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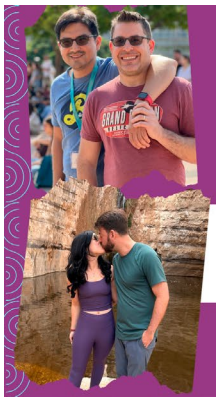

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Happy Chanukah


Gaby Weltman

As we come to celebrate Chanukah, I chose the dreidel for our cover because I couldn't stop thinking about the elections. In Israel, the United States, and Brazil, the margins have sometimes been so slim that the outcome felt like a spin of the dreidel, a traditional symbol of luck. The game we play during Chanukah highlights how precarious chance can feel.

Chanukah is not really a holiday about luck; it is a holiday about miracles, and the two are profoundly different. The Maccabees fought a powerful enemy and won against overwhelming odds. When they entered the destroyed Temple, they found only a small amount of oil left, yet miraculously it burned for eight nights. As Jews, we participate actively, pray for miracles, and refuse to rely purely on luck or passive fate.

In this edition, *Shalom Magazine* brings together a diverse variety of contributors, many of whom examine recent elections and what their outcomes truly mean for our communities. With the constant rise of antisemitism globally, casting a vote is merely the first step. Our communal responsibility continues long after the ballots are counted. We must hold our elected officials accountable for their campaign promises and ensure they take active steps to protect Jewish people as well as the State of Israel.

For over 17 years, *Shalom* has been uniting the Jewish communities in Massachusetts. We remained committed to serving as the voice of our people, bringing you comprehensive news from local community events, hard-hitting columns, and exclusive articles you won't find anywhere else.

I warmly encourage you to patronize our advertisers who choose to support our free and independent Jewish media. Let us continue to bring our people together and make everyone feel included, even when we do not share the same opinions or backgrounds. May this Chanukah remind us that if we put in our own dedicated work, we do not need to leave the outcome to luck. Chanukah Sameach!

Shirley Nigri Farber - Publisher

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Happy Chanukah

Chanukah 2026 begins at sundown on ***Friday, December 4***, and ends at nightfall on ***Saturday, December 12.*** The holiday lasts eight nights, with candles lit each evening on a nine-branched C*hanukkiah*. On the Hebrew calendar, it begins on the 25th of Kislev and ends on the 2nd of Tevet.

The "Festival of Lights" commemorates both a military victory and the miracle of a single day's supply of oil burning for eight days in the Temple menorah. Traditional celebrations include lighting the *Chanukkiah* (adding one candle each night), eating oil-based foods, playing dreidel, and giving children money or chocolate coins.

Standing with Jews in Somerville

Shalom Magazine stands with Councilor Kristen Strezo, who was the sole member of the Somerville City Council to vote against the new ordinance on Israel and Palestine, which passed 10–1 on November 12. The measure prohibits the city from contracting with or investing in companies it deems complicit in humanitarian violations, naming Israel specifically. As Councilor Strezo told her colleagues, the ordinance "makes us feel targeted. It makes us feel unsafe. It makes us feel unwelcome"— a sentiment shared by many Jewish and Israeli residents.

As history has shown, measures targeting Israel often fuel broader animosity toward Jewish communities. While supporters frame the policy around human rights standards for city contractors, *Shalom Magazine* disagrees: foreign policy belongs to the federal government, not a municipal purchasing office, and Somerville's own legal counsel has warned that the ordinance would likely be struck down in court, leaving local taxpayers to foot the bill.



Allan Alter

On the third anniversary of October 7, more than750 people came together with CJP and Temple Shalom of Newton to remember, bear witness, and find strength in one another. The audience was honored to hear from Nova survivor Ziv Abud and released hostage Eliya Cohen, who shared their heartbreaking and inspiring stories.



Our Community



The Israeli Women's Organization team at their Welcome Party on October 17 in Newton. From L to R: Noa Vardy, Michal Kennedy, Tanya Gordon, Pnina Biran and Michal Abramovich.



On October 21, TeensFeed, a collaborative program of Lappin Foundation, Congregation Shirat Hayam, and Temple Emanu-El of Marblehead, kicked off its 2026-2027 season at Congregation Shirat Hayam. Pictured L to R: Maya Berman, Ava Pouladian, and Allison Friedman.



Simchat Torah and dancing with the Winiker Band at Congregation Sha'aray Shalom, Hingham.

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A Flame for Tomorrow, G-d Willing



By Yosef Rodrigues, Ph.D.

In my Portuguese classes, I teach two ways to express the future: "*Amanhã vou…*" (Tomorrow I'm going to…) and "*Amanhã irei…*" (Tomorrow I will…). To me, "I'm going to" feels like a plan, while "I will" bears the burden of a promise. Both require you to imagine yourself in a day that hasn't yet arrived.

Recently, I've encountered more students opening up about anxiety and depression than ever before in my career. Insomnia is a frequent companion in these conversations. A sleepless night can drain a student's energy, making it a victory just to make it to class. The challenge continues: focusing, catching up, and sometimes, grappling with existential questions beyond the syllabus. *What do I want my life to mean?*

For many, public speaking (like giving a class presentation) has become daunting. Are they afraid of losing their place, feeling the weight of everyone's gaze, or being remembered for a single mistake? I wonder how often they're allowed to stumble in front of others and still find their voices valued.

Why do so many students I meet seem to be struggling? In the *2025-26 Healthy Minds Study*, about one in three surveyed college students screened positive for moderate or severe depressive symptoms. I think about the time lost to the pandemic and the demands of working to pay for school. Perhaps more students now feel able to talk about difficulties they once kept to themselves.

The marvels of technology still amaze me: a phone brings a loved one's face across oceans, a watch tracks our sleep. How do we reconcile such ingenuity with the exhaustion and loneliness so many feel? I worry about what we lose when we lack the patience to listen



A Flame for Tomorrow, G-d Willing

to someone searching for the right word. Where are we heading? During Chanukah, I find myself praying for miracles, thinking of my students.

The Talmud's account of Chanukah tells of the Maccabees, who recaptured the Temple and discovered a single sealed jar of pure oil, enough for one day. They lit it, and it lasted eight. I frequently reflect on that moment before the miracle was revealed: they poured the oil and lit the wicks, not knowing how long it would burn. It's easy to delay beginnings until we feel certain about the outcome.

Each night, we add another candle. *Hanerot Halalu*, the prayer recited as we light them, invites us to watch the flames and give thanks for the miracles of our ancestors. On the first night, one flame is enough to remind me of all I've received.

The Talmud also guides us to place the Chanukah lamp outside our doors, or in a window if we live above ground level. In times of danger, it's enough to keep the lamp on the table. A passerby in the cold might look up and share in the remembrance, becoming part of another's evening for a moment.

I seek to create that kind of welcome in my classroom. If a student falters in a presentation, I wait amid the silence. I notice the empty chair, close my laptop when someone wants to talk, and sometimes help them find support elsewhere. I want every student to know that someone is happy to see them.

Still, I hope for miracles on a grander scale. *Moshiach now!* I wish for children to wake up in safe homes, for parents to set food on the table. Maimonides describes the messianic era as a time free from hunger and war, when people can dedicate themselves to knowing G-d. What might we learn about G-d and each other if we could count on peace tomorrow?

The greatest miracle I seek in my own life is waking up feeling alive and well, rising, and doing the work I love. When I can get out of bed as the alarm sounds, I have a reason to give thanks before the day even begins.

Such gratitude is captured in *Modeh Ani*, the prayer recited upon waking: "I thank You, living and eternal King, for restoring my soul with compassion. Great is Your faithfulness." The last phrase comes from *Lamentations*, a book of mourning. Yet it speaks of G-d's mercies renewed every morning, a comfort as I begin the day with words that have carried others through loss.

The word that rings most is *bechemlah*, "with compassion." I can say it before knowing what the day will bring. I hope to carry its meaning with me, especially when a student stands before me and explains why they've fallen behind. I want it to shape how I listen.

Some mornings, I hurry through the prayer, and the day sweeps me along. This Chanukah, I want to linger with those words, as I linger with the first flame. Before making plans, before my first "I'm going to" or "I will," I want to pause and notice what's already here. The day I was preparing for has arrived and so have I. *Modeh Ani*.

Happy Chanukah! *Chag Urim Sameach!*

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



Temple Shalom of Newton hosted a community pet blessing on October 18, featuring an array of participants, including a chicken.



Hadar Boston Rosh Hodesh Kislev song gathering led by R. Deborah Sacks Mintz on November 9, in Brookline.



On October 14, the Wellesley Weston Chabad community was privileged to hear Almog Italie share his harrowing experience, the terrifying moments he endured, and his remarkable story of survival. Almog was on a Flydubai flight with his wife and two children when the plane was almost hijacked and crashed.



