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Memphis Jewish Federation’s Reunion 2022 Draws Huge Crowd for Pre-Thanksgiving Young Adult Premiere Event



Event Chairs Andrea Cohen, Stephanie Saslawsky, Joel Saslawsky, Kayla Klazmer, Marissa Magdovitz, Andrew Magdovitz (not pictured Ted Cohen) served as Event Chairs for Memphis Jewish Federation’s Reunion, a premiere event for Jewish young adults. Conceived as a hub for young adults to gather with their old Memphis crew over the holiday, Reunion was also designed as a fundraiser, bringing a new generation of donors into Federation’s Annual Community Campaign.

More than 150 young Jewish adults gathered the Wednesday before Thanksgiving for Memphis Jewish Federation’s first annual Reunion, a pre-holiday bash for locals, ex-pats, and out-of-town guests. The Old Dominick Distillery in downtown Memphis was the perfect setting for this rowdy bunch, who were so excited to reunite that their catch-up conversations crowded out the pumping

bass of the music. “This is exactly why we moved back to Memphis,” said Evan Sander, who served as a member of the event’s Host Committee with his wife, Rachel. “It was a blast being able to reunite with Memphis Jews of all age groups,” said Sarah Alpert, also a member of the Host Committee. “It can be hard to find time to see everyone you want to during

a short holiday break, so it was awesome to all be together in one place.” Federation’s Director of Development Judy Lansky conceived Reunion 2022 to fill a void; she wanted Jewish young adults in Memphis to have a dedicated space to get together before the traditionally family-oriented holiday while those who live elsewhere were back in town and locals were enjoying their time off. While organic gatherings often pop-up at old haunts like the Young Avenue Deli or Earnestine &

Hazels, Judy visualized one central hub with an open invitation to all in the 21-45 age span, a homecoming party where old friendships could be rekindled and new connections made, all woven together with colorfully diverse, but distinctively Jewish, thread. The event was also designed as a fundraiser, bringing a new generation of donors into Federation’s Annual Community Campaign. A portion of each ticket sale went directly

(See **Reunion** Page 3)



Attendees of Memphis Jewish Federation’s Reunion premiere event for young adults partied together into the wee hours the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving, at the Old Dominick Distillery in downtown Memphis. More than 150 21-45-year-olds gathered with old friends while making new ones at the Jewish Memphis homecoming party. A portion of each ticket sale went directly to Federation’s 2023 Annual Community Campaign.

Walmart Pulls \$40 ‘Elegant Sunscreen Scarves’ That Were Actually Jewish Prayer Shawls for Christians

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) – “Why wear a tallis to shul when you can wear a very real product from Walmart?” Ilan Kogan, an Orthodox rabbinical student, asked on TikTok late last Monday. Kogan was talking about “Elegant Sunscreen Scarves Sun Block Shawl Scarf Beach Shawl Towel Clothing Accessories for Women Judaism (Blue),” the search engine-optimized title for

a product that looked a lot like a tallit, the shawl worn by Jews during morning prayers. His post was one of several to call attention to the product listed on Walmart’s website, with reactions ranging from curiosity (“I have so many questions,” tweeted Atlantic columnist Yair Rosenberg) to outrage (from the watchdog group Stop Antisemitism).

By last Tuesday afternoon, Walmart had removed the item, which had been listed for \$40.99, as well as a second with a similar name from a different seller that had been available for the cut-rate price of \$14.49. “Walmart has a robust trust and safety program, which actively works to prevent items such as these from being sold on the site,” a spokesperson told

the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. “After reviewing, these items have been removed.” Like other products that have drawn criticism from Jewish consumers – such as “Schindler’s List” leggings printed with scenes from the iconic Holocaust film – the “elegant sunscreen scarves”

(See **Walmart** Page 2)

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Beth Sholom to Welcome the Jewish and Social Ethics Scholar Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz as Scholar in Residence on Dec. 9-10



Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz is “a model to watch of how Judaism can be a force for good in this world,” says Rabbi Sarit Horwitz of Beth Sholom.

Rabbi Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, named twice by *Newsweek* as one of America’s Top Rabbis and included on *The Forward’s* list of the 50 Most Inspiring Rabbis in America, will spend Shabbat, December 9 and 10, as a Scholar in Residence at Beth Sholom Synagogue. The shul invites the community to study with this brilliant and dynamic scholar, whom many regard as a pillar of ethical renewal and social justice within the American Jewish community.

“Rabbi Shmuly is an amazing teacher who shows that the primary thrust of Jewish thinking is our ethical tradition of giving and our responsibility to the other. He urges us to act on these ideals to help the many vulnerable people, children, and animals in this world,” said Susan Moinester, who is co-chairing the weekend with Dana Bernstein. “He inspires us to discover our unique way to fulfill the mitzvah of tikkun olam, to make the world a better place.”

A Modern Orthodox rabbi, Rabbi Shmuly is the president and dean of Valley Beit Midrash, a global center for learning and action, based in Scottsdale, Ariz. Among many other credentials, Rabbi Shmuly is a founder of YATOM: The Jewish Foster & Adoption Network, and he is the president of Shamayim, a Jewish Animal Advocacy nonprofit organization. He founded Uri L’Tzedek (“awaken to justice”), an Orthodox social justice organization that believes that “viewing the world through a Torah lens means we have a social responsibility toward humanitarian issues.”

“I am thrilled that our shul will have the special opportunity to spend so much time with Rabbi Shmuly,” said Rabbi Sarit Horwitz, the spiritual leader of Beth Sholom Synagogue. “When Rabbi Shmuly and I lived in New York at the same time during our rabbinical training, he was such a mover and shaker, really *the* person to watch as a model of how Judaism can be a force for good in this world. His work is such an inspiration, and I know that we will come out of the weekend renewed and energized to engage in our own social justice work.”

Rabbi Shmuly will address the following topics during the Scholar-in-Residence weekend.

- “Transforming the World from the Inside-Out,” Friday night Dec. 9, following Kabbalat Shabbat services and dinner. (Registration is required.)
- “How to See the Invisible Right Before Our Eyes: A Mystical Approach to Ethics,” a drash during Saturday morning Shabbat services Dec. 10.
- “Judaism as a Call to Social Action: Developing Our Unique Moral Voice,” an interactive Shabbat lunch and learn program during Kiddush.
- “Tales from an Activist,” Saturday evening, Dec. 10 following a light bite and Havdallah. (Registration is required.)

A prolific author, Rabbi Shmuly has 20 books to his credit and his articles have been published in *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Medium*, the *Atlantic* and other media outlets. He earned a bachelor’s degree in business,

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12/8/2022



Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. December 9, 2022 / 15 Kislev, 5783.....4:30 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. December 10, 2022 / 16 Kislev, 5783..... 5:30 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Vayishlach

politics & communications at the University of Texas at Austin; a master’s degree in leadership & moral development at Harvard University; a master’s degree in Jewish philosophy from Yeshiva University; and a doctorate degree in psychology (epistemology & moral development) from Columbia University. He was ordained as a Modern Orthodox rabbi by Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School.

For more information, visit bsholom.org. **HW**

Walmart...

(Continued From Page 1)
reflect the oddities of contemporary merchandising.

