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SERVING THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1925

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# Orgels Establish the Orgel Family Performing Arts Center at the MJCC



*Billy and Robin Orgel's donation to establish the Orgel Family Performing Arts Center will make a significant impact on the Cultural Arts programming at the MJCC for years to come.*

Robin and Billy Orgel have made a major gift to the Memphis Jewish Community Center to establish the Orgel Family Performing Arts Center. This gift will provide for a full renovation of the Belz Theater, which among many other things includes new seating and state-of-the-art sound, lighting and projection.

This generous contribution will also allow for enhanced and robust Cultural Arts programming in the years to come.

The Orgels have been a staple in the Memphis Jewish community and long-time participants, supporters and advocates of the MJCC.

As Robin states, "Having grown up here at the MJCC myself, it has been a pleasure to watch my children, Benjamin, Megan and Hannah, play and learn at this wonderful community treasure. For four generations our family has been able to take advantage of all that the MJCC has to offer, and Billy and I are so pleased to be able to make this gift to the J. We are so excited to do our part to strengthen and enhance performing arts experiences so that the MJCC, that helped to mold and shape my own Jewish identity, thrives today, tomorrow and for future generations."

"The MJCC provides so many vital and necessary services to our community," says Billy. "We feel very fortunate to be able to make a difference at the J and in our Jewish community, and we are looking forward to seeing this project come to fruition and its impact on the J and its cultural arts programming."

The renovation of the theater and expansion of its performing arts programming was a key component of the

MJCC's recent strategic plan.

Immediate Past Board Chair Jenny Herman reflects, "We spent a great deal of time as a board planning for the future of the MJCC. To see this piece of our plan coming together is so gratifying, and I cannot thank Robin and Billy enough for their generosity, vision and foresight."

The Memphis Jewish Community Center is in the early planning stages of the upcoming renovations and is hopeful that the project will be complete at some point during the 2022/23 cultural arts programming season. They are already busy working on the enhancements to the performing arts programming as well.

"Cultural Arts programming at the MJCC has become such a vital component of our program offerings and provides a key touch point and connection to the J and our Jewish community for so many individuals," says MJCC President and CEO Larry Skolnick. "This generous and transformational gift from the Orgels will allow us to offer vibrant and exciting programming in a modern and state-of-the-art facility."

The MJCC should have specifics on the renovation work and a better idea of the timeline for the project in the coming weeks and looks forward to sharing this information with the community as it becomes available. [HW](#)

# Are Jews White? Is Whoopi Goldberg Jewish? 'The View' Holocaust Controversy, Explained



*Whoopi Goldberg attends a benefit event in New York City, Sept. 13, 2021. Credit: Sean Zanni/Patrick McMullan via Getty Images*

*By Gabe Friedman*

(JTA) – She may not have meant to, but this week Whoopi Goldberg waded into a charged discourse that has polarized the Jewish community – and those who seek to discriminate against them – for centuries.

The controversy began brewing on "The View," the daytime talk show she co-hosts, during a discussion last Monday over the recent controversy over a Tennessee school board's decision to ban "Maus," the iconic graphic memoir about the Holocaust. The genocide was "not about race," she said, it was instead about "man's inhumanity to man." And

it involved "two white groups of people."

The comments immediately went viral and struck a nerve, leading to what Goldberg described as a deluge of accusations of antisemitism and Holocaust denial, and criticism from groups like the Anti-Defamation League.

Despite multiple apologies, the storm reached a climax last Tuesday night when ABC decided to suspend Goldberg from "The View" for two weeks "to take time to reflect and learn about

(See **Whoopi** Page 4)



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# My Teen Israel Story



Memphis teen Sofia Jalenak (r) had memorable experiences in nature during her time in Israel.

Sofia Jalenak, daughter of Monique and Charles Jalenak, is a junior at St. Mary's Episcopal School. Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemksy Endowment Fund provided her with a Teen Israel Experience grant to help offset the cost of her NFTY program in Israel.

### By Sofia Jalenak

The Israel trip to me was an experience like no other. I was able to travel with my best friends, meeting new people, and making stronger friendships. We stayed at so many different places with new people each time and meeting people from my camp I did not really know very well.

One place I will remember is when we slept and woke up early to hike Masada. The sunrise was beautiful, and I remember rushing up there thinking we were late, but we made it just in time. Another sunrise I remember is when I went to the IDF program. I had such a fun time meeting new people. I stepped out of my comfort zone and was away from all my friends and still had a good time.

Unfortunately, I was not feeling good but the sunrise I was able to watch was pretty and a little bit worth it. Another memorable place was in the middle of the woods during the IDF training.

The instructor led us single file into the woods at nighttime and told us we were not allowed to speak. I was able to sit there peacefully and watch the stars and reflect on my experience so far on the Israel trip. Once everyone was led out then we were all collected and led back to the camp. I will always remember how bright the stars were that night.

Just like when we were hiking in the desert, I will always remember the sunrise when we were waking up in the desert. I got close with so many people when we were hiking in the desert. The eight-hour long hikes made it seem like they were only thirty minutes because of the conversations and funny laughs we had. We would do trivia games and share jokes. Another sunset I will remember is the one on top of the roof in Akko. We had just gotten back from IDF training, and I had to say goodbye to all the new friends I made. We waited for the other buses to come and watched the sunset and saw the pretty pink sky shine bright on top of all the buildings.

The sunsets in Israel will always be my favorite thing. I saw them with all different people around me, including people I never thought I would ever be friends with or ever have the chance to meet. I watched the sunsets with new friends, old friends, and unlikely friends. It makes me sad to think that those times were the first and last times I was able to watch the sunsets with those people. I will forever cherish these memories and remember the beautiful sky and the beautiful people.

I am appreciative to Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund for making my NIFTY Israel trip possible.

All rising high school juniors and seniors in the Memphis Jewish community are eligible for grants up to \$3,000 to attend a recognized teen summer or semester program in Israel. Teen Israel Experience applications for Summer 2022 are now available online. To learn more and apply, please go to: [www.jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund](http://www.jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund). **HW**

# THE Hebrew Watchman

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## Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Feb. 11, 2022 / 10 Adar I, 5782 .....5:20 p.m.  
Havdalah, Sat. Feb. 12, 2022 / 11 Adar I, 5782 ..... 6:18 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Tetzaveh

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## Memphis BBYO Elects Chapter Leaders

Mazel tov to our new Memphis teen leaders! All four BBYO chapters re-elected new chapter boards last Sunday.

We are excited for them to lead their chapters this spring with fun programming and convention! **HW**



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Peres AZA

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# Wendy and Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service Accepting Applications for the Bernstein Scholarship Fund

## It's That Time of Year Again

In 2001 Nate and Minnie Bernstein set up a scholarship fund to assist any age Jewish student with educational tuition expenses. Wendy and Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service (Fogelman JFS) has been administering the fund since its inception. Once again there will be an open enrollment period beginning January 1, 2022, and ending March 30, 2022, during which Fogelman JFS will accept applications for the fund.

Recipients will be notified in May of the amount of their award; and awards will be disbursed in August. To be eli-

gible to receive a Bernstein scholarship:

- Must be Jewish
- Must reside in Memphis/Mid-South Area
- Funds must be used for educational expenses
- Recipients of other scholarship funds administered by Jewish Community Partners are ineligible for this fund

All disbursement checks will be made out to the educational institution that the student will be attending.

For more information or to obtain an application for the Bernstein Fund contact Fogelman JFS at 901-767-8511. **HW**

# Bridge and Mah Jongg Lessons at the MJCC

In February, Beginning Bridge and Beginning Mah Jongg lessons will start at the Memphis Jewish Community Center.

Both classes will be taught by instructors who have been teaching for many years at the MJCC and elsewhere in Memphis.

The class fees are \$72 for members and \$80 for non-members of the MJCC. Since both classes usually fill up, they will be on a first come, first serve basis.

Mah Jongg for Beginners, a five-week course, will be taught on Mondays from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. by Melanie

Mann. Come join other beginners and those relearning this popular game. A Mah Jongg card is included in class fee.

Beginning Bridge Lessons, a six-week-class, will be taught on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. by Debbie Jackson. Learn all the basics you need to start playing Bridge like a Pro.

