



Press Kit

About the Space Torah Project:

Spacetorahproject.com

The Space Torah project was founded in 2016 by Rachel Raz to preserve and share the journey of NASA astronaut Dr. Jeff Hoffman with communities around the globe. As part of the project, a short documentary was created by Verissima Productions with the leadership of Director Rob Cooper (Boston). The film was selected for over 40 film festivals in 10 countries around the world and won several awards. As part of the Project, the Jeff Hoffman's Collection and Archive was dedicated in the National Library of Israel and received recognition by the president of Israel. Educational resources have been developed and shared. The Space Torah Project is looking to expand its work in the future to continue with its mission and inspire many around the globe.

The Film:

Length: 25 min

Film Title: Space Torah

Production company: [Verissima Productions Incorporated](#)

Director: Rob Cooper

Executive Producer: Rachel Raz

Website: www.spacetorahproject.com

Email: spacetorah@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/spacetorah>

Synopsis

This film is the story of: how Dr. Jeffrey Hoffman realized a childhood dream by becoming an astronaut; how he was a key member of the spacewalking team that made critical repairs to the Hubble Space Telescope; how his own faith journey evolved as he took various Jewish objects on his five Space Shuttle missions; how his community came together to make it possible for

that small Torah to be with him on his final flight, when we read from the book of Genesis while soaring through space “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Short

In 1996, NASA astronaut Dr. Jeffrey Hoffman brought a small Torah scroll on board Space Shuttle Columbia. On Shabbat, he read from the book of Genesis, while soaring through the firmament “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

“בראשית ברא אלוקים את השמיים ואת הארץ”

Dr. Jeffrey Hoffman was the first male Jewish American astronaut to go into space. He became a NASA Astronaut in 1978; participated in five Space Shuttle mission; and was the first astronaut to log 1,000 hours aboard the Space Shuttle. He has performed four spacewalks, including the first unplanned, contingency spacewalk in NASA history (STS 51D - April, 1985) and the initial rescue mission for the Hubble Space Telescope (STS 61 - December, 1993).

During his five missions on the Shuttle, he chose to bring various sacred Jewish objects including mezuzot that he posted on the entrance to his sleep compartment; dreidels that he spun during Hanukkah; and atarot from his sons’ tallitot that they used for their Bar-Mitzvahs...and years later, as chuppah covers at their weddings.

The highlight was the Torah he took with him on his fifth and final mission (STS 75 - February 1996). This fulfilled the vision of Jeff’s Rabbi in Houston, Shaul Osadchey, who, after years of searching, was able to locate a small Torah scroll that, while being complete and Kosher, would also be small enough to fit into the limited space that astronauts were given for personal items.

When the Torah was returned to their Synagogue, Dr. Hoffman and Rabbi Osadchey held presentations for young people to help them appreciate the majesty of Torah and its ongoing significance in our lives. The Space Torah still used today for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and for various other services, always making those services more special. As Dr. Hoffman likes to say, “It wasn’t so much that going into Space made the Torah special as it was that the Torah made Space more special by going there.”

The film has touched people from around the world -- Jews and non-Jews alike -- who have found wonder in the enduring holiness and power of bringing our most sacred human traditions with us, even as we go places where mankind has never been before.

Trailer <https://youtu.be/BpuMDJ40X5M>

Promotional Photos - Attached

Articles

[From Sinai to Outer Space – eJewish Philanthropy](#)

[Jews and Judaism in Outer Space | Rachel Raz | The Blogs \(timesofisrael.com\)](#)

[Touched by the Torah That Went Into Space by Rob Cooper \(Jewish Boston\)'](#)

[Space Torah Project highlights astronaut who brought Judaica to space in new documentary](#)

Production Company

Verissima Productions: Since Pam and Rob Cooper founded it twenty years ago, Verissima has traveled across the country to produce more than seventy films including short documentaries, video biographies for families and businesses, educational films for not-for-profits such as New England Law Boston, Simmons College, the Ruderman Family Foundation, The American Cities Coalition, The Lappin Foundation and The Warren Group. Documentary credits include: *Zamir: Jewish Voices Return to Poland*, which aired nationally on PBS; *The Art of Speaking the Unspeakable*, a portrait of the artist Samuel Bak, which was distributed internationally; *Citizens Not Subjects*, which aired throughout the South; and *The Jews of Memphis*, used for pledge drives on WKNO-TV in Memphis.