In this case, the products were sold by third-party vendors using Walmart’s online marketplace, where shoppers can browse up to 60 million items. Those products are not subject to the same practices as those that Walmart sells directly, and many of them have names that are more a list of keywords than an accurate description of what a customer might receive.

Additionally, the tallit for sale were not actually intended for use by Jews. The printed Bible verses on the corners and the fish imagery visible in some of the product photos are giveaways that the items are made for Messianic Jews, who pray using the trappings of Jewish tradition while also believing in the divinity of Jesus.

Messianics and others who appropriate Jewish practices, including, increasingly, right-wing Christian activists, represent a growing market for ritual items. A search for “tallit” returned 286 items on Walmart’s website last Tuesday afternoon; some were clearly marked as Messianic but many others lacked language indicating that they are not traditional Jewish ritual items. **HW**

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The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

Lunch is Monday–Friday at 11:30 a.m. All programs start at 12:15 p.m.

Monday December 12
Field Trip to Crosstown Concourse.
Early in the morning on August 27, 1927, a skyscraper, 10 stories tall and the size of a 15-acre farm, was unveiled to the public. Sears Crosstown, the latest structure in the Sears mail-order empire, was a new regional distribution center that anticipated the advent of Memphis as the nation’s distribution center.

...the store closed around 1993. Then, in the second decade of the new century, an eclectic group emerged that shared a vision for Sears Crosstown: that Sears Crosstown could be resurrected as a vertical urban village populated by a wide range of diverse people coming to take part in the community.

That vision would become a reality as Crosstown Concourse opened in August 2017, 90 years after the opening of the original building. What was once a national hub for the distribution of goods was on its way to being transformed into a local heart for the cultivation of well-being, shifting focus from products to people, from commodity to quality of life.

The group will tour different parts of the building ending with FREE ice cream or coffee! Reservations can be made by calling the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810. Reservations are limited to 14 People. The Bus will leave the MJCC at 12:15 p.m. and return by 3 p.m.

Wednesday December 14
Speaker Rabbi Abe Schacter-Gampel, will give one of his interesting talks on the subject, “Chanukah, From Darkness to Light!”
Rabbi Abe, Director of The Center for Jewish Living and Learning at the MJCC, is one of the most requested speakers in the senior programs. Please come join us at 12:15 p.m.

Monday December 19
Bluma Zuckerbrot-Finkelstein will discuss “The Role of Chanukah in Israeli Society!” This talk will focus on how Israelis look at this important holiday in the Jewish calendar. There may also be some special guests!! Reservations are not required!

Wednesday December 21 at 12 p.m.
The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Monthly Luncheon will feature entertainment from Lisa Nobumoto, jazz vocalist. Dive into the vibe of a refreshing hot multi-jazz vocalist Lisa Nobumoto – the new and inviting authentic be-bop, blues and ballads singer with adult contemporary jazz song highlights. Lisa exudes an inspiring, joyful and hope-filled sound full of an era mixed with past- and present-day nuances. A song stylist who delicately blends sensitive and assuring, dynamic and captivating music, she wows her audiences. Enjoy a catered kosher lunch and entertainment for only \$5! Music provided by Creative Aging. Reservations can be made by calling the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810.



Lisa Nobumoto

Join us Monday through Friday at 11:30 a.m. for a delicious kosher lunch from the kitchens at the Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required the day before by 1 p.m. and can be made by contacting Adult Services Coordinator Steve Kaplan at 901-259-9220 or stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org, or calling the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810. **HW**

Reunion... (Continued From Page 1)

to the 2023 Campaign, marking many attendees’ first experience in Jewish philanthropy.

“Jewish Memphians in my age group are scattered all over the country, but regardless of where we all live, Memphis will always be our community,” said Judy. “I just moved back here, and there is something so special about re-connecting with old friends and already have so many shared experiences. Also, like me, many locals who start their adult lives outside of Memphis make their way back before long, and Federation is uniquely positioned to bring these people together and bond the next generation of movers and shakers in this wonderful community.”

Attendee Steve Wolf, who moved to Memphis from Chicago and works as a consultant in the agricultural sector, attended the Bluff City Bash soon after becoming a Memphian. Over the din of Reunion, he mentioned the pandemic-induced lack of social opportunities for young adults to gather, and gratitude to Federation for hosting this year’s event.

“Most of the people I met at the Bash, I unfortunately never saw again,” said Steve. “I’m glad that we’re kind of re-kindling that type of thing with this event tonight. I look forward to meeting new people and seeing people that I’ve seen around as well. This is awesome.”

“Community members in my generation have many opportunities to get together, but Jewish young adults, our kids, need opportunities to define themselves as a generation of leaders,” said Laura Linder, president & CEO of Jewish Community Partners, which manages Memphis Jewish Federation. “The bonds that tie us together are formed at social events like Reunion, and as the hub of the Memphis Jewish community, Federation has the distinctive ability to pull people from every corner of the community together.” **HW**

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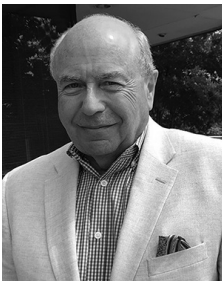


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UK Census: Less Than 50% Identify as Christians; Buddhists Overtake Jews

(JNS) – Less than half of the population in England and Wales identifies as Christian, according to census figures released last Tuesday.

The 10-year census conducted in 2021 revealed that the Muslim population was expanding quickly, while “no religion” was the second-most popular response behind Christian, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

The religion question was first included in the previous census, in 2001. It is still voluntary to respond, but according to the ONS, 94% did.

Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell, the second-most senior bishop of the Church of England, said it was no “great surprise” that the Christian population is in decline.

In England and Wales, 27.5 million persons, or 46.2% of the population, identified as Christian, a 13.1 percentage point decrease from 2011.

Muslims total 3.9 million people or 6.5% of the population, up from 4.9% previously, while “no religion” increased by 12 points to 37.2% or 22.2 million people.

Hindus (1 million) and Sikhs (524,000) were the next most prevalent responses, and the number of Buddhists surpassed Jews (273,000 to 271,000). **HW**

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Hereditary Cancers aren't Just a Women's Problem. Jewish Men Need to Take Precautions Too.



Ashkenazi men can carry harmful mutations of the BRCA gene, putting them at elevated risk not only of breast cancer, but also of melanoma and prostate, ovarian and pancreatic cancer. Yet there are precautions they can take to minimize their risks. Credit: Thomas Barwick / Getty Images

By Larry Luxner

Bill Harris, a veteran Los Angeles photojournalist, didn't think much of it when one morning in 2012 he woke up and found a tiny blood spot on the T-shirt he'd slept in. The next morning, he found blood in the same place on his chest – and went straight to his computer.

“Online, I could find only three things that would cause a man's nipple to discharge blood: being an avid runner, which I wasn't; having a subtropical fungus, which I didn't; and breast cancer,” he said. “That was a pretty big shock.”

Harris, then just a few weeks shy of his 61st birthday, immediately called his doctor, who ordered a mammogram and ultrasound. They confirmed a cancerous growth in his right breast. Ten days later, a biopsy came back positive. The next month Harris got a right mastectomy, followed by the removal of his left breast half a year later.

