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Beth Sholom's New Early Childhood Specialist Brings Shabbat to Life for Toddlers



Ariel Figueroa, Beth Sholom's early childhood learning specialist, teaches a Thursday religious school class. Her Shabbat-observant Tot Shabbat class is open to all members of the Memphis Jewish community.

On Shabbat mornings, you'll find Ariel Figueroa, the new early childhood specialist at Beth Sholom Synagogue, sitting on the floor with young children and parents. Children are using piles of props to create their own Shabbat experience. They will prepare a pretend Shabbat meal, say the blessings, carry toy Torahs around the room, and talk about the weekly parshah. It's an hour of fun, play and learning in a Shabbat-observant environment, and it helps the little ones develop as children and as Jews.

"Lavi is taking it all in," said Rabbi Abe Schacter-Gampel, speaking of his two-year-old son, a regular in the group, designed for children in kindergarten or under. "All week, he talks about Tot Shabbat and the things he learned, and he'll break out into song with something that Ariel taught. She's definitely making a lasting impression."

For Figueroa, it's an hour of joy. "I love the opportunity to be creative and have fun and see the children light up and get excited about what we're doing," she said. "We're learning about holidays, rituals and stories in the Torah in a tactile, sensory way."

For example, during Hannukah, Figueroa gave the children foam rectangles and circles and asked them to make a large menorah. In teaching the story of Joseph, Figueroa laid out pieces of colored fabric and helped the toddlers arrange them to create a giant coat of many colors on the floor.

"I've never seen an early childhood educator as skilled as Ariel," said Rabbi Sarit Horwitz, the spiritual leader of Beth Sholom. "Every week, Ariel thoughtfully puts together an activity that is both educational and fun, fully based on that week's parshah or the Jewish calendar. She balances creating routine each week, which is crucial for kids, with new material for them to get excited."

At Beth Sholom's Tot Shabbat, little ones learn about more than Judaism. They learn about themselves and their place in the world, Figueroa said. "When we talked about Rachel's thoughtfulness in watering Isaac's camels, we discussed that animals need to be tended to and cared for by humans, and that it's their responsibility to be kind to animals."

Then the children play-acted giving water to a group of stuffed animals that Figueroa brought in for the lesson.

Figueroa also asked children to imagine how Biblical heroes, such as Joseph, feel when facing adversity. They talk about how Biblical figures sometimes make mistakes, just like children do.

"I'm teaching the children that this is the story of our people, and the characters in the story are just like us who sometimes make not-so-great decisions and struggle with things. But we're still talking about these people thousands of years later."

Figueroa is no stranger to working with children. During the week, she is a kindergarten teacher at the Bornblum Jewish Community School and teaches at Beth Sholom's religious school. She previously taught at Temple Israel's Barbara K. Lipman Early Learning Center. A cum laude graduate from University of Memphis with a degree in early childhood education and a minor in sociology, Figueroa also writes children's books, available on Amazon.

Beth Sholom's Tot Shabbat is open to all members of the Jewish community. For more information, please call Beth Sholom at 901-683-3591. **HW**

Memphis Jewish Federation Helps Seniors Celebrate Hanukkah Across Memphis



were treated to some very special Hanukkah gatherings, thanks to Memphis Jewish Federation and its ever-growing community of donors. On Wednesday, December 1, the students of the Goldie Margolin School for Girls/Feinstone Yeshiva of the South boarded a bus headed for Brookdale Dogwood Creek in Germantown for a rousing dreidel tournament. Organized with the assistance of Deb Kornrumpf, Brookdale's activity director, the girls dispersed between tables to play the games and hand out dreidels and lots of chocolate gelt. The event was enjoyed by both the Jewish residents of Brookdale as well as the students of the GMSG who loved spreading the joy of Hanukkah.

"It was so inspiring to see the atmosphere at Brookdale Dogwood Creek come alive with the students and residents playing dreidel together, bridging all age gaps with cheer, songs and games," said Rabbi Baruch Harris, assistant Judaic Studies principal in the Upper School of GMSG/FYOS. "It truly was amazing to once again be able to give to others and all walked away enriched from the experience." Wednesday December 1 also saw Federation's Senior Jewish Activities Coordinator Hilly Safier visiting the Jewish residents of Belmont Village. Chatting with each resident for a few minutes in their apartments made the week of Hanukkah a bit brighter and brought joy in a year marked by isolation and distance. While taking pictures with several residents, one remarked, "When you take a picture with me, it makes me feel like I am an important member of the Jewish community."

Jewish residents of Brookdale Dogwood Creek and students from the Goldie Margolin School for Girls/Feinstone Yeshiva of the South enjoyed a rousing dreidel tournament to mark Hanukkah in early December, at an event organized by Memphis Jewish Federation's Senior Activities Coordinator Hilly Safier.

By Hilly Safier

Hanukkah marks one of the highlights on the Jewish calendar. Celebrating the Maccabean victory against the Greek Hellenists during the period of the Second Temple, Hanukkah's hallmark is

gathering to celebrate the miracles by lighting Hanukkah candles, playing dreidel and eating latkes. This year, despite the continued limitations imposed by the pandemic, Memphis-area seniors "It was absolutely the most amazing day ever," said Deb, who was watching from the sidelines. "My boss and I had tears in our eyes. Those girls were absolute angels, and our residents had a ball. Thanks you to Federation for sending them to us. I have offered volunteer hours any time they need it, or even when they just want to stop by."

On Thursday December 2, Cantor

(See Seniors Page 2)

Seniors...

(Continued From Page 1)

Aryeh Samberg of Anshei Sphard-Beth El Emeth Congregation visited Town Village Audubon Park. After giving a brief overview of the story and history of Hanukkah, he kindled the menorah and sang songs for those present.

On the very last day of Hanukkah, Monday December 6, Hilly attended a meet and greet for the Jewish residents of The Villages at Germantown. Attended by over 20 individuals, the event served to introduce Hilly to the large Jewish population there and talk about Jewish life in a retirement setting.

"After COVID isolation, the Jewish residents at The Village were delighted to finally welcome Hilly in person and have the opportunity to talk with her about our Jewish life here," said The Villages resident Carol Geller, who helped coordinate the event. "It was a perfect and meaningful last day of Hanukkah for all."

Throughout the pandemic, Memphis Jewish Federation, with the help of generous donors, has provided gift bags for many seniors throughout our community, including The Villages.

