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THE Hebrew Watchman

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15 CHESHVAN, 5782

OCTOBER 21, 2021

VOL. 100, NO. 7

Young Israel celebrates dedication and High Holidays in new building



Joyous dancing as the newly dedicated Torah arrives at Young Israel's Moss Foyer

It was a dream more than 20 years in the making. In August, Young Israel of Memphis opened the doors to its new 11,000-square-foot synagogue building on Yates Road – just in time for the High Holidays.

The \$3.5 million project, which broke ground in November 2020, reflects the unique design of nationally renowned architectural firm archimania and was built by Grinder Taber Grinder. Jonathan Kaplan, immediate past president of Young Israel, and executive board member Josh Kahane led the very successful building campaign and served as co-chairs of the Building Committee.

“It is a privilege to be part of this historic and defining time in the 23-year history of our Shul. We are most grateful to the many families from across the community who have given so generously to establish a beautiful new permanent home for Young Israel

of Memphis in the heart of the Memphis Orthodox Jewish community,” says Mr. Kaplan.

The stately, modern building is the embodiment of any congregation's wish list for their Shul facilities. Passing through the two-story glass entrance-way, one is immediately taken by the seemingly endless Moss Grand Foyer, flanked by a striking black-and-white custom-designed geometric tribute to the Shul's donors. The building is airy and open yet maximizes every foot of space. In the Kahane Sanctuary, a 16-foot-high majestic Aron Kodesh (ark) takes center stage against a stone wall. The Aron Kodesh, as well as the Amud (from where services are led), Bimah (from where the Torah is read), seating, tables, and Mechitzas (partitions) were all custom designed and built in Israel by the artisans of Kibbutz Lavi. The sanctuary tapestries including

the Paroches (ark curtain), Amud and Bima covers and Torah mantels, were designed and hand made by Israeli artist Chana Gamliel. The Ner Tamid (eternal flame) is a one-of-a kind design with nine separate hand-blown glass flames that intertwine to create a four-foot diameter flame that floats above the ark.

The Beis Midrash, which hosts daily services, study groups and classes, and the Teen Minyan on Shabbos, includes floor-to-ceiling bookshelves laden with all the classic works and commentaries on the Torah, Talmud and Jewish law. Flat digital screens at the main entrance display service times, event information, and an ever-changing gallery of images from Shul events. A digital yahrzeit board displays the names of loved ones in memoriam. A suite of offices, three large classrooms, a prep kitchen, spa-

cious bathrooms, and a family room for nursing mothers round out the interior. A large pedestrian promenade in front of the building, a spacious simcha patio at the back, a garden with green space, and playgrounds will provide ample outdoor event and play space.

The Shul's previous 3,600-square-foot building has been redesigned and constructed to provide three new spacious classrooms, a second Beis Midrash for additional services and learning, a large event space, additional restrooms, and the Shul's main kitchen.

“We are deeply appreciative of the Shul's original founders for giving us a solid foundation to build upon, and we are overwhelmed by the vision and dedication of our current leadership and everyone who contributed their time, re-

(See **Young Israel** Page 2)



Rabbi Akiva Males (center) dances with the new Sefer Torah on the parade route

Dr. Ron Wolfson will headline Global Day of Jewish Learning at the MJCC

On Sunday, November 7, the Memphis Jewish Community Center will join hundreds of communities on six continents for the 12th annual Global Day of Jewish Learning. After a year and a half of unprecedented change – The Bonds Between Us – is more important now than ever, as we slowly return to previously normal engagements with sacred community.

Dr. Ron Wolfson, the Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University in Los Angeles, will be the keynote speaker at the MJCC on November 7 at 10 a.m. His topic, “Building Good Tents and Creating Connections in the Post-Pandemic Jewish Community,” will use Torah text to frame how we continue to welcome others and build connections in this new reality.

The Memphis community is invited to the MJCC for the keynote and other Global Day programs. Dr. Wolfson will be streamed into the social hall from his home in Los Angeles, and the in-person



Dr. Ron Wolfson
Credit: Screenshot

audience will have the opportunity to engage with him and with one another throughout the program.

Dr. Wolfson is the author of 17 books on Jewish life including “God's To-Do List,” “The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven,” “The Spirituality of Welcoming,” “Relational Judaism,” “The Relational Judaism Handbook, a memoir – The Best Boy in the United States of America,” and his latest book with Dr.

Bruce Powell, “Raising A+ Human Beings: Crafting a Jewish School Culture of Academic Excellence and AP Kindness.” He is president of the Kripke Institute, which is dedicated to bringing joyous and meaningful Jewish living into homes and communal organizations.

The MJCC will host additional programs on the Global Day of Jewish Learning to help strengthen the bonds between us. Community members can join in Cookies for Community to spread joy and share Jewish wisdom through the simple act of delivering cookies. At 4:30 p.m., families can come together for a parking lot-style JFamily picnic, filled with s'mores and good times.

“The Global Day of Jewish Learning provides a framework for our local community to explore big ideas in Judaism,” said Lauren Taube, director for the Center of Jewish Learning and Living at the MJCC. “This is a time to gather, learn and celebrate the strength of our incred-

ible Memphis Jewish community.”

Part of the Limmud North America family of programs, the Global Day of Jewish Learning began in 2010 as a celebration of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz' monumental work of translating the Talmud. It is now an annual celebration bringing Jews across the spectrum of beliefs and backgrounds together through a shared love of learning. Rabbi Steinsaltz left a challenge to Jews everywhere: “To take a step ahead in Jewish learning and commitment.”

For more information and to register for the Global Day of Jewish Learning at the Memphis Jewish Community Center, visit www.jccmemphis.org/globalday. **HW**



Young Israel...
(Continued From Page 1)



More than 200 people gathered in celebration at the Donor Appreciation Dinner, which kicked off Young Israel's Dedication Weekend

sources, and goodwill to help us realize this dream," says Board President Jonathan Wogan.

"We remain mindful that our work is not complete," Mr. Wogan continues. "Our new home obligates us to strive further in our growth as Torah-observant Jews through meaningful davening, intense learning, educating our youth and creating a warm and inviting environment for all our guests. I'm excited to witness – in real time – as Young Israel of Memphis matures as a leader of Torah living in Memphis."

Based on a long-established Jewish tradition, a festive Chanukas HaBayis Building Dedication weekend was held just before the High Holidays to officially dedicate the new holy space. On Thursday, August 12, more than 225 people representing every single donor to the Building Campaign – regardless of donation amount – attended an inspiring dinner in the Moss Grand Foyer to thank them for their contributions. For most attendees, this was their first glimpse at the overall impressive structure of the new Shul and its contemporary, elegant decor.

On Friday evening August 13 and Saturday August 14, the congregation gathered for the first Shabbos and first prayers in the new Kahane Sanctuary.

"The inaugural Shabbos in our new home exceeded all of our expectations," says Rabbi Akiva Males of Young Israel of Memphis. "I can think of no better way we could have dedicated our Shul's new building than to have it overflowing with song-filled tefillah, happy children enjoying their youth programs, so many families enjoying each other's company, and celebrating our passion for Torah study with a Siyum – where we completed a Masechta (tractate) of Talmud that we had studied together as a congregation."

Internationally renowned recording artist and performer Mordechai Shapiro joined the congregation for the Chanu-

kas Habayis Building Dedication, leading the services throughout the weekend as well as an uplifting Kumzitz night of singing on Saturday evening. Other honored guests included Rabbi Aaron Feigenbaum of Young Israel from 2009-2016, and his wife, Malki.

The exciting and meaningful weekend culminated on Sunday, August 15, with a formal ceremony and the celebration of a new Torah scroll dedicated by Elana and Josh Kahane in honor of their parents Joanne and Joel Kahane and Ricki and Michael Krupp. The entire community – men, women, and children – gathered at the Kahane home and escorted the new Torah with jubilant singing and dancing for the several block parade to the Torah's new home in the Kahane Sanctuary at Young Israel.

"Elana and I view the ground up construction of this new Shul to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take part in something with truly generational significance. As our community continues to grow, we believe that Young Israel is a critical and necessary piece for ensuring continued vibrancy. We are so proud of the partnerships we shared with so many in bringing this dream to reality and are thankful that our family had the privilege



The one-of-a-kind 16ft by 16ft Aron was crafted by artisans from the famed Kibbutz Lavi in Israel.