Please contact Steve Kaplan, MJCC adult services coordinator with any questions or to make a reservation. Direct phone number 901-259-9220, or email [stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org](mailto:stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org). You may also call the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810 to make a reservation. **HW**

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# Exploring the Hebrew Bible: Beth Sholom Lehrhaus Speaker Series Features Dr. Shaul Bar, Chair of Excellence in Judaic Studies at the University of Memphis

Jewish tradition ascribes authorship of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible to one man: Moses. It may surprise you to learn that scholars – Jewish and Christian – have challenged this claim for centuries. Some have proposed another figure from Jewish tradition as the more likely author; others have asserted that the Five Books of Moses resulted from the stitching together of stories and traditions penned by multiple authors. Dr. Shaul Bar will explore the question of biblical authorship in his upcoming talk in the Lehrhaus speaker series sponsored by Beth Sholom Synagogue on

February 15 at 7 p.m.

Professor Bar's presentation is titled: **Who Wrote the Torah?**

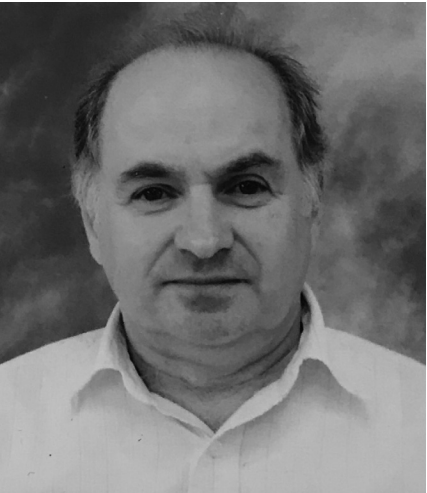
The tradition that Moses authored the Bible is based on several passages in which God orders Moses to write down some of His instructions (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; Duet. 31:9). During the Middle Ages, Jewish and Christian scholars began challenging this view.

They argued that since the last verses in the book of Deuteronomy describe Moses' death and burial (34:5-12), it is unlikely he wrote those verses himself. Instead, some proposed, the author

was Joshua, Moses' successor. Others insisted that since Moses was a prophet, he could have written the passages referring to events after his own death. More questions were raised in the 17th century with the rise of critical thought.

In his presentation, Professor Bar will examine these and other questions concerning biblical authorship.

Professor Bar's lecture is scheduled to take place at Beth Sholom. It will also be streamed on Zoom. The Zoom link as well as information about attending in person will be found on Beth Sholom Synagogue's Facebook page and website.



**Dr. Shaul Bar will discuss "Who Wrote the Torah" at Beth Sholom**

Dr. Shaul Bar received his PhD from NYU, and has taught for many years at the University of Memphis where he holds the Chair of Excellence in Judaic Studies. He is the author of eight books: "A letter That Has Not Been Read: Dreams in the Hebrew Bible" (2001); "I Deal Death and Give Life" (2010); "Gods First King: The Story of Saul" (2013); "Daily Life of the Patriarchs" (2014); "A Nation Is Born: The Jacob Story" (2016); "The Samson Story: Love, Seduction, Betrayal, Violence, Riddles, Myth" (2018); "Isaac the Passive Patriarch" (2020); and "Samuel the man of God" (2022).

Lehrhaus at Beth Sholom takes its inspiration from The Free Jewish House of Learning, the school for Jewish studies and adult education founded by Franz Rosenzweig in Frankfurt in 1920. Lectures in this series are free and open to the general public. **HW**

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## Whoopi... (Continued From Page 1)

the impact of her comments,” in the words of ABC News President Kim Godwin. Jews across the political spectrum, included many who objected to her original remarks, criticized the decision to suspend her.

Why did the comments create such a firestorm? The answer extends well beyond the Holocaust.

### Was the Holocaust ‘about race’?

After her initial comments circulated, Goldberg went on “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert” last Monday and attempted to clarify the situation. In doing so, she dug deeper into the race issue.

In her experience as a Black person, she said, race is something “I can see.”

“If the [Ku Klux] Klan is coming down the street with a Jewish friend... I’m gonna run. But if my friend decides not to run, they’ll get passed by most times, because you can’t tell who’s Jewish,” she said. “It’s not something that people say, ‘Oh, that person is Jewish.’”

“Race” is notoriously difficult to define. Is it, like Goldberg claimed, a group of people with shared physical characteristics? Can other social, economic and anthropological classifications factor in?

Jews have long debated whether they are a “race” or something else. Judaism is a religion, practiced by people of all varieties and races across the globe. But Jews do not have to be practitioners to regard themselves or be accepted by other Jews as Jews. The Jewish tradition of “matrilineality” – defining as Jewish a child born of a Jewish mother – points to a biological definition of Jewish identity. But Judaism also accepts converts.

Taken all together, these various understandings have led Jews to regard themselves (and others to regard Jews) variously as a people, a nation, a tribe, a family and a faith – sometimes in various combinations, sometimes all at the same time.

But Hitler, like many antisemites before him, specifically – and repeatedly, in writings and laws and speeches – labeled Jews as a physically impure Slavic-descended race, in contrast to what he termed the blonde, blue-eyed genetically pure German Aryan race. Nazi propaganda promoted pseudoscientific ways to supposedly identify Jews – by the size of their nose and lips, or the shape of their heads, among other things.

Hitler was obsessed by what he considered the biological fact of Jewish identity, and wrote that the “Final Solution” was inspired in part by his drive to create a more “pure” and singular human race, rid of “Jewish” and other impurities.

The Nazis drew on a tradition of “racially” stereotyping Jews that scholars have traced at least to 1000 CE. The

long, hooked nosed trope, for example, appeared in everything from medieval paintings to fictional characters, like the villain Shylock from Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice.” So the Jews were persecuted as a “race” by their neighbors in Europe and elsewhere for centuries before Hitler outlined many of his ideas in “Mein Kampf” in a jail cell in 1925.

In her next-day apology on “The View” last Tuesday, Goldberg said the Holocaust “is indeed about race because Hitler and the Nazis considered Jews to be an inferior race.”

### Are Jews white?

Goldberg also stumbled into an ongoing debate within and beyond the Jewish community: Are Jews “white people”?

Behind the question is another stereotype – that a Jew is a person with white skin, descended from European ancestors. In other words, an average Ashkenazi Jew.

In reality, the Jewish community is considerably more diverse than that. The majority of Jews in North America may be Ashkenazi Jews with roots in Eastern Europe, but Jews also descend from ancient communities in Ethiopia, India, China and beyond. Sephardic Jews come from communities in Northern Africa and what is now Spain and Portugal, while Mizrahi Jews come from the Middle East, including once vital communities in Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Syria and other countries.

Consciousness of that diversity has grown in part thanks to the advocacy of Jews of color in this country and Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in Israel. Thousands of Jews come from mixed-race and interfaith backgrounds, so even many Jews with Ashkenazi roots are not white.

Estimates of the proportion of U.S. Jews who are Jews of color range from 6% to 15% depending on the study and definition, and the Jews of Color Initiative argued in 2019 that the community has been chronically undercounted because of poor study designs. (Last year’s Pew Research Center report about U.S. Jews concluded that 92% of Jews identify as white.)

Add on people from all types of racial and ethnic backgrounds who convert to Judaism, those who practice Jewish traditions without having undergone formal conversions and people around the world who strongly identify with some aspects of Jewish culture, and “Jew” quickly becomes an extremely hard-to-define term.

The Atlantic’s Yair Rosenberg argued last Tuesday that “family” is a more accurate way than “race” to encapsulate the community.

In my experience, mistakes like

[Goldberg’s] often happen because well-meaning people have trouble fitting Jews into their usual boxes. They don’t know how to define Jews, and so they resort to their own frames of reference, like “race” or “religion,” and project them onto the Jewish experience. But Jewish identity doesn’t conform to Western categories, despite centuries of attempts by society to shoehorn it in. This makes sense, because Judaism predates Western categories. It’s not quite a religion, because one can be Jewish regardless of observance or specific belief. (Einstein, for example, was proudly Jewish but not religiously observant.) But it’s also not quite a race, because people can convert in! It’s not merely a culture or an ethnicity, because that leaves out all the religious components.

Still, even as more recognize Jewish diversity, stereotypes persist. White supremacy, hypernationalist and other far right streams, stemming from the post-2016 rise of the “alt-right,” see Jews as toxic “others,” regardless of what they believe or practice. And on the other end of the political spectrum, some left-wing progressives lump all Jews in with a largely white oppressor class.

