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THE

Hebrew

Watchman

SERVING THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1925

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Memphis Jewish Federation to Sponsor Evening with Memphis-born Israel Tour Guide Alan Harkavy



Steve, Risa and Jonah Baer, Molly Franklin, Karen Franklin, Alan Harkavy and Jody Franklin

In celebration of Israel’s 75th anniversary, Memphis Jewish Federation is pleased to invite the community to a special evening with Alan Harkavy in conversation with Karen and Jody Franklin.

Taking place on Thursday, March 23, at 7 p.m., “Journey from the Bible Belt to the Land of the Bible” begins in the Shainberg Gallery of the Memphis Jewish Community Center with a tasting of Israeli wines. Those attend-

ing will select wines that will be served at the May 17 “Shuk, Rattle and Roll” community-wide celebration honoring Israel’s 75th Anniversary at Memphis Botanic Garden. After wine and light refreshments, the evening continues in the Belz Theater at the Orgel Family Performing Arts Center for Alan’s presentation and conversation with the Franklins.

Born and raised in Memphis, Alan explains he was destined to live in Is-

rael: “As an American-born Jew, I have been fascinated with Israel for as long as I can remember. In 1980, at the age of 17, I had the privilege of attending ‘High School in Israel.’ It was then that my love affair with the Land was sealed, and it was then that I knew one day I would live in Israel.”

While in college, Alan studied Middle Eastern history at Tel Aviv University. He and his wife, Diane, met at the University of Michigan, and after law school he returned to Memphis where he practiced law for 30 years before making Aliyah in 2014.

Alan went back to “school” in Israel and became licensed as a tour guide by the Israel Ministry of Tourism in 2017. “Becoming a tour guide allows me to do what I love every single day; connecting people to Israel,” explains Alan. “I am so grateful for the privilege of guiding individuals, families and groups of all faiths through this historical and magnificently beautiful land.”

Alan made the move from the “Bible Belt” to the “Land of the Bible” with Diane, and their four daughters, Annie, Gabrielle, Charlotte and Lily. He added “Saba” (grandfather) to his resume with the birth of his grandchildren, Levana (2) and Shachar (5 months).

Jody and Karen reaped the benefits of Alan’s training and experience first-hand by touring with him when they visited Israel in 2017. “And just like in high school, Alan began our ‘Israel Education’ at the Flam winery. He educated and walked, hiked and exhausted us; from the water tunnels of Jerusalem to the early morning hike up Masada!” the two explained.

They are excited to interview Alan and plan to have some “fun” questions for him.

This program promises to be a highlight of Federation’s Israel at 75 celebrations and is free and open to the community with advance registration.

Please RSVP at: <https://form.jotform.com/230576278906062>

Participants are invited to bring pictures of themselves in Israel to be included in the Israel at 75 video montage to be displayed at a later event. Photos will not be returned. Digital or scanned photos may be emailed to crichardson@jcpmemphis.org. Please include the names of everyone in the picture.

For more information about the evening with Alan Harkavy or the community photo montage, please contact Federation’s Israel at 75 Coordinator, Jeri Moskovitz at jmoskovitz@jcpmemphis.org. **HW**

Lions of Judah Help Address Food Insecurity in Memphis



Memphis Jewish Federation’s Lion of Judah volunteered at Church Health for two weeks to prepare meals for Church Health’s Make a Meal, Share a Meal

For two consecutive weeks, the Memphis Jewish Federation’s Lions of Judah attended a program called “Make a Meal, Share a Meal” at Church Health, located at Crosstown Concourse. Armed with snacks and beverages to make for a fun and festive evening, the Lions of Judah arrived at Church Health ready to give back.

After touring Church Health and seeing, first-hand, where and how those in Memphis who cannot afford health insurance are cared for, the Lions headed to the Nutrition Hub at Church Health where they spent almost two hours cook-

ing and packaging food (and having lots of fun!) for some of the most vulnerable in our city. The meals the Lions of Judah prepared went directly into the community refrigerators at Church Health for patients who are food insecure.

“The Tikkun Olam committee of Lions of Judah chose to meet and make these meals for Church Health as part of our desire to get involved in our greater community and give a helping hand where needed,” said Kimberlee Strome, chair of the Lions of Judah Tikkun Olam committee. “The feedback from our members was excellent! We learned

all about the wonderful programs at Church Health and had a great time being together in their Nutrition Hub.”

Patients at Church Health typically work a minimum of 20 hours per week and make 200% or less of the federal poverty level. Because poverty is a huge factor in the social determinants of health, addressing the patients’ physical well-being is only one part of how Church Health cares for the whole person. Using what is called “The Model for Healthy Living,” Church Health believes that being healthy isn’t merely the absence of disease. To be truly healthy,

one must seek balance in all aspects of life including nutrition, movement, friends and family, work, medical, emotional, and a connection to something greater than oneself.

Church Health is always grateful for volunteer groups who participate in the “Make a Meal, Share a Meal” program and to our volunteer medical providers who help to care for our patients.

If you are interested in volunteering, contact Church Health Director of Strategic Partnerships and Opportunities Marcy Wurzburg Stagner at stagnerm@churchhealth.org. **HW**



My Teen Israel Experience



Sarah Hochman at the Kotel

Sarah Hochman, daughter of Molly Haley and Jacobo Hochman, is a junior at Houston High School. Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund provided her with a Teen Israel Experience grant to help offset the cost of her BBYO ILSI (International Leadership Seminar in Israel) trip last summer. 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. Applications for Summer 2023 are now available online. To learn more and apply, please go to: www.jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund.

By Sarah Hochman

During three weeks of Summer 2022, I participated in BBYO's International Leadership Seminar in Israel (ILSI). This trip was the voyage of a lifetime and my first ever trip to Israel. Over the three weeks we spent traveling across all of Israel, we were able to see and learn more than I had ever imagined to be possible.

From hiking the legendary Masada before sunrise, not only seeing but going into Ben Gurion's humble kibbutz home in the Negev, learning how to surf with a nonprofit on a Tel Aviv beach, visiting and praying at the Kotel multiple times, and exploring a bustling Jerusalem shuk (market) before Shabbat, each and every day provided me with a new experience. Other activities we did and places we saw include splashing in the Sea of Galilee, floating in the Dead Sea, camel riding, rafting down the Jordan River, staying in Bedouin tents, rappelling down a crater, hiking through cool and clear waterfalls, singing together un-

der the desert moonlight, and shopping along Ben Yehuda Street.

Each of these experiences deepened my connection to Israel and to the Jewish people more than I ever expected to be possible, reaffirming a bond I know will never be broken. I already am looking forward to taking another trip when I get the chance to go back.

When I arrived on the trip, I knew virtually no one. Being one of the youngest in a group that filled up four buses to their entirety was quite daunting. Yet, in the blink of an eye, I was surrounded by so many new friends who I still talk to every single day. These people have all changed my life, and I never would have met them if I hadn't gone to Israel. Being on a trip with 160 other Jewish teens from a plethora of different countries leaves me speechless; it helped me to realize how much we have in common with one another even while living completely different lives in completely different places. We would never have met and become friends if it weren't for this shared voyage, we all chose to do. It also was an inspiring and powerful example that Judaism thrives today in so many varying communities all over the globe.