“I walked into a woman's imaging center and had to get into a pink paper robe,” he recalled. “All the women in the waiting room were staring at me.”

Like many other Ashkenazi men, Harris never had considered that he might have been born with a harmful mutation of the BRCA gene, which elevates the risk not only of breast cancer, but also

of melanoma and prostate, ovarian and pancreatic cancer.

“Hundreds of other mutations in the BRCA gene are just as dangerous, but they're not specific to Ashkenazim,” said Dr. Robert Sidlow, director of the Male BRCA Genetic Risk Program at New York's Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. About 1 in 40 Ashkenazi Jews (those of Eastern European descent) carries the harmful mutation, compared to about 1 in 400 in the general population.

“The vast majority of patients I see are relatives of women who have breast or ovarian cancer and then get tested,” he said. Of BRCA mutation carriers, Sidlow added, “Most men are pretty happy to enroll in some kind of surveillance program once they get over the initial shock.”

Sidlow is on the Men's Leadership Council at Sharsheret, the national Jewish nonprofit organization that educates the community about cancer risks and supports those with breast cancer and ovarian cancer.

Elana Silber, CEO of Sharsheret (Hebrew for “chain”), says it's crucial that men with a family history of cancer undergo genetic counseling screening for BRCA and other hereditary cancer mutations.

Genetic testing is possible via a standard blood or saliva sample.

While Sharsheret is primarily considered a women's organization, it was using November – nicknamed Movember for its focus on men's health – for an awareness campaign focused on Jewish men's cancer risks.

“This is not only a women's issue,” Silber said. “Family history is so important. When a man shares his family history with his doctor, he may not realize that he should mention that his mother had breast cancer or that his sister had ovarian cancer, as these are not generally ‘men's diseases.’ They are not aware that these cancers could mean that they themselves are at increased risk for cancer and that they can pass on these mutations to the next generation – their daughters and their sons.”

If someone discovers he (or she) is a carrier of one of the genetic mutations with elevated cancer risks – not just BRCA but also such mutations as ATM, TP53, CHEK2, and PALB2 – there are various precautions they can take for themselves and their children. They can monitor their own health more closely, they can encourage their children to test to see if they are carriers and, for any future children, take steps to prevent the mutated genes from being passed down.

For example, couples can conceive via in vitro fertilization, or IVF, and then test the embryos before implantation to ensure that only those unaffected by the genetic mutation are implanted.

While most women are aware of the risks of breast cancer, men generally are not – even though the disease strikes 2,500 men in the U.S. every year and kills about 500 of them, according to Sidlow. About 1-2% of men with the BRCA1 mutation and 6-7% of men with the BRCA2 mutation will develop cancer by age 80.

“This is why we recommend periodic mammograms starting at about age 50 for men who carry a BRCA2 mutation,” Sidlow said. “We like to educate these men on how to check their chests once a month and have a clinician do a breast checkup on them once a year.”

Since the BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations also make prostate cancer more

likely, men with either mutation should get PSA (prostate-specific antigen) levels in their blood tested annually beginning at age 40, rather than 50, the age at which screening generally begins, Sidlow said.

Sharsheret has been promoting the importance of learning one's family history, genetic counseling and screening among both men and women. The 20-year-old organization also runs various peer support networks, offers financial assistance to cancer patients, provides mental health counseling and guidance to patients, caregivers, and their friends, and seeks to educate the broader Jewish community about cancer risks and support.

Peggy Cottrell, a certified genetic counselor at Sharsheret, said men in general are more reluctant to get regular checkups than women.

Ashkenazi Jewish men are at elevated risk not just of breast and prostate cancer but also of pancreatic cancer. Pancreatic cancer is particularly difficult because it's tough to detect early enough and hard to treat. The five-year survival rate is only 11%. About 2% of BRCA1 carriers and 4% of BRCA2 carriers will develop pancreatic cancer, Sidlow estimated.

“Usually by the time pancreas cancer is clinically detected it has already spread microscopically to the liver,” Sidlow said. “But pancreas cancer is potentially curable if caught when the tumor is extremely small.”

Even among those with elevated risks, certain behaviors can improve one's odds, such as avoiding obesity, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.

Harris, the California photojournalist, is still fighting at age 71. While he overcame breast cancer 10 years ago, last year he was diagnosed with ampullary cancer, a rare disease related to his BRCA2 status that was discovered thanks to his participation in a UCLA study. Surgeons have removed his gall bladder, half his pancreas and part of his small intestine, and he has had to endure eight rounds of chemotherapy.

“I'm still working through the aftereffects of the chemo. I have to eat smaller quantities than before and take enzymes to supplement my digestive processes,” Harris said.

Meanwhile, his 37-year-old son discovered that he, too, carries the BRCA2 mutation, and he had a double prophylactic mastectomy and reconstruction at age 30 – just to be on the safe side.

“If there's any history of breast, ovarian or prostate cancer in your family, get tested genetically so that you're informed,” Harris advised. “Diagnoses happen way too late for men, and the danger is too big.”

This article was sponsored by and produced in partnership with Sharsheret, the national Jewish breast cancer and ovarian cancer organization. This article was produced by JTA's native content team. **HW**

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Violinist Basil Alter and Pianist Riko Higuma Will Perform at Temple Israel for a Pre- Chanukah Celebration



Basil Alter and Riko Higuma

On Wednesday, December 14, 2022, at 7 p.m. in the Greenstein Sanctuary at Temple Israel, violinist Basil Alter and pianist Riko Higuma will present an evening of some of the most charming and exquisite works from the rich violin-piano duo repertoire, including favorites by Brahms, Gershwin, Bloch and Saint-Saëns. The duo will be joined by Temple Israel’s Music & Cantorial Director and saxophone virtuoso Emily Groff Heilborn to perform a special Chanukah piece. This event is open to the community, and there will be no charge to attend this performance. This event will be held in person at Temple Israel and also will be livestreamed at Temple Israel (Memphis) on Facebook and on timemphish.org.

Hailed as a “teenage virtuoso” in his *Commercial Appeal* profile, violinist Basil Alter began violin lessons with his mother at age 3. Following studies with Joy Wiener, he attended the University of Memphis’s Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music, where he was the violinist of the Contemporary Chamber Players and concertmaster of all three of the school’s symphonic and opera orchestras. He also was profiled in the *University of Memphis Magazine*. He later continued schooling in New York at Manhattan School of Music, where he was a rotating concertmaster of the school orchestras, working with conductors including Rob Kapilow and Kent Tritle. He was featured in *Jewish Scene Magazine’s* article “Basil Alter’s World of Music.”

This past year, he was a featured guest performer at Temple Emanu-El of NYC, performing on a Landolfi violin on loan to the temple from “Violins of Hope,” a traveling exhibit, which serves to educate and memorialize the lives of prisoners in concentration camps. He has performed as soloist with the Armenian Philharmonic in Yerevan, in addition to the University of Memphis orchestra and the Germantown Symphony.

Outside of violin, he is a sought-after music transcriptionist and arranger. His transcriptions commissioned from musicians on YouTube have gained millions of views worldwide. At Temple Israel, Basil will perform on a Baldantoni violin, circa 1820.