### With that last name, is Whoopi Jewish?

The extra thick layer of irony underlining this controversy is that it involves a celebrity who was not born Jewish, but who adopted a Jewish stage name because of what she has described as her positive feelings toward Jews and Jewish culture, not for religious reasons.

The EGOT winner – one of very few performers to have won an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony – was born Caryn Elaine Johnson in New York City to a Baptist clergyman father and a nurse mother. In 1994, her publicist told the Orlando Sentinel that her stage name Goldberg came from her mother’s side of the family (her first name is a nod to the whoopee cushion). But DNA tests and family trees constructed by the likes of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. trace her lineage back to non-Jewish roots in West Africa.

Nevertheless, in her words, she “feels” Jewish. She told the London Jewish Chronicle in 2016 that she “re-members” Jewish holidays, even if she is not regularly observant in any way. When people would ask if she were Jewish, Goldberg said she had a standard reply: “I always say ‘Would you ask me that if I was white? I bet not,’” Goldberg told the Chronicle. “The name is wonderful for starting conversations.” Mission accomplished.

### Why does any of this matter?

The Holocaust has stamped its legacy on nearly every Jew who has lived and been born in the 77 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. Because so many antisemites and European ultra-nationalists are intent on denying that the genocide happened, or insist that it has been exaggerated, Jewish groups are adamant that the facts of history not be distorted, intentionally or not. Such “accidental” distortion, many argue, can be antisemitic in effect, even if not in intent.

Others suggest that Goldberg’s comments reflect an emerging ideology that is trying to downplay the historic persecution of the Jews. As Daniella Greenbaum, a former producer at “The View,” wrote in The Washington Post last Wednesday, “It’s an ideology that tries to turn Jews into White people, that tries to erase Jewish vulnerability and oppression, to squeeze Jews who have light skin into modern American categories of race and ethnicity, and which also myopically categorizes the hatred against them into American considerations of what racism looks like.”

And yet many prominent Jews were willing to give Goldberg, if not a pass, then a second or third chance, especially in the name of using the controversy as a teachable moment.

As Rabbi Sharon Brous of the Ikar community in Los Angeles tweeted, “If what you want is to change someone’s mind, I have to think education is more effective than public shaming and punishment. Particularly when that person shows a sincere willingness to learn and apologize.” **HW**

# Local Jewish Developer Lands Carrefour Property for Redevelopment

By Shoshana Cenker

The prime location at the corner of Kirby and Poplar in Germantown is finally going to get a facelift. Plans had been in the works for two years to redevelop the huge site by Cannon, Austin & Cannon. The pandemic derailed those plans, which then opened the door for another local buyer: CRE Devco Germantown LLC, which is led by local developer Billy Orgel.

Adam Slovis is serving as project manager – he and Orgel have worked on many projects together over the years. Though the Shelby County Assessor of Property’s website says it appraised the site at \$8.1 million, CRE Devco paid more than double at \$17 million. Slovis says the major intersection spot at 6777 Poplar Avenue is worth the higher price. “That location deserves to be priced and built and done in a way that is deserving for Germantown and Memphis and that corner,” he added.

The previous buyers had done a tremendous amount of work planning the redevelopment including new architectural renderings with an overview of the \$100 million plans for its first two phases.

Slovis says his team will use much of those plans for the mixed-used development because they were approved by the City of Germantown’s Planning Commission back in 2019. The new development group will modify some of those plans, though, which include a hotel, retail, and multifamily spaces “and whatever else we can do there to really turn that property into what it deserves to be as you enter Germantown,” Slovis said. For several years, Germantown residents and city officials had previously been opposed to several large developments including Carrefour.

CRE Devco is planning to release updated plans within the next few months and hopes to begin construction before the end of 2022. The work is expected to be handled in phases. Modeled after successful intersection projects in Dallas, Atlanta, and Nashville, “it’s going to provide an environment for people to live and visit, play and work, eat and be entertained,” Slovis said.

“These types of projects have been happening in much more progressive markets for years now.” **HW**

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# Memphis Jewish Federation Launches 13th Annual Holocaust Art and Essay Competition

## “Safeguarding the Sacred: Perspectives on Holocaust Memory”



With her piece entitled *Life in a Jar*, Colonial Middle School student Whitney Ousley took the first-place ribbon in Art in Memphis Jewish Federation’s 2021 Holocaust Art & Essay Competition.

Memphis Jewish Federation has announced its 13th Annual Holocaust Art & Essay Competition for Mid-South and Tennessee students in grades 6-12. This year’s contest theme is Safeguarding the Sacred: Perspectives on Holocaust Memory. Students are invited to consider how Holocaust memory is transmitted through the generations and/or the threats posed to memory by Holocaust denial and trivialization. Contest en-

trants may explore one or more avenues of memory preservation: personal testimony, diaries, hidden archives, judicial prosecutions, historical accounts, visual arts, etc. and consider the opportunities and challenges posed by these methods to the future of Holocaust memory. Middle school students in grades 6-8 are invited to submit artwork, and high school students in grades 9-12 are invited to submit essays. Cash prizes for the top winners are made possible by the Kaethe Mela Family Memorial Fund of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis. “With all the disturbing Holocaust distortion we are currently seeing around us, we felt it was critical to focus on Holocaust memory for this year’s contest,” said Bluma Zuckerbrot-Finkelstein, executive vice president of Federation. “We hope that students exploring this theme will internalize the scope and magnitude of the Holocaust and the paramount need to protect its memory.” For the first time, the contest will also entertain digital art entries, with specific guidelines. As in previous years, all artwork entered into the competition will be displayed in the lobby of the Memphis Jewish Community Center. Contest winners will be recognized at the 60th Annual Yom HaShoah Com-

memoration on Thursday, April 28, 2022, featuring Elisha Wiesel. As the son of Elie Wiesel, Elisha has assumed his father’s mission of safeguarding the memory of the Holocaust. The first-place winning essay will be published in the program booklet and the first-place winning artwork will adorn the cover of the program booklet. The winning essay will also be published in The Hebrew Watchman and in JCP Connect, Jewish Community Partners’ online blog ([www.jcpconnect.org](http://www.jcpconnect.org)) and shared on social media. All entries will be judged according to the following criteria: creativity, passion, and relevance to the topic. Full guidelines and resources for entrants are available at [www.jcpmemphis.org/holocaustartandessay](http://www.jcpmemphis.org/holocaustartandessay) and should be carefully reviewed before submission. Students should email their essays to [HolocaustEssayMJF@gmail.com](mailto:HolocaustEssayMJF@gmail.com). Non-digital artwork should be dropped off at the Memphis Jewish Federation office, 6560 Poplar Avenue, Memphis, 38138. Digital artwork should be submitted digitally to [HolocaustArtContest@gmail.com](mailto:HolocaustArtContest@gmail.com) following all the specific guidelines. All entries are due by the close of business on Monday, March 21. Please include entrants’ name, grade, school, and contact information. [HW](#)

# Belgian Armed Forces Buy Anti-Tank Missiles from Israeli Subsidiary Company

(JNS) – German company Dynamit Nobel Defence (DND), a subsidiary of Israel’s Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, announced in recent days that it won a 19 million euro (\$22 million) contract to supply man-portable anti-tank weapons to the Belgian Armed Forces, according to a report by Israel Defense. The missiles, of the RGW90 type, “can be used from confined spaces and are able to destroy a wide range of land targets [such] as main battle tanks, light armored vehicles, fortified facilities, bunkers, wall structures and fixed shelters,” the report stated. The missile weighs around 10 kilograms (22 pounds) and has a firing range from 10 meters to 400 meters. The German military purchased similar systems last year from DND, announcing the procurement of more than 2,000 rocket-launchers. Meanwhile, 33 countries worldwide use Rafael’s Spike family of missiles, which are made for land, air and naval platforms. In November, the German Government Procurement Office announced together with the Israeli Ministry of Defense and Rafael a series of live-fire tests of the Trophy active protection system onboard tanks. The missiles were integrated into German military units following a government-to-government agreement reached last February. [HW](#)

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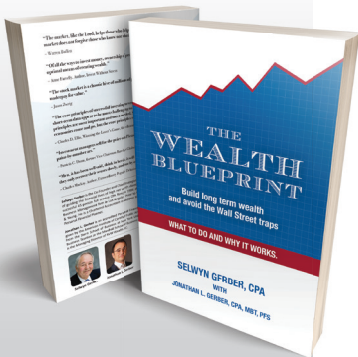
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## ZOA Complaint: Virginia School District Fails to Act Against Anti-Jewish Issues

(JNS) – The Zionist Organization of America filed a civil-rights complaint against one of the largest school districts in the United States, claiming it has failed to address its “hostile anti-Semitic environment.”