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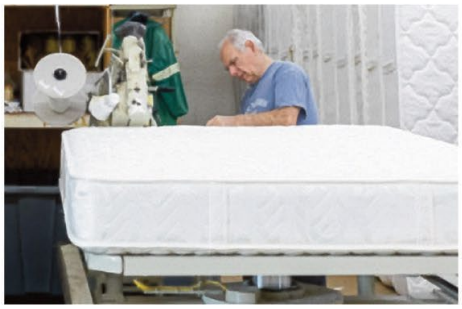

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After Israel's Election: Reconciling Identity and Security



By Douglas Hauer-Gilad

Democracy is not merely alive in Israel; it is fiercely contested. Yet the October election offers a reminder that winning the largest party tally is not the same as winning the ability to govern. Likud remains the largest party, but neither main camp secured an outright parliamentary majority. The real test now is whether Israel's leaders can turn a divided electorate into a government capable of earning trust beyond its own political base. Another campaign is no substitute for that work.

The broad figures tell us enough: Israel's parliament has 120 seats, and 61 constitute an absolute majority. Arab-led parties hold 19 seats and occupy a pivotal position between the rival camps. The detailed percentages matter less than the political message: no leader can wish away the citizens whose representatives could make governing possible.

President Isaac Herzog has now given Gadi Eisenkot the mandate to form a government. That is an opportunity, not a complete transfer of power; Benjamin Netanyahu remains caretaker prime minister. The suspense has therefore changed its focus. It is no longer simply about whom Herzog will choose, but whether Eisenkot can assemble partners who agree on more than replacing Netanyahu. If Eisenkot fails, Israelis will return to the polls to vote in the Spring, as a new election will be mandated.

Ari Shavit offers one route out of the impasse. In the subtitle to his pre-election essay "The Minority Coalition Dilemma," published October 23, he wrote: "Eisenkot and Bennett must ask Likud to join a post-Netanyahu *Tikkun* (repair) government." His prescription points toward political repair through a broader partnership rather than another narrow confrontation. It deserves serious consideration. But it also raises an uncomfortable question: can a post-Netanyahu arrangement become a practical negotiating option rather than an aspiration? Calling for unity is easier than agreeing on who leads it and what it must change. A close friend, Ari Shavit to me, holds the status of an Israeli political prophet. I think he raises a key issue, namely that the Zionist parties, Eisenkot's Yashar included, must find common ground with Likud.

Gilad Kariv emphasizes a different starting point: the electorate has changed the political possibilities. In a post-election statement quoted by *The Jerusalem Post* on October 28, he said: "The opposition has grown stronger, both in its representation of the liberal Jewish public and in its representation of the Arab public." That observation challenges the habit of treating Arab representation as an inconvenient footnote. Shavit's appeal for a broader governing framework and Kariv's recognition of Arab political strength need not be mutually exclusive. Both demand that leaders confront the country they actually have, not the electorate they would prefer.



On November 8, President Isaac Herzog tasked the Leader of the Yashar party, Gadi Eiskenot, with forming a government. GPO/Haim Zach

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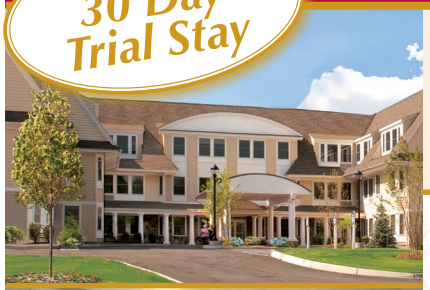



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After Israel's Election: Reconciling Identity and Security

The strength of the Arab-Israeli vote is one of this election's clearest messages. Reported turnout rose from roughly half of Arab voters in the previous election to about three-quarters this time, with particularly strong mobilization in Bedouin communities. Arab-led parties emerged with substantially greater parliamentary representation. This is not simply leverage for coalition bargaining; it is a demand to be heard on public safety, services and the community's place in the country's future. In my view, a democracy should welcome that participation. Arab citizens are not a single ideological bloc, and their growing electoral strength should prompt serious engagement rather than blanket suspicion.

Equal citizenship does not require pretending that every party is an equally suitable coalition partner. The distinction between a citizen's right to representation and a party's compatibility with a governing program is essential. Israel can insist on security, reject political violence and preserve its Jewish and democratic character while judging prospective partners by their stated commitments and conduct. What it should not do is make ethnicity itself a disqualification. A vote cast by an Arab Israeli deserves the same democratic respect as any other citizen's vote.

Ra'am and the Joint List should therefore not be treated as interchangeable. Mansour Abbas has sought to present Ra'am as a viable governing partner and has voiced support for Hamas's full disarmament. Other Arab-party cooperation may involve support from outside a coalition rather than cabinet membership. Those possibilities still face substantial opposition and unresolved disagreements. Recognizing that complexity is more useful than either romanticizing partnership or declaring it impossible before negotiations begin.

Nor can coalition bargaining evade the difficult questions within the Jewish parties. Military conscription, the distribution of public obligations and the terms of cooperation with ultra-Orthodox parties remain obstacles. A government that purchases stability by abandoning every principle on which it campaigned would begin with a credibility problem. The aim should be an honest, workable compromise — not an agreement whose contradictions are concealed until the first serious vote.

Another election remains a possibility, but it should not be treated as destiny — or as a guaranteed victory for Netanyahu. Predicting how frustrated voters will move is easier than proving it. My judgment is that Israel needs political courage before it needs another campaign: courage to negotiate across familiar boundaries, to distinguish legitimate security concerns from exclusion, and to respect the electoral strength of Arab citizens. The country has demonstrated its capacity to compete. Its leaders must now demonstrate their capacity to govern.

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.

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Our Community



On September 28, community members gathered at Temple Beth Zion in Brookline for a powerful and deeply moving event focused on the experiences and aspirations of Jews of Color. Attendees heard compelling personal stories centered on shaping a more inclusive future for the Jewish community. The evening opened with welcoming remarks and introductions by Ilana Kaufman and Rav Tiferet Berenbaum, followed by a panel discussion moderated by Colette Phillips. The panel featured Cindy Rowe (JALSA), Robert Leikind (AJC New England), Samantha Robinson (CJP), Adina Walker, Rabbi Abraham David, and Ellen VanDyke (JALSA). The event ended with a musical performance and pastries.



Our Community



On October 6, Temple Emanuel of Newton had the privilege of hosting a preview of the upcoming documentary Munkács Miracle. The film tells the remarkable, intertwined story of Magda Bader (a Temple Emanuel member) and Ruth Cohen. Born just days apart in 1930 and raised in Munkács, Czechoslovakia, their lives crossed paths again when they were deported to Auschwitz from the same place on the exact same day at just 14 years old. Their legacy stands as a true testament to survival and strength. The screening was followed by a Q&A with Magda Bader and Executive Producers Deborah Coltin, Lappin Foundation's Executive Director, and Sarah Ovadia.

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Our Community

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The Soul-lights of Chanukah

By Sonia Taitz

Traditionally, the eight lights of Chanukah are seen as symbols of a miraculous dedication in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. After long and barbarous desecration by our enemies, the sacred space was rededicated by means of candlelight. One tiny pot of oil was found with which to chase away the darkness and illuminate, again, our Jewish path. But it was enough. Somehow, with that meager amount of oil surrounded by hearts that remembered God, the light shone for eight days. It continues to shine each year, both in our hearts and in our homes. Each year, as we proudly light the *Chanukiah*, we assert our ability to keep bringing light into the world, no matter how dark the circumstances. From one small illumination, a sense of eternity is launched.

To me, the eight lights of Chanukah may hold an additional, personal meaning. Perhaps they speak of the growth of our own souls, which increasingly shine throughout our lives and beyond. Like the Chanukah candles, our *neshamot* (souls) are no less than glimmers of eternity in a dark and finite world. Maybe these eight candles are metaphors for eight stages of life, from birth to late old age. Could it be that our lives, too, are unfolding miracles?

Most people treasure the stages of childhood, youth, and adulthood, but fear the last decades, in which they feel they are "fading." They grip onto periods of obvious growth, of building and accumulating, trying to maintain stasis, holding on. But according to Jewish mysticism, the peak of the soul's beauty, its own miraculous splendor, begins only in the second half of life. Here, in our later decades, simple vanities fall away and what is real, permanent and holy appears more clearly. That is our true Zohar, or radiance.

The first candle, in this context, represents childhood, in which we begin to grasp the world and our place in it. The second is adolescence to early adulthood, where we grow to our full beauty and begin to seek a life-partner. Next, work and accomplishments occupy center stage, and our worldly powers seem to reach a glorious height. Then, a softening, as we begin to raise children and find the expansive tenderness to love them even more than ourselves.

The fifth stage is full maturity, where we can generously share our gifts with others, mentoring, leading, giving charity. The sixth brings our understanding that time is moving on, as we see our own parents age and realize that our own physical lives are finite. Seven, in Judaism, is a number of completion – there are seven days in the week, seven weeks in the *Omer*. At seventy, the sages say, one begins to be not only older but wiser. Spirituality grows beyond the rote. As our own worldly powers begin to fade, the inner light is all the more visible. We rest more, we relish more, we radiate more love.

