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Hebrew Watchman

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Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund forges lasting connections to Israel



Jordan Infeld, Gabe Freedman, Drew Harris, Jacob Shapiro, Louis Reagler, Jack Benjamin, and Michael Hirsch are seen posing at the Tel Aviv Port statue.

"The most inspiring part of my Israel trip was spending two nights in the desert," said Michael Hirsch, a senior at Lausanne Collegiate School who recently returned to Memphis from a summer NFTY Israel program, supported by a grant from Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund.

Federation's Teen Israel Experience program roared to life again this summer after missing a year to the pandemic, and dozens of Memphis teens were able to experience the magic of Israel and forge deeper relationships with the State and its people. Established through the generosity of the late Abe Lemsky, z'l, the Lemsky Endowment Fund enables Federation to strengthen bonds between Memphis Jews and Israel through a variety of programs like Teen Israel, which has brought hundreds of Memphis Jewish teens to Israel for the past quarter of a century.

This summer, 24 Memphis teens from across the Jewish community received a non-needs-based Teen Israel grant for an immersive summer Israel experience. With support from the \$3,000 granted by the Lemsky Endowment Fund per teen, this year's teenaged travelers participated in 12 different Israel programs, including trips through NFTY, Ramah, BBYO, NCSY/JSU and B'nei Akiva.

"Initially, it helped me realize just how beautiful Israel is. But, on a deeper level, it made me feel small in comparison to everything around me," said Michael, the son of Geoffrey and Marci Hirsch. "Seeing stretches of desert in every direction is something that made me feel more in tune with Earth. Being able to see so many countries from one point was another really cool moment that just left me in awe."

"My husband and I both want our children to have a connection with Israel," said Marci, who herself participated in a Federation-sponsored women's trip to Israel in 2018. "Experiencing that you are part of something larger than your local community changes your global perspective. I hope that having this experience will instill a lifelong connection to Judaism that goes beyond our synagogue and region. Taking this trip with camp friends gave Michael the opportunity to see Israel from a teenager's perspective. He was able to connect with Israeli teens and learn more about life in Israel through their eyes. We appreciate the Lemsky Endowment Fund of Memphis Jewish Federation for its support in sending Memphis teens to Israel every year."

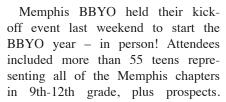
Memphis Jewish Federation considers immersive Israel experiences the key to developing and strengthening teens' Jewish identity and connection to Israel. Teen Israel applications for summer 2022 will open in November 2021 for rising high school juniors or seniors interested in participating in a recognized summer program or semester in Israel. **HW**

Memphis BBYO kicks off year with amazing attendance





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The teens went around Downtown Memphis in groups on a scavenger hunt to learn about Memphis landmarks. They ended the day with an ice cream stop as well as a sweet treat for the new year! **HW** **Chillin**'



901.763.2215

Synagogue threat, cemetery vandalism shakes Twin Cities Jewish community



Police set up a camera rig at Beth El Synagogue in St. Louis Park, Minn., Sept. 10, 2021. The synagogue closed for the day following a threat of violence. Credit: Lonny Goldsmith/TC Jewfolk

By Lonny Goldsmith, Lev Gringauz

(TC Jewfolk via JTA) – A suburban Minneapolis synagogue closed in the early hours on Fri., September 10 after receiving what its managing director deemed "a specific threat of violence" – about one day after 32 headstones were knocked down at a nearby Jewish cemetery.

Although local officials do not believe at this time that the two incidents are linked, their timing and close proximity has prompted worry among Jews in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area during the High Holidays.

"People are certainly asking about the situation and talking about it in the community," said Steve Hunegs, the executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas. Hunegs described the overall mood as "resolute, vigilant, concerned but ultimately calm."

Beth El Synagogue in St. Louis Park made the decision to close that Friday and move Shabbat services online after the regional offices of ADL Midwest in Chicago notified the congregation of the violent threat it received via its online incidence-report system. The threat was directed at an unspecified "Beth El Synagogue," but referenced St. Louis Park by name and seemed to originate from the area.

Meanwhile, St. Paul Police and the FBI investigated the cemetery vandalism Wednesday at Chesed Shei Emes cemetery in St. Paul. There are no suspects.

All the headstones were restored to their proper position by that Friday afternoon.

"This is a beautiful cemetery, it's close to my home," Chesed Shei Emes Chairman Ken Otto said. "You put your heart and your soul into it ...and you see that somebody just does stupid stuff like this. These people didn't do nothing to nobody. They're dead."

Beth El reopened Mon., Sept. 13 for all activities. Leaders of the Conservative synagogue indicated that they intended to hold in-person Yom Kippur services as planned on Wednesday night and Thursday.

"While the investigation of last week's threat remains active and ongoing, the timeframe of the threat has passed," Matt Walzer, the synagogue's managing director, wrote to congregants in an email last Sunday afternoon. "In coordination with local authorities, we are proceeding with this decision and have secured additional law enforcement presence to ensure the safety of our synagogue community and preschool families."

Other area synagogues and Jewish organizations including the Minnesota JCC expressed solidarity with Beth El, with some also indicating that they would be increasing security at their institutions in light of the threat.

ADL Midwest, the JCRC and the Secure Community Network said they were in contact with local and federal law enforcement regarding the synagogue threat and the cemetery vandalism.

Specific details of the threat are not being released, with authorities citing an ongoing investigation. At a news conference last Friday afternoon, St. Louis Park Mayor Jake Spano lauded the close connection between Beth El and law enforcement.

"The big takeaway for me right now is the confidence ... that our police department and the Jewish community in St. Louis Park have developed over

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9/23/2021

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the years – a tight, tight relationship and coordination around these sorts of threats," Spano said. "As tragic as this may be, [the threat] will not diminish the Jewish community."

At the cemetery, Otto suspected the perpetrators were kids with nothing better to do and expressed doubt they would be caught.

"It's just very disheartening for it to happen," Otto said. "I hear about it happening ... you see it, but it never happens to you. Well, it finally happened to me." Hunegs said his JCRC did not know if the threat and vandalism were related. He noted the increased security planning for the Jewish community of late.

"It's important to keep in mind that we've grown experienced in dealing with such issues, which are, unfortunately, a reflection of the time in which we live," he said. "[Our response] wasn't invented today or yesterday. We've been working on this for a while."

This story is based on a series of reports originally published in TC Jewfolk. Used with permission. **HW**





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CULTURE ~ BOOK REVIEW Deep in the woods, where a terrifying real-life Holocaust fairy tale unfolded

By Julia M. Klein Courtesy of St. Martin's Press

Printed with permission Forward. In fairy tales, the woods are a place of enchantment, a dark realm whose surprises can quickly turn sinister. For the embattled Jews of Poland, fleeing Nazi genocide, they were a refuge that was also riddled with dangers.

Rebecca Frankel's page-turning nonfiction narrative, "Into the Forest," takes us deep into the "hauntingly beautiful" woods where the Rabinowitz family and other Jews confront (and sometime succumb to) harsh nature and man-made terrors. But that entirely compelling story is just the prologue to an even more improbable fairy tale about rescue, reunion and romantic love.

Frankel telegraphs her "miraculously happy" ending in the book's opening pages, in which a university student has a life-changing encounter at a 1953 Brooklyn wedding. After that irresistible introduction, she flashes back to another wedding two decades earlier, in Vilna, between Miriam Dworetsky and Morris Rabinowitz. Miriam and Morris, "a genial carouser" who is also "sharp-witted and shrewd," meet at a Socialist Zionist youth gathering. Miriam later describes the encounter as "love at first sight," another fairy-tale trope.

