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THE Hebrew Watchman

SERVING THE MEMPHIS JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1925

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High Court Ruling on Reform Law Could Trigger Constitutional Crisis



Thousands of opponents of judicial reform near the Supreme Court in Jerusalem, July 22, 2023. Credit: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90.

By Joshua Marks

(JNS) – If Israel’s Supreme Court, sitting as the High Court of Justice, strikes down the “reasonableness law” that the Knesset enacted last Monday it would create an unprecedented constitutional crisis, legal experts tell JNS.

Several Supreme Court justices visiting Germany, including Court President Esther Hayut, cut their trip short and are returning to Jerusalem to study petitions opposition groups filed against the amendment to Basic Law: The Judiciary.

“The court has recognized Basic Laws as constitutional, even those passed without a broad consensus. If it strikes down a Basic Law, especially one dealing with its own jurisdiction, it means the court doesn’t get to just interpret the constitution, but also to decide what goes in it,” Professor Eugene Kontorovich, director of international law at

the Kohelet Policy Forum, told JNS.

Last Monday afternoon, all 64 members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s governing coalition voted in favor of the key judicial reform legislation. Opposition lawmakers boycotted the third and final vote.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid said he would petition the High Court last Tuesday. The Movement for Quality Government in Israel, a leading group in the protests against judicial reform, said it has already requested an injunction from the court.

Kontorovich said that striking down the law would give the court “absolute power of a kind unknown in Western democracies and trigger a fundamental constitutional crisis.”

Avi Bell, a professor of law at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan and the

University of San Diego, told JNS that Israel is already in the middle of a constitutional crisis because the court has acted without legal restraint.

He said any attempt to invalidate the “reasonableness law” would be illegitimate.

“There is no power that the court has in law to strike down an amendment to a Basic Law. There is no statutory basis for the court doing so,” Bell said.

“However, the court has invented such a power outside the law. It said that it can strike down laws because it doesn’t like the procedure by which they were adopted, and it has said that it can strike down laws that it feels have a political purpose. It has said that it can strike down laws because it feels that they are contrary to invisible and unarticulated principles that they [the judges] identify as the core of the Israeli system,” the professor continued.

“In other words, the court has given itself an unlimited extra-legal power to strike down laws which it could use here.”

The amendment to Basic Law: The Judiciary bars “reasonableness” as a justification for judges to reverse decisions made by the Cabinet, ministers and “other elected officials as set by law.”

Aeyal Gross, a professor of international and constitutional law at Tel Aviv University, told JNS that while in his view the petitions have merit, the court could decide to wait for a specific case involving the new law instead of deciding to strike it down right away.

This would involve the use of the “ripeness” doctrine that the law is too new to make a decision on its constitutionality.

“And even then when specific cases come the court may use other adminis-

trative law doctrines such as good faith, fairness, etc., rather than say this law prevents judicial review,” Gross added.

However, if the court does decide to strike down the law, the onus is on the government, Gross said.

“If the government respects [the court’s decision] it will just go out of the law books. Of course, they may try to re-legislate another version. If the government does not respect this – which I hope would not happen – this would lead to a constitutional crisis,” Gross said.

For Kontorovich, from the Jerusalem think tank that has argued for the need for reform, the “correct and democratic approach” to reversing the “reasonableness law” is for the next government to repeal it with enough votes in the Knesset, something that National Unity Party leader Benny Gantz indicated would happen.

Should the court strike down the law, it would mark the first time that the judicial branch has invalidated an amendment to one of Israel’s Basic Laws, which act as a sort of de facto constitution in the absence of such a document.

“The question on everyone’s mind is if the coalition government would respect that kind of ruling by the Supreme Court. It is difficult to say – we have never been in that kind of extreme situation where the coalition does not respect a ruling by the Supreme Court on such a major constitutional issue,” said Guy Lurie, a research fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute.

“If that will be the case then we will be in what is called a constitutional crisis, a disagreement as to the powers of whom to obey, and I very much hope that it will not come to such a crisis,” he said. [HW](#)

East Memphis Funeral Home Files Application to Build Crematorium Near Homes and Synagogues

By Shoshana Center

Memorial Park Funeral Home & Cemetery at Poplar Ave. and S. Yates Rd. has filed an application with the Memphis and Shelby County Land Use Board to construct a cremation retort facility at 5668 Poplar Avenue. The application, filed on June 23, states the specific location is S. Yates Rd. at Spainwood Ave.

Part of the cemetery currently sits just behind part of the King Arms neighborhood on Ashley Square South, as well as along S. Yates Rd. Many Jewish and non-Jewish residents are opposed to the planned crematorium build, citing concerns over air quality/

smoke, foul odors, toxins, unsightliness, and property value depreciation. A 2017 National Association of Realtors study indicates that crematoriums are one of the top 10 facilities that impact prop values.

“Anyone who says that these facilities do not emit smoke or an odor is lying,” said City Councilman Ford Canale, of Canale Funeral Directors, which owns a crematorium on Summer Ave. Of course, many Jewish residents further oppose the crematorium, as it would be a constant reminder of the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Residents against building the facili-

ty have two main courses are of action, should they choose to protest the application:

- Write a letter explaining reasons against the construction of the cremation facility. Send the letter as an attachment – not in the email body – to: alexis.longstreet@memphistn.gov. (Alexis Longstreet is a land use development planner with the Division of Planning & Development.)
 - Attend the public hearing on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2023, scheduled for 9 a.m. at Council Chambers on the first floor of City Hall, 125 N. Main Street.
- Rabbis from the nearby shuls – Baron

Hirsch Congregation and Young Israel of Memphis – sent out alert emails last week urging members to both write an email in opposition as well as attend the hearing meeting.

Those with experience in situations like this strongly advise attending the hearing in person, as there’s power in numbers, deeming attendance is essential. The deadline to email a letter of opposition is Wednesday, Aug. 2, 2023, at 8 a.m.

Memorial Park Funeral Home & Cemetery’s application can be found here: www.shelbycountyttn.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/13313 [HW](#)

Beth Sholom iPhone Minyan



The chapel went dark during evening minyan at Beth Sholom Synagogue, but mincha and ma’ariv services continued during the July 18 storm. Daveners switched on their smartphone flashlights and kept going.

“In all of my years growing up at Beth

Sholom, I have never used my phone during services, but it came in handy that night,” said Jillian Tochner, 14, who took this photo. That’s Sarah Siegel leading services. Beth Sholom holds daily weekday minyanim so mourners and yahrzeit observers can say kaddish. **HW**

Illegal Construction on Biblical Site Prompts Rare Israeli Action



The ancient Tel Aroma fortress in Samaria is the northernmost of eight fortresses established by the Hasmonean Kingdom to protect Israel’s eastern border. Credit: Regavim.

By Hanan Greenwood

(JNS) – Over the past several days, Staff Officer for Archeology (SOA) inspectors within Israel’s Civil Administration carried out enforcement operations in the Tel Aroma archaeological site in Samaria, located in Area B, which is under Palestinian civilian control. This was a relatively rare operation since, up until several months ago, the Civil Administration refrained from enforcing violations regarding archaeological sites not located in Area C,

which is in full Israeli control.

