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Chabad’s Grand Chanukah Celebration Brings Light and Joy to Memphis



Rabbi Klein explained the connection of the flower Menorah to Oct. 7th: “They tried to bury us; they didn’t know we were seeds and we’d flourish and grow.”

By Eli Ostrow

On Sunday, December 29, the Chabad Center for Jewish Life brought the community together for an unforgettable celebration of the fifth night of Chanukah. Community members from all over gathered to share in the warmth, meaning, and joy of the holiday.

The centerpiece of the evening was a breathtaking giant flower menorah, crafted entirely from colorful blooms. Beyond its beauty, the menorah was a symbol of the theme for the event: “They tried to bury us; they didn’t know we were seeds and we’d flourish and grow.”

The evening also included a heartfelt tribute to Memphians currently serving in the IDF, with a special remembrance of Rose Lubin, a fallen hero who gave her life in defense of Israel. Her grandfather, Nate Lubin, shared her story in a

moving moment that left a lasting impression on everyone in attendance.

Of course, the night wasn’t without plenty of fun. The Michael Clayton Magic Show left both kids and adults amazed with his jaw-dropping illusions. Festive music filled the air, and what’s a Chanukah celebration without the classics? Guests enjoyed crispy latkes, sweet donuts, and hot apple cider, making the evening as tasty as it was joyful.

More than just a celebration, the event showcased Memphis’s connection to the broader Jewish world. It was a night filled with love for tradition, community, and togetherness.

The best part? It was free and open to all, welcoming everyone to share in the festivities. If you missed it, don’t worry – Chabad has more events on the way. Visit JewishMemphis.com or call 901-754-0404 to stay in the know. We can’t wait to celebrate with you soon! **HW**

Beth Sholom Sisterhood Sweetens Christmas for Shelby County Workers



Volunteers Avi Grishman, Paige Portnoy, Rachel Grishman and Mark Grishman are flanked by firefighters at Germantown Fire Station #3. The volunteers visited two other fire stations and one police station on Christmas.

Continuing a nearly 20-year-old tradition, Beth Sholom members and families prepared and delivered platters of cookies and brownies to fire fighters, police officers, and hospital staff who were working on Christmas last month. More than a dozen Beth Sholom groups participated, spreading holiday cheer at about two dozen locations. Participants enjoyed the pleasure of giving, and recipients were delighted by the sweet mitzvah.

“I always enjoy baking for this pro-

gram,” said Lisa Shipowitz, Beth Sholom Sisterhood treasurer. “When our kids were young, all four of us would go out together to deliver treats on Christmas morning before we went to the movies.” She added that she and her family have delivered goodies to the same five locations every year for years. “One firefighter said he ‘had been waiting on’ my brownies to be delivered.”

The joy of giving runs in the family. Shipowitz’s mother, Marilyn Zellner, launched the project in the late 2000s



Marcia Menuskin brought her great-grandchildren, Dylan and Lilah Steinberg, to Memphis Fire Station #21.

when she was Sisterhood co-president. “I was visiting my sister and read about a similar program in the “St. Louis Light,” in the city’s Jewish newspaper,” she said. “I thought, ‘why can’t we do it in Memphis?’”

Zellner said she sees the project as an opportunity to interact with community members who don’t typically interact with Jews. “It’s important for people to know that we care about and do good things for our community.”

Mark Grishman echoed Zellner’s



Sisterhood members Barbara Hellman (center) and Elaine Klein visited Memphis Fire Station #18 near the University of Memphis.

thoughts. “Our family just moved to Memphis about 18 months ago,” he said. “We think the best way to get involved in a community is to give back. First responders, especially police officers, don’t always get the thanks for their hard work. What better time than the holidays to show our appreciation for all their efforts to keep us safe?”

The official name of the project was the Sisterhood Family Mitzvah Proj-

(See Sisterhood Page 3)

Jewish Community Springs into Action as Devastating Los Angeles-Area Fires Widen



The Pasadena Jewish Temple & Center smolders after burning in the Eaton Fire in Pasadena, California, Jan. 8, 2025. Credit: Mario Tama/Getty Images

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) – Daniel Sher’s voice broke as he related the latest to members of his Pacific Palisades synagogue. Kehillat Israel had just sent a message saying that its building had so far survived the devastating Palisades Fire, but, the associate rabbi noted, so much had been lost.

“I cannot begin to describe the feeling that I am currently holding as I hear from so many beloved community members who’ve lost their home — while my family has found out that we’ve lost our home,” Sher said in a video he posted to Instagram last Wednesday afternoon. “Our community that we love so dearly is in disarray.”