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SERVING THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1925

Established September, 1925
By Leo I. Goldberger (1902-1989)

MAILING ADDRESS
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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES:
Memphis and Mid-South \$36
Out-of-State \$50
Payable in Advance

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Send editorial submissions (calendar items, news releases, event photos, and letters to the editor) at least 9 days prior to publication date to info@hebrewwatchman.com

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The Hebrew Watchman is a Member of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, and Jewish News Service

THE HEBREW WATCHMAN (USPS #807-360) is published weekly every Thursday for \$36 per year by **JEWISH LIVING OF THE SOUTH, Inc. THE HEBREW WATCHMAN** PO Box 770846 Memphis, TN 38177-0846 Periodical postage paid at Memphis, Tenn.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to: **THE HEBREW WATCHMAN** PO Box 770846 Memphis, TN 38177-0846

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. October 22, 2021 / 16 Cheshvan, 5782.....5:57 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. October 23, 2021 / 17 Cheshvan, 5782 6:52 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Vayeira

to be part of not only building this facility but also building the future of Jewish Memphis," explained Mr. Kahane.

The tremendous joy and pride in the new building was palpable several weeks later as Young Israel held the first High Holiday services in its new home.

Benny Friedman, internationally renowned Jewish musician and vocalist joined Young Israel for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and led the soul-stirring services.

On Sukkos, even rain could not dampen spirits at Young Israel. The holiday was marked with a number of special kiddushes and activities and a gala Sim-



Inspiring evening of song with Jewish music sensation Mordechai Shapiro (rt) on Saturday night

chas Torah celebration, complete with candies, Kiddush and festive meals for the entire congregation.

While adults sway in prayer in the Kahane Sanctuary, the congregation's littlest members gleaned inspiration of their own. Since the very first Shabbos in the new building – and every Shabbos and holiday since – the seven cheerful, activity-filled classrooms, set the scene for captivating children's programming.

"Our youth programming is not designed simply to occupy children during services; the goal is to enrich and deepen our children's relationship with their Judaism," explains Rabbi Yaakov Gelb, Young Israel of Memphis's new Youth Director and member of the Memphis Kollel. "It is beautiful to see the new Young Israel campus abuzz with activity and the sound of children engaged in meaningful learning."

Young Israel looks forward to welcoming at its new facility not only its members, but also the broader Jewish community, and to hosting meaningful opportunities for prayer, Torah study, and many simchas, for years to come. **HW**

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Baron Hirsch and Anshei Sphard to welcome international scholar

Baron Hirsch and Anshei Sphard Beth El Emeth Congregations announced this week that they will be hosting Rabbi Menachem Leibtag as a Scholar-in-Residence on October 29 – 30. Rabbi Leibtag is an internationally known scholar, and one of the world’s foremost teachers of Tanach.

Rabbi Leibtag will speak on several occasions over Shabbat, and his classes will focus on the topic of shemitta as well as major topics in the book of Bereshit (Genesis), which is currently being read in the weekly Torah portions.

The visit kicks off with a Friday Night Dinner on October 29 followed by the first lecture. Dinner will follow Kabbalat services and will take place outside in the Baron Hirsch Winter Oak Portico at 7:10 p.m. This dinner is limited to the first 120 paid reservations. The cost is \$25 per adult and \$15 per child ages 3-12 with a family cap of \$75. The menu consists of a traditional chicken dinner with sides and salads.

Following dinner, Rabbi Leibtag will speak in the Belz Sanctuary at 8:15 p.m. on “The Biblical Meaning of ‘Shemitta,’ Then and Today.” The lecture is open to everyone, even if not attending the dinner. Childcare will be offered during the lecture.

On Shabbat morning, both congregations will come together following services for Rabbi Leibtag’s drasha. Scheduled to be at approximately 11a.m., he will speak on “The Biblical Meaning

of ‘Shabbat,’ Then and Today.”

On shabbat afternoon at 4:45 p.m. in the Belz Sanctuary, Rabbi Leibtag will expand upon “The Biblical Meaning of ‘Bechira’ [Being Chosen], Then and Today.” Children’s programs will take place during the lecture.

To wrap up the weekend, Rabbi Leibtag will speak at a melave malke on Saturday night on “How Chumash Explains our Siddur: How & Why We Daven.” The program begins at 8:30 p.m. in the Winter Oak portico.

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag is the founder of the Tanach Study Center www.tanach.org and is an internationally acclaimed bible scholar and pioneer of Jewish Education on the internet. His essays on Parshat ha’Shavua reflect his vibrant thematic-analytical approach, blending the methods of modern scholarship with traditional approaches. As a faculty member at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel, he is best known for his ability to teach students how to study Tanach. He teaches in many other yeshivot and seminaries in Israel and travels the world speaking in numerous communities.

To make your reservations for the Friday Night Dinner, call the Baron Hirsch office at 901.683.7485 or email gwen@baronhirsch.org. To hear more from Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, go to outorah.org/series/3842/?size=30 to access and read more of his lectures on the weekly parshiyot. **HW**

Beth Sholom prepares to kick off annual Lecture Series with five leading local scholars

Beth Sholom Synagogue is delighted to welcome five distinguished speakers for our 2021-2022 Lehrhaus Lecture Series, which highlights local scholars who graciously share and then answer questions in an area of their expertise. These events are open to the entire Jewish community.

Dr. Denise Ferebee will kick off the series on the evening of October 26 at 7 p.m. Dr. Ferebee is the director of Lemoyn-Owen College’s Center for Cybersecurity, which is recognized as a Center of Academic Excellence by the U.S. National Security Agency and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The topic of her lecture is “Social Media: How it is used to target people and the cybersecurity implications.” This will include how the Jewish community has been targeted through social media, as well as provide a more expansive context.

Following that, on January 25, Dr. Esen Kirdis, associate professor of International Studies at Rhodes College, will address the facts that run counter-intuitive to popular belief in answering: “Why is the youth in the Middle East becoming less religious?”

The third installment in the Lehrhaus Series will feature Dr. Shaul Bar, professor and director of the Bornblum Judaic Studies program at the University of Memphis. Bar will share his research and insights on February 15 by asking an age-old, thought-provoking question: “Who do YOU think wrote the Torah, and when?”

Then on March 29, Beth Sholom will welcome Dr. Erica Kaye, M.D., in

a much-anticipated lecture. Kaye will speak from a deeply personal as well as professional place as she addresses the topic, “Challenges of infertility and adoption in a Jewish home: Lessons learned as a mother, wife, physician and advocate.” Kaye is the director of the Division of Quality of Life and Palliative Care, and an assistant professor of Oncology, at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, as well as an associate program director at the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center.

Culminating the series will be a lecture on May 2 by Dr. Sarah Ifft Decker, assistant professor of history at Rhodes College. Her subject of her fascinating lecture will be “Gender, Money and Power: Jewish Women in Medieval Catalan Cities.”

All events will be at 7 p.m. We welcome you to join us in person at Beth Sholom; proof of COVID-19 vaccination and face masks are required as of the time of publication. The events will also be viewable online at bsholom.org/stream.

Lehrhaus at Beth Sholom takes its inspiration from The Free Jewish House of Learning, the school for Jewish studies and adult education founded by Franz Rosenzweig in Frankfurt in 1920. During each Lehrhaus evening, one of the many Memphian scholars who work on a topic of interest to the Jewish community will offer a portion of learning and answer audience questions. The series is organized by the synagogue’s Lifelong Jewish Learning Committee. For more information, please call the synagogue at 901.683.3591. **HW**

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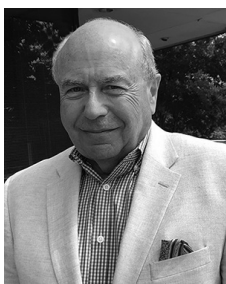
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HBO picks up film about boxer who escaped Auschwitz death march

By Gabe Friedman

(JTA) – HBO has bought the rights to “The Survivor,” a film by acclaimed Jewish director Barry Levinson based on the true story of a boxer who escaped an Auschwitz death march after being forced to fight with his fellow prisoners.