"This was a wonderful opportunity to put names to faces from the labels I had been sticking on bags for the better part of 18 months," said Hilly. "It was amazing to meet so many long-time, vibrant members of our Memphis Jewish community who have laid the foundation for our present success and defined our future goals with their leadership and vision."

Throughout Hanukkah, Hilly also coordinated the packing and delivery of 40 Hanukkah gift bags to area homebound seniors with the help of dedicated volunteers. Despite setbacks due to shipping and trucking delays, the bags made it to their recipients before Hanukkah ended. The bags contained a box of candles, Ricki's Hanukkah cookies, a small package of olives to remember the miracle of the olive oil and a bag of chocolate gelt. The bags were made possible through an anonymous donation from a Jewish Foundation of Memphis Donor Advised Fund-holder.

Although Hanukkah was over, Hilly made one last Hanukkah visit, this time to Harbor Chase Cordova, on Wednesday December 8. A brand-new senior residence, it does not currently have any Jews residing there, but despite this, Activities Director Keri Hopper thought it important to bring in a member of the Memphis Jewish community to teach and inform about the holiday. Speaking to 20 individuals, Hilly talked about the history of Hanukkah and the events leading up to the miracle and answered questions about Hanukkah and Judaism in general. The chef at Harbor Chase provided latkes and bagels with lox for the event.

"It was definitely my first time speaking to an audience who was completely unfamiliar with Hanukkah," said Hilly. "But I think it's so important for everyone to be informed of other religions and their practices to foster a sense of understanding and tolerance."

It was a week full of celebration, and Memphis' seniors were treated to some very special events, visitors and presentations about Hanukkah this year. HW

Young Israel Shares Sufganiyot with an Entire IDF Platoon



IDF soldiers enjoying Sufganiyot (jelly donuts) on Chanukah

By Rabbi Akiva Males

Chanukah has always been a time in which we share tzedakah in a generous fashion. Chanukah is also a terrific time to reach out and share some love with the brave Chayalim (soldiers) of Israel's Defense Forces (IDF). After all, they are

doing their best to protect our brothers and sisters in Israel - while away from their own homes, friends, and families.

Before and during Chanukah, YI's Rabbi's Discretionary Fund (RDF) was involved in sharing some Chanukah



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> Office: 901.763.2215 Direct: 901.827.7244

info@hebrewwatchman.com

Susan C. Nieman **Editor and Publisher**

Rebecca Miller Social Media Director Web Development

Larry Nieman **Advertising Sales Director**

Herman I. Goldberger **Editor and Publisher Emeritus** Barbara B. Goldberger

Editor and Publisher Emeritus

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Dec. 31, 2021 / 27 Tevet, 5782......4:40 p.m. Havdalah, Sat. Jan. 1, 2022 / 28 Tevet, 5782 5:40 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Va'eira

warmth with many deserving individuals and causes. While I'm not able to share the identities of those individuals our Shul was able to assist, I'm happy to identify one terrific cause that Young Israel supported.

This Chanukah, YI once again partnered with www.BasketstoIsrael.com to supply an entire platoon of active-duty IDF soldiers with Sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts) to enhance their Chanukah.

Knowing that a caring shul in faraway Memphis, Tennessee, was thinking of

them on Chanukah, surely provided that IDF platoon with a much-appreciated morale boost.

.....

Yasher Koach to all of Young Israel's RDF supporters who enable this fund to engage in so many meaningful good deeds!

Young Israel of Memphis' Rabbi Akiva Males can be reached at rabbi@ yiom.org HW



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In the Dec. 23, 2021 edition, the article, "Memphis Jewish Federation's Antisemitism Initiative Casts a Wide Net In Memphis," incorrectly listed the name of Jeremy Cooper, when in fact it was Ethan Cooper. Ethan Cooper was one of several who participated in the Shine a Light on Antisemitism videos. HW

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Beginning January 9, 2022 – Adult Hebrew Class for the Community

It is never too late to start learning Hebrew or brush up on what you once knew.

For six years, Barbara Mansberg has taught Adult Ulpan Hebrew Class through Temple Israel. Her knowledge and experience make learning Hebrew fun and easy. Aleph, the introductory class, is open to all and the perfect place to start for a quick refresh or to begin your Hebrew journey. Hebrew classes are held on Zoom beginning January 9, 2022, at 10 a.m. – you don't even have to leave your house!

"I have always loved learning new things, so when I read about the virtual Hebrew class at Temple, I was excited," said Deedee Perel. "Barbara Mansberg has made learning to read Hebrew fun. Not only does Barbara help us learn to pronounce and 'speak,' but she also explains the history behind many of the customs and pronunciations, teaches us the background of prayers, and makes the class come alive. I am amazed and thrilled that each week I can read more and more quickly."

Carolyn Mizne never learned Hebrew as a child but began learning at the age of 73 in the Adult Ulpan class at Temple Israel. "I completed the beginner class with Barbara Mansburg just before COVID. I continued in the next class on Zoom this year with Teri Peacock's excellent teaching and a wonderful group of other adult learners. I am finding new meaning in the prayers, and the best part may be that I am able to tell my children to never believe they are too old to learn something new."

For more information or to register, please contact Temple Israel's Judaic Program Specialist, Lynn Owen, at lynno@ timemphis.org. All are welcome! HW

Baron Hirsch Announces its Annual Meeting

Baron Hirsch Congregation announced this week that it will hold its annual meeting on Wednesday evening, January 5, 2022. This year's meeting will include a grand reopening of its refurbished spaces, which were created through its ATID Capital Campaign. The evening will begin at 6:30 p.m., when everyone is invited for hors d'oeuvres and to tour the newly finished spaces. The annual meeting will be held in the Marsi Moss Social Hall at 7:15 p.m.

Newly renovated spaces in the building include a new chapel, bet midrash, teen lounge, offices and bridal suite. In addition, beautiful updates have been made to all of the youth rooms, rabbi's office and administrative wing.

Highlights of the annual meeting will include the presentation of the Sam Abraham Member of the Year Award to outgoing president, Mary Trotz, and the presentation of the Louis Turetsky Chesed Award to the congregation's wonderful Decor and Furnishing committee.

"Mary Trotz has worked tirelessly over the past two years as the congregation faced significant challenges includ-

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ing our ATID campaign, construction and COVID-19. There has not been a day where she was not involved in the work of Baron Hirsch - whether she was travelling or on vacation. Her devotion is a major factor in our success, and everyone has benefitted from her care and love," stated Executive Director David Fleischhacker.