The complaint against Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) in Virginia was filed last week with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights. In the complaint, ZOA listed several anti-Semitic incidents at FCPS that officials allegedly knew about but did not respond to “appropriately and effectively.”

The incidents include repeated swastika vandalism at FCPS schools that

received no condemnation by school district officials; Jewish students being targeted with ethnic slurs, anti-Semitic “jokes” and “Heil Hitler” salutes from their peers; and a lack of accommodations for Jewish students and staff who observe Jewish holidays.

“As this complaint shows, there is a longstanding practice and pattern of harassment and discrimination against Jewish students (and staff) in FCPS, which FCPS officials have refused to address,” said the ZOA. The Jewish organization claims that FCPS’s refusal to act is in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

The organization noted that it filed the complaint after trying to resolve the issues directly with FCPS, but to no avail.

“The ZOA’s complaint describes in horrifying detail what Jewish students and staff have been enduring for many years in a school district that touts its diversity and claims to value a safe and respectful learning environment,” said ZOA national president Morton A. Klein and director of ZOA’s Center for Law and Justice Susan B. Tuchman.

They added: “We are hopeful that the Office for Civil Rights will promptly and thoroughly investigate the ZOA’s complaint, hold FCPS accountable and



**Fairfax County Public Schools administration building in Falls Church, Va. Source: Google Maps Screenshot.**

ensure that the district finally provides Jewish students with the safe, welcoming and respectful environment that they’re entitled to under the law, and that every student deserves.” **HW**

## Aaron Mostofsky, the Pelt-Wearing Son of a Jewish Judge, Pleads Guilty to Jan. 6 Charges



**Aaron Mostofsky, a supporter of US President Donald Trump protests in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, Jan. 6, 2021. Credit: Saul Loeb/AFP via Getty Images**

(JTA) – Aaron Mostofsky, the Jewish judge’s son who wore fur pelts and a bulletproof vest when he entered the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, pleaded guilty in a federal court last Wednesday to civil disorder, theft of government property and entering and remaining in a restricted building, NBC News reported.

Prosecutors dropped the most serious charge of interfering in an official proceeding. The civil disorder charge is a felony and has a maximum sentence of five years, although many of the 200 or so people convicted so far in the Jan. 6 insurrection have received minimal sentences. Mostofsky will be sentenced in May.

Mostofsky is the son of Steven

(Shlomo) Mostofsky, a Kings County (Brooklyn) Supreme Court Judge and former president of the National Council of Young Israel, an Orthodox synagogue association. NCYI has been outspokenly pro-Trump in the past.

Mostofsky’s brother, Nachman, who serves as executive director of Chovevei Zion, a politically conservative Orthodox Jewish advocacy organization, also attended the protests but he has said he left before the mob entered the Capitol.

The Jan. 6 rioters, heeding former President Donald Trump’s false claims that he won the election, sought to keep Congress from certifying Joe Biden’s win. **HW**

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## Former Ambassador David Friedman Warned by White House: ‘Don’t be so Jewish’

(JNS) – Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman was warned by a U.S. State Department staffer in 2017 not to be “so Jewish,” Breitbart has revealed.

Friedman reportedly recounts the anti-Semitic episodes in his new book, Sledgehammer: How Breaking With the Past Brought Peace to the Middle East, set to be released on Feb. 8.

The book centers on how the White

House under former President Donald Trump successfully achieved the Abraham Accords and a new era of peace in the region.

The excerpt from the book that was shared by Breitbart is as follows:

Word of my stubborn insistence on standing with our ally Israel had now circulated widely within the State Department. Another senior staffer decided to call me and offer the following advice: “Mr. Ambassador, don’t be so Jewish.”

“What?”

“Don’t be so Jewish. You represent the United States of America. Tone down the Judaism in your work.”

Don’t be so Jewish.

I was furious. “Do you think I am under any disillusion as to who I represent? I’m not a politically correct person but I have to ask you, why do the laws of political correctness not apply to Jews?”

“Just a free word of advice.” Worth the price.

Friedman said the remarks were made ahead of Trump’s first visit to Israel in May 2017, when the White House was conflicted over whether to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, its current site.

At that time, he helped arrange a visit for Trump to the Western Wall on that trip, making him the first sitting American president to do so. **HW**

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# A More Affordable Life Insurance Solution

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

Many people allow their life insurance policies to expire once their children are grown. This may not be a good idea, especially if you have a mortgage or other substantial expenses and your spouse would need continued financial support. But a new policy can be quite expensive when you are older. Survivorship life insurance may be a more cost-effective solution.

### Coverage for Two

Survivorship life insures the lives of two people, typically a married couple, and pays a death benefit after the death of the last-surviving covered person. For this reason, it is sometimes called second-to-die insurance. Because only one death benefit is paid and premiums are based on the life expectancies of both insured individuals, the cost is usually less than premiums for a policy covering either life alone. And it might be possible to obtain coverage for a spouse who has been rejected for an individual policy. Survivorship policies are also used to insure business partners, and options may be available to insure more than two people.

Survivorship policies are typically permanent life insurance, which offers lifetime coverage and stays in force as long as the premiums are paid. The death benefit of a survivorship policy could be used to leave a legacy for your heirs, pay taxes, settle an estate, and pay other end-of-life expenses.

### Creating Cash Value

A portion of the premium goes into a cash-value account, which accumulates on a tax-deferred basis throughout the life of the policy. Any cash value accumulated at the time the first spouse dies might be used to help support the surviving spouse. The cash value could also be tapped through loans or withdrawals while both spouses are alive and used for emergency expenses or to supplement retirement income.

Withdrawals of the accumulated cash value, up to the amount of the premiums paid, are not subject to income tax. Loans are also free of income tax as long as they are repaid. Loans and withdrawals will reduce the policy’s cash value and death benefit and could increase the chance that the policy will lapse.

### Five Good Reasons

Percentage of consumers who gave these reasons for owning life insurance (multiple responses allowed)



Source: 2020 Insurance Barometer Study, LIMRA and Life Happens

As with most financial decisions, there are expenses associated with the purchase of life insurance. Policies commonly have mortality and expense charges. If a policy is surrendered prematurely, there may be surrender charges and income tax implications. The cost and availability of life insurance depend on factors such as age, health, and the type and amount of insurance purchased. Any guarantees are contingent on the financial strength and claims-paying ability of the issuing insurance company.

Before implementing a strategy involving life insurance, it would be prudent to make sure that you are insurable.

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## Arabs Attack Orthodox Jews at Jerusalem Building Site

(JNS) – A group of Arab workers attacked haredi (Orthodox Jewish) protesters at a building site in Jerusalem last Wednesday, according to a video report shared by the website Kikar Ha-Shabbat.

The attack took place in the city’s Gilo neighborhood when haredim arrived at the worksite and started protesting the construction.

They broke into the worksite and the workers started striking and stoning them. The scene was captured on film by a passerby.

In the video, the Arab workers are seen kicking the men while they are on the ground and tossing away their hats.

One of the protesters was injured and rushed to receive emergency care at the Hadassah Medical Center. The hospital was contacted but did not confirm the information.

Israel Police said that there have been intermittent protests around the work complex in recent weeks and that some of the protestors have themselves used violence against the staff.

Security guards have been placed at the complex.

Police added that last Wednesday night, dozens of haredim again showed up at the worksite, and threw stones and “risked their lives” by lying under the wheels of the trucks. They also confronted the guards.

Police forces arrived and restored order; they said they were unaware of any incident last Wednesday evening.

“To the extent that a complaint is received by the police regarding violence by the security guards against protestors, it will be thoroughly investigated and treated accordingly,” the Police told JNS. [HW](#)

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# ‘Infuriating And Upsetting’: Liberal Jewish Movements Condemn Israeli PM’s Decision Not to Implement Western Wall Agreement



Members of the Women of the Wall movement hold Rosh Hodesh prayers as thousands of ultra-Orthodox women protest against them at the Western Wall in Jerusalem’s Old City, March 8, 2019. Credit: Hadas Parush/Flash90

By Shira Hanau

(JTA) – Israeli Prime Minister Naf-tali Bennett repeatedly cited his Amer-ican-born parents as the source for what he called his “special closeness” with American Jewry in an interview with the Jerusalem Post last week.

