FREE

# Shalom Magazine

PASSOVER / SPRING 2026
EDITION 51


## Happy Passover

פֶּסַח כָּשֵׁר וְשָׂמֵחַ

Community Events
Exclusive Articles

# ACHVA CATERING




**Woman-Owned**
**Chef-Led**
**Reliable**
**Institutional**
**Partner**

At Achva Catering, we deliver high-quality, Kosher and Halal certified meals to hospitals, universities, senior programs, hotels, and community organizations throughout Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

**Contact Us**
401-272-4835
AchvaCatering@gmail.com
AchvaCatering.com

Delivering quality, reliability, and care in every meal.

Kosher supervision by RI Kosher




*Chag Pesach Sameach from*

jalsa
JEWISH ALLIANCE FOR LAW & SOCIAL ACTION

## Live Out Your Jewish Values With JALSA!

*Justice, justice shall you pursue!*

Join with JALSA to engage the Jewish community and our allies in the pursuit of social, economic, environmental, and racial justice, and to defend our democracy.

E-mail JALSA at office@jalsa.org or scan this QR code to visit our website and sign up for our weekly Action Alert.

**Connect with JALSA at www.JALSA.org and on social media at:**

/JALSABoston /jalsa_boston /jalsaboston.bsky.social

# Stanetsky Memorial Chapels


## 781-821-4600

475 Washington Street, Canton, MA 02021

## www.Stanetskycanton.com

- 100% Service Guarantee
- Large-capacity Chapel (up to 250)
- Livestreaming of Service
- Pet Friendly

A Service Family Affiliate of AFFS and Service Corporation International
178 Winter Street, Fall River, MA 02720 (781) 821-4600

**Shalom Magazine 2026**
**Published by Farber Marketing Inc.**

**Uniting the Jewish communities in Massachusetts since 2009**
**Editor & Publisher**: Shirley Nigri Farber
**Marketing Director:** Scott A. Farber
**Web Designer:** David M. Farber

**Contributors**:
David Bernat, Ph.D.
Rabbi Moshe Y. Bleich
Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal
Lewis Finfer
Rabbi Dr. Yosef P. Glassman, MD
Rabbi Jonathan Hausman
Rabbi Shlomo Pereira
Rabbi Yosef Rodrigues, Ph.D.
John J. Michalczyk, Ph.D.
Ronit Treatman
Rus Devorah Wallen, LCSW, CIMHP

**Design**: Farber Marketing


**To receive your free online subscription, send an email to: ShalomMA@msn.com**
**Cover photo: istockphoto**

***Shalom Magazine has been published 3 times a year since April 2009. Free copies are distributed in Massachusetts and available at www.ShalomMA.com. Follow us on X @ShalomMagazine***

EDITORIAL

## *Happy Passover*


*Gaby Weltman*

Passover commemorates the transformative journey from slavery in Egypt to the promise of the Land of Israel. At the Seder table, Jewish families retell the story that forged our collective identity — a people bound by faith, family, and a devotion to education. This annual retelling is not merely a look back at history; it is a renewal of the values that sustain us through every generation.

That story also serves as a powerful reminder of our enduring connection to Israel. From the Exodus to the present day, the bond between the Diaspora and the Jewish state reflects one people with an unbreakable link. As we write this, Israelis are again seeking shelter as threats from Iran and Hezbollah escalate. In these difficult moments, the connection between Jewish communities around the world remains our greatest source of strength.

Simultaneously, we do not ignore the reality of antisemitism. It remains a challenge that requires constant vigilance and strong partnerships with allies. However, Jewish life must not be defined solely by the hostility directed toward it. The most potent answer to hate is living Judaism openly — in our homes, our schools, and our communities — with unwavering confidence and pride.

Our synagogues, schools, and cultural institutions are vital threads in the state's civic fabric, contributing to medicine, public life, the arts, and philanthropy. The strength of our community is measured not just in institutions, but in everyday acts: families gathering for Shabbat, children learning our history, and a shared commitment to building a better world for everyone.

In this edition of *Shalom*, our contributors reflect on the findings of the 2025 CJP Community Study. The photographs throughout these pages showcase Jewish traditions celebrated with joy.

As Passover arrives, our message remains simple: be proud of our heritage, united as one people, and confident in the future we build together.

Chag Pesach Sameach.

*Shirley Nigri Farber - Publisher*

**Like Us at: www.facebook.com/ShalomMagazine**

**www.ShalomMA.com**

**TO ADVERTISE, PLEASE CALL SCOTT AT 781-975-0482**

# פֶּסַח כָּשֵׁר וְשָׂמֵחַ

## *Pesach Kasher Vesameach*
## *Kosher and Happy Passover*

***A celebration marking the completion of a Torah in memory of Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Wolosow and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Plotkin was held March 8. A festive procession danced through the streets with the new Torah scroll from Young Israel of Sharon to the Wolosow's home, concluding with Torah dancing at Chabad of Sharon.***


The holiday of Pesach, or Passover, falls on the Hebrew calendar dates of Nissan 15-22. Pesach 2026 begins before sundown on **Wednesday, April 1,** and ends after nightfall on **Thursday, April 9**.

The Seder feast is held on the first two nights of Passover, Wednesday and Thursday (just on the first night in Israel), after nightfall.


The *Yizkor* prayer service will take place on morning of **Thursday, April 9**. Passover is celebrated by eating, among other traditional foods, *matzah* (unleavened bread) and *maror* (bitter herbs). For the duration of the 8 (or 7 days in Israel) days of Passover, which celebrates the emancipation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, *chametz* (leaven) is strictly avoided. During the eight days of the holiday, observers eat *matzah*, avoid any leavened products (*chametz*), and commemorate the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt through Seder rituals such as eating the *matzah* as well as *charoseth* and bitter herbs, hiding the *afikomen*, drinking four cups of wine, asking the four questions and reading from the *Haggadah* (guidebook detailing the story of the Exodus).

Jewish families and friends gather for festive meals, and many synagogues organize community seders. Be sure to check with your local synagogue for details on community events.

# Purim in Our Community

*The Boston Synagogue Purim Festival*

*Purim at Ahavath Torah Congregation in Stoughton*

*Purim at Temple Emanuel of Newton*

*Megillah reading at The Adams Street Shul*

# Live Your Best Life

## SERVICES

- Maintenance service
- Housekeeping service
- Casual & fine dining
- Chauffeured transportation
- Cultural and educational programs

## AMENITIES

- 200-seat theater
- Full service health club
- Heated indoor swimming pool
- Arts & crafts / woodworking shop
- 3-acre park with walking paths

**Independent Living | Assisted Living**

Southgate at Shrewsbury

*Exploring. Growing. Learning.*

**508-842-8331**

**www.southgateatshrewsbury.com**



# From Masks to Freedom: A Passover Reflection

***By Yosef Rodrigues, Ph.D.***

As I sit down to write these lines, the sounds of Purim still hang in the air. Purim has just ended, and already our thoughts are turning toward Passover, the next major event on the Jewish calendar. The laughter from costumes and festivities is still vivid in memory, yet soon we will gather around the Seder table, following a story that has shaped our understanding of freedom forgenerations. It feels natural that these two holidays follow one another. Purim is full of color, noise, and spontaneity, while Passover is guided by the careful structure of the Seder. One invites us to disguise ourselves, the other calls us to tell a story with clarity and purpose. Yet beneath their differences lies a shared movement from concealment to revelation, from uncertainty tomeaning.

Purim reminds us that truth is often hidden. The Book of Esther never explicitly mentions G-d, yet a deeper presence can be felt between the lines. The story unfolds through reversals and unexpected turns until identities are revealed, and what was concealed becomes visible. Masks fall, and reality appears in a new light.

Perhaps this is why Purim resonates so strongly today. We live in a time when many masks are falling. Around the world and within our own communities, individuals and institutions reveal their true faces. Sometimes what is uncovered is inspiring, and sometimes it is troubling, but revelation always marks the start of understanding. Seeing clearly isn't always comfortable, but without clarity, meaningful change is impossible.

Passover continues this journey from revelation to freedom. If Purim reveals who we are, Passover asks what we will do with that knowledge. The Israelites left Egypt not only as a people escaping oppression but as a people discovering their identity. Freedom was not just the removal of chains but also the potential to become who they were truly meant to be.

The Seder reflects this transformation. Its order isn't meant to limit us but to guide us toward meaning. The rabbis understood that true freedom requires direction. Without purpose, freedom falls into confusion. With purpose, freedom becomes creation.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch taught that redemption begins when a person recognizes the divine image within themselves and others. Freedom is therefore inseparable from dignity. To be free means to live truthfully and to allow others the same right.This idea feels particularly urgent today. Around the world, people struggle with the freedom to live according to their conscience. Some define belonging through rigid boundaries, while others find themselves judged or excluded by those same boundaries. Too often, authenticity is measured by outward signs of religious identity rather than by the quality of a person's actions.

Yet Jewish teaching consistently reminds us that deeds matter more than appearances. The Talmud teaches that the Merciful One desires the heart. Intention and ethical behavior carry a weight that cannot be replaced by visible conformity. One person may observe every ritual and still fall short in kindness, while another may live

# From Masks to Freedom: A Passover Reflection

with compassion and integrity without claiming religious authority. The question Passover asks is not only whether we were slaves in Egypt but whether we know how to live as free human beings today. Freedom involves the courage to seek truth honestly. Some express this pursuit through religious practice, others through study, creativity, or acts of justice. Some speak openly in the language of faith, while others do not. The story of the Exodus resonates with all who seek dignity and meaning.

> "...the simple flat bread of Passover, reminds us that freedom begins with humility"

Maimonides taught that the highest form of service is the pursuit of wisdom and moral action. In that sense, holiness is not limited to a single outward path. A person who lives with justice and compassion participates in redemption, whether they speak in explicitly religious terms. Perhaps this is the new order that our time calls for. It is not a rejection of tradition but a deeper understanding of its purpose. The Seder asks us to retell the story in every generation because each generation must discover its own freedom. The Haggadah does not silence questions. It begins with them.

Before Passover, we remove *chametz* from our homes, but the deeper work is to eliminate the inner *chametz* that fills us with unnecessary pride and division. Matzah, the simple flat bread of Passover, reminds us that freedom begins with humility. When the ego is flattened, space opens for truth, understanding, and connection with one another.

While Purim teaches us to remove masks, Passover invites us to move forward without them. Freedom is not just the right to live free from oppression but also the courage to be ourselves honestly and responsibly. This freedom belongs to everyone, whether religious or secular, believer or atheist. A person's true measure is not their label but the goodness they bring into the world.

The Exodus story concludes not with escape but with a journey. Freedom isn't gained in just one moment. It develops gradually through responsibility, disagreement, and growth. In every generation, we leave Egypt in our own way.

This year, as Purim transitions into Passover, we can carry a lesson from one holiday to the next. We can choose to live openly and use our freedom wisely and with kindness.

May this Passover bring renewal and clarity, a new sense of order rooted in dignity, and afreedom that enables every human soul to live in truth and peace.

*Chag Pesach Sameach* – חַג פֶּסַח שָׂמֵחַ

***Yosef Rodrigues, Ph.D., is the Director of the Portuguese Language Center Camões, I.P. at UMass Boston and a faculty member at Boston College and UMass Boston. He received rabbinic ordination in June 2025 from Machon Semicha Yeshiva – Institute of Halachah, New York.***

# Purim in Our Community

Kenneth Berman


*Purim spiel at Temple Sinai, Sharon*

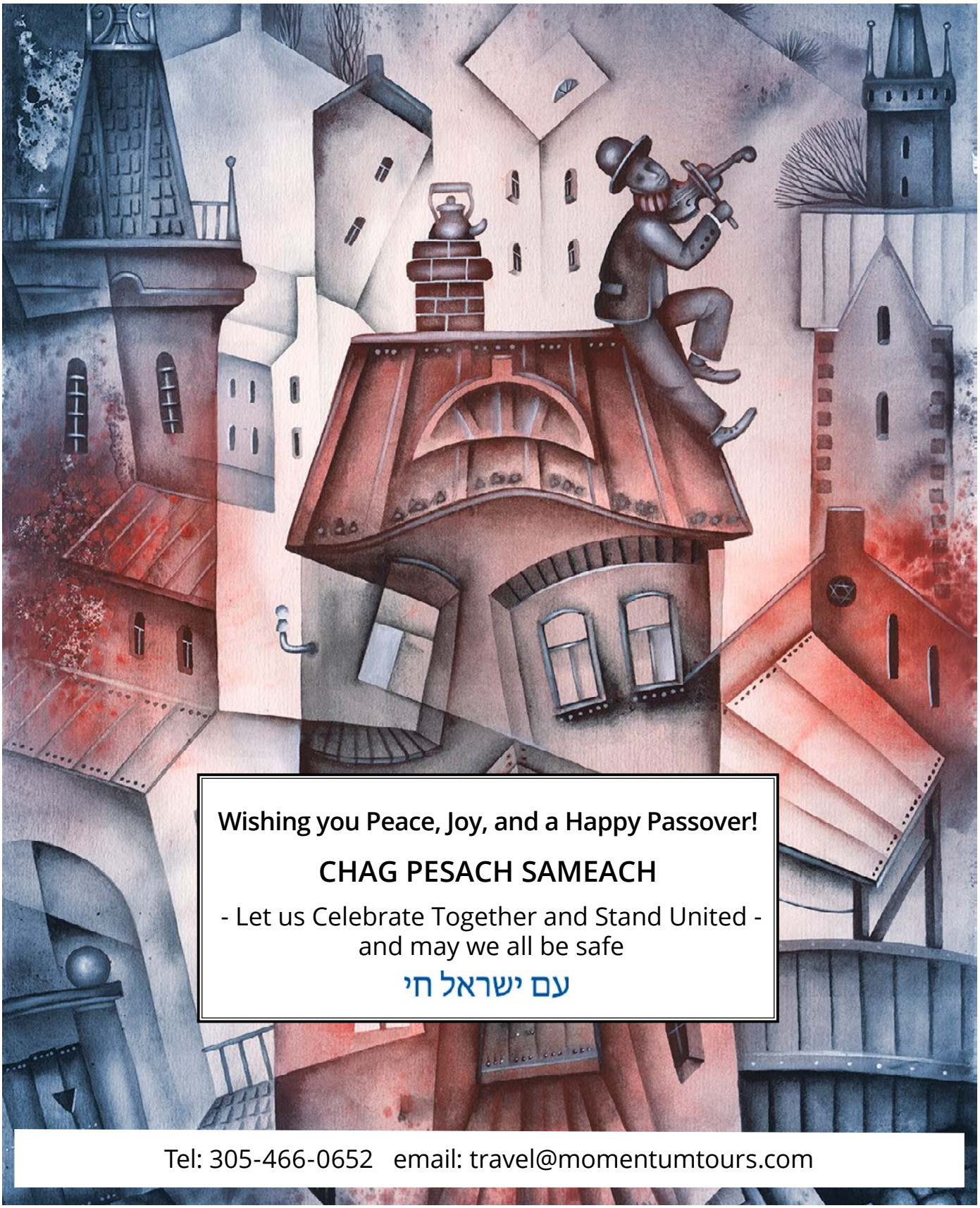
*Purim at MetroWest Jewish Day School*


*"K Pop Haman Hunters" spiel at Temple Shir Tikva, Wayland*

*The families of the* **IAC KESHET** *program celebrated Purim at Hebrew Senior Life*

## Your Travel Expert for Meaningful Jewish Journeys

- to Historic Jewish Destinations and Beyond -



**Wishing you Peace, Joy, and a Happy Passover!**

**CHAG PESACH SAMEACH**

- Let us Celebrate Together and Stand United -
and may we all be safe

עם ישראל חי

Tel: 305-466-0652  email: travel@momentumtours.com

MOMENTUM
Tours & Travel
*Creative Travel for the Discerning Customer*

www.momentumtours.com

# The Fragility of Freedom: Passover After Oct. 7

***By Rabbi Idan Irelander***

Around two months before the start of this Passover, the late Ran Givli, the last remaining hostage abducted into Gaza, was returned to Israel for a proper burial. This somber moment brought some closure to the devastation inflicted on our people when thousands of Islamic terrorists infiltrated Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. They murdered more than 1,000 Jewish people in a single day and abducted hundreds more. We held our collective breath for more than two years, unable to fully feel free, knowing that members of our extended family were not free.