“Tel Aroma” is a biblical site mentioned in the Book of Judges and a Hasmonean fortress city. It overlooks the Itamar Ridge and has suffered extensive destruction at the hands of vandals and thieves. Among other incidents, it was discovered that a Hasmonean fortification wall with a unique Herodian addition of decorated stones had been stolen.

About a year ago, “Israel Hayom” reported that the P.A planned to build a

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. August 4, 2023 / 17 Av, 57837:42 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. August 5, 2023 / 18 Av, 5783 8:40 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Eikev

Palestinian heritage site and a mosque commemorating the shahids (“martyrs,” a euphemism for terrorists) at the location. This plan was considered “terrorism aimed at harming Jewish history” by Yossi Dagan, head of the Shomron Regional Council.

According to the “Shomrim al Hanetzach” (Preserving the Eternal) organization, last week Civil Administration personnel confiscated an excavator used to pave an illegal road at the site, destroy-

ing archaeological artifacts. As a result of the confiscation, the violations were stopped.

The Civil Administration has recently changed its policy and begun operating in Area B as well, where violations of antiquities laws and archaeological site destruction occurs. Several months ago, “Israel Hayom” reported that the Civil Administration was operating in the Khirbet Turpin ruins, also located in Area B. At the beginning of this month, SOA personnel operated in Khirbet Turpin again, confiscating four vehicles and arresting looters at the scene.

“We welcome the new trend,” said Moshe Gutman, chairman of Preserving the Eternal. “The State of Israel has understood that it is also responsible for heritage sites located in Area B. The policy change that began in Khirbet Turpin is spreading throughout Judea and Samaria, led by the political echelon. We hope to see more and more effective enforcement operations such as these. The heritage belongs to us all,” he added.

The Israeli government has set as a goal acting against the phenomenon of archaeological site destruction in Judea and Samaria and preserving Jewish heritage in the region.

Last week, as previously published by “Israel Hayom,” the government approved a massive plan to combat the destruction of antiquities, allocating NIS 120 million (\$32 million) to the cause.

Originally published by “Israel Hayom.” **HW**

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The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

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

Monday, August 7
Field Trip to Baskins Robbins
Seniors will enjoy whatever treats are available. Please join us for a much-needed Cold Dessert!

Wednesday, August 9
Field Trip to Dixon Gallery & Gardens
The gallery is currently having an exhibition of Sally Hughes Smith. The Exhibition is: Adrenaline Rush! Born in Memphis and based in Charleston, South Carolina, Smith’s work has been exhibited at venues across the Southeast. In addition to her painting practice, she is also the author and illustrator of a children’s book, “Rosebud Roams Charleston,” and has led workshops on oil painting at the Gibbes Museum.

Monday August 14
Field Trip to Shelby Farms
Outside special dessert (weather permitting).

Wednesday, August 16
Monthly Luncheon at 12 p.m.
Featuring Tim Stanek on Piano
We’re excited for the return of the Monthly Senior Luncheons featuring a special kosher luncheon prepared by the chefs at the Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab and served by the MJCC Staff! The cost of the meal is only \$5 and reservations can be made by calling the front desk of the MJCC at 901-761-0810 by the day before by 1 p.m.
Pianist Tim Stanek is provided by Creative Aging from their cadre of artists and the luncheon is sponsored by Hospice of Hope! Please come join us for this delightful affair.

Please come join us from Monday through Friday for a delicious kosher lunch at 11:30 a.m, 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**

Senior Adult Classes Are Returning at the MJCC!

Starting on Tuesdays, August 8 – September 12, **Mah Jongg** will again be taught by Melanie Mann from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. Melanie has been teaching Mah Jongg for many years at the MJCC, as well as other places around town. Whether you are a beginner or relearning, Melanie can teach you this very popular game. A new Mah Jongg card is included in the class fee. Course number is 9484.
Beginning Bridge lessons will return on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., August 17 – September 21, taught by Debbie Jackson. Learn to play the

world’s greatest game. This class will teach you all the basics you need to start playing Bridge like a pro! Course number is 9483.
The cost is the same for all courses. \$80.00 for non-members of the MJCC and only \$72.00 for members. Reservations can be made by calling the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810. They can also be made by contacting Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator at 901-259-9220 or email stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org. Reservations are limited so please make your reservations before they are sold out. **HW**

THE HEBREW WATCHMAN
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Memphis Volunteers Walk to Fight Suicide

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, yet suicide can be prevented. Volunteers from Memphis are joining the quarter of a million people who are walking in cities across the United States to draw attention to the fight for suicide prevention. The annual Memphis Out of the Darkness Community Walk, hosted by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - Tennessee Chapter will be

held at 12 p.m., October 22 at Overton Park Greensward. This walk supports the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s education and support programs and its bold goal to reduce the annual U.S. rate of suicide 20 percent by the year 2025.
“Suicide touches one in five American families. We hope that by walking we will draw attention to this issue and keep other families from experiencing a suicide loss. Our ultimate goal is to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide,” said Halli Drake, AFSP Tennessee Volunteer.

The Memphis Out of the Darkness Community Walk is one of more than 550 Out of the Darkness Overnight, Community and Campus Walks being held nationwide this year. The walks are expected to unite more than 300,000 walkers and raise millions for suicide prevention efforts. Last year, this local walk raised over \$35,000 and had 750 participants.
“These walks are about turning hope into action,” said AFSP CEO Robert Gebbia. “The research has shown us how to fight suicide, and if we keep up the fight, the science is only going to get better, and our culture will get smarter about mental health. With the efforts of our courageous volunteers, and a real investment from our nation’s leaders, we hope to significantly reduce the suicide rate in the United States.”

To learn more about the Memphis Out of the Darkness Community Walk, visit afsp.org/Memphis.
The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. AFSP creates a culture that’s smart about mental health through education and community programs, develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy, and provides support for those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York, and with a public policy office in Washington, D.C., AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states with programs and events nationwide. Learn more about AFSP in its latest Annual Report, and join the conversation on suicide prevention by following AFSP on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. **HW**

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African-American Christians Seek to Fulfill MLK’s Dream in Israel



Members of a 200-strong delegation of African-American Christian women meet with the Knesset’s Christian Allies Caucus in Jerusalem on Tuesday, July 25, 2023. Credit: Courtesy.

By Etgar Lefkovits

(JNS) – A delegation of 200 African-American Christian women met last Tuesday with leaders of the Knesset’s Christian Allies Caucus in Jerusalem, seeking to strengthen the ties of friendship with the Jewish people epitomized by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The faith-based event, dubbed the “Women of the Bible” tour, which was organized by a U.S.-based evangelical organization, follows decades of fraught relations between America’s Black and Jewish communities despite the historic bonds forged during the Civil Rights Movement.

“In these days when people are re-writing history and fake news is everywhere, it is important to remember our roots and mutual history of struggle and rising up together, which connects us,” said Knesset member Sharren Haskel, who co-chairs the cross-party caucus.

“We are fulfilling the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King to bring African Americans to Israel,” said Cathlean Steele, national project coordinator at the Atlanta-based Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an African-American civil-rights organization co-founded by King. “Our job is to bring us back together because of the history we share.”