Jewish actor Ben Foster stars as Harry Haft, a Polish Jew who was imprisoned at the concentration camp at 16 but escaped as the Nazis evacuated the camps ahead of the advancing Red Army. He eventually moved to New York City. There he embarked on a fighting career that found him matched up against the likes of legendary heavyweight Rocky Marciano.

The movie, which premiered at this year’s Toronto International Film Festival, is based on “Harry Haft: Survivor of Auschwitz, Challenger of Rocky Marciano,” a 2006 book written by Haft’s son Alan. HBO Films has not set a release date.

Also involved in the production was a team from the University of Southern California’s Shoah Foundation, an archive of Holocaust survivor testimonies started by Steven Spielberg. The USC team “provided detailed historical consulting in addition to access to a testimony of Haft, filmed in 2007,” according to Deadline.

Foster has worked under Levinson before, in the film “Liberty Heights,” a tale of Black-Jewish relations in 1950s Baltimore. **HW**

These Jews want to normalize not circumcising – and they want synagogues to help

By Ben Harris

(JTA) – When Elana Johnson was shopping for a synagogue three years ago, the mother of four approached a Conservative congregation in Lincoln, Nebraska, to ask about joining.

For most synagogues, such an inquiry would have been a no-brainer. But Johnson had elected not to circumcise her three sons, departing from one of Judaism's most widely practiced traditions, and she was concerned about whether that would be a problem.

Johnson says the synagogue told her she was welcome to enroll her sons, but that without circumcision they would not be allowed to celebrate their bar mitzvah. That decision was in line with a position adopted by the Conservative movement's Jewish law authorities in 1981 that recommended including non-circumcising families in synagogue life but denying uncircumcised boys a bar mitzvah.

Johnson didn't feel included: Her family joined a nearby Reform synagogue instead.

"I want to be more observant and in a more observant community," she said. "But I also just want my kids to be happy and welcome and feel as little judgment as possible no matter where we go."

A new organization launched last week aims to make that more likely. The group, called Bruchim (literally "blessed," but part of a Hebrew phrase that essentially means "welcome"), is seeking to normalize the decision not to circumcise Jewish boys, a venerable religious rite that goes back to the Bible and which is widely practiced across the spectrum of Jewish observance, even by otherwise non-observant Jewish families.

"Families who are making this decision shouldn't feel marginalized and they shouldn't feel like they have to be secret about it," said Lisa Braver Moss, Bruchim's co-founder and president.

The group is an outgrowth of advocacy that Moss and Bruchim co-founder and executive director, Rebecca Wald, have been doing for decades. Moss first argued against Jewish circumcision in a 1990 essay, and together they outlined an alternative ceremony, brit shalom (literally "covenant of peace") in a 2015 book and distributed flyers at that year's Reform movement convention outlining ways for synagogues to be more welcoming for families that had opted out of circumcision.

Now, in Bruchim, they have a volunteer staff, including Johnson as social media strategist, as well as a four-member rabbinical advisory board. The team includes people with professional back-

grounds in all of Judaism's non-Orthodox movements, as well as several people who grew up Orthodox.

Among its objectives, Bruchim wants to see synagogues make proactive statements of welcome for non-circumcising families similar to those that have become common toward Jews of color and LGBT+ Jews. They also hope rabbis will offer one of several alternative welcome ceremonies for newborns in place of the traditional bris.

"I see circumcision – it's described as a sign, a sign of the covenant – and there are many options for signs," said Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, executive director of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and a member of Bruchim's rabbinic advisory board. "I actually don't think that it is an option [not] to bring your child into the covenant. I think you must bring your child into the covenant, or you should bring your child into the covenant. I want to push that as an expectation. How it's done – there are many equally valid options."

Whether Bruchim's requests will find a ready reception within American Jewish communities is uncertain.

The Reform movement does not have a policy about how to handle families who are considering or have decided not to circumcise. But the movement's leader, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, said in a statement that ritual circumcision remains something his movement "will always advocate" for – even as other choices are accepted.

"As one of the oldest rituals in the Jewish faith, we will always advocate and educate our community about the beauty and meaning of brit milah," Jacobs said. But he added, "Connecting oneself to the Jewish community may take many forms, and we understand that some families and individuals are making the choice to not circumcise as part of the brit ceremony. There will always be a place for everyone in the Reform community, regardless of how they or their family choose to express their faith."

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, the leading bioethicist in the Conservative movement and the chair of its top Jewish law authority, said there is no basis in Jewish law for denying an uncircumcised man access to religious life, including bar-mitzvah. But his movement has not made any formal statements since the 1981 opinion taking bar mitzvah off the table for uncircumcised children.

And Dorff said that advertising openness to non-circumcising families, one of Bruchim's main asks, is not something that he would endorse.

"Do I want to say publicly, even though it's certainly true, that people who violate Shabbat publicly are welcome in our community?" Dorff said. "Of course they're welcome in our community. But I don't want to say publicly that it's wonderful that you violate Shabbat."

One Bay Area Conservative rabbi who asked not to be named out of fear he would become the target of hate mail, said he has turned away about a half-dozen non-circumcising families in 20 years leading his synagogue.

"It's a covenantal mitzvah," the rabbi said, referring to circumcision. "It's the sign of the covenant, which is about as basic to Judaism as you can get. By not circumcising, you're saying that you're outside the covenant of Judaism. And bar-mitzvah is saying you're part of the mitzvah-observing community. You're starting with the basic idea that you're not going to observe one of the most fundamental mitzvot of Judaism."

No reliable statistics exist on the percentage of American Jewish men who are circumcised, though the vast majority are believed to be. In part, that's because circumcision is performed on the vast majority of American boys – some 90% of non-Hispanic whites, according to a 2014 study, making the U.S. a global outlier on this issue. But that figure appears to be dropping.

Critics of circumcision object to the practice on a number of grounds, including the physical and emotional trauma inflicted on children, a conviction they lack the right to modify someone's body without permission and a belief that there is no medical benefit for the child. The position of the American medical establishment is that the benefits of circumcision outweigh the risks.

The broad societal trend, coupled with the fact that 72% of American Jews who married between 2010 and 2020 chose a non-Jewish spouse, according to the 2020 Pew study, means that while the numbers of Jewish parents who choose to leave their children "intact" is almost certainly a tiny minority, their numbers are likely to be growing.

"I looked into the medical reasoning. I thought a lot about the ethics of it all. And my conclusion ... was, I don't think I feel so good about this," said one Jewish mother who sits on Bruchim's board but asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the subject. "Am I the only Jew that doesn't feel so good about this? And I started to realize that I wasn't, but everyone felt the need to be very quiet about it."

Some efforts to bar circumcision – in San Francisco, where Moss lives, and elsewhere – have been criticized as antisemitic. Bruchim is limiting involvement to Jews, advertising that anyone who is Jewish may donate and come to meetings, in an effort to make parents like the board member feel comfortable discussing their wrestling with tradition.

"We need almost a safe space to have these conversations without that sort of outside interference, where people can be really negative, even hateful, or just simply not get it even with the best intentions," said Johnson. "It's a conversation that Jewish people should only really be having with other Jewish people. And having Bruchim means that we're able to offer that support and community in a way that has not really existed until this time." **HW**

'Sabbath for \$400': Cholent stumps 'Jeopardy!' contestants in question about Shabbat restrictions



Mayim Bialik in her "Jeopardy!" debut, May 31, 2021.

Credit: Screenshot from ABC

By Shira Hanau

(JTA) – Contestants on an episode of "Jeopardy!" that aired last Wednesday night were stumped when presented with a photo of cholent, a stew traditionally cooked by observant Jews over the course of Shabbat.

The clue, for \$400 in the "Sabbath" category: "Exodus 35:3 bans doing this on the Sabbath, hence the Jewish dish 'cholent,' which can go on the stove Friday and cook until Saturday lunch."

The contestants got close with guesses of "What is cooking?" and "What is work?" but failed to name the exact Shabbat prohibition Mayim Bialik, the show's temporary host and herself an Orthodox Jew, was looking for.

In the end, Bialik explained the answer: "What is 'lighting a fire?' And the word 'cholent' is from the French 'chaud lent,' [meaning] 'cooks a long time.'"

Explaining cholent on national television was a fitting role for Bialik, the first Jew to host the popular quiz show.

