wanted to be. The work was harder, but we only ever heard booming laughter coming from his classroom."

Another of Moreh Shimshon's significant contributions was bringing Chidon HaTanach (the National Bible Contest) to our school. The prestigious annual competition tests students' in-depth knowledge of Biblical books and requires passing rigorous qualification exams to participate in the national finals event in New York.



Moreh Shimshon (far left) and Morah Anat Kampf (fifth from right) chaperoning 11 MHA students who qualified for the Chidon HaTanach final on a trip to New York in 2024.

"After about five years of being in Memphis, it seemed like a good time to start the Chidon program because the kids knew enough Hebrew and knew me," Moreh Shimshon said. "For those students who decided to take on the challenge, we studied Tanach together every school day, plus one after-hours lesson and one hour on Shabbat each week. Community members would sometimes listen in on our Shabbat afternoon lessons and were

astonished the kids knew how to look up sources and learn in Hebrew. It really became a part of their lives, and the trips we took to New York for the finals were amazing."

"Some of the students who participated in Chidon preparation over the years didn't have the strongest Hebrew background, but they wanted to be a part of it and their peers helped to translate things for them," Morah Shimshon said. "Seeing their interest and all the effort they put in taught me a really important lesson about not allowing Hebrew to be a barrier to learning Torah."



Moreh Shimshon and his eighth-grade Chidon HaTanach students in 2018.

Moreh Shimshon decided 2025 would be his final year of teaching at the MHA — with plans to move back to Switzerland and join Yehudit, who's been running a Jewish school in Basel for several years.

Prior to his retirement from the MHA, the MSG chose him as their honoree for their annual gala dinner last March. As stated in the dinner program, "We're honoring our long-time beloved *Ivrit* teacher, Moreh Shimshon Soleman. Throughout many long years, Moreh Shimshon made sure all his students came out speaking like true Israelis. The care he shows each and every student who walks through

his door is truly insurmountable. Whether they're in his class or not, Moreh Shimshon makes sure every voice is heard. Thank you, Moreh Shimshon, for countless years and tremendous effort transforming the lives of the GMSG."



Moreh Shimshon being honored at the 2025 GMSG gala dinner for his 17 years of service to the MHA.

While Moreh Shimshon anticipated retiring when he moved back to Switzerland, he simply couldn't stay out of the classroom. He now teaches part-time at his wife's school and is enjoying bringing the joys of Hebrew to the children of Basel.



Moreh Shimshon enjoying Purim with his students in Basel in 2026.

Moreh Shimshon and Morah Yehudit are also relishing their roles as grandparents to 10 grandchildren, nine of whom live nearby. He especially loves cooking their favorite dishes for them.

Over the course of his MHA tenure, Moreh Shimshon had the opportunity to inspire two generations of students. "A few of my more recent

students were the children of students I taught when I first arrived in Memphis," he said. "It felt full circle, as if I was teaching my own precious grandchildren."



The Solemans with three of their precious grandchildren.



Moreh Shimshon (back row, fourth from right) and Morah Yehudit (back row, fourth from left) and their family at the recent wedding of their son, Ariel.

He hopes all the students he taught in Memphis carry with them the enriching experiences of performing in holiday plays, singing Hebrew songs and studying Torah and Israeli history with him. "I also want each of my students to love themselves, to be a good advocate for Israel everywhere they go, to pursue their dreams, to be a good parent to their children, and to be a good Jew," he said. "We had a lot of success with what we started at the school, and hopefully that success will continue. I had a very good time in Memphis."

Dor L'dor

Tehillim (Psalms 79:13) teaches us, "From generation to generation, we will recount your praise." The MHA/CYOS is blessed with multigenerational families who carry on the traditions of our school and instill the values of our people in their children, grandchildren and beyond. Many of these families enjoyed participating in significant school events with their loved ones in recent months.

First Grade Chagigat HaSiddur – Feb. 23, 2026



Ellie Kaplan proudly displays her new *siddur* (prayer book) with her dad **Zac Kaplan** (MHA '01) and grandmother **Abbe (Seiger) Kaplan** (MHA '71).