But some American Jews took a very different message about their relation-ship with the prime minister from the interview.

In it, Bennett said his government would not implement the 2016 Western Wall agreement that he once champi-oned, which would have set up a perma-nent space for egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall.

“The continued denial of religious freedom is directly contradictory to the Prime Minister’s and other Ministers’

stated desire to bridge the gap between Israel and world Jewry,” leaders of the Conservative movement said in a state-ment last Sunday. The head of the Re-form Movement in Israel released a sim-ilar statement last Friday.

“It is both infuriating and upsetting when the Prime Minister of a ‘change government,’ wherein all heads of his coalition have committed to imple-menting the Western Wall Agreement, yields to extremist factions that object to the Agreement and its implementa-tion, just as they did with the former Prime Minister,” Anna Kislanski, CEO of the Israel Reform Movement, wrote in a Facebook post. “The eyes of Jews across Israel and the Diaspora look to the current government with the hopes

of implementing a suitable compromise that responds to all of the Jewish people and does not capitulate shamefully to bullying and violence.”

Bennett’s comments and the reactions they elicited mark the latest flashpoint in a years-long conflict between the Amer-ican Jewish community’s two largest liberal movements and Israel’s religious institutions, which are still dominated by the Orthodox rabbinate – even after the election last year of a more diverse government coalition that has floated various religious reforms.

The 2016 agreement, mediated in part by Natan Sharansky, the former Soviet refusenik who then served as head of the Jewish Agency, was forged through meetings between American leaders and the Orthodox group that controls the Western Wall plaza. The main plaza is divided into separate men and women’s prayer spaces where women are not allowed to read from a Torah scroll, in line with traditional Orthodox practice.

The agreement would have seen a permanent and enlarged space for egalitarian prayer set up at an archaeological site south of the traditional prayer site’s main plaza. Signs that lead to the main plaza also would have directed visitors to the egalitarian site, which currently consists of a raised platform that does not allow visitors to approach the actual wall.

But in 2017, facing pressure from his haredi Orthodox coalition partners who opposed the deal, then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu scuttled the agree-ment. When Bennett’s coalition came to power, the deal was expected to be revived, especially because there are no haredi Orthodox parties in the current coalition.

But Bennett and Religious Affairs Minister Motti Kahana have decided not

to implement the compromise.

According to a December report in Israeli news site Zman, Kahana chalked the decision up to “incitement and ha-tred, especially by people from Likud, who are latching onto it.” Kahana was referring to violent protests at the West-ern Wall in November the start of the new month, when hundreds of mostly haredi Orthodox men protested and at-tempted to block activists with Women of the Wall, a group that advocates for women to be allowed to read from the Torah at the wall, from conducting ser-vices.

Calls to protest Women of the Wall were shared by several right-wing Is-raeli politicians, including Netanyahu, currently the head of the opposition in the Israeli Knesset, or parliament, and members of his Likud party.

In his interview with the Jerusalem Post, Bennett said his government could not act on the compromise due to lack of consensus on the issue within the co-alition.

“Not all of our dreams will come true in this government,” Bennett said.

The statement from the American Conservative leaders, which included heads of essentially all of Conservative Jewish organizations, said they “feel be-trayed.”

“It is unconscionable that Prime Min-ister Bennett has shelved these plans in light of the fact that alongside a major-ity of ministers and MKs in the present government who concur with the imple-mentation, the majority of Israelis also believes that there should be free access for all Jews to pray according to their custom at the Western Wall. It is incon-ceivable that the government of Israel should continue to prevent freedom of prayer and equal rights to all Jews,” they said. **HW**

## Police Question Suspect Following Series of Anti-Semitic Crimes in Chicago

(JNS) – Chicago police have arrested a person of interest who is being ques-tioned in connection with a string of anti-Semitic crimes that took place last weekend in the West Rogers Park neigh-borhood, reported COLlive.

Last Saturday morning, Kol Tuv Kosher Foods, Tel Aviv Bakery and a synagogue all had their windows broken. Also, a yellow swastika was spray-painted on the wall of the FREE of Chicago – The Bellows Center, a Chabad center that distributes food packages. Anti-Semitic vandalism also took place at the Hanna Sacks Bais Yaa-kov High School.

Last Sunday, a Jewish man was “ver-bally assaulted” nearby the Chabad center, said investigators cited by The

Chicago Tribune. Other areas in the community, including bridge overpass-es, also had yellow swastikas drawn on them, according to Carmi Lawrence, di-rector of Community Safety and Secu-rity for the Concerned Citizens League.

“Make no mistake: This attack, as well as the deep hatred and bigotry that drives other anti-Semitic acts like it, is an attack on our city’s Jewish commu-nity and social fabric,” Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said in a statement last Monday. “Those responsible must be held accountable.”

The Anti-Defamation League Mid-west said in a statement that it is “alarmed” by the incidents and is work-ing with law enforcement to investigate the crimes. **HW**

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# We Will Not Accept Converts Under New Reform,' Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Warns



**Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef speaks at a swearing-in ceremony for the Rabbinat Council at the President's Residence in Jerusalem, on Oct. 24, 2018. Credit: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90.**

**By Hanan Greenwood**

(Israel Hayom via JNS) – Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef harshly criticized Religious Services Minister Matan Kahana last Tuesday for spearheading conversion and kashrut reforms Yosef claims go against Jewish law.

Speaking at a massive rabbinical gathering, Yosef accused Kahana of "heeding the advice of uninfluential rabbis who confuse him" instead of consulting with "great rabbis."

"Rabbis that he consults with say it's enough for the conversion process to be traditional, which goes against the Torah and halacha [Jewish law]. My father [the late Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef] would have been horrified by such opinions, and I am certain that if Abraham Isaac Kook was with us today, he too would cry out against" this, he said.

"Any convert who does not accept upon himself the commandments, we will not accept him ... We call on the religious services minister to not heed

the uninfluential rabbis, to wake up. You have already ruined kashrut, do you also want to ruin the conversion system? Repent."

Speaking at the same event, Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi David Lau said, "The Torah has given us definitive laws which we will not change," stressing that if improvements need to be made, they must be done in a way that does not negate the Torah.

Knesset member Yulia Malinovsky (Yisrael Beiteinu), who has sponsored the conversion legislation, said in response, "If the rabbis who attack the reform care about the conversion mechanism, and truly care about the State of Israel rather than control, power, or money, then I am open to dialogue and ready to attend any meeting. However, if the goal is to undermine state institutions then we will make sure that they will return to their ivory tower soon."

*This article first appeared in Israel Hayom. HW*

# In Wake of Amnesty 'Apartheid' Report, Palestinians Urge UN to Sanction Israel



**Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas heads for a meeting of the P.A. leadership in Ramallah. May 7, 2020. Credit: Flash90.**

**By Shahar Klaiman**

(Israel Hayom via JNS) – The Palestinian Authority last Tuesday night welcomed the newly released report by Amnesty International accusing Israel of apartheid, and urged the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council to impose sanctions on the Jewish state. The P.A. also called on the International Criminal Court at The Hague to launch an investigation into Israel's "crime against humanity of apartheid without delay."

The P.A. Foreign Ministry said in a statement that "Amnesty International joins a long list of distinguished Palestinian, Israeli and international human

rights organizations and experts in exposing Israel's colonial occupation for what it is: an institutionalized system of oppression and domination over the Palestinian people, designed to legitimize its colonial settlement expansion, deny the Palestinian people their inalienable right to self-determination, and erase Palestinian history, present, and future in their homeland."

It described the report as "a detailed affirmation of the cruel reality of entrenched racism, exclusion, oppression, colonialism, apartheid and attempted erasure that the Palestinian people have endured since the [1948] nakba ['catastrophe']."

The Palestinians will continue to "exercise their legitimate right to oppose and resist all forms of occupation, colonization, dehumanization, racism, and apartheid until they achieve justice and realize their rights to self-determination, return, freedom and independence," the statement said.

Following the release of the Amnesty report, the second by an international rights group in less than a year to accuse it of pursuing a policy of apartheid, Israel said it "consolidates and recycles lies" from hate groups and was designed to "pour fuel onto the fire of anti-Semitism."