Awards

Atlanta Jewish Film Festival - **Audience Award Best Short Film**

Ann Arbor Jewish Film Festival - **Best Documentary Short Film**

San Diego: Joyce Forum Jewish Short Film Festival - **Best Documentary**

Telly Awards (2021)

- **Biography - Silver**
- **Use of Music - Silver**
- **Religion/Spirituality - Bronze**

Istanbul Film Award (2020)– **Winner, Best Music Short Film**

Film Festivals

2020

Berkshire Jewish Film Festival

Big Apple Film Festival

LA / Toronto Documentary Film Festival

2021

Boston Jewish Film Festival, MA

Austin Jewish Film Festival, TX

Florida Film Festival, FL

Gershman Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival

UK Jewish Film Festival, UK

San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, CA

Toronto Jewish Film Festival, Canada

J x J Film Festival (Washington State)

Atlantic Jewish Film Festival (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Moscow Jewish Film Festival

Hong Kong Jewish Film Festival

Woodengate International Film Festival (Romania)

Joyce Forum Jewish Short Film Festival (San Diego)

Atlanta Jewish Film Festival

Istanbul Film Award (Turkey)

New Jersey Jewish Film Festival

Space Faring Civilization Film Festival

(Australia)

Tokyo Lift-Off Film Festival , Japan

Tsiolkovsky Space Fest (Russia)

Flint Jewish Film Festival

Boca Raton Jewish Film Festival

Spokane Jewish Film Festival

Miami Jewish Film Festival

Ann Arbor Jewish Film Festival

Baltimore Jewish Film Festival

International Cultural Artifact Film Festival (India)

2022

Baton Rouge Jewish Film Festival

Houston Jewish Film Festival, TX

Hartford Jewish Film Festival, CT

Denver Jewish Film Festival, CO

Sacramento Jewish Film Festival, CA

Tucson International Jewish Film Festival, AZ

Charlotte Jewish Film Festival, NC & SC

2023

Oklahoma Jewish Film Festival, OK

New Hampshire, Jewish Film Festival, NH

Palm Spring Jewish Film Festival, CA

Twin City Jewish Film Festival – Minnesota, MN

2024

Greater Phoenix Jewish Film Festival Phoenix, AZ

Producer / Director / Editor



Rob Cooper has been writing, directing and producing educational films and documentaries for over forty years. His credits include *Good Mornin' Blues*, hosted by B.B. King, which was awarded a Cine International Golden Eagle. As a producer at WBZ-TV, Rob won New England “Emmys” for *You Gotta Have Arts* and *MoneySense*. He has also produced videos for companies like Reebok, GE, The New England, Rockport, Esquire Magazine and Scholastic Publishing. His skills as a director, writer, editor and musician were essential in the production of this film.

Founder, Executive Producer & Educator



Rachel Raz is an educator, entrepreneur and consultant, and is the founder of multiple initiatives with global reach. Rachel started the Space Torah Project based on her vision to preserve this extraordinary story and share it with communities around the world. She has recently developed and led programs that use the film as a tool to promote deep conversations about identity, community, values, and striving to reach our highest goals. Rachelraz.com

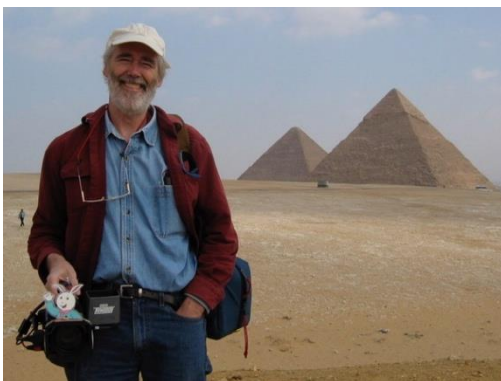
Co-Producer / Interviewer



Pam Pacelli Cooper has over thirty years of experience as a family systems therapist, researcher, and oral historian. She has interviewed numerous notable public figures, including politicians university presidents, and CEOs of major corporations.

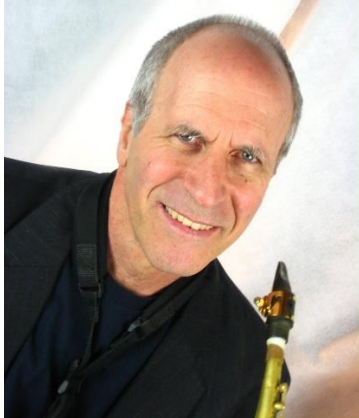
Pam holds a Master of Education from Harvard University, and certificates from the Birren Center for Autobiographical Studies, and from the Boston University program in Genealogical Research. Pam is a past Board member of the Association for Personal Historians, and co-founder of the Personal Historians Northeast Network.