We observed the last two Passovers wrestling with this paradox: feeling gratitude for our freedom, yet knowing some of our ethnic kin — even friends and family — were held captive in cruel conditions, not far from where our ancestors were enslaved by Pharaoh in a kingdom that preceded today's Islamic rulers. The enemy of my enemy is not always a friend.

The massacre of Oct. 7 did not merely take lives; it shattered assumptions and shook our sense of security. It exposed, once again, a truth Jewish history has repeatedly taught: exile and vulnerability are not theoretical. For so many of us, our sense of security — and of being welcomed as we have welcomed others — has been shaken. While mourning our losses half a world away, we also witnessed an astonishing phenomenon: masses here in our country, and in European cities and other enlightened societies, publicly supporting the murderers of our people. We will not allow that erroneous hatred, now so commonplace against the Jewish people, to define who we are.

And so, this year, as we sit at our Seder tables and recite: בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם - "In every generation one

# The Fragility of Freedom: Passover After Oct. 7

must see oneself as if he personally went out of Egypt," those words will feel less metaphorical. Freedom is not an abstract theological concept. It is precious. It is fragile. It is contested. It demands vigilance.

Our freedoms in this country of liberty are being eroded by a vocal, bigoted minority that has bullied others into excluding us from clubs, businesses and organizations. This has been especially visible on elite college campuses, though not exclusively there, as supporters of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, have flooded train stations, buildings and roadways. At the same time, we are grateful for the many friends who have stood beside us.

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם

"In every generation one must see oneself as if he personally went out of Egypt."

Passover has always been more than a commemoration of ancient redemption. It is a declaration that neither Jewish identity nor destiny is defined by our oppressors. In the era of Pharaoh, in the shadow of the Roman Empire, in medieval Europe, throughout lands of the Middle East where Jews once thrived, and in the aftermath of the Holocaust, our people confronted forces that sought our eradication. And yet, we remain. We remember. We thrive.

The enemies change names. The ideologies mutate. But their goals are identical: to steal, lie, subjugate and murder. And still, we endure. The Jewish people are, in many ways, the ultimate resisters.

Yet endurance alone is not the message of Passover. The Torah does not conclude the Exodus story with survival; it culminates in purpose. Our ancestors were redeemed not merely to escape suffering, but to build a covenantal society, to receive Torah at Sinai, to become a people who sanctify life and enlighten the world.

This is the tension we carry now. We are free, but vulnerable. Relieved, but not naïve. Grateful, but not complacent. Strong, but not untouched. We strive to differentiate between those who seek to harm us and those who have the misfortune of living among them.

Perhaps that is why the Haggadah insists that we diminish our joy when recalling the plagues that led to our ancestors' freedom. Even in moments of triumph, Jewish tradition tempers celebration with moral awareness. We empty our wine glasses, drip by drip, with the mention of each plague that wore down our enemies' resolve until, through our ancestors, we were freed.

Passover symbolizes the promise that history is not cyclical despair but movement toward redemption. The return of the last hostage for burial is not redemption. But it is a reminder that we do not abandon our own — not in Egypt, not in exile, not in Gaza and not in the United States.

As we lift the cup of wine and say, "Next year in Jerusalem," may it be not a slogan but a commitment — to Jewish continuity, to moral clarity and to a future in which freedom is not shadowed by captivity. The Exodus was not the end of danger. It was the beginning of responsibility. And that responsibility is now ours.

*Chag Herut Sameach*. Happy Festival of Freedom.

***Rabbi/Cantor Idan Irelander is the founding rabbi of Congregation Ahavat Olam in North Andover, Massachusetts, a post-denominational community embracing one Judaism. He received rabbinic ordination from the Academy for Jewish Religion; cantorial ordination and a Master of Jewish Education from Hebrew College; and a Bachelor of Music in composition and film scoring from Berklee College of Music.***

# Purim in Our Community

*On March 2, over 500 attendees joined Young Jewish Professionals (YJP Boston) at Icon Nightclub for the 'Heroes and Villains' Purim Unity Party*

*More than 100 young Israelis joined the Wellesley-Weston Chabad Purim party*

*Young and old alike enjoyed hearing the Megillah and sharing a delicious dinner with live music at the Chabad Chai Center of Canton*

*65 people braved the snow and joined the Wellesley-Weston Chabad Hawaiian Purim party*

WINGATE LIVING

# AN ELEVATED LIVING EXPERIENCE

At Wingate Living, we create the foundation for a fulfilling life. As a family-run business for three generations, our dynamic communities cater to the changing needs of today's seniors. Embrace an active lifestyle in a stunning residence tailored specifically for older adults. Offering everything from upscale Independent Living and Assisted Living to Memory Care and Skilled Nursing, Wingate communities truly encompass it all. With locations throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the choice is yours. Visit a Wingate Living Residence today and discover what a good life feels like.

WINGATE EAST

INDEPENDENT LIVING

**Coming Summer 2026**

## INTRODUCING WINGATE'S NEWEST MODEL FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Coming soon to Needham: One Wingate Way East. Our latest Independent Living community will offer a vast array of bespoke services and amenities for older adults seeking exceptional living experiences. Our entry fee model removes uncertainty and simplifies the payment process, allowing residents to live life to the fullest. Schedule a visit today and discover luxury living at its finest.

Learn more at **wingateliving.com**

# Reflections on Jewish Education in Greater Boston

***By Shoshanna Goldberg***

Jewish education in Greater Boston stands at a meaningful crossroads. We are fortunate to be part of a vibrant, diverse community, rich with institutions and a proud tradition of excellent day schools. At its height, the region was home to 14 Jewish day schools, each with its own philosophy, approach, and community focus. Covering the full spectrum of Jewish affiliation and identity, these institutions serve learners from preschool through 12th grade, meeting families wherever they are on their Jewish journey. Each school operates independently, sustained by tuition, endowments, and annual fundraising, while also benefiting from support from CJP, Boston's local federation, and the generosity of individual donors who understand that Jewish education strengthens both children and the community as a whole.

Jewish day schools in Boston face a range of headwinds, some unique to our region and others shared by schools across North America. Boston is an expensive place to raise a family, and public schools in many towns are among the best in the country. At the same time, Jewish life here is vibrant, offering numerous entry points and opportunities, which makes day school a choice rather than a necessity for families. Opting for a day school requires a real commitment of time, resources, and energy from parents.

As JCDS (Boston's Jewish Community Day School) Director of Development, I have been struck by both the opportunities and the challenges that come with sustaining a strong Jewish educational community. Tuition alone rarely covers the full cost of providing a rigorous, values-driven education, and many schools offer financial aid at levels that exceed the dollars coming in. Families often make meaningful sacrifices, and philanthropy plays a critical role in

# Reflections on Jewish Education in Greater Boston

sustaining programs that allow students to thrive, and teachers to earn meaningful salaries. What makes JCDS special is not only the academic and Judaic learning we provide, but the way we nurture each child as an individual, helping them develop confidence, curiosity, and a strong sense of belonging, while building a supportive community for our families.

Even long-standing, highly regarded day school programs face complex challenges. Recently, the announcement that MetroWest Jewish Day School will close after 25 years at the end of this school year has reminded us that no institution is immune to the pressures of sustainability. After decades of providing a deeply personalized Jewish education to families across Greater Boston, its leaders concluded that their particular model was no longer viable in the Metrowest region, despite extensive efforts to chart a path forward. While this news most directly impacts those children and families who were shaped by the school, it offers an opportunity for communal reflection: what elements of Jewish education are most essential today, and how can the strengths of programs like MetroWest continue to inspire and inform the broader ecosystem?

We know that many Jewish families in the Boston area feel genuine concern as images of antisemitism appear across our news feeds. In this climate, a landscape of thriving Jewish day schools is more crucial than ever. The most important work my colleagues in education do is to provide our students with a strong "Jewish operating system," equipping them to navigate familiar and new challenges with confidence and moral clarity. By creating a nurturing K–8 environment where students learn to think critically and engage in difficult conversations, we are preparing the next generation of Jewish Bostonians for a thoughtful and resilient future. We do not approach these realities with alarm, but with awareness: cultivating pride and intellectual rigor, rooting students in Jewish texts, values, and a connection to Israel and the broader Jewish world. Research, including the recently published CJP Greater Boston Community Study, reinforces that early Jewish experiences shape lifelong identity. Attendance at schools like JCDS strengthens intergenerational continuity, one of the most meaningful ways to respond to the challenges Jews face. While only a small percentage of Jewish children around Boston attend day school, the opportunity to have a lasting impact is immense.

The sustainability of Jewish day schools depends on communal prioritization. Supporting them is not only an investment in our individual institutions, but an investment in Jewish resilience, and a strong antidote to many of the challenges we face as a people. In moments of uncertainty, strengthening the day schools that shape identity is one of the most meaningful choices we can make.

***Shoshanna Goldberg is Director of Development and Communications at Boston's Jewish Community Day School.***

*Temple Israel of Boston hosted the Boston Jewish Arts Festival on Feb. 1. The program featured Cantor Alicia Stillman's annual winter concert and an art exhibit.*

**#IStandWithIsrael**

**For more updates, visit: www.ShalomMA.com**

# Our Community

*The Israeli Women Organization (Habostoniot) held a Tu B'Shvat event Feb. 7 in Newton, where participants created candles from scratch inspired by themes of plants and fruits.*

*On Jan. 27, the Consulate General of Israel to New England and the German Consulate General in Boston joined members of the diplomatic corps and local leaders at the New England Holocaust Memorial. Together, they observed International Holocaust Remembrance Day as Consul General Benjamin Sharoni and Consul General Dr. Sonja Kreibich laid a wreath to honor the memory of the 6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust.*

*Jacqueline Saper, author of "From Miniskirt to Hijab: A Girl in Revolutionary Iran," spoke at Shaloh House Chabad of the South Area on Feb. 11. During the event, which included a book signing, Saper shared a firsthand account of Iran's Islamic Revolution and the country's current state.*

*The Yiddish Book Center's 2025/2026 Translation Fellows reading their works in progress at the Center on March 9.*

# Altered States, Sacred Views: A Door, Not a Map
## Psychedelics, Meaning and Responsibility

***By Rus Devorah (Darcy) Wallen, LCSW, CIMHP***
***Based on my talk, 1/26/26 – NEFESH.org***

This subject didn't arrive in my life as an abstract interest. It emerged in the therapy room. Over the years, clients began coming to me after psychedelic experiences — some moved, others destabilized. In a few painful cases, the damage was profound. A destabilized, retraumatized perinatal woman, a marriage shattered after one partner interpreted a substance-induced vision as a divine command. These are not philosophical debates; they are lived consequences of using profound substances without prior information.

Many who seek altered states aren't reckless. They're searching for meaning, healing, and wholeness. Yet they often enter these experiences without knowing what questions to ask — or that there are questions. In Jewish tradition, we speak at the Seder about the child who does not know how or what to ask. I see that child in many of my clients: well-intentioned, intelligent people blindsided by experiences they didn't know needed preparation or integration.

We are in a cultural moment of convergence — of AI, biohacking, ceremonial substances, and spiritual longing. The intensity of experience is outpacing discernment. As a religiously observant Jew and therapist, I walk with care. I don't encourage psychedelic use. This isn't fear; I'm no prude. It's grounded in ethical, legal, clinical, and halachic concerns. But neither do I abandon those who come after the fact. Harm reduction is part of compassionate clinical care.

Clinically and spiritually, there's a glaring gap. Many people don't

# Altered States, Sacred Views: A Door, Not a Map
## Psychedelics, Meaning and Responsibility

understand what "set and setting" means — the internal and external conditions that shape psychedelic experiences. They aren't prepared for what may be stirred, unearthed, or amplified. These substances — especially classic psychedelics like psilocybin, LSD, DMT, and ayahuasca — activate the 5-HT2A serotonin receptor, which amplifies emotions, perceptions, and meaning-making. But amplification is not truth. Turning up the volume doesn't ensure you're tuned to the right station. A psychedelic may open the door, but it's not a map. Not every vision is a direction; amplification isn't evidence.

That's the paradox. Psychedelics can catalyze insight, but they can also distort. One can emerge with a deep sense of divine clarity — even if the message is misleading or destructive. As a clinician, I've seen both outcomes. That's why humility, not hubris, is essential when approaching these substances.

In exploring this topic, I engaged leaders from multiple religious traditions — rabbis, Catholic priests, and Buddhist teachers. While theological reasoning varied, their conclusions were strikingly aligned: conditional support for therapeutic use under strict supervision, with significant ethical safeguards for the safety and wellness of the patient. None of the major religions endorses recreational or unstructured/unsupervised use.

Why do people seek these experiences? For good and honorable reasons: to address depression, trauma, addiction, relationship issues, existential longing, and more. Viktor Frankl taught that meaning is not a luxury, it is a core human drive. And in our fragmented culture, many are seeking ways to bridge the spiritual and the psychological without reducing either. Psychedelics can sometimes open that door, but they are not a map. And when used without preparation, containment, and integration, they can lead people off course.

There are four broad categories of substances:

**Classic psychedelics** (psilocybin, LSD, ayahuasca): powerful amplifiers, still illegal under federal law.

**Empathogens** (like MDMA): promote emotional openness but carry risks like boundary confusion.

**Dissociatives** (e.g., ketamine): legal and promising for depression, but not without concern.

**Novel synthetics**: unpredictable and often dangerous.

"Natural" does not mean safe. Legality does not mean harmless. Clarity and conscience require us to resist the romanticization of these substances while also avoiding moral panic. Ethics demand nuance.

From a Jewish perspective, psychedelic use is largely prohibited—due to legal status (*dina d'malchusa dina*), concerns around idolatry and divination, and the mandate for clarity of mind. Other traditions echo similar cautions. The bottom line: altered states are not neutral. They affect perception, consent, and agency. Our task is not to dismiss them, but to approach them with the gravity they require. This is not about fear. It is about care.

Let us not confuse the keyhole with the door, nor the vision with the path. Healing is holy work — and it requires both reverence and responsibility.

***Rus Devorah (Darcy F.) Wallen, LCSW, CIMHP, PC is a clinical consultant, social worker, psychotherapist and motivational entertainer. To subscribe to her newsletter and read more in-depth articles, visit https://toratherapeutics.com.***

# Was Columbus Jewish?
## Identity, Memory, and the Politics of Reputation

***By Rabbi Shlomo Pereira***

Was Christopher Columbus Jewish? The question refuses to die, and that persistence tells us as much about our changing views of Columbus as it does about Columbus himself. His voyages were "paid in Jewish blood," launched as Spain expelled its Jews in 1492, and they inaugurated a catastrophic era for the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Those who see him as a heroic explorer, and those who see him as an architect of genocide, inevitably approach his Jewishness very differently. The debate is less a neutral historical inquiry than a mirror reflecting our anxieties about identity and responsibility.

The modern theory that Columbus was a secret Jew did not appear organically from fifteenth-century documentation. In fact, this theory appeared for the first time when the Spanish writer and public figure García de la Riega proposed, at a conference in 1898 and later in a 1914 book, *Colón Español: Su Origen y Patria*, a bold solution to the mysteries surrounding Columbus's name, origins, and life story. Columbus, he claimed, was not a Genoese wool-weaver's son but a Spaniard, a Galician from Pontevedra, of converso background who spent his life concealing his Jewish identity. This reframing, intended to claim Columbus for Spain, appeared at a moment when national and ethnic claims over "great men" served political and ideological needs.

In what followed, and in the same vein, proponents of a Jewish Columbus, both Jewish and non-Jewish, assembled a thick bundle of circumstantial evidentiary clues. They note his closeness to Jewish and converso circles in Portugal and Spain, his ease with the Jewish communities that helped finance and facilitate his voyages, and his surname Columbo, associated by some with the Hebrew Yonah. Genoa itself, they point out, was a destination for Iberian conversos; his father's profession as a weaver fit trades open to Jews there; and Columbus spoke Spanish, not Italian, as his mother tongue. In addition, Columbus delayed his voyage from Aug. 2 to Aug. 3, the very day after Tisha b'Av, when both the Jewish fast of mourning and the expulsion from Spain occurred. Finally, his will included bequests to charity in general and specifically to the gatekeepers of the Jewish quarter in Lisbon. To those inclined to see him as a crypto-Jew, these details read like the outline of a hidden biography.

From there, the argument drifted into the realm of the mystical and symbolic. Close study of Columbus's surviving letters to his son Diogo has led some to see in certain marks a veiled "B"H," "with God's help," the traditional Hebrew invocation that many Jews place at the head of documents. Likewise, his peculiar triangular signature was seen as a half-formed Magen David or even an allusion to the Kaddish prayer, a coded signal of Jewish identity and mourning. In these readings, the line between historical analysis and pattern-seeking becomes thin, as such designs might just as easily be scribal flourish or idiosyncratic vanity.

More revealing are the ways twentieth-century writers projected "Jewish character" onto Columbus. Jacob Wassermann, in his 1930 work *Columbus: Don Quixote of the Seas*, offers an almost psychoanalytic catalogue of Jewish traits: a certain soft-heartedness, a tendency to seek sentimental rather than practical solutions, and a timidity before far-reaching responsibilities, rooted, he suggests, in an age-old fear of irrevocable decrees. For Wassermann, these are quintessentially Jewish features. Columbus here becomes a canvas on which to sketch a quasi-racial psychology, and the exercise tells us more about interwar Jewish stereotypes than about Columbus himself.

Salvador de Madariaga's 1940 biography *Vida del Muy Magnífico Señor Don Cristóbal Colón* intensifies this approach. Madariaga describes an alleged Jewish "fascination for gold and precious stones," in "deep harmony with the soul of Israel," and links it to Columbus's own attitudes. He dwells on what he calls a Jewish "contractual sense," a mentality that makes every life event into a transaction demanding a precise quid pro quo. When he turns to Columbus's sexual life, Madariaga contrasts Christian and Jewish sexual morality:

# Was Columbus Jewish?
## Identity, Memory, and the Politics of Reputation

a Christian woman who yielded outside marriage was certainly "good-for-nothing," while a Jewish girl in the same circumstances might still be "a thoroughly decent soul." In this framework, the question "Was Columbus Jewish?" functions less as a historical query and more as a pretext for exploring fantasies and fears about Jews.

More recently, a study led by Miguel Lorente Acosta, a forensic doctor, opened yet another front in this debate. The study focused on DNA samples from remains in Seville Cathedral tentatively associated with Columbus's son Hernando and claimed that their genetic profile fits a Spanish Mediterranean origin and is compatible with Jewish ancestry. The focus and results of this study have been widely discredited on scientific grounds: the use of highly deteriorated DNA samples, non-disclosure of data, unsound methodologies and techniques, and conclusions that were not subjected to independent review. The way in which the study was made public is very telling as to its intent. A study in the making for more than 22 years was suddenly featured, in October 2024, in a documentary on Spanish national television, and its discredited results were grossly misrepresented as showing conclusively that Columbus was Jewish. The parallel is inescapable: Jews today portrayed as perpetrating or supporting genocidal Israel in Gaza are given a famous forerunner, the figure of a Jewish, genocidal Christopher Columbus.

Against all these speculative constructions stand more sober voices. In 1893, a mere five years before García de la Riega publicized his theory, Meyer Kayserling, the German Jewish historian, produced the most authoritative early study of Columbus and the Jews, simply titled *Christopher Columbus*. Kayserling had no doubt that Columbus was what he claimed to be, a devout Catholic from Genoa. Furthermore, he was sharply critical of Columbus's religious fanaticism and of his lack of sympathy for the Jews expelled from Spain at the very moment he set sail. For him, Columbus's significance for Jewish history lay in the tragic irony of timing, as the same crown that financed overseas discovery violently uprooted Iberian Jewry, and in the interplay of both events.

It is in this spirit that Jonathan Sarna, a leading American Jewish historian, in his essay "The Mythical Jewish Columbus and the History of America's Jews," published in Commentary magazine in November 1992 in connection with the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage, warned about a dangerous slippage. To fantasize about an inherent Jewishness in Columbus is, he argued, only a small step away from resurrecting the trope of Jews operating clandestinely, engaged in a vast conspiracy for their own benefit. If Columbus's "true" Jewish identity lurks behind the public mask of a Christian admiral, then the "discovery" of America itself becomes fodder for narratives about secret Jewish power. Sarna's concern is that what may begin as a potentially flattering claim, Jews helped discover the New World, ends in the reinforcement of conspiratorial antisemitic myths.

In the end, whether Columbus was Jewish may be the wrong question. For those who still wish to celebrate him as a visionary explorer, finding Jewish roots can serve to fold him into a positive Jewish story of courage, endurance and hidden creativity. For those who view his voyages as the opening act of colonial exploitation, enslavement and cultural destruction, insisting that he was Jewish can function as, at best, a way of keeping that guilt at a distance and, at worst, yet another incarnation of old antisemitic tropes. In both cases, Columbus's Jewishness becomes a token in a larger argument about whether he was fundamentally good or evil, hero or villain.

***Rabbi Shlomo Pereira is the director of adult education at the Chabad of Virginia, Richmond. He can be reached at shlomo@chabadofva.org.***
***Portrait of Christopher Columbus by Sebastiano del Piombo, 1519.***

# "Let All Who Are Hungry Come and Eat": Why Delivering Passover Meals Matters More Than Ever

***By Lino Covarrubias***

Each year at the beginning of the Passover Seder, we recite the words: "*Ha lachma anya* ... Let all who are hungry come and eat."

It is one of the most radical communal invitations in Jewish life — not merely symbolic, but actionable. It calls upon us not only to remember our own liberation from Egypt, but to ensure that no one in our community experiences isolation, hunger or exclusion from the collective story of freedom.

This year, the data tells us that fulfilling that mitzvah is more important than ever.

According to the 2025 Greater Boston Jewish Community Study conducted by Combined Jewish Philanthropies, there are now 138,200 Jewish households across Greater Boston, home to more than 333,100 individuals. Jewish life in our region is vibrant and growing — but the same study also reveals significant vulnerability beneath the surface.

Most notably:

- 27% of Jewish adults in Greater Boston are 65 or older
- 47% of Jewish adults who live alone are seniors
- 25% of those living alone report they are "just managing" or unable to make ends meet financially

At the same time, many older adults who live alone are also less connected to Jewish communal life, though 56% report attending a Jewish organizational program or event in the past year. This tells us something critically important: The desire for connection is there — but barriers such as mobility, health, transportation and affordability often prevent participation.

In MetroWest alone — one of the six regions identified in the study

# "Let All Who Are Hungry Come and Eat":
## Why Delivering Passover Meals Matters More Than Ever

— there are approximately 13,600 Jewish households, representing 10% of the Greater Boston Jewish population. Many of these households include older adults aging in place or families experiencing financial stress in one of the highest-cost regions in the country.

For these neighbors, participation in Passover is not always as simple as setting an extra place at the table.

Food costs are rising. Transportation is limited. Physical mobility may make grocery shopping or cooking difficult. And for some older adults, the greatest challenge is not preparing the Seder meal — but the absence of anyone with whom to share it.

That is why, each year, Jewish Family Service of MetroWest, in partnership with CJP and others, mobilizes hundreds of volunteers to deliver kosher Passover meals directly to isolated older adults and families in need throughout the CJP catchment area.

This effort is not simply about food delivery. It is about communal belonging.

Each meal delivered represents:

- A reduction in food insecurity
- A safeguard against social isolation
- A connection to Jewish ritual life
- And a reminder that one is still seen, valued and remembered by the community

The study reminds us that contemporary Jewish life is multidimensional and that connection to community varies widely across households.

Some participate through synagogue life. Others through cultural events. Still others — particularly older adults or those facing health or financial challenges — connect through the simple but profound experience of receiving support at home.

This year alone, JFS MetroWest will coordinate volunteers from synagogues, youth groups, civic organizations and local families to ensure that hundreds of households can observe Passover with dignity. These volunteers are not only delivering meals; they are delivering connection — fulfilling the ancient obligation that Jewish freedom must be shared collectively.

Passover teaches that liberation is incomplete when experienced alone.

As we open our doors this Passover, may we also open pathways to participation for those who cannot reach us — ensuring that, in Greater Boston, the words "Let all who are hungry come and eat" remain a living commitment.

***Lino Covarrubias is the CEO of Jewish Family Service of MetroWest.***

# For Israel's Tech, Resilience Is Not a Slogan

***By Steve Schuster***

Over the past 20 years, I've done business with hundreds of Israeli high-tech companies. I'm lucky to have had a front row seat to the up-and-down operating extremes that can swing wildly depending on whether missiles are falling.

But since the tragic events of Oct. 7, 2023, something has shifted in the founders and teams that I know. Not in a sentimental way, but in an intentionally practical way. Israeli high-tech founders have become more determined than ever to refuse to let existential adversity stand in the way of progress.

"Resilience" is the word most often used to describe Israeli high-tech these days, and certainly I believe it applies to Israelis in general. Most of the time resilience lands as a compliment, but since Oct. 7 it looks more like an operating system. Less about "keep calm" and more about "keep building."

The numbers back up that this is not just a vibe. The Israel Innovation Authority's 2025 report notes that high-tech's share of all Israeli exports kept growing, hitting about 57% in the first half of the year, with 2024 high-tech exports totaling 78 billion dollars. Clearly, the high-tech sector is shouldering a disproportionate share of Israel's economy.

Israeli high-tech companies raised an estimated 15.6 billion dollars in private funding in 2025, up from 12.2 billion dollars in 2024. That is not a boom in deal count, but rather a shift toward fewer, larger, higher-conviction funding rounds. Despite the year's 717 funding deals being the lowest count in a decade, the median private funding

# For Israel's Tech, Resilience Is Not a Slogan

deal hit a record 10 million dollars, up 67% from 2024.

This "fewer but bigger" pattern is consistent with what I have seen on the ground since Oct. 7. Less tolerance for vague ambition and more demand for durable roadmaps. Less "Startup Nation" and more "Scale-up Nation" — a market that rewards execution, resilience, and global-scale outcomes over slogans.

Then there is the wealth transfer that almost nobody talks about because it feels awkward to mention it during wartime. Israeli tech and startup news outlet Calcalist Tech reported that employees in the Israeli high-tech industry received via stock options about 15.8 billion dollars in 2025, driven by exits, secondary sales, and stock price gains.

This demonstrates that resilience is structural as well as emotional. Skin in the game stock options that turn into real money change what people can endure. They also incentivize what people choose to build next.

So what does Israeli resilience actually look like?

Well, despite the hardships and stresses of potential attacks from multiple fronts across the region, Israel prevails as a genuine technology superpower, driving category leadership in today's most cutting-edge technologies. These include:

· Cybersecurity
· Generative AI and AI infrastructure
· Quantum computing
· Medical devices and pharma/biotech
· Semiconductors and chips for AI
· Fintech
· Organizational software
· Agri tech
· Climate-tech and energy
· Water tech
· Defense
· And more emerging fields at the frontier of software and hardware innovation

Resilience looks like teams designing, building, and shipping products while lives are disrupted in ways we diaspora Jews can barely fathom.

Resilience looks like startup founders who stop romanticizing survival and start optimizing for execution.

Resilience looks like an industry ecosystem that can simultaneously hold grief in one hand and a product roadmap in the other.

But resilience is, of course, a fundamentally Jewish muscle that starts and ends with our historical discipline of continuing to move forward no matter the challenges, even existential ones. Despite a consistently threatening geopolitical environment, Israel's high-tech sector is more than ever a core economic engine, attracting capital and creating world-scale outcomes.

As a Zionist, I'm proud to be an active participant in all this, both as a service provider to Israeli companies as well as an entrepreneur with Israeli partners. I get to see Israeli resilience up close, in conversation after conversation with friends and colleagues there. It is both humbling and incredibly inspiring.

***Steve Schuster is the CEO and founder of Rainier Communications, a technology PR agency that helps deep-tech companies earn credibility through sharp positioning, proof-led storytelling, and disciplined media execution. With a BSEE and an MBA, he translates complex innovation into narratives that drive media coverage, strategic partnerships, and investor interest.***

***Photo of Masada by Steve Schuster***

# The Resilience of the Jewish People



***By Rabbi Jonathan Hausman***

We celebrated one of the most notable Jewish holidays of the year on March 4, 2026: Purim. Purim commemorates the Jewish nation's survival from a genocidal plot in ancient Shushan and Persia (modern-day Iran). The villain, Haman, sought to annihilate all Jews in the Persian Empire. But through courage, divine intervention and clever thinking by the Jewish heroine Esther, the plot was foiled and the Jews were saved.

Rarely has a Jewish holy day had as much relevance in our contemporary lives. It feels as if we are watching a biblical manifestation of Purim — as Israel and Iran remain at an impasse regarding diplomatic talks and threats of a U.S. military strike toward Iran careen toward kinetic action. The same geographic region that threatened Jewish existence 2,350 years ago remains a threat today. Since the advent of the "mullacracy" in 1979, Iran has openly called for Israel's destruction while funding proxy forces Hezbollah and Hamas, which have terrorized Israeli citizens for decades.

The threat of war between Israel and Iran has loomed for years. The first direct war between the two countries exploded over a 12-day period last June. As I spoke to family members and friends in Israel since military action began this past Shabbat (Feb. 28), they continue to go about their lives despite the intensity of war.

I asked several cousins, my nephew and niece if they were afraid. My niece responded with a comment from our Sages (*Shemot Rabbah* 21:5-6, a compendium of Midrashic commentary on Exodus): "בָּנַי, אַל תִּתְיָרְאוּ. כָּל מַה שֶׁעָשִׂיתִי לֹא עָשִׂיתִי אֶלָּא בִּשְׁבִילְכֶם. מִפְּנֵי מָה אַתֶּם מִתְיָרְאִים? אַל תִּירְאוּ, הִגִּיעַ זְמַן גְּאוּלַּתְכֶם." "My children, do not be afraid. Everything I have done, I have done only for you. Why are you afraid? Do not fear; the time of your redemption has arrived."

# THE RESILIENCE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

I added to the richness of this comment that even in dark times, redemption and survival are possible. With current tensions involving Iran's nuclear ambitions, regional conflicts and complex international dynamics, Jewish believers may find comfort in these teachings.

אַל תִּירְאוּ, הִגִּיעַ זְמַן גְּאוּלַתְכֶם

"*Do not fear; the time of your redemption has arrived.*"

"We are living in prophetic times," my cousin Dvorah stated. As her grandchildren remain in Israel and in IDF service, everyone is standing with feet firmly planted in the rich soil of the state of Israel.

During Purim, it is customary to take part in a tradition involving the giving and receiving of culinary treats called *mishloach manot* (מִשְׁלוֹחַ מָנוֹת), which means "sending portions." This is one of the four main *mitzvot* (commandments) of Purim, as written in the Book of Esther (9:22). The modern tradition involves creating a basket or tray of festive treats to deliver to another individual or family on Purim day. People often give *mishloach manot* to friends, neighbors and family, making it a vibrant community tradition.

Preparing *mishloach manot* is one way to feel aligned with this holiday and its ironic, prophetic timing this year. This mitzvah is an intentional gesture to connect with fellow members of our community and the Jewish nation writ large. Instead of fear, let us keep the words of the Sages, who remind us of the resilience of the Jewish people and the importance of community in the face of adversity.

***Rabbi Jonathan Hausman serves Ahavath Torah Congregation in Stoughton.***

# The Story of Us

***By Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal***

There is a concept in psychology known as the *Baker/baker paradox*. It suggests that people are far more likely to remember that someone is a baker by profession than that their last name is Baker. The reason is surprisingly simple: our minds remember stories, not arbitrary labels.

When we learn that someone is a baker, an entire narrative unfolds in our imagination. We picture early mornings before sunrise, hands dusted with flour, an understanding of the delicate science of ingredients, perhaps the memory of warm bread or a beautiful cake shared with others. The profession carries meaning, texture, and story. A name, by contrast, is largely arbitrary. It contains no narrative on its own.

That is why names are often the first things we forget, even when we remember so much else about a person.

And yet, there is one name we struggle with more than any other: the name of God.

In Jewish tradition, we often refer to the Divine simply as *HaShem* — "The Name." At times we use the English word "God," though that word carries layers of cultural assumptions and theological baggage. Hebrew tradition offers more than seventy different names for the Divine, each reflecting a different attribute or relationship, reminding us just how limited any single name can be.

Which is why the Torah offers us something remarkable during the story of Passover — perhaps my favorite name of God, because it is not really a name at all.

After Moses flees Egypt and settles in Midian, he becomes a shepherd. One day, while chasing after a stray lamb, he notices something extraordinary: a bush aflame, yet not consumed. Drawn toward this mystery, Moses hears the Divine voice calling to him, instructing him to remove his sandals, for he stands on holy ground.

# The Story of Us

God tells Moses that the suffering of the Israelites has been seen and heard, and that the time for change has come. Moses is given his mission: return to Egypt and lead the people to freedom.

But Moses hesitates. He raises a practical concern: "When I go to the Israelites and they ask me who sent me — what shall I say? What is the name of the God of our ancestors?"

God replies: *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* — I will be what I will be.

And then God continues with words we echo every day in the *Amidah*: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. This is My name forever; this is how I shall be remembered in every generation."

Instead of offering a fixed name, God offers a story — a history, a relationship, a promise carried across generations. The Divine identity is not defined by a label but by memory and covenant. It is the shared story of ancestors who encountered God and discovered liberation.

It is through story that Moses will convince the people. It is through story that the Israelites will recognize hope. And it is through story that God becomes known.

Stories are the lifeblood of communities. They form the foundation upon which values and morals are built. Stories sustain people through suffering. Stories make room for hope even when hope feels impossible. After four hundred years of slavery — centuries marked by silence and oppression — the Israelites still held on to their stories.

A midrash preserved in *Tanḥuma-Yelamdenu*, compiled in the 8th and 9th centuries, wrestles with a question in the Exodus narrative. Pharaoh intensified the Israelites' labor, working the men so relentlessly that they slept in the fields rather than returning home. How, the rabbis ask, did the people survive such despair?

The midrash tells of the ministering women:

"The women would go down to draw water from the river. The Blessed Holy One prepared small fishes inside their jars. They would cook some, sell some, buy wine with the proceeds, and go out into the fields to feed their husbands… After they had eaten, they took out their mirrors and looked into them together. She would say, 'I am more beautiful than you,' and he would reply, 'I am more beautiful than you.' In this way they awakened desire…" (*Tanḥuma Pequdei* 9, translation by Rachel Adelman)

Through tenderness, humor, intimacy, and imagination, these women sustained life itself. They told a different story than the one Pharaoh imposed — a story in which love, dignity, and future generations were still possible.

It was storytelling that allowed the Israelites to survive cruelty and degradation. It was storytelling that preserved their belief that life was still worth living. And it is storytelling that has carried these lessons into our own hearts.

Each Passover, we gather to retell this story — a story of trauma and hope, suffering and survival, and above all, love: love between partners, love within a community, and love between a people and the Divine.

The story of Passover is never finished. Every year, in every generation, we continue striving toward freedom — in our own lives and in every corner of the world.

So as we sit around the Seder table, we might ask ourselves: What stories are we telling? What values are we passing on? What is this story asking of me right now?

Whatever our answers may be, they become the next chapter in the unfolding story of our people.

May we remember both the bitterness of slavery and the joy of redemption. And may we continue to tell our story — faithfully, courageously, and lovingly — for generations yet to come.

***Jessica Lowenthal was ordained in June 2019 from Hebrew College. She now serves as the Rabbi at Temple Beth Shalom in Melrose.***

# Under Fire: The Passover Message for a Traumatized But Unbroken Israel

***By Colette A.M. Phillips***

As Jews around the world gather for Passover this year, the ancient story of liberation from Egypt feels less like distant memory and more like present tense. The Haggadah commands: "In every generation, each person must see themselves as if they personally went out from Egypt." It is an instruction to collapse time — to experience bondage and deliverance not as history, but as lived reality.

This year, that collapse feels especially acute. As Israel continues to absorb the trauma of Oct. 7, ongoing attacks from Hamas and Iran, and persistent regional threats, many Israelis live with sirens, loss, displacement and the vigilance required to survive in a region where their existence is contested. The metaphor of oppression is no longer abstract. It reverberates daily.

Yet Passover does not deny suffering; it insists on confronting it. The Israelites left Egypt not only with freedom, but with wounds — physical and generational. In Jewish tradition, liberation is not naïve triumphalism. It is forged in memory, resilience and covenantal hope. Jewish history has required rising repeatedly — from exile, from pogroms, from genocide, from war — and continuing to build life with fierce commitment. Judaism does not sanctify victimhood. It sanctifies life.

That paradox defines Israel today. Even amid grief and existential threat, Israelis plant vineyards, open schools, compose music, innovate technologies and celebrate births. Trauma and vitality coexist. The covenant is not with suffering, but with survival and purpose under G-d/Hashem — whose plan unfolds beyond any single historical moment.

Passover also reminds us that no people achieve freedom alone. The Exodus story includes courageous midwives who defy Pharaoh, Pharaoh's daughter who rescues Moses and a "mixed multitude" who leave Egypt together. Liberation has always required coalition.

Today, Jews worldwide face a troubling rise in antisemitism, ideological hostility and isolation. Houses of worship have been attacked. Jewish children are bullied on school playgrounds, and Jewish students feel unsafe on campuses. The pressures are real. But the lesson of Passover is equally clear: Moral clarity and collective security depend on partnerships across communities, faiths and nations committed to human dignity and pluralism.

***The next edition of***
***Shalom Magazine is***
***ROSH HASHANAH 2026***
***Reserve your spot by calling***
***781-975-0482***
***or emailing ShalomMA@msn.com***

# Under Fire: The Passover Message for a Traumatized But Unbroken Israel

So what might we carry from this Seder to meet the fraught moment?

**First, expand the circle at the Seder table**. Just as the Haggadah invites all who are hungry to come and eat, this year we might intentionally welcome allies — neighbors, colleagues and interfaith partners — to our Passover tables. Shared ritual builds shared understanding.

**Second, add a contemporary symbol of resilience**. Integrate Israel's present reality during the Seder, connecting ancient memory to current responsibility. Alongside the shank bone and bitter herbs, families might place an olive branch or Israeli grain — signs of continuity and life under threat.

**Third, act. Passover freedom is incomplete without obligation**. Each household might pledge one concrete act in the coming year: Support trauma recovery. Confront antisemitism. Strengthen Jewish life. Deepen cross-cultural alliances. Liberation matures through action.

The Passover story ends not in Egypt but with a journey. The Israelites step into uncertainty sustained by faith that history bends toward redemption. That faith has never been passive; it has required courage, unity and relentless rebuilding.

Around Seder tables from Jerusalem to Boston and the Jewish diaspora, Jews will retell the same ancient words. Not as nostalgia, but as a declaration: Oppression is real. Trauma is real. But so is resilience. So is the covenant. And so, enduringly, is hope. Next year in Jerusalem!

***Colette Phillips is CEO and founder of Colette Phillips Communications Inc. and Get Konnected!, a cross-cultural networking organization. She is the author of*** **The Includers: The 7 Traits of Culturally Savvy Anti-Racist Leaders.**

# After Oct. 7, Our Generation Abandoned Civil Discourse

***By Sabrina Chevlin***

On Oct. 7, 2023, I woke up to my worst nightmare: thousands of terrorists had flooded into Israel and massacred what, at the time, was estimated to be around 1,500 people. My heart sank.

The ever-looming threat of antisemitism that Jewish kids learn about in textbooks, that my grandfather warned me about, was no longer history — it was happening now.

On Oct. 13, 2025, the remaining Israeli hostages came home. After 736 days — two full years — Omri Miran, David Cunio, Nimrod Cohen, Rom Braslavski, Guy Gilboa Dalal and 15 others were released from captivity. The body of our last hostage, Ran Gvili, was returned Jan. 26. This should feel like an ending, but it doesn't.

In the 842 days since Oct. 7, I've watched the world transform. Or rather, unveil itself. After that day, I saw a visceral hatred emerge from its 70-year hibernation since the Holocaust. Suddenly, my community and campus erupted with varying displays of hateful rhetoric: chants for globalizing the intifada, glorification of terrorism and silence in the wake of growing antisemitism.

Physical demonstrations ran parallel to a social media war. My friends were doxxed and digitally harassed. Oct. 7 began to get painted as "propaganda." This polarization manifested in a palpable shift in how we view and speak to one another — or rather, in how we refuse to.

As a Jewish and Zionist student, the reaction I have witnessed in our generation following Oct. 7 has been one permeated by intolerance, extremism and the utter abandonment of nuance. The Zionist narrative — possessed by 85% of American Jews as of 2024 — has not only been ignored but weaponized to depict us as evil, ultimately leading to a swell in antisemitic violence.

Our generation has lost the capacity for civil discourse.

We need to bring nuance, discourse and tolerance back to our conversations. We need to be challenged, pushed beyond our comfort zones and forced to confront perspectives that differ from our own. These values are what college is about. Holding signs and glaring at one another will not rebuild trust in our generation.

I watch as professors, peers and community members speak about this conflict as if it is theirs to define, protest and refute. They distort Zionism beyond what it was ever intended to represent. Unlike what you may see on Instagram or on posters at a protest, Zionism does not connote settler colonization or ethnic cleansing. Zionism is the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in our ancestral homeland after millennia of persecution and displacement.

If there were still space for dialogue, I would tell people how deeply misunderstood I feel by the world and how estranged I feel from the progressive movement I once aligned with. I would tell them there

# After Oct. 7, Our Generation Abandoned Civil Discourse

are 3,000 years of history in that land between peoples that they know next to nothing about. I'd tell them that a few Google searches do not make them qualified ambassadors for this conflict. That, if the blood of the ancestors who fought and died for that land doesn't run through their veins, they should get out of the streets and get on the phone with their Jewish and Palestinian friends.

During the Black Lives Matter movement, our campus displayed an outpouring of support for the Black community. President Aoun released numerous statements in solidarity with the Black community, implemented university-wide training on cultural and racial literacy, and paused classes for a Day for Reflection, Engagement and Action.

Our campus learned to listen, reexamine our assumptions and give Black voices the space to define their own experiences.

Well, the Jewish people are talking. We are screaming for recognition, for understanding. We are trying to tell the world that this situation is not as simple as the slogans chanted on our campus quads suggest. While you call for "globalizing the intifada," Jewish students' parents call them to come home because their campus is no longer a safe place for them.

It's our conflict, our history, our identity — and yet, you've silenced us. You've tokenized the small percentage of Jews who agree with you and dismissed the rest of us as complicit or guilty.

Sometimes, I fear that this polarization has surpassed the point of repair; too much has changed. Over the past two years, the curtain has been pulled back, and I've seen too much hate, too much intolerance and too much hypocrisy, and I'm not sure I'll ever see my peers the same way again.

But this is not the future any of us want. This is not the future I'm willing to be complicit in.

We need to revive nuance, discourse and tolerance in our conversations, so that disagreement doesn't end in hostility, but in mutual understanding. College should be a place where we can challenge one another, expand our worldviews and confront our internal assumptions — even if we get offended along the way. Growth comes from engagement, not antagonism, and from conversation, not intolerance.

This doesn't mean abandoning your principles or refusing to criticize policies you disagree with. It means approaching these conversations with humility, recognizing complexity and being willing to listen to the people whose lives are at stake. It means understanding that for Jewish students, the question of Israel isn't an abstract political debate — it's about our family, our history, our DNA.

The Jewish people have survived because we remember. We carry our history in our bones, in our collective memory of persecution and resilience. But we have also survived because we have refused to let hatred consume us, because we have continued to believe in the possibility of coexistence and understanding.

I'm asking our campus community to believe in that possibility, too. Not someday, not after this conflict ends, but right now. Because if we can't talk to each other here — in this place dedicated to learning and growth — then where can we?

The hostages are home. But we're not. Not until we find a way back to civility.

***This article was originally published in Northeastern University's The Huntington News.***

***Sabrina Chevlin is a student at Northeastern University and a 2025-2026 CAMERA Fellow.***

*Jewish Federation of Central Mass Young Adult Division (YAD) Pre-Purim Ball at American Flatbread Candlepin Bowling*

# Central Mass

*The Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts hosts a Ladies' Night to celebrate Tu Bish'vat.*

*Director of Spiritual Care Allie Weiner leads a group to celebrate Tu Bish'vat at the Eisenberg Assisted Living in Worcester.*

# "Jews Against ICE" and the Jewish Responsibility to Defend Immigrant Justice

***By Cindy Rowe***

Leviticus 19:16 instructs that we cannot stand idly by when the well-being of our neighbor is threatened. Our immigrant neighbors, who contribute so much to the fabric of our communities, are not being treated with the dignity, respect and constitutional legal protections they deserve. As a Jewish community, we should be especially motivated to speak out given that immigration to the United States plays such a large role in most of our families' stories.


These most basic tenets of our democracy, as well as our deeply held faith-based values, are being violated by an ICE agency that is operating without regard for the rule of law, and we must stand up in this moment to protect the dignity of all human beings. Indeed, the Torah instructs us to "welcome the stranger" at least 36 times! It is clearly a foundational message that we must put into practice.

At this point, we've all seen too many videos of ICE agents grabbing people off city sidewalks, escalating confrontations with peaceful protesters and, tragically, much worse. Earlier this year, in the cases of Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti in Minnesota, we have also borne witness to American citizens being killed by ICE agents.

This unlawful and frightening conduct by ICE has led to people being terrified to go to work, send kids to school and seek medical care. ICE is even targeting immigrants when they attend immigration hearings as part of their citizenship process.

In accordance with our obligation to defend immigrants, the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action (JALSA) has taken on a central role in working with local and national organizations. During Tisha B'Av, JALSA was joined by 30 Jewish organizations and congregations across Massachusetts to assemble outside the regional ICE headquarters in Burlington, Massachusetts. More than 400 Jewish community members gathered to amplify the message of building sanctuary, standing up for the rule of law and our civil liberties, and adhering to the Jewish value of *Kavod HaBriyot* (honoring the dignity of all human beings).

JALSA also worked with T'ruah, Bend the Arc Jewish Action, Minneapolis-based Jewish Community Action and many other organizations taking part in the "Jews Against ICE" day of protests around the nation earlier this year. Along with partner actions in Minnesota and Washington, D.C., hundreds of JALSA members and allies once again gathered in Burlington to condemn ICE's actions.

JALSA is also organizing folks to get involved with local efforts like "Bearing Witness," which gathers weekly outside of the regional ICE headquarters, and "De-ICE Hanscom," which organizes peaceful standouts with the goal of eliminating ICE transport flights from Hanscom Field that deny immigrants their due process rights in Massachusetts.

In addition to using our First Amendment rights to peaceably assemble and protest in defense of these values, we must also work toward justice by improving our laws. Currently, there are a number of provisions proposed by the governor and Legislature being considered that will help Massachusetts achieve justice for our immigrant neighbors by making sure our Massachusetts state and local police do not collaborate with ICE and that we fund legal defense. We will also be taking actions against corporations that are supporting ICE in carrying out its activities. To learn more about these legislative priorities and other JALSA actions, visit JALSA.org and sign up for our weekly Action Alert e-newsletter.

This is a moment that cries out to us to act on our moral and faith-based values. It is our duty to speak out and call out the abuses of ICE, and do all we can to defend the rule of law, prevent mass deportations and uphold democracy.

***Cindy Rowe is the President and CEO of the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action.***

# Stolen Land? Let's Discuss

***By Steven Schimmel***

There is a lot of buzz at the moment around the condemnation of "stolen land." The current climate is defined by a push to address injustices, and in a world brimming with corruption, calls for moral clarity are appealing. It was in this environment that at the 2026 Grammy Awards on Feb. 15, Billie Eilish declared, "No one is illegal on stolen land," highlighting frustration with ICE and immigration enforcement. The line was powerful, but the sentiment it reflects has a deeper history that complicates the slogan.

Here in Massachusetts, it is widely recognized that the Nipmuc, the Wampanoag, and other native peoples lived on this land long before the arrival of European settlers. Many generations of tribes expanded or lost influence through conflict, diplomacy, and population change. Epidemics just before sustained English settlement and a devastating 1616–1619 plague reshaped native society. Their territories continued to shrink after colonization and collapsed after King Philip's War. Even though tribes suffered near annihilation, their connection to this land is rightfully acknowledged today. This principle is sound. It is based on respect, memory, culture, and identity. It asks us to see a people's historical connection to a place as part of who they are. Yet this same principle is often denied to Jews when the conversation turns to Israel.

The Jewish people were exiled by Rome after 70 C.E. and again after 135 C.E., but Jewish communities remained present in Israel, continuously. Jewish liturgy, law, and identity stayed centered on the land. There is layer upon layer of Jewish archaeological history there. DNA evidence links Jewish diaspora communities to the region. Yet today, Jewish Israelis are regularly labeled settlers or colonists. They are accused of living on stolen land, even though their cultural, historical, and religious connection to Israel is as deep and in some cases more continuous than Indigenous claims that are widely respected in other parts of the world.

Why is there this double standard? The modern Zionist movement began 19 centuries after the end of Jewish sovereignty in ancient Israel. Does the passage of time somehow erase the legitimacy of Jewish connection to the land? Rightfully, if time does not erase the Nipmuc connection to central New England, and if the Wampanoag bond to their homeland remains meaningful centuries after displacement, why is the Jewish people's connection treated differently? If these tribes were to launch a national movement to reclaim territory centuries from now, something like Zionism for their people, would they be described that way? How long after exile does an Indigenous people forfeit a claim to its homeland? History offers no clear statute of limitations.

The Israeli case is also shaped by documented migration into Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as economic growth attracted Jewish and Arab labor from neighboring regions. Roughly 525,000 to 580,000 Jews arrived in organized waves of immigration. During the same period, scholars estimate that 80,000 to 150,000 Arabs migrated into the region from surrounding territories such as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Transjordan. Thus, the early Jewish and Arab populations of modern Israel both grew in part through immigration, yet the group returning to its historic homeland is the one accused of being colonial settlers.

None of this erases injustice. It shows that the phrase "stolen land" is often applied selectively. Human history is layered. Land ownership is complex. Claims can be equally valid. If the principle that an Indigenous people retains a bond with its homeland is applied with consistency, it leads to a fuller recognition of the Jewish connection to Israel. The challenge is to move beyond slogans and engage history honestly.

***Steven Schimmel is executive director, Jewish Federation of Central MA.***

***The opinions and views expressed in this article do not represent the opinions and views of Jewish Federation of Central MA or its members.***

# Why Do the Four Sons Only Appear on Pesach?

***By Rabbi David Ehrenkranz***

Our rabbis teach that the Torah speaks of four sons who raise distinct questions about the holiday of Pesach. According to tradition (*Mekhilta, Parashat Bo; Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 10:4*), three of the sons appear in the Book of Exodus, specifically in *Parashat Bo*, and one appears in the Book of Deuteronomy, specifically in *Parashat Va'etchanan*.

The order of the four sons as they appear in the Torah is as follows: the wicked one (Exodus 12:26), the one who does not know how to ask (Exodus 13:8), the simple one (Exodus 13:14), and the wise one (Deuteronomy 6:20).

The wicked son, known in Hebrew as the rasha, asks, "What does this worship service mean to you?" The one who does not know how to ask, in fact, does not ask a question. The simple son asks, "What is this?" And the wise son asks, "What are the testimonies, statutes and judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?"

It is noteworthy that the rabbis changed the order of three of the sons when composing the Haggadah. In the Haggadah, the wise son appears first, the wicked son second, the simple son third — as in the Torah — and the one who does not know how to ask fourth. The rabbis also modified the answers given to three of the sons; only the simple son retains the original response found in the Torah.

Though much can be said about why the order and responses were altered, I would like to focus on a different question: Why do the four sons appear only on Pesach? Families gather for other holidays as well, and many questions could be asked about all of them. One could ask why we eat in the sukkah on Sukkot, why we have two challot on the table for Shabbat, why we hold a festive meal on Purim, or why we fast on Yom Kippur.

# Why Do the Four Sons Only Appear on Pesach?

Pesach is the first holiday celebrated by the Jewish people as a nation. It marks the beginning of our covenantal relationship with God, who, through His actions and words, demonstrates His care for us. At Mount Sinai, when He declared that He is our God, He reminded us that He is the One "who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." He cares about our spiritual, ethical, emotional and intellectual well-being. He then gave us 613 commandments to help us build a relationship with Him and with the world around us.

Pesach is, by definition, the holiday of freedom — but it is a distinctive kind of freedom. We moved from being slaves to Pharaoh to being servants of God (Leviticus 25:55). That idea troubles many people. Should we not be free to do whatever we wish? Why must there be prohibitions? Why are there rules governing our lives, even determining what and when we may eat?

Most other holidays do not generate these same tensions. We understand why we fast on Yom Kippur. We understand why we dwell in a *sukkah* on Sukkot. We know why two challot are placed on the Shabbat table. But on the day that commemorates our freedom, why are there so many restrictions and detailed rituals surrounding a meal that marks the anniversary of our redemption?

When a married couple celebrates a wedding anniversary, they are not required to avoid certain foods, consume specific items in measured quantities or adhere to strict time limits. Yet Pesach, because of the laws governing the Seder, invites precisely these questions. The meal is therefore not simply a meal; it is an extended lesson that began thousands of years ago.

On the night before leaving Egypt, we were commanded to sacrifice a young male lamb and to finish eating it, together with matzah and maror, by midnight while recounting the story of our departure. Although we no longer offer the Paschal lamb, the night of the 15th of Nisan remains an enduring lesson — one God has been teaching throughout our history.

That lesson is that He cares for us in moments of desperation and in times of joy. This night is different because it calls upon us to recognize the divine framework that shaped us into a nation charged not only with devotion to God, but with responsibility toward others.

For that appreciation to take root, thoughtful and passionate questions are required — questions about what God has done for us, what He continues to do for us, and what we must do in return, both in service to Him and in service to the broader world.

***Rabbi David Ehrenkranz has been teaching at the Maimonides School in Brookline since 1996.***

***Image: JM Nahson Sassoons Passover Haggadah-National Library of Israel.***

# Silent Alert:
# When Israel Prepares Without Being Told

***By Daniel Pomerantz***

It's a very Israeli "thing" — so much a part of our identity that we don't even have a word for it. I call it the "Silent Alert."

When the Israeli government prefers not to cause panic or tip off its enemies, when it wants to project confidence and strength, it sometimes announces… nothing at all. And yet somehow, we all know to prepare.

Despite the ongoing military buildup around Iran, the Israeli government has not put out an official warning or specific instructions to those of us on the "Home Front." Still, we are already double-checking our bomb shelters. When away from home, we are aware of our surroundings and note the location of the nearest shelters, as we did for nearly two years. We are a little more careful about keeping our phones charged and our kitchens stocked.

Why?

The superficial, intellectual reason: if the United States strikes Iran, then Iran will likely respond by striking Israel. There's precedent. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, an international coalition mounted a massive response. Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein, in turn, fired Scud missiles at Israel — an absurd response given that Israel had not joined the coalition striking Iraq.

Yet there is another, deeper and more Israeli reason: we just know.

Israel is a small country, where everyone knows everyone — not literally, but almost. Soldiers are not unknown figures on some distant base or overseas — they are our parents and children, our neighbors and co-workers, our friends and, in my case, many of my students. Small talk by the פינת קפה (*Pinat Cafe* - Israel's equivalent of the "water cooler") or discussions over family dinner are essentially low-key intelligence briefings.

Of course, we do not know the specifics of secret capabilities in advance — not about the stunning "pager operation" against Hezbollah in 2024, nor about the myriad tools Israel brought to bear against Iran last June — but we recognize when something is up.

For example, in 2024, despite no official instructions, Israeli homes stocked up on non-perishable food, bottled water, batteries, and even old-style analog radios, because we knew a war was coming with Hezbollah and that the terror organization was planning to target our electrical grid, water system, roads, and communications. Fortunately, Israel managed to defeat that threat before it fully materialized, but the danger was real.

Days before last June's "Twelve Day War," Israel's strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, Israelis were already bracing for a hit. Some were even beginning to predict the strike publicly.

As an aside, this is also how we know that our army is incredibly careful and ethical, and that our country is not committing a "pretendicide" in Gaza (a more accurate term, in my view, than the claimed "genocide"), and that the threats around us are very real. Yes, we have data, statistics, and reporting, but more importantly, we know the people in the field, personally and often intimately. We don't know the details of every operation, but we know how our soldiers feel and speak; we know what is in their minds and in their hearts. That proximity matters. It shapes how Israelis understand both the dangers we face and the conduct of those defending us.

And so we come back to our "Silent Alert."

Intellectually, we remember that some of Iran's most deadly attacks during last year's "Twelve Day War" came in its final days, with notable improvements in targeting and munitions power. If the Iranian regime is truly nearing its end, it may decide to use the most powerful weapons it has been holding in reserve. Even chemical weapons, though not expected, cannot be entirely dismissed. On the other hand, Israel's defenses have improved as well, including the unveiling of Iron Beam, the IDF's new laser-based missile defense system.

Yet beyond intellect, there remains that collective instinct. As in the case of Hezbollah's plans to devastate civilian infrastructure, these fears may not materialize. But for now, the danger is real, and Israeli civilians remain on "Silent Alert."

Of course, our thoughts are primarily with the astonishingly brave Iranian protesters, risking their very lives simply to march and speak out. But in the coming weeks, please also spare a thought for us, here in Israel.

***Daniel Pomerantz is CEO of RealityCheck Research, a policy analysis organization focused on Israeli security and Middle Eastern geopolitics. For more information, visit www.realitycheckresearch.org.***

# Yiddish Beyond Yiddishland: The Swedish Connection

***By Jan Olofsen***

In a recent conversation with professor emeritus Jan Schwarz of Yiddish studies at Lund University in Sweden, we discussed something most people don't realize: Sweden is one of the few European countries where Yiddish has official status.

In 1999, Sweden recognized Yiddish as one of five national minority languages. The decision was more than symbolic. It meant that the language of Yiddish literature, theater, journalism and everyday Jewish life would be protected, studied and supported. For those who associate Yiddish primarily with Eastern Europe, Sweden might seem an unlikely place for such a commitment. After all, the historic centers of Yiddish culture were cities like Vilnius, Warsaw, Lublin and Lodz. These were the great capitals of what scholars sometimes call *Yiddishland* — a cultural world that stretched across Eastern Europe and produced an extraordinary body of literature, theater and intellectual life.


Yet history has its own way of rearranging the map. Today, some of the vital work of preserving and studying specific cultures is taking place in places far removed from Yiddish's original geography. One of those places is Lund University, in southern Sweden. Here, Yiddish is not treated simply as a language. It is approached as the key to understanding a cultural civilization. Students study the language itself but also explore Yiddish literature, modern Jewish thought, theater, film and the history of Jewish publishing. Publishing is an essential part of the story.

Yiddish culture was, above all, a culture of the written word. Newspapers circulated and writers debated ideas in essays and journals. Poets, novelists and playwrights gave voice to the imagination and anxieties of Jewish life. The world of Yiddish publishing connected communities from Vilnius to Warsaw, and from Odessa to Berlin and New York.

Scholars at Lund continue to explore this literary universe. Through research, editing, translation and publication, they bring forgotten works back into circulation and make Yiddish literature accessible to new generations of readers and students.

For many people, the story of Yiddish is told mainly through loss — through the destruction of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe during the Holocaust. That tragedy is part of the story, but it is not the whole story. Yiddish was, and remains, a language of creativity, humor, argument and imagination. It was the language in which millions of Jews wrote novels, staged plays, published newspapers and debated the future of Jewish life.

What is remarkable is that this cultural world continues to live on in lecture halls, libraries and research seminars at Lund University, where the language of *Yiddishland* is still being studied and rediscovered. For those interested in encountering this cultural world firsthand, Schwarz will lead a unique program that celebrates *Yiddishland*, as expressed in language and historic places in Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. *Journey through Yiddishland* is not a tour of tragedy, but of creativity — an encounter with the locations where Yiddish literature and other artworks in multiple media were created. From its origins in Poland and Lithuania, the Yiddish language and culture traveled across borders and generations from the past to the present. Here, now, *Yiddishland* is still alive — in *Yiddishlund*.

***Jan Olofsen is co-founder and CEO of Momentum Tours. He can be reached at travel@momentumtours.com.***

***Photos: Jan Schwarz with his book,* Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust *(2015); The Yiddish translation of* The Hobbit, *published by Oliansky Farlag in Lund, Sweden.***

# "Choiceless Choices" During the Nazi Regime

***By Prof. John J. Michalczyk***

Many readers and viewers of the novel and film *Sophie's Choice* sympathized with Sophie Zawistowska's impossible dilemma at Auschwitz: An SS officer forces her to choose which of her two children will live. The other will be killed.

In Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary *Shoah*, and later in the outtake film *The Last of the Unjust*, the French director examines a comparable moral abyss — the impossible choices faced by members of the Jewish Councils, or Judenräte, in ghettos across Nazi-occupied Europe, including Lodz, Warsaw and Theresienstadt.

In *The Last of the Unjust* (2013), Benjamin Murmelstein — the last surviving elder of the Theresienstadt Judenrat — defends his actions, testifying that he sought to do as much good as possible within a horrific and morally compromised reality. In Vienna, he helped facilitate Jewish emigration to safer countries. Later, in Theresienstadt, he was forced to participate in administering what the Nazis cynically labeled a "model ghetto." After the war, while living in Rome, he was widely reviled as a collaborator.

Through psychological coercion and calculated manipulation, the Nazis imposed upon Jewish leaders the role of deciding, at times, who would live and who would die — particularly in the preparation of deportation lists. The regime shifted the administrative burden of destruction onto the shoulders of the "Elders," making them unwilling instruments in the machinery of extermination and later branding them collaborators.

Judenrat leaders were compelled to carry out Nazi directives, including selecting Jews for deportation to camps where death was likely or certain. This bureaucratic "pre-selection" preceded the final selections conducted by camp doctors such as Josef Mengele

# "Choiceless Choices" During the Nazi Regime

at Auschwitz — forced labor or the gas chamber. At the same time, the councils were responsible for regulating daily life in the ghettos: food distribution, labor assignments, sanitation, health services and enforcement of Nazi decrees. They functioned under constant threat. Refusal meant immediate execution.

Each decision posed a wrenching moral calculus: preserve one's own life and position in hopes of mitigating harm, or refuse cooperation and face certain death, leaving the community leaderless and potentially worse off. Some Judenrat members sought to save as many Jews as possible, using bureaucratic tools to shield the vulnerable. Others abused their authority, protecting friends or family at the expense of others.

Adam Czerniaków, head of the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat, chose another path. In July 1942, ordered to facilitate the daily deportation of 6,000 Jews to the newly operational Treblinka death camp, he took his own life by cyanide rather than sign deportation orders for children. Before his death, he had attempted to mitigate suffering by assigning individuals to essential work details — hospitals, sanitation and other indispensable services — and pleaded unsuccessfully for the children of Janusz Korczak's orphanage. Concluding that he could not participate in the destruction of children, he ended his life.

After World War II, the role of the Judenrat came under intense scrutiny. Were these individuals collaborators and traitors, or coerced intermediaries operating under threat of death? Trials of former Judenrat members, Jewish police and kapos were held in cities such as Warsaw and Krakow to determine culpability in aiding Nazi crimes. Defendants frequently argued that they acted under duress and sought to minimize harm. Some were stripped of civil rights or communal standing. Others were ostracized entirely. Some changed their identities or emigrated to avoid retaliation.

Eighty years later, historical judgment remains complex and case-specific. Diaries and testimonies, such as Czerniaków's meticulous journal, offer insight into the moral anguish and constrained agency of these leaders. Broad generalizations obscure more than they clarify.

Analogies are inevitably imperfect, yet the ethical questions remain relevant. How will future generations judge business leaders, academics and politicians who comply with unethical policies — whether globally or domestically — while claiming limited agency? As some defendants argued at Nuremberg, and as was heard in the aftermath of the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War: They were "just following orders."

History rarely grants the comfort of simple moral categories. The tragedy of the Judenrat lies precisely in the realm of "choiceless choices" — decisions made within a system designed to eliminate all truly moral options.

***Prof. John J. Michalczyk is the director of the Film Studies Program at Boston College.***

***Photo: Hanging of members of the Jewish Council of Lvov in 1942 (US Holocaust Memorial Museum)***

# *Rabbi Breindel Ponders Jewish Life in Space*

***By Alice Waugh***

Can Judaism adapt and thrive in space? That is the question explored in the documentary short *Fiddler on the Moon*, which features "Sci-Fi Rabbi" Rabbi Joshua Breindel of Congregation Beth El. The synagogue hosted a screening and talkback with Rabbi Breindel on Jan. 31.

Others appearing in the film include astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson; astronauts Jeffrey Hoffman and Jessica Meir; and Dr. Sheyna Gifford, who served as a medical officer and journalist during a yearlong NASA mission on Earth studying crew health under Mars-analog conditions. Among the questions the film raises: How does one determine the beginning of Shabbat when there is no consistent sunset aboard a spacecraft that orbits Earth every 90 minutes? And is it even possible to light a candle in space?

"Since childhood, I've wondered how Jewish life could travel beyond Earth. As the 'Sci-Fi Rabbi,' I was invited to bring a spiritual voice to *Fiddler on the Moon*," Rabbi Breindel says. A childhood friend of Dr. Gifford, he adds, "How can we — formed from the dust of the earth — not only live on other worlds, but thrive there? That's the question at the heart of this film."

In 2000, while earning his master's degree in Jewish studies at Hebrew College, Breindel explored these issues in a paper on Jewish sacred time, wrestling with when to observe Shabbat at Earth's poles, in orbit, and even on the Moon or Mars.

"*Fiddler on the Moon* balances emotional intensity, intellectual rigor, and spiritual inspiration. It celebrates Judaism's adaptability and offers a profound statement of hope for our future," says Rabbi Breindel, who also leads Beth El's online Jewish Fantasy and Sci-Fi Book Club, which is open to the public.

*Fiddler on the Moon* is available for streaming on Roku.

# Arts and Culture Community Grant

***By Arnon Z. Shorr***

In February, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies awarded ten artists and teams with this year's Arts and Culture Community Impact Grant. The grantees from across Greater Boston include filmmakers, installation artists, musicians and writers. I am fortunate to be one of these grantees, alongside my collaborator, Joshua M. Edelglass, for our comics and graphic novel project, "Festival of Forgotten Tales."

Three of this year's grantees — a full 30% of the grant recipients hail from my small town, Sharon, Massachusetts (population 18,574). They are Shoshana Ehrenkranz, a filmmaker who grew up here, and Jeffrey Else, a fine artist and educator whose work graces the walls of our synagogue.

What is it about this town and about this community that fosters so much creative Jewish energy?

When I was a child in the '80s and '90s, Newton and Brookline were the undisputed hubs of Boston Jewish life. Even now, Judaica shops, kosher restaurants and Jewish markets are largely clustered in those close Boston suburbs. But even back then, Sharon had a vibe. In the day schools that I attended (first, Maimonides, and then The New Jewish High School) the Sharon kids dressed more casually, had a more laid-back attitude, and a sort of ruggedness that the "city kids" (or, as close as we had to "city kids") lacked. Some of them owned livestock.

Five years ago, my family made the return to the east coast after a decade in California. In addition to the usual items on a Jewish family relocation checklist — safe neighborhood, good schools, a synagogue with shared values — I had one more requirement: we must live in a place where Jews can be different. I remembered the sense of isolation that came with being a young filmmaker among kids who could only imagine themselves pursuing careers in medicine, law, or technology. I didn't want to return to that isolation, or to limit the range of professional dreams my kids might consider. As I remembered it, Sharon was a place where "Orthodox Jews have chickens," an indicator, in my mind, of the town's outside-the-box community.

These days, Sharon is one of the fastest growing Jewish communities in Massachusetts, full of the same doctors, lawyers and tech folks whom I remembered from the more affluent suburbs of my youth. But quite a few of our new friends (even the doctors) keep chickens, and a significant handful of artists still call our community home. In addition to the CJP grantees, there are several fine artists, culinary artists, concert and pop musicians, professional dancers, and at least one theater designer. Unusualness is an important color of the cultural tapestry of Jewish Sharon, and many of us are using our unique ways of seeing the world to help reinvent and revitalize the Judaism around us.

Most of the artists I know here are affiliated with the Modern Orthodox Young Israel congregation. This may seem surprising, as Orthodoxy is often perceived as stuffy, rules-obsessed and dedicated to conformity. But this Orthodox community seems accustomed to iconoclasts, and as such, creates and maintains a communal space where creativity can flourish without judgment. Perhaps it is this seemingly contradictory blend of nonconformity and Orthodoxy that fosters Sharon's abundance of creativity?

Regardless of the reasons, I am glad to see the arts thriving in my community. Since the building of the Tabernacle, the arts have played a central role in our communal, religious and cultural lives. We might have lost track of that for a while, spending much of the last century focused on preserving the practice and ritual of Judaism, but — at least, here in Sharon — we're in the midst of a communal recommitment to our creative roots.

***Arnon Z. Shorr is a filmmaker, screenwriter and author. Along with local illustrator Joshua M. Edelglass, he is the recipient of a CJP Arts and Culture Community Impact Grant to aid in the completion of his comic book series and graphic novel, FESTIVAL OF FORGOTTEN TALES, a collection of Jewish, genre-bending, supernatural holiday stories. The first three Tales are available now at http://tinyurl.com/shorrstore.***

# Torta di Nocciole: Italian Passover Flourless Hazelnut Cake

***By Ronit Treatman***

When the Israelites left Egypt more than 3,300 years ago, they were in a bit of a hurry and didn't wait around for their bread to rise. Observant Jews still commemorate their exodus by skipping the leavening, and during the eight days of Passover, regular flour is not used in food preparation for fear that it may have come into contact with water, thereby activating the rising process. I see baking without flour ground from grains as an opportunity for creativity. In that spirit, here is a historic Jewish recipe that complies with the special rules of Passover.

One ancient recipe for a nut flour cake comes from the Piedmont region in Italy. Italy boasts one of the longest continuously residing Jewish communities in the world. The first Jews arrived in Roman Italia in the 2nd Century BCE. Italian Jews adopted local ingredients to prepare dishes for their holidays. Traditionally, in the Piedmont area, hazelnuts were harvested in the summer, and the leftovers were used to make desserts for the winter. With just three ingredients, you can whip up a delicious cake that Piedmontese grandmothers once made at home, and which today is also produced by renowned pastry chefs and served in Italy's finest restaurants. Here is a traditional hazelnut cake recipe that is perfect for Passover.

***Torta di Nocciole: Hazelnut Cake***

Ingredients:

4 eggs
1 ½ cups toasted hazelnuts
1 cup sugar
A pinch of salt (1/8 teaspoon)

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Line a baking pan with parchment paper. Finely chop the hazelnuts in a food processor. Separate the egg yolks from the whites. Beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt until stiff. Whisk the egg yolks with the sugar. Add the processed hazelnuts to the egg yolk mixture. Mix well, then gently fold in the whipped egg whites.Pour the batter into the prepared baking pan. Bake for 30-35 minutes. Check for doneness with a toothpick before pulling the cake out of the oven.

***Ronit Treatman is the author of Hands-On Jewish Holidays, https://www.handsonjewishholidays.com***

# The Israel Journey Today's Teens Are Asking For

***By Liana Rothman***

Every summer, Jewish teens travel to Israel seeking connection — to the land, to Jewish history, and to one another. They hike ancient paths, celebrate Shabbat in Jerusalem, and return home with memories that shape their Jewish identity for years to come.

But the teenagers I work with today are asking deeper questions about what an Israel journey can and should be. They are coming of age in a world defined by climate change, political polarization, and global uncertainty. They care deeply about the planet they will inherit, and they want their Jewish identity to help guide how they respond to those challenges.

As Youth Empowerment Director at Adamah, I hear these questions from teens: How does Judaism speak to environmental responsibility? What does it mean to care for the land of Israel today? And how can young people help build a more hopeful future in a complicated region?

Adamah is launching a new three-week Teen Israel Journey built around those very questions, in collaboration with RootOne. A group flight will depart New York City on Sunday, July 5, with a return flight leaving Israel on July 27. The trip is open to current 9th-12th grade students and will include three weekends in Israel. Thanks to the generosity of RootOne, each participant is eligible for a $3,000 voucher.

The program explores what we call "Peoplehood and Planethood"—the idea that our responsibility to the Jewish people and our responsibility to the Earth are deeply interconnected.

On this journey, American teens will travel throughout Israel alongside Israeli peers (who will join the group for 10 days). Together they will hike the lush landscapes of the Galilee, explore the fragile ecosystems of the Negev desert, and examine how cities like Tel Aviv are confronting the realities of a warming climate. They will trek through mountain trails, swim in desert springs, and learn about the preservation efforts of the coral reefs of the Red Sea while snorkeling.

Along the way, they will meet with environmental activists, climate tech innovators, and organizations working at the intersection of sustainability and social justice. Participants will learn how climate challenges affect different populations in different ways, and how collaboration around land and water can create space for dialogue where politics alone cannot.

The Hebrew word adamah means "earth" or "soil." It reminds us that caring for the land has always been central to Jewish life and tradition. Climate change does not recognize borders, and the health of ecosystems affects everyone who depends on them.