Our various awe-inspiring guest speakers, fearless BBYO staff members, and knowledgeable tour guides affirmed this, giving us perspectives from all their unique stories and connections to Israel. Some of them were Israeli, some were immigrants, and all came from different countries and different Jewish backgrounds. Whether they were sharing memories of their time in the army or an interesting fun fact, they provided us with learning op-

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Havdalah, Sat. March 11, 2023 / 18 Adar, 5783 6:41 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Ki Tisa

portunities we would never have gotten from school or even an Israel trip with our families, and that knowledge will forever remain a great asset to myself and all who were fortunate enough to experience ILSI or any Israel trip. If nothing else, everyone (including myself) learned: there is nowhere quite like Israel.

Thank you to Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund for helping make my BBYO ISIL Israel trip possible for me. **HW**

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Netanyahu: ‘Freedom of Protest is Not a License to Drag the Country into Anarchy’

By David Isaac

(JNS) – Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a televised address last Wednesday evening, spoke out against the violent protests that roiled the country throughout the day, in some cases leading to clashes with police.

“Freedom of protest is not a license to drag the country into anarchy and chaos. A sovereign state cannot tolerate anarchy,” Netanyahu said.

“I know that there are many citizens who love their country and who passionately support the legal reform. And I know that there are also many other citizens, who also love their country and who oppose the reform with equal fervor.

“But in a democracy there are clear rules on how to conduct the debate. There are red lines that must not be crossed,” Netanyahu said. “And it doesn’t matter how profound the debate, how stormy, how much it shakes

the soul – the clear red line is a complete prohibition on violence and anarchy.

“We will not tolerate a situation where a person does whatever seems good in his eyes. We cannot accept violence. We cannot accept the blocking of roads. We cannot accept threats against public figures and their family members. Something that is happening at this very moment,” the prime minister added.

He compared the current crisis to that of 2005, when the Israeli government decided to leave the Gaza Strip, uprooting 8,000 Jews from their homes. Netanyahu said that while emotions ran just as high back then, with a segment of the public believing it spelled the end of the state, the protesters of the time, and the public figures, including himself, acted responsibly.

“That struggle did not cross red lines. We didn’t see then what we see today,” Netanyahu said. “The protesters did not

strike police. They did not call for civil riots. They did not call for refusing to serve [in the IDF]. They did not send their money out of the state, nor did they defame Israel around the world.”

Demonstrators last Wednesday blocked highways nationwide in what protest organizers dubbed a “Day of National Disruption.”

“We will disrupt public order in the face of a government that is trying to disrupt the democratic order,” the organizers said in a statement. “Tens of thousands will go out to activities across the country to stop the regime coup, which has no support among the people.”

Police struggled to clear the roads, sometimes employing water cannons and stun grenades. Police Commissioner Yaakov “Kobi” Shabtai said following a situational meeting with his senior command staff: “The events today are

difficult and saddening. The Israel Police considers the right to protest a cornerstone of a democratic country. But at the same time, we will not allow violations of public order and we will not allow damage to property and symbols of government.”

Earlier last Wednesday, member of Knesset Benny Gantz of the National Unity Party called on Netanyahu to start talks. “Close the Knesset plenum now and don’t open it until we calm emotions. Stop everything and we’ll drive from here to the President’s Residence.”

In response, Netanyahu announced: “My door is open, come now.”

President Isaac Herzog said last Wednesday that Israeli society faced “a deep and serious internal crisis that threatens us all. It threatens Israel’s internal resilience and solidarity. It is dangerous, very dangerous.” **HW**

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U.S. State Department Offers \$5 million Reward for Info on al-Shabaab Leader

(JNS) – The U.S. State Department offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information about the whereabouts of Ali Mohamed Rage, also known as Ali Dheere, a senior leader of al-Shabaab. The department’s announcement last Tuesday came nearly 15 years after it declared al-Shabaab a Foreign Terrorist Organization in March 2008.

The Mogadishu-born Rage has planned attacks in Kenya and Somalia, according to the department, which labeled him a specially designated global terrorist in August 2021. The U.N. Security Council has also sanctioned Rage.

“Al-Shabaab is responsible for terrorist attacks in Kenya, Somalia and neighboring countries that resulted in loss of life, including of U.S. citizens,” stated Foggy Bottom. “The terrorist group continues to plot, plan and conspire to commit terrorist acts against the United States, U.S. interests and foreign partners.”

In 2019, Al-Shabaab said its deadly attack in Nairobi, Kenya, was a response to then-President Donald Trump recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

An American Jew, Jason Spindler, was among the nearly two-dozen people killed. **HW**

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Why are These Israeli Protesters Dressed Up Like Characters from ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’?



Protesters supporting women’s rights dressed as characters from ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ TV series attend a protest in Tel Aviv on February 20, 2023. Credit: Getty Images

This article originally appeared on Forward. Reprinted with permission.

An increasingly large group of women has joined the demonstrations against the Israeli government’s planned judicial overhauls in the past two weeks. Its members dress up as handmaids from the Hulu TV series “The Handmaid’s Tale,” based on the book by Margaret Atwood.

They have already staged their protest performances in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and last Saturday night, about 150 of them arrived at the latter city’s Dizengoff Square, before the main marches and demonstration began.

The Israeli protest joins a worldwide wave – demonstrators have donned the same red cloaks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Argentina, Ireland and elsewhere. Referring to the growing phenomenon the British daily “The Guardian” described the handmaids’ performances as one of the most powerful symbols of contemporary feminist protest.

Hadas Ragolsky, a veteran journalist and one of the initiators of the Israeli handmaids’ protest, says that they decided to use the image of the handmaid because it is so well-known. “Everyone is familiar with this image, and it works. In fact, it’s caught on unusually well.

The number of participants kept increasing and our photos made their way all over the world. Even Margaret Atwood shared a picture of us on Twitter.”

Ragolsky says that the initiative began in the WhatsApp group for Bonot Alternativa (Building an Alternative) – an apolitical group of women from all walks of society: secular, religious and ultra-Orthodox, Arab and Jewish. “This whole big, diverse group is fighting for women’s rights, equality, representation and an uncompromising war to end violence against women,” she says.

The group was established two and a half years ago after a 16-year-old girl was gang raped in the southern resort city of Eilat. Among other things, they promoted a number of campaigns and demonstrations, such as a protest at a Tel Aviv concert by the singer Eyal Golan, who has long been dogged by allegations of sexual misconduct; a protest against the early release of rapist Alon Kastiel from prison and a campaign for equal working conditions for male and female players on Israel’s national soccer teams.

Ragolsky spoke at a pro-democracy demonstration in Kfar Sava last week: “Four women were murdered in the past three weeks. But this government isn’t dealing with that, they and we aren’t

important to them. To them, it’s more important to oppose the High Court of Justice, to give a seal of approval for criminals to become government ministers, or to take care of the lodging and cosmetics budgets of the prime minister and his wife.”