Bialik, who starred in "The Big Bang Theory," served as a celebrity host during the search for longtime "Jeopardy!" host Alex Trebek's replacement and was named a host for primetime specials in August. After Mike Richards, the show's executive producer who was selected to host the show full-time, was revealed to have made offensive comments about women and Jews, Bialik was temporarily promoted to full-time host. While Jeopardy producers continue to search for Richards' permanent replacement, Bialik has said she'd like to keep the gig permanently.

Bialik frequently writes about her Jewish identity and posted a video about her Jewish identity to Twitter last Wednesday as part of a social media campaign organized by Hillel International to help Jewish college students feel proud of their Jewish identity. Bialik produced a series of videos for My Jewish Learning this year. **HW**

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'A Film for the Ages' "The Presence of Their Absence" filmmaker Donna Kanter to appear on Zoom with JHSMM



Donna Kanter

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South (JHS) will present a virtual program with noted filmmaker Donna Kanter who will discuss her riveting documentary: "The Presence of Their Absence" on Sunday afternoon, November 7, 2021, at 2 p.m. Central Time. The film has been called 'a film for the ages' and can be downloaded from the Jhsmem.org website after October 31, 2021.

Throughout her life, Ms. Kanter always wanted to know more about how children of Holocaust survivors were affected by the Shoah and how the trauma shaped their lives. In this film, she follows Fred Zaidman, a son of Holocaust survivors, as he embarks on a life-affirming journey to discover his family's roots.

Donna Kanter was "Born in Harlem, New York, the middle of three sisters, a mother from Manhattan and a father from Savannah, Georgia, with their roots in Russia-Poland, Austria-Hungary and Spain.

"I was raised in Los Angeles in an atmosphere of comedy writers," Ms. Kanter said. She did news reporting and became a TV producer, joined Newsweek, then ABC as a foreign editor and became a producer of NBC news and a comedy reality series. She joined Direc-

tors Guild Workshop and made a documentary about her father, Hal Kanter.

When Fred Zaidman saw her work, he wanted her to film his story. "The Presence of Their Absence" traces Fred's inherited trauma and search for his roots in the ashes of the Holocaust," said Ms. Kanter. "It is a privilege to tell his astounding story."

Fred Zaidman grew up in Los Angeles among Polish- and Yiddish-speaking Jews. His mother spoke emotionally about the Holocaust but never gave details, and his father never spoke about it at all. He had always wanted to know more about his grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins.

"I was hesitant to let a film crew follow my journey into the unknown, but it was an incredible journey that yielded a plethora of information, meeting new relatives, trips to Poland, Israel, and Germany and a surprise that I invite you to discover with me," he said.

Elaine Stegman, JHS program committee member and past chair and member of the Holocaust Memorial Committee of the Memphis Jewish Federation was instrumental in connecting the Society with Ms. Kanter.

"After reading about Donna's project on several Jewish genealogy websites, I'm excited that she's bringing her film to Memphis," Ms. Stegman said. "Her documentary follows a remarkable journey of discovery that will resonate with anyone who has ever wondered about their own family's past."

"This is a film and meeting with the filmmaker Donna Kanter that you don't want to miss!" added JHS President Lorraine Wolf. "It has a powerful message that speaks to us all."

For more information, and the Zoom links, visit jhsmem.org. **HW**

Concentration-camp guard to stand trial for 3,518 murders between 1942 and 1945

(JNS) – A former guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp who will stand trial in Germany this month is accused of being complicit in 3,518 murders, reported The Times.

The 100-year-old man, whose name has not been released to the public, is charged with "knowingly and willingly" being involved in the murder of prisoners at the concentration camp between 1942 and 1945 while he served as a camp guard that patrolled the watch-towers and surrounding area. He was allegedly complicit in executions done by firing squads and poisonous gas. His case opened October 7.

In August, prosecutors confirmed that the man was fit to stand trial after he underwent a medical assessment.

More than 200,000 people were imprisoned at the Sachsenhausen camp between 1936 and 1945, according to the Sachsenhausen Museum. Tens of thousands of prisoners died at the camp due to hunger, disease, forced labor, medical experiments, mistreatment and extermination operations.

Also set to stand trial this month in Germany is Irmgard Furchner, a 96-year-old former secretary at the Stutthof death camp. She was expected to be in court on Sept. 30 but was declared "on the run" when she failed to appear after taking a taxi from her retirement home near Hamburg to a subway station, where she went missing.

She was detained by police several hours later and held in custody for five days, but was released ahead of her trial on Oct. 19. **HW**



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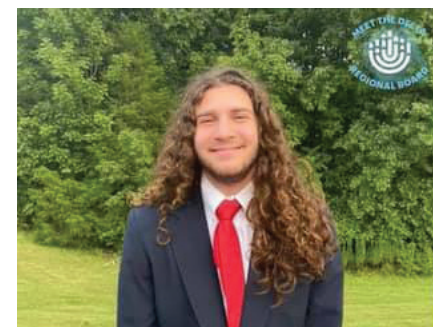
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This woman thought a Holocaust diet was a good idea



Gwen Shamblin

By Myra Fox

Reprinted with permission Forward.

It can be almost physically painful to look at photos of concentration camp prisoners, so emaciated that you can see the shapes of their skulls, their kneecaps, their sternums in sharp relief. Those photos are one of the starkest, most impactful ways of driving home the horrors of the Holocaust.

Unless you're Gwen Shamblin, a Tennessee church leader who took weight loss inspiration from those photos.

In a 2008 interview with CNN's Larry King about her diet program, Shamblin, a petite woman with impressively tall blonde hair and a Tennessee drawl, referenced the camps: "How in the Holocaust did you have all these people getting down real skinny? They ate less food."

The founder of a Christian weight loss program called The Weigh Down Workshop is the subject of a docu-

mentary miniseries on HBO called "The Way Down: God, Greed and the Cult of Gwen Shamblin." With her diet program a runaway success, offered in thousands of churches, she opened her own church, Remnant Fellowship, with weight just as central to its beliefs.

While eating less doesn't seem like a revolutionary weight-loss strategy, what stood out to Shamblin about the concentration camps was that everyone was thin, thus proving, at least in Shamblin's eyes, that there was no genetic influence on weight loss.

"When people were in prison camps and ate less food, they lost weight – all of them," she said in a deposition during a court case alleging Shamblin infringed on her employees' religious freedom by requiring them to attend Remnant as part of their employment in the diet program.

"Mrs. Shamblin, surely you're not making a comparison between the forced starvation of a population and middle-class Americans' eating habits. Are you honestly doing that?" asked the person taking her deposition. "I have been for 15 years and a lot of people have responded," Shamblin replied.

"I think her inability to see how offensive that example would be is a manifestation of the zealotry," said a lawyer from that case, interviewed in the documentary.

Shamblin's zealotry was just as tied to weight as it was to God. Her diet revolves around God, and her church revolves around weight, explicitly tying thinness to piety and morality. She believed people needed to "stop bowing down to their refrigerators" and bow instead to God, as she said in one interview.

Later in the interview she says, "I'm not asking people not to be addicted, I'm saying transfer over this addiction to God," instructing people to replace hunger with prayer.

Shamblin's Holocaust comments and diet strategies were not the only controversy associated with her diet or church. Shamblin was rejected by many churches when she took a stance against the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity, declaring that God is supreme over Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

This break with Christian teachings seems to have marked the beginning of Shamblin's extremism, which grows with her hair as the docuseries progresses; as she became more abusive, members were afraid to tell her it looked bad, according to one interview. This fear applied to far more dangerous choices than style, however; former members say she turned the church into a cult, controlling her followers' finances, medication, marriages and parenting choices. The film even shows Shamblin encouraging child abuse and connects her to a murder.

The first three episodes of "The Way Down," which are available on HBO, trace Shamblin's rise to power and have been in the works for over three years. But Shamblin, along with seven other leaders from Remnant, died in a plane crash in May of this year; her daughter, Elizabeth Hannah, has now taken the reins. The remaining episodes of the docuseries are now planned for release in early 2022 so they can take into account the church's changes since the crash, but without Shamblin, it's hard to imagine what there will be to say.

The higher the hair, the closer to God, or so they say. **HW**

Billie Eilish attacked by anti-Israel bots for addressing fans in video for new album



Billie Eilish Credit: Christian Bertrand/Shutterstock

(JNS) – American singer and songwriter Billie Eilish was targeted by anti-Israel bots on Instagram after promoting her new album in a video for MTV Israel, a new report by the entertainment industry group Creative Community for Peace (CCFP) revealed.