The newlyweds settle in Zhetel, Morris's predominantly Jewish hometown, where life had "a pleasing, reliable rhythm" and Frankel suggests that comity across social and cultural lines is the norm. Miriam runs a patent medicine shop; Morris works in the lumber business, learning the local forest and making friends nearby. They have two daughters, Rochel and Tania, and live happily, before history intervenes.

The history in question is all too familiar: World War II brings the Soviet invasion, with all its social upheavals,

I want to buy your home! Fast! Easy! No Repairs! No Commission! No Fees!

Licensed Realtor in TN! Lifelong Memphian! David Steinberg • 901-233-0313 steinbergdavid@comcast.net and then the even more brutal Nazi one. We know what will follow, or think we do. What distinguishes "Into the Forest" is the granularity and vividness of its storytelling – the product, in part, of Frankel's close personal connection to her characters.

During the tumultuous war years, the Rabinowitz family moves back and forth between Zhetel and the provincial capital of Novogrudek, where Miriam's family lives. But once the Germans arrive, no place is safe. Frankel distinguishes between the regular army, whose soldiers are sometimes courteous, and the pitiless SS, charged with herding Jews into ghettos and conducting mass executions.

In Zhetel's ghetto, where Frankel says the Jewish leadership is more protective than corrupt, an underground resistance coalesces. But the Nazis cultivate a "mentality of fear, submission and misplaced trust," and betrayals undercut solidarity. Soviet partisans already have begun populating the forest, but they have little interest in saving Jews.

When the selections and executions start, a work pass or skill may offer temporary salvation. But for how long? One horrifying detail: The children of the ghetto, mimicking the murderers, play "selection" games, consigning each other to different fates.

During one actual selection, Philip Lazowski, an 11-year-old refugee from another town, is separated from his family. He discerns that children unaccompanied by parents are being sent to their deaths, and begs Miriam Rabinowitz, a stranger, to let him pass as her son. She agrees, and the ruse succeeds.

After more ordeals and a brief separation, the Rabinowitz family reunites, in the summer of 1942, in the vast forest spanning the borders of Poland and Belorussia. Frankel describes the woods rhapsodically as a place where "mighty trees stretched their formidable branches to touch the sky" and "deceptively deep water stranded oaks and old alder trees onto small orphaned islands in a maze of intractable marshland."

But the protection the forest affords is limited. Life there would not exempt its inhabitants from "the war's brutalities or the bare-knuckled survival required to endure it," Frankel writes. The further they fled, "the more determined their hunters became to root them out."

Some Jewish ghetto escapees join Soviet partisan units or form their own. (The Bielski brothers' band, which both fights Germans and saves Jews, becomes the most celebrated.) But others, like the Rabinowitzes, gather in small family camps, aiming not for revenge but survival. They build shelters to withstand the winters, forage for food, and rely on friendly farmers to supplement their supplies. Lice, typhus, hunger, and bitter cold all threaten.

During periodic Nazi campaigns, the Rabinowitz family and their companions are forced to relocate to even more remote areas. Yet another horrifying detail: One SS commander involved in the hunt for Jews is so sadistic that other Nazi killing squad commanders call for his removal. How bad would he have had to be, one wonders, to have repulsed even his fellow mass murderers? His excesses notwithstanding, he keeps his job.

The Rabinowitz family endures many close calls. Miriam becomes deathly ill, but Morris nurses her back to health. At one point, Nazi soldiers walk across their well-concealed underground bunker, but they remain undiscovered.

Finally, the Soviets have the Germans on the run, and the surviving Jews are liberated. They walk back to Zhetel, where not much remains. In Novogrudek, the Rabinowitzes recover a few hidden valuables. In Lublin, they enjoy a small family reunion. Then, with guides, they make the arduous trek over the Alps to Italy, where they recuperate and dream of Palestine.

They end up instead in the United States, thanks to the sponsorship of Morris' relatives. The two daughters, becoming American, change their names to Ruth and Toby. The past recedes - and then makes a welcome reappearance: The boy rescued from the selection will marry into the family. Unlike many Holocaust survivors, and luckily for Frankel, the Rabinowitzes don't shy away from their wartime memories. Miriam tells her grandchildren stories in which the woods become "a fantastical, faraway place where their parents and grandparents loomed as large as the trees - heroes in their family's very own fairy tale." Julia M. Klein, the Forward's contributing book critic, has been a two-time finalist for the National Book Critics Circle's Nona Balakian Citation for Excellence in Reviewing. Follow her on Twitter @JuliaMKlein Courtesy of St. Martin's Press Into the Forest: A Holocaust Story of Survival, Triumph, and Love By Rebecca Frankel St. Martin's Press, \$28.99 HW



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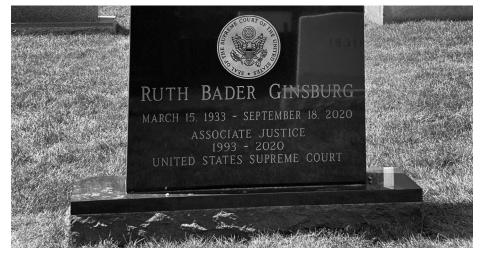




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Tombstone of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg unveiled in Arlington National Cemetery



Tombstone of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, September 2021. Source: Screenshot.

(JNS) – The tombstone of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the first Jewish woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, was unveiled days before the first anniversary of her death on Sept. 18.

The grave marker was revealed over the weekend at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

It features the U.S. Supreme Court seal, which has a single star beneath an eagle's claws to symbolize the U.S. Constitution's creation of "one Supreme Court." Below Ginsburg's name, she is remembered as an associate justice who served on the Supreme Court from 1993 until her death in 2020 at the age of 87 from complications of metastatic pancreatic cancer.

The Brooklyn, N.Y.-born attorney, judge and mother of two shares the tombstone with her husband, Martin, who died in 2010 and is buried alongside her in the couple's section of the historic cemetery.

According to People magazine, the couple is buried near former President John F. Kennedy and nine Supreme Court justices, including three who served with Ginsburg: Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and Associate Justices Harry Blackmun and John Paul Stevens.

It is customary for the unveiling of the tombstone to take place on the one-year anniversary of the death, also known as the first yahrzeit, as per Jewish tradition.

Ginsburg was the first woman and the first Jewish person to lie in repose inside the National Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol building before her burial. Earlier this year, she was honored in New York with two statues. **HW**

Israeli ministries issue legal opinion on smuggling of child in Italian cable-car crash



Eitan Biran with his late father, Amit Biran. Source: Facebook.

(JNS) – Israeli government attorneys said that the recent smuggling of 6-yearold Eitan Biran from Italy to Israel amounts to kidnapping under international law.

A legal opinion from lawyers at the Israeli ministries of justice and foreign affairs said the abduction meets the definition of a kidnapped child under the Hague Abduction Convention, a treaty Israel joined in 1991, reported Israel's Channel 12 news.

The convention provides for the "prompt return of abducted children to their country of habitual residence," according to the treaty's text.

Eitan is the sole survivor of a cable-car crash in Italy's Piedmont region in May. His parents, maternal great-grandparents and 2-year-old brother were killed in the crash. A total of 14 people died in the accident. Eitan's maternal grandfather reportedly flew him to Israel last Saturday instead of returning him to his paternal aunt near Pavia, in northern Italy, after a pre-arranged visit.

Now he is at the center of a custody battle after an Italian court ruled that he could live with his aunt. Eitan's maternal relatives in Israel said they worried that his Israeli identity would be eroded and wanted him returned.