The meeting was part of an eight-day educational tour of the Holy Land, which seeks to connect African Americans with Israelis and the Jewish People, said Dr. Ruth Pauline Plummer, CEO of Covenant Daughters International Ministries, who initiated the event.

“The importance of the day is to continue the work that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, started in building the relationship between the Jewish People, the State of Israel and African Americans,” said Plummer.

The predominantly American delegation hails from various Christian denominations and diverse walks of life, including pastors, entrepreneurs, businesswomen and singers. In addition to their tour of religious sites in the Holy Land, the women will visit the street in Jerusalem’s German Colony neighbor-

hood named in honor of King and will be hosted by Israeli first lady Michal Herzog at the President’s Residence in the city.

“The Black Church are natural allies to Israel because they believe in the Old Testament more than any other church,” said Josh Reinstein, director of the Christian Allies Caucus. “For them, Israel is something that is an everyday thing, witnessing the fulfillment of God’s prophecy to Israel.”

The gathering comes amid burgeoning relations between Israel and the largely supportive evangelical Christian community around the globe, based on shared Judeo-Christian values.

The Knesset Christian Allies Caucus, which has more than 50 sister-caucuses in parliaments around the globe based on faith-based diplomacy, was exploring establishing an African-American Christian Caucus in the United States to bring the communities together, said Haskel.

The event, which was originally scheduled to take place at the Knesset, was held at a Jerusalem hotel after parliament was shuttered to visitors in the wake of protests against the government’s judicial reform effort last Monday night.

The Jerusalem-based Plummer cited a letter that King’s widow, Coretta Scott King, had sent to Israeli parliamentarians acknowledging the actions the Jewish state took to commemorate her husband after he was assassinated over half a century ago.

“On April 4, 1968, just before he was killed, Martin delivered his last public address. In it he spoke of the visit he and I made to Israel,” the letter reads, according to the Jewish National Fund, which planted a forest in her honor, that members of the group visited.

“Moreover, he spoke to us about his vision for the Promised Land, a land of justice and equality, brotherhood and peace. Martin dedicated his life to the goals of peace and unity among all peoples, and perhaps nowhere in the world is there a greater appreciation of the desirability and necessity of peace than in Israel,” wrote Coretta Scott King. **HW**

Alaska Man Who Vandalized Jewish Museum with Swastikas Sentenced to 18 Months in Prison



The Alaska Jewish Museum in Anchorage, September 22, 2021. Credit: Jeffrey Beall via Creative Commons

By Andrew Lapin

(JTA) – A man in Anchorage, Alaska, who vandalized a local Jewish museum and several other locations with swastikas has been sentenced to 18 months in prison, on a combination of charges including unrelated drug trafficking.

Luke Foster went on a vandalism spree in 2021, twice tagging the Alaska Jewish Museum with stickers featuring a swastika and the phrase “WE ARE EVERYWHERE.” He also carved a swastika into the side of the building, and distributed stickers at seven other locations around town, including a gay nightclub.

Federal authorities initially tracked Foster down due to his unrelated efforts to sell hallucinogenic mushrooms online. When they searched his home in late 2021, they found various neo-Nazi material and evidence that he had committed the vandalism, Alaska Public Media reported. He was ultimately sentenced for one drug trafficking offense and two counts of hate-motivated property damage.

“It’s very sad when you see young people who are misguided, and don’t understand the danger of being influenced by the fear of ‘the other,’” Rabbi Yosef Greenberg, president of the museum’s board, told local outlets.

During his trial, Foster apologized for his actions. Greenberg said he was encouraged by the apology.

Alaska opened its Jewish museum in Anchorage in 2013; it houses a Chabad center and an early education program in addition to the museum. Around 4,500 Jews live in the state and refer to themselves as the “Frozen Chosen.” The same year the Jewish Museum was being targeted by the swastika stickers, the local Jewish community was rallying against COVID-19 lockdown protests that appropriated Holocaust imagery and were briefly endorsed by Anchorage’s mayor before he apologized the next day. Several notable Alaskan politicians, including multiple mayors of Anchorage and perennial U.S. Senate and House candidate Al Gross, are Jewish. **HW**

Israeli Produces New Song by Britney Spears, Will.i.am

(JNS) – Israeli multi-platinum record producer and songwriter Johnny Goldstein has produced a new song by Britney Spears and Will.i.am, which was released last Tuesday.

“Working with two living legends is the biggest honor ever. I can’t wait,” the 32-year-old from Motza Illit told “Ynet News” about the highly anticipated single, called “Mind Your Business.”

Word about the two artists reuniting for the single has been spreading on social media, with Will.i.am posting a preview of the new song to his Twitter account. The two performers last collaborated on a song for the first time 10 years ago with the hit “Shout and Scream.”

“Will and I have been working together for the past four years and love it,” Goldstein told “Ynet.” Our collaboration is working really well. He is one of the people closest to me, and a man

I appreciate. He is also my friend and mentor, and it is fun to create music together,” he added.

Spears last performed in Israel in 2017. Her first concert in the Jewish state drew 55,000 to Tel Aviv’s Yarkon Park.

Will.i.am performed in Jerusalem in 2021, rejecting calls to boycott the country. The rapper said that his close ties with Israelis led him to oppose the boycott.

“Do I turn my back on people that live here because of politics? No, that’s not the way we were built,” he said at the time.

Last month, it was announced that five-time Grammy-award-winning American pop singer Christina Aguilera will perform in Israel for the first time this summer. She is scheduled to take the stage on Aug. 10 at Live Park in Rishon LeZion. **HW**

11 Years after Attack on Israelis in Burgas, Terrorists Still Free

(JNS) – Eleven years after the terrorist attack on a busload of Israeli vacationers in Burgas, Bulgaria, the two main suspects remain on Interpol’s most wanted list.

Five Israeli tourists and their Bulgarian driver were killed and 35 others were wounded in the bombing at Burgas Airport on July 18, 2012.

Bulgarian authorities attributed the attack to the Iranian-backed Hezbollah terrorist group.

The suicide bomber was identified as dual Lebanese-French national Mohamad Hassan El Hussein, who had entered Bulgaria using the alias Jacques Felipe Martin.

After a four-year investigation, the

case reached the courts in 2016, but the trial did not start until 2018. Nearly 100 expert reports were submitted into evidence and 200 witnesses questioned during the proceedings.

Lebanese-Australian Meliad Farah, 35, and Lebanese-Canadian Hassan El Hajj Hassan, 28, were tried in absentia and charged with terrorism.

The two men were sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of commutation, and the court also awarded \$115 million in civil damages to the victims’ families.

Farah and Hassan El Hajj Hassan remain at large. **HW**

Netanyahu Nixes Proposed Basic Law on Torah Study



Yeshivah students study at the Kamenitz Yeshiva in Jerusalem on July 25, 2023. Credit: Chaim Goldberg/Flash90

(JNS) – A bill proposed last Tuesday to define Torah study as a “core state value” is “off the table and will not be advanced,” said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s ruling Likud Party, after members of the government came out against tabling the bill.