In a clip shared on July 31, the 19-year-old singer told her Israeli fans, "Hi Israel, I'm so excited that my new album, 'Happier Than Ever,' is out now."

Shortly afterwards, her Instagram page was flooded with bot-generated messages that consisted of Palestinian flags and "other Palestine solidarity-themed comments," according to a 16-page report by CCFP's Digital Entertainment Task Force.

The task force analyzed the top comments on six of Eilish's Instagram posts that were uploaded after the Israel video was released. They discovered that 30 percent were anti-Israel and posted by accounts that have zero posts on their personal profiles but hundreds or thousands of followers, which suggests bot activity. Some 48 percent were anti-Israel and uploaded by accounts with zero to two posts on their private profiles, another sign of bot activity.

The task force noted that "this coordinated attack on Billie Eilish is another example of how social media can be used to manipulate public opinion. And of a specific effort by anti-Israel activists, who use social media to distort and influence public opinion against Israel via unauthentic means."

The report also includes screenshots of the bot-generated messages and information about the fake accounts. **HW**



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Watchdog group: Media outlets give platform to anti-Semite, blood-libel posts



Quotes by Refaat Alareer. Credit: HonestReporting.

(JNS) – The Jerusalem-based media watchdog group HonestReporting last Monday called for The New York Times and other outlets to stop giving a platform to glaring anti-Semites.

During the 11-day conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip in May, which started when the terror organization began launching rockets at Israeli population centers, the Times published an essay by Gaza resident Refaat Alareer, co-editor of Gaza Unsilenced (2015) and former editor of (and contributor to) Gaza Writes Back (2014).

In it, he falsely claimed that Israelis “draw straws” as to “which block [in Gaza] to annihilate,” thus promoting a modern-day blood libel, said the watchdog group.

The article then became part of a les-

son plan for high schools by The New York Times Learning Network.

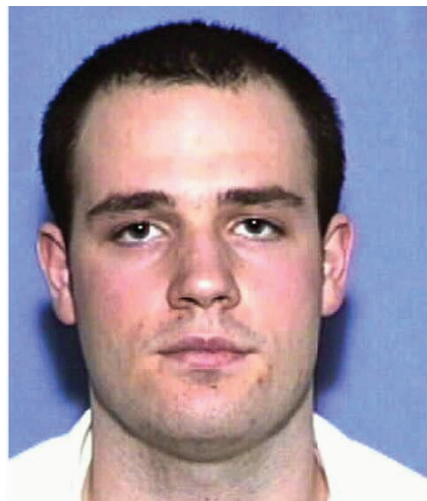
Alareer has also been quoted or interviewed by The Washington Post, The Guardian, NBC News, NPR, PBS, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Qatar’s Al Jazeera.

In addition, HonestReporting discovered that over the past two years, he posted at least 115 tweets comparing Israel and Israelis to Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler.

In one tweet, he wrote that Zionism and Nazism “are two cheeks of the same dirty arse.”

“When writers espouse such antisemitism, their reporting on the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be trusted. In fact, it should discount them from being published at all,” said HonestReporting. **HW**

Texas Jewish death row inmate who argued judge was antisemitic wins new trial



Randy Halprin was one of seven men sentenced to death over the murder of a police officer. Credit: TDCJ/AFP via Getty Images

By Shira Hanau

(JTA) – A Jewish man who asked for a new trial on the grounds that the judge who sentenced him to death was antisemitic will be granted a new trial.

Randy Halprin, 44, was originally set to be executed on Oct. 10, 2019, but won a stay from the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals after he alleged that the judge who presided over his 2003 murder trial was biased against Jews and referred to him using antisemitic slurs, including “f—in’ Jew” and “k-ke.”

The stay sent Halprin’s case back to Dallas County, where Judge Lela Lawrence Mays heard Halprin’s arguments in June and this week issued a decision granting Halprin a new trial.

“Judge Vickers Cunningham possessed antisemitic prejudice against Halprin, which violated Halprin’s constitutional right to a trial in a fair tribu-

nal equal protection, and free exercise of religion,” Mays wrote in her decision.

Halprin was serving a 30-year sentence for harming a child when he and six other inmates attempted to escape from prison. A police officer was killed during the attempt, and each member of the group, which came to be known as the “Texas 7,” was sentenced to death. Halprin claimed in his trial that he never fired his gun.

The judge who presided over the original case, Vickers “Vic” Cunningham, has been accused of using several antisemitic and racist slurs and, according to the Dallas Morning News, set up a trust fund for his children on the condition that they marry white Christians of the opposite sex. Court documents quoted a childhood friend of Cunningham’s who said the judge “took special pride” in sentencing the Texas 7 to death “because they included Latinos and Jews.”

Several Jewish groups got involved in Halprin’s case in recent years as he sought a new trial. The American Jewish Committee, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Men of Reform Judaism and Union for Reform Judaism were among those filing a joint amicus brief in support of Halprin’s 2019 appeal, and more than 100 Jewish lawyers in Texas signed on.

The brief made the case that the appeal was not about Halprin’s guilt, but about Cunningham’s antisemitism.

“[T]hose issues are irrelevant, because questions of guilt and punishment follow a fair trial; they do not precede it,” it said. “And if Judge Cunningham is the bigot described in the application, a fair trial has not yet happened.” **HW**

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When things seem out of control, there are some things you can control

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors

During times of heightened stress, a person can quickly become overwhelmed and even struggle to do things that might be considered simple or obvious. It can be helpful to focus on the things you can control, to identify actions that you can take, and to complete those action steps.

Here are four action items an investor may want to consider completing during extraordinary (and ordinary) times.

1. Review your investment plan

Before you start making changes to your investment portfolio, the first thing you should do is consider your goals. Are you saving for retirement? Do you need to build a college fund for your children? Did a recent event create a need to adjust your plan? If your goals have changed or if you haven't updated your plan in a while, set up a meeting with your Financial Advisor to review and update your investment strategy to support reaching your goals.

2. Understand your risk tolerance

After recent events, you may have a new definition of your tolerance for risk.

Risk is a key principle in investing. Some investments are riskier than others, but every financial decision involves risk. Risk is inescapable, so the key is to understand your risk tolerance and manage the risk you are taking, which should be based on your long-term financial goals. If your tolerance for risk has changed, review your strategy with your Financial Advisor and make sure you are still comfortable with the amount of risk you're taking.

3. Stick to your plan

When the market gets volatile, investors often have an emotional reaction and may want to pull out of the market to try to avoid loss. Try to remember that

moving or selling investments during a market decline will likely lock in the losses; staying invested may allow you to benefit when the market comes back. If you haven't updated your plan in a while, set up a meeting with your Financial Advisor to review it and make any necessary adjustments.

4. Organize and update important documents

Are your important documents up to date and accessible to those who may need them?

Take time to create a reference list of your documents and consider creating a digital version for easy storage and accessibility. Also check that your beneficiary designations for investment accounts, life insurance, and other accounts are up to date to reflect any new circumstances such as marriage, birth, death, or divorce. Beneficiary designations typically supersede your will, so you'll want to confirm that your beneficiary designations are current and accurate.

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Senate candidate Herschel Walker cancels fundraiser over host's anti-vax swastika profile picture



Republican Senate candidate Herschel Walker speaks at a rally featuring former U.S. President Donald Trump on September 25, 2021, in Perry, Georgia. Credit: Sean Rayford/Getty Images

By Shira Hanau

(JTA) – A Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate in Georgia canceled a fundraiser that was set to be hosted by a film producer whose social media account prominently displayed an anti-vax symbol in the shape of a swastika.

The producer, Bettina Sofia Viviano-Langlais, was set to host a fundraiser for Herschel Walker, a retired football player who is running for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate in Georgia.

Viviano-Langlais and her husband, Jim Langlais, also hosted last year's mask-burning bonfire organized by the Dallas Jewish Conservatives to celebrate the end of COVID restrictions in Texas.

Viviano-Langlais' Twitter profile picture showed four syringes arranged in the shape of a swastika, an emerging symbol in the anti-vaccination movement that has made comparisons between public health rules and the Holocaust a mainstay.