The Israeli relatives denied that they abducted the boy.

"We did not kidnap Eitan, and we will not use that word," said an Israeli aunt, reported the AP. "We brought Eitan back home."

However, after the legal opinion by the Israeli ministries, it is likely that Israel will work to return the child to Italy, who was taken without consent of his guardian, said Channel 12. **HW**

At Dutch COVID protest, men dressed as Nazis make mock arrest of participant wearing yellow star

By Cnaan Liphshiz

(JTA) – Several men dressed like Nazis were seen pretending to arrest a man wearing a yellow star as part of a rally against COVID-19 measures in the Netherlands.

Last Saturday's incident in Urk, near Amsterdam, was the latest among the hundreds of rallies worldwide in which protesters have drawn what they regard as parallels between the persecution of Jews by Nazis to rules meant to curb the spread of the virus.

But the protest in Urk was unusual because of its theatrics and the fact that it happened where the Nazis actually rounded up Jews at gunpoint.

The 10 men involved in the incident apologized for their actions in writing in a statement obtained by the "Hart van Nederland" television program. ogies," the statement read, adding that the protest "crossed a line that it should have not crossed." The protesters said they did not mean to offend Jews.

The young men played out a scene in which SS officers at gunpoint led a man wearing a striped uniform and a yellow star like the one that Nazis made Jews wear during the Holocaust, the NOS broadcaster reported.

The Urk municipality, which is considered one of the most pro-Israeli communities in the Netherlands, condemned the display in a statement.

"This behavior is not only objectionable, but also extremely inappropriate and offensive for many groups in the population," the statement read.

Urk has flown the Israeli flag on var-

Caught on hot mic, Israeli minister says 'green pass' not based on epidemiology



Israeli Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz talks with Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked ahead of the weekly Cabinet meeting on Sept. 12, 2021. Source: Channel 12/Screenshot.

(JNS) – Imposing "green pass" rules on certain venues is needed only to pressure members of the public to get vaccinated, and not for medical reasons, Israeli Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz

Horowitz went on to explain that the only way for there to be no exceptions – since people wonder why if it's ok not to have a pass for pools "then why for water parks, outdoor facilities and sports?"

"We wish to express our sincere apol-

ious occasions, including in May to show its solidarity with Israel during its exchange of fire with Hamas. **HW**

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said last Sunday, ahead of the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Horowitz was caught on a hot mic telling this to Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked, who was also unaware that the conversation was being taped and would be broadcast on Channel 12 News.

In response to Shaked's suggestion that the "green pass" could be removed as a requirement for outdoor seating at restaurants, Horowitz said: "For swimming pools, too, not just in restaurants."

"Epidemiologically, it's true," said Horowitz, adding, "The thing is, I'm telling you, our problem is people who don't get vaccinated. We need [to influence] them a bit; otherwise, we won't get out of this [pandemic situation]."

Currently, he said, "there is a kind of universality to the 'green pass' system, other than at malls, where I think it should be imposed, [because] now it's clear that it applies nowhere." - is to have the regulations be uniformly enforced.

On the one hand, he added, "we don't want to do things that have no medical justification. But I'm telling you that we have a problem. The 'green pass' isn't even being enforced; certainly not in the Arab sector, where it doesn't exist at all. And I'm seeing the effect on the hospitals."

Horowitz and Shaked were joined by Intelligence Minister Elazar Stern, who, also unaware that the conversation was on tape, expressed disgust with the unvaccinated.

"It's annoying that they're taking up the [hospital] beds," he said. To which Horowitz replied: "Those in intensive care, yes."

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett subsequently told the Cabinet that tolerance towards those who choose not to get vaccinated has ended, according to Channel 12. **HW**

Meet Memphis BBYOers



Jonas Kannady

I first joined BBYO as a freshman. Really, I joined because of Matthew Grossman, someone who I worked with at Temple Israel as a Madrichim. He was very involved with BBYO, and he asked me to come to an intake event, which is where freshman/8th graders get to learn a little about BBYO. I enjoyed it so much that I joined later that week.

After that, I found my own "why,"

which was to give other Jewish teens this same experience I got. A lot of Jewish teens just stop doing a lot of Jewish stuff after their bar/bat mitzvahs. I want to show those teens how much fun BBYO is and give them the opportunity to not only make lifelong friends in BBYO but allow them to learn so much more about themselves and their Jewish identity.

Being on Delta Regional Board is an honor – and any biggest accomplishment in BBYO. Being on Regional Board – and being Godol (president) – just shows that my peers really see what I have put into BBYO. They have faith in me to lead them and this Region to much bigger things to come.

For me, even though Regional Board is a decent amount of work, I don't mind it, because I am doing it with my best friends.

The 94/74 Regional Board for Delta has already become a family, and that's what I'm most happy about going into the bigger part of this term.

~ Jonas Kannady, 94th Delta Regional Aleph Godol **HW**

Dexwet's Pure Air filters installed in Bornblum Jewish Community School to keep students, teachers, and staff safe



Dexwet COO, Clemens Sparowitz, demonstrates how the patented filters use the scientific principle of Turbulence and Attraction to capture airborne dust, pollen, and nano-fine particles with 6th and 7th graders

To add an extra layer of protection, Bornblum Jewish Community School in Memphis became the first in the U.S. to install a new type of air filter technology created by Dexwet Pure Air Filters.

During the August installation, Dexwet COO, Clemens Sparowitz, demonstrated how the patented filters use the scientific principle of Turbulence and Attraction to capture airborne dust, pollen, and nano-fine particles such as bacteria and viruses in classrooms. The demonstration was part of a two-day learning of our kids first, so I'm not surprised that our school is doing this. Being the first school in the country to install this kind of filtration is exciting and comforting," said Stephanie Weiser, Bornblum Parent

Plough Towers: honoring Memphis Jewish Federation

By Harleen Tague

During this time of reflection and transition into the Jewish New Year, we look within ourselves to understand how we can move forward and look back at how we can overcome what we wish to improve, to make better, to help others and ourselves.

As we celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, we want to thank Memphis Jewish Federation's Fedovation grant program, which helped establish the Plough Towers Jewish Holiday; Celebrating and Learning Together display case.

This is a beautiful display of holiday symbols, customs, explanations and foods that mark the observance of these holidays.

Memphis Jewish Federation sustains our Jewish community by improving lives, caring for Jews in need, promoting Jewish values and continuity, not only in Memphis but around the world. Through their support, Plough Towers is only one of many organizations that Memphis Jewish Federation helps. At Plough Towers, they support the activities program and help make it a vibrant and important part of daily life. We appreciate the support of the B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy program of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis, which funded the partial annual fee for Creative Aging of the Mid-South, the Plough Knitting Ladies costs and the New Resident Welcome Basket program. We continue to be grateful for the generous funding from Memphis Jewish Federation's Scheidt-Hohenberg Kosher Hot Meals Program in partnership with MIFA.

The list is endless.

Plough Towers would not be the welcoming and inclusive home it is without its amazing volunteers and sponsors

Association president and parent.

"At every point during this Covid experience, Mr. Weiss has shepherded our school community, keeping his focus on our health and safety. He wants his employees and students to be protected; he knows that we are concerned for our



who support the Peanut Butter and Jelly Group, Friends of Israel Panera Bread Ladies, The Book Club, The Knitting Ladies, Temple Israel Sisterhood and so many more volunteers who enrich the lives our residents. If you would like to be a part of the Memphis Jewish Federation and Plough Towers' family of volunteers, please contact Plough Towers at ploughtowers.org. **HW**

families as well," said Deanna McAlexander, teacher and alumni parent.