Mary is concluding her second year as president of the congregation, and had previously served as 1st vice president, as well as several other positions on the congregation's board over the last eight years. She has been an active member of the Memphis community for many years. She was the first Jewish President of the Junior League of Memphis. She has served on numerous boards and chaired fundraisers for organizations such as Facing History and Ourselves, The Levitt Shell, Children's Museum of Memphis and West Tennessee Hunter Jumper Association. She is married to Corey Trotz, and they have two daughters. Mary graduated from Vanderbilt University and from the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt.

"Baron Hirsch means a great deal to our family. It has been an honor to serve the shul these past two years as president. The members, lay leaders, clergy and staff are what make this place a spiritual home for so many families. I can't wait to watch the newly renovated spaces inspire our community in the realms of torah study, davening and connections," stated Mary Trotz.

Over the past year, the Decor & Furnishing Committee has taken the lead in designing Baron Hirsch's newly refurbished spaces. The committee includes Sarah Ardestani, Aileen Cooper, Chana Dina Goldblatt, Lisa Kaufman and Penina Wender. They have used their talents to create rooms that are inspirational for tefillah, fun for youth, beautiful and majestic suites for brides, and inviting spaces to everyone who enters. The congregation will recognize the great chesed that this team has exemplified in spending countless months creating the areas that will be so enjoyed and enriching to all those who come through the doors.

A special moment will be taken at this year's meeting to recognize all those who helped Baron Hirsch and its members throughout the pandemic. This includes a wide variety of members who stepped forward in numerous ways. The Health Committee met regularly to review COVID-19 policies for the shul, and how to best maintain services in the safest manner possible. An Outreach Committee made sure that those most vulnerable were called frequently in the early days of the pandemic and were also active in helping the elderly set up appointments for vaccination, even arranging rides when necessary. Finally, the dedicated members of the daily minyan made sure that daily prayer services were always held. During the darkest days of the pandemic, this often meant meeting outside in a tent. Whether the temperature was 10 degrees or 95 degrees, the daily minyan attendees made sure that the lifeblood of the congregation continued. The meeting will also include a financial report on the congregation, as well the election of officers and board members for 2022. While only members may participate in the elections of officers, anyone is welcome to attend the meeting and celebrate with this milestone with the congregation. For more information contact the synagogue office at 901-683-7485. HW

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Israeli tissue engineers 3D-print an ear

By Brian Blum

(Israel21c via JNS) – A small percentage (0.1 to 0.3 percent) of people are born with congenitally deformed ears. This can have a severe psychological impact, and sometimes involves hearing loss.

While surgeons can reconstruct ears using cartilage harvested from a patient's chest, the procedure is not usually performed until at least 10 years of age.

Researchers at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and Sheba Medical Center have developed a way to 3D-print "scaffolding" as the basis for a replacement ear.

The scaffold, which allows for the formation of an aesthetic and stable auricle (the visible part of the external ear), is designed from a CT scan of the patient's ear and can be performed on children as young as six.

The biodegradable scaffold forms chondrocytes, the cells responsible for cartilage formation, and mesenchymal stem cells. Pores of varying sizes allow for cell attachment to form stable cartilage.

The procedure has so far been tested on lab rats. The researchers monitored cartilage formation within the auricle construct in the lab for between 10 days and six weeks before implanting it in the test subjects.

The grafted prosthetic ear demonstrated good biomechanical function, the researchers reported in the journal Biofabrication.

The project was led by professor Shulamit Levenberg of the Faculty of Biomedical Engineering at the Technion and Dr. Shay Izhak Duvdevani, a senior physician in the Otorhinolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery Department and head of the Tissue Engineering Lab at Sheba Medical Center. The protocols were developed in Levenberg's lab under Dr. Shira Landau.

"One of the challenges in the study was to find a suitable 3D-printing method, since fabricating an ear necessitates the use of biodegradable materials that break down in the body without harming it but have an extremely accurate external structure and small pores," said Levenberg.

"We estimate that it will be possible to tailor our technology to other applications, such as nasal reconstruction and fabrication of various orthopedic implants."

This article was first published by Israel21c. **HW**

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Beth Sholom Brings Holiday Joy for Coleman School Families



Journey Coleman School Principal Steven Ward (center) and staff greeted Beth Sholom volunteers who set up a gift shop for students to pick presents for their loved ones.

Journey Coleman School students and their families had a merrier Christmas this year thanks to the generosity of Beth Sholom Synagogue members and the tireless work of its Tikkun Olam committee. On December 15, two dozen Beth Sholom members and their friends set up the festive annual Coleman School "Give the Gift of Giving" Holiday Gift Shop at the K-8 school in Raleigh. There were enough gifts so that each of the 675 students was able to pick out a great Christmas present for a family member. Volunteer wrappers used dozens of wrapping paper rolls, bows and tape to make each present look as beautiful as the gift itself.

Coleman School Principal Steven Ward welcomed volunteers and expressed the school's gratitude for Beth Sholom's consistent support of Coleman. Beth Sholom runs school-supply collections and provides winter coats to many of the children.

This awesome event could not have taken place without the determined efforts of Susan Moinester, Susan Levko, Mindy Lipson, Debbie Pelz, Susan Gross, Tresha Mandel, Lynn Nelson and so many others.

"It's always a joy to volunteer with members of the Beth Sholom community," said Moinester. "They are so loving and generous. Our volunteers enjoyed the event as much as the children did!" **HW**



Santa's elves Janet Rubin, Susan Moinester, Susan Levko, and Mindy Lipson.



Students hold the beautifully wrapped gifts that they will proudly present to family members on Christmas day.

Young Israel Women's Circle Holds Inaugural Event



By Rabbi Akiva Males

On Sunday night, December 19, Young Israel's Moss Grand Foyer was filled with nearly 70 women in a relaxed and fun atmosphere. Women from across the community came together for a night of unity, creativity, good food and to

evening.

YI Women's Circle looks forward to hosting meaningful women's programming on a regular basis. After seeing what this group accomplished, I'm certain that many are eager to find out what they're planning next.

YI thanks the chairs of this incredible program: Aliza Gelb, Chana Goldstone, Yocheved Naftel, and Leah Semmel for all their hard work – and their attention to each and every detail. YI also thanks each volunteer who helped in planning, setting up for, and cleaning up from this fantastic event.

To learn more about YI Women's Circle, please email thewomenscircleyi@ gmail.com HW





simply enjoy each other's company.