How did these performance protests start?

“Before the first demonstration in Jerusalem, about two weeks ago, someone mentioned the idea that we should do a performance based on ‘The Handmaid’s Tale.’ It looked organized, but it was a guerrilla event. We bought cloaks that were sold as Little Red Riding Hood or Wonder Woman costumes, and sewed the white bonnets.

“I consulted with photographers about how we should join the demonstration so that we would stand out, and walked through a mass of Israeli flags with our red cloaks. We walked from Agranat Square opposite the Supreme Court building to the platform next to the traffic circle across from the Knesset, and we got onto the stage without coordinating it in advance. [Last] week there were handmaids’ protests all over the country, including at demonstrations in Kfar Sava, Ra’anana, Kiryat Ono and Haifa.”

What is your goal?
“The [Handmaid’s Tale] book and TV series present a dystopian reality that we’re afraid of. They’re trying to police us, to restrict us. We aren’t waiting until they put headscarves on us. We don’t want them to decide when we can go shopping in the supermarket, where we’ll sit on the bus and when we’ll take our child to the doctor. And that’s already happening in certain communities in Israel.

“The law to expand the powers of the rabbinical courts, which advancing almost under the radar, is an important step toward a significant blow to women’s rights. What will happen, for exam-

A diverse group of women are using a global symbol to make their fears heard at protests against Israel’s judicial coup

ple, is that a kindergarten teacher who has a problem with her employer and wants to sue him will be dragged into a rabbinical court – and we already know that those courts discriminate against women. We have been warning for several weeks now against the attempt to reduce our presence in the public domain, the pathetic representation of women in the government and in government ministries, and the legislative attempts that will undoubtedly expand to include measures excluding women and [against] abortions.”

One of the main criticisms of the protests is that the State of Israel has been harming Palestinian citizens of Israel and the territories, but now that it’s harming Jews, people are waking up. It’s the same situation with Haredi women – they have been discriminated against within their communities for years.

“The Bonot Alternativa group includes ultra-Orthodox women. And several months ago, there was a court hearing after the High Court decided that the Agudath Israel party is required to include women, which the party didn’t honor. [The Haredi women] told us – ‘Don’t come to the hearing, we’ll protest and you’ll support us.’

We’re saying that the deterioration we’ll likely see will hurt them first and further worsen their status. There are women in Israel who are dressed the same way we dress for the performances, and are required to behave in a certain way.” HW

Palestinian Who Killed Robert Kennedy Denied Parole for 16th Time

(JNS) – Sirhan Sirhan, the Jerusalem-born Palestinian who assassinated then-U.S. presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, was denied parole last Wednesday, “Reuters” reported.

A review board ruled in 2021 that Sirhan was eligible for parole but was overruled by California Governor Gavin Newsom.

“After carefully reviewing the case, including records in the California State Archives, I have determined that Sirhan has not developed the accountability and insight required to support his safe release into the community,” Newsom wrote in an op-ed at the time explaining his decision.

Sirhan subsequently sued the state, arguing the governor’s action was illegal.

It was not immediately clear how last Wednesday’s ruling would impact the lawsuit.

Sirhan was convicted of murdering Kennedy, 42, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on June 5, 1968, just minutes after Kennedy had given his victory speech for winning the California Democratic presidential primary. Kennedy died in hospital the following day.

His older brother, former U.S. President John F. Kennedy, was assassinated in Dallas in 1963.

Sirhan has claimed he has no recollection of shooting Robert Kennedy, although he is on record as saying that he was motivated to kill him due to his support for Israel.

He was sentenced to death in 1969, but the sentence was commuted to life in prison following California’s banning of the death penalty.

Sirhan is currently imprisoned at California’s Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility near San Diego. HW

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Federal Authorities Arrest Man Who Made Death Threats Against Michigan Officials



Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel. Credit: Michigan Department of Attorney General.

(JNS) – Federal law enforcement has arrested a man with access to numerous weapons who they said made death threats against Jewish politicians in the state of Michigan.

Jack Eugene Carpenter III, 41, of Tipton, Mich., was arrested by federal agents in Texas and appeared in federal court there on Feb. 21. He was then transported to Michigan. Authorities have requested that he “be detained pending trial.”

One of those he allegedly targeted was Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, who tweeted: “The FBI has confirmed I was a target of the heavily armed defendant in this matter. It is my sincere hope that the federal authorities take this offense just as seriously as my Hate Crimes & Domestic Terrorism Unit takes plots to murder elected officials.”

In a press statement, U.S. Attorney Dawn Ison said “no one should be threatened or targeted with violence because of their religious beliefs. Anyone who communicates a threat to kill or injure others can expect serious criminal consequences.”

She added that “this investigation was greatly aided by concerned citizens who timely came forward to law enforcement and thereby helped us keep our communities safe.”

According to the FBI, a Twitter threat was made by a user with the handle of “TemperedReason” on Feb. 17 “to kill Jewish government officials in Michigan,” according to the FBI’s criminal complaint.

“I’m heading back to Michigan now threatening to carry out the punishment of death to anyone that is jewish in the Michigan govt if they don’t leave, or confess, and now that kind of problem. Because I can Legally do that, right?” tweeted TemperedReason, who authorities allege is Carpenter.

On Feb. 18, he tweeted that he would be returning to town with expired license plates, saying, “You may want to let everyone know, and the Wayne County sheriff as well, any attempt to subdue me will be met with deadly force in self-defense.”

The complaint also says the Twitter feed included a “Declaration of Sovereignty, which claimed a new country named ‘New Israel’ was formed in a 9-mile radius” of an address in Tipton, in western Michigan near the border of Indiana. The address is Carpenter’s home, though he was not in Michigan. FBI agents used his cell-phone number to track him to a suburb of Fort Worth, Texas, where he was arrested.

The U.S. Justice Department said Carpenter had three 9mm semi-automatic pistols registered to him and that he was under investigation by the Michigan State Police for stealing a fourth pistol. It is also believed that he “owned a shotgun and two hunting rifles.”

Reacting to the news, Michigan State Rep. Noah Arbit (D-20th District), who took office seven weeks ago and is one

of three Jewish state legislators, said in a statement: “This incident is disturbing because it is consistent with the unabated rise in antisemitism, white nationalism and hate crimes targeting Jews across the country, as well as increased political violence and threats against public officials, particularly right here in Michigan.”

In 2020, a group of men plotted to

kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. They were found guilty last year of supporting terrorism. In December, a man from Dearborn, Mich., was arrested and charged with ethnic intimidation for allegedly harassing preschool students and their parents at Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Township near Detroit.

If convicted, Carpenter faces up to five years in prison. [HW](#)

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Congrats to BBYO International 96th Sganit Sydney Shanker



Sydney Shanker

Sydney Shanker ran for International 96th Sganit (Vice President of Programming) during International Convention in Dallas. She won! She currently holds the position of Nsiah (President) of Delta Region and is doing a fantastic job leading her region.

She is so passionate about BBYO and making each member feel included.

“I am very proud of her and can’t wait to see what she accomplishes!” said Senior Regional Director Zoë Goldberg.