"He has arranged for equipment and protocols to be put in place since March of 2020. I applaud this initiative with Dexwet to bring state-of-the-art health technology to our school." **HW**



Human Spirit

module developed with teachers for the school's 6th and 7th grade students.

"Our focus as a school is to empower our students to become confident, life-long learners. One of the most significant ways we achieve this is by integrating Design Thinking in their curriculum. We recognized the incredible learning opportunity before us when Dexwet approached our school about installing their air filter technology and involved our students in the installation process," said Daniel R. Weiss, head of school at Bornblum Jewish Community School. "The middle schoolers were incredibly engaged in the process and experienced a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring an innovative technology into the U.S. and into our school. We are grateful to Dexwet for providing such an engaging learning experience for our students."

"Bornblum has always gone to great lengths to put the well-being and safety

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Career change checklist: are you prepared?

Provided By Mike Stein, Manging Director – Investments

If you're considering a job or career change, it's important to do some homework before you make the leap. Many benefits from your current position could be tied to specific dates and time frames. Gathering the right information can help you strategically time your exit and set yourself up for greater success. Consider these steps before you resign:

1. Decide if you'd prefer to quit now or wait until you have an offer. This decision requires you to factor in how unhappy you are in your current position and whether you're able to live off your savings for a while. If you're in a traditional industry, such as sales, it might be better to find a new opportunity while you're employed. But if you're in high-tech, biotech, private equity, or a similar industry, there may be less risk in taking some time off.

2. Check your employment contract and noncompete agreement. Have a labor attorney review any legal documents you signed when you were hired to evaluate their terms and enforceability. Some contracts may require you to pay back relocation money, education grants, or bonuses if you don't stay for a certain period of time. Others include "golden handcuffs" that mean you will lose unvested options, restricted stock, deferred compensation, and other benefits upon resignation. Still others may require waiting for a specified length of time before taking a job with a competitor.

3. Review your retirement benefits. Check the vesting schedule for your employer's 401(k) contributions and profit-sharing contributions to see how long you have to work to claim your portion of the money. Many plans require you be employed on the last day of the plan year to get employer contributions for

that year. You may want to wait until after the plan year ends before you terminate employment so you don't lose those contributions.

4. Check the terms of stock options, restricted stock, or other forms of non-salary compensation. You may want to delay your departure if a valuable number of options will vest in the near future. If you're already vested, find out if you're still subject to the same trading windows and how much time you have to exercise your vested options once you resign. In many cases, options expire if they aren't exercised within a certain time frame – typically 90 days after your departure.

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'Cholent Festival' brings Jewish culture to Hungary via food, music, traditions



Lili Erdos (far right) and her family at the Cholent Festival in Budapest, Hungary, on Aug. 27, 2021. Credit: Eliana Rudee.

By Eliana Rudee

(JNS) – Thousands of people took part in the Sixth Hungarian 'Cholent Festival' ("Sólet" in Hungarian) at the Újbuda outdoor theater in Budapest before the start of the High Holidays, organized by the Chabad Lubavitch organization Association of Hungarian Jewish Communities (EMIH).

Jews and non-Jews alike gathered for the Aug. 29 festival, which was first held in 2015 and has since come back after a hiatus last summer due to restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Cholent is a slow-cooked meat stew that simmers overnight, often made by observant Jews in accordance with the laws that prohibit cooking on the Sabbath. It is traditionally served for Shabbat lunch and contains whole eggs in their shell, meat, beans, potatoes, barley and spices.

"We love this food," said festival-goer and Budapest resident Lili Erdos, who brought her family to the event. Erdos, whose Hungarian father's side of the family was Jewish, does not identify as such but "loves to learn about and is interested in Jewish traditions."

Anna Harmath and Balazs Haragh, each 25, also came to the festival because they "love the food." Two years ago, Harmath, a then-horticulture student at a nearby university, attended with her parents to try the dish and returned this year to take her boyfriend to sample the hearty stew.

Haragh, who is studying law at a local university, noted that the dish has a Hungarian taste to it. Until he first came to Budapest at age 19, he told JNS that he had never seen a Jewish person; recently, he has learned more about Hungary's "interesting Jewish past."

Last summer, the couple visited the former Jewish synagogue in Mád. "It was wonderful," said Haragh. "We learned that before the Second World War, there was an enormous Jewish community in Hungary."

"I wish I knew more about Jewish

culture," Harmath told JNS. "In my [current setting], there are some Jews, and I learn from them. I find it sad that I don't know them enough, and that here in Hungary and Europe there are not a lot of Jewish people. I wish there were more," she said.

Though Haragh's town in the Hungarian countryside has an old synagogue and Jewish cemetery, he said was abandoned "and nobody cares about it ... it disappeared like the Jewish people in Hungary, sadly."

According to a 1941 census, Hungary had a Jewish population of 825,000, less than 6 percent of the total population. Nearly two-thirds – as many as 568,000 – perished during the years of World War II and the Holocaust, the majority in the final year of the war, one of the last major European Jewish populations to be rounded up by Nazi Germans.

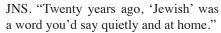
Between December 1944 and the end of January 1945, the fascist Arrow Cross Party installed in Hungary at the time took as many as 20,000 Jews from the ghetto in Budapest, shot them along the banks of the Danube and threw their bodies into the river. A monument called "Shoes on the Danube Bank" pays homage to the victims.

'A great way to build a bridge'

Chabad-Lubavitch emissary Eliezer Nogradi, who invited Jewish festival-goers to wrap tefillin, estimated that 30 percent to 40 percent of the festival participants were Jewish. The non-Jews among the crowd have nevertheless shown "respect and interest," he related. The Jews, he told JNS, are still "careful about being Jewish outside, some are even scared to tell their children ... they have fear after the Holocaust and communism."

However, Nogradi urged, "Be proud about your Judaism and be brave. It's getting better, and we are building it back like before the war."

This was precisely the message that EMIH head Rabbi Shlomó Köves wished the festival to express. "Because of the cholent festival, we have made Jews feel at home and safer," he told



To this end, the community has also run a billboard campaign in Budapest declaring, "It's good to be a Jew," with Köves seeing "a huge change in the public over the last 20 years, back when we couldn't have made such a festival."

The cholent festival, he continued, "Gives Jews strength and chance to connect" in a space where it is easier to "take the first step" into the Jewish community without sticking out, all while "softening the connection with the larger [non-Jewish] society – a great way to build a bridge."

And while Köves maintained that the pandemic has impacted the organization's funding and activities, the cholent festival was an auspicious way to "welcome people into the community and build connection and awareness before the High Holidays."

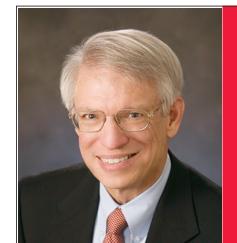
By mid-day, more than half of the 6,000 portions of kosher cholent were sold. The festival offered hundreds of pounds and several varieties of it – vegan, Hungarian, Israeli, Tunisian. The festival also featured live performances by Chassidic rapper Nissim Black, an American who made aliyah, and English singer/songwriter Alex Clare, who also lives in Israel.

As one of the highlights of the cultural festival, the new Torah scroll for the Bocskai Street Synagogue was also completed. Hundreds accompanied the Torah early in the evening to the nearby synagogue, which was officially inaugurated. The last time so many people gathered there, say locals, was perhaps only 85 years ago when the synagogue was first inaugurated.

At the synagogue, Köves emphasized that it is uplifting that, as the event showed, "we can live freely and proudly as Jews in other districts of Budapest as well."