The coalition’s United Torah Judaism Party had proposed the passage of a quasi-constitutional Basic Law in a bid to effectively place Torah study on par with military service and thus codify in perpetuity exemptions for haredim from the Israel Defense Forces.

“The State of Israel as a Jewish state views the encouragement of Torah study and Torah students to be of utmost importance, and regarding their rights and duties, those who dedicate themselves to studying Torah for an extended period should be viewed as having served a significant service to the State of Israel and the Jewish people,” read the bill.

“Torah study is a fundamental principle in the heritage of the Jewish people,” it continued.

The legislation was immediately denounced by members of Netanyahu’s party, with Defense Minister Yoav Gallant describing military service as the

“highest civic duty.”

There also appeared to be an internal dispute among Orthodox lawmakers in the coalition as to the timing of the proposed legislation. UTJ’s Moshe Gafni, chairman of the Knesset Finance Committee, said at a committee meeting last Tuesday that “the timing is entirely unnecessary, it’s wrong, whoever submitted it.”

One of the bill’s aims was to prevent the Supreme Court, sitting as the High Court of Justice, from striking down a proposed law that would regulate the drafting of haredi men into the army and exempt the vast majority from service.

In an official statement published last Tuesday, UTJ said the tabling of the bill at this time was “accidental.” The proposal came mere hours after the Knesset passed a key piece of the government’s judicial reform legislation into law, triggering massive protests across the Jewish state.

“As agreed upon in the coalition agreement, an agreed solution will be found with all factions of the coalition on the [IDF] recruitment issue... We apologize to anyone who tries to attach to the proposal what is not in it,” read the party’s missive. **HW**

Jewish Man Attacked, Tzitzit Torn in Southern California

By David Swindle

(JNS) – A 65-year-old Jewish man was attacked in “broad daylight” on July 24 at a 7-Eleven just blocks away from the Chabad center at San Diego State University.

Lt. Adam Sharki, public information officer at the San Diego Police Department, told JNS that the SDPD is actively investigating the “disturbing incident” as a hate crime.

“SDPD stands united with our community against bigotry and aggressively investigates these types of incidents,” he told JNS.

Sharki said the man was assaulted at about 9:50 a.m. at the convenience store at 5100 College Ave. in San Diego.

“This crime is being investigated by Eastern Division detectives. They are in the process of interviewing witnesses, looking for evidence, and analyzing video footage,” Sharki said. “Anyone with information is asked to contact SDPD or Crime Stoppers.”

Reportedly, the attacker tore the man’s tzitzit, and allegedly made antisemitic and anti-Israel statements.

The nearby Chabad center where the victim attends was the site of previous attacks, including the vandalism of a large menorah in March. **HW**

Children’s Park Evacuated as Fires Rip Through Jerusalem Foothills



Flames spread across hills surrounding Jerusalem as firefighters battled heavy fuel loads, July 24, 2023. Credit: National Fire & Rescue Authority.

(JNS) – A children’s amusement park in Israel was evacuated last Monday as 50 fire crews and eight planes battled wildfires that tore through hills surrounding Jerusalem.

“We have been fighting a fire between Ein Rapa and Tzuba for the past three hours,” said Jerusalem District Commander Tafser Shmulik Friedman.

“This is a dangerous area for us with a heavy heat load, strong winds and a lot of dry vegetation,” he continued. “We reacted strongly with 50 firefighting teams from Beit Shemesh, Jerusalem and reinforcements from surrounding towns.”

Eight firefighting planes from the

National Fire and Rescue Authority, a police helicopter, the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority, Jewish National Fund-USA firefighters and other volunteers all came together to extinguish the blaze.

The fires broke out near Kibbutz Tzuba in the Judean Mountains, about 6 miles from Jerusalem’s Old City.

Temperatures in Jerusalem are expected to nudge above 100 degrees over the remainder of the week with towns further south expecting 110 degrees.

Israel’s fire and rescue service is preparing for additional blazes as the country approaches August, traditionally the region’s hottest month of the year. **HW**

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Rabbinical Court Rules Berlin Rabbi Accused of Sexual Misconduct Should Not Hold Positions of Authority

JTA Staff

(JTA) – A Jewish religious court has determined that a Berlin rabbi accused of manipulating women into sexual contact should not hold any positions of religious authority in the Jewish world.

The decision, announced last Wednesday morning, follows days of testimony from at least 15 women who had accused Reuven Yaacobov of using his rabbinical status to force them to comply with his sexual demands over more than a decade. Yaacobov also testified last week before the court, known as a *beit din*, after the court delayed its process to accommodate him.

“Reuven Yaacobov is not fit to hold a rabbinical position,” the *beit din* said in a letter to the plaintiffs who had testified, and who were authorized to share the letter publicly.

“Accordingly, he should not serve in any religious, rabbinical, or educational positions such as a Rabbi, *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), *mohel* (circumciser), *sofer* (scribe), and teacher,” the letter said.

Yaacobov had filled all of those roles in Berlin’s Jewish community over nearly two decades. The Jewish Community of Berlin, the communal umbrella organization, had fired him on May 31, one day after hearing testimony from several women who accused him of sexual misconduct. They and other women came forward afterward to give the *beit din* their accounts of being preyed upon by Yaacobov, whom they said had taken advantage of their naivete or emotional

vulnerability to use religious arguments to lure them into sexual relations.

“I am happy that his status has been removed,” one of the women who testified before the *beit din* told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency last Wednesday. “I fear he will continue to influence people, to manipulate and do his things, but the decision means there will be fewer victims.

“The more public it is, the better,” added the woman, who asked to remain anonymous because she said she feared Yaacobov. “If everyone in the whole world shares this, he will have less chances to do his things elsewhere.”

In a public statement, the rabbinical court said its decisions reflected a clear expression of communal values.

“A person who harasses or abuses others is not suitable to hold a rabbinical position and should not be in religious, rabbinical or educational positions,” the court said.

In a statement issued through his attorney, Yaacobov disputed the court’s legitimacy under Jewish law and said its process had been “one-sided,” with his guilt predetermined. He also said the court and he were operating under “two different worldviews as far as Judaism is concerned” because the court is made of Ashkenazi rabbis, and he is a Sephardic Jew.

“I do not accept the *beit din*’s decision and will contradict it in another *beit din*,” he said in the statement. “Today I know more than before that it was a

targeted campaign against me, and that *beit din* was part of that campaign. I remain strong and will continue to fight until the full truth comes out and all the people who organized this campaign will be punished by the court.”

Yaacobov also noted in the statement that the *beit din* had not ordained him and thus could not rescind his rabbinic ordination. While the *beit din* did not claim to rescind his ordination, Rabbi Avichai Apel – who is on the board of ORD, Germany’s Orthodox rabbinical organization, and was one of the rabbis sitting on the *bet din* – said his group has been in touch with the Israel-based organization that ordained Yaacobov.

The ORD said that all circumcisions and bar mitzvahs carried out by Yaacobov remain valid. Apel told JTA anyone who had concerns about the status of a Torah scroll written by Yaacobov could contact the organization.