Asked for comment about the image by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the campaign first responded with a statement last Wednesday morning saying the image was "clearly an anti-mandatory vaccination graphic" and that "Herschel unequivocally opposes anti-semitism and bigotry of all kinds."

But within a few hours, the campaign changed course, calling the image "very



offensive" and saying it "does not reflect the values of Herschel Walker or his campaign." It canceled the fundraiser, which had been set for last weekend.

Viviano-Langlais denied that the image was antisemitic in a since-deleted tweet, though she misspelled the word in the process.

"I am the poster and because of the Left's need to silence free speech I took it down," she wrote last Wednesday. "It's insane to think that pic was Anti-Semitic. Desperate actually. It was a pic showing what happens when fascists demand people insert foreign material into their body they don't want..."

If he wins the Republican nomination in May 2022, Walker would face Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock in the general election in November 2022. Walker has been endorsed by former President Donald Trump. HW

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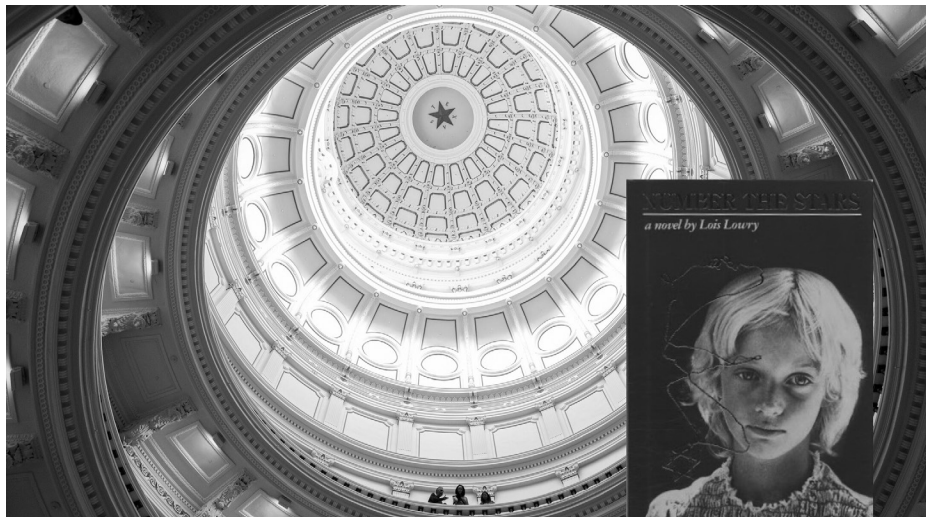
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Texas official to teachers: State law requires teaching 'opposing' views on the Holocaust



The Texas State Capitol rotunda, seen from below, is where state legislation is passed. Teachers wondered whether "Number the Stars," a Holocaust novel, would require an "opposing" perspective under the terms of a new education law there. Credit: Tamir Kalifa/Getty Images

By Philissa Cramer

October 14, 2021 (JTA) – Teachers in a Texas school district were told last week that a new state law requiring them to present multiple perspectives about "widely debated and currently controversial" issues meant they needed to make "opposing" views on the Holocaust available to students.

NBC News obtained an audio recording of the official, the Carroll Independent School District's executive director of curriculum and instruction, speaking to the teachers about how to work under the constraints of the new law, known as House Bill 3979. The law was passed amid a wave of efforts in Republican-led statehouses to prevent "critical race theory," "divisive" topics and concepts related to race and bias from being taught to children.

"Just try to remember the concepts of 3979," Peddy said in the recording. "Make sure that if, if you have a book on the Holocaust that you have one that has an opposing – that has other perspectives."

Gasps and sounds of nervous laughter can be heard on the recording, as one teacher asks aloud, "How do you oppose the Holocaust?"

Peddy responds: "Believe me. That's come up."

A Texas lawmaker who drafted a new version of the bill told NBC News that matters of "good and evil" are not subject to the education legislation.

But the possibility that the wave of conservative education legislation could get in the way of Holocaust education crossed the minds of education observers in at least some places over the last year.

"Under this law, it would be impossible to teach that Nazi Germany was in-

herently anti-Semitic, or that the Third Reich oppressed Jews simply because they were Jews, because that would identify Nazis as inherently biased and Jews as inherently and systemically oppressed," Russel Neiss, a Jewish educator in St Louis, wrote in the St. Louis Jewish Light in May about legislation that had been proposed in Missouri. Lawmakers there are continuing to push for anti-critical race theory rules for schools.

The episode comes a year after a Florida school district fired a principal – twice – who told a parent that he could not say the Holocaust was "an actual, factual event" because not all parents shared the same belief. Florida's school board has since enacted a ban on Holocaust denial in schools – as part of a ban on teaching critical race theory.

In Texas, the recording suggests that Peddy does not necessarily support the new law but does anticipate conflicts over its enforcement. Four days before the training, the Carroll school board had overturned a district ruling and formally reprimanded a teacher who drew a parent complaint for keeping an anti-racism book in her classroom.

At one point in the recording, a teacher says she is "terrified." At another point, an educator asks whether "Number the Stars," the classic Holocaust novel, would require another book to balance out. Peddy does not address that question on the recording.

"You are professionals. We hired you as professionals. We trust you with our children," Peddy tells the teachers prior to offering the Holocaust book example. "So if you think the book is OK, then let's go with it. And whatever happens, we will fight it together." HW

Holocaust denying neo-Nazi's remains were buried in a Jewish man's grave in Germany



The grave of Max Friedländer, a Jewish singer and music scholar in Stahnsdorf near Berlin.

Credit: Jens Kalaene/picture alliance via Getty Images

By Shira Hanau

(JTA) – After the remains of a notorious Holocaust denier and neo-Nazi were interred last week in the burial plot of a German-Jewish music scholar who died before the Holocaust, the church that oversees the cemetery is looking into moving the neo-Nazi's ashes to rectify its "terrible mistake."

Henry Hafenmayer, a neo-Nazi known for denying the Holocaust, died last week and was buried last Friday at the Stahnsdorf South-Western cemetery in Brandenburg, southwest of Berlin. The plot where Hafenmayer's ashes were buried had belonged to Max Friedländer, a Jewish singer and scholar of music who died in 1934.

The cemetery's management said Hafenmayer was originally denied a more central burial plot to prevent his grave from becoming a site of pilgrimage for neo-Nazis. But after denying Hafenmayer the more central plot, it accepted a request to bury him in Friedländer's plot, which had been deemed available for a new burial because its lease had not been renewed, allowing the cemetery to move Friedländer's remains elsewhere. Friedländer's headstone remained in its

place, however, because it was designated a historical monument.

According to the Guardian, Friedländer's headstone was covered for Hafenmayer's funeral with a sign inscribed with Hafenmayer's name and a verse from the New Testament: "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

In a statement, Christian Stäblein, a bishop at the church, acknowledged the church's error.

"The interment of a Holocaust denier at Max Friedländer's gravesite is a terrible mistake and a staggering course of events in view of our history. We have to immediately look into whether we can revert this process," Stäblein said.

In a tweet, Samuel Salzborn, Berlin's commissioner on antisemitism, said the choice of Friedländer's gravesite for Hafenmayer's burial was not an accident.

"The intention here is obvious that right-wing extremists deliberately chose a Jewish grave in order to disrupt the peace of the dead by burying a Holocaust denier," he wrote in a tweet last Tuesday. Salzborn filed a criminal complaint with the justice department. HW

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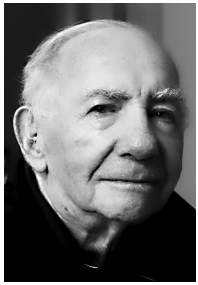


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*Editor's note:
This story is being
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of Ted Roberts in
appreciation of his
longtime service
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columnist.*

By Ted Roberts

My friend looked sick. He was as pale as the pillow his head rested upon. He spoke little and refused to focus on either my analysis of the Michigan State/Notre Dame game or the TV on the opposite wall.

Another indication of unwellness was the tube in his arm and blinking apparatus borrowed from a 40's Frankenstein movie surrounding his bed. To further validate my suspicions, this scene took place in a hospital room!

He had endured an operation – there were complications involving whatever physiologists call the human trash disposal system.