The eighth stage, the final candle, is true seniority. To reach old age is a privileged state in which all who know us may finally experience the lasting beauty of a fully illuminated human being. Each light, or stage, of our Chanukah ritual, takes us closer and closer to this ultimate brightness: A fully-lit *Chanukiah*, enlightening each Jewish home and bringing the presence of miracles to the world around it.

Sonia Taitz is the author of six books, including the prizewinning memoir,* The Watchmaker's Daughter. *Her forthcoming book,* A Soul of Many Colors, *will be published this March.





Mark Twain in Ottoman Palestine

By Rabbi Shlomo Pereira

Mark Twain camped just inside the walls of Tiberias in 1867. Before nightfall, he walked into town, where he saw Jews and Arabs among its inhabitants. In Jerusalem he described Jews gathering every Friday at the Western Wall. These are two scenes from Ottoman Palestine about fifteen years before the First Aliyah, the opening wave of large-scale Jewish immigration that began in the early 1880s. Alongside the poverty and sparse settlement Twain reported in parts of the country, his account records Jewish communities with established places of worship and ties to sites revered for generations.

In June 1867, Mark Twain sailed from New York aboard the steamship *Quaker City* on a five-month excursion that combined European sightseeing with a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His fellow passengers included clergy members, physicians, couples and families, and other newspaper correspondents. The San Francisco *Daily Alta California* paid Twain's passage in exchange for dispatches, and he also wrote for two New York papers, the *Tribune* and the *Herald*. He later reworked the newspaper letters into *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869. It was his first major book success, brought him a national readership, and remained his best-selling book during his lifetime.

For the Palestine leg, Twain and several companions left the ship at Beirut and traveled overland through Galilee and Samaria to Jerusalem, rejoining the steamer at Jaffa. The route took them through lakeside villages, cultivated valleys, and walled towns as well as the biblical sites that had drawn the pilgrims. On the overland journey, he was struck by the short distances between places familiar from the Bible. He estimated Palestine's width at forty to sixty miles. The places his readers knew from Scripture belonged to a country whose towns, villages, and cultivated valleys could be reached in a succession of rides.

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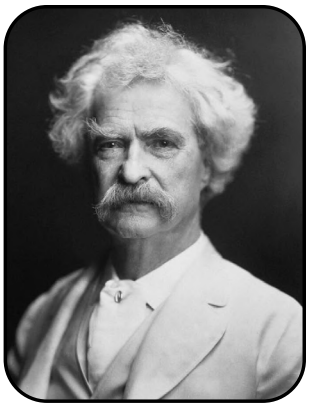
Mark Twain in Ottoman Palestine

Around the Sea of Galilee, Twain saw low yellow hills, rocky slopes, and a lake without sails. At Capernaum he saw ruins. At Magdala he described cramped houses and inhabitants who came out to beg from the visitors. Farther south, he found a different landscape at Nablus, the biblical Shechem. The narrow valley there was "under high cultivation," he wrote, and its soil was dark and fertile. The valley was well watered, and its vegetation stood out against the bare hills on either side.



In Tiberias, Twain noticed details of daily life, including women who wore their dowries in Turkish silver coins arranged on wires around their heads. He reported poverty in the town and described Jewish men whose sidelocks and distinctive hats caught his eye. He also drew on written sources to explain Tiberias's standing as one of Judaism's four holy cities. He identified it as the last seat of the Sanhedrin and as a former center of Jewish life in Palestine, home to generations of rabbinic scholars.

The graves of those scholars were part of the town's religious geography. Twain related that Jews had traveled from afar to live near the rabbis and to be buried beside them. In Twain's account, the cemetery helps explain why Tiberias mattered to Jews who lived far from Galilee. The town's standing as a center of rabbinic learning had outlasted the scholars buried there.

Jerusalem struck Twain first by its compactness. A brisk walker, he reckoned, could circle its walls in an hour. Inside, houses stood so close together that the city looked almost solid from above. He listed Jews, Muslims, and several Christian communities among its inhabitants. Near sacred sites, he saw people begging and people living with illness or disability. At the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, his party returned day after day. On the Temple Mount, he described the marble and mosaics inside the shrine he called the Mosque of Omar. His itinerary thus took him from Christian and Muslim holy places to the wall where he recorded the Jewish Friday gathering.

At the Western Wall, Twain was struck by the size of the masonry. He compared the length of individual blocks to that of two seven-octave pianos set end to end. He recorded that Jews assembled there every Friday to kiss the stones and mourn the fall of Zion. The regularity of the gathering is one of the most telling details in his account. Worshippers returned to the Wall week after week, and mourning for the Temple took on a public, recurring expression in the city.

In summing up the journey, Twain recalled the ancient grandeur of Jerusalem and called the city he had visited a "pauper village." His verdict on the land was equally harsh. He ended his assessment of the landscape with a question drawn from the biblical language of curse and blessing. "Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land?"

Twain called Palestine "desolate and unlovely," yet he also described the fertile valley of Nablus, Jewish residents in Tiberias, and Jews who gathered each Friday at Jerusalem's Western Wall. The Jewish communities he encountered were already rooted in the land, and the generations that followed enlarged that presence, founding new towns and bringing more land under cultivation. To turn Twain's question about the curse of the Deity around, the renewal of Jewish life that began just fifteen years after his visit brought prosperity and beauty to a land he had found so desolate and unlovely.

Rabbi Shlomo Pereira is Professor Emeritus at William & Mary and serves as the Director of Adult Education at Chabad of Virginia in Richmond. He can be reached at shlomo@chabadofva.org. You can browse his new website https://rshlomopereira.com/

Photo: Mark Twain by AFBradley, wikipedia.





Beyond the Latkes: Rediscovering the Meaning of Chanukah

By Robert Kaiser

As Chanukah approaches, we see menorahs in the windows and dreidels on the tables. Families gather, children play games, presents are exchanged. It is a joyful time. Yet too often, Chanukah has come to be thought of as a Jewish version of Christmas. Some even present it as a generic winter festival bringing light to a dark season. But that is an odd way to understand an event that took place not in Vermont during a New England winter (beautiful as that may be), but in Jerusalem, in the land of Israel, a land with more sunlight than nations of northern latitudes.

Somewhere along the way, the understanding of what this festival is about has been lost, or perhaps never fully learned. Behind the externals, Chanukah is our people's story of preserving our faith, traditions, and peoplehood in a changing and often hostile world.

Let's start at the beginning: Under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Seleucid authorities outlawed Judaism. Our Temple in Jerusalem was desecrated, and Jews who observed our mitzvot were executed. This led to the Maccabean revolt.

During this war, Jews were unable to properly observe their holidays, including Sukkot. After the Maccabees reclaimed the Temple, they held an eight-day celebration modeled on the Sukkot festival they had been unable to observe. As *2 Maccabees* 10:6–8 says: "Therefore bearing ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to God who had given success to the purifying of His own holy place. They decreed by public ordinance and vote that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year. Such then was the end of Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes."

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Beyond the Latkes: Rediscovering the Meaning of Chanukah



Chanukah is also about our connection to our ancestral homeland. Some decades later, Simon, the last surviving brother of Judah Maccabee, was confronted by a demand from the Seleucid king Antiochus VII to surrender territory that the Maccabees had recovered. Simon responded with a remarkable declaration: "We have not taken strange lands, nor are we ruling over foreign territory. We have returned to our ancestral inheritance." (*1 Maccabees* 15:33–34).

Lee Kern offers a great way of expressing this: "Chanukah isn't a platitudinous celebration of light. It's the specific commemoration of Jewish rebels (Maccabees) resisting attempts by non-Jews to erase Jewish life and culture in Judea and Jerusalem. Before any universal interpretation, Chanukah is a specific tale of Jewish freedom."

Chanukah also has a spiritual dimension: the rabbis established the recitation of complete Hallel, the Psalms of praise and thanksgiving, on all eight days of Chanukah (*Arachin* 10b). In fact, among the rabbinically instituted festivals, Chanukah is the only one requiring a full Hallel.

Closer to our time, Rabbi Pesach Sommer teaches: There's an idea that goes back to Aharon Rokeach (fourth rebbe of the Belz Hasidim) that connects Ner Chanuka (light of Chanukah) to the Ohr HaGanuz, supernal light revealed at creation, and then hidden away for the future…. We might think that once something is hidden away, like this light, that it is no different than it not existing at all. But the rabbis say otherwise: while the Ohr is not revealed, its effect can still be felt. On Chanuka, we are given a brief reprieve to see this light, and if we pay attention, we can still feel its light even when it goes back into hiding.

A modern master teacher, Rabbi Joey Rosenfeld, teaches that "our world is always trembling at the threshold between the two. Our *tefillah* (prayer) becomes our vehicle across that threshold: through prayer, we reach toward the flame seemingly in exile, where the sparks of the hidden Divine become pointers toward redemption."

