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THE Hebrew Watchman

SERVING THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1925

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3 TAMMUZ, 5783

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Margolin Hebrew Academy Holds 73rd Annual Scholarship Banquet



By Jessica Baum Sukhodolsky

On Sunday, May 21, nearly 300 guests gathered at Baron Hirsch for the Margolin Hebrew Academy's 73rd Annual Scholarship Banquet. Sarah Bracha and Jonathan Wogan were the evening's Guests of Honor for their consistent hard work and support of Jewish education and the community. Michelle Katz received the Eishet Chesed award for her volunteer efforts in the school. The program also introduced a new award – a special Legacy Tribute – which recognized Evelyn and Marlin Graber for their indelible contributions throughout the school's storied history. The theme of the evening was Midor L'dor, which was inspired by the fact that each of our honorees represented a multi-generational MHA family.

The theme rang true as each of the honorees spoke of the lessons they learned from the generations before them and are inspiring the next generation as well. Michelle Katz said, "I am grateful that I had many role models in my life who laid the path for me and

modeled Chesed. To maximize community involvement, you must give of yourself in all ways to help strengthen the people and organizations that make up that community. Each person counts. Our school is the heart of this community, and we must strive to keep it – and all other facets of our Jewish community – vibrant. We can do that by giving of ourselves to the best of our ability. I hope that, with Hashem's help, I can continue to give and model for the next generation of givers."

Jonathan Wogan shared that "With the Torah firmly grounded as our North Star, and as the foundation for the healthy discussions regarding our continued growth, we will peacefully and meaningfully work together to build on the groundwork and legacy of our founders, pillars and educators, and create a school environment that both reflects their vision and values, and caters respectfully to the diversity of our community."

Pesi Katz, daughter of Michelle and David Katz, and current 12th grader at

the Goldie Margolin School for Girls, delivered a d'var Torah. Additionally, Rabbi Yisroel Weiner, head of school, presented Mrs. Laura Timmons and Mrs. Miriam Finkelman with the Teacher of the Year Awards, and Executive Director Brandy Flack was recognized for her tireless devotion to the MHA.

The event featured a delicious four-course dinner catered by Paradox Catering. The Banquet was chaired by Rashki and Zac Kaplan and Aviva and Richard Lewis.

One of the highlights of the event was a beautiful legacy tribute video in memory of Evelyn and Marlin Graber. The video, which was created by Message in a Bottle Productions, featured Graber family members and community members, who shared inspirational stories of the Grabers' commitment to the MHA and Memphis Jewish community. Board President Dr. Deena Davidovics said, "Our legacy tribute honorees, Marlin and Evelyn Graber, zichronam lebracha, were foundational supporters of the Mar-

Left: Several members of the Graber family were in attendance for the Legacy Tribute

Middle: Guests of Honor Sarah Bracha and Jonathan Wogan

Right: Michelle Katz receives the Eishet Chesed Award

gol Hebrew Academy. Marlin served the school as president of the board of trustees and Evelyn was a PTA president. They were tireless volunteers who worked on behalf of the MHA and supported our school throughout their entire lives, and also ensured that even after their passing their support would endure. The Grabers were part of an illustrious group who helped build our Orthodox Jewish community, starting with increasing their own observance and dedicating themselves fully to the creation and continuity of the infrastructure we have to this day, the cornerstone of which is the Margolin Hebrew Academy."

The Banquet served as the perfect ending to a remarkable school year at MHA-FYOS! **HW**

Memphis Unity Proclamation for Israel at 75



Memphis Rabbis and Heads of School read a Memphis Unity Proclamation at Memphis Jewish Federation's Shuk, Rattle & Roll Israel at 75 Event

WHEREAS, 2023 marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the modern State of Israel, which was created on May 14, 1948; and

WHEREAS, for more than 2,000 years, there has been continuous Jewish presence and residence in the land comprising the State of Israel; and

WHEREAS, over thousands of years, the Jewish people maintained our attachment to the Land of Israel; and

WHEREAS, the modern State of Israel was created just a few years after the Holocaust, where the death of six million Jews did not eliminate the will of the Jewish people to seek dignity in life and a place of respect and recognition among the people of the world; and

WHEREAS, Israel is a spiritual center of the Jewish people with many religious sites sacred to Judaism and is also home to and respects other religions and sacred sites; and

WHEREAS, the State of Israel has become a source of agricultural, industrial, technological, academic, and cultural achievement and creativity; and

WHEREAS, the United States recognized the new State of Israel on the same day in 1948, established full diplomatic relations with it, formed many strategic partnerships and developed a relation-

ship valued by both countries; and

WHEREAS, since its inception, the State of Israel has and continues to face external threats to its safety and security and internal challenges navigating the complexities of its diverse society; and

WHEREAS, for 75 years, the Memphis Jewish Community has maintained close ties to Israel through personal, organizational and congregational visits, philanthropic support, rich Israel-based education, programming, and advocacy on the local, national and international fronts;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Memphis Jewish Community recognizes and congratulates the State of Israel on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of its independence; Rejoices in the accomplishments of the still-young state; Joins together today to pray for peace, both internally and externally, and Stands together today as one community in celebration of this historic milestone. **HW**

My Teen Israel Experience



Becky Schubert sand surfing with Rebecca Venger and Atara Kanovsky

could be until I experienced it myself. Already on the first day of the trip when we were all at the airport, I met up with my old friends and got to meet some new ones too. The next day was Friday, meaning it was the first Shabbat. That first Shabbat was a great time to meet new people and start to see what the summer was going to be like. That Saturday night we went on a super cool night hike in a crater where we could see all the stars in the sky. The next week was full of fun activities including Yom NCSY where we got to meet up with other programs for a super fun concert. For those first two weeks of the program, we had a blast, but we were also pushed outside our comfort zones. We were pushed to become a team and work together and grow as a group.

Becky Schubert, daughter of Char-na and Eric Schubert, is a junior at the Goldie Margolin School for Girls. Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund provided her with a Teen Israel Experience grant to offset the costs of her NCSY / JOLT Israel program. All rising juniors and seniors are eligible for grants of up to \$3,000 to attend a recognized teen summer or semester program in Israel. Teen Israel Experience applications for Summer 2023 are open and can be accessed at Lemsky Endowment Fund | Jewish Community Partners (jcpmemphis.org)

By Becky Schubert

This past summer was an unbelievable experience for me that I will never forget! I spent the summer touring Israel and volunteering in Israel as part of JOLT Israel, an NCSY program. JOLT Israel is a five-week leadership traveling program throughout Israel where you learn about the history and culture of Israel and learn what it means to be a Jewish leader. All this is done while touring the amazing land of Israel and making new friends from all over America and Canada. The leadership training culminates in a one-week camp that the members of JOLT Israel run for siblings of children with serious illnesses. For one week, we put the needs of these children first and focused on making it a fun experience for them.