Wish Sydney a mazel tov on her new position as International 96th Sganit! Way to go! [HW](#)

Hundreds of Police Rescue Sara Netanyahu after Protesters Trap Her in Hair Salon



Police officers stand guard while Israelis demonstrate against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s wife Sara Netanyahu outside a hair salon in Tel Aviv, March 1, 2023. Credit: Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90.

(JNS) – Thousands of protesters blocked the entrance to a hair salon that Sara Netanyahu, the prime minister’s wife, was visiting last Wednesday night. Hundreds of security forces were called to the scene to rescue her.

After several hours trapped in the salon, Sara Netanyahu was extracted at about 11 p.m. Israel time.

Israeli police first blocked the entrance to the salon to prevent protesters from entering, and police mounted on horseback were called to the scene to reinforce the perimeter around the salon. Clashes broke out between the protesters and police who tried to remove them.

The incident began when protesters identified Sara Netanyahu entering the salon. Thousands marched to the scene.

They shouted, “She won’t be allowed to leave the barber shop” and “Shame.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the protesters on Twitter: “The anarchistic activists under the leadership of [Opposition leader Yair] Lapid continue to cross red lines. They are currently harassing and threatening my wife in Tel Aviv. I call on Lapid and the opposition to stop this immediately and condemn this shameful act which is unprecedented.”

Netanyahu spoke out against the violent protests roiling the country earlier that evening in a televised address to the nation.

“Freedom of protest is not a license to drag the country into anarchy and chaos. A sovereign state cannot tolerate anarchy,” Netanyahu said. [HW](#)



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- Working knowledge of a synagogue community preferred

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Estate Planning Will I Lose Control Over My Assets When I Put Them in My Trust?

By Benjamin I. Wachtel, Esq.
and David L. Mendelson, Esq.

Many individuals fear that by establishing and placing assets into a trust they lose control over and access to those assets. While in certain trusts this concept holds some truth, the extent of accessibility depends largely on the type of trust the individual or couple establishes. In this article, we will explore briefly two (2) types of trusts, namely (1) Revocable Trusts and (2) Irrevocable Trusts.

(1) REVOCABLE LIVING TRUSTS

Revocable Living Trusts offer much greater control than Irrevocable Trusts over assets “funded” (legal term for “put into”) into the trust because the couple or individual who set up the trust act as the initial trustee(s), or individuals who manage and carry out the terms of the trust. In the case of a Revocable Living Trust, the couple or individual who set up the trust maintain complete access to and immediate control over the assets transferred into the trust. Here are just a few of the key reasons why a Revocable Living Trust is often the ideal plan for a couple or individual:

1. AVOIDING PROBATE COURT: When property and assets are held in a Revocable Living Trust, they can pass to beneficiaries without going through probate, which can be a lengthy and costly process.

2. PRIVACY: Unlike a Will, which becomes a matter of public record when it is probated, a Revocable Living Trust allows for the distribution of assets outside of court and in private.

3. INCAPACITY PLANNING: A Revocable Living Trust can provide for the management of assets in the event of incapacity. If one becomes unable to manage his or her own affairs, the person designated as successor trustee takes over management of the trust assets without court involvement.

(2) IRREVOCABLE TRUSTS

As its name suggests, except under limited and specific circumstances, Irrevocable Trusts cannot be modified or voided. When one establishes an Irrevocable Trust, for the most part, the Grantor(s) (the legal term for the individual or couple who establish the trust) relinquishes direct access to and immediate control over the assets held



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within the trust. If that is the case, why would one ever establish an Irrevocable Trust? There are several important circumstances and reasons why an Irrevocable Trust is often the ideal plan for an individual or couple. Here are two (2) common reasons:

1. FEDERAL ESTATE TAX: Individuals or couples whose estate exceeds the threshold for the Federal Estate Tax (the current threshold is an estate worth \$12.92 Million but that figure is set to become significantly lower at the end of 2025) can use Irrevocable Trusts to shield assets from the Federal Estate Tax. As noted in previous articles, the Federal Estate Tax is significant because when it does apply, it consumes forty percent (40%!) of the overall estate. Thus, individuals whose estate exceeds the threshold can benefit from certain Irrevocable Trusts that facilitate and enable asset transfers at a tax discount. Perhaps more importantly, assets held in an Irrevocable Trust are not considered part of the Grantor’s estate for estate tax purposes, which renders those assets immune from the Federal Estate Tax altogether.

2. SPECIAL NEEDS PLANNING AND BENEFIT PROTECTION: A second key area where Irrevocable Trusts play a major role is for special needs individuals or anyone who receives “means tested” governmental benefits. Irrevocable Trusts preserve eligibility for the special needs or disabled individual and enable said individual to benefit simultaneously from other assets. In these cases, individuals are able to remain eligible for Medicaid or other governmental benefit programs and still benefit from other assets without those additional assets counting against the individual under the government’s “means tests.” In other words, assets held in this type of Irrevocable Trust are not counted against the individual under the government’s “means tests” as pertains to eligibility for governmental benefits. **HW**

Artist Depicts Disarmingly Beautiful Holocaust Art

(JNS) – At first blush, the recent, photorealistic paintings of Los Angeles-based Jewish artist Robert Russell look inviting, almost sweet. A lamb turns its head to look back over its shoulder in one, and in another, a crouching dog looks to the right, wide-eyed.

But all is not well in these enormous pictures.

In the works, which went on view March 9 at Anat Ebgi Gallery in Los Angeles, Russell drew inspiration from photos in auction catalogs of Allach porcelain figures. Henrich Himmler founded the company, based near Munich, in 1935. When it was short on employees during the war, the Nazis forced Jewish prisoners at the Dachau concentration camp to make the figurines.

“Until they were liberated in 1945, these prisoners, living in unimaginable circumstances, created figurines of such things as puppies, sheep, rabbits and perfect Aryan children,” according to the gallery.

“Russell places these subjects against vacant horizonless backdrops; the result is compositions that are hauntingly still and breathless,” it added. “On the surface, the beautiful imagery provides viewers with the opportunity for quiet reflection, while the reality of their origin turns thoughts to the nature of evil.”

As a Jewish artist, Russell said he wanted to “reclaim” the images and to “paint them vastly larger than life, exposing them as the monstrous creations they really were.” **HW**



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SECURE 2.0 Aims to Brighten the Future for Retirement Savers

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors
Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com • fa.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael-stein

The \$1.7 trillion appropriations bill passed by Congress at the end of last year included some notable provisions affecting workplace retirement plans and IRAs. Dubbed the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022, the new legislation builds on the sweeping Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement Act that was passed in 2019.

Here’s an overview of the Act’s changes to the complicated rules that govern tax-advantaged retirement accounts. The following provisions – though far from a complete list – are intended to help workers save more money for retirement and let retirees leave their savings untouched and untaxed for longer.

Looser RMD Rules

The 2019 SECURE Act raised the age at which retirement savers must begin taking taxable distributions from their traditional IRAs and most work-based retirement accounts to 72.

SECURE 2.0 raises that age again to 73 beginning in 2023 (for those who reach age 72 after December 31, 2022) and to 75 in 2033.