The rabbis of the *beit din* issued several other calls intended to manage the fallout of the case, which has particularly impacted a subset of Germany’s Russian-speaking Jewish community. The rabbis called on the general public to “continue to treat his wife and children with respect,” and to ignore any photos

that the accused might publish of his accusers.

Some of the women who spoke to JTA previously said that when they tried to extricate themselves from Yaacobov’s influence, he told them he had taken compromising photos or videos of them and others and would release them.

Apel said the *beit din* warned Yaacobov not to release any such photos, if he had them.

The rabbis of the *beit din* also urged the Jewish Community of Berlin to reopen the Sephardic Synagogue, which has been locked since Yaacobov’s firing, as swiftly as possible, and to provide financial support to the women to cover the costs of psychological treatment “for the trauma they have suffered and its consequences.”

Another woman who had testified before the *beit din* told JTA last Wednesday that the swift action against Yaacobov over the last six weeks reflected the right approach to allegations of sexual misconduct.

“If you want to be sure that something is just a rumor, you have to investigate it,” the woman said. “The person with the resources and the power and the knowledge, they need to investigate.” **HW**



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Dov Hikind: ‘I’ve Become Very Disillusioned with the Democratic Party’



Dov Hikind. Credit: Americans Against Antisemitism.

By Sergio Carmona

(JNS) – Dov Hikind, a former New York state representative, announced last week that he is leaving the Democratic Party. In an interview with JNS, Hikind said the decision to become a Republican was a long time coming.

“Over the recent years, and with some of the stuff that has happened even more recently, I’ve become very disillusioned with the Democratic Party that exists right now,” he told JNS.

Members of the Democratic Party, including Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) “and on and on,” have made it “very radicalized,” he said.

The former New York lawmaker also cited U.S. President Joe Biden’s and his administration’s recent criticism of Israel, including calling for the Israel government to slow judicial reform and praising left-wing, mass demonstrations that have roiled Israeli society in recent months.

Selective road blocks

Hikind, who served in the New York State Assembly from 1983 until 2018 and later founded the group Americans Against Antisemitism, announced on Twitter on July 20 that he and his wife, Shani, were switching parties.

“It’s official: My wife and I have switched our party affiliation from Democrat to Republican! People have long been asking, ‘Dov, when are you gonna leave the Democratic Party?’” he wrote. “Well, the time has come because the Democrats have turned their back on Jews and Israel.”

Speaking to JNS from Israel, Hikind said that when he recently arrived in the Jewish state, he couldn’t get out of the airport because protesters were blocking the roads.

“If demonstrators, for whatever cause, were blocking the roads leading to Dulles Airport in Washington or Kennedy Airport in New York or other airports in the United States, would the leaders of those communities permit that to happen?” he told JNS. “That was going on in Israel.”

He related that he finally got a taxi, and it “was like hours to get out of the airport to where we were going, all because of people and their point of view, which they have every right to have but they were imposing that on everybody else,” he told JNS. “That’s not cool.”

“Meanwhile, the Biden administration was sort of lecturing Israel,” he added.

‘Atmosphere where it’s OK to criticize Israel’

Rather than protecting victims of crimes, the Democratic Party has aligned itself more with the perspective and needs of criminals, Hikind told JNS. An “anti-police sentiment” has become part of the party, even though not

all Democrats feel that way, he said.

“The whole ‘woke’ culture, the whole cancel culture, is just out of control,” he told JNS. “I felt I needed to make a public statement. My wife feels the same way.”

In the past, Hikind always supported the candidate he thought was best, whether the person was a Democrat or Republican. That won’t change, he told JNS.

“Now that I’m officially a registered Republican, if I feel a Democrat is better for America, better for the community and better for the Jewish people, I would support the Democrat,” he assured.

His announcement on Twitter came the day after progressive Democrats, including Omar and Ocasio-Cortez, boycotted Israeli President Isaac Herzog’s speech to a joint session of Congress marking the 75th anniversary of the modern-day Israeli state.

Their boycott of Herzog was another reason that Hikind decided to switch parties, he told JNS, saying “I blame Biden for creating an atmosphere where

it’s OK to criticize Israel.”

He added that those boycotting went further than the president has.

“Biden has been nonstop critical of the Netanyahu government that was elected by the people of Israel. If Biden can be nonstop negative of Israel, then what’s stopping AOC and members of the progressive caucus from going a step further?” he told JNS. (He referred to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and to Ocasio-Cortez, commonly referred to as AOC.)

“Is Israel perfect? No. Is America

The former New York state representative and Jewish leader shared his reasons for registering as a Republican.

perfect? No,” Hikind told JNS. “But is Israel a real democracy? Yes. So this behavior on the part of the Biden administration has really pushed me over the top.” [HW](#)

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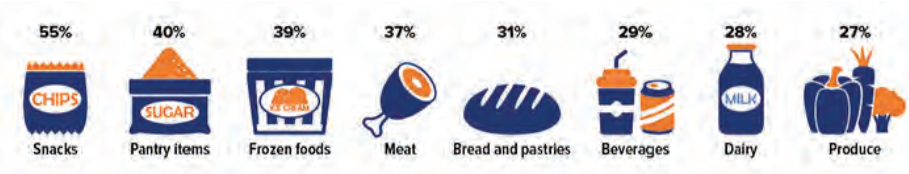
Most Grocery Shoppers Aren't Fooled by Shrinkflation

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
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Have you noticed that packages are smaller at the grocery store? If so, you're not alone. A survey of consumers taken in 2022 found that a majority of U.S. adults have noticed shrinkflation — products shrinking in size while prices stay the same or increase. This is a common strategy among manufacturers, but it accelerates in periods of high inflation, when companies are under more pressure to control their costs.

About two out of three shoppers who noticed shrinkflation were concerned about the trend. Many of them reacted by purchasing a different brand or a generic product instead, or by buying in bulk, which may also be good ways for you to stretch your own grocery budget.

Where U.S. Shoppers Have Spotted Shrinkflation



Source: Morning Consult, August 29, 2022 (multiple responses allowed)

Spotting shrinkflation is the first step in reducing its impact. To do so, it helps to take your time and pay closer attention to the size or net weight printed on the package, as well as the unit price (the price per ounce, pound, or sheet) of the products you are comparing. This information can usually be found in small print on the shelf tag.

Source: Morning Consult, August 29, 2022

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Israel to Assist Firefighting Efforts in Greece



A firefighting plane works to extinguish a blazeout in Moshav Kedma, in south-central Israel, May 31, 2021. Credit: Gershon Elinson/Flash90.

By Etgar Lefkovits

(JNS) – Israel is sending two fire-fighting aircraft to Greece to help combat raging wildfires there, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office announced last Wednesday.

The two planes were scheduled to depart for Athens early on Thursday morning and will support Greek firefighters "for as long as needed," at Greece's request, the statement said.

The decision to send the aircraft was taken by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in consultation with the defense, foreign and national security ministers.

"The Government of Israel will stand by Greece's side in dealing with the immense wildfires, and appreciates the contribution of Greece in extinguishing fires in Israel over the last decade," the statement said.

The Greek wildfires burned for a third day just outside of Athens last Wednesday, destroying forests and homes and spurring evacuations amid a scorching heatwave only expected to intensify last Thursday, with no end in sight. Aircraft from Italy and France joined the efforts last Wednesday as part of an E.U. civil protection mechanism, along with crews from Romania, Poland and Slovakia.