Before going on this program, I heard from my older brother and others who had gone on JOLT just how amazing it is! I didn't quite comprehend how that

After these few weeks of training, we welcomed the children to the special camp. I will always remember the children arriving; we greeted them with a human bridge and the feeling of seeing the smiles on the kids' faces was priceless. The camp was such a great experience for me and helped me connect with the land and language of Israel. We spoke to the children in Hebrew and toured the land with them for that week. Seeing how excited they were to spend time with us was the best part for me.

The last two weeks of the trip flew by. During the end of the trip, we did a lot of learning about the history of Israel. We went to places like the Ir David Water tunnels, the graves of our forefathers, and the Kotel. During the last few days, we did our last-minute shopping on Ben Yehuda and at the Mahane Yehuda market called the Shuk. But that also meant it was time for goodbyes. It was hard to leave my friends and Israel after making such meaningful connections, but I was so grateful for the memories I made and the time I had spent with them.

This past summer wasn't my first time in Israel, but each time I go to Israel it is always a unique and exciting experience. I came into the summer not sure exactly how it would go, but I am beyond happy of how it turned out and the person I am today because of it.

Thank you to Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund for helping make my NCSY/Jolt Israel journey possible for me. **HW**

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PO Box 770846
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Office: 901.763.2215
Direct: 901.827.7244

info@hebrewwatchman.com

Susan C. Nieman
Editor and Publisher

Larry Nieman
Advertising Sales Director

Toni Nieman
Office Manager & Subscriptions

Rebecca Miller Schudel
Social Media Director
Web Development

Herman I. Goldberger
Editor and Publisher Emeritus

Barbara B. Goldberger
Editor and Publisher Emeritus

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. June 23, 2023 / 4 Tammuz, 5783.....7:59 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. June 24, 2023 / 5 Tammuz, 5783..... 9:02 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Korach



Above: Memphis Jewish Federation's Executive Vice President Bluma Zuckerbrot-Finkelstein attended the June meeting of the City of Memphis Multicultural Advisory Board. Members were joined by Japanese Consul General Yoichi Matsumoto, based in Nashville. The Japanese government, in partnership with the Mayor's Board, is sponsoring a Memphis community-wide program this November featuring the incredible story of Japanese Vice-Consul Chiune Sugihara who, based in Lithuania, saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust by issuing exit visas.



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These Bingo Games will feature special prizes. No reservations necessary. Please come join us at 12:15pm!

Wednesday, June 28

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Please join us from Monday through Friday 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. by contacting Adult Services Coordinator Steve Kaplan at 901-259-9220 or stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org, or by calling the front desk at 901-761-0810. **HW**

Steven Spielberg Involved in Possible TV Adaptation of 'Leopoldstadt,' Tom Stoppard's Holocaust Play

By Gabe Friedman

(JTA) – Tom Stoppard's Holocaust play "Leopoldstadt" could get a TV series adaptation – with the help of Steven Spielberg.

"Deadline" reported last Monday that Spielberg and his Amblin production company are shopping the idea of a limited series. Patrick Marber, who directed the stage version, would adapt the script for television, and Stephen Daldry, known for his work on the revered show "The Crown," would direct.

According to "Deadline," no deal has been struck because of the Writers Guild of America strike, which began earlier this month.

"Leopoldstadt," which made its

North American debut on Broadway last year to rave reviews and is expected to have a strong showing at the Tony Awards next month, follows a Viennese Jewish family through multiple generations before and after the horrors of the Holocaust. Stoppard, the acclaimed 85-year-old playwright and screenwriter who had never before written his Jewish ancestry into his creative work, based the play on his own family's story.

The play originally played in London's West End in 2020 and 2021, and its Broadway run, first slated to end in March, has been extended through July. **HW**

Recruiting Singers for the 2023 Jewish Choral Festival



Hundreds of Voices Create Harmonious Choral Community

Each year since 1990, the North American Jewish Choral Festival (NAJCF) has attracted hundreds of singers who "Sing Their Hearts Out" and connect to Jewish culture during a five-day immersion in Jewish music. From around the country, hundreds of voices come together to form one harmonious choral community led by a renowned staff of conductors and other music experts who inspire and create a truly unique musical society. This year's 34th annual event will be held from July 9 - 13, 2023 at the Sleepy Hollow Hotel in Tarrytown, N.Y.

"The Festival is for anyone who wants to experience the joy of Jewish music," says Matthew Lazar, Festival founder and director. "The participants are multi-generational and include ama-

teur singers, professionals, cantors, conductors, and lovers of Jewish music of all ages."

Festival participants from across North America and beyond, enjoy a wide variety of Jewish musical experiences. These include daily community sings; workshops and seminars on topics ranging from sight-singing and vocal technique to spirituality through music; and evening concerts featuring choirs and outstanding performers.

According to Dana Stein of North Brunswick, N.J., who has been participating in the Festival since its inception, "The Festival presents a wonderful opportunity to learn extraordinary music and work with accomplished conductors from all over the world, all while having a mini vacation."

One of the distinguishing features of this Festival is that individual singers can participate in "Instant Ensembles." All singers are divided into five different choirs, based on their sight-reading abilities and previous musical experience. The Festival culminates with ensembles performing for the entire group.

"The Festival is an uplifting experience for people of all denominations who have Jewish connections to come together through their love of music," adds Sharon Greene of Sarasota, Fla.

This year's Festival celebrates the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel with choral repertoire by Israeli composers featured throughout the Festival program.

According to Barry Brian of Walnut Creek, Calif., "The Festival represents my five favorite days of the year. I connect to my Jewish heritage through music and form an emotional bond with hundreds of people to create glorious sound."

"Whether you're a novice or a pro, you'll leave with new skills, new music and new friends to cherish as hundreds of singers gather together for an unforgettable experience," concludes Mr. Lazar.

The North American Jewish Choral Festival is a program of the Zamir Choral Foundation. To register for this year's Festival go to zamirchoralfoundation.org or formstack.com/forms/najcf_2023

For more information, go to zamirchoralfoundation.org. **HW**

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Howie Mandel and Rachel Bloom Headline an LA Comedy 'Roast of Antisemitism'



Michael Rapaport performed at the Roast of Anti-Semitism, June 14 in Los Angeles. Courtesy: Dani Zoldan

By Jacob Gurvis

LOS ANGELES (JTA) – The White House recently released a detailed strategy for combating antisemitism, complete with more than 100 action items.

One thing not on the list? Comedy.

That's where Jewish celebrities such as Howie Mandel, Rachel Bloom and Michael Rapaport came in last Wednesday night at the Saban Theater in Beverly Hills, at a so-called "Roast of Anti-Semitism."

As event organizer Dani Zoldan put it, the comedy show was focused on "making fun of people that hate Jews."