Chanukah prayers help us recognize Divine sparks that remain present even in a world where God's presence is not always apparent.

So this Chanukah, by all means, enjoy the latkes, decorate your homes, and light the candles. Celebrate with your family and friends. Just also take time to explore its meaning. The candles are only the beginning of the story.

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.



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Newton Mayor Marc Laredo joins Israeli American Council (IAC) Co-Chairs Dorit Cohen and Avi Almozlino, and NE Regional Director Sagit Sade Attia at the Rosh Hashanah toast.

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Faith, Freedom, and the Public Menorah

By Eli Rubin

Reflecting on the 1979 inauguration of the National Menorah near the White House, the Rebbe — Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson — noted that "the Chanukah Menorah … has won a place not only in Jewish life, but also in the life of the American people."

At that 1979 event, President Carter had stepped up to a podium emblazoned with his official seal to address the gathered crowd. "The season of Chanukah," he said, "commemorates the perpetuation of age-old dreams, and the hunger of men and women down through the ages, to maintain a spirit committed to life under the most difficult circumstances, the most difficult persecutions, the most difficult dangers, and under the most difficult suffering. It also commemorates humankind's commitment to be free."



Mt. Rushmore Menorah Lighting by Chabad of South Dakota

Rather than dismissing these remarks as artless and naive, I take them as explications of a simple truth we sometimes risk forgetting: American freedom is sacred, but not sectarian; anchored in G-d, extending aspirationally through time and space, it hopes to include all human beings in its expansive spirit of generosity.

The Rebbe's campaign for public menorahs faced criticism from leaders arguing it violated the separation of church and state. In response, the Rebbe took note of the routine opening of the U.S. Congress "with a religious invocation by a representative of one of the major religions in this country." Given that the U.S. Congress "is the place where the Constitution of the U.S.A. should be most rigidly upheld," he argued, it should be clear that there was nothing at all unconstitutional about this sort of relationship between government and religion.

In 1986, a district court noted that "the establishment clause is not so strictly interpreted as to forbid conventional nonsectarian public invocations of the deity, a standard example being the slogan on U.S. currency and coins: 'In G-d We Trust.'" Soon after, in 1989, the Supreme Court ruled that a menorah, owned by Chabad, could be erected in front of Pittsburgh's City-County Building. In the words of Jonathan Sarna, one of the leading historians of Judaism in America, Chanukah menorahs have since "become ubiquitous in public and government venues across the United States."

One of the secrets of Chabad's success is the Rebbe's penetrating understanding of America's soul. America's religious heritage, he intuited, is so intrinsic that no reading of the establishment clause can be so strict as to erase it from our public institutions and civic spaces.

This intuition relates not only to the Menorah case, but to the Rebbe's vision for Judaism in the United States in the broadest possible sense. To quote Sarna again: "The widely publicized debates over menorah displays, followed by the US Supreme Court's vindication of Chabad's Constitutional claims … helps to explain" the "ubiquitous … presence" of Chabad "in communities and college campuses from coast to coast." And, "so too," Sarna adds, "does the genius of the Rebbe himself."

Eli Rubin, a contributing editor at Chabad.org, is the author of Kabbalah and the* Rupture of Modernity: An Existential History of Chabad Hasidism *(Stanford University Press, 2025). He was a co-author of* Social Vision: The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Transformative Paradigm for the World *(Herder and Herder, 2019). He received his PhD from the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University College London.





When Minds Collide or Collude: Theory of Mind Explained

By Rus Devorah (Darcy) Wallen, LCSW, CIMHP

There is a quiet miracle happening whenever two people speak: one nervous system is trying to imagine another. I can see your face, hear your words, and know something of your history, but I cannot enter your consciousness. Still, the brain constructs hypotheses about what another person believes, intends, fears, remembers, and feels. Psychology calls this **Theory of Mind**, or more broadly, *mentalizing*.

Mature mentalizing does not mean, "I know what you are thinking." It means almost the opposite: *I know there is a mind there, but my interpretation of it may be wrong*. That humility is essential because the brain is also a prediction machine. It constantly combines present information with past experience to anticipate what things mean. In relationships, where another person's mind is hidden, those predictions can quickly masquerade as facts. Someone becomes quiet and the brain supplies a story: *She's angry. He's rejecting me. I did something wrong.* The brain often hands us its predictions already dressed as reality.

Under stress, reflective thinking becomes harder. We grow less tolerant of ambiguity and more likely to interpret uncertainty as threat. Sometimes we even **hypermentalize** — constructing elaborate explanations for another person's motives and becoming excessively certain about them: "You looked away because you're ashamed." "You took longer to answer because you wanted to hurt me." Healthy Theory of Mind lives between social blindness and psychic omniscience. It says: *Something may be happening here. Let me investigate.*

Chassidus offers a parallel principle: ***mo'ach shalit al haleiv*** — the mind can guide the heart. Tanya does not ask us to erase emotion. Emotion carries memory, attachment, fear, and longing. The question is whether feeling becomes information or dictator. Pirkei Avot





When Minds Collide or Collude: Theory of Mind Explained

similarly teaches, "Judge every person favorably." This is not naïveté or ignoring harmful behavior. It is refusing to pretend certainty where certainty has not been earned. When several explanations fit the facts, we leave room for one that does not immediately turn another person into a villain.

This matters because old relational experiences shape present interpretations. A delayed text can awaken abandonment. A neutral tone can echo earlier rejection. As I often tell clients, "**If it's hot, it's old.**" Not always — but when emotional intensity greatly exceeds the present event, an older relational map may have been activated. Wisdom begins by noticing the reaction before it becomes behavior: the tightening jaw, racing heart, angry certainty. *Eizehu hachochom? Haro'eh es hanolad* — Who is wise? One who sees what is developing.

Then we can distinguish feeling from interpretation. "I feel rejected" is different from "You rejected me." "I feel afraid" is different from "You are threatening me." That grammatical distinction can save a relationship. Instead of manufacturing meaning, we ask: "When you became quiet, I interpreted it as anger. Is that what was happening?"

Human beings will misread one another. Secure relationships are not rupture-free; they are relationships capable of repair. Theory of Mind ultimately asks for a courageous humility: *I may be wrong about what you are thinking, and this relationship matters enough that I am willing to find out.*

Torah Sources: Pirkei Avot 1:6; Shabbos 127b; Tamid 32a; Tanya, Likutei Amarim, ch. 12.

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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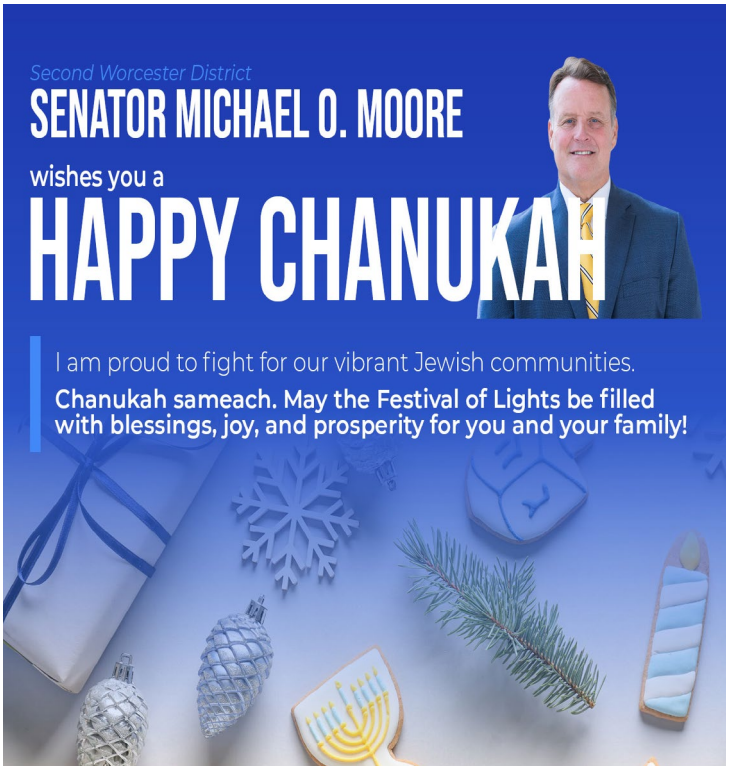



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Center Makor Welcomes LimmudBoston

By Vladimir Foygelman

We are thrilled to share some momentous news: *LimmudBoston* has officially merged with Center Makor, with Center Makor continuing as the surviving entity. By uniting our strengths, resources, and shared passions, we are creating an even more vibrant, dynamic hub for cultural heritage, education, and community connection.



A presentation by writer Martin Bodek

But what exactly is *Limmud*, and what does this exciting new chapter mean for you?

The heart and soul of *Limmud* are in the name. *Limmud* (the Hebrew word for "to learn") is a global movement that began in the UK in 1980 and has since taken the world by storm. It isn't just a lecture series; it's an immersive, volunteer-driven celebration of Jewish culture, creativity, and knowledge.