Current law requires those who fail to take their full RMD by the deadline to pay a tax of 50% of the amount not taken. The new law reduces that tax amount to 25% in 2023; the tax is further reduced to 10% if account holders take the full required amount and report the tax by the end of the second year after it was due and before the IRS demands payment.

Bringing Roth 401(k)s and similar employer plans in line with Roth IRAs, the legislation eliminates the requirement for savers to take minimum dis-

tributions from their workplace Roth accounts (starting in 2024).

Expanded QCDs

The amount eligible for a qualified charitable distribution from an IRA (\$100,000) will be indexed for inflation starting in 2024. In addition, beginning in 2023, investors will be able to make a one-time charitable distribution of up to \$50,000 from an IRA to a charitable remainder annuity trust, charitable remainder unitrust, or charitable gift annuity.

Not all charitable organizations are able to use all possible gifts, so it is prudent to check first. The type of organization selected can also affect the tax benefits the donor receives.

Rising Catch-up Contributions

Individuals who are age 50 and over can make an additional catch-up contribution of \$1,000 to their IRA. Starting in 2024, this amount will be indexed annually for inflation, similar to employer plan catch-up contributions (limited to \$7,500 in 2023). Also, starting in 2025, the catch-up contribution for people age 60 to 63 will increase to a minimum of \$10,000 for 401(k)s and similar workplace plans (\$5,000 for SIMPLE plans). However, beginning in 2024, all catch-up contributions for workers with incomes above \$145,000 will be after-tax (Roth) contributions.

New Penalty Exceptions

Distributions from retirement savings accounts are generally subject to ordinary income tax. In addition, distributions prior to age 59½ also may be subject to an early-withdrawal penalty of 10%, unless an exception (such as

death or disability) applies. SECURE 2.0 ushers in several new exceptions to the early-withdrawal penalty, including an emergency personal expense, terminal illness, domestic abuse, to pay long-term care insurance premiums, and to recover from a federally declared disaster. Amounts, rules, and effective dates differ for each circumstance, with some exceptions effective immediately.

Changes to Employer Plans

Beginning in 2025, the Act requires most new employer-sponsored plans to automatically enroll employees with contribution levels between 3% and 10% of income, and it automatically increases their savings rates by 1% each year until they reach at least 10% (but not more than 15%) of income. Workers will be able to opt out of the programs.

The new law permits employer matches to be made to Roth accounts. Currently, employer matches must go into an employee’s pre-tax (traditional) account. This provision takes effect immediately; however, it may take time for employers to amend their plans to include this feature.

Beginning in 2024, the legislation permits employers to automatically enroll non-highly compensated employees into emergency savings accounts where they can set aside up to \$2,500 (or a lower amount that an employer stipulates) in a Roth-type account. Savings above this limit can go into a Roth retirement account, if the employee has one, or would not be accepted. Employers may also help workers who are making qualified student loan repayments to simultaneously save for retirement by investing matching contributions in a retirement account in their name.

Rolling 529 Plans to Roth IRAs

When parents or grandparents contribute to a 529 college savings plan for a student, the investment earnings accumulate on a tax-deferred basis, and withdrawals are tax-free as long as they are used for qualified education expenses. But for withdrawals not used for qualified education expenses, earnings may be subject to taxation as ordinary income and possibly a 10% tax penalty. Thus, when there is money left over in a 529 account that won’t be used for a family member’s college expenses, the owner may dread the tax bill that would

come from cashing out and repurposing the money.

Fortunately, starting in 2024, account beneficiaries will be able to directly roll over up to \$35,000 from 529 plan accounts to Roth IRAs, provided the 529 accounts were open for at least 15 years. The rollover amounts would be subject to Roth IRA annual contribution limits (\$6,500 in 2023 and indexed for inflation thereafter). Distributions from the Roth IRA will be tax-free and penalty-free as long as the 5-year holding requirement has been met, and they are taken after age 59½ (or an exception applies).

As with other investments, there are generally fees and expenses associated with participation in a 529 savings plan. There is also the risk that the investments may lose money or not perform well enough to cover college costs as anticipated. The tax implications of a 529 savings plan should be discussed with your legal and/or tax professionals because they can vary significantly from state to state. Also be aware that most states offer their own 529 plans, which may provide advantages and benefits exclusively for their residents and taxpayers. These other state benefits may include financial aid, scholarship funds, and protection from creditors.

Before investing in a 529 savings plan, please consider the investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses carefully. The official disclosure statements and applicable prospectuses – which contain this and other information about the investment options, underlying investments, and investment company – can be obtained by contacting your financial professional. You should read these materials carefully before investing.

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Cleveland Rabbi Sentenced to Prison for Soliciting Underage Sex had a Prominent Conservative Rabbi as His Character Witness



Rabbi William Lebeau provides a character witness testimony on behalf of Rabbi Stephen Weiss at Weiss’ sentencing hearing for crimes of soliciting underage sex, Cleveland, Ohio, Feb. 27, 2023. Weiss was sentenced to six months in prison. (Screenshot)

By Andrew Lapin

(JTA) – A Cleveland-area rabbi was sentenced to six months in prison last Monday for soliciting underage sex, capping a sad and shocking saga for the area’s Jewish community.

Among those who testified on Stephen Weiss’ behalf in a bid for leniency was a prominent rabbi in the Conservative movement.

Weiss, formerly senior rabbi at B’nai Jeshurun Congregation in Pepper Pike, was sentenced for the crimes of attempted unlawful sexual conduct with a minor and possessing criminal tools. He had been arrested and charged after a sting operation last April and pleaded guilty to the two felony charges in January. Weiss, 61, will be required to register as a sex offender for 25 years.

Appearing as a character witness for Weiss at his sentencing hearing was Rabbi William Lebeau, a former dean of the rabbinical school and former vice chancellor at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Lebeau currently serves as a senior consultant for rabbinic and institutional leadership with the Rabbinical Assembly, the professional association for Conservative rabbis.

“I first met Rabbi Weiss when he was a rabbinical student and I’ve maintained a close relationship with him to this day. I’ve come from New York City this morning because I wanted to share with you in court my experiences with Rabbi Weiss over the more than three decades that I’ve known him,” Lebeau said as he opened a three-minute statement on Weiss’ behalf, according to a recording of the hearing.

In the rest of the statement, he described “the Rabbi Weiss that I know” as “beloved by his classmates and respected by his teachers,” “especially admired for his qualities of kindness and sensitivity,” “his inspirational teaching of children and adults” and his support for congregants experiencing trouble.

Lebeau noted that Weiss felt remorse and had sought professional help in the wake of his arrest.

“Significantly, over more than 30 years as a rabbi there was nothing close to a grievance about his rabbinic service or his personal conduct,” Lebeau said. “There was nothing that would have predicted this aberrant moment in his life. I respectfully ask you your honor to consider the case of Rabbi Weiss in the context of the life of devotion to his family and to his community that he lived prior to this tragic event.”