Emceed by longtime standup and occasional TV actor Elon Gold – who joked that there were no Proud Boys in the audience, only "Jewish mothers who are proud of their boys" – the evening was full of Yiddishisms, circumcision jokes and poking fun at the likes of Kanye West and Donald Trump.

There were countless jokes about antisemitic stereotypes – more than one performer mocked the idea that Jews control the weather, noting that the auditorium was uncomfortably warm. There were bits about conversion, Jesus and Hitler, and even a couple musical numbers, including Bloom's rendition of "Remember That We Suffered," from the musical comedy she co-created and starred in, "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend."

The sold-out crowd of 1,900 also heard from Montana Tucker, the social

media star who has become known for her Holocaust education content, and Noa Tishby, the actor and Israel's former antisemitism envoy, who was fired after criticizing the current government's proposed judicial overhaul.

Israel itself was not a big topic at the show, aside from a few jokes about flying El Al and Gold proclaiming, to considerable applause, that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism."

Zoldan, whose Manhattan comedy club Stand Up NY produced the show, said he and his collaborators hope to pitch the show, which was recorded, to streaming platforms to help it reach an even wider audience.

"There's obviously so many different initiatives around the world fighting antisemitism, so this was just our contribution, hoping to make some small difference," Zoldan told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in a phone interview prior to the show. Zoldan is also the creator of the Chosen Comedy Festival, a touring Jewish comedy show featuring many of the same comics.

Daniel Bernstein, who works at nearby Wilshire Boulevard Temple, said he attended the roast because he is "pro-semitism."

"I think we've been through so much, the only way to get through it is to laugh," he said.

Bernstein was there with his friend,



Howie Mandel, Jeff Ross, Elon Gold and Tehran backstage. Courtesy: Dani Zoldan

Talia Amoyal, who added that "a lot of pain comes out through humor."

Tehran Von Ghasri, who goes simply by Tehran on stage, also performed last Wednesday. A comedian and actor based in LA, Von Ghasri said he often seeks opportunities to use comedy to address difficult topics. He is half Iranian and half Black, and his maternal grandmother is a Mizrahi Jew from Egypt.

"I wanted to add some literal and metaphorical color to this lineup," he said. He added that his close bond with his grandmother made Judaism a big part of his life growing up. He celebrated Jewish holidays and had a bar mitzvah.

"It's good to show that there's no monolith of Judaism," he said. "There's no one thing or person that it looks like."

Zoldan, who himself is an observant Jew, said the event was largely targeted at a younger, non-Jewish audience. The team behind the show relied on influencers and social media marketing to spread the word and sell tickets.

"I don't think it'll help the cause if we just filled the audience with Jews who agree that antisemitism is bad," Zoldan said. Instead, he said he hoped the show would offer a younger, non-Jewish audience "a different side and a different conversation about antisemitism."

In fact, multiple comics asked the non-Jews in the audience to make some noise – a prompt which received a few

scattered cheers.

The show also featured Orthodox comedian Modi Rosenfeld, who, along with Mandel, received the most laughs of the night; a video from Triumph the Insult Comic Dog (who was created by Jewish comedian Robert Smigel) interviewing people in London about controversial Pink Floyd frontman Roger Waters; "Roastmaster General" Jeff Ross and others.

Due to the size of the lineup, each comedian's set lasted only around 10 minutes. Still, Zoldan said, he recognized how big the ask was each time he invited someone to participate.

For one thing, unlike in a typical comedy show, in which traveling comics can repeat their go-to set (which Rapaport and Yamaneika Saunders still seemed to do anyway), this show's specific theme required the performers to write new material. Plus, Zoldan added, the ongoing Hollywood writers strike may have dissuaded some comics from agreeing to take part, out of deference for the striking writers.

Mandel, who closed out the show, ended by encouraging the crowd to be proud about their Judaism – that is, after he made fun of a woman in the front row for falling asleep during his set.

"We've been persecuted for 6,000 years," he said, "but you can't sit for a f—ing hour?" **HW**

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Israel Fears U.S. Arms in Ukraine will End Up in Iranian Hands

(JNS) – Israel is worried that weapons from the U.S. and other Western countries sent to Ukraine will find their way to Iran and its proxies.

Israel has two main concerns regarding such weapons. One is that Tehran will reverse-engineer them. Another is that Iran will supply those arms to Hamas and Hezbollah, a high-ranking IDF officer told "Newsweek," speaking on condition of anonymity.

The IDF officer mentioned the transfer of one weapons system specifically, the American Javelin shoulder-fired anti-tank missile system.

Both Russian and Ukrainian forces could transfer U.S. weapons, he said. Russian elements are motivated by the defense alliance between Moscow and Tehran. Pro-Ukraine forces are motivated by financial gain.

The main smuggling route is through the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, he said, noting the situation was "very dan-

gerous."

"It's really challenging to build the picture, but we see the signs," the Israeli commander said. "We see the signs, and this is very, very troubling."

Another source, working in intelligence for a foreign country, told "Newsweek" that on Aug. 20, a Russian Il-76 transport aircraft dropped off a cargo in Tehran worth an estimated \$100 million.

Reportedly in that cargo were U.S.-made Javelins and U.K.-made Next-Generation Light Anti-armor Weapons (NLAWs).

Iran has a long history of reverse-engineering Western weapons. In 2018, an Iranian drone that entered Israeli airspace and was shot down by the Israel Air Force was determined to have been based on the American RQ-170 Sentinel spy drone.

Iran captured a Sentinel drone in 2011 while it patrolled the border between Iran and Afghanistan. **HW**

Toronto Jews to Hold 'Jewish Pride' Motorcycle and Car Rally



Aaron Hadida of Herut Canada. Credit: Courtesy.

(JNS) - Herut Canada expects several hundred people to attend "A Day of Jewish Pride" motorcycle and car rally in Toronto on June 25.

The 11 a.m. event, which is to include speakers, a Krav Maga demonstration and class, Israeli music and food – is to commence at Earl Bales Park in North York. According to recent data, Jews, who make up 3.4% of the Toronto population, are the victims of 26% of the Ontario capital's crimes. (A retooled Holocaust museum opened last week in Toronto.)

"Antisemitism is very much alive both here and the rest of the world. Jews need to come out, be tough and show our pride," Aaron Hadida, national director of the local chapter of Herut, a pro-Israel nonprofit, told JNS.

Organizers anticipate a line of cars, motorcycles and other vehicles "coming out and showing that we are not afraid," Hadida, who hosts a podcast called "Tough Jews," told JNS. Herut will also hand out Israeli flags and T-shirts.

No one should have to endure discrimination based on the culture or community into which one is born, according to Hadida.

"But I think that the Jewish community has to show more pride because the hostility we get is disproportionate," he said. "It should not be 'open season' for Jew-bashers simply because the Jewish community is quiet about it. We are usually very peaceful people."