He had been through this before, and I had told him of the Prayer, Asher Yotsar. I had told him of a time when I had been dammed like the Grand Coulee blocks the Arizona River and how I had recited the prayer – a traditional one used daily by more observant Jews than me – to thank our Creator for the deft engineering of the system that rids us of liquid waste. (“Blessed are you Hashem who heals all flesh and acts wondrously.”)

Voila. The free-flowing brook pushed aside boulders, rubble, debris and found

Asher Yotsar

its way to the sea.

We began our goodbyes, whereupon my friend, who had marveled at my earlier healing, turned his head as we stood in the hospital room doorway. “Ted,” he said. “Say that prayer for me – the one with the funny name, you know.” He said it again as we lingered in the doorway. We who have wives that can’t resist individual goodbye kisses and speeches to everyone in the room are used to lingering in goodbye doorways. So, five minutes later I’m leaning against the wall wondering if my warmhearted wife will kiss the nurse, too. My friend, with some effort, turns in the bed to look directly into my eyes. “Don’t forget the prayer,” he says.

I went home and immediately ran upstairs and pulled out the prayer poster. It is garish, primitive, almost cartoonish, but Isaiah was a lousy dresser and Abraham probably would have flunked out of Yeshiva and Sinai has none of the snow-covered elegance of Mt. Fujiyama. Appearances are only appearances and in the reality show of the world that’s veiled to us, they mean nothing.

Two weeks pass. My friend is home and probably appreciating for the first time the astonishing miracle we call the human body. That long-lasting oil of Chanukah is kid stuff compared to this. It shouldn’t work – too many failure possibilities. Reliability engineers marvel. Regarded as a machine you wouldn’t bet a nickel on ten minutes of trouble-free operation. We observe the statistical miracle of life and thank the Creator for His gift.

So, we pray in gratitude. We tell Him over and over of our praise and then we ask that He favor us with health and prosperity. Like the cute little kid next door who wandered in our open door last week when the wife was baking. “Oh Mrs. Roberts, what pretty, pretty drapes. Can I have a cookie?” Not subtle, but remarkably effective on a proud baker. First praise, then the payoff.

But let me not denigrate prayer. It is one of the languages that the Jew uses – that all faiths use – to communicate with G-d. Deeds, ritual, ceremony, and prayer all work together. At one time – in Temple Times – sacrifice was also one of the dialects of reverence. Things change. Maybe we should add music to the list – or to put it more generally – artistic creation. I’m sure Chagall would agree with me. And so would Gerard Manley Hopkins, the great Christian poet. Who can doubt that King David’s music and lyrics to the accompaniment of his lute were the essence of prayer? There are those who could argue that his artistry, even if the theme was worldly and maybe even a trifle crude, was a form of prayer.

Some of us are better at prayer than others. A great story, *The Juggler of Notre Dame* by Anatole France, tells about a medieval juggler who is too ignorant to pray; very much like the Chasidic tale of the peasant who whistles in shul. (You don’t believe G-d reads his meaning? – asks the amazed storyteller.) Or in some versions the peasant simply recites the Aleph-Bet (G-d can’t put the letters together and deduce words?)

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Anyhow, the juggler, sheltered in a monastery during the holiday that Christians call Christmas, looks around to see the talented monks devising beauty in all forms to revere the holiday and the founder of their faith. But he has no skills for illustrated bibles, stained glass windows, art or sculpture. And he knows no prayers. What to do, a simple juggler? He gives the only art G-d gave him. Guess what that is? It’s a great story with a Chasidic flavor. They got it from us – G-d wants the riches of the heart, says the Chasid, no matter the poverty of the mind.

The syndicated humor of Ted, the Scribbler on the roof, has appeared in newspapers around the U.S., on National Public Radio, and numerous websites. HW

INSIGHTS FROM ISRAEL

A New Jewish Agency Chair: Important to Memphis?

By Howard Weisband

On July 7, 2021, Isaac Herzog became President of the State of Israel, following his earlier election by the Knesset to the Presidency. He had been chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) for the previous three years.

At the end of October, the board of governors of JAFI will elect a new chairperson of the executive. The position formally has been open since July 7 although not vacant, as Yaakov Hagoel, chair of the WZO, World Zionist Organization, is also acting JAFI chair.

It is interesting that for the first time the competition for the job is quite fierce, involving some 10 qualified candidates, both men and women, currently involved in public life in Israel. Each is open and willing to leave another position of responsibility to assume JAFI leadership.

For me as an observer today, that factor in and of itself is fascinating. Having had the privilege and honor to serve as secretary general of JAFI for some 12 years (1985-1997), I was involved in the process of individuals transitioning to the position when there were generally single candidates who most often had to be convinced to leave the Knesset, for

instance, to head the Jewish Agency. An example, in 1986, was that of Simcha Dinitz, who had been Israel’s ambassador to the United States prior to being a member of Knesset.

My purpose in this column is not to review that strong list of candidates, nor to say who might be best for to assume JAFI leadership responsibilities. Rather, I would like to reflect a bit on the Jewish Agency itself and focus on why the organization is important to the Jewish people and the Memphis community, likewise other communities in the United States and throughout the world.

The Jewish Agency was formed in 1929 by Chaim Weizmann, who took the initiative as president of the WZO to form a worldwide organization that would include Zionist entities, some founded as far back as 1897 by Theodor Herzl in the First Zionist Congress, with individuals who then did not identify as Zionists. His purpose was to unite the Jewish world in the effort to establish a Jewish State, one that would meet both ideological objectives and to have a homeland for Jews in endangered lands.

And in fact, the Jewish Agency was the forerunner of the State of Israel. In

1948, David Ben-Gurion on May 14, the 5th of Iyar, was the chairman of the WZO and Jewish Agency; on the following day, having signed and read the Declaration of Independence with his colleagues, he became the Prime Minister of Israel.

Ben-Gurion stated that the Jewish Agency was the scaffolding, and the building – the State – was now established, so it was time to take down the scaffolding. Other leaders in Israel and in the Diaspora, led by Nahum Goldmann, objected, saying that world Jewry still required the Jewish Agency to be involved in the upbuilding of the State.

They were right.

The Government of Israel and the Knesset make decisions on matters, which relate to the security and the well-being of the State, including for instance, the budget, the borders, the peace process, etc. Diaspora leaders may have input and consultation, but in the end, these are decisions of the State.

Matters of the Jewish People, such as Aliyah, Jewish identity and education, Israel experiences, and Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World), are to be deliberated, decided, and funded through

the Jewish Agency. In the words of the late Prof. Daniel Elazar (disclosure: a mentor and dear friend of mine), an acclaimed political scientist who fathered the Jewish Political Tradition, the Jewish Agency stands atop and represents the polity of the Jewish People.

Through the Memphis Jewish Federation and the Jewish Federations of North America, the Memphis community is linked to JAFI and its multiplicity of accomplishments and programs.

From the Talmud, a basic Jewish value is “Kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh,” “All of Israel are responsible for each other.” The global fulfillment of this concept is represented in large part through the good work of the Federation system in conjunction with the Jewish Agency.

Howard Weisband served as Assistant Executive Director (1975-77) and Executive Director (1977-84) of the Memphis Jewish Federation. Following Aliyah with his family in 1986, he served as Secretary General of the Jewish Agency for Israel through 1997, and then in other senior professional positions in Israel. Now retired, he and Kayla live in Jerusalem. He can be reached at hweisband@gmail.com HW

US State Department still looking for vandal who etched swastika in elevator

(JNS) – More than three months after the U.S. State Department began an investigation into who etched a swastika into a wood panel inside one of its elevators, the vandal is yet to be identified.

State Department spokesman Ned Price was reminded of the incident during a briefing last Tuesday in a question from Associated Press state department correspondent Matt Lee, who noted that a long time has passed without

news of a resolution.

Price responded that there were no updates, but that it remained a priority for the department.

“Our diplomatic security remains engaged in this investigation. As you know, immediately upon discovering this horrific symbol in the building, [U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken] ordered an investigation,” said Price. “They have resorted to a number

of investigative techniques. We are also taking into account what other practices,

Spokesman Ned Price said there were no updates, but that it remained a priority.

procedures, tools we might implement here in the building to help us in the course of any such future investigations, hoping that we don’t need to resort to that.”