Weiss had already pleaded guilty to the crimes; Lebeau and Weiss’ daughter appeared as character witnesses as

part of his attorney’s effort to secure a more lenient sentence. Weiss’ legal team had argued that his 2022 solicitation of an undercover police officer posing as an underaged boy was an aberration in Weiss’s three decades of rabbinical activities. His lawyer also cited a 2018 brain injury as a relevant factor in his behavior.

Some in the community questioned the decision of Lebeau, a widely admired mentor in the Conservative movement, to testify on Weiss’ behalf.

“I have a great deal of respect for Rabbi Lebeau. He’s a very important person in the movement,” Rabbi Noah Bickart, an endowed professor of Jewish studies at John Carroll University in Cleveland, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Bickart had been a student at JTS when Lebeau was its dean.

But, Bickart said, “Choosing to support and defend Rabbi Weiss here, as opposed to the community that was victimized or potentially victimized, was the wrong decision to make.”

In an email to JTA, Lebeau said, “I chose to make a personal statement referring to the Stephen Weiss I have known for 35 years and the qualities that defined him, as I said in the courtroom, ‘prior to this tragic event.’”

The Rabbinical Assembly, with which Lebeau is currently associated, had harshly condemned Weiss’ alleged behavior upon his initial arrest in April 2022 and suspended his membership, making him ineligible to apply for jobs or participate in other activities.

“These deeply disturbing accusations betray the sacred trust our communities put in their clergy and must be fully and immediately investigated and dealt with appropriately,” the group said in a joint statement with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism at the time.

The Rabbinical Assembly began publicizing a list of suspended and expelled rabbis in 2021, amid a widespread reckoning over whether Jewish organizations had inappropriately obscured misconduct by rabbis and other leaders.

“Rabbi Lebeau’s testimony was not on behalf of the Rabbinical Assembly,” a Rabbinical Assembly spokesperson said in a statement this week, which noted that the group is now in the process of expelling Weiss permanently. “And his testimony did not seek to justify nor excuse the behavior for which Steven Weiss was convicted.”

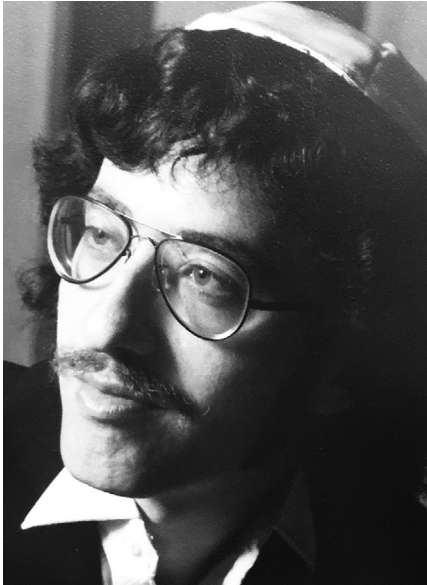
Lebeau had previously defended a different rabbi accused of inappropriate behavior towards children. In 2014, according to the “Forward,” he had supported a rabbi in Savannah, Georgia, who had given a lesson to a class of 9-year-olds about child sex trafficking filled with explicit language, alarming many parents.

Back then, Lebeau told the “Forward” the accused rabbi was “one of the kindest, most sensitive, caring people among all the students I met,” and expressed particular concern about the damage the incident could do to the rabbi’s reputation, saying, “This is a man’s life and a man’s reputation.” No crime was ever alleged to have taken place with the rabbi in Savannah.

Bickart said he was unfamiliar with the Savannah case but had a theory about why Lebeau spoke on behalf of the rabbis in both cases.

“I think Rabbi Lebeau honestly just wants to defend rabbis,” he said. “My

OBITUARIES



Ronald “Ronnie” Charles Angel

Ronald “Ronnie” Charles Angel, age 79, passed away peacefully in his sleep at 3:11 on the morning of March 1, 2023, at Baptist Reynolds Memorial Hospice House. He was born on October 26, 1943, at Methodist Hospital to the late Dolly and Milton Angel of Memphis, Tenn., where he lived out his life. He attended White Station School and graduated from Germantown High School, and he attended the Memphis State University.

He leaves his twin brother, Donnie Angel (Susan), his sisters, Emily Angel Baer (Dennis) and Melinda Angel Rothenberg (Stuart); and his nieces and nephews, Tamara, Joshua, Cara, Hilary, Aaron, Courtney, Rebecca, Henry, Jacob, Claire, Roxanne and Adam.

The funeral was held at Baron Hirsch Cemetery on March 2. Ronnie’s family wishes to thank the staff of Baptist Reynolds Memorial Hospice House for their skill and kindness to Ronnie. He could not have been in more understanding and thoughtful hands.

Ronnie loved performing. He was an incredibly talented tap dancer, studying at the old Martha Scott Dance Studio with her son, Otis Smith. His happiest summer was spent performing in a production of the musical “L’il Abner” at Dogpatch, USA, in Arkansas. He also performed in Branson, Mo. At the Memphis Jewish Community Center, Ronnie won the role of Erronious in “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,” a scene-stealing character first played by Buster Keaton. At Rhodes College in “Little Mary Sunshine,” he played Chief Brown Bear, father figure to Mary. In addition to performing on stage, he often choreographed tap scenes in various productions in Memphis. At Theatre Memphis, Ronnie played Fezzwig, the funniest character in “A Christmas Carol.” He also perfected the dance role of silent screen star Charlie Chaplin, complete with curly hair, tiny moustache, bowler hat and cane.

Ronnie was artistic in other ways as well. He used to regale his nieces and

nephews with folding intricate origami shapes out of dollar bills, not from a book of designs or instructions, but from the imaging of his own mind. He was quite adept at magic tricks, and he enjoyed figuring out how professional magicians performed their illusions. He was a treasure trove of trivia. He knew amazing tidbits of basically worthless information, unless he was on your trivia team – then his propensity to remember minute information and details was quite valuable indeed.

On the piano Ronnie was somewhat of a prodigy. Ronnie could be heard playing everything from classical to rock and roll to Broadway tunes throughout the day and night. He couldn’t read much music, but anything he heard, he could reproduce on the piano. He enjoyed teaching his young nephews how to play the “Boogie Woogie Blues,” one of his favorites. Ronnie had as much fun playing it as the boys did listening. He also sat at the piano with his grand-nephew, Ronnie playing the right hand and his nephew playing the left. As the younger kids progressed in their music, Ronnie beamed with pride, smiling as though these were his own children. Ronnie spent a lot of time with the kids of the family, not just around the piano, but also in the movie room, where Ronnie would join them to watch their favorite tv shows, like “The A-Team” or “The Dukes of Hazzard” on a big screen when those projection televisions were in their infancy and movies were played on the VCR. Ronnie was always relatable to the nieces and nephews, and they loved him for it.