He noted that most news consumers probably would expect Jews to number much more than about 15 million worldwide, given the disproportionate coverage that Jews receive and the large number of antisemitic hate crimes.

About 400,000 Jews live in Canada, mainly in Toronto and Montreal with smaller communities throughout the rest of the country, including Vancouver, Ottawa and Winnipeg according to the World Jewish Congress.

"We are very concerned about Canada. There is antisemitism, anti-Zionism and many Jews don't know what to do," Karma Feinstein-Cohen, executive director of World Herut and of its youth wing Magshimey Herut, told JNS.

Extremists on the political left and right, and of religious extremes, target Jews in Canada with racism, according to Feinstein-Cohen. She also noted the recent trend in anti-Israel sentiment at Canadian universities.

"Our job is to speak up against all these different forms of antisemitism," she told JNS. **HW**

Baron Hirsch Welcomes Back Rabbi Shai Finkelstein as Scholar-in-Residence

Baron Hirsch Congregation is announcing a Scholar-in-Residence many would be familiar with, Baron Hirsch's former Senior Rabbi, Shai Finkelstein. Rabbi Finkelstein is returning to Memphis and will deliver several lectures on Shabbat, June 30-July 1 – Parshiot Chukat-Balak. Rabbi Finkelstein served as Baron Hirsch Senior Rabbi for 11 years before returning to Israel in July 2016. Prior to his tenure at Baron Hirsch, he was the Rosh Kollel of the Memphis Torah MiTzion Kollel for five years.

Rabbi Shai Finkelstein was born in Israel. He attended Yeshivat Haasder, Shaalavim and served in the Artillery unit of the IDF. He was ordained by the Chief

Rabbinat of Israel, and he is currently the Rav of Kehilat Nitzanim in Baka, Jerusalem. He lectures in Pardes, OU Israel center, Yeshurun, Begin Center and Bet Avichai. He is also the Editor in Chief of the Koren "Mikraot Hadorot" project.

While serving as Baron Hirsch Senior Rabbi, he also earned an MBA from the Fogelman School of Business and Economics at the University of Memphis.

On his upcoming visit to Memphis, Rabbi Finkelstein will give a Friday night Dvar Torah, his topic is "The Halachik Debate over Birkat Nachem." Services begin at 7 p.m.

Following Shabbat Drasha, at approximately 11 a.m., his topic will be "Hu-

man Wisdom VS Divine Wisdom the Story of our Imperfection."

On Shabbat afternoon, Rabbi Finkelstein will give a lecture at Shiur entitled "Israel: Where Should we go from Here? An Analysis of Current Events and a Vision for the Future." The lecture will take place in the Belz Sanctuary beginning at 6:45 p.m. Rabbi Finkelstein will also be speaking during Seudah Shlishit on the topic of "17th of Tammuz: Lessons from The Tablets," which will take place at 8 p.m.

For more information about the lectures, visit Baron Hirsch's website at www.baronhirsch.org or contact the office at 901-683-7485. **HW**



BARON HIRSCH CONGREGATION

welcomes

RABBI SHAI FINKELSTEIN

Prior to the last 7 years as Rav of Nitzanim in Israel, Rav Shai is fondly remembered here for his 16 years spent in Memphis as the Rosh Kollel of Torah Mitzion and Senior Rabbi at Baron Hirsch

Shabbat June 30-July 1 - Parshiot Chukat-Balak

Friday Night Dvar Torah
Mincha @ 7:00 pm

THE HALACHIK DEBATE
OVER BIRKAT NACHEM

Shabbat Drasha @ 11:00 am

HUMAN WISDOM VS. DIVINE WISDOM
THE STORY OF OUR IMPERFECTION

Seudah Shlishit Dvar Torah
@ 8:00 pm

17TH OF TAMMUZ:
LESSONS FROM THE TABLETS

Shabbat Afternoon Shiur @ 6:45 pm

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WHERE SHOULD WE GO FROM HERE?
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Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab is Making Dreams Come True!



By Baylee Less

Last month, Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab officially launched Wishmakers – a special wish-granting program for the long-term care residents at the Home. On a quarterly basis, residents apply for their dreams (big or small!) to come true.

During this first-ever round of applications, the residents at Memphis Jewish Home are dreaming big, but they are also dreaming of meaningful moments. One resident has hopes to meet Steph Curry, the famous Golden State Warriors basketball player, and another resident wished to visit the viewing deck at the Bass Pro Pyramid in Downtown Memphis. Various other wishes include a picnic lunch with more than 20 family members, a day at Herb Parsons lake, and a laptop to start a creative writing project. As applications continued to roll in, most residents' wishes were relatively modest, but they always included sharing the experience with family or friends.

The inauguration of Wishmakers follows an extremely challenging three years in the sector working through the COVID-19 pandemic, when restrictions on nursing homes forced many seniors to remain in their rooms or on their campus at all times. Residents are looking forward to venturing out into the com-

munity again and experiencing new places and activities.

Jo Barton, President of Resident Council at Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab, says, "We haven't been able to go out properly for so long – mostly for holidays, but not like we did before COVID-19 – and I'm just so excited to be out with friends again. It's very generous of the foundations and partners to grant these wishes to us, to take care of us, and I want to thank them very much."

Wishmakers is made possible due to grants from the Sephardic Foundation on Aging, the B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy Board at the Jewish Foundation of Memphis, and various community partners who have stepped up with in-kind donations, including The Butcher Shop, Feast & Graze, MEM-Pops, Bass Pro Shops at the Pyramid, Folk's Folly, Memphis Pizza Café, Bass Transportation and Wolf River Brisket. Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab hopes it will provide more interaction between community members and seniors, improving intergenerational connections and advancing elder care awareness.

"When we find out a resident's wish, I start contacting various local businesses to see who would like to help make it happen. We've already received such

wonderful feedback and support from our Memphis community," Baylee Less, director of development at Memphis Jewish Home, explains.

One resident requested to pay a visit to the new Crosstown Concourse building because she worked at the old Sears Concourse for more than 20 years and has yet to see the restoration. The team at Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab are planning a big day for this resident and her children including lunch at Wolf River Brisket, a sweet treat from MEM-Pops, a tour of the building and other surprises along the way.

Bobby Meadows, executive director at Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab, says, "Launching this program has been a personal dream of mine for many

years. The pandemic slowed us down, but I'm so proud of our team, turning these dreams into realities! Our residents should always know that you're never too old to dream, and now they will."

Before the end of July, the Home will have fulfilled 11 wishes for their residents and it's only just the beginning!

Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab is a not-for-profit nursing home, Jewish in character and environment, dedicated to providing the highest level of care possible with dignity, compassion, and professionalism. Only through the help of generous donors is the organization able to care for those in need. Find more information at www.memphisjewishhome.org/giving. **HW**

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House of Lords Delegation Witnesses 'Sobering' Israeli Security Landscape



Lord Michael Howard.
Credit: Roger Harris via Wikimedia Commons.