This was the inaugural program of the newly formed YI Women's Circle, and it was billed as "A Night To Ignite and Unite." The chairwomen of the event hosted a unique S'mores Board Woodwork Workshop. The space was decorated beautifully, the food and refreshments looked delicious. And I've heard much positive feedback about the



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He Brought Hanukkah to a Street Famous for Christmas Lights. Antisemitism Followed – But So Did Joy.



Joshua Lamont, wearing a Hanukkah suit, stands in front of his festively lit home. Courtesy of Joshua Lamont

By Rudy Malcom

It's a holiday tradition in Baltimore: Visiting the Miracle on 34th Street, a city block where houses go all out with candy canes, rooftop Santas and lifesize plastic elves and snowmen –except for one row house, where a seven-foottall inflatable polar bear spins a dreidel, and a silver LED menorah "burns" from Thanksgiving to New Year's.

The house's owner, Joshua Lamont, grew up in the heart of the Baltimore area's Jewish community in the neigh-

borhoods of Pikesville and Owings Mills. In his childhood, he often visited the annual holiday lights display, which pays homage to its namesake Christmas movie, in the city's quirky, historically working-class Hampden neighborhood.

Lamont, 31, a freelance sign language interpreter who also manages his parents' gemstone shop at the Maryland Renaissance Festival, was impressed by the dazzling lights and extravagant decorations. But he also felt left out.



He came, he said, to hate the "sheer inyour-face-ness of Christmas."

Then, in 2017, a house on the block went up for sale.

"I found out there was a possibility of living on 34th, and I was like, 'OK, cool, this is my shot to bring some of our culture and some visibility to the holiday on a larger scale," Lamont said.

The result: the "Hanukkah House."

Yes, Lamont said, Hanukkah, a fairly minor holiday, is given extra importance because it often falls near Christmas. But his Hanukkah House, he says, is no monument to commercialism.

"Not a single house on this street makes a profit off this event," he said. "No one takes care of the electric bill. We do this out of the sheer joy it brings people."

"So while maybe the industrial complex of Christmas has created a capitalist-driven holiday, that's not what we're about."

For Lamont, who was raised in a religiously "Conservative-leaning" household and now identifies as "more spiritually, culturally Jewish than religiously," garnishing his home in blue and white is a way of bringing a Jewish perspective to the winter solstice season, even if the dates are sometimes off.

Lamont admits that some non-Jews may be led by his spectacle to see Hanukkah as Jewish Christmas. He doesn't have any problem with that, even though the Festival of Lights is about a fight against assimilation.

What matters to Lamont – whose great-grandparents were a "nice Scottish boy and a nice Jewish girl" – is highlighting a tale that celebrates the survival of the Jewish people, especially during a time of rising antisemitism.

"We stood up for ourselves," he said. "In today's climate, it's important for us to have that representation."

That message has occasionally hit close to home. One year, someone spray-painted the polar bear with swastikas. This year, someone drove by and cursed Lamont out.

"I was a wreck for the rest of the eve-

ning," he said. "There was a point in time that I really thought I was going to take all my lights down and be the dark house on the street."

"It definitely takes a toll. You never know when the next instance is gonna come and if it's gonna be worse than the previous."

However, Lamont's neighbors have been "incredibly supportive," he said. And he tries not to take acts of antisemitism too seriously. For example, he reminded the passing driver that Jesus himself celebrated Hanukkah.

And when there's vandalism, he tries not to make a big deal out of it. "I fix it when I see it and keep on walking," he said. "I'm not gonna change their minds. They're not gonna hear out my rational arguments and go, 'Oh my Lord, I've seen the light!'"

At the same time, Lamont's lights have served as the backdrop for much joy – like when Pikesville native Zephan Blaxberg proposed to his then-girlfriend, Mollye Lipton, in front of them in 2017.

Blaxberg said the location was sentimental for him because one of the first businesses his family opened upon immigrating to Baltimore in 1912 was a men's clothing store located nearby on 36th Street.

"To be able to start my family and my next journey in the same place, or rather, just around the corner was meaningful," said Blaxberg, a videographer. "Being able to celebrate our Jewish heritage as I asked my now-wife to marry me in front of the Hanukkah House was icing on the cake."

Lamont said that this sort of appreciation from the community motivates him to put up his lights year after year.

"For every moment someone says, 'F- you,' I have 10 moments where someone says, 'Thanks for representing me," he said. "To walk out on my front porch and have someone say 'Hanukkah sameach' or ask 'When was Hanukkah this year?' – all of that lends to the beauty of this and why I keep doing it."

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American Jews 'don't like' Israel, Trump charges



U.S. President Donald Trump at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., October 2020. Credit: Official White House Photo by Tia Dufour.

(Israel Hayom via JNS) – Evangelical Christians love Israel more than U.S. Jews, who "either don't like Israel or don't care about Israel," former U.S. President Donald Trump said recently in an interview with Israeli journalist Barak Ravid.

Trump said that when he grew up in New York City, his father, a real estate developer, "Was very close to many Jewish people, because it was Brooklyn real estate, Brooklyn and Queens."

"[He had] many Jewish friends, a great love of Israel, which has dissipated over the years for people in the United States," Trump said. "I must be honest, it's a very dangerous thing that's happening. People in this country that are Jewish no longer love Israel. I'll tell you, the evangelical Christians love Israel more than the Jews in this country. It used to be that Israel had absolute power over Congress. And today I think it's the exact opposite," Trump told Ravid. "The New York Times hates Israel, hates them. And they're Jewish people that run The New York Times," he said, referring to A.G. Sulzberger, publisher and chairman of the newspaper.

Trump also criticized Jewish voters, the majority of which are traditionally Democrats, for not lending him their support in the 2020 presidential election.

He attributed the shift in U.S. Jewish attitudes on Israel to President Joe Biden and former President Barack Obama.

"And yet in the election, they [Democratic Party candidates] still get a lot of votes from the Jewish people. Which tells you that the Jewish people, and I've said this for a long time, the Jewish people in the United States either don't like Israel or don't care about Israel," he said.

Commenting on the interview in a podcast, Ravid said, "It's not only about whether you're Jewish or not. It's a lot

about whether you're liberal or conservative," according to Business Insider.

"I think that for Trump, being liberal is a much bigger sin than being Jewish, but what can you do? It's the same folks," added Ravid.

The interview was slammed by Jewish groups in the United States, who have accused Trump of anti-Semitism.

According to NBC News, the American Jewish Congress condemned the former president for trafficking in "radioactive anti-Semitic tropes."

"Why is Mr. Trump once again fueling dangerous stereotypes about Jews?" the AJC asked in a tweet.