Fires are common in Greece, but hotter and drier summers have exacerbated the situation.

The Israeli assistance comes amid burgeoning ties between the two countries over the last decade and a half in a variety of fields, including tourism, medicine, cybersecurity, energy and defense, and a week before a trilateral summit of the three leaders in Cyprus, where a major energy deal is expected to be signed.

Summit ahead

The trilateral summit is expected to include the signing of an agreement to connect the national electricity grids of the three eastern Mediterranean countries.

The mammoth, E.U.-backed project is going forward as the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia fuel a global energy crisis that has hit the European Union hard, spotlighting the continent's dependence on foreign energy sources.

Cyprus firm EuroAsia Interconnector said last Wednesday that it had awarded French company Nexans a 1.43 billion euro contract for a submarine power cable to connect the three countries' grids.

The "electricity highway" is set to run for 1,208 kilometers (751 miles) along the Mediterranean Sea floor at a depth of more than 3,000 meters (9,850 feet).

Billed as the world's longest and deepest interconnector project, it aims to "end the energy isolation" of Cyprus and Israel and connect both to the European mainland via the Greek island of Crete. It will have the capacity to supply over three million homes with electricity.

Last month, Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides said that the relationship between Cyprus, Greece and Israel has developed into a "strategic partnership" based on a shared vision for a thriving eastern Mediterranean.

Earlier this month, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen visited Athens, where he pledged to continue to advance strategic relations with the Hellenic triangle.

His trip was the first official visit by any foreign minister to Athens since last month's Greek elections, signaling the robust relations between Israel and both Greece and Cyprus. **HW**



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OBITUARIES



Dr. Donald Earl Schaffer

Dr. Donald Schaffer was a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. His number one priority was his family, which he was consummately loyal to. First and foremost, he was devoted to his wife Harriet – who sadly predeceased him four years ago almost to the day after 64 years of marriage and 70 years of love and friendship. Don was also deeply committed to his six children, 11 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He grew up in Chicago, Ill., with his doting parents, Jack and Ethel (Wolf) Schaffer, older brother Jules (Yudie) Schaffer and lots of extended family.

In addition to school, Don started working even as a young boy in his father’s liquor store sweeping and cleaning up. Later, for six years during high school and college, he was a successful salesman in a men’s and boys’ clothing store. He had such a keen sense of style and dress that he had his own clients. He maintained that flair until his last days with a collared shirt with the collar flipped up and coordinating cardigan.

He was a heedful student, graduating college in 1953 from the University of Illinois with a Bachelor of Science in Physics and Science. Don wanted to go to medical school at a time when there were quotas. He was first admitted to the University of Illinois Dental School. He spoke to the dean and was able to transfer to medical school but had to spend his first two years at a program at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

After those cold years and train trips home on holidays, he and Harriet got married and they spent the next two years at the University of Buffalo, where he graduated with his medical degree in 1957.

Don went into the Navy and served his first two years of general practice under the Berry Plan at Naval Station Great Lakes in Chicago. He completed his residency in Psychiatry. He and Harriet spent the next eight years in Bethesda, Md., where Jackie, Kevin and Robyn were born. The family was sent to Japan in the spring of 1964, where Don worked for a short while at Yokosuka Naval Hospital and Harriet had an almost 6-year-old, 4-year-old, 2-year-old and was pregnant again! What would have been a three-year assignment, was cut short late in 1964 when the Navy reassigned Don to the Millington Naval Base just outside of Memphis. Initially, Don started a part-time practice in Memphis and upon his honorable discharge, he opened his practice full time. He provided the utmost of committed care to his patients. He was a decent and honorable professional and was a well-respected mentor and friend in the medical community. Don and Harriet lived in Memphis for 46 years, where Karyn, Susan and Larry were born. Don was a member of the Economics Club of Memphis, and he and Harriet were lifetime members of Beth Sholom Synagogue. They retired to West Palm Beach, Fla., in the summer of 2011. Post Covid, the Atlanta-area kids convinced

Don to move to Georgia, and they enjoyed having him there for the last two years of his life.

He leaves behind his clan of children, Jackie Schaffer of Memphis, Tenn., Dr. Kevin (Barbie) Schaffer of Atlanta, Ga., Robyn (Brett) Hodess of Narragansett, R.I., Karyn (Larry) Parker of Roswell, Ga., Judge Susan Schaffer of Athens, Ga., and Larry (Tracy) Schaffer of Pipterton, Tenn. His jokes will be missed by his grandchildren in chronological order Erin (Alex) Fettner, Kyle Schaffer, Chloe (Richard) Crosby, Hannah Hodess (Paul Delancy), Joe Schaffer, Sophie Hodess, Jenna Parker, Lauryn Parker, Parker Hood, Rachel Robinson, and Irina Robinson and great-grandchildren, Sollo Crosby and Rivi Crosby. He also leaves behind his brother-in-law, Eugene Sollo, of Chicago, Ill., and many loving nieces, nephews and cousins.

A graveside burial was held on Wednesday, July 26, 2023, at Beth Sholom Memorial Gardens.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to Beth Sholom Synagogue General Fund, 6675 Humphreys Blvd, Memphis, TN 38120, www.bsholom.org, the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, www.lls.org, or the charity of your choice. **HW**

Roman-Era Sarcophagus Unearthed in Gaza

The necropolis contains more than 60 tombs.

By Pesach Benson

(JNS) – An archaeological team excavating an ancient cemetery in Gaza unearthed a 2,000-year-old Roman-era sarcophagus last Sunday.

The sarcophagus is composed of lead and is believed to have been made for a prominent person, according to an official from Gaza’s Hamas-run Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

It is the second sarcophagus discovered during an excavation of the necropolis, which is located on the northern coast of the Gaza Strip with a view of the Mediterranean Sea. Palestinian and European archaeologists discovered a similar one in February.

The cemetery, which was discovered by construction workers in 2022, contains more than 60 tombs.

The sarcophagus has been taken to the Pasha Palace Museum in Gaza City for closer examination. **HW**

Rachel Bloom’s One-Woman Musical Comedy to Open Off-Broadway this Fall

By Lisa Keys

(New York Jewish Week) – Award-winning Jewish actress, comedian and writer Rachel Bloom, star and co-creator of the CW hit “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend,” will bring a one-woman musical comedy to an off-Broadway theater this fall for a four-week run.

“Death, Let Me Do My Show,” written by and starring Bloom, will begin previews at the Lucille Lortel Theatre (121 Christopher St.) on Sept. 6, with opening night on Sept. 14.

“I don’t want to say TOO much about it but, in summation, it’s a show that is definitely NOT about the ever-present spectre of death,” Bloom wrote in an email to her fan club last Tuesday. “It’s filled with raunchy and escapist material that will in NO way explore the pandemic and all the tumultuous events that ensued in my personal life.”

The email, with the subject line “Baby’s First Off-Broadway Show!,” also features a photo of Bloom, 35, wearing a T-shirt from legendary Upper West Side Jewish grocery Zabar’s.