(JNS) – Twenty members of the British House of Lords went on a four-day mission to Israel from May 28 to June 1.

The trip was “the largest-ever delegation from the British parliament to Israel, marking the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel” and “a significant milestone in the work of the European Leadership Network (ELNET) strengthening U.K.-Israel relations,” Daniel Shadmy, a spokesman for the European Leadership Network told JNS.

ELNET and the UK’s Britain-Israel All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) arranged the trip, which included former Conservative Party leader Lord Michael Howard and veteran Labour Party lawmaker David Watts.

“Peers had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of Israel’s security challenges, integration efforts and democratic values,” Shadmy said. “We hope it will pave the way for long-term cooperation.”

Shadmy also said the trip came “at

this crucial time to foster dialogue, promote bilateral ties and explore opportunities to work together.” The delegation “embodies our commitment to building enduring partnerships based on shared democratic values,” he said.

The cross-party group arrived in Israel on a balmy Sunday and stuck to an ambitious itinerary, engaging with six Israeli officials. Among those participants met were Gila Gamliel, Israeli intelligence minister, and Amir Ohana, speaker of the Knesset. The group also met scholars and security officials.

“The trip showed us – both those who’d been to Israel before and those for whom it was their first visit – the vibrancy of the Israeli public square,” Lord David Wolfson of Tredgar, a former parliamentary undersecretary of state for justice, told JNS. “Israel and the UK share a democratic tradition, the rule of law and increasingly close relations in trade, security issues and many other areas.”

The group’s meeting with Ziad Abu Amr, deputy prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, in Ramallah was “an opportunity to hear that perspective firsthand and to have a frank but constructive exchange of views,” Wolfson, who is an Orthodox Jew, told JNS.

Concerning judicial reform, which he said is concerning to many within and outside of Israel, Wolfson said that “each country must fashion a judicial system which suits its needs and society, but the independence of the judiciary, the rule of law and the integrity of the judicial system are essential values for any modern, stable democracy.”

The group’s meeting with Fatah activist Samer Sinijlawi was “pretty eye-opening,” Conservative peer Lord Howard Leigh told JNS. Sinijlawi told the visiting British delegation that he



The Iron Dome air-defense system near the southern Israeli city of Ashdod on May 9, 2023. Credit: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90.

would have been throwing stones as part of the First Intifada in the early 1990s.

“Nowadays, he is something more akin to a peace advocate,” Leigh said.

‘I don’t think we could ask for more’

Some group members, including Howard, were critical of Sinijlawi’s suggestion that a two-state solution wouldn’t work, according to Leigh.

“Michael suggested that a one-state solution would be an Arab majority, which could lead to votes on defense, which would be a problem for Israel,” Leigh said. “Sinijlawi didn’t really have much of a response, other than proposing a possible canton system in which sovereignty was more evenly distributed rather than being concentrated just in Jerusalem.”

Gamliel, the Israeli intelligence minister was “at pains to emphasize the strong relations between two countries, especially in terms of behind-the-scenes

intelligence sharing, and, of course, our underlying friendship,” Leigh added. “I don’t think we could ask for more.”

He said he hopes it was constructive that the visiting delegation shared with Israeli counterparts about “how our constitution works including our bicameral system, which they don’t have.”

The group also took an excursion close to Israel’s border with Egypt and to the Gaza Strip, witnessing the Iron Dome missile-defense system stationed near Sderot.

“The bit that shook everyone was that we had a security briefing at the Gaza Strip on the observation point next to Egypt with the Iron Dome defense system,” Leigh said.

Mere days before, an Egyptian officer killed three Israeli soldiers near the site the group had visited. Leigh noted that “it was sobering to realize just how close we had been to that.” **HW**



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Social Security Offers Benefits from Birth through Old Age

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 bulk of Social Security benefits go to retirees, but Social Security is much more than a retirement program. Most Americans are protected by the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program – the official name of Social Security – throughout their lives.

At the Beginning of Your Career

Your first experience with Social Security might be noticing that Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) taxes have been taken out of your paycheck. Most jobs are covered by Social Security, and your employer is required to withhold payroll taxes to help fund Social Security and Medicare.

Although most people don't like to pay taxes, when you work and pay FICA taxes, you earn Social Security credits. These enable you (and your eligible family members) to qualify for Social Security retirement, disability, and survivor benefits. Most people need 40 credits (equivalent to 10 years of work) to be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, but fewer credits may be needed for disability or survivor benefits.

If You Become Disabled

Disability can strike anyone at any time. Research shows that one in four of today's 20-year-olds will become disabled before reaching full retirement age.¹

Social Security disability benefits can replace part of your income if you have a severe physical or mental impairment that prevents you from working. Your disability generally must be expected to last at least a year or result in death.

When You Marry...or Divorce

Married couples may be eligible for Social Security benefits based on their own earnings or on their spouse's.

When you receive or are eligible for retirement or disability benefits, your spouse who is age 62 or older may also be able to receive benefits based on your earnings if you've been married at least a year. A younger spouse may be able to receive benefits if he or she is caring for a child under age 16 or disabled before age 22 who is receiving benefits based on your earnings.

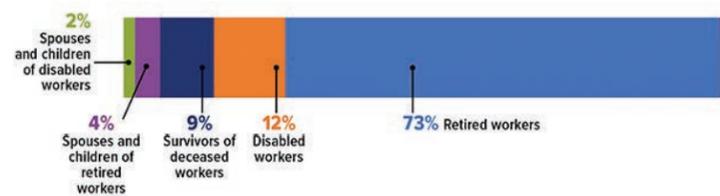
If you were to die, your spouse may be eligible for survivor benefits based on your earnings. Regardless of age, your spouse who has not remarried may receive benefits if caring for your child who is under age 16 or disabled before age 22 and entitled to receive benefits based on your earnings. At age 60 or older (50 or older if disabled), your spouse may be able to receive a survivor benefit even if not caring for a child.

If you divorce and your marriage lasted at least 10 years, your former unmarried spouse may be entitled to retirement, disability, or survivor benefits based on your earnings.

When You Welcome a Child

Your child may be eligible for Social Security if you are receiving retirement or disability benefits, and may receive survivor benefits in the event of your death. In fact, according to the Social Security Administration, 98% of children could get benefits if a working parent dies.² Your child must be unmarried and under age 18 (19 if a full-time el-

Current Social Security Beneficiaries



Source: Social Security Administration, 2023

ementary or secondary school student) or age 18 or older with a disability that began before age 22.

At the End of Your Career

Social Security is a vital source of retirement income. The benefit you receive will be based on your lifetime earnings and the age at which you begin receiving benefits. You can get an estimate of your future Social Security benefits by signing up for a my Social Security account at socialsecurity.gov to view your personal Social Security statement. Visit this website, too, to get more information about specific benefit eligibility requirements, only some of which are covered here.