Versatile pianist Riko Higuma made her U.S. debut as a soloist with the Fort Worth Symphony. A sought-after collaborative pianist, she has shared the

concert stages with artists such as Aaron Rosand, Neil Rosenshein, Cho-Liang Lin, Alan Gilbert, Ray Chen and Timothy Eddy, and she has collaborated (engaged by the New York Philharmonic) with Leonidas Kavakos, Gil Shaham and Michael Tilson Thomas.

Performance highlights as a member of the Zodiac Trio include Festival Radio France/Montpellier, Ottawa Chamberfest, Edinburgh Festival and Shanghai Oriental Art Center. She has been featured in music festivals around the world including Zodiac Music Academy & Festival in France, La Jolla Music Society Summerfest, New Docta in Argentina, and LidalNorth in Norway. Her performances were featured by France 3 Television, Radio France, CBC, WXQR, WFMT, WGBH and NPR. She is a staff pianist and vocal coach at the Manhattan School of Music where she studied with Phillip Kawin.

“Temple Israel is delighted to welcome Basil Alter and Riko Higuma to Temple Israel and to offer this wonderful and memorable evening of classical music to the community as a pre-
Chanukah celebration,” said Temple Israel’s Membership & Special Events Director Jan Reisman.

Special thanks to The Scheidt Family for sponsoring this performance at Temple Israel. HW

A Quarter of U.S. Hiring Managers Discriminate Against Jews, Survey Shows



Conference room. Credit: Pixabay.

(JNS) – A quarter of hiring managers say they are less likely to move forward with Jewish applicants, according to a survey conducted by a San Francisco-based employment resource firm.

In light of recent high-profile cases of antisemitism in the U.S., ResumeBuilder.com polled 1,131 recruiters. Twenty-three percent say they want fewer Jews in their industry, while 17% add that managers have told them to avoid hiring Jews.

The top reason for discriminating against Jews, the results show, is a supposed fear of their “power and control,” with 38% of hiring managers citing that excuse. Recruiters also justified discrimination by claiming that Jews consider themselves the “chosen people” and they have too much wealth, in addition to listing that “Jews are greedy,” “Jews killed Jesus,” “Jews are an inferior race,” “Jews are oppressors” and “Jews are less capable.”

“In this era of fighting for equality in hiring, Jewish individuals have largely been left out of the conversation and the issue of antisemitism has, for the most part, gone unaddressed,” said Stacie Haller, ResumeBuilder.com executive recruiter and career counselor. “Antisemitism in the workplace starts at the hiring process with individuals who do not want to hire Jews because of bigot-

ed stereotypes, but that is not where it ends.”

Among current employees, 33% said that workplace antisemitism is frequent and 29% said that antisemitism is acceptable within the company that employs them, according to the survey.

While 56% of hiring managers understood that candidates were Jewish because they had confirmed it themselves, 33% said they identified their Jewishness by their last names and 26% of hiring managers make decisions about who is Jewish based on a candidate’s appearance, the survey found. Some recruiters said they had identified Jewish candidates by their “voice,” their “mannerisms,” or because, “they are very frugal.”

Said Haller, “Organizations need to commit to oversight, training and having meaningful conversations about antisemitism. Removing prejudice and ensuring the workplace is equal, fair and accessible for all is not an easy challenge for organizations to tackle, but it’s absolutely essential.”

There does appear to be some room for optimism, however. Thirty-one percent of those surveyed claim their attitude towards Jews has improved over the last five years. Nine percent say their attitudes towards Jews have worsened, though, while 60% noted no change. **HW**





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Young Israel Thanks First Responders on Thanksgiving



Some of YI’s children and adults visiting local firefighters on Thanksgiving Day 2022

By Rabbi Akiva Males

Thanksgiving is a wonderful and obvious time to stop and say ‘Thank You’ to some very important people whom we don’t often recognize – our local firefighters, police officers, sheriff’s deputies and our friends at Veterans Security Group. After all, rather than spending Thanksgiving at home with their families, those hard-working heroes spend that day on duty keeping our neighborhoods safe and secure.

Seven years ago, Young Israel (YI) began the beautiful tradition of sharing some shul-made pies and ‘Thank You’ posters with our local firefighters on Thanksgiving. This heart-warming program, ‘Pies for Our Guys,’ has been very well-received. In 2020, YI added the Memphis Police Department, the Shelby County Sheriff’s Office and Veterans Security Group to our list of pie

recipients, and we excitedly continued the tradition this year.

YI thanks the many children and parents who joined together at shul on Sunday morning, November 13 to create appreciative posters, and to prepare / bake 40 mouth-watering pumpkin pies. Taking part in these activities was also a fun and meaningful activity for everyone involved.

On Wed., November 23, I delivered 10 of the shul-baked pumpkin pies and a ‘Thank You’ poster to our friends at Veterans Security Group (VSG). That hard-working team of security personnel help keep Young Israel safe each Shabbos and Yom Tov. The VSG team was happy to then take YI’s pies home and enjoy them with their families on Thanksgiving.

On Thanksgiving morning, Novem-

ber 24, Young Israel brought dozens of children and adults together to say “Thank You” to our firefighters at Fire Station 21 (located just next to Kroger on S. Mendenhall Road).

The children presented more than 12 of their pumpkin pies, as well as their hand-crafted Thanksgiving cards and posters to the very appreciative – and noticeably touched – firefighters.

The firemen gladly treated our entire group to a tour of their fire-station, gave us a close look at their equipment, and even let the children climb into their ambulance.

During YI’s visit, an actual call came in. Everyone quickly moved out of the way and watched the firefighters hastily gear-up and take off in two of their fire engines. Witnessing our first responders in action on Thanksgiving helped the

children gain an even deeper appreciation of our local heroes.

Following the program at the fire station, I presented about 20 more shul-made pies to the appreciative Memphis Police Department officers stationed on Appling Farms Parkway, as well as the grateful deputies of the Shelby County Sheriff’s Office in Arlington.

Visiting and thanking our local firefighters and law enforcement agents on Thanksgiving made the day so much more meaningful for everyone involved.

Young Israel thanks everyone who helped sponsor this heart-warming program. YI also thanks the many children and parents who helped us express our appreciation to our community’s first responders and our shul’s security professionals.

Young Israel’s Rabbi Akiva Males can be reached at rabbia@yiom.org **HW**



YI’s Rabbi Akiva Males sharing Shul-made pumpkin pies with members of the Memphis Police Department on Thanksgiving Day 2022



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Top Israeli Cop Says Closing in on Jerusalem Bus Stop Bombing Perpetrators

(JNS) – The perpetrators of last week’s twin terrorist bombings in Jerusalem will be apprehended in the near future, a top Israel Border Police official said last Wednesday.

“In the coming days we will get to each and every one of those involved... and bring them to justice,” Ch. Supt. Oded Aflalo, the Border Police’s head of operations, said in an interview with *Kan Radio*.

“The investigation is continuing on numerous levels – intelligence, which I cannot detail but which is progressing, and operational – whereby the Border Police is working with the Israel Security Agency [Shin Bet], the Yamam [counter-terrorism police] and other units.”

Two Israelis were killed and more than 20 injured in two explosions last Wednesday at bus stops located near entrances to Jerusalem. Authorities believe that the sources of the blasts were two remotely detonated bombs packed with nails to cause maximum damage.