Sher later shared a picture taken by his wife of what remained of the home they lived in with their three young children and pets. Only a fireplace and chimney could be distinguished from a sea of ashes — one of thousands of structures that have burned in the last two days as fires rage across the Los Angeles area.

At least one historic synagogue, the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center, was completely destroyed by fire, but not before community members battled challenging conditions to remove the Conservative congregation’s 13 Torah scrolls.

Los Angeles’ Jewish community — the second largest in the United States — has swung into action, attempting to provide relief and reassurance at a volatile time. Synagogues and Jewish community centers in safe areas are opening their doors to those who have fled their homes. A Jewish loan society is doling out funds to people who must start from scratch. And local Jewish eateries are fanning out to distribute free food to firefighters who have been battling blazes for days, with no end in sight.

“We have bagels. We have food trucks.

We want to pull up to any safe zones to feed firefighters or anyone displaced from their homes,” Yeastie Boys Bagels posted on Instagram last Wednesday. Soon after, it announced that it would be distributing bagels at several evacuation centers. Last Thursday, the pop-up shop announced, it would partner with Jose Andres’ World Central Kitchen, known for its work in disaster zones, to do even more.

At least five people have died and more than 100,000 have been ordered to evacuate the fires, the worst in L.A. history, burning mostly uncontained in multiple locations across the region. Many others, lacking power and reliable water, have preemptively left their homes for areas with clean air and less risk.

Among those who have lost their homes are the Jewish celebrities Billy Crystal, Adam Brody and Eugene Levy. Meanwhile, a local newscaster encountered Steve Guttenberg, a Jewish actor who belongs to Kehillat Israel, as he sought to help people who had to abandon their cars in gridlock while evacuating the Palisades Fire.

Some of the new fires have cropped up in densely populated areas closer to the city’s core, including Hollywood. The city continues to experience high winds and low humidity, creating conditions for continued spread. Firefighters have reported a shortage of water in hydrants, leaving their hoses less than full.

While the region has always been prone to wildfires, the risk has historically been low in the winter. But this year, little rain has fallen, drying out vegetation fueled by last year’s historic rainfall, creating optimal conditions for a winter blaze that watchdogs say is a perfect example of the kind of “com-

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Jan. 17, 2025 / 17 Tevet, 57854:55 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. Jan. 18, 2025 / 18 Tevet, 5785 5:55 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Shemot

pound climate disaster” that is becoming more common.

“Now is the time to rally support for the communities being ravaged by these ferocious fires,” Rabbi Jennie Rosenn of Dayenu, a group that aims to mobilize Jews on climate issues, said in a statement. “It is also the time to use our radical imagination to envision and build a different future — one that is just, livable, and sustainable — free of this kind of rampant and devastating destruction.”

For now, many in the region are focused on immediate, practical concerns.

The Jewish Free Loan Association announced \$2,000 no-interest loans that do not require guarantors for all Angelenos with emergency needs, such as replacement clothing and hotel stays. The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles compiled a list of more than a dozen Jewish institutions providing refuge and emergency assistance to people from across the region, while also looking ahead toward the long recovery process the region will require. And community members are taking stock of what has been lost, even as the risk remains for more devastation to come.

“I do know that we will continue to care for one another, to reach out to one another, and we will rebuild,” Sher said in his video. “So many of us are experiencing heartbreak. But when a community experiences heartbreak together, it means we can mend our hearts together as community as well.” HW



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Sisterhood...

(Continued From Page 1)

ect, because the organizers wanted to involve everyone from children, grandchildren, adults, parents, grandparents, and even one great-grandparent.

Grishman said in his household, the mitzvah was a true family affair. His two children, Rachel and Avi, along with Paige Portnoy, a friend from Beth Shalom’s T3 program for teens, took charge.

“The kids baked the cookies, packaged them, and delivered them to three fire stations and one police station with me and my wife, Ellen. It was important to have everyone participate, because it is not enough to tell your kids to be good people, you have to show them what that looks like.”

Barbara Vaccai, who chaired this year’s Mitzvah Project, called it a “blast,” because so many people and families enthusiastically participated,

saying, “It was special to see how many people volunteered and were so willing and eager to go to more than one location.” Vaccai delivered her package to the emergency department at St. Francis hospital. “The two nurses at the desk were pleasantly surprised. They were grateful and expressed their appreciation,” she said.

Vaccai thanks the many people who joined her to volunteer their time and effort: Sonya Anderson, Francine Brown, Emily and Marc Davis, Patti and Stanley Elster, Sharon Finkelstein, Mark and Ellen Grishman. Barbara Hellman, Elaine Klein, