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FREE

Magazine

ROSH HASHANAH / FALL 2026

EDITION 52

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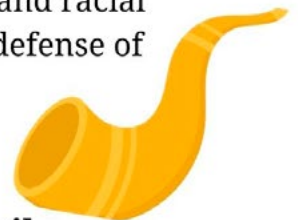
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A Time to Listen

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Gaby Wellman

Rosh Hashanah arrives once again as a season of reflection, a moment to look back on the year that has passed and consider who we want to be in the year ahead. For us, it is also a moment to evaluate what community really means.

We talk often about unity in the Jewish community, and rightly so. But unity is not the same as uniformity.

A truly robust collective is made up of individuals from widely varying backgrounds, income levels, life experiences, cultural traditions, and differing opinions, each carrying their own understanding of what it means to be Jewish. Sometimes leadership simply does not understand or know how to absorb those who are different. It is far easier to lecture, or instruct people on how things should be done, than it is to listen and learn.

Yet hearing each individual and welcoming them as they are is what makes a community whole. Think of a puzzle missing one piece: however beautiful the rest, it is never complete. When we stop trying to reshape everyone to our own standard and instead make room for people as they are, we stop losing pieces, and the picture comes together, united in its diversity.

In this edition, you will find a wonderful array of voices and contributors, each bringing something unique to these pages, and that variety is exactly the point. Various organizations shared photos of their activities, and members expressed their perspectives in writing.

As always, we are deeply grateful to our advertisers and supporters, who make it possible for *Shalom Magazine* to remain free and accessible, not only at Jewish institutions, but in local markets and everyday spaces, reaching individuals who might not otherwise feel they belong.

I would love to hear from you! Share your thoughts by emailing ShalomMA@msn.com.

Wishing you and your loved ones a Shanah Tovah.

Shirley Nigri Farber - Publisher



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OUR COMMUNITY

Billie Weiss, CJP



On May 27, Consul General Benjamin Sharoni joined the Boston Red Sox on the field at Fenway Park for the team's annual Jewish Heritage Celebration, an evening honoring Jewish life and heritage in New England.



Nursery School ceremony at Temple Shalom of Newton

שנה טובה ומתוקה

*Happy and Sweet
New Year*



*Jewish High Holiday 2026
schedule (all Jewish holidays
begin and end at sundown)
Elul 5786 - Tishrei 5787*

Rosh Hashanah

Begins sunset of *Friday, September 11*
Ends nightfall of *Sunday, September 13*
Shofar blowing on the morning of *September 13*
Tashlich recited *Sunday, September 13*
Fast of Gedalia is *Monday, September 14*
Kapparot is performed between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur

Begins sunset of *Sunday, September 20*
Ends nightfall of *Monday, September 21*
Yizkor is recited on Yom Kippur, *Monday, September 21*
Shofar blowing at the end of Yom Kippur

Sukkot

Begins sunset of *Friday, September 25*
Ends nightfall of *Friday, October 2*

Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah

Begins sunset of *Friday, October 2*
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SUMMER IN OUR COMMUNITY



The Israeli Women Organization celebrated 12 years of empowering, connecting, and bringing Israeli women in Greater Boston together with a joyful end-of-year celebration.



photo: Kim Soper

*Shabbat on the Lawn
at Temple Sinai of Sharon on July 10*



The Chabad Jewish Center of Cape Ann brought the community together on June 14 at Stage Fort Park for the Cape Ann Jewish Cultural Festival, celebrating Jewish culture, music, and food.



Leket Israel Founder Joseph Gitler met with Boston-area supporters in May to discuss addressing rising food insecurity in Israel.

L' Shanah Tovah
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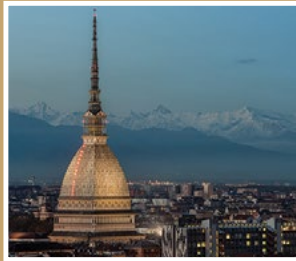
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THE SOUND AFTER THE BREAKING



By Yosef Rodrigues, Ph.D.

Rosh Hashanah is here, but let's be honest: the world feels anything but new. We're still watching wars unfold, families search for home, and Jewish communities brace for another year shadowed by antisemitism that refuses to fade. The noise is nonstop. We scroll, react, mourn, and scroll some more. In times like these, the very idea of a fresh start can feel almost laughable.

Judaism, however, has never mistaken renewal for naïveté.

The kabbalists saw creation as a story cracked open. In the Lurianic imagination, divine light blazed so fiercely that its vessels shattered (*shevirat ha-kelim*), and holiness scattered like confetti across the universe. We're born into that mess and handed the work of *tikkun*: to gather the fragments, to repair what's within our reach.

Brokenness isn't an accident; it's part of the blueprint.

Maybe that's why the shofar doesn't serenade us with a song for the New Year. Instead, it gives us fragments: *Tekiah's* bold call, *Shevarim's* broken sighs, *Teruah's* urgent staccato. And *Tekiah* again, as if to remind us that wholeness can return. We can hear wholeness; we hear it break; and we listen for the courage to believe in wholeness once again.

That shofar rhythm? It feels painfully true today. Hatred slips into everyday language. Suffering turns into a political point. People become faceless hashtags on the other side of a screen. Outrage is easier than compassion, and honestly, it's exhausting to keep caring when each day brings something else to fear, fight, or tune out.

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THE SOUND AFTER THE BREAKING

The real spiritual danger isn't just that the world is broken; it's that we might grow accustomed to it. Kabbalah dares us to resist that numbness. If sparks of the sacred are scattered everywhere, nothing wounded is without light. Someone we argue with is still a soul. A stranger's fear is still holy. A threatened community is more than a headline. A life (yours, mine, theirs) can never be a slogan.

Tikkun isn't a lofty promise that everything will be magically fixed. It starts with the piece of the world right in front of us.

Sometimes that fragment is huge: standing up to antisemitism, defending someone vulnerable, refusing to let anyone (Jewish or not) be dehumanized. Sometimes it's tiny: calling someone who's lonely, making time to visit someone in the hospital, praying for the sick, showing up for someone in pain, apologizing without an excuse, giving quietly, or choosing not to spread a rumor. None of these gestures will fix everything. We're simply asked not to walk away from the piece of the world that needs us.

Rosh Hashanah is also the day we crown G-d as King, a reminder that we're not the center of the universe. All year, we defend our opinions, dig in our heels, and clutch our grievances. The shofar cuts through all that noise. No arguments, no hashtags, no captions, just breath through a ram's horn, raw and real. That's the heart of this day.

And for a moment, everyone listens.

Perhaps that's what our broken world needs most: the courage to listen before we speak. Jewish hope doesn't mean pretending everything is fine. We've built a calendar from heartbreak, exile, and shattered tablets. And still, we bless wine, welcome children, build homes, study Torah, and wish each other sweetness. Why? Because despair can never be our theology. So this Rosh Hashanah, the question isn't whether the world is whole (it's not). The real question is: What kind of vessel am I becoming within it? What kind are we?

Can I hold grief without becoming bitter? Can I hold my convictions and still be humble? Can I remember without getting stuck in the past? Can I hold someone else's pain without first checking if it fits my worldview?

The vessels once shattered because they could not hold the light.

Our work in 5787 is quieter, maybe harder: to stretch our hearts and make more space for truth, compassion, courage, and one another.

Maybe, just maybe, that's how a little more light gets in. Maybe, just maybe, the sound after the breaking is how hope begins, and how a broken world finds its wholeness again.

Shanah Tovah!

Yosef Rodrigues, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Portuguese Studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He received rabbinic ordination from Machon Smicha Yeshiva-Institute of Halachah in New York.

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OUR COMMUNITY

2026 Maccabiah Games Israel



"Janet's Bar-B-Que Crew" at Temple Emunah's BBQ & Barekhu on June 19



Lee Popper, right, of Needham, won a bronze medal at the 2026 Maccabiah Games, competing alongside Michael Coakley.



IAC Magen Day for teens at Camp Kimama Halfmoon



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Clockwise: Lucy and Joe Press Food Pantry; Social programs for older adults in partnership with the Framingham Housing Authority; Providing support to newly arrived Haitian refugees; A Patient Navigator volunteer escorts a client to a medical appointment; A volunteer delivers a Passover seder box to a community member; Providing backpacks with school supplies to young, first generation students.

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Wishing You a Sweet and Healthy New Year!

*From the Board and Staff of
Jewish Family Service of Metrowest*

TU B'AV WHITE PARTY



Young Jewish professionals ages 21–35 celebrated Tu B'Av at the White Party on July 28, hosted by YJP Boston at the Owl's Nest Beer Garden along the Charles River Esplanade. For more photos, please visit yjpboston.org.



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NEWTON / MASSACHUSETTS



Rosh Hashanah: September 12 and 13, 9 a.m.
Yom Kippur Kol Nidre: September 20, 6 p.m.
Yom Kippur: September 21, 9 a.m.

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TU B'AV WHITE PARTY

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OUR COMMUNITY



The Rhode Island-Israel Collaborative (RIIC) hosted on July 30 an evening at the Carney Institute for Brain Science showcasing neurotechnology projects by Ben Gurion University and Brown University students. Rhode Island Commerce Secretary Stefan Pryor and Professor Oren Shriki joined community leaders to celebrate the students' innovation and international collaboration.



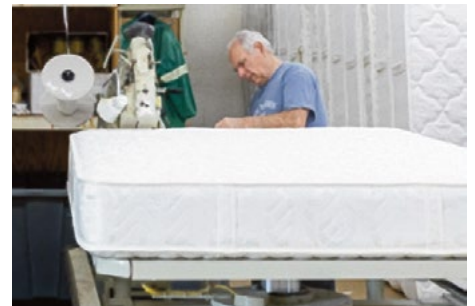
On May 19, Governor Healey celebrated Jewish American Heritage Month, joined by Massachusetts Jewish community leaders, Treasurer Goldberg, Senate President Spilka, and other administration officials. The event recognized the contributions of the Jewish community in Massachusetts. The Office of the Governor featured an art installation by Boston-based Jewish photographer Ilene Pearlman, whose collection shows the diversity of Jewish communities around the world.



On July 23, during Tisha B'Av, JALSA joined more than 50 organizations across Massachusetts to sponsor a rally at Boston City Hall Plaza opposing a recent Supreme Court decision affecting Temporary Protected Status for Haitian immigrants. Massachusetts is home to the third-largest Haitian community in the country. JALSA President and CEO Cindy Rowe spoke at the rally and emphasized that shared Jewish values compel us to "welcome the stranger" and "not stand idly by when the well-being of our neighbor is threatened."

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THE UNBROKEN SPIRIT OF PARISIAN JEWS

By Flora Goldenberg

*"Seeing your friends lying in a pool of blood?
You never get over something like this." - Jo Goldenberg*

Two armed men stepped inside my grandfather's restaurant, Chez Jo Goldenberg, in Paris' historic Le Marais district on Aug. 9, 1982. They did not come to sample our Ashkenazi specialties. They came to commit an act of terror.

Opening fire indiscriminately and throwing hand grenades into the dining room, the attackers killed six people, including our chef, and injured 22 others simply because the establishment was Jewish.

It was mid-August, the height of summer when native Parisians traditionally vacate the city and tourists fill the narrow, winding streets of Rue des Rosiers. Located at the heart of the Pletzl, the historic Yiddish quarter of Le Marais, our restaurant was bustling with patrons, including many Americans, when the attack unfolded during the lunch hour.

Warning signs had appeared the day before. Sensing something was wrong, my father, who was in his early 30s and running the restaurant while my grandfather was on vacation, noticed suspicious individuals scouting the surrounding streets. He immediately reported his concerns to the local police station.

Unbeknownst to him, authorities dispatched two undercover police officers to keep watch inside the restaurant the following day.

When two of the terrorists burst into the dining room carrying submachine guns and hand grenades, Mohamed, a dedicated worker at our restaurant, bravely approached them to dissuade them. They shot him first.

The attackers threw two grenades, one of which failed to explode, and continued firing. Hearing the chaos from the kitchen, where he was making his famous homemade mayonnaise, my father ran

Shana Tovah!

from

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THE UNBROKEN SPIRIT OF PARISIAN JEWS

upstairs to grab a small weapon. When he rushed back down to defend our customers, he found himself face-to-face with two men holding drawn handguns: the undercover officers.

Not knowing they were police, my father fired to protect the room, striking one officer in the leg. He was briefly detained by responding officers later that evening, but was quickly released given the chaotic circumstances.

Meanwhile, the assailants fled into the street, firing at bystanders as they escaped. A third accomplice had stayed outside to secure their getaway and prevent help from reaching the victims. Emergency crews arrived at a scene of total panic and devastation.

My grandfather, Jo Goldenberg, a Holocaust survivor who had already witnessed the horrors of the German occupation in Le Marais, rushed back from his country home an hour outside Paris. As soon as he arrived, he dropped to his knees in tears at the sight of the chaos.

Yet, defying the terror intended to intimidate Parisian Jews, my grandfather and father reopened the restaurant the very next day.

The three terrorists escaped the country, eventually settling in Norway, Jordan, and the West Bank. For decades, they lived unbothered. It was only after many years that one suspect was extradited from Norway to face trial in France.



More recently, French authorities negotiated a deal with the Palestinian Authority to extradite the suspect residing in the West Bank in exchange for formal French recognition of Palestinian statehood. For the survivors and families who gather annually for commemoration ceremonies, linking justice for this tragedy to political bargaining remains painful to accept.

My grandfather closed Chez Jo Goldenberg in 2006, weighed down by sadness since the attack. He passed away in 2014.

Decades later, my father and I still live and work in Le Marais. Though the attack changed him forever, my father remains resilient, refusing to leave the place he calls home. Every year, we gather to commemorate the victims, honored by visits from world leaders, international ministers, and presidents from the United States, Europe, and Israel who come to pay their respects.

Flora Goldenberg is an art historian and state-licensed Paris tour guide specializing in Jewish heritage, holding degrees from Sorbonne University. Descended from an Ashkenazi family continuously present in Paris for over a century, she and her team design private cultural tours across major institutions like the Louvre and the Holocaust Memorial. She can be reached at <https://jewish-paris-tours.com/> or Flora.goldenberg@gmail.com.

Photo: Copyright Flora Goldenberg.

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Hadassah National President Carol Ann Swartz with guest authors Jenna Blum and B.A. Shapiro at the Books on the Beach fundraiser in Newport, R.I., on Aug. 5.



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THE SHABBOS EFFECT AS A (DDD)

“DIVINE DIGITAL DETOX”

TORAH, NEUROSCIENCE, AND A TASTE OF THE WORLD TO COME

By Rus Devorah (Darcy) Wallen, LCSW, CIMHP

In an age of endless scrolling, fractured attention, and the quiet tyranny of constant availability, the idea of a “digital detox” has become a modern necessity. Yet long before we had language for dopamine loops, attentional fatigue, and cognitive overload, Torah had already established a recurring “sanctuary in time.”