Bloom is best known for “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend,” a musical TV series about a successful but miserable New York lawyer, Rebecca Bunch, who decides to follow her camp ex-boyfriend to suburban West Covina, California. The series, which ran for four seasons

between 2015-2019, “is hilarious, zany and addresses Jewish identity in myriad ways,” a JTA article declared in 2016. Bloom won a Golden Globe for her performance in the starring role, as well as an Emmy for Outstanding Original Music and Lyrics.

A Los Angeles native, Bloom, who studied drama at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, once told JTA that she always felt a kinship with New York Jews. “I’d always felt like a neurotic Jewish person growing up in California, and New York really brought out in a great way those parts of me,” she said in the 2016 interview.

Bloom, who says she was raised “pretty secular,” went to Hebrew school until around age 9. “We didn’t have Passover seders, but I know every single celebrity who’s ever said anything antisemitic,” she told JTA.

Bloom co-wrote a 2013 Hanukkah comedy album, “Suck It, Christmas,” and her 2020 memoir, “I Want to Be Where the Normal People Are,” is packed with Jewish jokes. “Jews talk about being Jewish a lot,” she said. “They’re very aware of their Jewish identity.”

“Death, Let Me Do My Show” is directed by Seth Barrish (“Mike Birbiglia: The Old Man & the Pool”) and originally played to sold-out crowds in London, Chicago, Boston and elsewhere. **HW**

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This story is being
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Ted Roberts

A midrash, you know, is a story, a parable – maybe told by an identifiable rabbi – maybe only an anonymous tale gray with age. Of all the great and inspirational midrashim told by our rabbis, the one I like least is that story of Avram and his father, Terah. There’s no question that the profession of Terah, father to the inventor of monotheism, was an embarrassment. He was in the idol business. You remember. (“So, Avram,” asked his Hebrew school pals, What’s your papa do?”)

“Oh, he’s got a Hobby Lobby franchise over on the highway. Pottery, carving, ya know.”

Long, long ago when most of us were in Sunday School Kindergarten we heard this midrash about Terah. We’re talking circa 2000 BCE – pre-Sinai, pre-Torah. A time when the dictionary of professions was limited to five categories; merchant, shepherd, farmer, soldier, and cadaver due to starvation. According to this bizarre midrash, Terah was a merchant and his goods, his inventory, were idols. What a strange line of merchandise for the father of He who founded monotheism. It’s as though Henry Ford’s pop was a dealer in horses. Or Alexander Graham Bell’s father had an exclusive line of megaphones. The midrash tells us that Terah leaves Avram in charge of the store and the young man, in a fit of righteousness, smashes the idols. His explanation

when Pop returns? Oh, the clay figures we call idols had a heckuva fight – and only this big guy is left!” If you’re an idol worshiper you gotta believe the story, right? But it reflects badly on Father Terah, and it fails to explain his son’s sudden insight.

Since I, too, am the father of a righteous son, I prefer the following version. OK, Terah has this glitzy store in downtown Haran and one day leaves young Avram in charge. Sorta scary, thinks the child. It’s dark and rainy outside and the gloom of the store is packed with dozens of dusty shapes who, according to their clientele, can bring life or death, riches or poverty. Often Avram was in charge. Like a good son, he helped his father.

How often had the boy heard his pop’s sales pitch? “Avram, bring me that special mantelpiece carving of Gulak. So powerful it requires minimal sacrifice. Notice, too, his pleasing shade of blue goes with almost any interior.” And never did Terah consider the damage to this dutiful son’s soul.

So, today Terah appoints his son temporary manager of Idol Mart. “Watch the store,” says Terah as he goes out the door. What’s to watch, thinks the young seller of idols. I’m alone in here. So, he cracks open a long papyrus scroll – it’s a best seller, “When Schmu-el Met Rachel.” Appropriately, he has hidden it behind an idol of Astarte the G-ddess of Love.

But no sooner has he unrolled it to line 387 – that’s where Schmu-el tells Rachel that he likes her better than honey cake – when an idol speaks up. I said an IDOL! Who one month ago was soggy earth beside the riverbank! The molder of the universe has decided to take the pulpit in the education of Avram. Says the clay figure; “Why am I priced at only two handfuls of copper coins when shimshak over there by the door has a price tag of

ten pieces of silver?” He was followed by a chorus of idol voices – all loudly complaining. This one too cheap – this one overpriced. And a lot of complaints about shelf space and location. Everybody wants center aisle, front door.

Young Avram, the only human in this room full of angry pottery was also the only one with a zipped lip. He is awed by the garrulousness of his father’s clay and wood products. “Papa wouldn’t believe this,” he muttered to himself. “You’re only merchandise to dress up a pagan living room or decorate an otherwise drab and desolate bedroom. You have no powers to bring rain, make the sheep fertile, grow the lush ears of corn, or push the river over its banks. Something else does that. Who or what, I know not, but I strongly suspect it’s not a clay figurine on a shelf. But how is it that I hear you talking? And such silly fiddle faddle as your price and location, and ... “ Just then the door opened and in walked Terah, back from his errand.

His son rushed into his arms. “Father, Father, the idols were talking like you and me. I was frightened. They talked like humans, just now the store was full of their voices.” Terah looked deeply into the face of his only son whom he loved. This idol business was a good living, but not good enough to justify the corruption of this promising, but naive child who listened too closely to his old man’s sales pitches. Dramatic maybe, even skillful. But harmless. Or so he thought. He was a marketer, not a worshiper of idols.

Meanwhile, his son continued to rant about these products of the village potter and their complaints. “Yes, Papa, they all wanted to stand by the door.” “Well, let’s help them,” said the father of Avram. “Baal! (He was the biggest of the clay figures and priced accordingly.)

The Scribbler On the Roof

By Ted Roberts

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Go stand immediately to the right of the entrance to the shop.” If Baal could have heard, he would have said “yes sir” and occupied the premier position. But, since molded clay figures are deaf, dumb, immobile, he took not a step.

“How disobedient,” said Terah. “Let’s give him a push.” So he did, and all six feet of Baal fell flat on the floor and broke into three dozen pieces. “Maybe he was sick,” said Terah, father and teacher. So, next he picked Delmonte, G-d of corn, beans and vegetables. “Here, let me help,” he said. Another push – another job for the lady who swept out the store. On and on until the floor was ankle deep in pottery shards.

“Avram, they are only clay figures. Idols are for selling, not worshipping,” which to skip four millennia and several dimensions of reality, reminded me of my old boss, who owned a liquor store. I, while attending college, was the night clerk. “Teddy,” he said, “whiskey’s for selling, not drinking.”

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 Judicial Reform: Questions I’ve Received

By Howard Weisband

At the moment, to my great sorrow, Israel is a very divided society, perhaps more so than the country has ever experienced in its 75 years of Statehood.

As all are aware, two days ago as I write this column, on Monday, July 24, the Knesset passed a law that cancels the reasonableness clause, which allowed Israel’s Supreme Court to block government appointments and decisions by elected officials that it deemed to be unreasonable and not in the public interest.