"Watching our granddaughter at her Chagigat ha'Siddur program was so special. It brought back wonderful memories of watching her father receive his first siddur on that very same stage. Back then, it was Morah Miriam Greenblatt, z'l, who instilled such a love of Torah and tefillah in her students. Now, our granddaughter is fortunate to have another Morah Miriam (Finkelman), who has expertly taken up the mantle of inspiring our young children. We feel enormously grateful to the MHA for all they do to teach our children." -**Abbe (Seiger) Kaplan**



Ahron Katz, our school's first fourth-generation student, displays his *siddur* (and eagerness to dive into the cupcakes) while surrounded by his great-grandfather **Allan Katz** (MHA '65, YOS '69), grandfather **David Katz** (MHA '88) and father **Avi Katz** (MHA '11, FYOS '15).

"As I sat and reminisced while watching my great-grandson get his siddur during the MHA siddur play, I felt a sense of pride in knowing the chain of my family's legacy has the potential to continue into future generations. As it says in Koheles (4:12), 'And the three-stranded cord will not break quickly.' This was mixed with trepidation, knowing the challenges our youth face in society today." -**Allan Katz**

Second grade Chag ha'Chumash – Feb. 8, 2026

A proud Joseph Lewis with his mom **Aviva (Krupp) Lewis** (MHA '02, FYOS '06) and grandmother **Ricki (Thomas) Krupp** (MHA '66, YOS '70). Joseph is also a son of **Richard Lewis** (MHA '99, FYOS '03).



Jacob Weisfogel with mom **Dvora (Stein) Weisfogel** (MHA '96, FYOS '00) and grandfather **Mike Stein** (MHA '68, YOS '72).



Eitan Plotitsa with his new *chumash* (five books of Torah) and his dad **Lenny Plotitsa** (MHA '97).



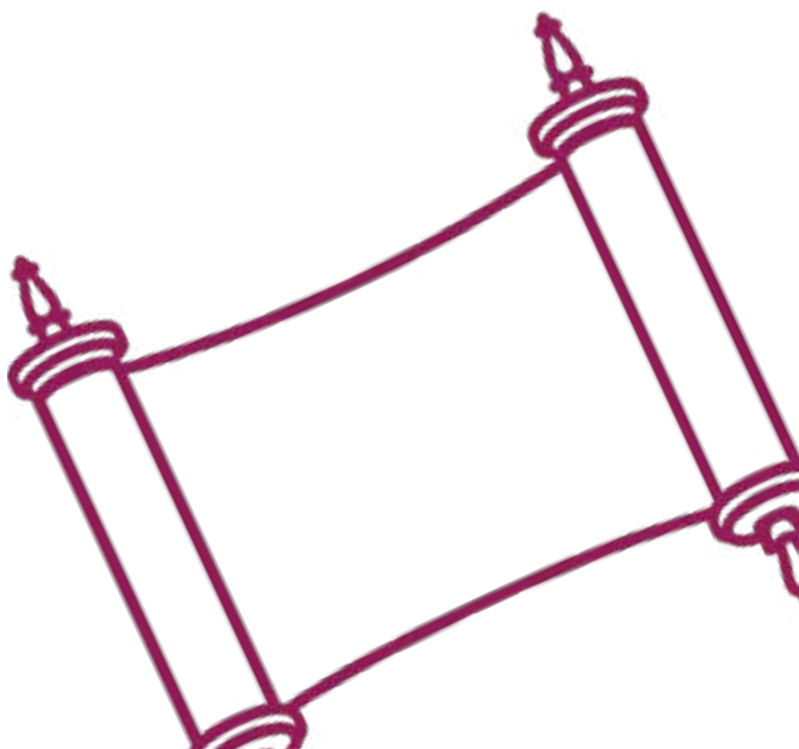
Yoel Chaim Gibber with proud mom **Jamie (Epstein) Gibber** (MHA '10, FYOS '14). Yoel Chaim is a grandson of **Amy (Thomas) Epstein** (MHA '71, YOS '75) and **Mike Epstein, z'l** (MHA '68, YOS '71).

"Seeing my son receive his first chumash in the same place where I, and both of my parents, received ours was incredibly special. It was a real full-circle moment and a powerful reminder of traditions being passed down through the generations."

-Jamie (Epstein) Gibber



Hadassa Safier and her dad, CYOS faculty member **Rabbi Dovid Safier** (MHA '00, FYOS '04).



ALUMNI REUNITE

We continue to be impressed by the submissions to our “Alumni Reunite” feature.

Any time two or more alumni get together — whether for a *simcha* (celebration) or otherwise — we would love to get a photo. Submissions can be sent to alumni@mhacyos.org. Our thanks to those who provided these pictures, especially those who took time out during meaningful family occasions to assemble MHA/CYOS alumni and friends. *Yasher koach* (kudos)!