*This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in Israel Hayom. HW*

# Nazis Rally in Orlando and Vandalism Reported at Chicago Synagogue as American Jews Remain on High Alert



**Neo-Nazis rally in Orlando, Fla. on Jan. 29, 2022.**

**Credit: Stop Antisemitism via Twitter**

**By Shira Hanau**

(JTA) – In Orlando, neo-Nazis yelled antisemitic slurs from a highway overpass. In Chicago, a Jewish school and a synagogue were vandalized. In Washington, D.C., a man was arrested and charged with spray painting swastikas on a train station.

The turbulent weekend – which also included a rally in Ottawa against COVID-19 vaccine mandates that featured swastikas – comes just a few weeks after the hostage situation at a Texas synagogue left American Jews feeling vulnerable in their synagogues.

A video of the Orlando rally that spread on social media last Monday showed protesters standing on a highway overpass in front of banners of swastikas. One audibly yells "Heil Hitler."

The Orlando Sentinel reported that the group shouted other antisemitic slurs, and an array of Florida officials, including Republican Sen. Rick Scott and Democratic House Rep. Val Demings, condemned the gathering.

The highway overpass location resembled similar demonstrations in Austin, Texas, in October in which a group called the Goyim Defense League hung a sign that said "Vax the Jews" from an overpass.

Last Sunday afternoon, a Jewish school and synagogue in Chicago's West Ridge neighborhood were vandalized. Graffiti was sprayed on the F.R.E.E. Synagogue, and a window was smashed at Yeshivas Meor Hatorah Of Chicago, where a cargo container was also painted on. The suspect also apparently tackled someone to the ground before running away, according to the local ABC news station.

Debra Silverstein, a local alderman whose office is located next to the synagogue, said police were still investigating the incidents. "No official pronouncement has been made on a possible motive, but these have all the hallmarks of hate-based crimes," she said.

In Washington, D.C., police arrested a 34-year-old man named Geraldo Pando who was suspected of spray painting several swastikas around the entrance to Union Station, an Amtrak station near Capitol Hill, early last Friday morning. Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser responded to the incident in a tweet.

"This symbol of hate displayed in our city is both shocking and unsettling, particularly on the heels of International Holocaust Remembrance Day," she wrote. HW

# Florida Gov. Desantis Won't Condemn Nazi Rally in Orlando



**Ron DeSantis Jan. 9, 2019.**

**Credit: Joe Raedle/Getty Images**

**By Shira Hanau**

(JTA) – Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has refused to condemn a Nazi rally that took place in Orlando over the weekend, claiming that those asking him to condemn the Nazi rally are trying to "smear" him.

A video of the Orlando rally that spread on social media last Monday showed protesters standing on a highway overpass in front of banners of swastikas. The Orlando Sentinel reported that the group shouted antisemitic slurs, and an array of bipartisan Florida politicians, including Republican Sen. Rick Scott and Democratic House Rep. Val Demings, condemned the gathering.

But DeSantis claimed those asking him to condemn the Nazis tried to "use this as some type of political issue," according to CNN. "We're not playing their game," he added.

Among those calling on DeSantis to condemn the Nazi rally was the An-

ti-Defamation League's Florida office.

"We expect any public official, especially a voice for @GovRonDeSantis, to address the fears of the Jewish community thoughtfully – not with this troubling and careless approach," the branch said in a tweet last Monday.

Nikki Fried, Florida's Jewish agriculture commissioner running for governor as a Democrat, said she was "horrified but not surprised" at DeSantis' lack of condemnation. She recently compared DeSantis to Hitler.

The ADL tweet, and other calls for DeSantis to speak out against the rally, came after the governor's spokesperson Christina Pushaw asked in a tweet that she later deleted whether the rallies might have simply been in disguise.

"Do we even know they're Nazis? I trust Florida law enforcement to investigate and am awaiting their conclusions," she said in a tweet that she later deleted, CNN reported.

The Orlando rally was one of several antisemitic incidents to unfold over the weekend across North America, just a few weeks after the hostage attack on a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas. A Jewish school and a synagogue in Chicago were vandalized and swastikas were painted on a train station in Washington, D.C. A rally in Ottawa against COVID-19 vaccine mandates also featured swastikas. HW

# The Great Resignation is Fueling a Rabbinic Hiring Crisis



**Rabbis are leaving their jobs in unusually large numbers as the pandemic enters its third year. Credit: Getty Images**

**By Asaf Shalev**

(JTA) – In early December, Judaism’s Conservative movement sent a disquieting message to dozens of synagogues looking for a new rabbi: Many of you won’t make a hire this year.

At least 80 Conservative synagogues anticipated rabbi vacancies – approximately one of every seven affiliated with the movement, the email said. At most, 50 to 60 rabbis would be looking for new jobs.

“We are not presenting this information to alarm, but rather to help you prepare for and navigate the challenges of this search season,” said the email, which was signed by the “career search team” of the Rabbinical Assembly, the Conservative movement’s rabbis association, and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the group that represents its nearly 600 congregations.

That email outlined a number of strategies that synagogues, rabbi applicants and movement organizations could adopt to mitigate the challenging job market. But last week, a new message indicated strongly that the mismatch remains acute.

Starting Feb. 1, the new letter said, the Conservative movement is suspending many of the rules that are meant to ensure that Conservative synagogues hire only rabbis trained at the movement’s seminaries or who have otherwise applied for and won admission to the Rabbinical Assembly.

Those rules are relaxed late in the hiring season in a typical year, but the accelerated timeline represents a concession that the movement, which has been shrinking for decades, is not fully situated to meet the needs of its congregations right now.

“We understand that this decision will be received with mixed emotions,” the latest email said. “This is yet another challenging year both in general, and for rabbinic search specifically.”

A confluence of factors has led to this year’s tight rabbinical labor market. But one of them seems to be that the Great Resignation – a mass wave of resignations across the United States triggered during the COVID-19 pandemic – has come for the rabbinate, with potentially major implications for American Jewish communities.

In what appears to be a blip, the first year of the pandemic saw fewer retire-

ments of baby-boomer-aged rabbis. Rabbi Ilana Garber, the Rabbinical Assembly’s director of global rabbinical development, calls these rabbis “kind souls” who stayed because it was the right thing to do for their congregation during a time of crisis.

This year, there’s a bumper crop of retirements, while a thinning out of the next generation that was already underway continues. Denominational seminaries are ordaining fewer clergy, and fewer of those being ordained are choosing to assume the pulpit.

Another dynamic has emerged as the pandemic has worn on: More rabbis are choosing to retire early. And a significant number of rabbis have decided to leave their congregational jobs mid-career, many times with no intention of serving in another pulpit again.

Some of them, in keeping with one theme of the Great Resignation, say they are no longer willing to tolerate unpleasant working conditions. One rabbi told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that “an atmosphere that stifles innovation, enthusiasm and initiative” and the “soul-crushing” experience of low participation in Shabbat and holiday observance in his community drove his decision to leave his synagogue.

Elsewhere, rabbis are seeking to capitalize on the growth of non-traditional work opportunities. One Conservative rabbi who had worked in a Long Island synagogue for eight years decided to leave to launch a consulting firm. Rabbis with more than a decade leading synagogues in New England and Minneapolis announced to their communities that they would leave their roles but remain in the area. And other rabbis told their congregations that they wanted to explore rabbinic work outside of the pulpit.

“Many rabbis have been working tirelessly through the pandemic and are seeking a position with life-work harmony,” the December letter cautioned synagogues. “Make sure to communicate your congregation’s needs, while also understanding the burnout pervading the entire workplace in 2021, rabbinic and otherwise.”

To rabbis on the job market, they wrote, “please communicate from the outset the time off and mental health support you require to perform your best

work for your future community.”

Garber said she understands rabbinic burnout well. After all, she was experiencing it herself when she left the West Hartford, Connecticut, synagogue where she worked for 15 years shortly before the pandemic to take the Rabbinical Assembly role.

She said she was missing simple things, such as sitting next to her family during services. But she also found that what had drawn her to the rabbinate – the responsibility of supporting Jews at their most vulnerable moments – was working against her.

“After a while, if you don’t take care of yourself, each of those vulnerable moments can chip away at you to the point where you’re just going through the motions and you’re broken,” she said.

The pandemic has exacerbated issues of work-life balance for many people. Rabbis, like others across many fields, have taught and counseled via Zoom from their own homes, eroding boundaries that can be tenuous in the best of circumstances. Many have done so with small children at times attending virtual school from adjacent rooms.