By bringing American and Israeli teens together to explore these ideas, build friendships, and learn from those working toward environmental solutions, we hope to cultivate a generation of leaders who see both people and planet as part of their shared responsibility.

To learn more, please visit our website: adamah.org/teen-israel-journey.

***Liana Rothman is the Youth Empowerment Director at Adamah.***

# THE SEDER AND THE JEWISH IMAGINATION

***By David Bernat, PhD***

Our rituals and festival observances often call for a stretch of the imagination, whereby we find ourselves, at once, in several locations and moments in time. For example, when we light Shabbat candles in our home, our "feet" and spirits are also in Eden with Adam and Eve when they experienced their first sundown. Simultaneously, we are gazing toward a future when "every day is a Shabbat of perpetual rest" (*Mishnah Tamid* 7:4). The following morning, when reciting the *Kedushah* in our synagogues, we are worshiping in tandem with a congregation of angels extolling God in the Temple on high. When we eat in the Sukkah, we are with our biblical ancestors who constructed temporary dwellings at the edge of their fields in order to complete the fall harvest. On Shavuot, when we hear the reading from the Torah of *Aseret Hadibrot*, "The Ten Commandments," we are also standing at the foot of Mount Sinai witnessing the dramatic tableau of thunder and lightning accompanying the first utterance of these words that are central to our tradition.

Perhaps the most vivid, poignant, and multifaceted leap of imagination is manifest in the Pesach Seder. While we dine and recline, we are walking on dry land across *Yam Suf*, the Sea of Reeds, where soon the chariots of our Egyptian pursuers will be consumed by these same waters. This notion is explicit in the *Haggadah*: "*Bechol dor vador, chayav adam lir'ot et atsmo ke'ilu hu yatsah miMitzrayim*; In every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as if they were leaving Egypt." Simultaneously, we are pilgrims walking the steps to the Temple Mount to eat a combination of *matsah* and *maror* with our lamb offering, as was the custom of the Sage Hillel. At the same Seder table, we also must envision ourselves alongside Rabbis Akiva, Tarfon, Joshua, Eliezer and Elazar, taking refuge in caves during the Bar Kochba revolt of 135 CE, thus unable to see that the sun was rising and it was time to recite the morning *Shema*. Finally, when we open the door for the Prophet Elijah, we are anticipating a transformative moment when he heralds the coming of the Messianic Age, an ideal era when we are permanently delivered from our enemies and can bask in the glow of everlasting peace.

Allow me to conclude with a personal reflection. As I write this column, wrapping up my pre-Purim fast, friends and family are in shelters or called up for *Miluim*, reserve duty. The brave pilots of Israel's Air Force are flying sorties over Persia and dropping bombs on our intractable enemies. In these times, the hope for everlasting peace is close to all of our hearts.

With that, I wish you a heartfelt *Chag Sameach*.

***David Bernat received his PhD in Biblical Interpretation from Brandeis, and much of his writing and research has centered on Jewish ritual from antiquity to today. Bernat has held faculty positions at Wellesley College, Hebrew College, and UMass Amherst.***

# *Local Craft Chocolate, Perfect for Your Passover Seder Table*

In Somerville, a chocolate company is rethinking what Kosher for Passover chocolate can taste like. Wild Child Chocolate is a bean-to-bar micro-business crafting single-origin dark chocolate from ethically sourced cacao. Each bar is made with just three ingredients: cacao beans, sugar and cocoa butter, allowing the natural character of the cacao to shine. No additives, no fillers, just deeply flavorful chocolate made with intention.

Certified Kosher for Passover under KVH, Wild Child Chocolate produces all of its chocolate in a dedicated dairy-free, nut-free and gluten-free facility in Davis Square. Because it's a dedicated facility, the equipment and recipe can stay consistent and high quality year-round.

What makes single-origin chocolate special? Like coffee or wine, cacao reflects where it's grown. Origins from Belize, Peru, Ivory Coast, Thailand and beyond each offer distinct flavor notes, from bright fruit to deep cocoa richness; these bars are equally at home on a Seder table, as a host gift or alongside a favorite bottle of wine. As a local, family-run business, Wild Child Chocolate combines craftsmanship, ethical sourcing and community connection in every batch. Explore the full Passover collection at www.WildChildChocolate.com/Shalom.

# *Israel Travel Fair Inspires Hope*

The Rhode Island community looked ahead with optimism March 1, as the Rhode Island–Israel Collaborative (RIIC) and the Jewish Alliance of Greater Rhode Island hosted an Israel Travel Fair. Held at the Jewish Alliance building in Providence, the event connected community members with travel professionals and organizations focused on tourism, volunteering and cultural exchange.


***Dori Adler and Avi Nevel***

Dori Adler of the Jewish Alliance opened the afternoon by emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong ties with Israel. Avi Nevel, founder and CEO of the RIIC, highlighted the community's resilience.

"Israel misses you, and you miss Israel. Now, more than ever, it's time to go," Nevel said.

Eitan Sasson, head of sales for Dan Hotels in the U.S., delivered greetings on behalf of Israel's tourism sector. Exhibitors included Hadassah, Jewish National Fund, Leket Israel, Masa Israel Journey, Rootone LLC and Sababa Travel.

The festive atmosphere featured Israeli music by Yuval Gur and Ariella Marcel of the Berklee College of Music, along with food from Bonapita and Navad Bakery. The event was partially sponsored by the Consulate General of Israel to New England. For more information, visit www.theriic.org.

# "Mom, Dad, I Will Tell Your Story"

***By Alex Kor***

Seven years ago, I had no intention of writing a book or speaking publicly about my parents, both Holocaust survivors.

On July 2, 2019, in our hotel room in Krakow, Poland (during the annual CANDLES Holocaust Museum trip to Auschwitz), I asked my mom, "You are not getting any younger. When will you slow down your hectic speaking schedule around the world?" Having celebrated her 85th birthday earlier that year, shortly after heart surgery, I was worried about her health.

Without hesitation, she replied, "How can I slow down, Alex? There is so much hate and antisemitism in the world. My work is needed more than ever."

She died suddenly in that same hotel room 48 hours later. I never had the chance to ask her what role I should take moving forward.

After her passing, my father spent the last 15 months of his life in my hospital. I saw him every day. We spoke often about his life and legacy. Never one to seek the limelight, he did not assume his story needed to be told. As his health declined, I realized it did.

I asked him, "Dad, would it be OK with you if I wrote a book about you?"

"Alex, wow! You would do that for me?"

"Yes, Dad, I will."

Working full time as a podiatrist, I had no idea how to write a book. I shared my interest with my close friend Graham Honaker, who worked in development at Butler University, my alma mater, and had written two books on college athletics.

After months of conversation, he sent me a list of questions one evening in August 2023. I responded, and over the next five months, that exchange evolved into a manuscript. The events of Oct. 7, 2023, tragically made the project feel even more urgent.

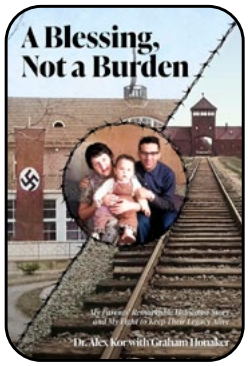
Most of my writing took place on weekends. I vividly remember writing about my parents' final days. Reliving those painful moments felt like losing them all over again — with the same heartbreaking ending.

In May 2024, co-authored with Graham Honaker and published by Pediment, *A Blessing, Not a Burden* was released, fulfilling my promise to my dad. Now in its fifth printing, the book — and the continued interest in my parents' stories, and my own — has reaffirmed my role moving forward.

I often think about my final conversation with my mom on July 4, 2019. Today, I have a path that will hopefully help future generations understand the importance of hope, healing, humanity and perseverance — lessons my parents lived and taught. The book is also a call to action for other descendants of Holocaust survivors who feel both the weight of loss and the responsibility of preserving their families' stories.

Over the past two years, Graham and I have spoken to audiences in Latvia and 25 states. The response has been deeply meaningful. Throughout the writing process, I struggled to articulate why I felt so compelled to tell these stories.

# "Mom, Dad, I Will Tell Your Story"




That changed in July 2025, when I was invited to speak to a group of high school students in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who had just returned from visiting a concentration camp. Alongside Dr. Lesa Rae Vartanian, an assistant professor at Purdue University Fort Wayne and an expert on death and dying, I helped debrief the students.

After I finished speaking, one of her first slides read: "Storytelling Is Healing."

I began to cry. In that moment, I understood my purpose.

In the final scenes of the 2018 award-winning documentary by Ted Green Films and WFYI, *Eva: A-7063*, my mom looks to the heavens and speaks to her mother: "Mom, I will tell your story. I hope that you are proud of me."

Today, in 2026, knowing that I promised my dad I would tell his story and that I want to continue my mom's work, I echo those words: "Mom and Dad, I will tell your story. I hope that you are proud of me."

Continued interest in these stories has also drawn the attention of Pigasus Pictures, and a motion picture is now in development.

***Dr. Alex Kor is a podiatrist with Hendricks Regional Health in Danville, Indiana, and director emeritus of the CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Terre Haute, Indiana, founded by his parents in 1995 to empower the world via education, hope, healing, respect and responsibility, while shining a light on the stories of survivors, especially the Mengele twins.***

# Pesach in Tiberias: A Ten-Month Journey to Six Holy Days

***By Smadar Sara Babchuck***

I have a standing yearly meeting on the morning after the Seder with the strange-looking woman in my mirror. She always looks the same: heavy-eyed, slumped, emptied out. Every year she tells me, "Next year in a hotel." I agree. And every year, I remember Sarina.

A century ago, Sarina Yishvi Skili married into a distinguished rabbinic family whose lineage traced from Morocco back to Spain before settling in Tiberias in 1780. Tiberias was then a small city of mixed Arab and Jewish populations, nestled along the shores of the Kinneret. Widowed young, in 1923 she moved with her four daughters to a modest house near the water beside a friendly Arab family. The home consisted of one main room, a tiny pantry, an outdoor kitchen, and an outdoor toilet. In the summer, they slept on the roof beneath the open sky.

In Tiberias, Pesach did not arrive suddenly. It was constructed slowly over the course of the year.

For those of us who order Pesach supplies online and complain about the scale of preparation, it is difficult to imagine what the holiday once demanded in time, strength, and discipline.

The process began at Shavuot, during the wheat harvest. Sarina rose at dawn and walked two miles to the shuk, a wholesale market run by Arab farmers, to purchase wheat designated specifically for matzah. Pesach wheat could not be mixed with ordinary grain. An Arab boy carried the sacks home. There, she wrapped them in white cloth and suspended them from the ceiling beams, where they remained until Purim, Pesach literally hanging overhead.

After Purim, the pace intensified. The pantry was emptied and freshly painted. The wheat was lowered, and Sarina and her daughters sat for hours around a brass tray called a *siniyeh*, meticulously removing grit and stones by hand. This was one of the few household tasks Sarina required of her girls. She believed childhood should not be consumed by labor.

The final stretch unfolded with precision.

Six days before Pesach, the women of Tiberias gathered by the lakeshore to kosher their cookware through *ha'agalah*, immersing utensils in boiling water. Fires burned beneath large basins filled with water drawn from the Kinneret. One small dairy pot was prepared for milk; the rest were meat vessels.

Five days before, Sarina prepared sweets that required neither baking nor refrigeration, especially marzipan and nut confections. Nuts were peeled and crushed by hand.

Four days before, an Arab porter carried the cleaned wheat to a mill a mile and a half away. Sarina waited with other Jewish women, socializing while carefully guarding her grain to prevent it from being mixed. At home, she sifted the flour again and set aside a portion for matzah shmura, specially supervised from harvest to baking.

Three days before, she brought the flour to the communal Pesach bakery. Private homes had no ovens. She never left her flour unattended. The finished matzot were stored in the prepared pantry.

Two days before, she returned to the shuk for fresh vegetables: beans, peas, onions, and potatoes. Though Sephardic communities traditionally permit legumes on Pesach, in Tiberias only fresh varieties were used.

# Pesach in Tiberias: A Ten-Month Journey to Six Holy Days

One day before, Sarina drew water from the Kinneret and left it outdoors overnight. This was *mayim she-lanu*, "water that rested," allowed to cool to the proper temperature for matzah *shmura* dough. The water drawing was communal. Jews gathered along a traditional stretch of shoreline associated with ancient burials, prayed *Mincha*, and filled their ceramic pitchers together.

Tensions between Jews and Arabs already existed decades before 1948. One year, families arriving to draw water found thousands of pieces of pita floating on the surface. Suspecting deliberate contamination, the Jewish community boycotted Arab vendors. The local Mufti later apologized, attributing the incident to a prank by youths. Trade eventually resumed, though trust was more fragile.

On Erev Pesach morning, Sarina returned to the bakery to bake three matzot *shmurot* from her reserved flour and rested water. Only afterward could she purchase fresh meat from the *shochet*. Without refrigeration, it had to be prepared immediately. Sheep, goats, and chickens were staples. She cooked the meat and hid several pieces of matzah for later observances. Her daughters set the table, thankfully.

Seders in Tiberias were held at home and without guests. After her husband's death, the responsibility for leading the Seder passed to her son-in-law, who conducted the full halachic ritual for her household before returning home to lead another for his own family. When he died, his eldest son assumed the role. Leadership moved through the family like inheritance.

Throughout the festival, Sarina maintained warm relations with her Arab neighbors, bringing them holiday sweets. On the final day, they reciprocated with pita, labneh, and green onions as symbols of abundance and renewal.

The season did not end with Yom Tov. Tiberias was, and remains, a city of revered rabbinic graves, including Rambam (Maimonides), Rabbi Meir Ba'al HaNes, and other sages. The day after Pesach, the community visited the Rambam's tomb to celebrate *Mimouna*, lighting fires, giving charity, and praying for blessings.

A month later, on Pesach Sheni, a citywide procession walked to the tomb of Rabbi Meir Ba'al HaNes, where Jews and non-Jews alike sought healing. Those who had missed the mitzvah of eating matzah during Pesach fulfilled it then. Sarina would take out the small pieces she had hidden and share them with her daughters, just in case.

Only after ten months of intention and six days of disciplined preparation did rest arrive.

So when we stand before our self-cleaning ovens and feel overwhelmed, it is worth remembering: freedom was once prepared grain by grain, day by day, shoulder to shoulder.

***Smadar Sara Babchuck grew up in Israel and now resides in Newton Centre. She is a clinical social worker in a private practice and has three children and seven grandchildren.***

***Picture 1: Tomb of Rabbi Meir Ba'al HaNes; Picture 2: view of the Kinneret.***

# You Can't Have A Jewish Community Without Jewish Culture

***By Joey Baron***

In 2009, Jim Ball and I created the Boston Jewish Music Festival with a simple mission: to share great Jewish music in as many places as possible — storefronts and synagogues, nightclubs and day schools, concert halls and country clubs — across Greater Boston.

With that in mind, we presented events not only in expected hubs like Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Brookline, and Newton, but also in Framingham, Medford, Natick, Randolph, Sharon, Swampscott, Watertown, Westborough, and even Portsmouth and Nashua, NH.