1-2) Social Security Administration, 2022

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Bedouin Tribe that has Lost 18 Family Members Serving in Israeli Security Forces Given AJC Moral Courage Award

TEL AVIV – A Bedouin tribe that has been steadfast in its support for Israel and its security despite having 18 family members killed in the line of duty, was honored [on June 14, 2023] by American Jewish Committee (AJC) with its Moral Courage Award.

Several members of the Sawaed family have served in the Israeli security services. Two family members, Trad and Mustafa Sawaed, told AJC Global Forum in Tel Aviv the Muslim family serves for a simple reason: They are Israeli and have the same rights and responsibilities as their Jewish counterparts.

“Here we were born, here we live together, in the State of Israel, and we are equal citizens, and equality is expressed in everything,” Trad Sawaed said after a two-minute standing ovation during the final plenary session at AJC Global Forum. “It is our duty to help protect the security of Israel, the security of all of our homes.”

Trad's brother, Omar, was kidnapped in October 2000 along with two other Jewish soldiers by the terrorist organization Hezbollah, which refused to release any information about the kidnapped soldiers. After a long campaign led by the families of the three soldiers as well as a lengthy negotiation process led by a third party, Israel agreed in 2004 to release 36 terrorists and the bodies of 400 terrorists, in return for the bodies of the murdered soldiers and an Israeli who was kidnapped in Lebanon and returned alive.

The Sawaed tribe numbers in the thousands, living in the Galilee in northern Israel. The family has unhesitatingly served in security services, despite the losses they have experienced.

“There is nothing more painful than losing a son, brother, father, cousin, or friend,” Trad Sawaed said in Hebrew. “The pain is endless. It is difficult to describe the grieving process in words,

but the hug we receive from our Jewish brothers, our partners, our comrades in arms, is enormous. For them, we are part of their flesh. For us, the feeling is the same.”

Among the relatives the family had to bury recently was Asil Sawaed, a Border Police officer, stabbed to death in February by a 13-year-old Palestinian assailant at a Jerusalem checkpoint. He was 22.

Mustafa Sawaed, Asil's brother, said the pain of Asil's murder was tempered somewhat by the outpouring of support from all walks of Israeli life.

“Thousands of people came to Asil's funeral, Bedouins, Jews, policemen, soldiers, civilians,” Mustafa said. “The commissioner of police also came. Everyone carried the same message – Asil is one of us. Our partnership is stronger than anything and every day gives us strength to continue.”

Craig Unterberg, a member of the AJC Board of Governors, who introduced the Sawaeds at Global Forum, said that while words cannot make up for the family's loss, “you have the gratitude of all those who love this great country.”

Mustafa said the feeling was mutual.

“It is not taken for granted that a Jewish organization chooses to award recognition and appreciation specifically to a Muslim Arab family,” he said. “It moves me and also the rest of the family members sitting here with us today to know that you see us as part of you.”

AJC is the global advocacy organization for the Jewish people. With headquarters in New York City, 25 offices across the United States, and 14 overseas posts, as well as partnerships with 38 Jewish community organizations worldwide, AJC's mission is to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values in the United States and around the world. [HW](#)

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https://home.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael.stein

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Lecture on Holocaust in Poland Canceled After Far-Right Lawmaker Storms Podium



Polish-Canadian historian Jan Grabowski stands at the podium for a planned lecture as far-right lawmaker Grzegorz Braun of Poland's Confederation party grabs the microphone and smashes it at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, Poland, May 30, 2023.

Credit: Jan Grabowski

By Asaf Elia-Shalev

(JTA) – Polish-Canadian historian Jan Grabowski was about to deliver a lecture in Warsaw [on May 30] related to his battle against efforts by Polish leaders to suppress uncomfortable truths about the history of antisemitism in the country before and during the Holocaust.

But before Grabowski could get started, a far-right Polish lawmaker with a record of antisemitic statements stormed the speaker's podium, smashing the microphone, knocking over loudspeakers, and yanking cables, according to "Notes from Poland," an independent local outlet. Grzegorz Braun, of the Confederation party, later said he disrupted the event to defend Poland's good name against Grabowski's "historical propaganda."

Warsaw-born Grabowski, a professor at the University of Ottawa whose father was a Jewish Holocaust survivor, has been a vocal critic of Poland's efforts to constrain discussion of the Holocaust there. It became illegal in 2018 in Poland to accuse the country of complicity with Nazi crimes.

Grabowski recently published an academic study exposing the alleged distortion of Wikipedia articles on the Holocaust in Poland, leading to an unusual intervention by Wikipedia's top authorities. He has drawn forceful criticism from right-wing nationalists and has even been prosecuted over his research.

"Nothing like this has ever happened to me, I felt like [I was] in Poland in the 1930s," Grabowski was quoted as saying following the incident at his lecture.

When the police arrived at the scene, Braun invoked his parliamentary privilege and refused to leave Warsaw's German Historical Institute even as the event was called off and the crowd vacated the premises.

Braun reportedly said he "refuses to leave the building [because] I am protecting the Polish nation against a provocative attack on our historical sensitivity. The Germans will not teach us history in Poland."

When the Institute's director, Milos Reznik, asked Braun to stop damaging the Institute's property, Braun said he won't take orders from a German and told Reznik, "Get out of Poland." Reznik is Czech, not German.

Outside the institute, participants encountered a protest of the lecture led by Robert Bąkiewicz, a prominent nationalist figure. Ahead of the event, public media outlets dominated by the ruling right-wing Law and Justice criticized

Grabowski and the government-run Institute of National Remembrance condemned what it characterized as efforts to blame Poland for German crimes against Jews.

Meanwhile, [the next day], the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial criticized the use of the Auschwitz death camp in a campaign video by Poland's ruling party, Reuters reported. The video, which was posted on social media, discouraged viewers from attending a political opposition rally slated for that Sunday.

The video seized on language used by a government critic, Tomasz Lis, who had tweeted that "a chamber" would be found for ruling party leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski and President Andrzej Duda, who is an ally of the party.

The video presents an image of the front gate of Auschwitz with its infamous slogan, "Arbeit macht frei" and asks, "Do you really want to march under this slogan?"

Lis said he meant to say "cell," not "chamber," and intended no allusion to Nazi gas chambers.

"The instrumentalization of the tragedy of people who suffered and died in the German Nazi Auschwitz camp – on either side of the political dispute – is an insult to the memory of the victims," the Auschwitz museum said on Twitter. "It is a sad, painful and unacceptable manifestation of the moral and intellectual corruption of the public debate." **HW**

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Was Richard The Lion Hearted A Chasid? (Did He Know Shema Yisrael?)