The philosophy of *Limmud* is built on a few powerful ideas: learning is lifelong, education should be accessible to everyone, and everyone has something to teach as well as something to learn. No matter your background or level of knowledge, you belong here. We celebrate



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Center Makor Welcomes LimmudBoston

diversity and inclusivity because we embrace the rich spectrum of Jewish life. It's a place where cross-communal conversations thrive in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Empowerment and volunteerism at the *Limmud* events are built by the community, and for the community.

Since our merge we are moving forward together to implement our vision, as *LimmudBoston* finds its permanent home at Center Makor, our mission expands. We are dedicated to creating space for ideas, collaboration, and unforgettable live experiences.

Whether we are hosting massive community festivals, cozy discussion groups, or hands-on creative labs, our goals are clear: to foster deep connections by building networks where families, innovators, and creators can collaborate and ignite curiosity by providing unique educational programming that explores Jewish heritage, art, history, and modern life. We very much would like to empower the next generation by giving young minds the tools and spaces to lead. At the *LimmudBoston* at Center Makor there is a place for everyone. No matter who you are at *LimmudBoston* at Center Makor we have something crafted just for you.

Families could discover hands-on arts and educational labs where parents and kids create memories and learn side-by-side. Teens and young adults will find your crew, debate big ideas, and lead collaborative community projects that matter. The general public will have a great opportunity to immerse themselves in rich cultural exhibitions, film screenings, live music performances, and thought-provoking lectures.

This is a community built on your curiosity, your energy, and your voice. The door is wide open, and the next chapter is ours to write together. Our next event is on Sunday, January 10, 2027, from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Find more at www.centermakor.org.

Vladimir Foygelman is the President of Center Makor.



The next edition of Shalom Magazine is PASSOVER 2027. Reserve your spot by calling 781-975-0482 or emailing ShalomMA@msn.com



To Kindle a Light of Chanukah



By Rabbi Sam Seicol

For all who live north of the Tropic of Cancer, the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev (falling between the last days of November and the end of December) marks the entrance into Winter. The final moon before the winter solstice is waning as the days grow shorter and the nights longer. Thus, these are the longest and darkest nights of the year.

Chanukah has been celebrated since the writings of the Books of Maccabees. Much has been written about this festival for over 2,100 years: from rules and regulations to stories and interpretations. While connecting across scores of generations, each has also found meaning and inspiration for their specific time.

This article offers some thoughts during the actual lighting of the *Chanukiah* (חֲנֻכִּיָּה) with a *drash* on the words of the *b'racha* (בְּרָכָה): *l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah* (לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה) / to ignite (cause to burn) a light of Chet Nun Chaf Hei (חנכ״ה). While the first candle/wick lit is the *shamash* (שַׁמָּשׁ), the blessing traditionally refers to the light of that evening, lit first by the *shamash*. The *shamash* itself, however, is unblessed and unheralded.

Yet all rely on the *shamash*. By its flame are all others ignited. In sharing its spark with the others, its light is undiminished. Like the *shamash*, each person who brings light into the darkness can brighten the world while retaining their own glow.



The final word of the blessing for the *Chanukiah* derives from the root Chet Nun Chaf (חנ״כ), meaning education and dedication. The challenge, especially at this time of Chanukah, is to be more like the *shamash*: to be the giver, not simply the recipient, of a light of dedication — shining a light of learning and growth into the gloom of darkness that spreads across the land.

When we say *l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah*, to kindle a light of Chanukah, may we remember and emulate the unsung of this and every generation who sought to bring lights of life and hope that can dispel the darkness of hate and fear.

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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A Plea for Jewish Unity



By David Bernat, PhD

My *cri de coeur*, my appeal for Jewish unity this Chanukah, is informed by Santayana's cautionary "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

I am completing this column on November 1, on the heels of voting in Israel, and anticipating election day at home. I fear the consequences for the Jewish community if we don't heed the lessons of our history, specifically the rise and fall of the Maccabees, or more properly the Hasmoneans.

Every Jewish child knows the beginning of the story. Once there was, in Modiin, an aristocratic family of priestly descent, the Hasmoneans, whose patriarch was Mattathias. Helmed by his son Judah the Maccabee (Hebrew for "Hammer"), the Hasmoneans led a successful revolt against the Seleucid Greek overlords and their king, Antiochus IV. They established Jewish rule over Judea, and we commemorate their triumph every year with our Chanukah celebration.

Judah's brother Simon was next in line and declared himself king and high priest. However, Jewish control of the homeland was not fully secure until about 120 BCE amidst the reign of Johanan Hyrcanos, Simon's son and Judah's nephew. Johanan built the nation's economy and embarked on a military campaign that doubled the size of the kingdom. Johanan's son Alexander Yannai inherited the mantle in 103 BCE and built upon his father's success. He expanded the borders of the land beyond that of the biblical monarchy's glory days, enriched the nation, and kept the Romans at bay through diplomacy. A testament to his popularity was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls: a prayer for his health and welfare, the first such prayer in the name of a Jewish ruler.

That said, he was not universally loved. The Pharisees, the progenitors of the rabbis responsible for the Mishnah and Talmud, resented him because he and his father favored their religious rivals,



A Plea for Jewish Unity

the Sadducees. In 88 BCE, the Pharisees attempted to overthrow Yannai and invited a Greek king to aid them. The coup nearly split the nation asunder, but was unsuccessful. Yannai held on to the throne and publicly executed the leaders of the insurrection. Yannai died in 76 BCE, and his wife, Shlomzion, ruled for ten prosperous years. Yannai and Shlomzion had two sons, Aristobulos II and Hyrcanos II. When Shlomzion passed in 67 BCE, the brothers competed for the throne and the high priesthood. Aristobulos won the day, but only temporarily. In 63 BCE, Hyrcanos asked the Romans, under Pompey, to intervene on his behalf. Taking advantage of the chaos, the Roman general Aemilius Scaurus invaded and overran Judea. Hyrcanos was installed as a puppet ruler, but Judea was annexed to the Roman Empire. After 63 BCE, Jews did not rule our homeland again until 1948. The attempted coup in 88 BCE nearly destroyed the nation from within. The brothers' rivalry led to the implosion of Jewish leadership, whose tragic consequences endured for 2,000 years.

Today, we are threatened by a similar disintegration of Jewish unity. The Israeli elections as of now are inconclusive, and the rancor is palpable. Bibi and Eisenkot will not agree to a coalition. Haredim in the present administration are hostile to non-Orthodox and secular Israelis, women's and LGBTQ rights, while the toxic policies of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich continue to sabotage Israel's standing internationally and even in the US. And who will include the Arab parties? Israel, due to her heroic military, has kept our external enemies — Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran — at bay, but she is a nation at war with herself.

Circumstances in Israel, and in the electorate at home, are pitting Jew against Jew. MAGA supporters must turn a blind eye, among many problems, to the acceptance of groups whose rallying cry is "Jews will not replace us…" While most Jews have found our home in the Democratic Party, we are increasingly confronted by figures such as Zohran Mamdani, Abdul El-Sayed, Bernie Sanders, and a Massachusetts congressional delegation that is unsympathetic to Israel and the notion of Jews as an indigenous people in our homeland. In "progressive" congregations that are committed to social justice and *tikkun olam* — core Jewish values — rabbis are donning watermelon kippot, and keffiyehs are replacing *talitot*.

By the time this *Shalom Magazine* edition is published, we will likely have conclusions to the elections. And in their wake, we must, as Jews, find a way to engage despite our differences, rather than allowing our community to crumble, as did the Hasmoneans, ultimately, despite their initial triumph. I wish I could offer a solution; I am inspired by the Chanukah song, *Banu Choshech Legaresh:* "We Have Come to Expel the Darkness." *Kol Echad Hu Or Katan, veKulanu Or Eitan*: "As individuals we are a small light, but together we are a mighty light."

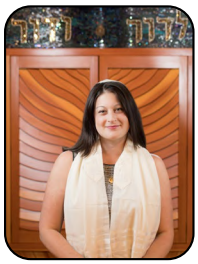
With that, I wish you a joyous Chanukah: *Chag Urim Sameach*!

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





After the Battle, the Oil



Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal

Every Chanukah, we tell two stories.

The first is a story of war. A small band of Jewish fighters, led by Judah the Maccabee and his brothers, takes on the Seleucid Empire, a far larger and better-equipped army, and wins. It is David and Goliath, except that it happened in recorded history. It is the story of Jews winning back their sovereignty against all odds, and it has always captured the imagination.

The second is a story of light. When the Jews return to the Temple after the fighting, they find it defiled. They search for pure oil to light the menorah and find a single sealed jar, enough for one day. They light it anyway, and it burns for eight days, long enough to prepare new oil and rededicate the Temple.

Both stories belong to the holiday. But which one we emphasize has always depended on where we stand.