Shabbos may be understood as an act of Divine foresight. The Creator – Whose ineffable name says that He, “Who Was, Is, and Will Be as One” – embedded into the structure of time a protected interval in which we step back from production, manipulation, and, in our era, the hypnotic pull of digital immersion. What can appear to be an ancient and antiquated day of rest reveals itself as a remarkably precise antidote to a distinctly modern dis-ease. This dis-ease is not necessarily pathology. It is, quite literally, a loss of ease.

Digital life trains the nervous system toward perpetual activation. Notifications function as intermittent rewards, drawing the brain into cycles of anticipation rather than fulfillment. Attention becomes fragmented, the prefrontal cortex repeatedly interrupted, and the ability to dwell deeply on anything begins to erode. Over time, continuous engagement can also affect stress levels, sleep, and the body’s capacity to settle into restoration. We grow accustomed to low-grade vigilance and forget what genuine rest feels like. I call this, “Technopathy” (If one were to imagine this phenomenon formally classified, it might read something like my mock ICD-10 diagnosis)



Against this background, Shabbos appears not only as a mitzvah, but as mercy.

The Torah describes the first Shabbos as both cessation and sanctification: “*Vayishbos... Vayikadeish*” – And He rested... and He sanctified” (Bereishis 2:2–3). Chazal call it *me'ein Olam Haba* – a foretaste of the world to come (Berachos 57b). *Shabbos* is therefore not merely a pause from labor; it is a weekly return to a more whole and properly ordered mode of being.

From a neuroscientific standpoint, this cessation is deeply regulatory. Removing the barrage of digital input interrupts reward-seeking loops and reduces the micro-activations of stress that keep the nervous system on edge. In simple terms, the brain begins to remember how to settle. But *Shabbos* is not only an emptying. It is a filling. Davening offers

structured attentional training. Unlike digitally captured attention, prayer directs awareness intentionally through rhythm, repetition, melody, and meaning. Rather than scattering the self, it gathers it. In Torah language, this reflects the concept of MeLeCh — *moach, lev, kaveid* — mind, heart, and drives — an inner hierarchy in which the mind gently governs emotional and instinctual life.

Even the walk to synagogue matters. In a compressed and sedentary digital culture, walking restores rhythm, embodiment, and presence. Unaccompanied by devices, it becomes more than transportation; it becomes regulation. Sometimes the simple act of walking — breathing, singing softly, moving at a human pace — quietly recalibrates the soul.

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“DIVINE DIGITAL DETOX”

TORAH, NEUROSCIENCE, AND A TASTE OF THE WORLD TO COME

Community further deepens the “Shabbos effect.” Face-to-face conversation, communal singing, shared meals, and unhurried presence counter the thin simulations of connection so often offered by screens. At a lively kiddush or a quiet Shabbos table, one encounters something increasingly rare: human beings fully with one another.

And when *Shabbos* is quieter, reading and Torah learning take center stage. Deep reading restores capacities that digital skimming weakens: attention, imagination, memory, and empathy. Torah learning adds yet another dimension. As Pirkei Avos teaches, “Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it.” This is the opposite of novelty-chasing. It is an apprenticeship in depth.

Each of these elements counters a weekday imbalance. Fragmentation is met with continuity. Hyperstimulation is met with gentle pleasure. Performative connection is replaced by genuine presence. Information overload yields to wisdom. Compulsion yields to choice. With a bit of whimsy, I’ve created this **Shabbos Intervention Digital Detox Tx Protocol**. (Disclaimer: For educational and inspirational purposes only)



Importantly, *Shabbos* does not reject the world; it reorders it. The problem is not technology itself, but inverted hierarchy — when the machine governs the human rather than the human directing the machine. *Shabbos* trains that hierarchy each week. It teaches that a person can step away, live without constant input, and reconnect to essence.

Chazal’s description of *Shabbos* as ‘a taste of the world to come’ resonates across every domain. Spiritually, it offers holiness. Psychologically, coherence. Neurologically, regulation. Existentially, a glimpse of life rightly aligned toward peace.

Each week, *Shabbos* gathers the scattered pieces of the person and returns the mind to depth, the nervous system to calm, and the soul to its source.

It reminds us that wholeness is not something we must invent someday. It is already given — one day at a time, one week at a time.

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>.

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THE ROSH HASHANAH SEDER AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL

By Rabbi Shlomo Pereira

Rooted in Talmudic teaching that advocated eating symbolic foods as positive omens, the Rosh Hashanah Seder was formalized as a structured ceremony in the Geonic period, associated especially with Hai Gaon. Sephardic communities elaborated the practice throughout the Mediterranean, while foods drawn from the biblical Seven Species and prayers for return to Zion tie the ritual firmly to the Land of Israel.

The tradition of a Rosh Hashanah Seder has its roots in the Talmud, tractate Horayot 12a, where the sage Abaye (c. 280-339 CE) established the theological foundation for symbolic food consumption. His often-cited teaching states that a person should be accustomed to eating on Rosh Hashanah squash, fenugreek beans, leeks, chard, and dates, since each of these grows quickly and serves as a positive omen for one's actions in the coming year. The choice of these specific foods was deliberate, based on Hebrew and Aramaic wordplay: *rubiya*, beans, evokes *yirbu*, may they increase, while *karti*, leeks, suggests *karet*, to cut off, expressing the hope to cut off Israel's enemies.

The transition from Talmudic concept to structured ceremony occurred during the Geonic period (c. 589-1038), an era during which the Geonim, the heads of the great Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbedita, served as the foremost religious and legal authorities of the Jewish world. Hai Gaon (939-1038), one of the last and most influential Jewish scholars of the period, maintained significant connections to the Land of Israel despite living in Babylonia. These connections notably influenced his religious innovations, including the Rosh Hashanah Seder tradition. Historical accounts describe how his students, after synagogue services, would bring him a basket of symbolic fruits over which he would recite biblical verses and special blessings, marking the evolution from simple food consumption to structured ritual ceremony.



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The practice spread throughout the Sephardic world during the medieval period, particularly flourishing in Ottoman Empire communities, North Africa, and the wider Mediterranean basin. Each community adapted the core Talmudic foods while adding local variations reflecting regional agriculture and cultural preference. The fourteenth-century legal code *Arba'ah Turim* (Four Rows), written by R. Yaakov ben Asher (1269–1343) in Toledo, provided detailed etymological explanations for the symbolic foods, helping standardize the practice across Sephardic communities. The same themes recur in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Prepared Table) of R. Yosef Karo (1488–1575), composed mostly in Safed in the sixteenth century.

The Rosh Hashanah Seder's connection to the Land of Israel operates on multiple levels. Most significantly, some of the traditional *simanim*, or omens, are drawn directly from the *Shivat HaMinim*, the Seven Species that the Torah identifies as characteristic of the Promised Land, "a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey (from dates)" (Deuteronomy 8:8). The pomegranate, the most iconic of the seder foods, exemplifies this connection: native to the Land of Israel, it carries deep symbolic weight, its numerous seeds, traditionally said to number 613, corresponding to the *mitzvot*, representing the hope to be "filled with *mitzvot* like a pomegranate is filled with seeds."

Beyond individual foods, the seder's thematic orientation toward Jerusalem reinforces the connection to Israel. Many of the *Yehi Ratson* (May it be Your will) prayers that accompany the symbolic

foods conclude with expressions of hope for collective redemption and restoration; aspirations centered on the return to and rebuilding of Jerusalem. Sephardic communities transformed the basic Talmudic framework into rich, varied ceremonial expressions: the Ottoman tradition developed elaborate liturgical poems to accompany the food blessings, North African and Turkish communities incorporated additional local foods with their own wordplay significance, Italian Sephardim created artistic seder plates reminiscent of Passover arrangements, and Eastern Mediterranean communities developed distinctive melodies for the prayers.

In the modern era, the Rosh Hashanah Seder has experienced a remarkable expansion beyond its traditional Sephardic boundaries. Its emphasis on hope, renewal, and connection to the Land of Israel, through both its agricultural foundations and its spiritual aspirations, resonates particularly in contemporary Jewish life, offering a tangible way for communities far removed in time and place from Geonic Babylonia and Tiberian Palestine to express an enduring bond with the Jewish homeland, the Land of Israel.

Sources and Further Reading

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DISABILITY RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY



By Samuel J. Levine

I always appreciate the opportunity to speak and write about the importance of neurodiversity acceptance and broader disability rights and inclusion in Jewish law and tradition. And yet, I am often a bit perplexed by — if not somewhat concerned about — the need to articulate these principles to the Jewish community.

After all, the mandate for inclusion is well known, grounded, for example, in foundational biblical sources depicting the creation of humans in God's image, the prescription to love your neighbor as yourself, and the instruction to teach each child in their own way. At the same time, I am, accordingly, quite puzzled by — and quite concerned about — the perception among many, growing out of an undeniable basic reality, that Jewish communities are not inclusive, in our shuls, in our schools, and beyond, particularly toward individuals with disabilities as well as their families.

In an effort to promote a greater sense of awareness, inclusion, and acceptance, I would like to suggest an answer to this puzzle, premised upon the popular phrase that two things can be true at once. That is, it need not prove contradictory for the Jewish community to be aware of the familiar sources in Jewish tradition that express the significance of inclusion, while also falling short of living up to the values embodied in those sources.

Perhaps paradoxically, it may be precisely the familiarity of these principles that causes them to be considered less imperative in the context of communal commitments. How many shuls have signs instructing us to love our neighbors as ourselves? How many schools declare their fidelity to educating each child in their own way? And of course, who could even contemplate disagreeing with these sentiments? It is possible, however, that these principles, and even

the biblical sources themselves, have taken on the status of slogans and nice ideas, rather than being properly recognized as urgent and obligatory communal priorities.

I posit that viewing these principles merely as sentiments is actually the root of the problem. Because we know how obvious it is that including everyone is the right thing to do, as a community, we do not dedicate the necessary effort or emphasis toward turning these sentiments into action. Instead, they remain slogans, truisms, or, at best, ideals that are categorized as a form of *chesed* — a nice thing to do, something extra when convenient, certainly something to be applauded and admired, but not an obligation or a priority.

In response to these attitudes, I recommend that the Jewish community take a closer look at these sources, our shared traditions, and their implications for communal action. Specifically, it is not enough to repeat the phrase “in God's image” without taking concrete steps respecting the Divine spark and inherent dignity of all human beings — and in turn, without each of us demonstrating the Divine image and inherent dignity within us — by making sure that everyone is included.

Similarly, our greatest teachers, from Hillel and Rabbi Akiva to Maimonides and Nachmanides, as well as countless others before and since, have eloquently explained that loving our neighbors as ourselves is not a slogan, but a command that is central to our communal and individual obligations. It seems implausible to claim that we are loving someone as ourselves if we fail to include that person, just as we, ourselves, would want to be included.

A close look at the source instructing us to teach a child in their own way reveals a more subtle and, on some levels, a more vital — if not troubling — lesson. References to this phrase rarely include the second part of the verse, which continues that if we teach a child according to their own way, when they are older they will not veer



Mary Winer (top) and family picking apples in Sharon, MA, 1920s.
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from what they are taught; they will not leave their community and their heritage behind.

The corollary to this verse compels us to acknowledge that if we do not teach a child in a manner that fits their own way of thinking — whether neurotypical or neurodivergent — the child will remain unwilling or unable to learn and to appreciate what they are being taught, a vulnerability that renders them prone to leaving the community — which has itself shown a refusal to accept them.

This lesson speaks more generally and more urgently to the need to promote greater acceptance and inclusion in the Jewish community. Beyond the slogans, beyond the *chesed*, and even beyond the biblical mandates, if we fail to actualize inclusion as a communal priority, ultimately, we pose the risk that those who have been marginalized and excluded, feeling that they have been rejected by the community, will reject the community as well. This is a lesson we ignore at our peril.

In closing, as we prepare for the High Holidays, it would be fitting to recall yet one more well-known source, the famous story of the Baal Shem Tov presiding over Yom Kippur prayers. According to many versions of the story, as the congregation reached the most solemn point of the services, a young boy cried out loudly, emitting an inarticulate sound that startled the congregants who surrounded him.

We do not know why the boy was unable to recite the Yom Kippur liturgy along with the rest of the congregation. Perhaps he was an individual with a learning disability, or maybe he was nonspeaking. Perhaps he was neurodivergent, or in the past he had been excluded or ostracized by the community that he was now desperately trying to rejoin.

The story continues with some of the congregants reacting viscerally, scolding the boy for behavior that constituted, in their view, an inexcusable breach of decorum, an inappropriate interruption of the holy services. The Baal Shem Tov took a different approach, explaining to the congregation that the boy's unique form of heartfelt prayer, an outward manifestation of the purity and sincerity within his soul, was especially dear to God.

As we reflect upon the story, we might ask ourselves which approach we would have taken. Can we honestly say that we do not exclude others because they are different? Or might we find that we sometimes act like the congregants who, out of their own sense of protocol, disregarded the authentic feelings and sensitivities of the young boy? Or at other times, do we notice ourselves placing our own comfort and convenience above the needs of those we do not devote the time or energy to understand?

As we enter the High Holidays, and throughout the year, let us commit to following in the path of the Baal Shem Tov, embracing differences, accepting and appreciating others for who they are, and including everyone as an integral part of the community.

Samuel J. Levine is Professor of Law & Director of Jewish Law Institute at Touro Law Center and author of Was Yosef on the Spectrum? Understanding Joseph Through Torah, Midrash, and Classical Jewish Sources. He has partnered with a number of organizations in the Boston area, including the Ruderman Family Foundation and Congregation Shirat Hayam, and he has delivered lectures at Harvard, Boston College, and Suffolk University.

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PROPHECY, POLITICS, AND RESPONSIBILITY: REFLECTION ON RABBI ARTHUR WASKOW'S LEGACY

By Robert Kaiser

I did not always agree with Rabbi Arthur Waskow. That fact does not diminish the significance of his life or the good he accomplished. On the contrary, it is precisely because he mattered that his ideas deserve careful and honest evaluation. Rabbi Waskow expanded the boundaries of Jewish public engagement. He helped revitalize the idea that Torah speaks not only to the synagogue but to the streets. For many Jews alienated from conventional institutions, he modeled a Judaism that was urgent and alive.

But recognizing this must not preclude critique. In evaluating his legacy and impact, we must wrestle with these tensions. One of the flaws of his theology, and that of his followers in Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, as well as Reconstructionism, is the unwillingness to distinguish between liberal allies and illiberal, antisemitic movements. Under his guidance, much of the left-leaning Jewish community adopted frameworks dismissive of Jewish concerns about the growing, deadly antisemitism all around us.

His legacy created a feeling of Jewish responsibility for the suffering of others rather than admitting the vulnerability of Jews themselves.

Waskow didn't understand Judaism's balance of universalism and particularism — a universal moral vision with a commitment to Jewish survival. The Torah insists on justice for the stranger, the widow and the orphan — but this must coexist with communal self-preservation.