Dr. Imre Laszlo, mayor of Budapest's 11th district, which includes the Újbuda outdoor theater and synagogue, added: "There is no Hungarian history without Jewish traditions." **HW**





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ANDREW BOSHWIT

The greatest Holocaust movie ever made, starring Steve Buscemi, debuted on 9/11. It's time to revisit it.



Steve Buscemi and David Arquette in "The Grey Zone." (Screenshot via Lionsgate Entertainment; Photo illustration by Grace Yagel)

By Rich Brownstein

(JTA) – On Sept. 11, 2001, the greatest Holocaust film ever made, before or since, premiered at a festival – and quickly disappeared, largely unnoticed.

The film's cast included Steve Buscemi, Harvey Keitel, David Arquette, Michael Stuhlbarg and Mira Sorvino, and it was written and directed by the acclaimed Jewish actor Tim Blake Nelson. Roger Ebert called it one of the best films of the year; later, he added it to his prestigious Great Movies series. The film was so extraordinary that Steven Spielberg considered distributing it himself, less than a decade after making "Schindler's List."

This was the astonishing pedigree and support behind "The Grey Zone." But it couldn't translate into any attention for the beleaguered film, which had a quickly forgotten premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival and languished at the box office when it was released the next year.

"The Grey Zone" is not about righteous gentiles or good Nazis who redeem themselves by saving Jews. It's not a happy-go-lucky film with a father and son prancing around Auschwitz playing games, or a cartoonish Adolf Hitler mugging for the camera. It lacks the other typical trappings of Holocaust movies: the lush musical score, the tortured accents, the melodramatic misdirections. "The Grey Zone" is, instead, about the moral and philosophical conundrums faced by the Sonderkommando: the Jews in the death camps who worked to dispose of the victims' bodies in exchange for slightly better treatment from the Nazis.

Drawing on the writings of Primo Levi and the true story of the forgotten rebellion at Birkenau by the Sonderkommando in 1944, where the Jewish workers destroyed two of the main four crematorium complexes on the deadliest spot in human history, Nelson portrays real people living their reality – not with black or white choices, but with grey moral choices. And "The Grey Zone" tells its complex, layered story in an economical 108 minutes, with grace and humility.

How did such an important film fall through the cracks? "The Grey Zone" was practically stillborn, set to premiere just after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, while smoke was still rising from lower Manhattan. Yet even if the film's release date had not itself been cataclysmic, it was still made by Nelson - best known at the time for playing a buffoonish ex-con in "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" - and starring a cast of American actors not known for weighty dramatic performances. Even though Nelson, basing the film on his own play of the same name, was himself the son of a Holocaust refugee and had traveled to Dachau and Auschwitz for research, he'd hardly seemed like the kind of filmmaker to pay the Holocaust sufficient reverence.

In the 20 years since the film's release, it has come to seem oddly prescient in the world of Holocaust cinema. More and more often, dramatizations of the Shoah, including Roman Polanski's "The Pianist" and foreign-language films like "Fateless" and "The Counterfeiters," favor more unsparing, morally complicated depictions of Holocaust victims. And in 2015, the Hungarian film "Son of Saul" drew from much of the same plot and setting as "The Grey Zone" for its own depiction of the Sonderkommando; that movie won the Best Foreign-Language Film Oscar, while its forebear suffered the fate of most pioneers, alone and forgotten.

Nevertheless, Nelson remains proud of his contribution to Holocaust cinema. "There's nothing I've done that's more important to me than 'The Grey Zone," he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in a recent interview looking back on the film. "And it doesn't matter that most people have never even heard of it."

Nelson sat down with JTA for an interview to discuss the film's 20th anniversary.

JTA: Tell me about growing up as a Jewish kid in 1970s Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Nelson: I've described it before as strangely exotic. Being a European Jew in Tulsa, the son of a Holocaust refugee, we were obviously different. I feel like I got the best of both worlds. I got to grow up as a Jew, celebrating Passover at my grandparents' house on plates and silverware that somehow they brought over from Germany – yet in Oklahoma, which is also unique. And that combination gave me a level of intimacy and distance that has really served me well in my life.

What was your first exposure to Holocaust films?

It was the 1978 miniseries "Holocaust." Other Holocaust films that had similar impact on me were, of course, "Shoah," "Hotel Terminus" and "Schindler's List."

How much of the Birkenau revolt in "The Grey Zone" was fictional?

Almost none of the core plot was fiction. "The Grey Zone" was based mostly on "Amidst a Nightmare of Crime: Manuscripts of Prisoners in Crematorium Squads Found at Auschwitz," as well as Dr. Miklós Nyiszli's "Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account" and, of course, Primo Levi's "The Drowned And The Saved," a chapter of which provided the film's name. The film was also heavily influenced by André Schwarz-Bart's novel "The Last of the Just," and the memoirs of both Dario Gabai and Filip Muller.

Did you go to the camps in preparation for making "The Grey Zone"?

I went to Dachau and Auschwitz to write "The Grey Zone" play, which was performed in New York several years earlier. And we had the architectural plans from the London War Museum, so we were able to make exact replicas of two of the crematoria, which were ultimately destroyed in the 1944 uprising.

Interestingly, just a few years ago, I went back to Auschwitz with my son, Henry. After the tour, in the Birkenau gift shop, I pointed and said, "Look Henry, they have 'The Grey Zone' DVD." The cashier jumped in and said, "That's the best Holocaust movie anybody has ever made." I paid for the post-card and left without telling him that it was my movie.

What parts of the killing process did you represent in the film?

Over the course of the movie, you get every single aspect of the victim's journey to death – actually up into the clouds, because at the end we see smoke and ash rising. It's not all in order, but you get every single part of the killing apparatus from the train to the oven except for one: there was no way I was going to shoot inside the gas chamber during the gassing. We show Germans pouring in the Zyklon B [from] the roof, and you hear the screaming.

We did have a shot inside the gas chamber right after, just a mass of dead bodies against the wall. But it was too much, too gruesomely real in an almost pornographic way. Fortunately, we were in a position not to have to use it in edit.

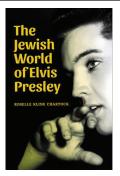
There is also a torture scene, but you can't see what's actually happening to the victim. These decisions were made because at a certain point unflinching can become gratuitous.

You were working as an actor for Steven Spielberg while you were editing "The Grey Zone." Did he see your movie?

I was acting in "Minority Report" and we got along very well and still do. And I said to him on set, "Look, I just made this Holocaust film. Would you take a look?" And so I got him the workprint. It wasn't even the finished film. Steven watched it in his screening room over the weekend. And he said, "This is incredible. I love it. Look, I want to consider putting it out through DreamWorks." So he showed it to his executives, who told him two things: "We're not in the business of putting out films that are on a maximum of maybe only 750 screens, and it's always going to be compared to 'Schindler's List,' sometimes favorably and probably mostly not favorably, so we don't see it for DreamWorks." So we took it to Lionsgate, who distributed it. So, yes, Steven loved the film and has always been supportive.

Why were the film's characters flawed and unflattering, unlike Jewish victims in almost every other Holocaust film?

Primo Levi's breathtaking implication about the Sonderkommandos, who extended their lives through some level of participation, was that Levi couldn't claim he would've done differently. And so, that to me was almost a command that the characters needed to be inherently flawed, like you and me. I identify with every one of the Jews in the film on a really personal level. And even though each character is very different from one another, they had conversations that I think most people would have when confronting their same predicament: either work in the gas chambers and fill the ovens or die in them. Do you believe that "The Grey Zone" was not taken seriously because you are best known as a comedic actor? I think being known as Delmar from "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" did not help. It also didn't help that I cast wellknown friends in parts, like Steve Buscemi and David Arquette – particularly David Arquette, who was not allowed to



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(See Movie Page 9)

Movie...