Meanwhile, their roles expanded to include becoming health care consultants, responsible for keeping their communities safe from COVID-19, while the in-person gatherings that are the heart of rabbinic leadership have been constrained. More recently, the hostage crisis at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, offered a stark reminder that being a rabbi can entail physical risk as well.

“Can I continue doing this for 20 more years?” If you knew how many good, fulfilled rabbis are asking this question in their souls, with their spouse or partner, and to one another, you would sense that seismic shockwave that potentially faces us,” Rabbi Lewis Kamrass wrote in eJewish Philanthropy in October. “It could even be going on within your own congregation or organization.”

Kamrass is president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents 2,200 rabbis in the Reform movement, American Jewry’s largest denomination. Reform synagogues are also seeing an increased number of openings because of a surge in retirements this year, according to Rabbi Janet Offel, the director of consulting and transition management at the Union for Reform Judaism.

But it is within the Conservative movement where concern is sharpest. The Conservative synagogues hiring this year represent a broad cross-section of the movement, which is home to about 17% of American Jews, according to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center.

Some are growing and adding a second rabbi. Many are in regions that are attractive to Conservative rabbis because they offer Jewish day schools and kosher dining options.

But even some synagogues in major metropolitan areas appear to be struggling to find suitable candidates: A Conservative congregation in Montreal took the unusual step of buying a quarter-page ad in the Jerusalem Post this

week to alert its readers that it is seeking a full-time senior rabbi.

Synagogues in areas with dwindling Jewish populations, where few amenities of Jewish life are likely to be present for rabbis and their families, may be having even more trouble drumming up rabbinical candidates. One synagogue in Kalamazoo, Michigan, told its congregants earlier this month that not a single application had come through the Conservative movement hiring system.

In more isolated communities, going without a rabbi could be a blow to organized Jewish life. And hiring a rabbi from outside the Conservative movement could change a synagogue community’s character – a reality that the most recent letter from the movement groups suggested guarding against.

“Please remember that non-RA rabbis may have a wide range of attitudes towards halakhah,” or Jewish law, which the Conservative movement prioritizes more highly than other non-Orthodox denominations, the latest letter to synagogues said. “We urge you to ask questions about their policies to be sure that the rabbi’s views are consistent with Conservative Judaism and your community’s values and priorities.”

Within the movement, officials expect a substantial number of synagogues to end the hiring season without a new rabbi under contract. Their concern is so acute that a team of 25 leaders has convened to discuss a looming questions: If synagogues can’t be reasonably assured of rabbis from within the movement, why should they continue to pay dues to belong to it?

“About a month ago we started really having some serious conversations about this when the numbers made clear to us that this was going to be something we needed to address for this year,” Garber said. “We do very much believe in the movement and that we need to strengthen this movement and answer the questions of why should I affiliate with this movement?”

Part of the answer could come with how the Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, which effectively merged in 2020, handle synagogues that end up without rabbis. The December letter outlined a range of possibilities, including creating a “cadre of transitional rabbis” to hold positions for a short time; initiating rabbi-sharing and other “outside the box” staff structures; and launching virtual programs “to ease the pressure on clergy.”

Garber said the task force – which includes representatives from the movement groups; deans from the Jewish Theological Seminary and American Jewish University, the movement’s two seminaries; and rabbis and cantors from various synagogues – had alighted on a plan. She declined to share details but said “an exciting opportunity” will come into play when, in not too long, the search process is resolved and the synagogues without rabbis seek help.

“Then they come to us and say, ‘nu?’” she said. “And we’ll say, all right, we’ve got some options for you.” **HW**

## New York Launches Contest for Israeli Startups to Tackle Clean-Energy Challenge

(JNS) – New York is holding a competition for Israeli startup technology companies to help solve the state’s utility challenges as it works to transform itself into a fully clean-energy user.

“New York and Israel have a long history of collaboration and a common interest in developing new clean-energy solutions that will address climate change and mutually benefit our power systems,” said New York Gov. Kathy

Hochul. “The Smart Energy Challenge will give small startup firms the opportunity to work with a large utility and allow New York State to maintain its lead as an innovator as it moves aggressively towards a 100 percent zero-emission electric grid by 2040.”

The New York Power Authority and Israel Smart Energy Challenge will award the winning company \$1 million to collaborate with the power authority

on smart-energy projects. Applications are being accepted through early April; the winner is expected to be announced in June.

A similar contest was held last year with the Tel Aviv-based Prisma Photonics emerging victorious for its “real-time transmission line issue detection system.”

This year’s focus is on, among other things, the next generation of electric-vehicle charging, artificial intelli-

gence, energy storage and more.

Israel Consul General in New York Asaf Zamir said the Jewish state “is internationally recognized as a high-tech center powered by cutting-edge innovation, and the ideas of Israeli entrepreneurs and companies with ‘can do’ attitudes. We share many of the same goals and values as New York State when it comes to addressing climate change and promoting green energy.” **HW**

## Top Senate Foreign Relations Democrat Robert Menendez Signals Trouble for Biden’s Iran Plans



**Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.) chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee speaks during a hearing on Capitol Hill, Dec. 8, 2021. Credit: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images**

**By Ron Kampeas**

WASHINGTON (JTA) – Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., launched a lacerating expression of no confidence in the Biden administration’s efforts to reenter the Iran nuclear deal, a sign that Congress will make what has been a rocky road even rockier.

“At this point, we seriously have to ask what exactly are we trying to salvage?” said Menendez, speaking last Tuesday evening on the Senate floor.

Menendez is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and will have the power to exact considerable oversight over the reentry of the United States into the deal, which trades sanctions relief for Iran’s rollback of its nuclear program.

President Joe Biden wants to reenter the deal, brokered in 2015 by the Obama administration when he was vice president and squelched under Donald Trump, because he sees it as the most efficient means of keeping Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons power.

Menendez said he was optimistic at first about Biden’s plans to reenter the deal as long as Iran agreed to extend its nuclear enrichment rollback provisions and expand the deal to cover missile delivery systems.

However, Iran has proven recalcitrant especially since the election last year of a hard-line government under President Ebrahim Raisi, and Menendez wondered what the point was of continued negotiations to reenter the deal.

“I have yet to hear any parameters of ‘longer’ or ‘stronger’ terms or whether that is even a feasible prospect,” he said in an hour-long speech. “And even when it seemed a constructive agreement might be possible last summer, upon taking office, the Raisi government abandoned all previous under-

standings and, as I mentioned, made absolutely clear that Iran’s ballistic missiles and regional proxy networks are ‘not negotiable.’”

Menendez called on Biden to institute greater pressure on Iran, something the administration has been reluctant to do, fearing that will cut off any chance of reentering into the deal.

“These new efforts should include creative diplomatic initiatives, stricter sanctions enforcement, and a steely determination from Congress to back up President Biden’s declaration that Iran will ‘never get a nuclear weapon on my watch,’” he said.

The American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, wary of Biden reentering a deal that it opposed in 2015, retweeted a video of Menendez’s speech, calling it an “important statement.”

Critics of the speech included NIAC Action, a group representing Iranian Americans who seek to deescalate tensions between Iran and the United States. Menendez has “been dangerously out of touch on Iran for years, and has never proposed a viable alternative that could do a tenth of what the JCPOA achieved,” wrote Ryan Costello, NIAC’s policy director, using an acronym for the deal.

Trump pulled out of the deal in 2018, reinstituting sanctions suspended during the deal and adding many more. In retaliation, Iran stopped complying with components of the deal and stepped up its enrichment of nuclear fissile material. It is now close to weaponization levels.

Menendez was among a handful of Democrats who opposed the 2015 deal, but who also opposed Trump’s 2018 withdrawal, saying it would make matters worse. [HW](#)

## Israel-Bahraini Military Ties are Strengthening, Says U.S. Commander

(JNS) – Military ties between Israel and Bahrain are strengthening, and naval cooperation between regional countries under American leadership is one of the largest of its kind in the world, a senior American naval commander has told Makor Rishon.

In a report published last Thursday, Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of the U.S. Naval Forces in Central Command, said the importance of the presence of the United States Fifth Fleet in Bahrain lies in strengthening military ties between Israel and Bahrain.

Cooper noted that the signing of the Abraham Accords and the transfer of Israel into the U.S. military’s CENTCOM

(Central Command, responsible for the Middle East) area of responsibility, away from EUCOM, are two new factors that can be used to further strengthen regional naval security.