Rabbi Waskow framed Jewish responsibility in terms of solidarity with other marginalized groups. In an era of civil rights struggles, anti-war activism and environmental crisis, this emphasis resonated deeply. His language of “prophetic Judaism” called Jews to moral

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courage. But he and his followers ultimately, and dangerously, downplayed threats — antisemitism, Islamic terrorism and regional hostility toward Israel — in favor of self-satisfying prophetic moral critiques.

Waskow and his followers ignored the reality—known long before the massacre of Oct. 7 — that progressive activism had become aligned with Islamic terrorist groups. Even after Waskow's ally groups publicly celebrated the rape and mass murder of Jewish women, children and babies, Waskow and his followers never recanted; they never spoke out against the communities that supported the death of our families.

Rabbi Waskow frequently invoked the language of prophecy. He understood his activism as a continuation of the ideals of Isaiah, Amos and Jeremiah: speaking truth to power, calling a nation to justice. Something indeed that I, too, believe in. But when contemporary political agendas are framed as God's prophetic voice, it becomes dangerous. In Tanakh, our *nevi'im* (prophets) are recognized reluctantly and often only posthumously. When modern movements like Aleph claim God's infallible prophetic word for their social and political platforms, the line between moral urgency and moral absolutism blurs dangerously.

Traditional forms of Judaism thrive not through charismatic singularity but through argument — Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai's model. But Waskow's charisma reached the point where the Jewish left treated him as almost infallible. Rabbi Shai Held of Hadar writes: "I did not always agree with the political positions Rabbi Arthur Waskow took, and I had significant reservations about people dubbing their own politics 'prophetic.' But I rarely, if ever, met another Jew so burning with spiritually-rooted moral fire quite like Arthur."

Sociologist Max Weber distinguished between charismatic authority

and institutional authority. Charismatic leaders inspire through personal magnetism. Rabbi Waskow was undeniably charismatic. His followers described him as spiritually electric. This makes people feel good. But it makes the rest of us concerned.

I do admire Rabbi Waskow's guts and convictions. He was certainly right to fight against oligarchy and authoritarianism. He was right to fight against misogyny and racism. Waskow was right to point out that other parts of organized Judaism failed to understand the importance of our teachings about caring for the environment. His integration of environmentalism with Jewish theology — eco-Judaism — is of great value.

Regarding omnicide — the horrifying danger of worldwide nuclear war — Waskow was a voice in the wilderness, one of the few rabbis trying to get more Jewish people to understand the issue. See his articles, "The Bomb & The Torah," and "The Parables of Flood, Ark, Rainbow."

Rabbi Arthur Waskow's legacy is neither simple nor one-dimensional. He expanded the Jewish imagination and challenged complacency. Yet serious legacies require serious evaluation. To wrestle with those tensions is not to diminish him. We honor someone by taking their ideas seriously enough to test them. An honorable Jewish response to his legacy is not unquestioning admiration nor dismissive rejection, but rigorous, principled debate. His positions, which I wish would have been more nuanced, certainly always came from beautiful Jewish intentions. May his memory be for a blessing.

Yerachmiel (Robert) Kaiser is a father, writer and advocate for science education from Boston's North Shore. He is administrator of the Facebook havurah, Coffeehouse Torah Talk, and the Merrimack Valley Havurah website.

Photo: Reb Arthur Waskow, Wikipedia.



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The Wedding Entertainer:

An Israeli Film Blending Laughter, Redemption, and Timeless Jewish Tradition

By Dr. Yosef P. Glassman

Israeli cinema has welcomed one of its most anticipated releases with *The Wedding Entertainer* (*The Tale of Moishe Badhan*). The heartfelt comedy-drama made its world premiere at the 2026 Tribeca Festival before screening at the Jerusalem Film Festival and the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, where audiences praised its emotional storytelling, memorable performances, and authentic portrayal of Jewish life. The film has quickly emerged as one of the year's most talked-about Israeli productions.

Written by Shuli Rand and directed by acclaimed filmmaker Gidi Dar, *The Wedding Entertainer* reunites the creative team behind *Ushpizin*, widely considered one of the most beloved Israeli films of the modern era. The production was led by producers Daniel Finkelman, Aviv Ben Shlush, Gidi Dar, and Chaya Amor, with executive producers Elon Gold, Moshe Edery, Jon Gordon, Charles-Edouard Gros, Jonathan Margolis, and Isaac Zablocki. Together, they assembled an international production that bridges Israeli storytelling with worldwide audiences.

Daniel Finkelman has rapidly become one of the leading Jewish filmmakers of his generation. Through Daniel Finkelman Films, he has built a reputation for producing artistically ambitious projects rooted in Jewish history, identity, and the universal human experience. His producing credits include the Independent Spirit Award-nominated *Menashe*, the acclaimed thriller *The Vigil*, *The Performance* starring Jeremy Piven and Robert Carlyle, the HBO Max and YES anthology series *One Day in October*, and the award-winning *Here I'm Alive*, which received a jury award at Tribeca 2026. His productions have premiered at Sundance, Berlin, Toronto, SXSW, and Tribeca, establishing him as a vital voice in contemporary independent cinema.

Set amid Jerusalem's colorful world of Hasidic weddings, the

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The Wedding Entertainer:

An Israeli Film Blending Laughter, Redemption, and Timeless Jewish Tradition

film follows Moishe Striker, once the city's most celebrated *badchan* — a traditional Jewish wedding entertainer whose music, wit, and storytelling brought joy to countless celebrations. After alcoholism destroys both his reputation and livelihood, Moishe embarks on a final attempt to earn enough money to marry off his beloved daughter. The film courageously explores a subject rarely addressed in Orthodox Jewish cinema: the complex relationship between Jewish culture, celebration, and alcohol, presenting addiction not with judgment, but with compassion, humor, and hope.

Shuli Rand once again delivers a masterful performance. Widely regarded as one of Israel's greatest actors, writers, and musicians, Rand earned the Ophir Award for *Ushpizin*, a landmark film that introduced authentic Orthodox Jewish life to audiences around the globe. His ability to combine spiritual depth with humor and vulnerability has made him one of Israeli cinema's most respected artists.

Adding another layer of authenticity, Rand stars opposite his wife, Tzofit Grant Rand, who portrays Moishe's devoted wife, Fruma. One of Israel's best-known television personalities and philanthropists, Grant Rand brings warmth and emotional sincerity to the role, making their on-screen relationship especially compelling.

American comedian Elon Gold, internationally recognized for his stand-up specials, television appearances, and uniquely Jewish humor, shines as Meshulam, Moishe's charismatic American rival. Veteran Israeli entertainer Tal Friedman — celebrated for decades as an actor, comedian, singer, and television personality — adds both comic brilliance and emotional depth as Moishe's lifelong friend.



Rising actress Malky Goldman delivers a breakout performance as Sarah Leah, Moishe's daughter, whose upcoming wedding becomes the catalyst for her father's journey toward redemption.

Gidi Dar once again demonstrates why he is among Israel's most accomplished directors. From the enduring success of *Ushpizin* to the visually groundbreaking *Legend of Destruction*, Dar has consistently crafted films that celebrate Jewish history, faith, and resilience while resonating with audiences far beyond Israel.

According to *Variety*, *The Wedding Entertainer* attracted significant international attention before its premiere when The Film Sales Company acquired worldwide sales rights, ensuring broad global distribution. The publication highlighted the film's universal appeal, noting that although it is deeply rooted in Jerusalem's Hasidic community, its themes of family, forgiveness, perseverance, and redemption transcend cultural boundaries.

With its celebrated cast, accomplished creative team, international distribution, and enthusiastic reception at Tribeca, Jerusalem, and San Francisco, *The Wedding Entertainer* stands poised to become another enduring classic of Israeli cinema — one that celebrates Jewish tradition while offering a moving story of faith, family, second chances, and hope.

Prior to becoming a physician, Dr. Yosef P. Glassman was an artist who published poetry and installed multiple painting and sculpture exhibits across the Boston area. Most recently, at the invitation of Daniel Finkelman Films, Dr. Glassman served as an executive producer for The Wedding Entertainer.

Photo: Yosef P. Glassman, Shuli Rand and Elon Gold



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HEALING AND REPAIR BEGIN WITH FORGIVENESS

By Rabbi Idan Irelander

I recently enjoyed the North Shore Music Theater's performance of Joseph and the *Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. I was impressed by the way the musical brought to life one of the most profound moments of transformation in the journey of our ancestors, of Jacob's (Israel's) sons, with a focus on his 11th son, Joseph.

Joseph's story is one of deep pain, transformation, and, ultimately, remarkable forgiveness and healthy progress, the very themes that perfectly capture the spirit of the High Holy Days. Joseph's decision to forgive his brothers, who sometime before, horrifically betrayed him, offers us a timeless lesson: Even in times of uncertainty, maintaining faith in personal reflection and relationship repair can provide strength and resilience. By letting go of his anger, Joseph broke the cycle of hurt, paving the way for healing and reconciliation and leading the way to a better future.

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for the future is "*atid*," which can be linked to "*yated*," meaning "peg" or "stake." A peg symbolizes a fixed, anchored point, at times used metaphorically to signify stability and grounding. Just as a tent, or sukkah, like the one we begin building each year immediately after the High Holy Days, is stabilized by its stakes (*yated*), our future (*atid*) depends on the foundations we lay today. As Joseph so powerfully taught us, when we forgive ourselves and those who seek our forgiveness, we lay the foundation for acknowledging our past flaws, seeking to rectify them, and opening the door to a better tomorrow.

Forgiveness, the central theme of our High Holy Days, is not about excusing wrongdoing or minimizing pain. It is about freeing ourselves from the burden of resentment and opening the door to healing. Joseph's forgiveness transformed his relationship with his brothers and ensured the survival of his family. More importantly, it set the stage for the unity and survival of the tribes of Israel, our family.



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HEALING AND REPAIR BEGIN WITH FORGIVENESS

In our own lives today, forgiveness can be equally transformative. It can allow us to break free from cycles of pain, creating space for growth and renewed relationships. But forgiveness is not always easy. It requires humility, empathy, and faith, the very qualities that Joseph exemplified and that we would benefit from striving to emulate.

Yet, we must not ease up on our vigilance. Unfortunately, we Jews are constantly reminded of the dangers we face. Almost daily, we encounter hateful speech and antisemitic rhetoric that too often translate into discriminatory and even violent acts directed against our people.

We are not duty-bound to forgive those who remain relentlessly cruel and dishonest, who smear the Jewish people and Israel, and who mischaracterize Zionism.

In our families, communities, and global relationships, we encounter situations in which forgiveness feels impossible. Perhaps someone has hurt us deeply, or we struggle with the moral dilemmas of conflict and justice. Joseph's story reminds us that forgiveness is not just a personal act, but a powerful force for transformation. By forgiving his brothers, Joseph paved the way for a future of unity and hope. He indirectly urged his brothers to be worthy of forgiveness. May today's enemies of Israel and the Jewish people be worthy of forgiveness one day.

As we contemplate the Days of Awe and begin the New Jewish Year 5787, may we find the strength to forgive, the faith to see the potential for good, and the courage to move forward, transforming our lives and our relationships for the better.

L'Shanah Tovah.

Rabbi/Cantor Idan Irelander is the founding rabbi of Congregation Ahavat Olam in North Andover, a post-denominational community embracing one Judaism. He received rabbinic ordination from the Academy for Jewish Religion.



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WHAT ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR TEACH US ABOUT STARTING OVER

By Colette A.M. Phillips

Twice a year, the Jewish calendar hands us something rare, a sanctioned pause. For the Jewish community, that pause arrives each Fall in the form of the High Holy Days — Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and ten days later, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Together they form the holiest stretch on the Jewish calendar, and whether or not you set foot in a synagogue, the wisdom embedded in these ten days has something to offer everyone.

For an observant Jew, Rosh Hashanah is not simply a celebration of a new year in the way January 1st is. It is the anniversary of creation itself, a moment to stand before G-d and take stock. The Shofar, the ram's horn sounded throughout the holiday, is meant to function almost like an alarm clock for the soul that says, wake up, pay attention, notice how you have been living.

It is followed by the Ten Days of Awe, a period of deep introspection that culminates in Yom Kippur, the day of fasting, prayer, and atonement, when Jews ask forgiveness from G-d, and just as importantly, from one another.

What strikes me most about this tradition is its insistence that forgiveness is not automatic. Judaism teaches that G-d can forgive sins committed against G-d, but sins committed against another person require that you go to that person directly, name what you did, and make it right. There is no shortcut. That single idea, that repair requires actual repair, not just good intentions, is one of the most useful spiritually transformative experiences I know of, religious or not. And this is where the holidays speak beyond the observant community. You do not need to keep kosher or fast on Yom Kippur to recognize the value of an annual reckoning. How many of us go an entire year without ever asking: Who did I hurt? What did I avoid? Where did I fall short of the person I meant to be? The High Holy Days have a built-in discipline that most of our calendars never force



upon us - a structured, unavoidable appointment with our own conscience.

There is also something deeply human in the balance these holidays strike between accountability and renewal. This is not a season of shame. It is a season of honest reckoning followed by genuine release. Once Yom Kippur ends, the slate is understood to be wiped clean. You do not carry last year's failures into the new one. You set intentions, you recommit, and you move forward lighter.

That rhythm of reflect, repair, release, renew, is something

I wish every person, regardless of their faith or none, could experience.

This past year I have been tested personally as have so many others. The increase of antisemitism here in Massachusetts and around the world, the cruelty and vitriol and violent assault on Jews, immigrants and Blacks and those considered to be "other," have left many of us exhausted and has tested our capacity for grace toward one another. I am truly grateful that there is a tradition in the Jewish faith that insists, on a fixed date, that we do the work of forgiveness rather than simply hoping it happens on its own. Not forgiveness as forgetting, but forgiveness as a discipline, practiced, structured, and renewed annually.

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, I find myself thinking less about ritual and more about rhythm. We all need moments that force us to stop, look honestly at the year behind us, and choose intentionally and deliberately who we want to be in the one ahead. Judaism has built an entire architecture around that need. My wish is that the rest of the world would take a room in it.

L'shanah Tovah! Here's to a sweet, prosperous, peaceful and joyous New Year.

Colette Phillips is CEO and founder of Colette Phillips Communications Inc. and Get Connected! She is the author of The Includers: The 7 Traits of Culturally Savvy Anti-Racist Leaders.

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CREATING A WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY



By Rabbi Sam Seicol

For the past half-century, the number of Jewish-defined homes among intermarried families has increased significantly, according to a 2020 Pew Research Center study. Over half of all non-Orthodox families include a parent who was not born Jewish.

In a significant number of these households, the non-Jewish parent has not converted but remains supportive of and invested in raising the child with a Jewish identity. This percentage increases when a family affiliates with a congregation or an identified Jewish community system.

In Reform, Reconstructionist, and several other congregations, children from families committed to a Jewish home and identity are fully welcomed. No special requirements are enforced to prove their Jewish identity. At the time of a B'Mitzvah, the child is celebrated regardless of which parent is Jewish. This has been standard practice in the Reform movement since 1983.