(Continued From Page 8)

have that moment as an actor by critics. At least Steve was recognized as a serious actor, while David, unfairly, was not. Because if you're going to take this material on, you have very little latitude.

In fact, "The Grey Zone" was blackballed by someone at the Hollywood Foreign Press [Association], who even refused a screening. He said, "This movie is essentially vile and offensive for trying to depict what it does." That was probably, for me, the nadir of our attempts to put the movie out in a way that it would have been seen. And that was heartbreaking.

Do you regret having cast your friends in the film?

I don't, because, first of all, it's the only way I could've gotten the film made. Avi Lerner, our financier, needed known actors in some of the roles. Once David Arquette and I worked on the part, I knew that he could do it beautifully. The soul of his character is in David, who is an incredibly sensitive man behind all the outrageous comedy that he presents to the world. He is very much in touch with a sense of shame that is distinctively questioning and therefore Semitic. And he also has the Holocaust in his direct family lineage. I wanted it for David. And in terms of Steve Buscemi, I think he's appropriate for the role and he's great in it.

As for Harvey Keitel, he didn't want to play a Jew, even though he is a Jew. [Keitel plays an S.S. officer in the film.] And I liked the way that Harvey talked about the movie with me, and I liked the way that he lined up by my side in pursuit of getting it made. And Harvey was the first one in. There was nobody more zealous in pursuit of making something extraordinary over there among the acting core than Harvey. So, no, I don't regret it.

What was the impact of 9/11 on the release?

I literally woke up on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, to a review in the Toronto Star that was exactly what we wanted. The critic really got the movie. I was supposed to have breakfast with Roger Ebert that morning. Before breakfast, I went on this radio show and that guy was rhapsodic about the movie. And it was to premiere that night. The night of Sept. 11. And I was sitting there on this radio show thinking, "My God, people get the movie. They're appreciating it. All the risks that we took are being vindicated." And [I] looked up, and news footage showed the planes crashing into the buildings. And so, I daresay, that had some impact on the film's future. And of course, that started with the understandable cancelation of our premiere that night.

Were you ever able to have a proper screening of the film after the tragedy?

Yes. In fact, my mother was supposed to go to the screening in Toronto on 9/11. But she finally saw the movie at an industry screening a year later, and there was a Q&A afterward. And she raised her hand. And I thought, oh my God! And she said, "I'm Tim's mother. And Tim will be the first to tell you that I don't always like what he does. As an example, his last play I thought was awful! But Tim, in terms of this movie, I am in awe." And that meant a great deal to me because my mother is, shall we say, parsimonious with her praise, so it really means something when it does come.

After 20 years, do you think that the film holds up?

I do. I'm incredibly proud of it and my work as its writer and director. But I have so much gratitude to Avi Lerner for financing it, and also for the incredible people who taught me so much about filmmaking while I was making it. It was this great group effort. And I'm so proud to have had that team working on this project.

How does "The Grey Zone" rank in your professional career?

There's nothing I've done that's more important to me than "The Grey Zone," and it doesn't matter that most people have never even heard of it. The great irony of my life is that more people know me from my cameo in "Scooby-Doo 2" than will ever have heard about "The Grey Zone."

"The Grey Zone" is currently available to stream for free (with ads) on Amazon Prime, IMDB TV and Tubi, and for rental from various VOD services.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of JTA or its parent company, 70 Faces Media, **THW**

OBITUARIES

Dr. Benjamin Beatus, Jr.

Benjamin Louis Beatus, Jr, MD, a loving husband, father, grandfather, brother-in-law, uncle, and friend to many, passed away peacefully at his home September 7, 2021, at the age of 84. He was born in Memphis, Tenn., September 21, 1936, to the late Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin Louis Beatus, Sr.

Ben planted his roots in Memphis for his lifetime after attending Tulane University and University of Tennessee Health Sciences where he attained his medical degree. He completed his psychiatry residency in Kansas City and then proudly served our country as a Captain in the Air Force at Homestead Air Reserve Base in Homestead, Fla., during the Vietnam War. Upon his return from the military, he began a successful private practice in psychiatry for over 50 years.

Ben had a strong commitment to his community and dedicated his life to having a positive impact on it. He served on numerous community boards including Temple Israel, Memphis Jewish Community Center and Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. Following his retirement, he continued to serve the community through his work as a volunteer at Church Health within the Behavioral Health division.

Generous and kind, his life was complete with his wife by his side every step of the way. Ben and Sandra Loskovitz Beatus, who preceded him in death, were married for 54 years and led a beautiful, rich life. Throughout their marriage, they enjoyed traveling with family and friends, and above all else, a constant joy of spending time with their children and grandchildren. They relished being surrounded by their family and friends.

Ben also had many personal passions and interests, and he found time to indulge them all. An advocate for fitness, Ben enjoyed skiing, boating, and tennis. A self-motivated and conscientious lifelong learner, Ben enjoyed world history and could always be found reading a book for personal or professional enjoyment. His lifelong learning led him to traveling the world, speaking the native language, listening to the native music, and exploring the land and its culture. No travel destination was too far to dream of visiting by car, plane, or boat. And upon his return home, he would proudly share his adventures with family and friends allowing others to live through his experiences.

He leaves behind a legacy of love, a heritage of gratitude, and the lessons of a life well-lived.

Ben is lovingly remembered by his sons Dr. Mitchell Beatus (Tracey Smith) and Todd Beatus (Kirsten Plonner Beatus), grandchildren Cody Beatus, Ellie Beatus, Laken Lomax and Sydney Smith; sister-in-law Myrna and brotherin-law Myron Thomas, brother-in-law Lewis and sister-in-law Debra Loskovitz, and many nieces, nephews, and cousins; all who will dearly miss his smile and gentle spirit.

In lieu of flowers, please donate in Ben's name to Temple Israel General Fund or the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund, Memphis Jewish Community Center, Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab, Church Health, or a charity of the donor's choice. **HW**

OBITUARIES

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Muslims and Jews join in Congress to press US government for kosher and halal food relief



to face food insecurity," the letter says. "The pandemic has exacerbated this problem and we are deeply concerned about the share of kosher and halal meat and other protein options available to the many observant individuals and families who utilize" The Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP. Other Democrats joining with Meng in asking fellow lawmakers to sign were Reps. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts; Ilhan Omar of Minnesota; and Ted Deutch of Florida. Deutch and Omar coordinating on the same issue is somewhat extraordinary: Deutch, who is Jewish, and Omar, a Muslim, have been sharply at odds on Israel policy. In addition to Deutch, Jewish signers include Jake Auchnicloss of Massachusetts; Suzanne Bonamici of Oregon; David Cicilline of Rhode Island; Steve Cohen of Tennessee; Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey; Elaine Luria of Virginia; Jerrold Nadler of New York; Jan Schakowsky of Illinois; and Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida.

including ICNA Relief Muslims for Humanity, the Met Council on Jewish Poverty, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, Agudath Israel of America, Masbia Soup Kitchen Network, Jewish Women International and Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies. Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel's vice president for government affairs, said in an interview that distribution of food relief was generally hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic, but food distribution to kosher and halal networks was especially affected.