Director of Photography



Austin de Besche has worked in motion pictures for nearly 50 years, as a cinematographer and director. He has DP'd for: feature films including John Sayles (*Return of the Secaucus Seven* and *Lianna*); documentaries (including Emmy winners *Voices of the Children* and *On Thin Ice*); national children's programming (*Postcards from Buster*, *Design Squad* and *NOVA* for PBS), His most recent work as a DP includes *The Year We Thought About Love*, a feature-length documentary and the HBO film *Marathon: The Patriots Day Bombing*.

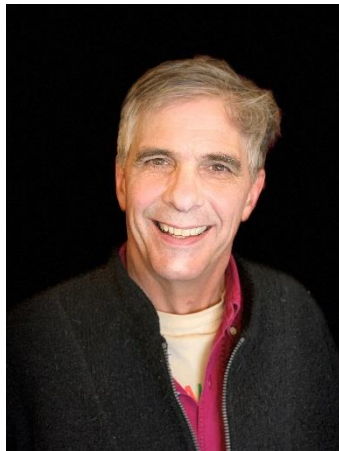
Composer



Billy Novick has gained international recognition as a performer, studio musician, arranger, and composer.

His film credits include *Seabiscuit*, *The Opposite of Sex*, and *Eight Men Out*. You can hear his clarinet-playing on the theme for the popular PBS shows *Antiques Roadshow*. Billy has composed full-length ballet scores for *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises* which premiered at the Kennedy Center. His adaptation of *Peter and the Wolf*, narrated by Dave Van Ronk, premiered at New York's Lincoln Center. His orchestral arrangements have been performed throughout North America and Europe.

Post-Production Consultant



Shady Hartshorne has worked on a variety of television programs including: *Antiques Roadshow*; *Frontline*; *Weekends with Yankee*; and *America's Forests with Chuck Leavell*. He has also worked in the corporate world for Liberty Mutual, Athenahealth, Boston Consulting Group and many others. He last worked with Verissima Productions on the documentary "*Citizens Not Subjects! Re-Awakening Democracy in Memphis*". As an avid follower of space exploration, Shady was thrilled to be able to contribute to the nuanced editing of *Space Torah*

Finishing Video Editor



Arnie Harchik has worked on a variety of projects for PBS and WGBH, including *Antiques Roadshow*, *ZOOM* and *Weekends with Yankee* which is currently airing nationwide. Arnie has earned four New England Emmy awards for documentary work at Connecticut Public Television, as well as several national nominations for 'Outstanding Editing. Because of his skills in color correction, Arnie was able to harmonize the wildly different quality level of the *Space Torah* video footage which was old as *Flash Gordon* and as new as the latest 4K Hubble footage from NASA.

Graphics & Animation



Benjamin Reichman has been an editor / animator for ten years. His work includes: *The Passages of Walter Benjamin*, a one-hour documentary about the German Jewish philosopher and writer; Ben has also worked on a variety of award-winning PBS series, including *FRONTLINE*, *American Experience*, *Weekends with Yankee*, *Lidia Celebrates America*, and *Simply Ming*. He also edits for nonprofit organizations, including the American Repertory Theater and Groundwork USA.

Archival Researcher



Heather Merrill has been an archival researcher for historical films and publications for over 15 years. Her associate producer and research credits include work on numerous PBS documentaries including: *The Violence Paradox* (for NOVA); *Coming of Age in Aging America*; *Seeds of Conflict*; *Intelligent Lives*; and *Dancing at the Crossroads*. Heather has also done publication research for books by historians, journalists and authors such as Edward O'Keefe, Daniel Okrent and Lewis Gould.

Dr. Jeffrey Hoffman



Dr. Hoffman received a BA in Astronomy (summa cum laude) from Amherst College (1966); a PhD in Astrophysics from Harvard University (1971); and an MSc in Materials Science from Rice University (1988). He was a NASA astronaut from 1978-1997 and was the first astronaut to log 1000 hours of flight time aboard the Space Shuttle. Dr. Hoffman was Payload Commander of STS-46, the first flight of the US-Italian Tethered Satellite System. As the NASA representative for EVA, he helped develop and carry out tests of advanced space suit designs and new tools needed for the assembly of the International Space Station.

Dr. Hoffman also spent four years , in Paris as NASA's European Representative. For over 20 years has been on the faculty of MIT where he courses on space operations and space systems design. His primary interests are designing innovative space systems for human and robotic space exploration and improving the technology of space suits. He is currently Deputy Principal Investigator of the MOXIE experiment on NASA's Mars 2020 Perseverance Rover. Which for the first time produce oxygen on the surface of Mars using local resources.