Although Ronnie was of small physical stature, his heart was big. He played in the cold shallow water of the Jewish Community Center swimming pool with his nieces and picnicked with them on a beach towel. He’d sit on the floor with the nieces and nephews and build with Lego blocks or create houses of playing cards that seemed to defy gravity. But his compassion extended beyond his own relatives, as he quietly made donations to a number of national organizations. Ronnie touched so many people in his life in such a positive way. Charles Dickens described Fezzwig, the character he created and Ronnie brought to life on stage, like this: “The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.” Ronnie took pleasure in the simple things of life. He had a passion for justice and equality. He loved his parents and his family. He took pride in the achievements of those closest to him. Like Fezzwig, the smiles he brought to our faces were priceless. Ronnie will continue to be loved and missed by all of us and remembered with a smile.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Baron Hirsch Synagogue or a charity of choice. **HW**

sense is that Rabbi Lebeau is probably the go-to person to be a character witness for anybody.”

Still, Bickart said, he found the choice to testify on Weiss’ behalf meaningful.

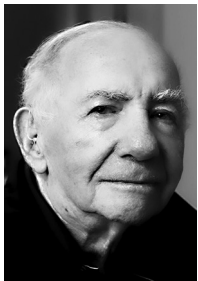
“As somebody who’s a parent of a boy precisely the same age as the fictitious victim in this case, it’s hard for me to see an important rabbinic mentor seemingly take more seriously the concerns of a convicted sex offender than of the community,” Bickart said.

Prosecutors for Ohio’s task force on internet crimes against children disputed the arguments of Lebeau and Weiss’ attorney that Weiss’ conduct was a brief irregularity, saying that he had shown

evidence of premeditated action. Weiss had previously sent explicit messages to an undercover officer posing as an underaged boy in 2020, and waited for hours in order to separate his target from his parents in 2022, when he was arrested.

B’nai Jeshurun, where Weiss had served since 2001, suspended the rabbi immediately upon his arrest in 2022, and he resigned days later. The congregation had determined in its own investigation that Weiss had not engaged in any illegal or illicit activity at the congregation itself. After Weiss’ sentencing was announced, the congregation’s president and senior rabbi emailed congregants to offer counseling services. **HW**

From Generation to Generation



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

Ted Roberts

“Grandma,” said Rachel. “It’s only a noodle kugel. We’ll buy one if you can’t cook it up. No need to be so unhappy.”

So said the ten-year-old junior chef wrapped in an oversized apron stained with cinnamon and milk. Bubbe didn’t even look up. She was clearly distraught, as she leaned with both hands on the kitchen counter and stared down on a pseudo-kugel. An unfinished kugel, a baking dish full of noodles; like an apple pie without cinnamon, sugar, or a small squeeze of lemon. It was not yet a kugel, only a 9x13 Pyrex dish containing noodles.

She couldn’t recall the recipe! Just like one day last week she couldn’t recall her daughter-in-law’s cell phone number. Clearly, it was worsening – these lapses of memory.

“Maybe oregano,” said the kugel assistant. Well, at least that brought a smile. “Just joking, Bubbe – I know oregano goes with your spaghetti and meatballs.”

Mildred Greenberg was noted for her kugel. She made it frequently for synagogue socials, for friends. If there was a TV kugel channel, Mildred would have been their CEO, chief cook and technical consultant.

But now she stood with her noodles boiled and layered in the baking dish – but not sure of the magic mixture – the

alchemy that turned mere noodles into Mildred Greenberg’s world-class noodle kugel – after a 60-minute bake at 325 degrees, naturally.

Cream cheese, she remembered. Even cottage cheese and sour cream. And milk, too. She could recall also the cinnamon. But that was basic, like tomatoes and onions for spaghetti sauce. Blue ribbon kugel, Mildred Greenberg’s kugel, soared above such common ingredients.

It began with her mother of sainted memory. Mildred, just like the young cheerleader in the blousy apron, had handed ingredients to her mama like an operating room nurse slaps the proper instrument into the outstretched hand of the surgeon. About 600 kugels later Mildred was the kugelmeyer – beside her, at least in those early years, her own daughter, Laura.

But following some tricky laws of genetics, the frisky kugel gene had skipped Laura’s generation. And so had Yiddishkeit. At first, she had kept a sticky hand in the kugel ceremony. But then college and its intellectual temptations – a buffet of choices – distracted her. This child had no interest in her heritage. Nor in kitchens. Make love, not war (and warfare somehow included kugels) was her mantra.

She had fled to that alien world where kugels were referred to as noodle casseroles and were mass produced by the Kraft Corporation, who omitted raisins, cinnamon and enough eggs – a good buy for 59 cents, but not kugel. Sometimes tradition unwinds, and we lose our children to the passing parade of the world. Laura ran off with the circus, so to speak. Soon after she bore Rachel, she sold her birthright for a stew of deadly delights. In her 21st year, the Angel of Death, the Malach Hamoves in person

collected her from the ER of Central Municipal Hospital. The excesses of a dissolute life had cut the cord of life.

Today, the family kugelmeyers were Mildred and her apprentice granddaughter, Rachel, separated by a generation.

But now this helpless feeling, the sporadic loss of phone numbers, social security numbers, the PIN on her credit card – that was annoying – but sources were available. However, her mother’s kugel recipe, unrecorded, only existed with her mama in a world that defied computers and cell phone communication.

She sat at the kitchen table, her grandchild next to her. “What else, Rachel? What else besides the milk, cream cheese, cottage cheese, sugar and cinnamon?” That would work – these ingredients alone would produce an edible kugel. More, even. A novice kugel consumer would lick his lips and call it a delicious noodle casserole. But Mildred’s public was accustomed to a dish that brought down the angels from heaven with a fork and a to-go box strapped to their wings.

Bubbe and her assistant looked at each other across the kitchen table. Painfully, Mildred mentally retrieved the basics then hopelessly shook her head in despair. If she couldn’t recall a few spices, how could she hope to imbue this granddaughter with the love of Judaism. She looked down at her incomplete masterpiece and then through the kitchen window. Something caught her eye. There, unlatching the white picket gate that led into the backyard was Laura, Rachel’s mother, the lost generation. Wasn’t that her in pleated skirt and what they called Bobby Sox? Or was it a sick old woman’s fantasy produced when needed by a cooperative imagination?

The Scribbler On the Roof

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Suddenly Rachel, next in line to be Kugel Queen of the Greenberg family, beamed with newfound importance.

“OK Bubbe, first of all three eggs added to the mixture. Mix it all together – oh, and don’t forget eight ounces of sour cream. Pour it over the noodles. And on top, you always put five pats of butter and a generous sprinkling of cinnamon and sugar. And you know what would be really, really special? Six thin slices of pineapple on top that would gradually flavor the noodles.”

Bubbe smiled the smile of the chef whose table has been set by the angels and whose bowl of confidence is overflowing.

“Such a child – go write it down, now, this minute. Ah, yesterday was your mother’s yahrzeit – I can tell you’ve been talking to her.”

From generation to generation as the Chumash says.

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

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ISRAEL INSIGHTS National Day of Sadness

By Howard Weisband

As I write this column today, March 1, may have been the saddest national day I’ve experienced since our Aliyah in 1986.

As another victim of terror was lovingly laid to rest, ugly violence broke out for the first time in Tel Aviv within increased demonstrations called against the Government and its introduction of legislation toward judicial reform.