In the Conservative movement, the policy dictates that children of a Jewish mother are fully welcomed to celebrate a B'Mitzvah. However, children of a Jewish father and a mother who has not converted under Conservative policy are not treated as equal, fully welcomed members of the community. Before a B'Mitzvah, these students are required to undergo a conversion to celebrate with the community. Some Conservative congregations have substituted an affirmation before a *beit din* (rabbinical court) and immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) in place of a standard conversion certificate. Some Conservative rabbis have argued that this requirement does not impose a burden on intermarried members.

A growing number of social media posts on this topic, however, seem to indicate increasing dissatisfaction with this approach. Some families accept the distinction reluctantly, while others seek alternatives, including private B'Mitzvah ceremonies or foregoing the ritual entirely.

No matter how open and intentionally welcoming a rabbi and congregation in a Conservative setting may be, a risk remains of not being fully inclusive. This is especially true for families who were active in a patrilineal-affirming community and later moved to an area where a Conservative congregation is their only option for affiliation.

Adopting a patrilineal policy is not the only way to create a Jewish community that is explicitly and implicitly inclusive. Instead, the B'Mitzvah process can be expanded beyond leading a religious service. Accepting the mantle of *mitzvot* can become a truly transformational experience.

As part of their preparation, B'Mitzvah students can study both the history and modern practices of the *mikveh*. Handwashing before meals or before participating in rituals like a Passover Seder can also be taught as a form of mini-*mikveh* — a recognition of small life transitions. Formal immersion in a mikveh marks major life milestones.

As B'Mitzvah students prepare to acknowledge and celebrate their first major life transition on their own behalf, a mikveh immersion accompanied by an affirmation before a *beit din* and a certificate can deepen their growth from a *mitzvah*-dependent child into a recognized Jewish adult. If adopted as a universal class ritual, this process could eliminate any stigma attached to children of non-Jewish mothers.

An increasing number of Jewish communities have established *mikvaot* that operate outside Orthodox authority and welcome all Jews. Other communities utilize suitable natural bodies of “living waters.” In the greater Boston area, the community is fortunate to have access to Mayyim Hayyim, an independent *mikveh* open to the entire Jewish community. Using a *mikveh* alongside an affirmation process represents a major step toward removing perceived barriers to full inclusion in congregational life. Ultimately, this practice can foster deeper bonding among students and add greater meaning to the B'Mitzvah experience.

Rabbi Sam Seicol dedicated 33 years to healthcare chaplaincy and spent 10 years providing interim leadership to congregations and Jewish institutions in transition. Now retired, he lives in Brookline.

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The Consulate General of Israel to New England celebrated Israel's 78th Independence Day with innovators, academics, athletes, public officials, community leaders, and many friends from across New England who have helped make the Israel-New England relationship as strong as it is today.

Massachusetts Secretary of Economic Development Eric Paley delivered an impactful keynote address, speaking to the deep bonds between Israel and Massachusetts and the exciting future of the Israel-Massachusetts innovation partnership.

Cross-border collaboration between Israel and New England is expanding, and the momentum is palpable, from Sheba Medical Center's new ARC Landing Boston innovation accelerator, to a new medical collaboration between Brown University and Tel Aviv University, to Israeli and New England companies finding partners in each other's markets and beyond.

This year carries added meaning. As America celebrates 250 years of independence, the shared values and interests binding our two nations feel as relevant and as vital as ever.

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ARC LANDING BOSTON



Nicole Loeb, Brightside Media

ARC Landing Boston, the first U.S. hub of Israel's Sheba Medical Center, the Middle East's largest hospital and 7th best in the world according to *Newsweek*, officially opened in March.

In partnership with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Sheba established ARC Landing Boston as a soft-landing platform for global healthtech companies entering the U.S. market, giving them structured access to clinical validation, regulatory guidance, investment readiness support, and Massachusetts health systems.

Since arriving in Boston in March, six exceptional healthcare startups developing technologies across diagnostics, digital health, and AI-powered care have significantly advanced their U.S. market-entry programs through ARC and its global network of over 300 healthcare institutions.

ARC Landing Boston is creating high-quality jobs, attracting international companies and capital to Massachusetts, and further cementing the region's position as a global leader in healthcare innovation. By connecting global startups directly with local providers, investors, and institutions, ARC Landing Boston is strengthening one of Massachusetts' most critical and fast-growing sectors.

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ONE PEOPLE, MANY VOICES: JEWISH UNITY DOES NOT REQUIRE JEWISH UNIFORMITY

By George Garcia

On Rosh Hashanah, the shofar will sound throughout Massachusetts. It will be heard in synagogues, on college campuses, and in community centers across the Commonwealth. The melodies will differ, as will the Hebrew pronunciations, seating arrangements, and styles of prayer. Yet the call of the shofar belongs to all of us.

We frequently speak about Jewish unity, especially at a time of rising antisemitism and growing polarization. But too often, what we call unity is really a desire for uniformity. We want other Jews to pray like us, observe like us, vote like us, or understand Judaism through the same lens we do. When they do not, disagreement can quickly become dismissal. We tell ourselves that they are not observant enough, or that they are too religious, or even that their synagogue is not really Jewish.

Our differences are real and should not be ignored. An Orthodox synagogue can remain Orthodox. A Reform congregation can remain Reform. Each community should be able to preserve its beliefs, practices, and traditions.

Jewish unity does not require anyone to surrender their deeply held convictions. It asks us to hold those convictions without contempt. We should be able to say, "I cannot accept this practice within my religious framework," without saying, "You have no place among the Jewish people."

Another community's melody does not silence our own. I have had the pleasure of being invited into Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox spaces. Not every setting has felt equally spiritually aligned for me, but finding my place in Jewish practice does not require me to deny another Jewish community's traditions or connection.

Respect does not require theological agreement. Jewish diversity is not a modern problem that needs to be solved; it has always been part of our story. Across continents and generations, Jewish communities carried the same covenant through different languages, customs, melodies, and historical experiences.

We have always been one people with diverse traditions. The High Holy Days ask us to look honestly at how we treat those whose practices differ from our own. On Yom Kippur, we confess in the plural: *Ashamnu. Bagadnu*. We have sinned. We have betrayed. We do not say, "They have sinned." We say, "We have sinned."

Perhaps one of the sins requiring *teshuvah* is the way we speak about other Jews. Have we mocked customs we did not understand? Have we confused unfamiliarity with illegitimacy? Have we made another Jew feel that there was no place for them within the Jewish "we"?

Massachusetts is home to an extraordinary range of Jewish communities, yet many of us can spend years in Jewish life without meaningfully encountering people outside our own circles. Real unity requires relationships and cooperation even within our own Jewish space. We may disagree about theology, politics, ritual, and religious authority, but we can still stand together against antisemitism, protect our institutions, support vulnerable families, strengthen Jewish education, and help sustain the next generation.

Our true test of Jewish unity is not whether we appear together in a photograph. It is whether we show up for one another when it matters. This year, each of us can take a step beyond our familiar circle. We can visit another congregation, learn from a teacher whose background differs from ours, or share a meal with Jews whose customs are unfamiliar. The goal is not to evaluate them or correct them. The goal is to listen.

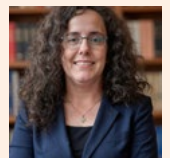
As we start the Jewish New Year, this Rosh Hashanah, the shofar will sound. Its call asks us to awaken from the belief that the only authentic Jewish story is our own. We do not need a single melody to be one people. We need the humility to hear one another, the restraint to disagree without cruelty, and the courage to remain responsible for one another.

George Garcia is a Cuban - Spanish Jew and member of the Beit Sasson Sephardic Congregation of Newton.



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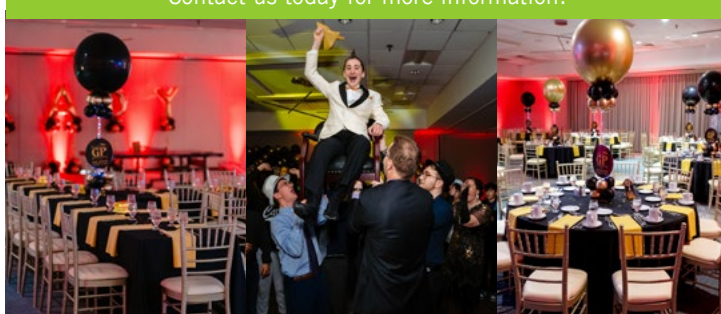
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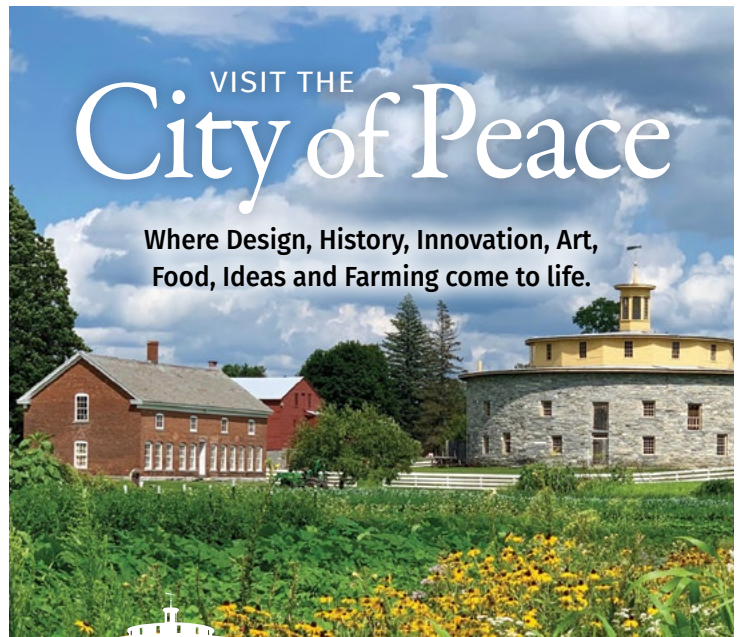
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WHAT PALESTINIAN PUBLIC OPINION SAYS ABOUT THE FUTURE

By Steven Schimmel

Public opinion polling cannot tell us everything about a society, particularly one experiencing the upheaval of war. But as it pertains to the Palestinian perspective, it provides an important window into attitudes Western observers sometimes seem reluctant to confront — and serves as a barometer of how far we have to go before we may see peace.

Palestinian polling data after Oct. 7 is especially revealing.

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research has repeatedly asked Palestinians whether Hamas was correct to launch its Oct. 7 attack. In December 2023, 72 percent said the decision was correct, including 82 percent in the West Bank and 57 percent in Gaza. In March 2024, the figure was 71 percent. In June, it was 67 percent. By September, it had fallen to 54 percent.

Even two years later, in October 2025, 53 percent still said Hamas's decision had been correct. In recent polls, however, a majority of Palestinians now say they prefer a two-state solution. This should not be mistaken for broad acceptance of Israel or normalization with it — but it is a possible opening. Let's be clear-eyed: 88 percent still oppose Arab normalization with Israel, and even if Israel recognized a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, 61 percent would continue to oppose normalization. The notable exception is Gaza, where half would accept normalization under those conditions.

Essentially, large portions of Palestinian society continue to oppose Israel, and a sizable number believe Hamas was correct to launch the operation that produced the bloodiest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Across the broader region, recent Arab Opinion Index polling found that 87 percent of Arabs opposed their countries recognizing Israel, while only 6 percent supported recognition.

That raises a much more difficult question: What must happen for lasting peace to become possible?

History provides both a warning and hope.

German citizens did not wholly abandon Nazism at the end of World War II. Allied polling conducted immediately after the war found that nearly half of Germans continued to describe National Socialism as a good idea that had simply been badly carried out. Japan likewise did not instantaneously abandon the nationalism and militarism that had fueled the Pacific War.

Yet Germany and Japan ultimately became peaceful democracies and allies of the nations they had fought. How did that happen?

What followed V-E Day and V-J Day was not simply an end to the shooting. Germany underwent denazification and democratization; Japan underwent sweeping demilitarization and democratization. Institutions were rebuilt, education was reformed, militarism was dismantled, democratic structures took root, and new generations grew up under fundamentally different systems.

However, Hamas — along with Hezbollah, the IRGC, and their proxies — has not yet been decisively defeated and, as of this writing, remains intransigent. Despite enormous damage to the leadership

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WHAT PALESTINIAN PUBLIC OPINION SAYS ABOUT THE FUTURE

and military capabilities of this axis against Israel, it continues to exist, retains influence, and portrays Oct. 7 as resistance rather than a catastrophic failure.

These regional foes will ultimately need their own process of “de-Hamasification,” deradicalization, and “de-Anti-Zionism”— a massive undertaking to make reality.

The analogy is imperfect. Palestinians are not Germans or Japanese, and Hamas is not Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan. But the underlying lesson remains relevant: lasting peace requires changing institutions, reforming education, rejecting the glorification of terrorism and violence, developing credible alternative leadership, and offering a new generation a different vision for its future.

And that is where history offers hope.

Germany and Japan demonstrate that political cultures are not permanent. Societies that once embraced catastrophic ideologies can change dramatically.

But the sequence matters. Military defeat was followed by institutional transformation, and institutional transformation eventually made reconciliation possible.

If the region is ever to live in peace, military defeat will only be the first step of the process, as daunting as that reality is to confront.

Steven Schimmel is executive director, Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts. The opinions and views expressed in this article do not represent the opinions and views of Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts or its members.



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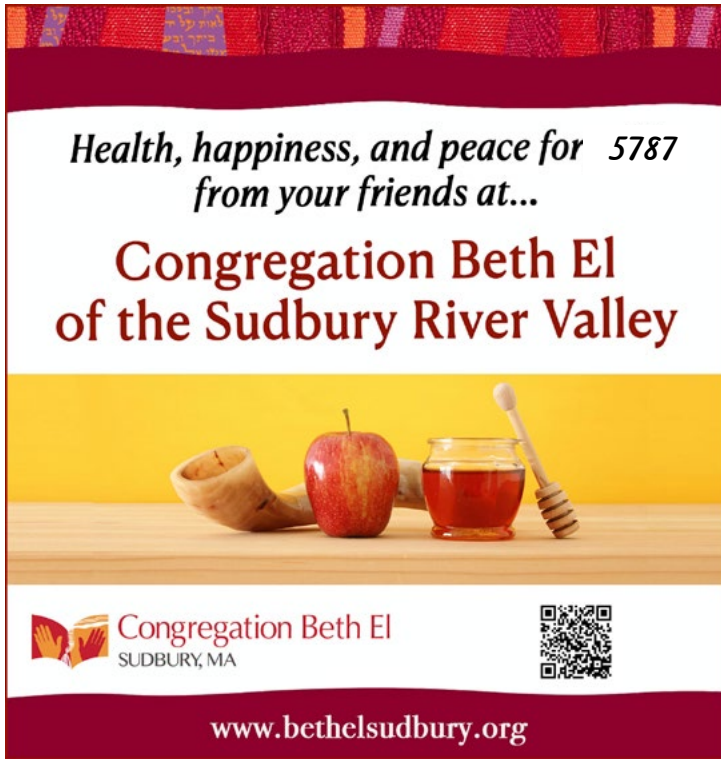
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*Chuppah created by Beth El
member Lisa Breit*

By Alice Waugh

Members of Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley manifest their Judaism through religious observance, social action, and services and events that incorporate many styles of music. But it is the art that makes the spirit of the congregation most visible.