Police described the explosives as “high quality” and said that an organized terror cell likely planned and carried out the attack.

Israeli security forces have been conducting search operations in eastern Jerusalem as well as in Judea and Samaria, with reports suggesting they were closing in on suspects and may have already made several arrests, although details have not been cleared for publication. **HW**

What Will Biden’s Policy Be Towards Israel for the Rest of His Term?



U.S. President Joe Biden speaks during a ceremony at Ben-Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, July 13, 2022. Credit: Sraya Diamant/Flash90.

By Benjamin Weinthal

(JNS) – Questions abound about how U.S.-Israel relations will unfold now that the midterm elections are history. Will the White House move closer to Israel’s tough policy on isolating the Islamic Republic of Iran? Will Biden seek to strong-arm Jerusalem into a bad territorial deal with the Palestinians? Will the State Department build on the Abraham Accords to normalize relations between Israel and additional Muslim-majority countries?

Daniel Pipes, the president of the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum, told JNS, “Perhaps the most important thing [former U.S. Secretary of State] John Kerry ever said in his long and undistinguished career was in 2016: ‘No. No, no and no.... There will be no advance and separate [Israeli] peace with the Arab world without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace. Everybody needs to understand that. That is a hard reality.’”

The prominent Mideast historian Pipes added, “His [Kerry’s] supreme confidence meant that, when the Abraham Accords came along, his and the Democrats’ entire interpretation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict shattered. This seems to have had the happy consequence that the Democrats have stayed away from this topic. I hope and think

that will continue to be the case.”

The Trump administration secured the most significant normalization agreement since Israel’s peace deal with Jordan in 1994, the Abraham Accords. The Abraham Accords solidified diplomatic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in the Gulf region and Morocco and (a work in progress) Sudan in Africa.

When asked whether he views the Biden administration moving closer to Israel’s hawkish posture towards the Iranian regime, Pipes said, “Yes. Weirdly, it took Russian use of Iranian drones in Ukraine – an unrelated issue – to prompt the Europeans and Biden to realize that the mullahs are not cuddly. So, now there is a new wariness about Tehran, though no thanks to all those years of Israeli efforts.”

The U.S. and Israel air forces launched a two-day drill last Tuesday simulating strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, suggesting a more assertive tone from Washington towards the jingoistic theocratic state.

The State Department has classified Iran’s clerical regime as the world’s worst state-sponsor of terrorism. But Tehran has rapidly advanced its nuclear weapons program since Biden entered into office in January 2021.

All of this helps to explain the fierce criticism of Biden’s attempts to cajole Iran’s rulers with \$100 billion-plus in sanctions relief funds to impose a mere temporary restriction on their development of nuclear arms.

If the U.S. and the other world powers seal a new nuclear deal with Iran, it would mean a massive infusion of cash into Tehran’s coffers. Veteran Iran experts say that the regime would use the money to sponsor a new round of terrorism.

Pipes does not see the White House squandering valuable energy and resources on twisting Israeli arms to make concessions to the Palestinians. “I think not, both for the reasons explained above and because there are now real crises to deal with,” he said.

Asaf Romirowsky, the executive director of both the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA) and Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME), told JNS, “The elevation [on Nov. 22] of Hady Amr to [U.S.] special representative for Palestinian affairs signals a desire by the Biden administration to attempt to re-centralize the Palestinian agenda. This goes in line with other Biden representatives like U.S. ambassador to Israel, Thomas Nides, and [Deputy Assistant Secretary] Elizabeth Campbell, formerly UNRWA’s Washington lobbyist, and

others to highlight how Biden is following the Obama administration’s playbook of ‘tough love’ vis-à-vis Israel, rushing to embrace Iran and a perilous nuclear deal that has terrified Arabs and Israelis alike.”

Critics say UNRWA [the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees] perpetuates the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

“Support for Palestinian causes like UNRWA, as well as ... hysteria about Israeli construction in the West Bank [Judea and Samaria], are sops thrown to the shrinking number of ideologues who think the world revolves around Palestine. All of this has deflected from the importance of the Abraham Accords, which should be bolstered,” said Romirowsky.

Nides recently backtracked from his January 2022 statement that he would not visit Judea and Samaria, paying a shivah visit in mid-November to the family in mourning of Tamir Avihai, who was killed in an act of vehicular terrorism carried out by a Palestinian terrorist. Avihai, a father of six, was from Kiryat Netafim, near Ariel in Samaria.

The U.S. Embassy said Nides’s visit was not about a change of policy regarding visiting “settlements” but rather his custom of visiting the victims of terrorism. [HW](#)

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Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors
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Higher taxes could follow in the wake of soaring government spending on pandemic relief measures – a likelihood that shines a new light on the tax advantages of life insurance. Permanent life insurance offers a tax-free death benefit, and a portion of each premium goes into a cash-value account that accumulates on a tax-deferred basis. The policy owner may also access the cash value, if needed, without triggering income taxes.

Assets in tax-deferred retirement accounts will eventually be taxed as ordinary income, whether distributions are taken by the current owner or a beneficiary who inherits the account. Thus, taxpayers with well-funded retirement accounts should bear in mind that today’s historically low income tax rates are scheduled to expire after 2025.

Taking IRA distributions while taxes are low and shifting the money to life insurance could provide a hedge against future tax increases. Here are three ways in which permanent life insurance can be used to fund retirement and estate strategies.

1. Supplement retirement income. The cash value is available for emergencies as well as for normal retirement expenses such as housing costs and health

care. You can generally make tax-free withdrawals (up to the amount paid in premiums) or use loans to tap into the accumulated cash value. Although policy loans accrue interest, they are free of income tax (as long as they are repaid) and usually do not impose a set schedule for repayment.

Still, you should generally have a need for life insurance protection and evaluate a policy based on its merits as such. Loans from a life insurance policy will reduce the policy’s cash value and death benefit, could increase the chance that the policy will lapse, and might result in a tax liability if the policy terminates before the death of the insured. Additional out-of-pocket payments may be needed if actual dividends or investment returns decrease, if you withdraw policy cash values, or if current charges increase.

Budgeting for Long-Term Care

Medicare pays for up to 100 days in a skilled nursing facility after a qualifying hospital stay of three or more days, and provides limited coverage for home health care. Medicaid pays for some long-term care services, but eligibility is based on the person’s income and assets, and often requires “spending down” to qualify.

National monthly cost, 2021



Private room in a nursing home



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*Based on 44 hours per week
Source: Genworth Cost of Care Survey, 2022

2. Help pay for long-term care. Many retirees worry that their savings could be depleted later in life by the escalating cost of long-term care. A long-term care rider attached to a life insurance policy could help pay for these expenses if they are ever needed. Any payouts for covered expenses would reduce (and are usually limited to) the death benefit, and they are typically much less generous than those of a traditional “use-it-or-lose-it” long-term care policy. Optional benefit riders are available for an additional cost and are subject to the contractual terms, conditions, and limitations outlined in the policy; they may not, however, benefit all individuals.

3. Leave a tax-free legacy. Most non-spouse beneficiaries who inherit IRAs must now empty the account within 10 years, and heirs who are forced to take distributions in their peak earning years could face large income tax bills. By contrast, the death benefit from a life insurance policy could provide a tax-free inheritance.