The Books of Maccabees, written close to the events, are mostly military history. Yet when the rabbis of the Talmud, living in Babylonia under foreign rule, asked "What is Chanukah?", they answered with the oil. The war barely comes up.

That choice makes sense. For most of the past two thousand years, Jewish communities had little power. They relied on outside rulers for their safety and took care not to provoke them. A holiday celebrating armed revolt against an empire was a risky thing to put front and center. A holiday celebrating a quiet miracle inside the sanctuary was not. So for generations, the story we told was about faith and divine help, not military strength.

That changed with the rise of Zionism, and above all after 1948. The Maccabees became heroes again, a model for a people determined



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to defend themselves. The parallel was hard to miss. A small, outnumbered nation, many of its citizens refugees driven from their homes across Europe and the Middle East, fought off the armies around it and regained sovereignty in the Land of Israel two thousand years after losing it.

For many Israelis, the war story is not ancient history. The first decades of the state were Maccabean in spirit: the few against the many, relying on no one but themselves. Seen from Israel, Chanukah reads like history repeating itself.



Today the Jewish people live in both worlds at once. We have a sovereign state, and we have diaspora communities whose security feels far less certain than it did only a few years ago. So we cannot simply choose one story. We have to hold both.

And for those of us in the Diaspora, especially in America as election season comes to a close, the second story has something particular to say.

Imagine walking back into that Temple. The war is over, and you have barely survived it. The adrenaline that carried you through the fighting is gone. What remains is exhaustion, and a ruined sanctuary staring back at you.

Winning was not enough. Now came the hard, unglamorous, detailed work: hauling out the debris, taking stock of the damage, working out what could be repaired and what had to be found and replaced. Nobody writes songs about that part. It does not make your heart race. Mostly, it reminds you how tired you are.

And yet that is the work the holiday is named for. Chanukah means "dedication." The festival does not commemorate a battle. It commemorates what came after.

Elections are the battle. They are high-stakes, intense, and rarely pretty, and for months they run on adrenaline, one spike after another. Once the votes are counted, we enter the next phase, the one that matters most and gets the least attention: governing.

Our hope for the people we have elected, whoever they turn out to be, is that they can take a deep breath and step into the Temple. That they can sit down with the people they spent months running against and find compromise. That they will measure success by how well they serve their constituents, not by how soundly they defeat their opponents. That they will look carefully at the damage and begin the slow work of repair.

May they rededicate themselves to the work they signed up to do.

And may we do the same. Campaign season trains us to see our neighbors as opponents. Rededication asks something harder of us: to sit with people we disagree with and keep talking, to question our own certainties enough to let in new information, and to do the patient, unglamorous work of rebuilding trust.

The miracle of Chanukah was not that the jar was full. It was that someone lit a jar that looked far too small for the job, and it turned out to be enough. This season, may we find the courage to light what we have, and the eyes to notice the small miracles that happen every single day.

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





Weaving the Tapestry: 135 Years of Ahavath Torah Congregation

By Rabbi Jonathan Hausman

In 1891, a group of Eastern European immigrants arrived in Stoughton with little more than their traditions and a shared hope for the future. Seeking comfort and continuity, they formed the small societies that eventually united to become Ahavath Torah Congregation.

For 135 years, ATC has been much more than a physical sanctuary. It has been a steady anchor through changing times and a silent witness to generations of family milestones. The congregation's addresses have shifted over the decades — from the old Lipsky home near Stoughton High School, to Porter Street, and eventually to Pearl Street in 1954 and Central Street in 1969. But through every transition, the spirit of the community remained unbroken.

That resilience has been guided by steady spiritual leadership. Following the foundational decades of Rabbi Henry Gerson — who served from 1926 until 1970 — and the cherished tenures of Rabbis David Oler, Harold Schechter, and Steve Conn, our community has maintained a rare continuity. Marking thirty years at the helm, I have had the privilege of watching this congregation weather life's seasons together.

Today, ATC pulses with a vibrant life. Our halls bring together children and seniors, Torah learners and cultural seekers, while welcoming our wider neighbors to share in music, art, and community events. We stand as a living bridge — honoring our founders, remembering the Holocaust, celebrating Israel, and engaging the questions of our time.

As we look toward our next century, our goal is simple: to honor the vision of those who came before us, to cherish the family we have built today, and to keep this sacred home welcoming for the generations to come.

ATC is more than a synagogue. It is living history, written together.

Rabbi Jonathan Hausman serves Ahavat Torah Congregation in Stoughton, www.atorah.org.



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The Walnut Street Synagogue Presents a World of Jewish Discovery: from Latin America to Israel

By Tom Barth

The historic Walnut Street Synagogue of Chelsea is pleased to launch an online series, *Jewish Journeys through Latin America*, that will run through February 2027, exploring the rich history, culture, and enduring traditions of Jewish communities across four Latin American countries: Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

Through engaging presentations by local Jewish educators, historians, and community leaders, participants are invited to discover the fascinating stories of Jewish immigration, settlement, and community life, while exploring how Jewish identity and heritage have been preserved and transformed across generations.

The series opened in November with a virtual journey through Colombia, examining both the country's established Jewish communities and the growing interest among Colombians discovering Jewish ancestry that may have been hidden for centuries.

The December 16 program travels to Recife, Brazil, a city with an extraordinary place in Jewish history. Participants will explore the arrival of Sephardic Jews during the colonial period, the flourishing of Jewish life under Dutch rule, and Kahal Zur Israel, remembered as the first synagogue established in the Americas. The tour will also introduce the Jewish community that continues to call Recife home today.

On January 13, the series moves to Chile, where presenters will share more than a century of organized Jewish life. Through photographs, videos, and personal stories, participants will visit important Jewish institutions in Santiago and learn about the generations of immigrants who helped build the country's Jewish community.

The final presentation, on February 17, explores Jewish Uruguay, tracing the arrival of European immigrants, the development of Jewish neighborhoods and institutions in Montevideo, and the influence of Uruguay's distinctive secular and progressive society on Jewish identity and communal life.

All presentations take place online at noon Eastern Time.

Another series, *Off the Beaten Track in Israel: Hidden Landscapes, Untold Stories & Unexpected Discoveries*, is tentatively planned for March through June 2027. The four-part journey will travel beyond the familiar landmarks to discover the country's hidden corners, breathtaking landscapes, fascinating histories and distinctive local cultures. From Carmel's forested trails and the spiritual legacy of the Carmelites to the bird-filled wetlands of the Hula Valley, the rolling hills of the Galilee, and the dramatic desert landscapes of the Arava, lesser-known museums will be uncovered along with remarkable archaeological sites, tucked-away villages, spectacular viewpoints and cuisine worth discovering.

Both series are made possible in part by a grant from the Congregation Ahabat Shalom Religious Fund and are provided at no charge.

The Walnut Street Synagogue is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is open for individual, family and group tours by advance reservation.

For more information and to register for programs or tours, please visit walnutstreetsynagogue.org. Contact the synagogue by email at info@walnutstreetsynagogue.org with questions.





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Beyond the Flame

By George Garcia

The cold arrives early in New England. By late afternoon, the streets darken, windows glow, and people hurry indoors. We pull our coats tighter, close our doors, and seek warmth among those we know.

Then comes Chanukah, asking us to do something almost counterintuitive: bring a flame to the threshold.

In the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Yosef Karo, the great Sephardic sage, describes placing the Chanukah lights by the entrance, opposite the mezuzah. One marks the doorway with the words of our faith; the other illuminates it. Between them stands a person preparing to step into the world.

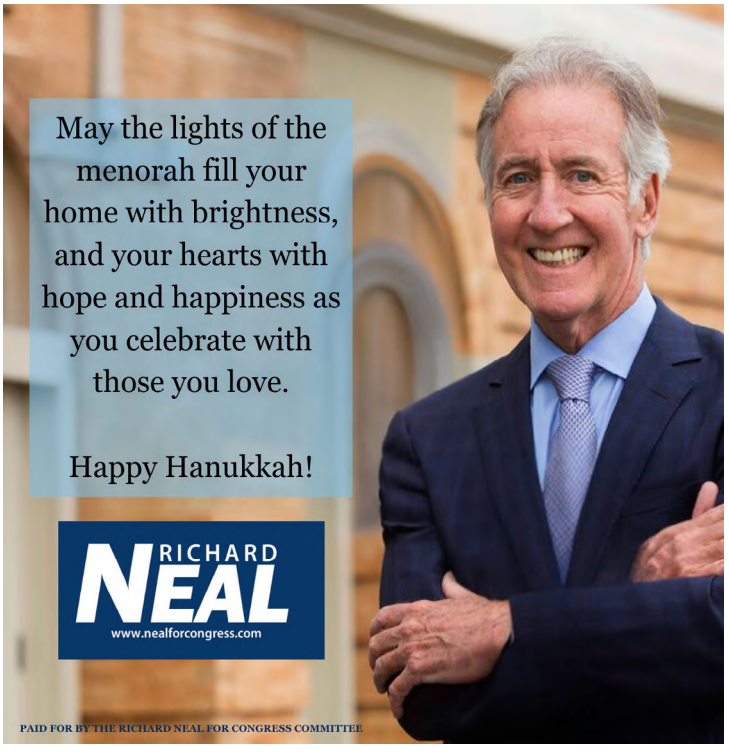
I find that image more demanding than comforting.