We believed the diverse styles of Jewish music should be heard everywhere — not concentrated in a single neighborhood or institution. Just as importantly, we believed that decentralizing access to Jewish arts and culture was essential to reaching people — especially those with little or no affiliation with existing Jewish organizations.

Then came Covid. Attendance at cultural events of all kinds plummeted. While many organizations have since rebounded, new challenges have emerged. Federal funding for the arts is shrinking. Inflation is straining already limited nonprofit budgets. Jewish philanthropists are being asked to meet an expanding range of urgent needs all while supporting our many legacy institutions — longstanding pillars of the community — whose relevance some younger audiences are beginning to question.

If I've learned anything over the past 15 years as an advocate and presenter of Jewish culture, it's that access matters. People are far more likely to engage when cultural experiences are brought into their own communities, on their own terms. While centralization can create cost efficiencies, it can also substantially limit access. It's a strategy that does not effectively reach and welcome those who remain on the periphery of Jewish life.

Jewish organizations must find ways to demonstrate their relevance to newer generations whose focus is often universal, not tribal. Too often, institutions devote more energy to cultivating donors than to fully realizing their mission of serving community. To be fair, much of this is unavoidable in a time of constrained resources and competing demands. But that reality makes clarity of purpose even more essential.

If we want a vibrant, inclusive Jewish future, we cannot rely solely on where people used to gather. We need to meet people where they are — and bring our culture to them.

The richness of Jewish arts and culture can foster pride, meaning, and hope in a difficult time — but only if we are willing to share it more boldly, more creatively, and more widely. We owe it to the future of our Jewish community — and, in some small way, to the wider world as well.

***Joey Baron is a former advertising creative director and founder of the Boston Jewish Music Festival and Jewish Arts Collaborative. Now living in Northampton, Joey produces an annual multi-cultural collaborative event to foster understanding and create connections between diverse groups and organizations.***

# Single for Eleven Years

***By Rawan Osman***

When I was in my mid-30s, my sister and close friends suggested therapy. They thought I must be broken, carrying trauma from previous abusive relationships. I didn't think I needed therapy. I was satisfied with my independent life as a divorced single mother. My son was more than enough company.

We became best friends. We lived alone together in several countries, even if he only remembers glimpses beyond Germany. What he retains are the most enjoyable memories — Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus — and the most terrifying ones: the tanks he saw from my mother's 11th-floor balcony in Damascus in 2011, and the Syrian soldier who once pointed his rifle at me after he complimented my behind and I gave him the finger. That "civil" interaction went over my 3-year-old's head.

We can sit in the same room for hours without speaking, and we cherish that silence. We have heated debates. We laugh at the same *Seinfeld* and *Friends* jokes we've heard a hundred times. Why would I want a hairy and potentially aggressive man to disturb our peace?

Maybe I did need therapy.

To console the loving worriers, I offered a compromise: once a year, usually in August, I would go on 10 dates. If I found him, I was willing to explore a shared life. If not, I would try again the following year.

I had the craziest experiences. I was mindful of everyone's time. If my date was rude to the waiter, I left. If he spoke while chewing, I left. If he was more concerned about the price of the meal than enjoying it, I left. If he walked through doors before me, I ended it. There are details no dating app — no matter how sophisticated — can reveal. Only two men over five years made it past the first date. One I truly liked did not like me at all, especially not my political views.

Sometimes my son (who knows he may only call in case of emergency) would call anyway, offering me an excuse to leave. Wanting to help, he once sat down with me and drafted a list: nonsmoker, no tattoos, tall, multilingual, Zionist… until he stopped and said: "I know you're allergic to pets, but there are hypoallergenic dogs that can keep you company when I leave. Forget about finding 'the man' or adjust your expectations."

Since I began converting to Judaism, something has shifted.

Companionship, partnership, intimacy… what once felt optional has become deeply significant. In Judaism, partnership is an ontological completion. It is metaphysical architecture. Two souls are meant to build one home. Not as dependency, but as wholeness. What once felt irrelevant now feels absent. Not desperate, but missing — like a limb you forgot you had.

But how does one find "the partner"?

So many of my friends — men and women — are searching for love. Impressive profiles. Successful careers. Sharp minds. And still, frustration.

Through a Jewish lens, I am no longer willing to "interview candidates." My partner is not a job applicant. I want to meet him and recognize him. I want to marry someone I am madly in love with — not someone who merely fits criteria.

Where is he? I sense his existence; I just can't find him.

Then I listened to Rabbi Manis Friedman, who criticized those who meticulously plan and proactively build every project in their lives yet leave the most important one — finding their match — to coincidence.

That made me pause.

Maybe love is not meant to be hunted. But perhaps it is not meant to be left entirely to chance, either.

***Rawan Osman is a Syrian-born German activist and writer who serves as a visiting research and diplomacy fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs. A self-described "recovered antisemite" and a proud Zionist, she dedicated her career to advocating for normalization between Arab countries and Israel.***










# Reflections on the 2025 CJP Community Study

***By Shirley Nigri Farber***

I recently read portions of the 2025 Greater Boston Jewish Community Study published by Combined Jewish Philanthropies (https://ma.cjp.org/communitystudy2025) and found myself both encouraged by what is thriving and challenged by what isn't.

This study paints a portrait of a vibrant and multidimensional Jewish community — yet it also reveals significant gaps in awareness, connection, and participation that we cannot ignore.

One of the most striking findings is around awareness of available Jewish events and programs. The study reports that "1 in 3 said they were not aware 'at all' of Jewish events, activities, or programs in the Greater Boston area."

That's not simply a statistic — it's a call to rethink how our communal offerings are shared.

My experience reflects this gap. Many people want to participate in Jewish life but don't know what's happening or just want to attend one event without becoming a member. This was a central reason I founded *Shalom Magazine* in 2009: to help unite Jewish communities throughout Massachusetts and to inform people who might not be involved with formal organizations but still want to engage in Jewish culture and identity.

One thing was clear to me is that many Jews live in mixed religions family households or do not have means to financially contribute so have a hard time feeling welcomed at Jewish events.

Unlike synagogue newsletters or institutional mailings that mostly reach already-engaged families, Shalom Magazine is distributed free across the state — including in supermarkets, restaurants, and everyday public spaces frequented by Jews and non-Jews alike. This strategy expands awareness by placing Jewish content where people already live their daily lives.

The study also highlighted the strength of Jewish values around generosity: 80 percent of Jewish adults reported making charitable donations in the past year.This underscores a deep commitment to tzedakah and responsibility for one another.

Yet many individuals express a desire to give more than money — they want to volunteer, to help, to participate — but feel they are never asked. As the data shows, financial support remains high, but participation in non-financial

# Reflections on the 2025 CJP Community Study

roles is less tapped. If we want a thriving community, we must broaden our invitations for people to contribute time, talent, and energy, not only treasure. This way we will be able to include the less fortunate among us.

Perhaps the most concerning trend involves younger adults. The study finds significant generational differences in connection to Jewish life and communal belonging. While the report highlights that Jewish life remains important across ages, younger adults feel less connected to Jewish institutions than older peers.

This aligns with what many in our community have observed, especially in the wake of October 7: a portion of Jews between ages 18–29 are less engaged in Jewish or communal activities than before. These are not numbers we can dismiss — they reflect a broader shift in how younger Jews are experiencing identity, community, and meaning.

Most of the study's findings are not surprising. But they do demand a response. We can affirm what is working: our strong values around charity, our vibrant cultural traditions, and the deep roots that connect us across generations. The study notes that holiday observance and cultural practices remain widespread, with 86 percent of Jewish adults celebrating Jewish holidays throughout the year.

Yet we also must confront the realities that complicate connection for many: lack of awareness, uneven outreach, and divergent experiences among younger Jews.

If data is a portrait of who we are, then action is how we define who we will be.

I believe *Shalom Magazine* plays a role in that action — not by replacing communal institutions, but by connecting with people where they are, whether they walk into a bagel shop in Brookline or pick up groceries in Framingham. We reach people who might otherwise remain outside formal Jewish networks, and thanks to our advertisers, we do it without any cost to readers in print and online.

***Journalist Shirley Nigri Farber is the editor and publisher of Shalom Magazine. Born in Brazil, she moved to the Boston area in 2001. She also hosts and produces since 2005 the bilingual TV show "Bate Papo com Shirley" on Comcast.***

# *Faith Under Fire, A Memoir*


***By Scott Hayes***

I am a U.S. Army veteran, a father, and an American who believes deeply in faith, service and standing up for what is right even when it comes at great personal cost. My life has been shaped by a journey that began in Brookline, Mass., where I was raised in an Irish Catholic family. From a young age I was taught the importance of faith, duty and community. Those values led me to enlist in the United States Army, where I served for more than a decade on active duty.

During my military career I served in multiple deployments, including Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq. Those experiences shaped my understanding of the world and reinforced my belief in the importance of freedom, democracy and protecting those who cannot protect themselves. The military taught me discipline, resilience and loyalty to something greater than myself.

After leaving the Army, my life took a different path, but my commitment to service never left. Over time I developed a deep connection to the Jewish community and to the State of Israel. That connection was rooted in shared values: faith, perseverance, family and the belief that people must stand together in the face of hatred and violence.

My memoir, *Faith Under Fire*, tells the story of that journey. The book begins with my upbringing in Massachusetts and the lessons that shaped my character. It follows my years in the military and the experiences that forged my sense of duty and purpose. But the heart of the book focuses on a moment that tested everything I believed in.

In Sept. 2024, while attending a pro-Israel solidarity rally in Massachusetts, I became the victim of a violent attack. What followed was a series of events that turned my life upside down. Despite acting in self-defense, I found myself arrested, prosecuted and forced to fight a legal battle to clear my name.

*Faith Under Fire* is not just the story of a single incident. It is a story about courage, conviction and the cost of standing up for your beliefs in a deeply divided world. It explores themes of faith, justice, political bias and the importance of community support during life's darkest moments.

Ultimately, this book is about resilience. It is about refusing to be silenced, refusing to be intimidated and holding on to faith even when everything around you seems to be falling apart. My hope is that readers will see that standing for truth and principle is never easy, but it is always worth it.

# EVENTS

## Celebrating Jewish Plays

Shakespeare & Company has announced its 2026 season lineup at its Lenox, Massachusetts, campus, running from June 19 to Dec. 20. The season has been themed "Integrity & Absurdity" by artistic director Allyn Burrows, who describes storytelling as a balm for turbulent times.

"On the world stage, when integrity can be in short supply and absurdity is the order of the day, the collective fight or flight impulse can kick in," he said. "One can be allowed a bit of reflective diversion."

The season opens with Matthew Barber's *Fireflies* and includes Shakespeare classic — *Twelfth Night and Hamlet* — alongside contemporary works like Terrence McNally's *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* and the dark comedy *The Norwegians*. Returning favorites include *Circus & the Bard* and *Shake It Up: The Remix*, plus the return of *Celebrating Jewish Plays* in October. The season closes with a costumed reading of *Pride and Prejudice.*

Community programming highlights include a free Community Day on May 23, a Celebration of Life for the late founding artistic director Tina Packer on May 31, the 5th annual Plays in Process series, and the returning *Celebrating Jewish Plays* festival. Free Behind the Curtain talks and guided Merry Wanderers Tours round out the offerings.

Tickets and FLEXpass packages are on sale now at shakespeare.org.

### *Yom HaShoah Commemoration*

***Sunday, April 12 at 10 a.m.***

***The State Room, 60 State St., Boston***

The Greater Boston community will gather to commemorate *Yom HaShoah*, a day of remembrance for the 6 million Jews murdered during the Holocaust. Register in advance at jcrcboston.org/yh2026register. The event will conclude at the New England Holocaust Memorial in partnership with Boston 3G, Israeli American Council - IAC New England and the Greater Boston community.

***Tuesday, April 14 at 7 p.m., Chabad of Peabody***

Local author and journalist Julie Masis will present her book, *How My Grandfather Stole a Shoe and Survived the Holocaust in Ukraine*, in honor of *Yom HaShoah*. The book tells the story of Shlomo Masis, a longtime resident of Lynn and Peabody who lived to be 102 years old.

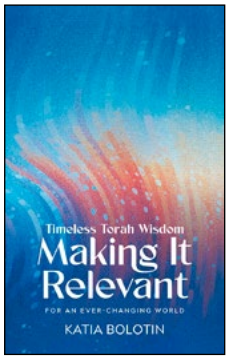
### *Cape Ann Jewish Cultural Festival*

***June 14, 1-3 p.m. at the Stage Fort Park, Gloucester***

The Festival celebrates Jewish life and culture through music, art, traditions and foods that Jewish people celebrate and enjoy. Free and open to the public. Details and tickets at https://www.capeannjewishfestival.com/

***More news and local events, check www.ShalomMA.com***

## Can the Torah Continue to be Relevant?




In a fast-changing world where many feel disconnected from meaning and direction, author and lecturer Katia Bolotin offers a compelling path back to relevance, purpose, and spiritual growth. Her new book, *Making It Relevant* (published by Mosaica Press), speaks to readers of all backgrounds — from seasoned learners to those just beginning their Torah journey.

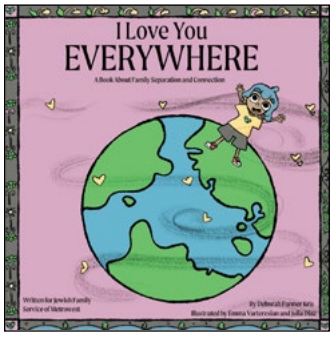
Katia Bolotin is known for teachings that are deeply rooted in Torah yet strikingly attuned to contemporary life. Her voice is warm, clear, and emotionally resonant and is shaped by lived experience rather than abstract theory. In addition to her Torah work, she is a pianist, songwriter, and composer of contemporary classical music, bringing creativity, empathy, and soul to everything she shares.

At the heart of *Making It Relevant* is a universal longing: we want our lives to matter, and we want our actions to matter. When relevance fades, living can feel mechanical. Purpose weakens, relationships stagnate, and meaning slowly slips away. This book offers a way back.

Structured around the weekly Torah portion, each chapter combines powerful insight with practical, actionable steps for growth. As Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz notes, the careful reader is rewarded not merely with a thoughtful "vort," but with meaningful guidance on how to grow as a Jew, and as a refined human being. That blend of intellectual depth and personal development is part of what makes the book so compelling.

Accessible, sincere, and grounded in real-life application, *Making It Relevant* is poised to become a trusted resource for parashah reflection, personal growth, and meaningful living in today's world.

## New Children's Book Offers Comfort During Family Separation




Jewish Family Service of Metrowest is sharing a new children's resource, I Love You Everywhere, created to support young children experiencing separation from a parent or caregiver — a circumstance that can be deeply unsettling and emotionally traumatic.

Separation — whether due to immigration enforcement, detention, divorce, chronic illness, incarceration or military deployment — can profoundly affect a child's sense of safety and attachment. I Love You Everywhere was designed to provide emotional grounding during these moments, reassuring children that love remains constant and present even when families are apart. For more information, visit JFSMW.org.

***For more events and news, please follow us on www.Facebook.com/shalommagazine or www.ShalomMA.com.***