Ted Roberts

*Editor's note:
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longtime service
as a newspaper
columnist.*

There's a beautiful, old myth – we might in a Jewish context, call it a Midrash – about the search for the legendary King Richard the Lion Hearted. The crusading adventurer eluded death by Muslim swords, but while homeward bound had been waylaid by a fellow Christian monarch and imprisoned in some remote castle, unlisted even in the primitive yellow pages of the day. The Christian world held its breath and wondered, where was King Richard?

According to folk legends, the much-loved ruler was sorely missed in his native England. But what to do. No maps, no internet. No Global Positioning Satellites. And worst of all, no money of expeditionary forces to scour the continent. The crusades had sucked the gold and silver out of the European economy. Noblemen, knights and commoners of England threw up their hands in despair.

However, one man would not give up on his king. He vowed that he would be a crusader – not for the cause of Christianity, but for his earthly ruler, Richard Plantagenet, Richard Cour de Lion

of England. The acolyte was the royal troubadour, Blondell, the court musician. Only the music of Blondell could somehow find the heart of the missing monarch. (Don't you hear the echo of a Chasidic tale?)

He wandered around Europe – castle to castle – and played the song most lovely and recognized by the king. The troubadour was like a man in a maze of forests, rivers, hills and castles. He'd see a fortified stone building high on a hill. "Aha, that must be where they're hiding my king." And up he would climb. (Why were they never on level ground? Always the hill.) Once there, he would tune up his lute and play; hoping for a hallow of recognition. Finally, one blue-skied day when the sky and river were a perfect match, the troubadour aimed his music at a castle on the Danube. The king shouted down, "Blondell, it is I, your king, Richard." The search was over.

Richard must have employed the best PR firm in London because poets, artists, and Hollywood scriptwriters portray him as a paragon of noble chivalry; but historians tell us he was characteristically a bloodthirsty medieval ruler, rapacious of life and property, never happier than "when at war" according to the Britannica; and an equal-opportunity decapitator of foes, though he clearly preferred Muslim heads. Deep down he didn't much care. If he was a typical crusader, he despoiled many Jewish villages on his way to the Superbowl

that was Jerusalem. But Blondell didn't judge his ruler. He only loved him.

Anyhow, that's how the myth goes – and I believe that's what it is – a myth. But it sounds so Chasidic, so poetic. The call for the king in the heart of the song. I believe they got it from us. I think it came from the Jewish song book. The trick lies in singing the right song. I believe it's a knock-off of the Chasidic myth in which the student seeks his lost Tzadik who has been kidnapped by bandits.

Reminds me of another Jewish story. A sweet story. A metaphor of the search that is the obsession of thoughtful men and women. In a way, like the seeking troubadour, life's victories depend on singing the right song in the right place.

Historians of World War II, concerned with the plight of the hundreds of thousands of Jewish children missing after the war, tell this story.

Immediately after the war, rabbis and leaders of Jewish philanthropic organizations roamed Europe searching for the young survivors of European Jewry. These were the torchbearers if we were to have a future.

They were found in the likely places, and they were found in unlikely places. Many were found in the homes of courageous Christians. The stakes – imposed by the Gestapo – were life or death. And the motive, too, all altruistic were mixed; sometimes the simple virtue of saving a young life, sometimes the sheer hatred of evil, sometimes it must be admitted, the lure of conversion.

U.S. Pop Star Christina Aguilera to Perform in Israel

(JNS) – Five-time Grammy-award-winning American pop singer Christina Aguilera will perform in Israel for the first time this summer, Live Nation announced last Thursday.

She is scheduled to take the stage on Aug. 10 at Live Park in Rishon Letzion.

The 42-year-old is celebrating 25 years in the music business ahead of the silver anniversary of the release of her self-titled debut album that spawned

four hit singles, including "Genie in a Bottle" and "What a Girl Wants."

While not Jewish herself, in 2005, Aguilera married Jewish music executive Jordan Bratman in a "traditional Jewish wedding ceremony" in California. In 2008, they held a Jewish naming and circumcision ceremony for their newborn son, Max Liron Bratman. The couple divorced in 2011.

Meanwhile, U.S. singer Bruno Mars

may add a third concert in Israel. A second show has already been added, and both of them quickly sold out.

The 37-year-old will perform at Tel Aviv's Yarkon Park on Oct. 4 and 7, with 124,000 tickets sold for the two shows.

Earlier this month, U.S. hard rock band Guns N' Roses performed in front of a sold-out crowd of more than 60,000 at Yarkon Park. **HW**

ISRAEL INSIGHTS

The State of Israel Diaspora Relations

By Howard Weisband

It had long been an informal understanding in Israel Diaspora Relations that internal issues relating to either Israel or the Diaspora, in our case American Jewry, were best left to the respective leadership to debate, decide, and fund, that is, to one's own jurisdiction. Opinions could be shared, most often privately, but jurisdiction was respected.

Shared decision making and joint actions were prevalent in matters and challenges that affected world Jewry. Examples of the latter category include the upbuilding of the State of Israel especially in its earlier years, the rescue of Jews in the former Soviet Union, then likewise those from Russia and surrounding countries like Ukraine currently, as well as Jews living in Arab lands and other endangered locations, and additionally the Aliyah of Jews from Ethiopia and other countries who are coming Home to Israel.

Much is changing. In part the changes are due to a smaller world and the cultural shifts that accompany a "global village," the ease of communications and travel, and other objective factors. Subjective variables also play their part, for instance, corrective measures that people want to take since many feel

that Israeli and Diaspora Jews today are more distant from one another.

The significant upsurge in worldwide antisemitism (I use the "Jerusalem Post" preferred spelling), and the decrease in Jewish identity as shown in numerous surveys, have also spurred change. As a result, there are calls from both the Diaspora and inside Israel to be more involved with one another around these issues. So much so that the Israel Knesset is considering budgeting significant funds to address both Jewish education and antisemitism worldwide.

The current hot button issue is the proposed judicial reform on the part of the Netanyahu-led Government and his far-right coalition. We are witnessing huge civil protests throughout Israel accompanied by significant protests abroad, particularly in the U.S. Generally polite environments in the best American tradition surrounding working conferences, and the joyous atmosphere of the annual Israel Parade in New York, have been boisterously interrupted with protests against possible judicial reform occurring some thousands of miles away.

These new realities show that people care about the other as they are drawn closer to one another through both tra-

ditional media sources and social media techniques.

But if an Israeli Minister is told that he or she is not welcomed, or is disinvited, or an event cancelled – all of which have happened – I don't consider that to be constructive dialogue or mutual understanding.

On June 11, however, I was pleased to read a positive, constructive suggestion from David Suissa, the respected publisher and editor-in-chief of the "Jewish Journal" in Los Angeles, in his column entitled "Judicial Reforms: An Idea to Break the Impasse."