It would be easier to think of Chanukah as eight evenings of beautiful candles, familiar blessings, and food shared around the table. Those moments matter. But a doorway is not a place where we settle in. It is the place where we decide whether to remain inside or cross into the lives of others.

Sephardic Jewish history understands that threshold. Across centuries, Jews carried their prayers and customs through the streets of Córdoba, the ports of Morocco, and the neighborhoods of places they could not have imagined. Some doors opened in welcome. Others closed. Yet the traditions endured not because our ancestors kept them sealed away, but because they practiced them: in homes, synagogues, marketplaces, kitchens, and the relationships that sustained community.

For me, the beauty of our tradition lies partly in this refusal to separate the sacred from the everyday. A melody heard in prayer returns at a family table. Hospitality is not merely good manners; it becomes a religious obligation. A blessing reminds us that even an ordinary act can be performed with intention.

And so I wonder what our Chanukah lights illuminate here, now, in New England. Our communities are busy, yet loneliness can hide



behind a full calendar. We are constantly connected, yet a person can go days without being truly seen. Many of us carry anxieties that do not announce themselves when we walk into synagogue, work, or a neighbor's home. None of this can be repaired by a candle alone.

But the candle can ask a question.

Who has not been invited to a Shabbat table in months? Who stands quietly at the edge of the congregation, unsure whether there is room for them? Which elderly neighbor has stopped coming because no one offered a ride? Who needs a phone call that asks nothing in return?

We speak often of פַּרְסוּמֵי נִיסָּא (*pirsumei nisa*), publicizing the miracle. Perhaps one way to honor that commandment beyond the ritual itself is to make the light of our Jewish lives visible through our conduct. Not through grand declarations, but through attention: an extra place at dinner, a patient conversation, an act of generosity performed without an audience.

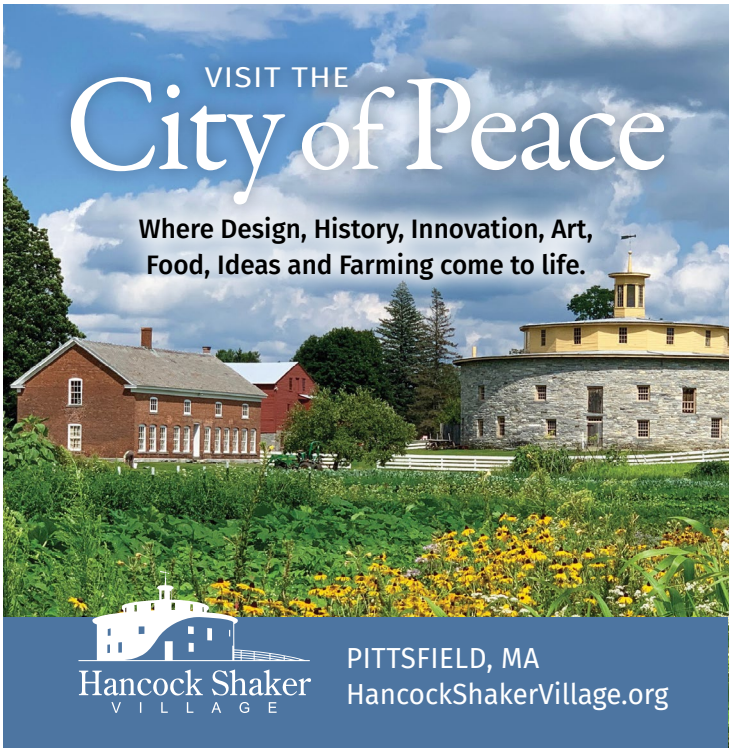
The Chanukah flame is small. It does not warm New England streets or shorten the dark winter nights we experience. And Jewish law does not even ask us to use its light for ordinary tasks. We kindle it to witness, to remember, to recognize something holy.

Then, when the candles burn out, the work begins…

This winter, may we carry our traditional inheritance not only in the melodies we sing or the customs we preserve, but in the doors we open. May our homes be warm enough to welcome a stranger, and our communities attentive enough to notice who is missing.

The miracle of Chanukah happened long ago. The decision to bring light across the threshold belongs to us tonight.

George Garcia is a Cuban-Spanish Jew and member of Beit Sasson, the Sephardic Congregation of Newton. He has over 20 years of experience in healthcare, executive operations, and organizational leadership.





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The Year We Almost Cancelled Chanukah

By Joey Baron

When our son was about nine years old, one afternoon he declared, "I don't want us to celebrate Chanukah!"

My wife and I were slightly concerned, but mostly curious about what had led to this decision. His younger sister, however, was in tears. "What do you mean, no Chanukah? No presents?" I was thinking, "Well, we can still have latkes." My wife was concerned about what to do with the many thoughtful presents she had already purchased.

Our son explained that he didn't want to celebrate the Maccabees. He discovered that the Maccabees had forced Jews who didn't believe the way they do to leave their homes and they even murdered some. While the Maccabees are usually considered rebel heroes, he saw them as fanatics. The fact is, I don't remember my Hebrew school teachers ever mentioning that the Maccabees expelled other Jews, burned down villages, and even forcibly circumcised others.

Given my son's immense pride in being Jewish, along with his inquisitiveness, I knew I didn't have the depth of knowledge or the delicacy to respond appropriately. How do you balance a son's desire to make a political statement with a daughter's desire for family get-togethers and presents?

Not having access to King Solomon, I reached out to our family's rabbi, Carl Perkins. Rabbi Perkins was always impressed by my son's unique perspectives and took my son's questions seriously. After listening to his concerns and pointing out that his decision would affect other family members, the rabbi asked him a simple question: "Do you know what you need to do to observe Chanukah?"

Reuben looked a little stumped.

The rabbi went on to explain that to celebrate Chanukah, you don't have to believe in the story of the Maccabees, that some oil burned for eight days, or even in God. Our obligation is to light the menorah and observe the light of the candles. Why that is our obligation, and what you choose to believe, is up to you. You just have to be present in the candlelight.

Having been heard, seen, and treated with intelligence and dignity, Reuben looked at him and then at me and declared, "I can do that."

A few days later, our family celebrated with candlelight, blessings, songs, and, let's not forget, some latkes.

By the way, you don't have to believe in applesauce or sour cream, either. You just have to enjoy that, in this darkest time of the year, we can find light in our homes and in our souls.

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

The next edition of Shalom Magazine is PASSOVER 2027. Reserve your spot by calling 781-975-0482 or emailing ShalomMA@msn.com

Finding Light in the Next State Legislative Session

By Cindy Rowe

Chanukah is a season of light during a period of increasing darkness. This coincides with a key time — looking ahead to the next state legislative session. Now more than ever, I am reminded of the eternal words of Pirkei Avot 2:16, "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." That means we as a Jewish community must strive to find more light.

JALSA works to advance our fundamental Jewish values in our current times. We believe that every human being is entitled to be treated with dignity, that we are obliged to welcome the stranger, and we must love our neighbors as ourselves.

On January 6, the state legislative session starts again. Bills are filed and the agenda is set for the next two years. It is the opportunity to say that we don't have to settle for the world as it is, but we can strive to achieve the world as it should be.

Our Jewish values command us to act on these critical issues:

Feeding the Hungry: Federal changes have stripped 196,000 people in our state of their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits, including 70,000 children. Of these, almost 10,000 people are refugees, asylum seekers, and those who came here as survivors of domestic violence and victims of human trafficking. The state anticipates another 150,000 families will lose SNAP.

Healthcare: Massachusetts is bracing for a $3.5 billion cut in federal MassHealth funding. Up to 300,000 people in our state could lose healthcare coverage, and 37,000 of our state's immigrants have already lost their benefits due to new federal rules. This will result in increased insurance premiums, and cuts to hospitals and medical services.

Housing: With the cost of living going up, people are at risk of losing their housing. With federal changes in this area, rental assistance for formerly homeless people and people with disabilities is in jeopardy. Vouchers, which help people get out of shelter and start new lives for themselves and their children, are no longer being issued in many cities.

These are just some of the challenges that JALSA will take on during the next legislative session. If you would like to know how you can join us and help bring more light into our world, please sign up for our weekly action alert at www.jalsa.org.

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





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Writing Your Best Last Chapter: How to Identify, Share, and Protect Your Care Choice

Thursday, December 10, 12:00 p.m.