Such decision making is subjective in nature. But so was the decision of the Supreme Court itself in the 1990s under its then President Aharon Barak to assume such responsibility. The issue in large measure relates to the fact that Israel has never developed a Constitution nor a Bill of Rights, though there is the Declaration of Independence and a series of Basic Laws.

On Monday, I quickly began receiving several questions from concerned, even alarmed, cousins and good friends, both in Israel and abroad, wanting to know my perspective, or my “take” on what’s happening inside Israel.

I decided to share some of those questions and my responses within this col-

umn. I hasten to add that I am not a legal expert or commentator; rather a fairly well read and informed citizen of Israel, who loves this country and is able to be a loving critic. (As a dual citizen of Israel and the United States, I can say the same of the U.S.A.)

Perhaps the most concerned question, from the U.S., was: “Do you think this is Israel’s civil war right now?” My quick reply: “G-d Forbid!! No!!! Civil strife, yes; divide yes. But the demonstrations have been civil in great measure, democratic in nature.”

Then from another friend in the U.S.: “They keep saying that this is the worst that the country has ever been divided. Worse than the Altalena in 1948 or the German Reparations in 1954?” I responded: “I believe so. We’ve never had so many take to the streets, democratically demonstrating for change. Closest to it probably were the demonstrations to get out of Lebanon after the 1982 war.”

His follow up comment: “That is scary. The reservist strike frightens me.” To which I replied: “It’s very serious. But remember The IDF is a people’s army, and the reserves are very much a voluntary aspect of the army. They are

expressing themselves within a democratic system. Believe me, if Hamas or Hizbullah, or G-d forbid, Iran even threatened to attack, every one of those reservists would run to his/her base.”

I added: “Keep the faith, Good Friend. Israel remains a strong democracy albeit with a terrible political system, and now some nasty politicians who were elected on a hidden agenda. That political system is what needs reform, much more than the judicial system. We have a wonderful country with a terrible political system.”

The discussion shifted to the current coalition and Prime Minister Netanyahu, more specifically if they are prepared and able to reform the political system.

My comments: “Certainly not at this point. Politics is about power, and no politician wants to give it up. Personal power vs the national interest. Guess what wins! Bibi is too much Machiavelli-like now. Driven by his super ego. Did so much good for Israel in the past. Not now. Thirsts for power.”

I continued: “What Bibi has done over the last years has alienated too many outside his immediate camp. When he was able to build a broad centrist coa-

lition, with those on both the right and left, he succeeded. Given his tendency to create more enemies than friends, he had to turn to a far right coalition this time to regain power. He locked himself into a corner with people that represent some of the worst past behavior and do not ascribe to political norms.”

How did they get elected? “Likud and those parties on the far right strategically ran their campaign and won on an agenda that the people at large wanted: provide security, fight terrorism, limit Iran however possible, decrease crime in the Arab sector, etc. Judicial reform was buried tactically on their platform, not spoken of or presented openly. It was a dishonest campaign.”

They won. The country lost.

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

Biden Officials Sift through Herzog Visit, Judicial Reform in Video Briefing



Terry Wolff. Source: Screenshot.
By Mike Wagenheim

(JNS) – A senior member of the National Security Council, which advises the U.S. president, said last Monday that U.S. President Joe Biden wants to see compromise on future Israeli legislation despite the government’s passage of the “reasonableness” law, an important part of judicial reform.

Terry Wolff, the council’s senior director for Middle East and North Africa, spoke about the new law and about Israeli President Isaac Herzog’s recent visit to Washington and New York during a White House video briefing for the American Jewish community.

“Some folks will decide based on what they’ve heard – and the fact that a good number of folks boycotted the vote – that it’s all over,” Wolff said. “But I think the president’s argument and his perspective has been that it’s really important that the sides get together, that they talk and that discussion should not be over.”

Judicial reform in Israel was one of many issues that Biden and Herzog discussed last week in their meeting in the Oval Office, according to Wolff.

“One is the regional concerns, and the second is really kind of Israel proper and the domestic challenge that Israel is experiencing,” he said. Iran topped the list of those regional concerns, which also included Russia and China, according to Wolff.

“They talked about normalization. They talked about opportunities with the Abraham Accords, as well as the Negev Forum, and where that goes next,” he said.

The conversation, Wolff said, is one that happens continually in official channels between the United States and Israel.

“There’s a healthy dialogue. We don’t always agree on everything, but at the same time, we do talk about just about everything,” he said. “This was in a way just a refreshing of the constant themes that we are always tackling with our Israeli friends.”

Samantha Sutton, director for Israel and Palestinian affairs at the National Security Council, who also participated in the briefing, echoed Wolff’s perspective on broad American-Israeli cooperation.

Sutton, who recently ended her tenure as chief of staff to former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Thomas Nides and worked for the U.S. mission to the United Nations at the U.S. Department of Defense, told attendees that she has seen “the breadth of issues that we cooperate with Israel on” at the United Nations, in Jerusalem and at the Pentagon.

“I’ve been pleasantly surprised,” she said. “It’s not just on security or the Palestinians.”

A familiar agenda

Many of these topics surfaced in a phone call last week between Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, their first direct communication in months.

“It’s almost the same agenda of discussion topics from the Herzog meeting, and it’s exactly what you’d expect that these two leaders would talk about,” Wolff said.

“President Biden did spend a little more time with the prime minister talking about judicial reform and trying to understand it from the president’s vantage point,” he said.

Prior to Herzog’s address to a joint session of Congress last week, a “good number” of U.S. officials watched a 1987 C-SPAN video of the president’s

father – the late Chaim Herzog, then Israel’s president – speech before Congress.

“We watched the entire thing,” Wolff said, calling it “quite remarkable” to compare and contrast the father’s and son’s speeches.

Climate unveiling

Ilan Goldenberg, special adviser to Vice President Kamala Harris for Middle East and North Africa, said during the briefing that the setting was right – given Harris’s focus on Africa and Israel’s attention to the region – for the joint announcement from the vice president and Herzog of a climate technology initiative.

“This is part of Israel’s ‘near abroad,’” said Goldenberg, referring to an area outside the immediate region but within Israel’s sphere of influence. “There are a lot of opportunities there for collaboration that, frankly, I’m only seeing for the first time, despite all my different roles in government. There are always new things to learn.”

He said on the call that Harris “raised the importance of working with Palestinians” on climate and environmental issues “by investing in renewable-energy projects that can help spur Pales-

tinian economic growth” with Herzog, even though the Palestinians are not a part of the new climate technology program.

“That is separate and apart from the project but was also part of the agenda that we discussed,” he said.

Sutton, who assisted Nides on efforts to gain Israel entry into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, cited the announcement during Herzog’s visit that Washington and Jerusalem had signed a Memorandum of Understanding on a pilot program.

The program is designed to ensure that Palestinian Americans and other Arab Americans are treated at entry points to Israel in a manner that fits the Visa Waiver Program parameters. Israel had long avoided reducing such scrutiny, citing security concerns.

Sutton said on the call that she was skeptical that Israel would be accepted into the Visa Waiver Program but has since changed her mind.

“I was doubtful, to be honest, just because the list of requirements is so onerous – that go way beyond reciprocity, like data-sharing,” she said. “But it is looking much more promising.” **HW**

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