"His past support for Israel doesn't give him license to traffic in radioactive antisemitic tropes – or peddle unfounded conclusions about the unbreakable ties that bind American Jews to Israel," the group tweeted. "Enough!"

Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, also condemned Trump's remarks, tweeting, "Once again, former President Trump has linked his lack of strong support among most US Jews to their feelings about Israel and used classic antisemitic stereotypes about Israeli and Jewish control of Congress and the press to bolster his argument.

"It's sad that once again we have to restate this point, but the vast majority of American Jews support and have some type of connection to Israel, regardless of which political candidate they vote for," he continued.

"Let me be clear: insinuating that Israel or the Jews control Congress or the media is antisemitic, plain and simple. Unfortunately, this is not the first time he has made these offensive remarks," said Greenblatt.

This article first appeared in Israel Hayom. **HW**

Congressman Cohen Announces Graduate Medical Education Grant to St. Jude

WASHINGTON – Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-09) announced earlier in December that St. Jude Children's Research Hospital will receive a \$189,418 grant from the Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Hospitals Graduate Medical Education Program.

Congressman Cohen made the following statement:

"This grant helps our leading children's research hospital teach doctors how best to treat sick children. I am always pleased to see investments in education and medical research. This funding will improve children's lives." **HW**





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What is the most taxefficient way to take a distribution from a retirement plan?

Provided By Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells **Fargo** Advisors

If you receive a distribution from a qualified retirement plan such as a 401(k), you need to consider whether to pay taxes now or to roll over the account to another tax-deferred plan. A correctly implemented rollover avoids current taxes and allows the funds to continue accumulating tax deferred.

Paying current taxes with a lumpsum distribution

If you decide to take a lump-sum distribution, income taxes are due on the total amount of the distribution (except for any after-tax contributions you've made) and are due in the year in which you cash out. Employers are required to withhold 20% automatically from the check and apply it toward federal income taxes, so you will receive only 80% of your total vested value in the plan. (Special rules apply to Roth accounts.)

The advantage of a lump-sum distribution is that you can spend or invest the balance as you wish. The problem with this approach is parting with all those tax dollars. Income taxes on the total distribution are taxed at your marginal income tax rate. If the distribution is large, it could easily move you into a higher tax bracket. Distributions taken prior to age 591/2 are subject to 10% federal income tax penalty. (Special rules may apply if you were born before 1936.)

Deferring taxes with a rollover

If you don't qualify for the above options or don't want to pay current taxes on your lump-sum distribution, you can roll the money into a traditional IRA.

If you choose a rollover from a tax-deferred plan to a Roth IRA, you must pay income taxes on the total amount converted in that tax year. However, future withdrawals of earnings from a Roth IRA are free of federal income tax after age 59½ as long as the five-tax year holding requirement has been met. Even if you are not 591/2, your distribution may be tax-free if you are disabled or a first-time home purchaser (\$10,000 lifetime maximum), as long as you satisfy the five-year holding period.

If you elect to use an IRA rollover, you can avoid potential tax and penalty problems by electing a direct trustee-to-trustee transfer; in other words, hands. IRA rollovers must be completed within 60 days of the distribution to avoid current taxes and penalties.

An IRA rollover allows your retirement nest egg to continue compounding tax deferred. Remember that you must generally begin taking annual required minimum distributions (RMDs) from tax-deferred retirement plans after you turn 701/2 (the first distribution must be taken no later than April 1 of the year after the year in which you reach age $70\frac{1}{2}$). Failure to take an RMD subjects the funds that should have been withdrawn to a 50% federal income tax penalty.

Of course, there is also the possibility that you may be able to keep the funds in your former employer's plan or move it to your new employer's plan, if allowed by the plans. (Make sure you understand the pros and cons of rolling funds from an employer plan to an IRA before you take any action.)

Before you decide which method to take for distributions from a qualified retirement plan, it would be prudent to consult with a professional tax advisor.

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Spanish Town Until Recently Known as Fort Kill the Jews Struck with Antisemitic Graffiti

By Orge Castellano

MADRID (JTA) - A tiny Spanish town that has veered over the centuries from being a refuge for Jews to a rallying cry for their death was defaced with widespread antisemitic graffiti.

Residents of Castrillo Mota de Judíos, a village in Northern Spain, began to discover the graffiti almost as soon as they woke last Monday.

They ultimately found vandalism in four locations: on the entrance to the town hall, the signpost on the road entering the village, the planned site for the future Sephardic center and the sign commemorating the town's sisterhood with the Israeli city of Kfar Vradim.

No Jews live in the town, which has

Some of the graffiti last week amended signs in the town to the old name. One scrawling praised Torquemada, the infamous first leader of the Inquisition, which tortured, killed and expelled Jews living in Spain. "Long live Catholic kings," one sign said.

Rodriguez revealed the vandalism in a series of tweets last Monday in which he condemned the people who committed it.

"These are cowardly, intolerant and ignorant people who do not value neither heritage nor people; nor do they have respect for anyone or anything," he wrote. "These intolerant people are not allowed here."

The Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain also condemned the vandalism.



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only about 50 inhabitants. The vandals were instead taking aim at the village's history, and the efforts by its current mayor, Lorenzo Rodriguez, to preserve it.

Originally named Castrillo Motajudíos, or Jew's Hill Fort, in 1035 when Jews fleeing from a neighboring pogrom settled there. The town was renamed Castrillo Matajudíos - Fort Kill The Jews - in 1627, during a period of extreme religious persecution by the Inquisition.

It wasn't until June 2015 that the town's name was restored to Castrillo Mota de Judíos -following a referendum initiated by Rodríguez. Since then, he has worked to restore the town's Jewish past. His most recent project is the construction of the Center of Jewish Memory of Castilla y León, which is expected to open in 2022 along the Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage route undertaken annually by hundreds of thousands of Christians.

"These attacks and threats against the Mayor, Lorenzo Rodriguez, are unacceptable and reveal the danger of the ideologies that led Europe to the disaster," the group said in a statement. "We strongly stand by the Mayor of Castrillo Mota de Judíos and encourage him to continue working for the recovery of the [village] Jewish past and in peaceful and tolerant coexistence."

Rodriguez said he would not be deterred. He filed a complaint with the Spanish police last Tuesday morning, then tweeted a statement of defiance.