Rep. Grace Meng of New York speaks during a faith vigil for victims of an earthquake in Haiti at the steps of St. Jerome's Roman Catholic Church in Brooklyn, Aug. 16, 2021. Credit: Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images

By Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON (JTA) – A congressional letter backed by Muslim and Jewish groups is urging the federal government to make kosher and halal meat available to observant Jews and Muslims through an emergency food program.

Rep. Grace Meng, D-N.Y., initiated

the letter sent last Wednesday to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Forty-eight Democrats have signed the letter, which was obtained exclusively by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

"As the United States continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 29 million Americans continue

The letter comes at the behest of a coalition of Muslim and Jewish groups,

The Muslim and Jewish groups want Vilsack to "see where improvements could be made into the system, so that TEFAP can really live up to its promise and provide the Americans the kosher and halal food that they require," Cohen said.

The groups celebrated the opportunity to join forces, said Alexander Rapaport, Masbia's director.

"It is an uplifting experience to work with our Muslim brothers and sisters on hunger advocacy, and especially when it comes to kosher and halal needs," Rapaport told JTA. **HW**

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A Simchat Torah Legend

On Simchas Torah it's entirely appropriate to ask a basic question that our sages, throughout the ages, have ignored. Why did The Almighty wait so long to hand us the Book of Books – the Torah?

There's a legend – not quite at the Midrashic level – just a legend told by kibitzers sitting around the pool that explains the delay.

The angels, says the story, cast a unanimous vote for the Almighty to lay the Torah at the foot of the Tree of Knowledge that first week in Eden. They suggested that he prop it up against the trunk, so the world's first newlyweds dizzy with the world's first love affair, couldn't miss it.

The angels were wary of man. "He's dangerous," they advised the Creator. "At first, he'll use a stick to walk with. Next, he'll use it to knock fruit out of the trees. Then, he'll sharpen one end of it and throw it at his fellow creatures. You have made him with the reproductive glands of the desert hare, the ferocity of the tiger, and the acquisitiveness of the honeybee. But the hare is gentle, the tiger is lazy, and the honeybee is small. They will never desecrate your creation. But man is different. He needs restraints. He needs Torah now."

The Lord replied, "Humanity is not programmed like the animals. I have given this breed a soul and I've given them the blessing and curse of free will. We shall see what we shall see."

And the Lord looked down on the paradise he had built on earth. And he saw the incredible variation of plants and creatures. And He saw Adam and Eve, the newlyweds, as gentle as the fruit-eating orangutans. So the Lord rested.

The angels chattered among themselves like the blue jays in the garden. "He shouldn't have rested before he made Torah."

"Yeah," said one little fellow with still fluffy wings. Wait'll he gets a load of Cain."

The next day – a day of heaven is many generations on earth, you know – the Lord inspected His universe. He saw the first act of disobedience in the Garden, and He saw Cain's murderous rage. He saw the generations who displayed all the faults of the desert hare and the honeybee with none of their virtues. "The earth was corrupt in his sight," as he was later to note in Genesis Chapter 5, verse 11.

So, he sent the flood. "That'll do it," He predicted to the angels. "Such power will make man fear me. They will flock to me like the gentle dove. Just watch their improvement."

"They need the Torah," mumbled the angelic court.

"No," He said.

Then came the generations of the Patriarchs; G-d fearing men, but imperfect. With hesitancy and a sigh, the Master Builder of the universe peeped between his fingers again at the strange animal with a soul, called man. Just in time to see the sons of Jacob betray their father and their brother Joseph.

"Now!" said the angels.

"No," said the Lord. "Did I not make them in My likeness? And unlike the animals, did I not give them freedom – even unto sin?"

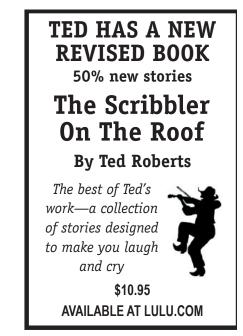
Soon, the descendants of Abraham were slaves in Egypt and their wailing drifted up to heaven itself and the ears of their Creator.

Ah, another opportunity to demonstrate My power to this unruly species, He thought. Therefore He delivered his people from the whips and clubs of the Egyptians. Later, He was to tell the whole story in Exodus.

Strengthened by His might, they strode out of Egypt as free men, but no sooner had they struck off their chains than they assumed the characteristics of the lustful hare, the savage tiger, and the acquisitive honeybee.

The Lord threw up His hands in despair.

"They need a rule book," He announced to the heavenly hosts, who without exultation modestly nodded. "They need limits on their freedom like the planets need an orbit – like the river



needs a bank."

And the Lord G-d took the ex-slaves to Sinai where He spoke face-to-face to Moses and gave him the Torah like a father gives a son a prayer book on his bar mitzvah day. The slaves were now accountable, even as you and I.

As I said before, it's only a legend and a legend has nowhere near the authenticity of a Midrash. Ask your Rabbi. But if he laughs at your legend, ask him for HIS explanation.

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 Sukkot as Joy and Jewish Unity

By Howard Weisband

As I write this column, Yom Kippur is less than 24 hours away. As you are reading, we all are in the midst of celebrating the Sukkot holiday.

In rabbinic literature, as we are reminded by Rabbi Jay Kelman, Sukkot is known simply as Chag, the Holiday par exellence. More than other moments on the Jewish calendar, Sukkot is Z'man Simchateinu, the Time of our Joy.

Two themes are woven together on Sukkot, those of Simcha, Joy, and the unity of the Jewish People. Symbolism abounds. The arba minim, the four species, including the lulav and etrog, symbolize the different types of Jews, each of whom is incomplete without the other.

The theme of Jewish unity is also present in the sukkah itself, where the sages understood the verse "all citizens of Israel shall dwell in a sukka," to mean that "all of Israel, that is all of the Jewish People, are to sit in one sukka."

While such a reality may be physically impossible, the messaging is both imminently possible and important. In fact, happily, it is happening. More and more of what is being spoken and written by Jewish leaders and bloggers in both Israel and America is about the shared values of Jewish Peoplehood and Zionism, why being Jewish is important, and why it is critical to preserve the Jewish People. We must acknowledge and respect our differences, while understanding the multiple roles that community and Israel play in those efforts.

As we respectively walk through our streets and neighborhoods of Jerusalem and Memphis during this holiday, as we see and sit in the various sukkot, may we focus on Jewish unity as if we are all sitting together in one sukka.

And another happening....

My last column was about Prime Minister Bennett's visit to Washington and his meeting with President Biden. This week he traveled a far less distance, to the southern Egyptian resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh, overlooking the Straits of Tiran at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba. There he met with Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. The regional significance of this meeting in many ways matched the global importance of the Washington summit.

It was the first time in 10 years that an Israeli Prime minister officially met ited coverage of their meeting coming only on the day it was taking place. That represented wise diplomacy and organization, so as not to allow outside groups such as Hamas, alien to both sides, to negatively influence and possibly threaten the meeting itself.

According to the Israeli and international press, the agenda included a range of regional issues from Gaza to the Palestinians to Iran, but the focus first and foremost was on bilateral relations between Israel and Egypt. Discussions related to cooperation on security, geopolitical, and economic matters.

A personal note: we were living in Memphis, and I remember my exultation in 1978 when Anwar Sadat suddenly announced and made his visit to Jerusalem where he was welcomed by Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the Knesset, and again my joy when subsequently the Israel – Egypt peace treaty was signed the following year. That treaty has been upheld through tensions and multiple conflicts not involving Egypt, yet it has been a cold peace with a bare minimum of trade and tourism.

Prime Minister Bennett has been quoted following the September 13 meeting that "we created a foundation for deep ties in the future."

I share that optimism.