Several years ago, two congregants thought it would be inspiring to have Jewish-related artworks by artists in the congregation decorating the halls of Beth El, so they put out a call for submissions and mounted the first show in 2021. There have been several exhibits since then, each with a Jewish theme, such as “*Otot u’Mofim — Signs and Wonders: Seeing the Extraordinary in the Everyday*” and “*V’Hayita Ach Sameach: You Shall Be Joyful! Finding Jewish Joy in Challenging Times.*”

The art on display takes many forms, including quilts, sculptures, paintings, photographs, prints and collages. It has drawn admiration from members as well as visitors who walk by the pieces and read the accompanying artists’ statements on their way to the sanctuary.

Almost all of the artwork that has been displayed is by adult members of Beth El, but the “*V’Hayita Ach Sameach: You Shall Be Joyful!*” exhibit featured a multigenerational project. Each child in the religious school made a quilt square representing one of the holy days or festivals throughout the Jewish year, which were then sewn into an heirloom calendar quilt.

The quilt is now on permanent display in the school wing. The theme of the next show, which will open in October 2026 around the time of Sukkot, will be “*Pe’ot S’dotenu: Sharing the Corners of Our Fields — Practicing Gratitude and Generosity.*” The exhibits have drawn Beth El artists closer to each other and the rest of the congregation as they discuss and share their work. “Besides the beauty, enjoyment and inspiration that the art show provides, each viewer brings a unique perspective or interpretation, which allows us to know each other better as we appreciate the work,” says Lisa Breit, an art quilter and one of the effort’s organizers.

For more, visit bethelsudbury.org and click on “Jewish Life.”



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EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO BEGIN THE YEAR WITH CONFIDENCE

By Lino Covarrubias

Each fall, thousands of children across Greater Boston return to school carrying more than backpacks. They carry hopes for a successful year, excitement about new opportunities, and, for many families, the weight of financial uncertainty.

In a region where the cost of living continues to outpace household incomes, preparing for the school year has become increasingly difficult. Beyond notebooks and pencils, families must purchase backpacks, calculators, headphones, clothing, and other supplies that have become essential for classroom success. For many, these expenses compete with rent, groceries, transportation, and healthcare.

A child should never begin the school year feeling unprepared simply because their family is facing financial hardship.

That is why, each year, Jewish Family Service of Metrowest brings together volunteers, community partners, and donors through our annual *Build a Backpack* initiative. Together, we provide fully stocked backpacks to children in our region, ensuring they enter their classrooms ready to learn with confidence and dignity.

This effort is not simply about school supplies.

It is about opportunity.

Each backpack represents:

- A family experiencing less financial stress;
- A child beginning the school year with confidence;
- A community investing in educational success;
- And a reminder that every child deserves to feel prepared, included, and valued.

This year, volunteers gathered at Morse Institute Library, Temple Shir Tikva, and The Rashi School to assemble backpacks for local children and families. Across these three locations, hundreds of community members came together with a shared purpose: ensuring that every child begins the school year equipped to succeed.

What made these events especially meaningful was that they reflected the strength of partnerships that extend well beyond a single day of service.

Temple Shir Tikva and The Rashi School have long been valued collaborative partners of Jewish Family Service of Metrowest, each sharing a commitment to strengthening our community through service, learning, and leadership. At The Rashi School, that partnership extends beyond this annual initiative through the JFS/Rashi Learning and Leadership Council, which brings together students and JFS leaders to explore community needs, Jewish values, and meaningful opportunities for service. Together, these relationships bring families, students, congregations, civic organizations, and volunteers together around a common purpose.

These gatherings accomplish more than assembling backpacks. They strengthen relationships, cultivate volunteerism, and demonstrate how our Jewish institutions can work together to put our shared values into action.

As we welcome Rosh Hashanah, we are reminded that a new year is also a new beginning. Jewish tradition teaches us that repairing the world is not accomplished through grand gestures alone, but through countless acts of kindness that affirm the dignity of another person.

For one child, a backpack may seem like a simple gift.

For that child's family, it can represent relief.

For our community, it is a tangible expression of tzedakah, tikkun olam, and our shared responsibility for one another.

As we enter the New Year, may we continue building a community where every child begins the school year knowing they are supported, every family knows they are not alone, and every act of generosity helps create a future filled with hope.

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





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BEYOND THE ALGORITHM: WHAT WINNING ONLINE REALLY LOOKS LIKE

As social media increasingly shapes how young people encounter Israel, the challenge is not simply to be heard, but to communicate effectively. I spoke with Jake Donnelly, CAMERA's Social Media Content Creator focused on K-12 & Higher Education, about what serious online advocacy demands and how to pursue impact without losing perspective.

What are you trying to accomplish through CAMERA's new push into social media?

Our goal is to translate CAMERA's gold-standard research into content that resonates with younger audiences where they already spend their time. By using short-form video, humor, and pop culture, we help these audiences understand the depth and breadth of anti-Israel media bias and propaganda.

When trying to reach audiences that have likely already been (over) exposed to more hostile anti-Israel perspectives, a better approach may be to just present those ideologues' words with minimal commentary, insert one or two pointed leading questions, and then let people judge for themselves which "side" is more trustworthy.

That's just one method. The facts tend to stay the same, but each demographic requires its own unique engagement strategy. With middle schoolers, for instance, I might use a *Billy Madison* clip to explain why they should care when a prominent children's author claims that Zionists do not have souls.

By tailoring unique strategies to target audiences, CAMERA — and the broader fight for truth about Israel — gains a communicative edge.

How should our numerical disadvantage online change how we define success?

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BEYOND THE ALGORITHM: WHAT WINNING ONLINE REALLY LOOKS LIKE

You have to redefine what success looks like. Jews are a demographic minority. Neither the algorithms nor the numbers favor you. If you go toe to toe with anti-Israel influencers like Dave Smith or Mehdi Hasan, you probably won't "win" by getting more likes, impressions, or reposts.

What you can do is focus on forcing them to confront the reality of what they say and what they believe. At CAMERA, we make it clear what it means when students are chanting "From the River to the Sea." It's always been an existential threat, either as a call to ethnically cleanse Jews from Israel, or as an explicit incitement to violence. So don't worry about getting ratio'd; what's important is that we keep injecting these corners of public discourse with the kind of honesty and accuracy that platforms like X and TikTok desperately need.

Social media moves fast, but the internet remembers. Most viral moments disappear quickly. Strong arguments don't. Even if you don't change minds immediately, you're creating a public record that other people will find weeks, months, or years later. That's a different kind of victory, and one that's often much more valuable.

What earns trust online, and what responsibility comes with it?

Trust starts with believing the person behind the content is real. Younger audiences are surrounded by curated personalities, so anything manufactured stands out. That is what I mean by radical authenticity: the person people see online should be the person they meet in real life.

Authenticity gets people to listen. But it does not make you right. To earn trust, you can't use that connection to tell people only what they already want to hear. Show how you reached your conclusions, distinguish between what you know and what you think, and never ask your audience to outsource its judgment to you.

Which misconception about Israel is easiest to correct?

The apartheid slur is easier to challenge than people expect, but I've achieved more success when I steelman critics' arguments. When someone points to military courts, movement restrictions, or Palestinians in the disputed territories not voting in Israeli elections, it isn't necessary to deny those realities. These are the consequences of an unresolved territorial and security conflict, not a racial system governing Israeli society. Since Arab citizens of Israel have equal political and civil rights, the accusation essentially relies on confusing people about what privileges and protections countries owe to their own citizens — of all backgrounds — as opposed to non-citizens.

Ultimately, what makes CAMERA valuable is the way it brings creativity and rigor together. Its research gives us the confidence to experiment, communicate like real people, and meet younger audiences where they are without lowering our standards. That combination gives us a real chance to change how people understand Israel.

Seth B. Mendel is the Campus Editor for CAMERA. Opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of CAMERA.



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MUSIC, THE HOLOCAUST, AND TWO AMERICAN GIs



*Performance of the St. Ottilien Displaced
 Persons Orchestra
 (US Holocaust Memorial Museum)*

By Prof. John J. Michalczyk

Robert (“Bob”) Hilliard, a U.S. Army veteran of World War II, at age 101, recently reissued his book on his experiences surrounding the delay of U.S. government assistance to the dying survivors of the Holocaust, primarily from Dachau and Buchenwald. His original work, *Surviving the Americans: The Continued Struggle of the Jews After Liberation*, explores what he views as the genocidal neglect of the Jews through Army officials’ desire to end the war in Europe before coming to the aid of survivors who were dying day by day from malnutrition and mistreatment in the camps. It all started with Bob’s journalistic work for the U.S. Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* when he attended a liberation concert by Holocaust survivors at the St. Ottilien monastery in Bavaria on May 27, 1945.

Dressed in their concentration camp clothes, the emaciated survivors performed the music of Grieg, Bizet, and “Kol Nidre,” with lead performer Henny Durmashkin singing “*Ich Vil a Heim*” (“I Want to See My Home Again”) in Yiddish. Moved by this event, the Purple Heart veteran of the Battle of the Bulge attempted to hide his tears. The Jewish Displaced Persons Orchestra of St. Ottilien touched Bob deeply, as he began to understand what the survivors had endured over the previous several years.

While attempting to rescue the remaining Jews at the monastery by sending countless letters with his GI friend Ed Herman to the American public and government officials to request emergency assistance, Hilliard provided the necessary publicity to keep the music alive. Through the assistance of Hilliard and Herman, our Etoile Productions film crew was able to trace the origins of the orchestra from the Vilna Ghetto to St. Ottilien in 1945, through to its dissolution in 1949. By that time, the musicians were emigrating to Israel and America.

The orchestra Bob Hilliard heard performing in May 1945 was the St. Ottilien Jewish Orchestra, later called the Ex-Concentration Camp Orchestra. Eventually, they referred to themselves as *She’arit ha-Pletah*, meaning in Hebrew “The Surviving Remnant.” The orchestra comprised musicians who had already played and sung in various settings from Vilna to Warsaw. Michael (Misha) Hofmekler conducted the orchestra, with David Arben and Max Beker on violin.

MUSIC, THE HOLOCAUST, AND TWO AMERICAN GIs

The sisters Henny and Fanny Durmashkin used their voices to offer a type of spiritual resistance. As manager, Jascha Gurewitz organized performances throughout Bavaria in displaced persons camps and beyond.

Our documentary, *Creating Harmony*, describes how some of the musicians, like Henny Durmashkin, had to sing for the SS at age 15. Once the orchestra settled in, it provided music for patients at St. Ottilien, and later across Germany, for David Ben-Gurion, and for the Nuremberg Trial judges at the Nuremberg Opera House. Before heading to the new state of Israel to conduct the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, famed conductor Leonard Bernstein led the orchestra on May 10, 1948. Under his baton, the orchestra performed music by Weber, Puccini, Verdi, and Gershwin at the Feldafing and Landsberg displaced persons camps.

In our documentary, *Creating Harmony: The Jewish Displaced Persons Orchestra of St. Ottilien*, Vilna survivor Samuel Bak — an international artist who exhibited his work at age 12 in the Landsberg Displaced Persons camp — highlights the richness of the arts in Vilna that the group brought to St. Ottilien. Rita Lerner and Sonia Becker shared their memories and materials from their mothers, the Durmashkin sisters. The director of the Terezin Music Foundation in Boston, Mark Ludwig, placed the orchestra's music in the larger, rich context of music and the Holocaust. It was Sonia Weitz, a local poet and Holocaust survivor, who added her voice to the others in showing how music filled the concentration camps with entertainment as well as sorrow during the hanging of prisoners.

Today, more than eight decades later, Bob Hilliard views this concert experience as one of the most important of his life.

Prof. John J. Michalczyk, a retired Boston College professor, is a documentary filmmaker and author.





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DOR L'DOR (WITH A SIDE OF CLICKETY-CLACK)

There's a certain magic in the objects passed from one generation to the next. A candlestick, a kiddush cup, a seder plate, a menorah: pieces of Judaica that carry the stories of the homes they once lived in and the hands that once held them. Many Jewish families have at least one such treasure, lovingly rescued from an elder's home or proudly passed down as a link to the past.

Enter the recent Mah Jongg renaissance, where a new heirloom has joined the list of coveted family treasures: Bubbe's Mah Jongg set. From the table in Aunt Sara's kitchen to private social clubs, open plays, and tournaments, American-style Mah Jongg has experienced a resurgence unlike any other game. At the forefront of this revival in New England is a growing premier Mah Jongg tradition.

What began as a modest gathering at Ahavath Torah Congregation in Stoughton, has grown into one of the most anticipated Mah Jongg events in Massachusetts. Today, the ATC Mah Jongg Tournaments, held four times a year, host 33 tables and sell out within hours of registration opening.

The modern tournament didn't appear overnight. Years ago, Inez Springer and Ellen Greene cochaired a January tournament two years in a row. These early events were smaller and drew a modest crowd primarily from the local Jewish community.

In the mid-2010s, Marilyn Rabinovitz recognized the steady growth of Mah Jongg across New England and knew it was time to reintroduce tournaments at Ahavath Torah Congregation — this time to a much

larger audience. Inviting Springer to cochair, the two rebuilt the tournament into the thriving institution it is today.

With hard work, dedication, and creativity, the ATC Mah Jongg Tournaments in Stoughton have become destination events. They welcome players of all ages, from 18 to nearly 100, men and women, and people of all faiths and backgrounds, each with their own path to the game. Every tournament fills a full roster of 132 players, selling out in under five hours and spilling onto an active waitlist. Nearly 600 players have asked to join the notification list, hoping to secure one of the highly sought-after seats.

Mah Jongg and the Jewish Community: A Cultural Connection

Mah Jongg has long held a special place in Jewish communities, becoming a beloved social tradition beginning in the mid-20th century. The

tournaments at Ahavath Torah Congregation continue that legacy, celebrating connection, culture, and the joy of gathering around a game that has brought people together for generations.

Looking Ahead

From 28 players to 132. From once a year to four times annually. The journey of the ATC Mah Jongg Tournaments is a testament to passion, teamwork, and the enduring power of tradition.

Looking forward, we celebrate not only the game itself but the community that has grown around it — built and supported by those who truly cherish Mah Jongg. So, find that old set, gently dust off the case, call your Mah Jongg friends, shuffle the tiles, and begin your game. If you listen closely to the clickety-clack, you might hear echoes of quiet conversations, tile names called out, and treasured memories of mothers, Bubbies, great-aunts, and others whose hands lovingly washed those tiles so many years ago.