"We continue forward in the task of recovering our past, our culture and our identity," he wrote. "What happened in Castrillo is an example of the cowardice of some individuals and groups who use violence to show their complete lack of knowledge and with the only goal of causing harm." HW

Numbers mark the graves at a former psychiatric hospital's Jewish cemetery. Families want names – and answers



A number marks a Jewish grave, left, at the former Central Islip Psychiatric Center on New York's Long Island. A stone at right was added after the hospital began working with a Jewish burial society. Credit: Patricia Desrochers/Touro Law Center

By Stewart Ain

(JTA) - (New York Jewish Week via JTA) - While researching his family tree, Brian Madigan of Locust Grove, Virginia, found something strange: Although his maternal great-great-grandfather had lived in Brooklyn, he was buried in East Islip, on New York's Long Island.

Further research revealed that his relative, Napoleon Hedemark, had been committed to the Central Islip Psychiatric Center sometime before 1900. He died there on Nov. 21, 1916, at the age of 72. He was interred in its cemetery with simply a number to designate his grave.

Several weeks ago, Madigan wrote to the New York State Office of Mental Health asking for a copy of his relative's "full file" to learn the circumstances that led to him being committed, the exact location of his grave and a copy of his photograph.

"I'm just looking for some kind of closure," Madigan, 63, said. "I plan to visit there, and I would like to know the location of his grave so I can erect a marker [with Hedemark's name]. I can't abide by my ancestors' graves going unmarked."

Madigan, a defense contractor, may get his closure - thanks to a twice-delayed agreement between a Jewishly affiliated law school and the Office of Mental Health. Before the COVID pandemic hit, they had agreed to care for the Jewish and non-Jewish portions of the cemetery and to assist relatives who believe a loved one is buried there.

For Napoleon Hedemark and other former patients interred at the cemetery, it is an opportunity to restore in death the dignity they may have been denied over the 120-year history of what had been one of the largest psychiatric hospitals in the United States. The unacknowledged dead include Holocaust survivors, who twice in their lives were given numbers instead of names. Madigan was referred to the state by Sam Levine, director of the Jewish Law Institute at the Touro Law Center, which was built on a portion of the psychiatric hospital's property after it was closed in 1998. The cemetery is all that remains of the hospital, which was opened in 1889. The cemetery holds the graves of an estimated 5,500 former patients from not only the Central Islip facility, but the Kings Park and Pilgrim State psychiatric hospitals. After the Central Islip hospital closed, the state fenced off the cemetery, restricted public access and provided mowing and cleanup. Shortly after Touro opened in 2007 as a law school "consistent with Jewish tradition," Ken Rosenblum, then the school's associate dean of admissions, walked out the south door of the school and saw a rusted fence at the end of the parking lot.

Pushing aside overgrown brush, he began walking through a seemingly empty field until he realized he was stepping on graves and rectangular stones, flush with the earth, bearing numbers. He then saw two iron gates covered with vines, each marked with a rusting Star of David.

While Rosenblum was unaware that there was a Jewish cemetery with some 500 graves in Touro's backyard, others remembered. The Jewish section had been consecrated in 1980 by Rabbi Melvyn Lerer, the former Jewish chaplain at the psychiatric center. He had raised funds for the cemetery's restoration, the installation of the gate with the Star of David and the purchase of proper headstones for all future internments, which numbered about 100 until the hospital closed.

Ben Etkin, president of the Men's Club at the North Shore Jewish Center in Port Jefferson, Long Island, said that each year for the last 30 years the Men's Club has held a ceremony at the Jewish section of the cemetery at which they recited the Mourner's Kaddish for those buried there.

"We have never failed to have a minyan. These people have no one to say Kaddish for them," he said. "We go each year after the High Holidays. We walk around and clear some of the footstones that have been covered up. And we tell some anecdotes. The people buried there deserve it. It's a shame they were buried under just a number."

Until a few years ago, Rabbi Lerer attended this annual ritual and would often remark that those buried there were forgotten in life and discarded in death, Levine said.

how so many people would come to be buried in a hospital cemetery, without even a name to remind people who they were. "Most of them were bereft of families," said Lerer, who in 2018 retired after 42 years as the Jewish chaplain at Pilgrim State and before that at Central Islip. "Many had been in the hospital for 40, 50 or 60 years, and they were the only ones left in their family.'

Some families were also "embarrassed that they had a relative in a psychiatric hospital and so they didn't want to claim the body. So I arranged the funeral and for the chevra kadisha [burial society] of Shomrei Hadas Chapels in Borough Park. At each funeral, the only ones there were myself, the guy who died and the gravedigger."

Hired at Central Islip in 1976, Lerer met with the hospital's deputy director and soon had an area designating the area as a Jewish cemetery.

From then on, each person buried in the Jewish cemetery had a headstone that contained a Jewish star, their name in English, both the Hebrew and English date and the words in Hebrew: "May their souls be bound up in the bond of eternal life."

In October 2013, the law school and the state signed their agreement in which the Office of Mental Health agreed to restore the cemetery and help relatives identify ancestors who lie under numbered stones. The project was delayed for a number of years before being revived in 2019.

There were plans to "hold a big event at which we would erect an historic marker at the cemetery, but then COVID came along and it was no longer a priority," Levine added.

James Plastiras, a spokesman for the Office of Mental Health, said that project is once again under way, and would include a historical marker and paving an existing walkway.

He added that families are free to erect approved markers at the graves of relatives "once direct lineage has been established" through the supervising facilities' Records Department.

Rosenblum, who is now retired, also noted that some of those interred at the cemetery were Holocaust survivors.

"I felt so moved to get involved in the cemetery when I learned Holocaust survivors are buried there," Rosenblum said. "That was one of the reasons I made a pest of myself to get funding for a beautiful new fence.... We want to pave the central walkway and put in benches so that students can use this as a place of quiet reflection and there would be limited public access." HW

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Chanukah and Christmas: A Study in Ecumenicism



Editor's note: This story is being reprinted in memory of Ted Roberts in appreciation of his longtime service as a newspaper columnist.

By Ted Roberts

Chanukah and Christmas have many similarities: they both fall in December. They both delight the merchant classes. They're both lighthearted holidays that don't sufficiently emphasize their religious/historical origins, and both festivals love light.