Before implementing a strategy involving life insurance, it would be prudent to make sure you are insurable. The cost and availability of life insurance depend on factors such as age, health, and the type and amount of insurance

purchased. In addition to the life insurance premiums, other costs include mortality and expense charges. If a policy is surrendered prematurely, there may be surrender charges and income tax implications. Any guarantees are contingent on the financial strength and claims-paying ability of the issuing insurance company.

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U.N. Middle East Envoy Says the Region Reaching a ‘Boiling Point’



U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland, Jan. 26, 2021. Credit: UNSCO Photo by Daniela Penkova.

By Mike Wagenheim

(JNS) – The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is “reaching a boiling point,” given a surge in violence in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, the United Nations’ point man in Jerusalem warned last Monday.

“High levels of violence...including attacks against Israeli and Palestinian civilians, increased use of arms, and settler-related violence, have caused grave human suffering,” U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland told the Security Council during its monthly meeting on the Israeli-Palestinian file. “The current trends bring neither stability nor security for anyone.”

Wennesland urged the international community to condemn last week’s twin bus stop bombings in Jerusalem that killed two Israelis and injured around 20 others, as well as another Palestinian terror attack that killed three Israelis earlier this month in Ariel. The Norwegian also denounced what he termed “settler violence against Palestinians” in Hebron, adding that “the targeting of civilians can never be justified, and the violence must stop.”

Israeli Ambassador to the U.N. Gilad Erdan has been complaining for months that these monthly Security Council meetings have dwelled too much on the minutiae of the conflict, with Wennesland issuing reports detailing every violent incident, tribal dispute and municipal ruling.

Last Monday, Wennesland, who gave an in-person briefing, chose to “provide a broader perspective” on the way forward, pledging to remain focused on both short-term violence and “de-escalating” projects, and on longer-term prospects for a political settlement of the conflict.

Wennesland told JNS that the adjusted framework had been in the works for some time, and he will be utilizing it going forward, but denied there was any connection to Erdan’s critiques.

United States Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, meanwhile, chided most U.N. actions dealing with the conflict, which she said are “not designed to advance direct negotiations, let alone achieve peace. They are only intended to denigrate Israel.” She called for a focus on concrete, life-improving steps, rather than grandstanding and pursuing unproductive measures.”

Lamenting the attention to the matter that has been drawn away by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Wennesland said that while progress on the ground seems to remain “stuck,” nothing about the conflict is static, telling the council and reporters afterward that “demographics are now running ahead of politics,” with increasing Israeli and Palestinian populations threatening the availability of

land and natural resources, portending further violence.

He praised Israel for issuing more work permits to Gazans and for allowing new materials into the Gaza Strip amid concerns they could be used for terror infrastructure.

When asked by JNS whether he had made contact with Israel’s presumptive incoming government, Wennesland responded that he “deals with one government at a time” but noted his involvement in de-escalating last May’s 11-day Israel-Gaza aerial conflict while presumptive Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was previously in office.

Responding to a reporter’s question about whether he expected added difficulties in dealing with Israel’s incoming government, given its inclusion of hard-line right-wing elements, Wennesland quipped that “it’s hard to deal with any government in the Middle East.”

“It’s the Israeli population that are electing their own government. It is a process of the internal dynamics in Israel,” he said. “I can assure you one thing – the U.N. will work with this government in one way or another.”

On November 29, the U.N. hosted its International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on the anniversary of the 1947 U.N. vote to partition the British Mandate of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, a motion the Arab world rejected in a decision that Israel says still drives the conflict. **HW**

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Stephen H. Biller

Born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1940, Stephen H. Biller passed away at home on November 27, 2022, surrounded by his loving family and golden Lab.

Stephen is survived by his wife, Margaret, of 60 years, his children, Caroline Biller Bernstein, Jonathan Biller, Daniel Biller (Tara), his grandchildren, Sophie Bernstein, Emily Bernstein, Andrew Biller, Jonah Biller and Macie Biller. Stephen is also survived by extended family Bonnie and Sam Nickol, Harold and Julie Ceitlin and their families.

After graduating Boston University School of Law, Stephen was recruited by the National Labor Relations Board in Memphis and subsequently joined the practice of Goodman Glazer as a litigation attorney. He then joined Heiskell, Donelson, Adams, Bearman, Williams, and Kirsch, now Baker Donelson, as a partner earning a reputation as an expert in civil litigation and all aspects of Labor and Employment law. Stephen later practiced with trusted colleagues at The Bogatin Law Firm and The Biller Law Firm. A passionate pursuer of truth, justice, and holding honor above all, Stephen established precedent in multiple state and federal landmark cases. He loved the practice of law.

Stephen strived to leave the world a

better place and those whose lives he touched would agree, he succeeded multiple times over. Regardless of life challenges or obligations set before him, Stephen always put his family first, setting aside any and everything for family needs, both monumental and incidental. Stephen acted with humility and respect for others. He was a learned listener, deeply connecting with others through subtle intuition and careful word choices. In turn, Stephen earned the respect, admiration, and love of all, even so-called adversaries and opposing legal counsel with whom he interacted.

He lived his values by serving the community as a civil servant, most recently as Commissioner of the Memphis Civil Service Commission. He was a writer, lecturer and educator. As a leader in the legal and Jewish communities, Stephen served as trustee and chairman of the Tennessee Bar Foundation, fellow on the American Bar Foundation, president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, a Temple Israel board member, and numerous other roles of both named and unnamed importance.

Stephen found joy and respite in the outdoors, gardening, hiking, and on the water, especially with his golden Lab, Viva, as well as his loving family. He was a voracious reader and lifelong learner with a deep fascination of history.

Stephen’s friends and family are immensely proud of his legacy: putting truth, honor, justice, and integrity in every action. We are heartbroken, fortunate, lucky, and grateful to have had our beloved husband and Daddy lead and care for our family.

Even more than purple flowers, Stephen cared for philanthropic efforts to improve access to legal education for the less fortunate. If you wish, please contribute to The Tennessee Bar Foundation, the Low-Cost Veterinary Clinic at the Humane Society of Memphis and Shelby County, or Temple Israel in his memory. **HW**

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In ‘Mapping Jewish San Francisco,’ A Treasure Trove of Bay Area Jewish History Goes on Display



On the front steps of the original House of Love and Prayer at 347 Arguello Blvd., CA 1969.
Credit: Marvin Kussoy-Courtesy Yehudit and Reuven Goldfarb

By Maya Mirsky

(*J. The Jewish News of Northern California via JTA*) – The year was 1968. Young people from around the country were descending on San Francisco looking for ways to express themselves, making efforts – sometimes heroic, sometimes tragic – to free themselves from the bonds of American society.

At the same time, a group of Jews came together in the city to create something new.

“After painfully realizing that the Jewish leaders and especially, in San Francisco, are only interested in lectures on the terrible lost generation, but have no wish of giving them a helping hand, we opened, on our own, a house of love

and prayer in San Francisco.”

Those words, by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, are on a handmade brochure from 1968. It’s only one artifact in a treasure trove of documents and photos displayed in a new, online exhibit out of the University of San Francisco called “Mapping Jewish San Francisco.” Much of the historical material is being seen publicly for the first time.