Dr. Hoffman is director of the Mass. Space Grant Consortium, responsible for space-related educational activities. In 2007, Dr. Hoffman was elected to the US Astronaut Hall of Fame.

Rabbi Shaul Osadchey



Rabbi Osadchey was Dr. Hoffman’s Rabbi while he was living in Houston and working at NASA. During his 30 years in Houston, Rabbi Osadchey has championed various Jewish and social justice issues including: traveling to the former USSR to support Jewish refuseniks; developing the first Jewish AIDS Care Team; co-chairing the United Way Campaign for the Homeless; officiating at the first same-sex Jewish marriage ceremony in Houston, and being an Advisory Board member of the AFL-CIO Union Community Fund. It was because of Rabbi Osadchey’s inspiration and persistence in obtaining the miniature Torah that is was available for Dr. Hoffman to be able to bring it along on the Space Shuttle flight.

For ten years, Rabbi Osadchey’s served in Calgary, where he founded the Calgary Interfaith Council. For this work, he was awarded the 2017 Gold Medal by King Abdullah II of Jordan for UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. As Co-Chair of the Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Build Project he raised \$1 million for affordable homes for low-income families. Rabbi Osadchey also helped found the Joint Interfaith Task Force Against Hatred and Violence in Calgary. He is past-president of the Calgary Council of Christians and Jews and co-founded the Calgary Jewish-Muslim Council, where rabbis and imams meet to address common concerns and to promote mutual respect and understanding.



Janna Kaplan M.S. is Lecturer in Psychology and Sr. Research Associate at Brandeis University’s Ashton Graybiel Spatial Orientation Lab, specializing in Neuropsychology and Space Research where Janna studies human adaptation to various conditions of space flight such as: non-Earth planetary gravitational environments; artificial gravity; virtual environments; movement control; spatial orientation; and space motion sickness. Her primary field is the study of human factors in moving and virtual environments including sensorimotor human factors in and interplanetary spaceflight, spaceflight-analog and planetary environments, as well as nautical and aeronautic vehicles.

Janna’s undergraduate and graduate degrees are from the University of Leningrad (now, St. Petersburg). She came to the US as a Jewish refugee from Russia in 1982, fleeing state sponsored anti-Semitic violence as well as intellectual and cultural suppression.

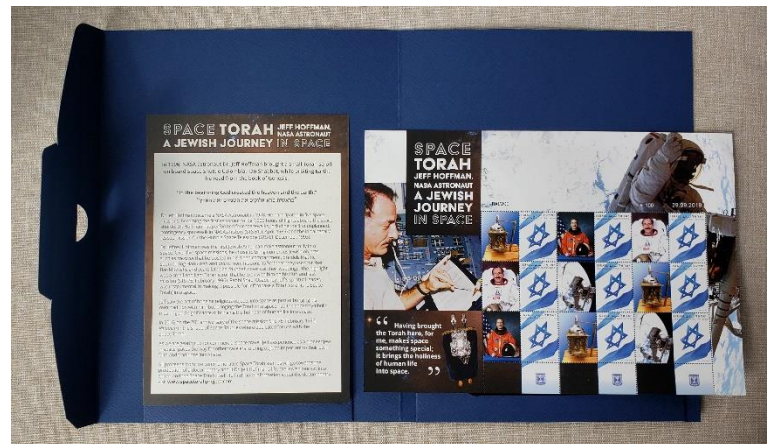


The Space Torah (which measures 7" in height and 4" in diameter) became possible when Rabbi Shaul Osadchey -- Dr. Hoffman's rabbi at Congregation Or Hadash, who'd been dreaming about what it would be like for Jeff to take a Torah on a Space Shuttle flight -- set out to find one that would fit into the small personal space each astronaut is given. He was ultimately able to get it from the Klein Brothers of Brooklyn., NY. It was, in fact, a new Torah originally purchased in Israel by Rabbi Moshe Klein from Yichyeh Sharabi, a Yemenite Jewish scribe. Since returning to earth, the Space Torah has resided in a specially designated place within the ark of the sanctuary of Congregation Or Ami, the successor to Congregation Or Hadash. It is still used for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and on other special occasions.

LIMITED EDITION COMMEMERATIVE STAMPS

Limited Edition (200) Space Torah Commemorative Israeli stamps are now available. All proceeds will support the Space Torah Project.

To order: Please contact Rachel Raz at spacetorah@gmail.com. Signed Commemorative stamps by Dr. Jeff Hoffman: \$360



Coming soon!

NEW Children's Book
Space Torah: Astronaut Jeffrey Hoffman's Cosmic Mitzvah by Rachelle Burk is available to preorder on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).