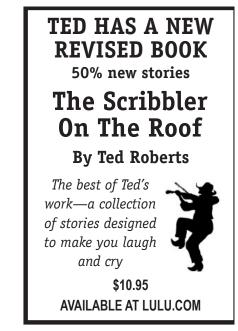
Jews light candles. Christians light up evergreen trees. And finally, they're both followed by a flood of bankruptcy filings by Christian and Jewish families who have blown the December budget on munificent gifts to kids who will forget their parents' names, address, and phone number by the time they're 21. ("Citi Bank writes monthly about their new credit card, but not a word from Marvin," says one of my neglected friends.) Chanukah used to be a skimpy little holiday – more patriotic than religious. Jewish families feasted on fried potato cakes – latkes – a delightful medley of potato, onion and matzoh meal. De riguer – on Chanukah, followed by long periods of togetherness as the family holds hands, suffers from heartburn and chews Rolaids together.

The Jewish family laps up potato cakes while their Christian neighbor dines on a great, golden goose surrounded by festive delicacies. This menu inequality, and perhaps a disagreement over the arrival date of the Messiah, is all that keeps Christians and Jews from some serious cost cutting with a corporate merger.

In Jewish homes, after the prayers, candle lighting, latke feast and anti-acid therapy regimen, a longwinded storyteller, like the author, tells the tale of Chanukah: the campaign of liberation waged by the Jews of the second century before Christ.

In the old days, kids enjoyed a frugal Chanukah. They usually received a coin each day of the eight-day celebration. But sometime around the middle of the 20th century, inflamed by their Christian neighbors and their frenzied December generosity, Jews turned Chanukah into an eight-day orgy of gifts. It was a giant step toward economic assimilation and bridge building between the two sister religions. Jews were now ALSO broke in January. Their checks bounced as well as those of their Christian friends. They could even tell better shopping stories due to the eight-day frenzy of exercising their credit cards.

I remember the scene when I was a youthful Chanukah celebrant. My grandmother, enthroned in the softest chair in the living room, handed out holiday coins to a line of grandkids, nephews, and nieces. There was a protocol – like when you were introduced to the Queen. You held out your hand as grandmother reached into her purse and selected your coin. This was no egalitarian exercise. The coins ranged from quarters to silver dollars. Both behavior and kinship went on the scale. A courteous, well-cleaned up cousin with clean fingernails could cop a bigger prize than a grandkid who



never called grandmother. The ceremony ended with a long slow kiss to grandmother's cheek—an obligation, which smart kids realized affected next year's disbursement. My cousin, Arlene, as far sighted as the prophet Elijah, was even smart enough to help cut up her Bubbe's latkes. And that was Chanukah in my day.

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 Omicron Boomerangs on Israel Diaspora Relations

By Howard Weisband

I have witnessed over the years several serious issues of conflict within Israel Diaspora relations, some of them ongoing, many of which could be solved with rational thinking and discussions or negotiations.

Those issues swirl around Who is a Jew, even Who is a Rabbi, conversion, marriage, and the current Kotel or Western Wall controversy over an appropriate egalitarian prayer location.

The issue of aliyah has been another such issue. Ezer Weizman, was President of Israel in 1995, when the JTA reported in March that year: "Weizman said the sole message to Diaspora Jewry must be persistent, unequivocal and clear: aliyah, immigration to Israel."

Appropriately, there was immediate and consistent backlash from all ranks of the Jewish people in both Israel and the Diaspora, from community leadership to students, who emphasized the agenda of Jewish identity and Jewish education first and foremost.

Weizman's thinking was reminiscent of the ideology of Israel's founding Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who in 1949, according to records of the American Jewish Committee, "... in an address to an American Jewish delegation Ben-Gurion had stressed the importance of large-scale immigration of American youth, and had threatened to appeal directly to the youth, over any parental objections."

Subsequently, there was an important exchange between Ben-Gurion and the President of AJC, Jacob Blaustein, who was then the most-respected American Jewish leader. This resulted ultimately in October 1956, with a letter to Blaustein in which Ben-Gurion acknowledged: "The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel." At the same time, toward the end of the letter, he reaffirmed his personal ideological position: "For me, Zionism means to live in Israel, and personally to build there our new Jewish independent life."

I recall the above and the issues mentioned earlier because they are reflective of critical matters within the Israel Diaspora relationship. I stress here the term "critical matters." Through both courage and dialogue on the part of Jewish leaders, solutions can be found.

I was thus surprised and disappointed

Dr. Warren Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of South Africa. Writing in the face of the most recent COVID variant Omicron, he opens his op ed with the statement: "In banning Jews who are not Israeli citizens from entering the country, Prime Minister Bennett and his government are doing fundamental and lasting damage to Israel's very identity as a Jewish state."

Really? I reread that: "... fundamental and lasting damage to Israel's very identity as a Jewish state." Caused by a temporary closure to protect the health of Israel's citizens, which Rabbi Goldstein acknowledges that "... no government should endanger the health of its citizens."

Neither of us are medical experts, although it is generally recognized that South Africa was one of the first "red countries" wherein the Omicron virus was spreading rapidly.

There has already been significant pushback from various directions. On December 21, Gil Troy published a column in the Jerusalem Post titled: "Travel ban leaves Diaspora Jews with broken hearts but unbroken bond."

Rabbi Goldstein, and others, have written very personally and emotionally, without any acknowledgement of the painful, yet temporary nature of this Government decision, albeit there have been mistakes along the way. Nor any mention of the Prime Minister's accompanying statements. Nor especially the exceptions that have been made for immediate family members, including grandparents, to enter Israel for births, bar and bat mitzvahs, and weddings.

I endorse the conclusion of the Jerusalem Post editorial of December 16: "We need to make sure that people – especially Diaspora Jews – who want to visit Israel can, so we can all look forward to a new wave of tourists and pilgrims as we bid farewell to 2021 and usher in 2022. We need to see some light at the end of this tunnel."

Further, my plea to Jewish leaders today is that we focus our substantive, constructive comments on the critical issues that are on the Israel Diaspora agenda, and we work together to find solutions.

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**

to read in the Jerusalem Post on December 12 a severe opinion piece by Rabbi

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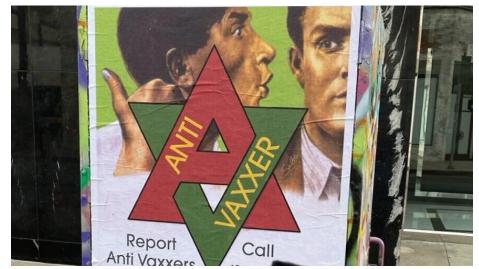
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Anti-Vaccine Posters Featuring a Star of David Found Across Los Angeles Area



Anti-vaccine posters that featured a Star of David on them were discovered in at least two Los Angeles-area this past wee. Credit: Magen Am.

(JNS) – Anti-vaccine posters that featured a Star of David on them were discovered in at least two Los Angeles-area locations last week, including pasted to an electrical box outside a synagogue.