Free Webinar: VIA Zoom

While 92% of Americans agree that discussing end-of-life wishes is important, only 32% have actually had that conversation. Join Hebrew SeniorLife for an empowering webinar that introduces key concepts and tools, demystifies the planning process, and helps you protect your care choices. Led by Hebrew SeniorLife experts, including John Halporn, MD, Harriet Warshaw, and Rabbi Karen Landy, this session offers practical guidance on starting meaningful family conversations, navigating Massachusetts legal and medical documents such as Health Care Proxies and POLST, and understanding palliative and hospice care. To sign up, please email EmilySigal@hsl.harvard.edu.

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ARTS & CULTURE

Psalm 27: A Dialogue with Text and Art



Whisper of the Eternal Presence by Silvina Mizrahi

Hebrew College Arts Initiative presents *Psalm 27: A Dialogue with Text and Art*, curated by Deborah Feinstein, on view September 9 through December 18. Eighteen artists respond to the biblical poem attributed to King David, which explores the tension between worldly fear and divine faith. The selection reflects the psalm's shifting tones, offering varied paths into tradition, spirituality and universal reflection. Feinstein, Arts Committee chair and contributing artist, calls it "a broad, enveloping exhibition." Most works are for sale, with a portion of proceeds supporting the Hebrew College Arts Initiative Fund. Admission is free.



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A Zionist Reads Anti-zionism

Anti-Zionism: A Jewish History

By Benjamin Moser
Published by Doubleday,
a division of Penguin Random House
Reviewed by Shirley Nigri Farber

I opened Benjamin Moser's *Anti-Zionism: A Jewish History* already knowing where I stand: I have always been a Zionist. What drew me in was a different question. Who within our own community doubted Herzl's vision of a Jewish state, and why? Pulitzer Prize winner Moser shows that doubters appeared in every generation, Orthodox and Reform, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, right and left. The book follows these figures across generations and regions, blending history with memoir. Some Orthodox Jews saw Zionism as contrary to religion, preferring to wait for the Messiah to gather Jews from around the world. Moser also tells his own transformation: raised in a Zionist home, he later questioned the model Herzl envisioned, and he takes the reader through what he calls a "painful process."

As a Brazilian journalist, I went first to the chapter on Helena Salem, "Palestinians, the New Jews." Her story shows what happens to those who dissent from a certain vision of Zionism: they are expelled and ostracized by their own community. Salem, a journalist from Rio de Janeiro of Sephardic background working as a correspondent in Cairo, developed a deep sense of identification and empathy toward the Arab population, and struggled to reconcile this with the prevailing policies in Israel.

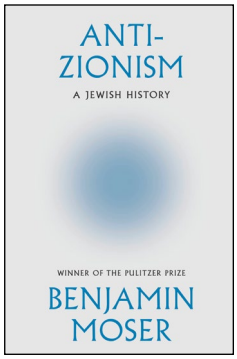
I recognized her empathy. I grew up in a Lebanese Jewish home where Arabs were never seen as enemies, unlike the way many Jews arriving from Europe saw the non-Jews around them. I remain an unapologetic Zionist, but I understood her.

That background is also why I was most interested in how many of the doubters came from the Middle East, like Sadiq Saad, a communist Jew from Egypt who turned against Israel in his writing. After most Jews were forced out of Egypt, he stayed and converted to Islam. Jews of Arab descent have a particular connection with non-Jewish Arabs. I have always believed that had Jews from the Middle East been part of the creation and leadership of the State of Israel from the beginning, we would be in a better position to deal with our Arab neighbors.

Moser also notes that before the state existed, the path to Israel was open, and many Jews chose not to take it. My own family is an



example. They lived in Lebanon, a few hours' drive from Haifa, and my father would take day trips there with his friends before 1948. They were proudly pro-Israel, but they emigrated to Brazil for work and self-sufficiency, not charity. That matters today, because many Zionists choose not to live in Israel, and it does not make them any less connected to the state or to a land that is part of Jewish history.



Reflecting on this history also brings to mind how Zionism fundamentally shifted the perception of Jews globally, transforming how the world viewed us — and how we viewed ourselves. When I went to Zionist day school in Brazil, we learned about the return to our ancient homeland, but looking back, I never bothered to ask who lived in the land before 1948. History shows that even during the darkest hours of the Holocaust, Jews around the world felt comfortable and rooted in their places of residence; it was the later hardening of national definitions that made Jews everywhere increasingly singled out and seen as perpetual foreigners.

That connection to our heritage shows in a detail of Jewish ritual. Moser observes that even Jews who live in Jerusalem end the Passover Seder by saying "next year in Jerusalem." But I learned that they say "next year in Jerusalem rebuilt," which includes the new Temple that we do not have yet. The longing is not only for a place but for its rebuilding. Jews have a state but not the redemption that we pray for.

This is why I cannot accept that Zionism began with catastrophe. It was conceived long before the Holocaust, and the bond with the land is older still: the foundation of Judaism is that we were brought out of Egypt to Israel to become a people. Moser, however, describes 1948 as an ethnic cleansing and wonders how his life would have changed had he been taught about the Nakba and what happened to Palestinians living in the area. I do not think we are defined by the exile of Palestinians in 1948, because I see it as an exchange: a comparable number of Jews left or were forced out of Middle Eastern countries.

Furthermore, it deeply bothers me that the book employs anachronisms — applying popular terms used today by political antagonists to talk about complex incidents of the past. Labels like *apartheid*, *genocide*, *settler-colonizer*, *ethnic cleansing*, *fascist Zionist*, and *settler colonialism* distort history rather than illuminate it. Questioning Herzl's vision is legitimate, but it should not become a way to deny that historical bond.

Where that denial leads is what troubles me most, and the book bears on the debate over whether antizionism is the same as antisemitism. Moser shows that Jews themselves have opposed Zionism for many reasons, so I won't say the two are identical. But in my view, antizionism often ends up feeding antisemitism, because it gives power to those who hate Jews as we see today around the world, through protests and the desecration of synagogues and Jewish owned businesses. That is why I consider it dangerous, and why I believe we should avoid it.

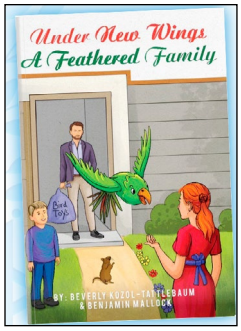
Even so, I am glad I read it. Moser says his goal is to offer a vision of Jewish life free from racism, nationalism, and militarism. It may be naive, but it is a lofty goal. I do not agree with his views, but the book is worth reading. Moser did a great deal of research and deserves praise for it, and I learned a lot. Jews have always argued without losing their connection to the holy land, and this book recovers that argument, albeit with a lot of harsh accusations. I just hope the division of opinions will be used to improve our future.

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





Grandmother and Grandson Share a Story of Love and Family

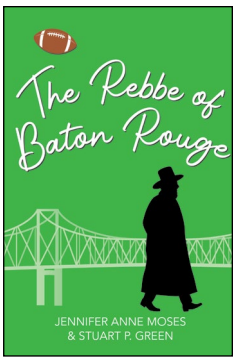


Massachusetts authors and grandmother and grandson Beverly Kozol-Tattlebaum and Benjamin Mallock have joined talents across two generations to write *Under New Wings: A Feathered Family*, a beautifully illustrated children's book inspired by a true story. Although the book is not specifically about Jewish traditions, its message emphasizes values deeply cherished in Jewish family life — particularly *chesed* (loving-kindness), compassion, responsibility, and caring for those who need a loving home. The heartwarming story follows Paco, a beloved Amazon parrot, whose journey between two families teaches children that family is defined by love, that families can grow in unexpected ways, and that loving one family does not mean losing another.

The Rebbe of Baton Rouge

By Jennifer Anne Moses and Stuart Green

University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press



When When disgraced Yiddish literature professor Anna Zisk flees Boston for her childhood home in Baton Rouge, she expects quiet refuge. Instead, she finds herself relegated to teaching LSU football players basic composition — a skill they do not crave and will not master — while navigating a fraught sisterly bond and a lingering first boyfriend.

Meanwhile, Adam Kluger, the town's struggling "new rabbi," is fighting to keep his tiny congregation afloat amid poaching rivals, heartbreak, and a deeply inopportune haunting by a spectral, Yiddish-speaking Hasid. When Anna and Adam's paths cross, an unexpected romance begins to bloom against a vibrant backdrop of Southern Jewish life.

Written by Jennifer Anne Moses — author of nine previous books, including *Bagels and Grits: A Jew on the Bayou* — and Stuart Green, this novel brilliantly captures a proud, vulnerable community. Absorbing, witty, and deeply moving, *The Rebbe of Baton Rouge* explores the rivalries, friendships, faith, and fierce solidarity of a unique world where traditional Yiddish heritage meets the Deep South.

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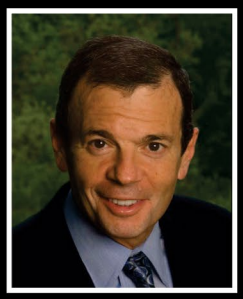

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