“We really want people to get a sense of the unique elements of Bay Area Jewish life,” said Oren Kroll-Zeldin, lead curator of the project and assistant director of the Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice at the university.

The San Francisco project was in-

spired by “Mapping Jewish Los Angeles,” a UCLA endeavor that for more than a decade has been bringing multimedia stories of L.A.’s diverse Jewish neighborhoods to life.

“I thought, oh my goodness, we need to do this about San Francisco!” Kroll-Zeldin said.

He brought the idea to Aaron Hahn Tapper, director of USF’s Swig Jewish studies program.

“He was immediately excited and supportive of it,” Kroll-Zeldin said.

They got to work, but executing the projects was a bit more daunting than expected, including making sure the multimedia elements of the website worked perfectly.

But now the site has launched with two inaugural exhibits: Kroll-Zeldin’s deep dive into Carlebach’s synagogue and religious commune known as the House of Love and Prayer, and a comprehensive look at the Karaite Jewish community in the Bay Area and beyond.

“Through ‘Mapping Jewish San Francisco,’ we aim for people to better understand how today’s Bay Area Jewish community came to be and the role that Jews have played in the creation of this major American city,” Hahn Tapper said in an email.

Kroll-Zeldin said a key factor in the effort was the access he had to personal papers, stories, photos and anecdotes, provided to him by the people who were there. He calls it “one-of-a-kind archival material.”

“This is only possible based on the willingness of these people to tell these stories,” he said.

There are also videos, including a series of oral histories with locals who experienced communal living, and archival audio recordings of Carlebach’s teachings and music. The exhibit covers the reach of the rabbi’s impact, but also touches on the controversies around Carlebach, who was accused of sexual assault by many women.

The second exhibition, led by Hahn Tapper, highlights the history of the Karaite Jews, a small but distinct and vibrant community of Jews who are the inheritors of a little-known branch of Judaism.

They split from the mainstream, theologically, somewhere between the eighth and 10th centuries. While they

follow Torah, they do not follow the rabbinic interpretations in the Mishnah and Talmud. Karaite Jews have many customs and prayers that set their religious practice apart.

The largest group of Karaites lived in Egypt until the 1950s, when tensions, violence and war drove many of them out. Some moved to Israel and others to the Bay Area, where they built a tight-knit and active community.

Only 50,000 or so Karaites are left in the world today, with an estimated 1,000 in the Bay Area, site of the only Karaite synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.

“They are a very important subcommunity of Jews,” Hahn Tapper said. “In addition, as a religious studies scholar who focuses on contemporary social identities, the ways this Jewish community has re-established itself here in the Bay Area is astounding.”

Hahn Tapper said he went through mounds of documents and hundreds of hours of video interview footage to put together the online exhibition, called “Out of Egypt.” He said the videos are invaluable because so many of the Karaites who immigrated to the United States have died in recent years.

“Through this exhibit we have documented their lives, lives of Jews in Egypt that no longer exist,” he said. “These interviewees paint a picture of what it was like to celebrate Jewish holidays in Cairo, some of whom did so with their Muslim neighbors.”

Kroll-Zeldin said each exhibit takes up to two years to prepare, in collaboration with academics, students and community leaders; scholars first collect and digitize the material, then do the research, writing and bibliography work.

The next project is being led by Rabbi Camille Angel, USF’s rabbi in residence, who is working with her students to collect stories of Jewish LGBTQ life in San Francisco. Their research and findings will help tell that chapter of Bay Area Jewish history, a form of storytelling that will continue to be central to the project as it unfolds.

“People like stories,” Kroll-Zeldin said. “Stories connect people. And there are so many interesting stories to tell.”

A version of this piece originally ran in J. The Jewish News of Northern California and is reprinted with permission. HW

Leonard Cohen’s 1973 Yom Kippur War Concerts to Be Dramatized in TV Series By ‘Shtisel’ Writer

By Gabe Friedman

(JTA) – Leonard Cohen’s momentous trip to the Sinai Desert to perform for Israeli soldiers in the wake of the Yom Kippur War is being turned into a dramatized TV series.

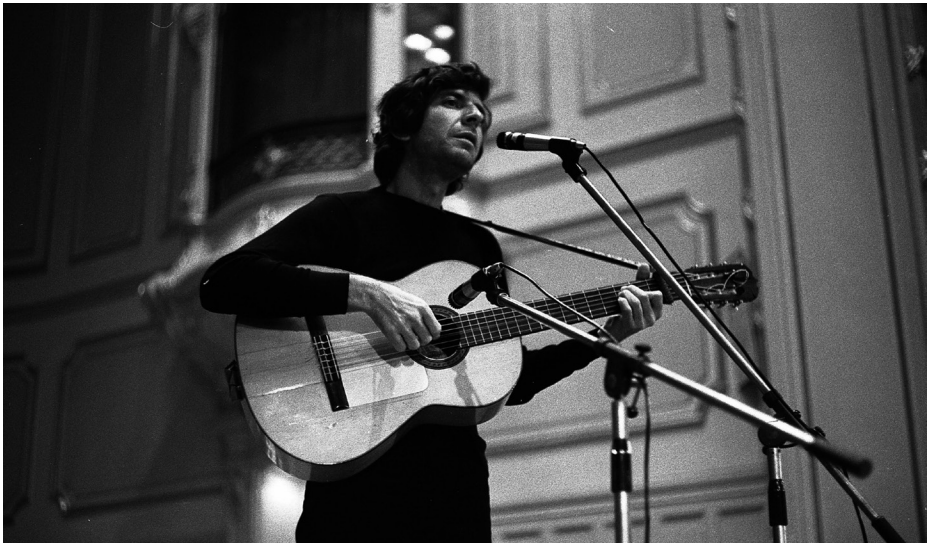
“Who by Fire: Leonard Cohen in the Sinai” will be written by Yehonatan Indursky, a co-creator of “Shtisel,” the landmark Israeli drama about an Orthodox family in Jerusalem, according to *Variety*, which reported the news last Monday.

The limited series, an adaptation of journalist Matti Friedman’s 2022 book of the same name, will film in Israel in 2024. It’s being co-produced by Keshet, the Israeli company that has also produced shows such as “Prisoners of War,” which was adapted for U.S. audiences as “Homeland.”

Cohen’s trip to the frontlines of the 1973 war became a turning point in the way the folk troubadour incorporat-

ed his Jewishness into his songs – for instance, his 1974 album “New Skin for the Old Ceremony” featured “Who By Fire,” a song inspired by the Yom Kippur “Unataneh Tokef” prayer. Despite being internationally famous, Cohen slept in an army sleeping bag, ate army rations and performed a series of concerts for on-edge soldiers, who decades later told Friedman that they were moved by his support.