Classmates **Abbe (Seiger) Kaplan** (MHA '71, left) and **Amy (Thomas) Epstein** (MHA '71, YOS '75) — now proud grandparents of MHA students — reconnected at the school's Grandparents Day in December.



While visiting Israel in January, **Lisa (Wruble) Kaufman** (MHA '73, second from right) arranged to get together with fellow alumnae (from left) **Debbi (Brown) Nissel** (MHA '76, YOS '80), **Mashie (Greenblatt) Langsam** (MHA '73, YOS '77) and **Chana (Anet Yaffe) Silver** (MHA '76, YOS '80). Thank you, Lisa, for remembering to take a picture!



A sign of the times: **Benjamin Rubenstein** (MHA '00, FYOS '04, left) and **Elisha Kutliroff** (MHA '93) ran into one another in a public bomb shelter in Israel after hearing a siren.



In December, **Ranelle (Evensky) Kibel** (MHA '66, YOS '70, center) was joined by her sister, **Emily (Evensky) Steinberg** (MHA '63, right) and longtime friend **Judy (Yormark) Fruchthandler** (MHA '75, YOS '79) to celebrate the engagement of her granddaughter, Yael Kibel, to Zacharia Belsky (a great-grandson of Rabbi Meir Belsky, z'l, who founded the Yeshiva of the South).



Also in December, **Ranelle (Evensky) Kibel** (MHA '66, YOS '70, second from left) attended the wedding of grandson Mordechai Polsky and Nechama Birnbaum in Lakewood, New Jersey. Celebrating with her were (from left) **Lisa (Yormark) Neuman** (MHA '79, YOS '83), sister **Emily (Evensky) Steinberg** (MHA '63) and niece **Peninah (Rebecca Steinberg) Simon** (MHA '91).



Sisters **Ranelle (Evensky) Kibel** (MHA '66, YOS '70, center) and **Emily (Evensky) Steinberg** (MHA '63) with **Lee Hanover** (MHA '69).



Jeff Address (former FYOS faculty member) and his wife Tania (center) visited their son **Gabe Address** (MHA '10, FYOS '14, far left) in Israel. They bumped into **Benjamin Rubenstein** (MHA '00, FYOS '04, far right) at the *shuk* in Jerusalem and made sure to document the encounter.

FLASHBACKS

2016-2020

Photographs from the past



CYHSB students in the student lounge in 2017: (standing in back row, from left) **Yisrael Wiener** (MHA '15, FYOS '19), **Sam Lulky** (FYOS '18), **Jone Skapino** (FYOS '18), **Akiva Finkelstein** (MHA '15), **Ethan Beyer** (FYOS '18), **Jered Weinstein** (MHA '14, FYOS '18), **Shlomo Bosin** (MHA '14, FYOS '18), **Ethan Morris** (MHA '15, FYOS '19), **Joel Weinstein** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), Yotam Berendt, **Daniel Katz** (FYOS '17), Liam Smokey, **Yishai Berendt** (MHA '14, FYOS '18), **Anthony Palumbo** (FYOS '20); (seated in middle row, from left) **Asher Kirshtein** (FYOS '19), **Reuben Stein** (FYOS '20), **Mark Fertel** (FYOS '17), **JJ Kampf** (MHA '13, FYOS '17), **Jeffrey Owen** (FYOS '17), **Efraim Wiener** (MHA '13, FYOS '17), **Gary Goldmeier** (FYOS '17), **Elan Cooper** (MHA '13, FYOS '17), **Yosef Goldblatt** (FYOS '17), Gabe Itkowitz, **Caleb Milobsky** (FYOS '17), **Ahron Braverman** (MHA '13, FYOS '17), **Chaim Gersten** (MHA '13, FYOS '17), **Evan Rosenthal** (FYOS '17), William Goldmeier; (seated in front row) **Ezra Cooper** (MHA '15, FYOS '19) and Eli Ostrow.

"Fun back story behind this picture: I believe that, as their senior prank, the class of 2017 stole the furniture from the GMSG lounge and moved it to the CYHSB lounge. The whole CYHSB took a picture together, lounging on the girls' furniture, before the administration asked that all furniture be returned immediately." -Ezra Cooper



GMSG friends (clockwise from left) **Rena Wogan** (MHA '18, FYOS '22), **Shuli Cohen** (FYOS '19), **Ilana Leibowitz** (FYOS '21) and **Serena Cooper** (MHA '18, FYOS '22) in 2018.