Termed a National Day of Disruption, a number of protestors blocked a major highway in Tel Aviv. In response, police moved in, some on horseback, to disburse the crowd. According to a report in the “Times of Israel,” “For the first time since protests began some two months ago, cops deployed tear gas, stun grenades and water cannons to disperse demonstrators...”

Such actions are truly painful, emotionally as well as physically. They venture well beyond “democracy in action,” albeit they represent a minority of the protestors.

No, I don’t believe that democracy in Israel is threatened. Yes, the current Government and Knesset composition represents a political swing too far to the right, not necessarily center-right nor committed to working “across the aisle.”

Realizing the depth of the current di-

vide in the nation, President Isaac Herzog addressed the nation on February 12 in an unprecedented fashion. Prophetically, wrote Barak Ravid in Axios, he “warned that the confrontation in Israeli society... could lead to violence. We are not in a political debate anymore. We are on the brink of a social and constitutional collapse. The powder keg is about to explode,” Herzog said. The Israeli president said the calls for judicial reform are justified but stressed the government’s current plan “raises deep concerns for potential negative implications on Israel’s democratic foundations.”

While all the political actors on both sides of the spectrum, within the coalition and in the opposition, spoke respectfully of the President’s words, they each only conditionally accepted his invitation for discussion to bridge the divide. All maintained their hardened political positions.

It is commonly said that politics is the art of the possible and the art of compromise. Two days ago and today, perhaps, hopefully, we’ve begun to see some positive political interactions taking place.

On February 27, in the Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee of the Knesset, constructive discussion rather than polarizing, angry argumentation seemed to take place. Committee chair-

man MK Simcha Rothman, who has been driving the legislative process on judicial reform, and committee member MK Gilad Kariv exchanged views on the process of judicial review.

Rothman, a member of the coalition with the National Religious Party, and Kariv, a member of the opposition with the Labor Party, found some level of agreement within a British model of judicial review. Without delving into detail, it would combine “hard” and “soft” modes of review. Essentially, the court would be able to provide opinion and rule on contradiction or incompatibility regarding Israel’s Basic Laws.

“It’s not a bad idea, your suggestion is very important, and the structure itself is a good idea,” said Rothman. “I will ask the legal counsel to propose such an integrated alternative,” Michael Starr reported in the “Jerusalem Post.”

Perhaps, finally, some compromise is possible within the judicial reform debate.

There is additional symbolism in this exchange. Rothman is an Orthodox Jew, and Kariv is a rabbi ordained by the Reform Movement in Israel. Both men are pictured wearing kipot.

Then late today, March 1, news reports inform us that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told National

Unity Party head Benny Gantz that his “door is open” and to “come now” to discuss the judicial reform. According to Tovah Lazaroff in the “Jerusalem Post,” Netanyahu spoke just after Gantz met with his Knesset faction and confirmed that he had spoken with Netanyahu and Knesset speaker MK Amir Ohana and asked them to close the Knesset and to travel with him to President Isaac Herzog’s office to try and reach an understanding.

By “close the Knesset” Ganz means stop the legislative process. That won’t happen as such, but possibly it could be slowed down further in order to find productive compromise.

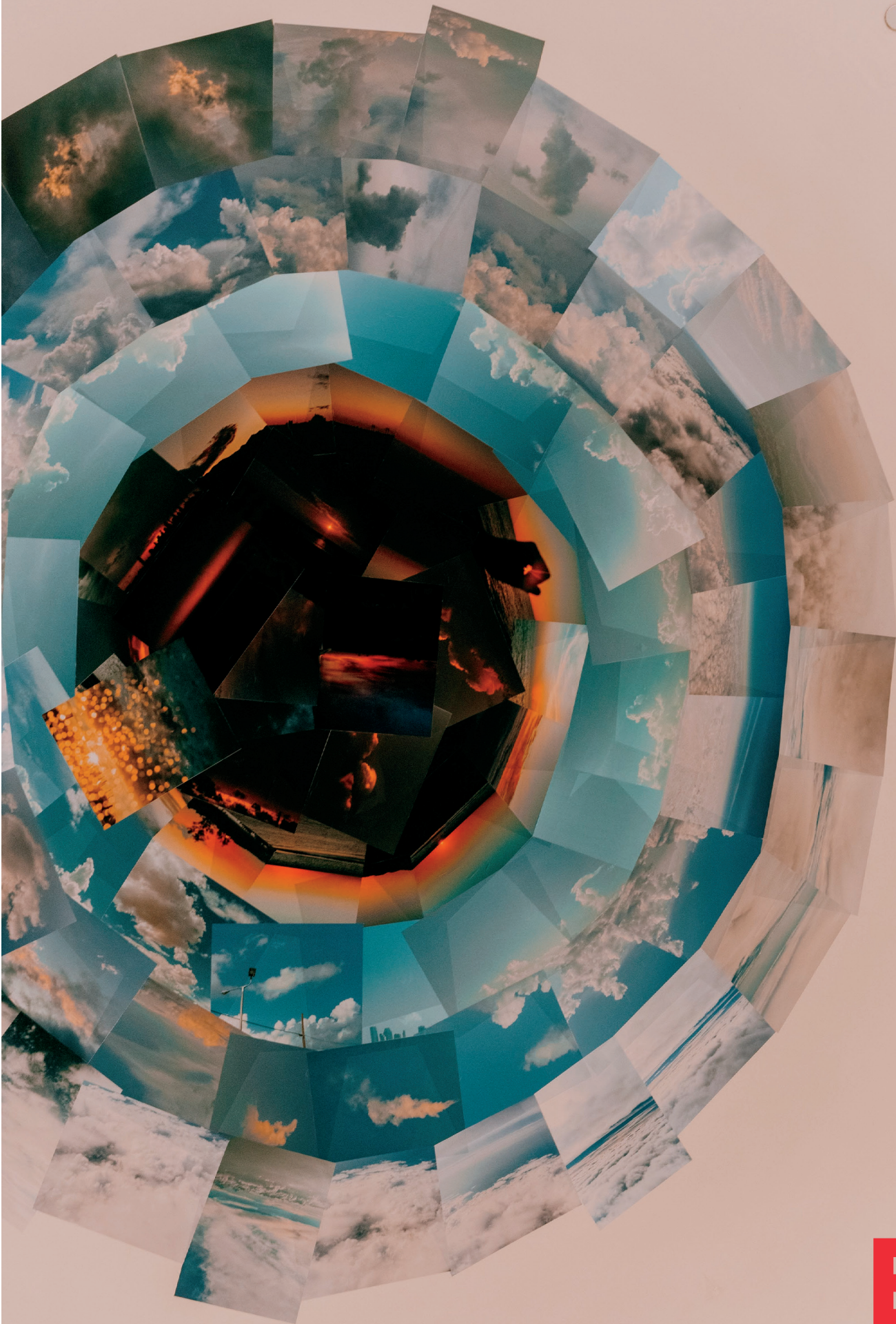
President Herzog warned: “We will all lose, the State of Israel will lose, if no consensual agreement is reached.”

May our politicians heed the words of the President.

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

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