Dor L'Dor — Mah Jongg style.

Marilyn Rabinovitz and Inez Springer are both members of Ahavath Torah Congregation. Rabinovitz grew up in the congregation. Initially resistant to learning to play Mah Jongg ("It's a game for old ladies"), she was convinced otherwise by Springer. The two have been playing together and cochairing the tournament for many years.



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JEWISH AMERICANS OR AMERICAN JEWS?

By Rabbi Jonathan Hausman

Few Americans realize that one of the country's most beloved entertainers was born Israel Iskowitz, the orphaned son of impoverished Jewish immigrants on New York's Lower East Side. He later changed his name to Eddie Cantor — the legendary comedian, singer, actor, and radio personality who entertained millions. However, when European Jewry came under assault during the 1930s, Cantor never hesitated to speak publicly as a Jew, even when doing so invited criticism and placed his career at risk. When history demanded that he choose which identity would speak first, Eddie Cantor answered as a Jew.

As America celebrates the 250th anniversary of its independence, Cantor's example invites us to ask a larger question: How should Jews understand themselves while living in America? Are we Jewish Americans or American Jews?

Is this distinction simply logomachy? After all, both phrases describe Jews who proudly call America home. Yet, perhaps, the difference is more than linguistic. It may reflect something deeper about how we Jews understand ourselves.

The question is not whether we are patriotic, nor is it how deeply we cherish either America or Judaism. Rather, it is which identity each phrase places first.

For some Jews, Judaism is understood primarily as a source of universal moral values, such as justice, compassion, and creating a better world. For others, Judaism begins with belonging to the Jewish people, an eternal nation whose shared history, memory, and covenant have shaped Jewish life for more than three millennia. Both perspectives see themselves as part of the Jewish people and embrace many of the same ideals. However, each begins from a different starting point. Where we begin often shapes where we arrive.

This distinction may help explain why thoughtful, committed Jews can respond so differently to many of the questions confronting our community today. Recent disagreements over Israel, Jew-hatred,

Jewish education and literacy, religious observance, and communal responsibility have revealed differences that often run deeper than politics or religious affiliation. They reflect differing understandings of Jewish identity itself.

The point is not that one group loves America more than another. American Jews across the religious and political spectrum have every reason to feel profound gratitude toward this country. The United States has offered the Jewish people freedoms and opportunities unmatched in much of human history. We Jews have flourished as citizens while contributing richly to American life. This alone is a blessing worthy of celebration, especially as the nation marks its semiquincentennial.

But gratitude alone does not answer the deeper question of identity.

Personally, I think of myself as an American Jew. I am a Jew whose family has been blessed to make its home in America, while some of my family has built their lives in Israel. I cherish this country, pray for its welfare, and remain deeply grateful for the liberties it has afforded my family and generations of Jews before us. However, my citizenship, precious as it is, does not define the deepest part of who I am. That identity was forged long before the United States came into being. It binds me to a people, a history, and a covenant that transcends every country in which Jews have lived — a people with a 4,000-year history.

America's 250th anniversary is a fitting moment to reflect not only on what it means to be an American, but also on what it means to be a Jew living in America. Whether we ultimately describe ourselves as Jewish Americans or American Jews, the more important question remains: Which identity does each phrase place first? Our understanding shapes not only how we see ourselves, but also how we meet our responsibilities to one another, to our country, and to the Jewish people.

Rabbi Jonathan Hausman serves Ahavat Torah Congregation in Stoughton.

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FINDING A MINYAN AT FENWAY

By Rabbi Moshe Y. Bleich

Around two months ago, the Red Sox hosted Jewish Heritage Night at Fenway Park.

My son Dovie really wanted me to take him, but I had already decided that we would sit this one out. I am currently in a year of mourning after the passing of my mother, and during this year it is important for me to pray with a *minyan* so I can say Kaddish. As much as I wanted to go, I was not convinced I would be able to find a minyan for either Mincha or Ma'ariv at a baseball game.

But Dovie lobbied hard.

Eventually, I figured that I should put my kids first for one evening. I decided we would go and I would simply do my best. With God's help, I was sure I would somehow scrape together the *minyanim* I needed.

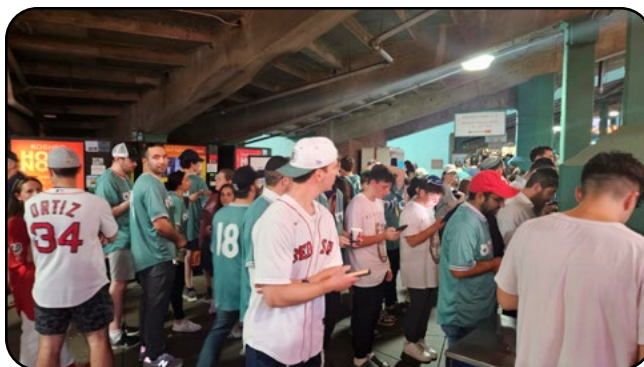
The moment we arrived at Fenway, I began my search.

I was scanning the crowd, looking for fellow Jewish fans, trying to determine whether there was any realistic chance of putting together a minyan. Very quickly, I realized that this was going to be much harder than I anticipated.

Finding one Jew? Easy. Finding 10 Jews at the same place and the same time in a stadium full of 35,000 people? Not so easy.

Eventually, we headed to our seats, and I resigned myself to the fact that I might miss *Kaddish* for both Mincha and Ma'ariv.

But Hashem had other plans.



As soon as we sat down, people all around us started yelling and pointing:

"Rabbi!"

"Look up!"

Everyone in our section seemed to be screaming at me. I had absolutely no idea what was happening.

Then I looked up.

There we were, on the Jumbotron, in front of more than 35,000 people. For a few surreal moments, our family was the center of attention at Fenway Park.

And then my phone exploded.

Within about 30 seconds, I received roughly 25 texts and WhatsApp messages.

"Rabbi, we just saw you on the Jumbotron!"

"Was that you at Fenway?!"

"We saw you on the big screen!"

Every message got the exact same response: "Mincha. 8 p.m. sharp. Gate 18."

At that moment, I realized something.

I was no longer looking for the Jews of Fenway Park. The Jews of Fenway Park had found me.

Apparently, all it takes to locate every Jew in a baseball stadium is a few seconds on the Jumbotron.

The results?

Fifty men showed up for Mincha. Forty men showed up for Ma'ariv. And perhaps best of all, two additional people who needed to say Kaddish were able to do so with a minyan as well.

I came to Fenway worried that I would not be able to find 10 Jews. Instead, Hashem arranged for 35,000 people to help me find all of them.

Looking back, I cannot help but think of the well-known teaching of our sages: "Open for Me an opening like the eye of a needle, and I will open for you an opening through which wagons can pass."

My job was simply to make the effort. To show up. To look for a minyan. To send a few texts. To do whatever little bit I could.

That tiny effort was my "eye of a needle."

The rest was entirely Hashem.

I was trying to find 10 Jews in a crowd of 35,000. Hashem put me on the Jumbotron and turned the entire stadium into my search party.

So often we hesitate because the challenge in front of us seems impossible. We wonder how we will ever accomplish what needs to be done. But this experience was a powerful reminder that Hashem does not ask us to finish the job. He asks us to take the first step.

When we do our part, even if it seems as small as the eye of a needle, Hashem opens the door the rest of the way. Sometimes, He opens it wide enough to fit a Jumbotron through.

Shanah Tovah,

Rabbi Moshe and his wife Geni Bleich serve as the directors of the Wellesley-Weston Chabad.



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JUDAISM AND DEMOCRACY: ROOTED IN RESPECT AND DIGNITY

By Cindy Rowe

The underlying concepts of Judaism and democracy are intertwined. Both are rooted in recognizing that every individual is entitled to respect and dignity. This may explain why, for centuries, Jewish people have thrived in societies where democracy has been the prevailing structure.

However, we cannot take democracy for granted.

In a recent virtual conversation, Aaron Dorfman, executive director of A More Perfect Union, quoted Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman on the U.S. Supreme Court, who said, "The practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool. It must be taught and learned anew by each generation."

Dorfman added his own thoughts on the quote: "In other words, democracy is not a guarantee. It is a practice that must be renewed, reaffirmed and reinvigorated every day by the people who live in and benefit from it. In that way, it is much like Judaism."

In Judaism, that renewal, reaffirmation and reinvigoration can take many forms. It may include attendance at High Holiday services, participation in Shabbat services, preparation of a seder for Passover, lighting Hannukah candles or giving *tzedakah*.

There are also many ways to participate in the ritual of democracy. The most obvious form is voting in elections. Other practices include attending rallies or protests, contacting elected representatives through letters, emails and phone calls, and organizing communities in support of an issue. In a famous quote, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said that when he marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "I felt as though I was praying with my feet." In bringing together the concepts of prayer and action for civil rights, Rabbi Heschel offered a model for what is needed today.

So many traditional Jewish values obligate people to take action in the world and make their voices heard through votes and active participation in a democratic society.

It is through those votes and civic engagement that people practice *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world. Citizens can work for environmental protection, striving for the Jewish value of *bal tashchit* (avoiding wasteful destruction). The Jewish values of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) and *sh'mirat haguf* (caring for the body) can form the basis of meaningful healthcare policy.

The Torah calls for the fair treatment of workers. Deuteronomy 24:14-15 compels employers: "Do not take advantage of a hired worker... Pay them their wages each day... because they are counting on it." On immigration policy, the Torah instructs people to "welcome the stranger" 36 times. Similarly, Proverbs 22:6 states the importance of early education as a communal responsibility: "Train a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Undergirding all of this, the Jewish value of *kavod habriyot* (upholding every person's inherent human dignity) reinforces the importance of civil rights, the rule of law and equal treatment under the law — alongside access to basic necessities like healthcare, housing and food.

This autumn, amid both the High Holidays and election season, community members will have many opportunities to renew, reaffirm and reinvigorate both their Jewish faith and their commitment to American democracy. It is incumbent upon each person to take part in these opportunities to advance both institutions for future generations.

Cindy Rowe is the President and CEO of the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action. Please visit jalsa.org to learn more or to sign up for our newsletter.

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SIRENS AND SHOFAROT

By Rabbi Joseph B. Meszler

In Israel, it has become all too common to run for shelter when rockets fall from the sky. Israelis get alerts on their phones, and sirens go off around the country.

It is a bit eerie that one of the meanings of the shofar was also as a siren for physical danger. Tractate *Ta'anit* 3:4 teaches us that when a pestilence breaks out or a building collapses, we must declare a fast and sound the shofar. In addition, all the surrounding cities must also participate by doing one or the other — fasting or sounding the shofar in solidarity.

In other words, the Sages in the Mishnah said that in an emergency, we sound the shofar and fast, much like we do on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. When we sound the shofar, we cry on the outside. When we fast, we cry on the inside. We share that wordless cry as a community.

Much like Israel's present-day alert system, 2,000 years ago the shofar warned us of a disaster: to run, to help, to be aware and to act in some way. The shofar was a siren that told us that not all was right with our world.

The two sounds — Israel's alert system and the blast of the shofar — have something else in common. Each is a cry, a distinct wail. In addition to the physical need to run for cover, both sounds express our longing and need for salvation. They are the sounds of our suffering and prayer. They might also be a call for empathy, from each other as a community and most especially from God to share our hurt. Not only the town that was struck but also the surrounding towns needed to respond, not unlike the State of Israel and the Diaspora.

These Days of Awe, we need to be able to hear Israel's alert system within the sound of our shofarot in the United States. We need to stand ready as allies. We share their prayers for safety and eventually for peace.

We can also take comfort and remember that eventually there will be a sounding of the shofar that indicates redemption. "It shall come to pass on that day, that a great Shofar will be sounded, and all the lost shall return" (Isaiah 27:13). Maybe this kind of shofar blast is like an all-clear signal, that the danger is over, and that we can come outside in ease and at peace.

Let us hope that we hear that kind of siren soon.

Joseph B. Meszler is the rabbi at Temple Sinai of Sharon.





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THE WOUND WE KEEP MISSING

Veteran care is challenging, and death by suicide is one of its most distressing issues. In the United States, the official number is 18 veteran suicides a day. In Israel, at least 17 active-duty soldiers have died by suicide so far this year — plus at least nine more who died after completing their service. Both figures are devastating, but researchers believe they understate the true toll: Count deaths never officially labeled “suicide” but rooted in the same untreated pain, and some estimates put the real number at more than double.

Why does the number keep slipping through the cracks? Because we've been looking for the wrong wound — moral injury, which is not the same thing as PTSD, though the two are constantly confused, and the confusion costs lives.

PTSD, at its core, is about fear: a nervous system that stays braced for a threat long after the threat is gone. Moral injury is different. It happens when a person does something, fails to stop something, or witnesses something that breaks their own moral code — something they cannot reconcile with who they believed themselves to be. It's not about being afraid; it's about being changed. Because our screening tools are built to catch fear, not this kind of moral pain, a person can pass a standard evaluation and still be quietly carrying the injury that will eventually endanger them.

Israel has produced this wound at a scale we've never had to face before. This isn't a short war with one hard day to process and move past. It is long, and length changes everything: soldiers making split-second, irreversible life-and-death decisions for months on end. It began with Oct. 7, when army units spent days among the dead rather than minutes, and has run through first responders confronting brutality nothing in their training prepared them for, including sexual violence whose aftermath doesn't fade. It has run through forensic teams who identified remains for weeks under unbearable pressure — people who will tell you, months later, that it isn't the images that haunt them most. It's a smell they still can't unsmell.

War is death, up close and relentless. Combat soldiers lose friends, witness death, and sometimes carry the belief they should have saved a life they couldn't. Yet many also return with a paradoxical gift: meaning, a bond with comrades civilian life rarely offers, a spiritual encounter with the line between life and death.

Modern life, by contrast, is comfortable and medicalized, built around postponing death — leaving most of us little capacity to sit with any of this. So soldiers return, often very young, straight from a peak experience into the ordinary — back to work, changing diapers — with no time to integrate what happened. They describe stepping

in and out of a parallel reality. That mismatch is where moral injury takes root.

I saw this happen, early in the war, with a young film student hired to edit raw footage from the terrorists' own cameras. For weeks he sat with it alone — material no editing course prepares you for. First he stopped eating, then sleeping. Certain images wouldn't leave him, playing on a loop, because they were never things a human mind is built to file away. Then came the part that worries us most clinically: He stopped leaving his apartment, stopped answering friends, and cut himself off from anyone who might have helped.

That isolation — not the exposure itself — is the moment we now recognize as the real danger point for suicide. Thankfully, his family caught it in time. What helped him recover quickly was simple in concept, if not in practice: He needed to get what he was carrying out of his own head and into a space someone else could help him hold.

That's the whole message: Moral injury doesn't heal in silence, and it doesn't heal alone.