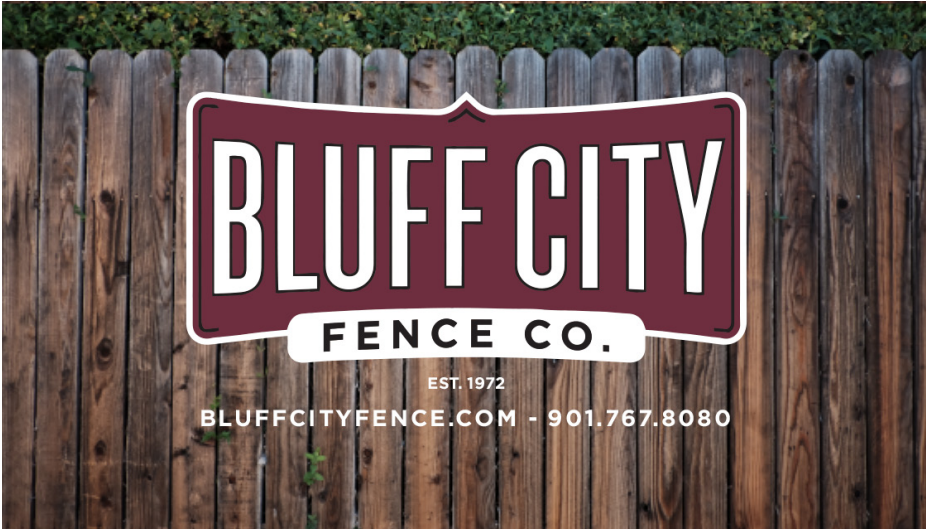
“In October 1973 the poet and singer Leonard Cohen – 39 years old, famous, unhappy, and at a creative dead end – traveled to the Sinai desert and inserted himself into the chaos and blood of the Yom Kippur War,” the show’s press materials read. “Moving around the front with a guitar and a pick-up team of local musicians, Cohen dived headlong into a global crisis and met hundreds of fighting men and women at the worst mo-



Leonard Cohen performs in Hamburg, Germany, May 4, 1970.
Credit: Gunter Zint/1970 K& K Ulf Kruger OHG/Redferns/Getty Images

ment of their lives. Cohen’s audience knew his songs might be the last thing

they heard, and those who survived never forgot the experience.” **HW**



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Sendak, Maurice. Design for show curtain from Nutcracker (No. 116). 1979-83
Credit line: The Morgan Library & Museum, Bequest of Maurice Sendak, 2013.103.58e.

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Star-studded gala benefits Paul Newman’s camp in Israel for children with serious illnesses

By Howard Blas

(JNS) — The applause from the audience of over 900 at the SeriousFun Children’s Network gala at New York’s Jazz at Lincoln Center was rivaled only by the smiles of the 22,000 children with serious illnesses and 5,000 families who have taken part in the activities of the Jordan River Village in Israel during the past 10 years.

The Jordan River Village camp in Givat Avni (15 minutes west of Tiberias and 40 minutes east of Haifa) is part of the SeriousFun Children’s Network, the global organization of 30 camps and programs founded by the late actor and philanthropist Paul Newman. The Nov. 14 gala, which raised \$2.2 million, honored Newman’s widow, Joanne Woodward, and brought together inspiring campers and celebrities such as actors Julia Roberts and Samuel L. Jackson, singer/songwriter Sara Bareilles and violinist Joshua Bell.

Roberts spoke of her personal connection to the camps. “I was a counselor for one summer at the Hole in the Wall Gang Camps [founded by Newman in 1988 and part of the SeriousFun Network]. I witnessed some of the strongest and bravest people.”

The biggest stars of the evening were the campers from SeriousFun Children’s Network, including Logan, Taylor, Maddie, Serenity, Drew, Zippy and Sophia. The campers wowed the crowd with a number of musical performances, participated in segments with SeriousFun’s celebrity guests and shared personal stories of the impact of the camps. Drew said, “At camp, I feel safe and re-

spected and loved all the time.” Taylor’s mother, Natasha, spoke of her daughter’s 40 hospitalizations and transfusions. “Through it all, Taylor has been a trooper. She is strong, resilient and brave in the face of it all. Camp gets it. All of it. They think of everything. There is no need for drone moms. At camp, she found her second home. We are blessed with a village!”

Jackson and his wife, LaTanya Richardson Jackson, noted Woodward’s great impact on the children served by SeriousFun. “On top of her incredible career, we also want to honor her work over the years with the SeriousFun camps. She and Paul always recognized the real stars at the camps are the kids. And that’s the truth.”

Other performances came from singer/songwriter John Mellencamp; Bell, accompanied by pianist Peter Dugan; and the Martha Graham Dance Company.

Bell shared a moving story of flying with Newman on his personal plane to visit and perform at one of his camps. “I was looking for the place when all of a sudden, Joanne walks out—in jeans with her hair tied back with the warmest smile.” He recounted how she kept in touch with many camps “for a long time.”

The evening also featured personal video messages from Elton John, Meryl Streep and Channing Tatum. The showstopper, however, was the event finale of “Brave,” performed by Bareilles together with the campers.

The Jordan River Village, the only free, year-round, medically safe, over-

night camp in the Middle East for kids living with serious medical conditions and disabilities, is one of SeriousFun’s 16 camps and programs serving children living with serious illnesses and their families around the world. Another 14 camps in South America, Africa and Asia make up the network’s 30 camps worldwide. The 60-acre camp in Israel features Jerusalem stone and is bright white; the materials used in the construction of the zipline and climbing structures take local weather conditions into consideration.

Campers at the Jordan River Village camp live with a wide range of serious and chronic illnesses (both visible and invisible) and represent the diversity of Israeli society—participants come from all over Israel, are rich and poor, Jewish and Arab, Hebrew and Arabic speakers, religious and secular. There are participants with 40 different medical conditions, including (but not limited to) spina bifida, arthritis and kidney, metabolic, neurological and skin disorders; some campers are ventilator-dependent. The camp aims to help participants gain confidence and a sense of independence.

The Jordan River Village was initially shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic and was then given permission to reopen in a limited capacity under certain conditions. The village created “JRV on Wheels” to bring the camp program to families.

The camp is in the process of starting a fully medically accessible mechina (post-high school, pre-army informal education) program as well as an acces-

sible glamping option. Newman and his impact are still very much felt at the camp. He “was part of the building of Jordan River Village, but he never made it here,” noted Gail Androphy, executive director of American Friends of Jordan River Village. Newman died in 2008, four years before the camp opened after raising \$30 million from supporters in Israel, the U.S. and worldwide. Today, the village continues to receive support from the Newman’s Own Foundation. Its annual budget of \$3.5 million supports a lean staff that is supplemented by thousands of volunteers a year.

Newman, who visited Israel in 1959, is known for his portrayal of Ari Ben Canaan in “Exodus,” the 1960 film based on the historical novel by Leon Uris about the famous Exodus ship and the founding of the State of Israel. The Jordan River Village was inspired by Newman and founded by the late Murray and Marilyn Grant, Chaim Topol, Michael Finkelstein, Sue Ann Friedman and many others. “I’ve heard from [Newman’s] daughter and his friends that he loved Israel,” said Androphy, who added, “He shaped Americans’ perceptions and love of Israel through his portrayal of Ari Ben Canaan in ‘Exodus.’”

Newman even had a sense that the camp would one day lead to peace in the Middle East. In 2000, Newman wrote to the Grants, founders of the village, “I share your hope that, in the future, this camp can reach children from throughout the eastern Mediterranean and serve to enhance the efforts toward peace in your region.” **HW**



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