Last Wednesday, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz landed in Manama, Bahrain, for the first official visit by the head of Israel’s defense establishment to the Gulf country.

Gantz was joined on the trip by senior Israeli military officials, including Commander of the Israeli Navy Vice Adm. David Saar Salama; Military Secretary to the Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Yaki Dolf; and Zohar Palti, director of the policy and political-military bureau. [HW](#)

### OBITUARIES



**Robert E. Harmel**

Robert Earl Harmel, age 75, passed away surrounded by family on January 29, 2022, at the Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab, in Memphis, Tenn.

Robert, affectionately known as Bob or B.O.B by his friends at Belmont Village, was born in San Antonio, Texas. Shortly after he was born, his parents, Albert and Jane Harmel, both from Youngstown, Ohio, moved the family to Memphis with Bob and his older sister and brother where they all grew up and chose to make their home.

Bob graduated from East High School and earned his bachelor’s degree in planning and design from Memphis State University. His spent the earlier part of his career designing restaurants and other commercial properties in Atlanta and Memphis. He went on to spend the rest of his career as a planner and draftsman for the Memphis City School System,

including asbestos removal and remediation within the school system.

Upon his retirement, he spent time on his creative passions including continuing education, art, sketching, painting and photography, all of which he pursued and excelled at an exceptional level. He especially loved sharing and giving his artwork to his family, close friends and extended family at his retirement home at Belmont Village.

Bob lived his life with a continual passion for his work, the creative arts, a love of Memphis Tiger Basketball, Temple Israel and, most importantly, his beloved family.

He is survived by his brother, Paul Harmel, his sister, Lee Harmel Malkin, his two children, Benjamin Harmel of Dallas, Texas, and Emily Harmel Kass (Moshe) of Las Vegas, Nevada, his nieces and nephews in Memphis, Amy Malkin Filderman, Laura Malkin Tanenbaum (Alan) and Arthur Malkin (Andrea). He also thought the world of his four great-nieces and four great-nephews.

A private family funeral was held at the Temple Israel Cemetery on Tuesday, February 1, 2022.

Messages of condolence may be sent to the family at: [BobHarmelFamily@gmail.com](mailto:BobHarmelFamily@gmail.com).

The family welcomes donations to the Temple Israel (1376 E. Massey Rd., Memphis, TN 38120) as an expression of sympathy instead of flowers or food. [HW](#)

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## In HBO’s ‘And Just Like That’ Finale, a ‘They Mitzvah’ Challenges Jewish Traditions

By Philissa Cramer

*Spoiler alert: This story contains details from “Seeing the Light,” the season finale of HBO’s “And Just Like That,” which first aired Feb. 3, 2022.*

(JTA) – The previews for the season finale of “And Just Like That,” the “Sex and the City” reboot airing on HBO, suggested that viewers would get to see a “they mitzvah.”

And for most of the episode, which began streaming last Thursday, that’s exactly what seemed like was happening. Charlotte (Kristin Davis), who converted to Judaism in the original series, is busy arranging the details for a gender-neutral Jewish coming-of-age ritual for her younger child, who recently began using “they” pronouns.

The family’s approach is in line with how many Jews and Jewish communities are handling bar and bat mitzvah, the Jewish transition to adulthood that happens at age 13 (or 12 for girls in some communities). The name of the milestone is traditionally gendered, so boys become bar mitzvah and girls become bat mitzvah.

But as awareness and acceptance of gender identities beyond male and female have accelerated, many communities have sought to frame the milestone in an inclusive way. Some use the abbreviation “b mitzvah” for all children; others have held “b’nei mitzvah,” using a Hebrew plural word, for just one child. Using the pronoun adopted most widely by people who identify as nonbinary, Charlotte is planning a “they mitzvah” for Rock (Alexa Swinton).

Charlotte – a consummate traditionalist – and her Jewish husband, Harry, (Evan Handler) seem both delighted and disquieted by recasting the ritual for their child.

They buy up rainbow-themed kippahs and decorations for the party and hire a transgender rabbi (played by Jewish transgender actor Hari Nef) to work with Rock. “Who better to lead a ‘they’ mitzvah than a trans rabbi?” Charlotte exclaims. “It’s bashert [destiny]!”

But when their friend, Anthony, the proprietor of Hot Fellas Baked Goods, suggests going with sourdough challah loaves – “Behold! Chot-fellas challah,” he announces, with an exaggerated “ch” – Harry balks.

“It’s hipster challah,” he says. “We’re already pushing the envelope with this ‘they’ mitzvah. Can we please give the old Jew something they’ll recognize?”

Perhaps the most significant departure from the traditional bar or bat mitzvah is that the family appears not to belong to a synagogue at all. Instead, the Goldenblatts are seen working with freelance rabbis to plan an event on their own. This path is being taken by more and more families who want to mark their children’s maturity within the Jewish tradition but who, like the vast majority of Jewish adults in America, are not members of a particular synagogue.

The family also appears to be planning on an unusually condensed timeline. While children typically prepare for months or even years to read from the Torah for the first time, help lead services and give a speech to their community, Rock cycles through multiple rabbis just weeks before the planned ceremony.

Rabbi Jen, the transgender rabbi, takes aim at the timeline when she meets with Charlotte and Harry. “Great kid, totally unprepared, complete disaster,” she tells them about their child, who prefers to play video games than prepare. (This may be the most conventional aspect of the family’s experience.) She adds,

“Moving forward with the current plan is not realistic. They simply haven’t mastered the material.”

“But it’s next Saturday,” Charlotte says. “What do you suggest we do?”

The rabbi suggests that Rock reads only two lines from their Torah portion (“That would be upsetting,” Charlotte responds), or that Rock conducts the entire service in English.

“No, I did not convert to Judaism to have my child be they mitzvahed in English!” Charlotte yells.

In the end, the they mitzvah doesn’t happen – because as it turns out, gender is not the only identity that Rock is working through.

“I’m not doing it. I don’t believe in it,” Rock tells their parents, the guests already assembled in the ballroom where the they mitzvah is set to take place. (The party was filmed in the Prince George Ballroom, a rentable venue in Midtown Manhattan.)

“Believe in what?” Rock’s parents exhort, offering expensive gifts if only the day would move forward as planned.

“I don’t want to be labeled as anything. Not as a girl. Or a boy. Or Non-binary. A Jew. A Christian. Muslim. Or even” – and this prompts gasps – “a New Yorker!”

“So what, you’re nothing now?!” Charlotte asks.

Rock replies: “I’m only 13! Can’t I just be me?”

The outburst represents perhaps the most significant challenge to Jewish tradition in the episode. Even as the role of synagogues in American Jewish experience has evolved, and even as communities craft new ways to include children who do not identify as boys or girls, the age at which a Jewish child takes on adult responsibilities has remained un-

changed. In fact – as certain the mohel character on another TV show pointed out – becoming bar, bat or they mitzvah is automatic depending on a child’s age, not their preparation.

Charlotte doesn’t comment on this. Instead, she laments, “I’ve failed as a mom and I’ve failed as a Jew.” The show is about female friendship, but Charlotte’s longest and more durable friends, absorbed with their own issues, don’t counsel her in the moment. Instead, it’s a newer friend who urges her to stop chastising herself and think about what she really wants to have happen.

“This is not over!” Charlotte announces with fierce determination. “There are 300 people, 130 challahs, a rainbow chai and a trans rabbi. I did not come all this way and do all this work to have it end like this. Someone is going out there and getting they mitzvahed, today!”

But there is no coercion for Rock. Instead, the episode cuts to Charlotte completing the blessing said after reading from the Torah, draped in a tallit and beaming beside Rabbi Jen. The assembled crowd chants, “Amen.”

Carrie (Jewish actor Sarah Jessica Parker) leans over to Miranda (Cynthia Nixon) and, with a whisper, clarifies the situation: It is Charlotte, and not Rock, who has marked a milestone today. “Our little girl is a woman now,” she quips.

“Harry, now that Charlotte has become a bat mitzvah, please come and join us on the bimah,” the rabbi says. “And if anyone else from the family would like to come join us for this next blessing, they are more than welcome.”

The couple’s older daughter jumps to her feet, but Rock moves more slowly. Then, as a clarinetist plays “Oseh Shalom,” they, too, join the family behind the Torah. [HW](#)

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