So what do we do? Two things, mainly. First, talk about it openly — not as weakness, but as the predictable cost of asking people to do things no one should have to do. Second, train the people around them to notice warning signs before isolation sets in: skipped meals, sleepless nights, repeating images, the friend who suddenly goes quiet.

The American and Israeli numbers should serve as a warning, not a comparison. We are, right now, raising a generation carrying an injury our categories were never built to catch. The only real prevention is making sure no one carries it alone.

Dr. Cathy Lawi is the founder and CEO of EmotionAid, a trauma therapist, international trainer and former biotech executive. EmotionAid, an Israeli-based non-profit, provides emotional first aid through brief, effective interventions for those facing intense stress and trauma.

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THIS ROSH HASHANAH: HINEINI FROM KYIV

By Douglas Hauer-Gilad

I have said the word *hineini* many times in study and prayer. “Here I am.” It is the answer Abraham gives when called by God to sacrifice Isaac, the answer Moses gives before the burning bush, and the answer we hear again and again at the most charged moments of Jewish life. This Rosh Hashanah, I will say it not as an abstraction, but with my whole self, standing before the liberal Jewish community of Kyiv, Ukraine, reading the timeless *Akedah* narrative from the Torah at Kyiv’s Progressive Synagogue, Hatikvah.

I am an Israeli American. I was trained as a lawyer in Boston, where I attended Boston University School of Law and built my professional life. For many years, I served as a partner at Mintz Levin, a major Boston law firm, where my work in immigration law often brought me to the intersection of law, human vulnerability, and cross-border movement. Boston shaped my legal mind and, in many ways, my public conscience, which brought me to the rabbinate to serve others. Boston’s civic-centered culture instilled in me the concept of *hineini* well before I decided to become a rabbi.

Since Russia’s invasion in 2022, I have spent substantial time in Ukraine documenting war crimes, assisting the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and doing humanitarian work. I have met ordinary Ukrainians who take on the extraordinary task of serving Ukraine tirelessly, often assuming substantial risk. Saying *hineini* has become a way of life for Ukrainians. I am proudly joining them.

But I am not traveling to Kyiv for Rosh Hashanah for solidarity alone. This journey is different. I am coming to celebrate the New Year with fellow Jews. I am coming to read from the Torah in a city under threat from constant missiles and drones, in a country fighting for its life, with Jews who are building liberal Jewish life not as nostalgia, but as a future. I am coming because I want to participate in that future.



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THIS ROSH HASHANAH: HINEINI FROM KYIV

I have no Ukrainian ancestry. My attachment to Ukraine is not inherited through my own family. Yet Jewish history does not permit such clean separations. My mother-in-law, Ruth, was a child Holocaust survivor from Rivne, Ukraine. Ukraine has never been merely a place on a map for Ruth. It was a landscape of catastrophe and survival, of Jewish absence and Jewish memory, of ruins that still speak. I have inherited this legacy and plan to honor it. Part of my commitment to Ukraine reflects my love for Ruth. To honor her is not only to remember what was taken; it is also to help make possible what can yet be built.

That is why the Progressive Synagogue in Kyiv matters to me. It is why my vision as a rabbi is to persevere for Ukraine. Liberal Judaism in Ukraine is not a museum exhibit and not a charity case. It is a living claim: that Jews in Ukraine can pray, learn, argue, bless, celebrate, grieve, and renew in ways that are faithful to tradition and honest about modern life. Progressive Jews in Ukraine deserve more than admiration from abroad. They deserve partners, teachers, students, friends, and fellow builders. They deserve Jews from Boston, New York, Jerusalem, and everywhere else to understand that their future is part of our collective Jewish future.

On Rosh Hashanah, we stand before a new year with fear and hope. The Torah reading is never only text; it is an encounter. When I stand

in Kyiv and chant from the scroll, I will not be performing Jewish continuity; I will enter it. I will be saying to the Jews of Kyiv: I am here with you. I am here not only because of what happened to Jews in Ukraine, but because of what Jews in Ukraine are still becoming. I am here because the Jewish future is not built only in comfortable places.

It is built wherever Jews gather, open the book, bless the year, and refuse despair. And I am here because I believe in your future.

This year, my answer is simple. To Boston, which formed me; to Ruth, whose survival obligates memory; to Ukraine, whose courage demands partnership; to the liberal Jewish community of Kyiv, whose future I hope to help build; and to the World Union for Progressive Judaism, I say: hineini. Here I am.

Douglas Hauer-Gilad is a lawyer and rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College. He lives with his spouse, Dr. Jack Gilad, in Newton. A Russian speaker, Hauer-Gilad also works in Ukraine as a journalist accredited by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense.

Photos: 1- the author at the Kharkiv Choral Synagogue taken by Chabad shlucha (emissary) Miriam Moskovitz on August 9, 2026; 2- Babin Yar Holocaust Memorial, in Kyiv.



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MORAL INVENTORY AND THE MITZVOT

By David Bernat, PhD

During the High Holidays, the *Yamim Noraim*, we are called to reflect on our behavior in the past year, repent our transgressions, and commit to a life of ritual observance and ethical activity in the year to come. But what drives our decision making? The Talmud begins with the notion of obligation, a set of rules that are compulsory. As Rabbi Hanina says: Greater is one who is commanded to do a mitzvah and performs it than one who is not commanded (Kiddushin 31a). The Tosafists, medieval commentators on this passage, elaborate "It appears that the reason the one who is commanded and does is preferred is because he worries and is pained more, lest he transgress, as opposed to the one who is not commanded."

Rabbi Harold Kushner, however, pushed back, inquiring whether this framework speaks to generations of modern Jewry. In his essay "Conservative Judaism in an Age of Democracy," he suggests that a Kantian approach might be more convincing to one who asks "why should I..."

He asserts "in order to be moral, a deed must be freely chosen and not done under compulsion. After all, don't we consider the driver who obeys traffic laws out of concern for life and property to be more admirable than the one who does it because a policeman is watching?"

However, does the Kantian model miss the point? The Talmud is not highlighting an idea of ethics and obedience as a reaction to an external authority, such as the traffic cop. Rather, it is an internalization of an obligation to follow a set of rules that govern a society we choose to be a part of. Moreover, if we just obey traffic laws out of a concern for safety and life, if we observe a situation where we can speed without compromising safety, why wouldn't we?

Rabbi Kushner does follow up with a notion that I find particularly persuasive; the mitzvot provide "the opportunity to be in touch with God by transforming the ordinary into the sacred." In this regard, he echoes the Torah's fundamental imperative "Be holy, because I, Adonai your God, am Holy." And even if a person is not theologically inclined, the ability to transcend a life of mundanity, each and every day, is quite compelling.

With that, I wish you a Shanah Tovah, a year imbued with holiness.

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.

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TO PRAY OR TO KIBBITZ: A HIGH HOLIDAY DILEMMA

By Joey Baron

For some people, the High Holy Days are about preserving Jewish traditions. For others, they are a chance to reflect on the year that's passed and the one that's about to begin. Some do their reflection in the sanctuary; others find sanctuary on a walk through the woods or sitting quietly by the ocean. Between the family holiday dinners and the final sounding of the shofar, this is a time rich with meaning.

Growing up in Mattapan (Boston's last Jewish neighborhood), when the High Holy Days came around, there were certain things I could count on: my mother "making me" go to temple (though she and my dad never went), having tea and honey cake with my grandmother as she broke her fast, and joining dozens of kids hanging out in front of the temple.

Sure, occasionally, I would go inside the sanctuary to sit with my grandmother who I always suspected had a little crush on the cantor, Leon Gold. But most of my time was spent outside, talking with all the other kids whose parents "made them" go to shul, too.

Using the High Holy Days as an opportunity to socialize with friends became my High Holiday ritual. Adulthood, however, has changed some of that. I'm no longer getting taller each year, so I don't need a new sport coat and, instead of talking about school, sports, or movies, now we catch up on our kids, the latest shows we're streaming, and, alas, our ailments and prescriptions.

For years, I felt guilty spending more time talking with friends than praying to God. But now, I realize those conversations — that comfort I find in being part of a Jewish community — are my prayers. It's not just making a minyan that counts; it's being counted on to live a proud Jewish life, even if it is a rather unorthodox one.



Growing up in a Jewish neighborhood made finding and creating that sense of community the driving force in my life. Every year, the conversations I have at temple remind me that I am part of something much bigger than myself, that I need to strive to be a better person, and, most of all, that we are not alone.

Although I always arrive late, I do pop into services more often than I did as a kid. Even though I know far fewer congregants at my current temple in Northampton than I did at my previous temple in Needham, I still spend far more time seeking a place to kibbitz.

When I do enter the sanctuary, it's usually only to hear (and rate) the rabbi's sermons. It's to connect with certain prayers that talk to me. *Unetaneh Tokef*, which Leonard Cohen transformed into the song *Who By Fire* makes me think of all the people I have lost and how precious life is. Even after 50 years, reading the story of the Binding of Isaac continues to raise profound questions about fatherhood, God, and sacrifices we may have or need to make in our lives. Throughout services, the primal sounds of the shofar never fail to touch something deep inside me. Though I must confess, I am guilty of rating the quality of shofar blowers, too.

The High Holy Days remind us that no matter how different our observance levels, knowledge, and beliefs may be, Jewishness requires a community. Recited ten times on Yom Kippur, the *Vidui* prayer reminds us that it is we, not I, who have sinned. It's a powerful reminder that the only way we can repair the world is together, whether we're *davening* in the sanctuary or laughing in the parking lot.

Joey Baron is a former advertising creative director and founder of the Boston Jewish Music Festival and Jewish Arts Collaborative. He lives in Northampton.





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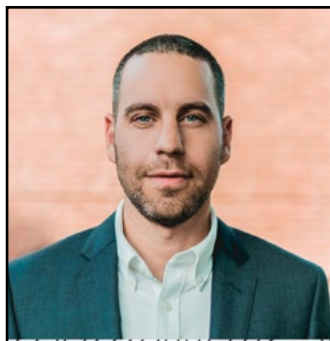
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IN CASE YOU FORGOT: ISRAEL IS STILL AT WAR

By Daniel Pomerantz

Here is an update from seven fronts: Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria, Iran, Yemen, and domestic terror attempts inside Israel itself.

President Donald Trump stood before the Knesset in October and announced the “end of a war” and “the historic dawn of a new Middle East” as the last living hostages returned home. Israelis breathed a sigh of gratitude and relief, and the world promptly forgot that Israel was, and remains, at war for its very survival.

With Trump’s announcement and the return of the hostages came the end of a national nightmare, along with enormous gratitude and relief from the Israeli people. But the “end of a war” was never more than political sloganizing.

Two Israel Defense Forces soldiers fell just last week, making a total of 48 since the “end” of the war. An estimated 75,000 soldiers continue to risk their lives in active combat positions, with another 250,000 on alert for reserve duty. Deadly, undeterrable enemies remain active on seven fronts: Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria, Iran, Yemen, and domestic terror attempts inside Israel.

Here is the “big picture.”

Gaza

The U.S.-led “Board of Peace” continues to make plans, Hamas continues to reject them, and Israel continues to guard the “Yellow Line” — the position inside Gaza to which the IDF has advanced.

The Board of Peace made a dramatic announcement last week that Hamas had agreed to disarm, adding that Israel is now required to withdraw from Gaza entirely. It quickly became clear that to Hamas, “disarming” actually means giving up only some weapons, not all. The Board of Peace urged Israel to leave its defensive positions anyway.

Israel pointed out that Trump’s own 20-point plan requires Hamas to

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give up all weapons entirely before Israel leaves its positions — and for good reason: There was, after all, a ceasefire in place on Oct. 6.

Hamas remains armed and firmly in control of the parts of Gaza beyond the Yellow Line, while the IDF remains in combat positions just beyond, facing attacks and regular ceasefire violations. Israel carries out targeted strikes against terror operatives who are either actively violating the ceasefire or were directly involved in the Oct. 7 massacre. Meanwhile, the rest of the world remains largely ineffective.

It is not just Hamas; Palestinians in general overwhelmingly oppose the idea of Hamas disarming, even though that is the necessary first step toward an IDF withdrawal, international reconstruction, and an entirely new life for Gaza. It appears that Hamas' core vision of annihilating Israel is a higher priority for the Palestinian people than long-term prosperity or basic needs, no matter the cost.

Lebanon

Lebanon follows the same pattern as Gaza. The U.S., Lebanon, and Israel — the parties to the Trilateral Framework — continue to meet and hold empty discussions about peace and disarmament. Meanwhile, Hezbollah remains armed and active while the Lebanese Armed Forces fail to fulfill their obligations to dismantle or contain the Iran-backed terror group. This should not be surprising, as Hezbollah effectively controls the Lebanese parliament. The idea that Lebanon would or could disarm Hezbollah while remaining under the group's political control was always a fantasy.

As a result, the IDF continues to guard the Lebanon Yellow Line, engaging in frequent direct combat against Hezbollah forces, tunnels, and resources.



Iran

The U.S. continues an unending dance of negotiations, threats, more negotiations, and more threats, all while carrying out limited strikes and waiting for midterm elections. Iran continues to fire on civilian ships in the Strait of Hormuz, U.S. bases, and Arab Gulf states, all while carefully avoiding Israel — an ironic reversal of history.

The reason is straightforward: An attack on Israel will turn limited strikes into something much larger, something for which Iran is not yet ready. Israel learned the limits of deterrence on Oct. 7, and no one is foolish enough to believe this bubble of safety is sustainable long term.

Additional Fronts

Judea and Samaria is the site of an invisible war, with constant counterterrorism operations mostly unnoticed by the public. Syria presents a similar story. The Iran-backed Houthi terror group in Yemen remains a real threat as Israel builds its capacities in Somaliland, just across the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Meanwhile, Israel is in a constant process of foiling terror attacks at home.

As all this unfolds, Israeli soldiers continue their dangerous and often deadly military service, even as Israeli civilians maintain high alert for an expanded *miluim* (IDF reserve duty) call-up.

The entire country remains on a war footing, even if the headlines have forgotten.

Daniel Pomerantz is the founder and CEO of RealityCheck. To subscribe, visit realitycheckresearch.org.

Photo: Americans march for Israel at the National Mall in November 2023. (Photo courtesy of Jewish Federations/Chris A. Williams)

Shanah Tovah!

As we celebrate the High Holidays this year, we choose each other in reflection, in celebration, and in shared responsibility. May the year ahead be one of connection, belonging, and hope.

Discover meaningful ways to get involved with CJP this High Holiday season at cjp.org/getinvolved.



EVENTS

Film Preview: Munkacs Miracle

Tuesday, October 6, from 7-8:30 p.m.

Newton (Location provided upon registration)

A sneak preview of *Munkacs Miracle*, documenting the reunion of Holocaust survivors Magda Bader and Ruth Cohen 81 years after their shared deportation from Munkács to Auschwitz. The event includes a post-screening Q&A with Magda Bader and Executive Producers Deborah Coltin and Sarah Ovadia. Light refreshments will be served. Appropriate for middle school and older. Free; registration required at <https://lappinfoundation.tfaforms.net/429>

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YOUR VOTE ON QUESTION 9

By Joanna Troy

Have you felt unsettled by the increase in attacks on synagogues since October 7, 2023? Has your synagogue invested in more security measures and personnel to protect its students, congregants and staff?