The swastika was noticed on July 27 in an elevator near the office of ambassador-at-large to monitor and combat anti-Semitism with its discovery eliciting condemnation from American and Israeli officials. HW

Sally Rooney: Israeli publishers can't put out my new book for now, but Hebrew translation 'would be an honour'



Sally Rooney speaks onstage during a conference in Pasadena, California on January 17, 2020. Credit: Erik Voake/Getty Images for Hulu

By Ben Sales

(JTA) – The bestselling author Sally Rooney said she decided not to publish her latest novel with an Israeli publishing house because she supports a boycott of Israel but added that a non-Israeli press could still publish the book in Hebrew.

Rooney's statement, made last Tuesday, confirms a report by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz last month that Rooney declined to sell Hebrew publishing rights for her new book, "Beautiful World, Where Are You," to Modan Publishing House, an Israeli press that published her first two novels in Hebrew.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency and others this week characterized Rooney's decision not to work with Modan as a decision not to allow her critically acclaimed book to be translated into Hebrew at all. Rooney said that is not true.

"It would be an honour for me to have my latest novel translated into Hebrew and available to Hebrew-language readers," the statement said. "But for the moment, I have chosen not to sell these translation rights to an Israeli-based publishing house."

Whether that's possible is unclear: The Hebrew-language publishing industry is centered in Israel, the only country where Hebrew is an official language.

Rooney, 30, the Irish author of the acclaimed 2018 novel "Normal People," has been called one of the world's premier millennial authors. Her books have topped bestseller charts, gotten television deals and been praised for their depiction of urbane millennial life and romance.

She had expressed her support for the movement to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel, known as BDS, in July,

when she was one of thousands of artists to sign a letter urging an end to international aid to Israel as well as "trade, economic and cultural relations." That came shortly after Israel's May conflict with Hamas in Gaza prompted renewed international criticism of Israel, including a wave of boycott calls.

Citing recent reports by Human Rights Watch and the Israeli human rights group Btselem, Rooney said in her statement that "Israel's system of racial domination and segregation against Palestinians meets the definition of apartheid under international law." (Human Rights Watch said that "Israeli authorities systematically discriminate" against Palestinians in a way that "amounts to the systematic oppression required for apartheid." Btselem said that Israel maintains an apartheid regime" that "uses laws, practices and organized violence to cement the supremacy of one group over another.")

Anticipating questions about whether she is permitting translations in China or other countries with records of human rights abuses, Rooney acknowledged that many countries "are guilty of grievous human rights abuses," but compared Israel to Apartheid-era South Africa and said that she's chosen to boycott in response to a call from Palestinian civil society.

"I understand that not everyone will agree with my decision, but I simply do not feel it would be right for me under the present circumstances to accept a new contract with an Israeli company that does not publicly distance itself from apartheid and support the UN-stipulated rights of the Palestinian people," she said.

Irish left-wing activists have long connected their historical struggle against the British to support for Palestinian in-

dependence. Both of Rooney's first two books contained references to Israel: In "Normal People," the main characters attend a protest of Israel's actions in the 2014 Gaza War, and her first book, "Conversations with Friends," contains a sardonic reference to Israel being seen as "nicer" than Palestine.

Israeli officials and advocates for Israel have decried the boycott movement as unjust, with some going so far as accusing boycott supporters of antisemitism. Israel's Diaspora affairs minister, Nachman Shai, made that connection around Rooney's decision.

"Why read her at all?" Shai tweeted last Tuesday, shortly before Rooney released her statement. "The cultural boycott of Israel is antisemitism in new wrapping, [and] it's a badge of shame for her and others who act like her."

Rooney is the latest in a string of prominent artists to support a boycott of Israel, and her decision not to publish with an Israeli press is the most significant of its kind since the author Alice Walker announced in 2012 that she would not publish "The Color Purple" with an Israeli house. (Several years later, Walker drew fierce criticism after she endorsed a book that placed Jews at the center of a global conspiracy to control the world.)

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency has asked Rooney's agent if she has made any inquiries into publishing the novel in Hebrew outside of Israel. In her statement, she suggested that she would be open to doing so.

"The Hebrew-language translation rights to my new novel are still available, and if I can find a way to sell these rights that is compliant with the BDS movement's institutional boycott guidelines, I will be very pleased and proud to do so," Rooney said. [HW](#)

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BBC changes label calling French army captain Dreyfus 'notorious Jewish spy'



Credit: French Jewish Capt. Alfred Dreyfus. Source: Screenshot.

(JNS) – The BBC changed the description of a new French period crime drama that identified Alfred Dreyfus, an army captain falsely convicted of treason, as a “notorious Jewish spy.”

The broadcaster edited the written synopsis of the BBC Four program “Paris Police 1900,” which premiered on Oct. 9, after receiving complaints from the Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) and British Jewish actress Tracey-Anne Oberman.

A spokesperson for BBC explained the mishap, saying: “The sentence was not intended as an historical statement, but

to reflect the rumors towards the Dreyfus case that we see in the drama, which also depicts the rise of anti-Semitism,” reported The Jewish Chronicle. The show’s new description simply refers to Dreyfus as someone “arrested for spying.”

Karen Pollock, chief executive of the HET, was outraged by the mistake and tweeted last Sunday, “I don’t understand how these things aren’t checked and somehow get through.” British-Jewish actress Tracey Ann-Oberman asked the BBC, “Are you an actual Nazi propaganda channel?”

Dreyfus was a French Jewish army

captain wrongly convicted of spying in 1894 for allegedly selling military secrets to the Germans. A victim of anti-Semitism, he was pardoned in 1899 after it was revealed that evidence in the case against him was forged. His original conviction was overturned in 1906, and he later served with the French army in World War I.

“Paris Police 1900” focuses on the rumors that Dreyfus was released from Devil’s Island, where he served his prison sentence. The French-language show was created by graphic novelist Fabien Nury and is inspired by true events. **HW**

‘Holocaust was a scam’ projected on Swedish synagogue during international antisemitism conference

By Cnaan Liphshiz

(JTA) – Swedish police are investigating how the words “the Holocaust was a scam” were projected onto the main synagogue in Malmö while that city was holding an international forum on combating antisemitism.

The projection was seen on the Synagogue of Malmö and on other buildings in cities across southern Sweden last Wednesday night, the day of the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism.

Police are handling the case as a hate crime, the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter reported.

The Nordic Resistance Movement, a neo-Nazi group, claimed responsibility for the incident, according to Dagens Nyheter.

The conference had brought together heads of state and other prominent gov-

ernment officials from dozens of countries in a city known for its high rates of antisemitism.

Israel’s strikes in Gaza in 2009 triggered a wave of antisemitic assaults in Malmö, which had then over 1,000 Jews. Then mayor Ilmar Reepalu reacted by instructing the local Jewish community to distance itself from Israel, giving many the impression that he was blaming the victims.

The Jewish community in Sweden’s third-largest city has since dwindled down to around 500.

Despite last Wednesday’s synagogue incident, Katharina von Schnurbein, the European Commission’s coordinator on combating antisemitism, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency last Friday that she thinks the conference shows that “change is possible.”

“The fact that the conference happened

in Malmö sends a message, that this sort of thing will not be accepted and will be confronted,” von Schnurbein said.

At the conference, she presented a new strategic plan for combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life in Europe, published by the European Commission on Oct. 5.

Although the plan does not include a stated budget, von Schurbein said, “it will tap into programs in various departments” and its “components will receive millions of euros in funding in the coming period.”

Among the goals of the plan is to set up a cross-European methodology for documenting and reporting antisemitic hate crimes.

Last Tuesday, Jewish community leaders at a separate conference in Brussels complained that the EU plan was “not serious” because it does not

address two issues that have alienated local Jews for years: bans on the ritual slaughter of animals and attempts to ban non-medical circumcision.

Von Schurbein said the plan does reference the ritual slaughter issue. Member states need to find “a fair balance between respect for the freedom to manifest religion and the protection of animal welfare,” the document states.

The EU Commission and her office intend to facilitate efforts to strike the balance, von Schnurbein said, and call on “EU countries to ensure through policy and legal measures that Jews can live their lives in accordance with their religious traditions,” she added.

“But when it comes to the document, the Commission is bound by the ruling of the European Court,” which in 2020 upheld the rights of states in Belgium to ban ritual slaughter. **HW**



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