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**

with the Egyptian President. Again, an emphasis was on getting to know one another and on relationship building. Not unimportant.

Unlike the media buildup and public fanfare associated with the Washington meeting, by agreement the two leaders and their offices kept arrangements private, with the announcement and lim-



stabbing at Gush Etzion Junction

Israeli forces thwart attempted



Israeli security forces near the scene of an attempted stabbing attack at the Gush Eztion Junction in Judea and Samaria on Sept. 13, 2021. Credit: Gershon Elinson/Flash90.

(JNS) – Israeli forces thwarted an attempted terror attack at Gush Etzion Junction last Monday morning, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

The assailant, a Palestinian, approached a soldier guarding the site and attempted to stab him with a screwdriver, the IDF said in a statement. The soldier fought off the suspect, at which point another soldier on the scene opened fire, neutralizing him.

The assailant was evacuated to the hospital for further medical treatment, according to the statement. **HW**

IAEA chief visits Tehran to discuss Iran's nuclear program

(JNS) – International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Rafael Grossi met with the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami last Sunday to discuss issues related to the oversight of Iran's nuclear program.

"We had constructive negotiations. There are essentially technical issues between the two sides. We agreed to participate in the next summit and to continue our negotiations on the sidelines of the summit," Eslami said after the meeting, referring to the upcoming IAEA General Conference (Sept. 20-24).

The meeting came after the IAEA issued two reports last week criticizing Iran for blocking IAEA inspectors' access to its nuclear facilities.

One of the reports complained that Iran had not let the nuclear watchdog agency reset monitoring equipment and replace memory cards before they ran out, reported The Wall Street Journal.

The two sides said in a joint statement released after the meeting that the "IAEA's inspectors are permitted to service the identified equipment and replace their storage media, which will be kept under the joint IAEA and AEOI seals in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The way and the timing are agreed by the two sides."

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett addressed the reports at last Sunday's Cabinet meeting, warning that Iran's nuclear program was "at its most advanced point ever."

"These reports have given an official stamp to what we have been saying for a long time: The Iranians are advancing unhindered with their nuclear program. They are ignoring the IAEA guidelines.



IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi Credit: Wikimedia Commons/Dean Calma/IAEA

They are simply disrespecting it, and are trying to disguise the fact that their program was and remains a nuclear-weapons program," he said.

"The Iranians understand that they are facing world powers that are very interested in returning to the nuclear deal at almost any cost – and I remind you, we do not believe in this agreement," he said. "It does not provide the necessary benefit."

However, he continued, "the Iranians are dragging things out and making progress in the meantime. According to the second report, Iran is ignoring the IAEA demands to investigate evidence that indicates the existence of a weapons program in Iran."

"I hereby call on world powers not to be misled by the Iranian smokescreen that will lead to further concessions. There can be no giving in on the investigation of the sites, and the most important message is that time must be allotted for this," said Bennett. "They are delaying, but a distinct and clear deadline must be set that says, 'no more."" **HW**

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Kosher restaurants fear losing customers over NYC vaccine mandate



The owner of this kosher restaurant in Brooklyn says a vaccine mandate will not convince the unvaccinated to get the shot. Credit: Lauren Hakimi

By Lauren Hakimi

(New York Jewish Week via JTA) – New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced last month that beginning Sept. 13, restaurants would have to ask customers for proof that they received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in order for them to dine indoors or else be fined.

As the deadline approached, some kosher restaurants in New York City were still debating the consequences of complying – or not.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," Miriam Lebovitz, the manager of Milk N Honey in Borough Park, Brooklyn, said last week. "I think it's going to hurt us very bad."

For kosher restaurants in Borough Park, where many Orthodox Jewish residents have taken to the streets to burn masks and protest COVID restrictions, deciding whether to follow the city's mandate means weighing the cost of fines against the cost of losing unvaccinated customers.

"I don't know what customers will do," Lebovitz said.

A kosher pizzeria owner in Brooklyn is more confident. The New Yorker, who

wished to remain anonymous for fear of inviting government inspectors to his neighborhood, said he'll "100%" lose customers if his restaurant starts asking for proof of vaccination, even though the new policy allows unvaccinated customers to still dine outdoors or get delivery.

"If we open up the store and put up the sign, nobody's going to walk in," he added, referring to the signs that some restaurants have put up saying masks are required for entry.

Joe Klein, manager of Cafe Paris in Borough Park, said that while he supports vaccination because he's seen the number of deaths caused by the coronavirus, he's worried about losing unvaccinated customers.

While de Blasio hopes the mandate will push those on the fence to be vaccinated, Klein said that based on his conversations with customers, this will "definitely not" happen.

In the zip code for heavily Orthodox Borough Park, only 44.65% of residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to city Health Department data. This is lower than the firstdose rate for the city overall, 66.8%. On Sept. 7, the most recent day for which the data was available, there was a seven-day rolling average of 1,446 daily COVID cases among city residents.

"There are people who've, God forbid, boycotted restaurants who are following the law," said Elan Kornblum, who runs a Facebook group where "kosher foodies" have debated the city's new policy. "That, I think, is disgusting."

Rivky Amsel, a mother of five in Brooklyn, says she doesn't support a boycott, but she also doesn't want to go anywhere where she will be asked for vaccine proof.

"I feel bad for [the restaurants]. I do," the Midwood resident said. "And I also really appreciate the establishments who stand up and say, 'This is not OK.' You can't ask people to say that. It's not your business."

"Being from a family of Holocaust survivors, I know that it's terrible," Amsel said. "People don't see it that way – they see the equating of the asking for vaccine cards to anything related to the Holocaust as very, very extreme and negative. But me, I just can't help it. I come from a family where, if my husband wore a yellow tie, my great aunt would say 'We don't wear yellow ties because it's too similar to a yellow star.'

"I don't think I'm alone in that feeling," she added.

The mandate comes at a time when many restaurants, despite receiving government aid during the pandemic, have already been suffering financially. Their workers have faced harassment, too.

"It's very, very rough, very hard to get money, even if we don't put up the sign" requiring masks, the pizzeria owner said.

If he decides not to ask for vaccine proof, he risks incurring fines of \$1,000 after an initial warning, \$2,000 for a third offense and \$5,000 for any sub-

sequent violations of the policy. Starting Monday, inspectors will be hitting neighborhoods in all five boroughs, de Blasio said Thursday.

But lingering questions remain.

"What happens if someone brings in a fake document?" Kornblum asks.

"Or what happens if someone comes in and gives them a problem and starts arguing with them? And we're also wondering, how is the government going to enforce? Are these inspectors coming every day? Are they going to be walking up to restaurant customers and saying, 'Can I see your passport?'"

Restaurant workers "have enough to deal with with reservations and noshows and cancellations and a shortage of staff and rising costs of food and the entire gamut of what it takes to run a restaurant for decades, let alone the last couple of years," Kornblum added.

Melissa Fleischut, CEO of the New York State Restaurant Association, said it's not just kosher restaurants that are worried about the new policy.

"The concern is that they're being put in a position where they have to police this, and some customers are very upset about the mandate and are pushing back on the staff," Fleischut said.

In a survey conducted last fall by One Fair Wage, more than three quarters of restaurant workers surveyed said they experienced or witnessed hostile behavior, including sexual harassment, from customers when a worker tried to enforce COVID-19 safety protocols. Restaurant workers also reported a decline in tips.

"Don't say 'I'm not going to help the restaurant' because you can still take out, you can still get delivery," Kornblum said. "I encourage people to keep supporting restaurants and doing what you can, and just being respectful to others as well." **HW**



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