If either or both of these questions speak to you, I urge you to vote YES on Question 9 on the ballot on November 3 to preserve Massachusetts' gun safety laws!

I am a Steering Committee Member of the Jewish Partnership for Gun Safety, a collaborative alliance of members from three local synagogues (Beth Elohim of Wellesley, Isaiah of Lexington and Aliyah of Needham) that seeks to educate and activate the Jewish community and its allies to prevent gun violence through the Vote Yes for a Safe Massachusetts campaign.

Massachusetts has the most comprehensive gun safety laws in the nation, and it is no surprise that as a result, the state also has the lowest rate of preventable gun deaths in the continental United States.

After a thorough and careful process that involved law enforcement professionals, clinicians and community groups, the Massachusetts Legislature passed comprehensive legislation in 2024. Among other measures, the law regulates the sale of ghost guns, requires a live-fire test before someone can obtain a gun license, expands Extreme Risk Protection Orders to help prevent firearm suicides and mass shootings, and creates a firearms data dashboard to better track gun trafficking in the Commonwealth.

Ghost guns are build-it-yourself firearms without serial numbers, assembled by consumers from kits sold directly by manufacturers. Designed to bypass existing laws, these untraceable weapons are frequently used in crimes and favored by white supremacists.

Following the passage of the 2024 legislation, gun extremists led by members of the Gun Owners Action League (GOAL) — the NRA's Massachusetts affiliate — launched a ballot initiative seeking to repeal these laws in the November 2026 state election. GOAL is disseminating misinformation as part of its campaign to encourage voters to repeal these protections. Operating under the name "Civil Rights Coalition," the group presents the ballot referendum as a false choice between rights and safety.

The 2024 laws do not limit anyone's Second Amendment rights, nor do they threaten to confiscate firearms from licensed owners. Instead, they ensure that Massachusetts remains a national leader in gun safety.

If these laws are overturned, the NRA will likely use the precedent as leverage to discourage other states from enacting similar protections, undermining a model that other states look to for guidance.

Effective gun regulation saves lives. Please vote YES on Question 9 to preserve our state's effective gun laws, and encourage your family, friends and neighbors to do the same.

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CELEBRATING JEWISH PLAYS RETURNS TO SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

Shakespeare & Company welcomes back Celebrating Jewish Plays October 9-11. The event features three readings presented over three days during the holiday weekend, along with live poetry, speakers, musical performances, and other additions to this year's program.

On Friday, October 9, at 11 a.m., the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires, in partnership with Shakespeare & Company, kicks off the weekend with a free Knosh and Knowledge discussion on Israeli theater. The session features Michal Peles-Almagor, a postdoctoral fellow at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a research fellow at Tel Aviv University.

The weekend continues Friday afternoon at 2 p.m. with a reading of *After the Revolution* by Amy Herzog, followed by Joshua Harmon's *Bad Jews* on Saturday at 7 p.m.

On Sunday, October 11, at 2 p.m., a new performance will be staged at the Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre: *Many Jewish Voices — for String Trio and a Trio of Poets*, by Owen Lewis. Lewis joined the Celebrating Jewish Plays planning committee this year after attending last year's event.

"I was pleased to join this year's planning committee to help include other Jewish arts in the 2026 mini festival: poetry, chamber music, klezmer, and a talk on contemporary Israeli theater" Lewis said.

The festival closes Sunday, October 11, at 4 p.m. with a reading of Arthur Mille's *Broken Glass*. For tickets and more information, visit shakespeare.org or call the box office at 413-637-3353.

EVENTS

Jews of Color: Our Stories, Experiences, and Full Belonging
Monday, September 28, 7-8:30 p.m. (Reception to follow)
Temple Beth Zion, Brookline

An exploration of building a more inclusive Jewish future, featuring a guest speaker, a panel discussion, and actionable insights on allyship. A post-program reception follows from 8:30-9:15 p.m. Free. Details and RSVP: <https://tinyurl.com/bdcmuj9x>

JHC Road Race 5K
Sunday, October 11, 9:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.
Jewish Healthcare Center, Worcester

A community 5K road race for runners and casual walkers alike. The event offers a fun way to get moving, connect with others, and support the community. Free for walkers and seniors; registration fee applies for runners. Details and registration: <https://www.jhccenter.org/jhc-5k-road-race-run-walk/>

Yachad New England Yom Chesed
Sunday, November 8, 1-3:00 p.m.
384 Harvard St., Brookline

An annual community service event inviting participants of all ages to work together on hands-on projects supporting those in need. Free and open to the public. Details and registration: <https://www.yachad.org/newengland/events/49853/yom-chesed-2026> (Contact: SalzbergS@ou.org)

CELEBRATING JEWISH PLAYS

Knosh and Knowledge—

A discussion of Israeli theater with Michal Peles-Almagor

Friday, October 9, 11 am

Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre

Presented in partnership with the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires

After the Revolution

by Amy Herzog

Friday, October 9, 2 pm

Tina Packer Playhouse

Bad Jews

by Joshua Harmon

Saturday, October 10, 7 pm

Tina Packer Playhouse

Many Jewish Voices—

A String Trio and a Trio of Poets arranged by Owen Lewis

Sunday, October 11, 2 pm

Elayne P. Bernstein Theatre

Broken Glass

by Arthur Miller

Sunday, October 11, 4 pm

Tina Packer Playhouse

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Rhode Island's Kosher Food Scene Takes Center Stage on JLTv's *Tripping Kosher*



Rhode Island may be the smallest state in the union, but its vibrant, diverse culinary scene is about to get national television exposure. Jewish Life Television (JLTV) has announced the premiere of *Tripping Kosher*, an exciting new food and travel series hosted by CW Silverberg that uncovers the hidden gems of the kosher world. Local viewers have a special reason to tune in: a dedicated Rhode Island episode is set to air on Monday, Sept. 14, at 8:30 p.m. and will repeat throughout that week and otherwise on JLTV.

The weekly series follows Silverberg as he travels from city to city in search of exceptional kosher dining, highlighting everything from established institutions to local neighborhood favorites. Far more than a traditional cooking program, *Tripping Kosher* focuses on the thrill of discovery, showcasing community stories, local culture, and unexpected establishments that leave even lifelong kosher travelers asking, "Wait... that's kosher?"

The Rhode Island episode takes a deep dive into the Ocean State's impressive array of kosher and plant-based offerings. Silverberg explores a spectacular lineup of local spots, proving that the region is a true haven for mindful and kosher diners alike. In Providence, the show visits Lighthouse Kosher (Plant Base Cafe), the expansive Plant City (Plant Base Restaurant), and the beloved Like No Udder for vegan ice cream. The capital city tour wraps up with crepes and coffee at Cafe Zoey.

The culinary journey then extends across the state, stopping in Pawtucket to highlight Wild Flower (Vegan Bakery and Juice Bar) and the comforting, vegetarian fusion dishes at Garden Grille. Down in Newport, Silverberg checks out Plant City X, before wrapping up the regional tour at Basil & Bunny, a popular vegan, plant-based restaurant in Bristol.

"*Tripping Kosher* is exactly the kind of series that reflects the breadth of Jewish life today," said Brad Pomerance, executive vice president of JLTV. "Whether you keep kosher or not, *Tripping Kosher* is fun, accessible, and entertaining, and introduces viewers to communities, businesses, and people they may never have discovered otherwise."

The series is produced by Silverberg alongside veteran documentary filmmaker Tsvika Tal. To watch JLTV in Massachusetts and Rhode Island on Breezeline, Cox, DirecTV, Spectrum, Xfinity, or other cable, digital, or streaming providers, please visit jltv.tv/channels for channel position.

Photo: CW Silverberg and Rabbi Barry Dolinger, founder of Lighthouse Kosher (Courtesy JLTV)

How My Jewish Upbringing Shaped My Journey as a Fantasy Writer

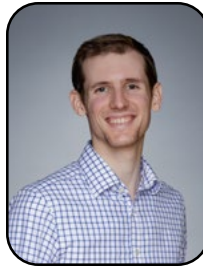
By Sam Larson

From a young age, I was captivated by stories. I remember listening intently to my mother read *parsha* (weekly Torah portions) books around the Shabbos table. I patiently listened to my father read *The Hobbit* and the entire *Lord of the Rings* series by the time I was nine. At Maimonides Day School, *Navi* (Prophets) was always my favorite subject. Stories of epic battles, military strategy, betrayals, and triumphs fascinated me.

Judaism has always understood that stories shape people. The Torah doesn't simply preserve laws or history; it preserves the lives of flawed human beings because stories have the power to teach values in a way that lectures never can. They inspire us to become better people and challenge us to wrestle with difficult questions. Just as importantly, we are shaped by the stories we tell about ourselves. By repeatedly encountering our ancestors' failures alongside their triumphs, we learn humility, honesty, repentance, and hope.

That belief has deeply influenced the kind of writer I aspire to be. I began writing fantasy at fifteen and spent nearly twenty years writing on and off before finally finishing *Born of Broken Chains*. Although the novel takes place in a fictional world, its central questions — how power should be used, when violence is justified, what redemption truly means, and how hope survives even in darkness — were shaped by my Jewish upbringing.

The character arcs in the novel are firmly rooted in the Jewish belief in free will: that every person possesses the inclination toward both good and evil and can freely choose between them. Some characters glimpse the future through otherworldly means, but as a wise priest tells the protagonist, "Our choices ultimately decide our fate." This echoes one of the enduring messages of the prophets, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah: while the future may be foretold, human choices can still change the course of events.



Another central theme of the novel is that evil cannot truly be overcome until we confront the darkness within ourselves. In *Born of Broken Chains*, the protagonist receives a crucial piece of knowledge that allows him to succeed later only after he faces his inner demons by traversing an enchanted labyrinth. This connection between the inner moral battle and the struggle against evil in the world is a recurring theme throughout Jewish tradition, from the Torah all the way to Chassidic philosophy.

Another element I borrowed from Jewish tradition was the *Even Shetiyah*, the Foundation Stone from which creation began. In my fictional world, a mythical Foundation Stone likewise serves as the source of all magic, which awakens for a seventy-two-year period only once every three hundred and fifty years.

One of my long-term goals as a writer is to create fantasy that feels distinctly Jewish at its core. Not through retelling biblical stories or writing fiction exclusively for Jewish audiences. Rather, I hope to write the kind of sweeping epic that anyone can enjoy, but with Jewish values and perspectives just beneath the surface.

I also believe young adult literature should remain true to its audience. Stories can wrestle with trauma, sacrifice, and moral ambiguity without relying on explicit sexual or adult content. As an observant Jew, it's important to me to write books I would feel comfortable allowing my own children to read when they are teenagers.

My hope is that readers come away from my novel not only entertained by the adventure, but also reminded — as Judaism has taught for generations — that the stories we read and tell have the power to shape the people we become.



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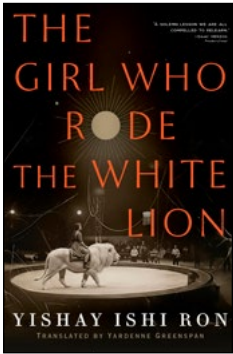
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The Girl Who Rode the White Lion



Having read many Holocaust-themed books over the years, I am always drawn to stories that find a fresh perspective. *The Girl Who Rode the White Lion*, the new novel by National Jewish Book Award-winning author Yishay Ishi Ron, caught my attention for how unexpectedly it connects WWII Europe with postwar New York. The story opens in Germany, 1938, where a young Jewish girl named Sarah Frank escapes Nazi persecution by hiding in a traveling circus, forming an extraordinary bond with a circus lion. Decades later, in 1957 New York City, a routine autopsy on

an elderly zoo lion reveals a silver SS ring hidden inside its body. This chilling discovery launches a search for answers across Paris, Tel Aviv, and New York, uncovering long-buried wartime secrets. Ron, whose previous novel *Dog* won two National Jewish Book Awards, combines historical suspense with quiet reflection on memory, identity, and loyalty. Moving from the shadows of Nazi Germany to the bustling streets of 1950s New York, it makes for an engaging and thoughtful read for Shalom readers.

(Shirley N. Farber)

How My Grandfather Stole a Shoe and Survived the Holocaust in Ukraine



In her book *How My Grandfather Stole a Shoe and Survived the Holocaust in Ukraine*, award-winning journalist Julie Masis records the memories of her late grandfather, Shlomo Masis — a longtime Lynn resident who passed away in 2019 at age 102. The book details his family's survival under Romanian occupation during WWII and life in the post-war Soviet Union. During the brutal first winter in Ukraine's Obodovka ghetto, where nearly half the imprisoned Jews perished — including five of the eight Masis family members — Shlomo was driven to survive by sheer curiosity to see who would win the war.

Rather than dwelling on tragedy, his stories focus on resilience, acts of kindness from local Ukrainians, and lucky coincidences, including a family legend of a German medic who saved the author's grandmother.

Suitable for middle schoolers and adults alike, the book features illustrations by the late Soviet artist Felix Lembersky. Praising the narrative, Yale history professor Laura Engelstein wrote: "I loved the book. I admire the tone, unusual for the subject, and the author's gift for making the characters come alive." Masis, who also edits the *Russian Boston Gazette* and contributes to *The Boston Globe* and *The Times of Israel*, lives in Haverhill.

For more events and news, please follow us on www.ShalomMA.com.



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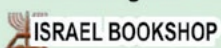
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Our Center for Holocaust, Antisemitism, and Jewish American Heritage Programs serves Jewish, public, and private schools in our service area. We offer Holocaust education, including a Holocaust Survivors Speakers Bureau; timely programs about antisemitism for students and for the community; professional development for educators; and free books about the Jewish American experience for K-5 teachers for Jewish American Heritage Month (May).

For more information, check us out at **LappinFoundation.org** or contact Deborah Coltin at 978-740-4428 or email **dcoltin@lappinfoundation.org**.



HAPPENING NOW!

Registration is open for our **2027 Youth to Israel Adventure** that includes a **March of the Living Trip to Poland for Jewish teens** who are in the 10th or 11th grade. The fully subsidized trip will take place from **June 29 - July 14, 2027**. For more information, visit **Y2I.org** or contact Sharon Wyner at **978-565-4450** or email **swyner@lappinfoundation.org**.



2026
Annual Event

Our Annual Signature Event honoring Colette Phillips and Karen & David Rosenberg with the Inspirational Jewish Leadership Award will take place on **Sunday, November 8, 6:00 p.m.**, at a Newton-area location. Keynote speaker is **Ido Aharoni Aronoff**, former Israeli diplomat and branding expert. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit **LappinFoundation.org** or contact Sarah Ovadia at **978-740-4404** or email **sovadia@lappinfoundation.org**.



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