Suissa writes: "Of the many issues that are currently being negotiated, perhaps the stickiest is deciding who picks the judges.... to control the judicial branch, the coalition needs to control who picks the judges.... there are nine votes in the selection committee. If the coalition can control 5 out of those 9 votes by assigning them to political cronies, it would effectively control the assignment of judges. A majority of one is a majority of one; there's not much room for compromise. Is there a way to break that impasse? I think so. Make President Herzog the tiebreaking vote."

That is a bold suggestion, some might

The Scribbler On the Roof

By Ted Roberts

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Specifically, the seekers searched orphanages – both religious and secular. The authorities, eager to help, turned up their hands in helplessness. So long ago – records were destroyed – the children, themselves, were too young or uninformed to know for certain their religious/cultural origins. Who could tell the Jewish from the Christian child?

The rabbis agreed on a strategy. They would slowly walk the halls of institutions and the dusty roads of ruined villages reciting loudly, the Shema – our anthem, you might call it. That did it! From the rooms adjoining the central hallway, from tumble-down homes flanking the roads, came the wail of little voices in many languages, "Mama, Papa." Some songs are never forgotten.

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

The five-time Grammy winner will hit the stage this summer for her first concert in the Jewish state.

even think it to be "chutzpah," for an American Jew to publicly suggest to an Israeli Prime Minister and his Government how to solve a critical, internal, political matter. But it is indicative of winds of change in the Israel Diaspora relationship.

To be honest, the suggestion most probably will not be accepted or even considered for political reasons, neither by the coalition nor the opposition.

Suissa writes that his suggestion is "in the spirit of President Herzog's (April) initiative, "Kol Ha'am – Voice of the People: The President's Initiative for Worldwide Jewish Dialogue," which aimed to "connect the Jewish people with constructive conversation."

More on that initiative in a future column.

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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Jury Finds Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter Guilty on All Counts

By Ron Kampeas

PITTSBURGH (JTA) – The gunman who committed the worst antisemitic attack in U.S. history is guilty of all charges he faced, according to the verdict delivered by a federal jury last Friday morning.

Robert Bowers, who killed 11 worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue on Oct. 27, 2018, was charged on 63 counts in total. Those include 22 capital charges – two for each of his victims: 11 charges of the federal crime of “obstruction of the free exercise of religious beliefs resulting in death,” and 11 charges of the federal crime of “willfully causing bodily injury because of actual or perceived religion resulting in death,” which is a hate crime.

The sentencing phase of the trial is set to begin June 26, during which the jury of seven women and five men will consider whether to give the defendant the death penalty. Defense lawyers told the court they were prepared to argue a mental health defense and would bring witnesses to the stand.

The verdict is a milestone in one of the most significant court proceedings in American Jewish history. It provides a determination of legal accountability in a tragedy that has reshaped American Jews’ sense of security in Pittsburgh and beyond in the nearly five years since it occurred.

The trial opened with jury selection in April, and lawyers delivered their opening statements on May 30, beginning 11 days of harrowing testimony from survivors of the shooting and first responders who described the attack and its aftermath.

Last Friday, families of the victims and survivors packed the courtroom and an overflow room where they were able to monitor the proceedings over video. Staff from the 10.27 Healing Partnership, a counseling service housed at the local Jewish Community Center, were on hand to assist them.

The victims of the attack were Joyce Fienberg, Richard Gottfried, Rose Mallinger, Jerry Rabinowitz, Cecil Rosenthal, David Rosenthal, Bernice Simon, Sylvan Simon, Daniel Stein, Melvin Wax and Irving Younger. They worshipped at three congregations housed in the building at the time: Tree of Life, Dor Hadash and New Light.

Before the jury entered the courtroom, the defendant strode in, wearing a dark blue sweater over a collared blue shirt and looking around the room. Once the jury was seated, he rose to face them for a moment, whispered to one of his lawyers, Elisa Long, and then sat down. He appeared to be taking notes throughout the reading of the verdict.

Judge Robert Colville asked those in attendance not to react during the verdict, and they complied. Maggie Feinstein, the director of the 10.27 Healing Partnership, gave out blue stress balls to family members. Meg Gottfried, the widow of Richard Gottfried, took a deep breath when Bowers was pronounced guilty of the crime of murdering her husband. Ellen Leger, whose husband, Daniel, was shot and wounded, put her arm around him after the verdict was read.

During the trial, the trauma of the shooting was evident when survivors

spoke in the courtroom. Andrea Wedner, one of two worshippers who were shot and survived, asked not to be on the stand during the playback of her 911 call. Leger, the other shooting victim who survived, and the Tree of Life rabbi, Jeffrey Myers, became emotional as each recounted reciting the Shema, the Torah verse and central Jewish prayer that Jews have traditionally recited at times of mortal peril.

The defense team never contested that their client committed the shooting, electing to call no witnesses and present no evidence at the trial. Their sole argument, articulated by Elisa Long in her brief closing statement last Thursday, was to rebut the capital charge that Bowers was guilty of “obstruction of the free exercise of religious beliefs resulting in death.” The defense attorneys, headed by a prominent death row lawyer, Judy Clarke, are expected to argue that their client suffered from epilepsy, schizophrenia and other mental illnesses in their effort to keep him from being sentenced to death.

Long said Bowers was under the delusion that Jews were facilitating the entry of immigrants into the United States to commit genocide, and that his goal was to prevent them from doing so, not to keep Jews from worshipping. But she did not contest the hate crime charge. There is no question, she said, that “his statements that day reflected animosity and hatred toward Jews.”

Prosecutors anticipated that the defense would argue that the gunman did not intend to obstruct worship. Government attorneys concluded each survi-

vors’ testimony with some form of the same question: “Did the defendant prevent you from praying?”

At times, the testimony doubled as a kind of crash course on American Jewish worship, with witnesses explaining the differences between Reconstructionist and Conservative Judaism as well as the use of ritual objects, like a prayer shawl or ritual fringes.

Prosecutors used visuals to make the point that the attack interrupted an exercise of religion: prayer books were stained with blood, a kippah was split into two by gunfire. Bernice Simon used a prayer shawl to stanch the wound that killed her husband, Sylvan, before she was killed.

Another theme pervading the proceedings was the political polarization that has beset the United States in recent years. Ahead of the shooting, the gunman posted hateful messages and signaled his intent to commit the attack on Gab, a social media site that is a redoubt of far-right extremists. The site’s founder, Andrew Torba, testified in the trial, as did Mark Hetfield, the CEO of HIAS, the Jewish refugee aid group. The gunman chose to attack the Tree of Life building because Dor Hadash partnered with HIAS on its National Refugee Shabbat the previous week.

The non-death penalty charges the defendant faced are related to the injuries suffered by Wedner and Leger as well as police personnel who engaged with Bowers when they raided the synagogue, in addition to gun charges. The shooter was an avid collector of guns. [HW](#)

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