GMSG students (from left) **Shuli Cohen** (FYOS '19), **Vanessa Golding** (FYOS '20) and **Ilana Leibowitz** (FYOS '21) dissecting a shark in science class.



CYHSB students (from left) **Jone Skapino** (FYOS '18), **Asher Kirshtein** (FYOS '19), **Jeffrey Owen** (FYOS '17) and **Chaim Gersten** (MHA '13, FYOS '17).



GMSG students with Jewish singing star Mordechai Shapiro, who came to Memphis for a concert and performed at the school banquet in 2019: (from left) **Sophie Wruble** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), **Alexandra (Goldblatt) Niren** (FYOS '19), **Rena Wogan** (MHA '18, FYOS '22), **Esti (Samberg) Klaus** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), **Sara Weinstein** (MHA '18, FYOS '22), **Yael Cooper** (MHA '18, FYOS '22), **Shayna (Kahane) Lesnoy** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), **Shuli Cohen** (FYOS '19), **Rakhel (Finkelstein) Friedman** (MHA '17, FYOS '21), **Vanessa Golding** (FYOS '20), **Rina Soffer** (FYOS '19), **Chani Karasik** (MHA '16, FYOS '20), **Nancy Alexander** (FYOS '20), **Ilana Leibowitz** (FYOS '21) and **Serena Cooper** (MHA '18, FYOS '22). Highlights of Shapiro's visit to Memphis are available [online](#).

"I definitely remember when Mordechai Shapiro came and performed. It was lots of fun, jumping and dancing with the whole school. We really enjoyed it! One memory that sticks out was seeing our rabbis jump up on the stage with him. It was hilarious and a night to remember!" -Esti (Samberg) Klaus



(Back row, from left) **Simcha Osdoba** (MHA '15, FYOS '19), **Asher Kirshtein** (FYOS '19), **Benjamin Mendelson** (MHA '17, FYOS '21), **Nossy Orgel** (FYOS '19), **Jered Weinstein** (MHA '14, FYOS '18), **Ezra Cooper** (MHA '15, FYOS '19), **Ethan Morris** (MHA '15, FYOS '19), **Yisrael Wiener** (MHA '15, FYOS '19), **Ethan Beyer** (FYOS '18); (front row, from left) **Shlomo Bosin** (MHA '14, FYOS '18), **Joel Weinstein** (MHA '16, FYOS '20) and **Dovid Frieden** (FYOS '19).

"There was a lot of anticipation leading up to the famous Rhynia Henry hill workouts. We started hearing about them at the very beginning of the year, and the date was marked on our calendars weeks in advance. In the time leading up to it, we went through weeks of rigorous training. At the time it felt brutal, but looking back, I realize it put me in the best shape of my life. In fact, when I trained with the Marines two years later, the workouts felt easy in comparison and even helped put me in a position to finish first in that training. When the day finally came, I was excited. After hearing so much about it and putting in so much work with the team, we were ready to tackle whatever the day had in store for us.

It's funny though: After thinking about it for so long, I expected the hill itself to be bigger. My mind had built it up more than the reality. But the workouts were every bit as tough as advertised, and we were ready for them.

This picture was taken on that legendary day, right after we completed the hill challenge together. It was a moment that captured the pride, effort and bond we built as a team — a bond that will never be broken and a day none of us will ever forget." -Joel Weinstein

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The 36th issue of our newsletter is scheduled for publication around Rosh Hashanah. In it, we will once again highlight the early years of our school: the graduating classes of **1957-1965**. Members of these classes will receive questionnaires by email (or regular mail) sometime in July. Please return your completed survey promptly so you can be included.

Our feature story in that issue will spotlight **Rabbi Nachum (Herbert) Lansky** (MHA '57), one of the three members of our school's very first graduating class. If you knew Rabbi Lansky as a student or from his many years of teaching at Ner Israel in Baltimore, please share your stories, photos and memories with us. You can send them to Joanne Kahane, alumni chair, at joannekahane111@gmail.com or to her attention at the school's mailing address below.

Additionally, be sure to submit your Mazel Tov events, as well as photos for the Alumni Reunite feature, so we can include them in our next issue. Thank you!



Rabbi Dr. Gavriel Brown, head of school
Mark Kaplowitz, president, board of trustees