The first was found outside the Baba Sale Congregation and showed the letters "A" and "V" overlapping to form a Star of David. The same poster was found in front of a building affiliated with Cedar-Sinai Medical Center. Both fliers said, "Report Anti-Vaxxers, because you care and they don't," and included a telephone number that, according to a local media outlet, went to a restaurant in Hollywood.

The Baba Sale synagogue is no stranger to hateful messages; in 2019, vandals spray-painted "Free Palestine" on the building's exterior.

Magen Am – a nonprofit, armed security patrol in the heavily Jewish Los Angeles neighborhoods made up of former Israel Defense Forces and U.S. military veterans – has been in touch with the local police and has moved around its patrol to "cover additional daytime hours, as much of this has been happening in broad daylight," according to Leibel Mangel, the group's executive director.

The anti-vax posters were the most-recent incident of anti-Jew hatred tied to COVID-19. Just last weekend, people in nearby Beverly Hills and Pasadena found fliers on their front yards from the virulently anti-Semitic Goyim Defense League, that claimed Jews are responsible for or profiting from the pandemic. They were among hundreds of people in eight states across the country who also el," according to local officials.

In a release, the local police and city council members said "these cowardly acts and any divisive attempts of intimidation will be rejected outright.... the City condemns this unwarranted hate speech that has been unsuccessfully used to disparage a community that has, and always will, stand strong together and fight hatred of any kind.

"Senseless acts like this have no home here and will never be accepted. Our community is home to families of survivors of the Holocaust who have seen evil and will never give in to such attacks," the release went on to say. **HW**



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received those hate-filled fliers.

It was the second time in as many months that such fliers were left in Beverly Hills, which is "one of the only Jewish-majority cities outside of Isra-

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For A Growing Number of Jews in Israel, It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas



A Christmas display at the entrance to the Tel Aviv flagship store of Tiv Ta'am, an Israeli supermarket chain known for selling food that doesn't meet kosher dietary rules. Credit: Asaf Shalev

By Asaf Shalev

TEL AVIV (JTA) - You ask Yaeli Amir, a seven-year-old Jewish girl growing up in a rural town in Israel, what her favorite holiday is, and she won't name any of the almost countless Jewish ones. Instead, she'll say, without hesitation, "Christmas!"

Amir knows all about Santa Claus, and the decorated tree people keep in their home, and the gift-giving. But the joy derives primarily from the weather: "It's fun because it snows and you get to play in the snow," she said.

She hasn't exactly gotten to play in the snow on Christmas in Israel. But she's imbibed the holiday's traditions while watching movies like "The Grinch" and going on a family trip to New York City, where she got to hug a Santa mannequin.

Amir's secular Jewish parents embrace Christmas, not for religious reasons but as an occasion for celebration. The same holds for Halloween.

Yaeli's mother, Dana, said her rural cooperative village, known as a moshav, is planning to host an American-style Halloween with costumes and trick-ortreating next year.

"I am on the moshav's education committee and we just talked about how we have to plan a Halloween party next year because all over Israel they have started to celebrate Halloween," she said. "We are about the last moshav that hasn't."

Signs that similar sentiments are widespread can be seen all over Tel Aviv, the bastion of secular Israel. The party stores near Tel Aviv's Levinsky Market carry Christmas-themed decorations and clothing accessories. Tiv Ta'am, a supermarket chain notable for selling food that doesn't meet kosher dietary rules, has a large Christmas tree display at the entrance to its flagship store. Only about 2% of the population of Israel are Christians, the vast majority of whom identify as ethnically Arab, according to the Pew Research Center.

One of the factors likely driving this trend is the influx over the past 30 years of more than a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union, many of whom were deeply secular and, in some cases, identified as Christian or had Christian spouses. The highly assimilated immigrants also brought with them a civic holiday called Novy God that resembles Christmas.

Of course, the fact that the Holy Land is the place where Jesus is believed to have been born, lived and died raises awareness of the holiday, although in recent years COVID-19 and occasional unrest have suppressed tourism to Bethlehem and other sites connected to the Christmas story. Instead, with strict foreign travel restrictions in place, Jewish Israelis have been flocking to Christian sites like Nazareth. "We're not going overseas so fast at this point in the coronavirus," a Haifa psychologist, Roni Harari, told Agence France-Presse this week. "Here it feels like a little bit of abroad."

But there's also a newer phenomenon at play: Israel's massive tech sector. Concentrated in and around Tel Aviv, the culture among startups and established companies is shaped by secular Israelis, including a significant contingent of Soviet immigrants or their children.

According to Tamara Raynor Cote, a public relations account manager and HR coordinator in Tel Aviv with lots of tech clients, the industry likes to foster holiday spirit during Halloween and Christmas.

"A lot of HR or office managers will buy into these holidays," Raynor Cote said. "When I went to buy Halloween decorations it was me and all the HR managers of Tel Aviv."

She said tech companies who are competing to recruit from a limited supply of computer engineers want to project an image of excitement and cosmopolitan savvy. They routinely throw parties where pop stars perform, for example. Having employees celebrate

during Christmas and Halloween at the office and posting photos of them doing so on social media generates a desirable kind of buzz.

"It comes down to wanting to look international and fun, it helps with recruitment," she said. "Having the appearance of being a globally-minded company is appealing."

In a recent podcast discussing "Christmas in a Jewish Majority State," the American-born Israeli writer Yossi Klein Halevi suggested that Jews in Israel could appreciate Christianity and Christmas without the anxiety that religious Jews like him experienced growing up in the United States.

"We were now a sovereign state with a Christian minority. We had reversed the dynamic. And so I felt this tremendous opportunity as an Israeli" to learn more about Christianity and Islam, he said on the podcast, a production of the Shalom Hartman Institute, where he is a senior fellow. "I could discover Christmas.... I could allow myself the possibility of holy envy to a religion that I'd grown up fearing and loathing."

Amid the holiday excitement, Dana Amir, Yaeli's mother, paused to reflect on the significance of marking holidays that come from outside the Jewish tradition. When she was growing up, her family would have frowned upon the idea.

"Someone said, 'Let's also do something for Christmas as a moshav," Dana recalled. "I told her, 'Good thing my grandmother isn't alive to hear what we are doing.""

But Dana says she is raising Yaeli and her two sisters to appreciate Judaism, and that enjoying the trappings of Christmas doesn't come at the expense of celebrating Jewish holidays. "It's all in good fun," she said. HW







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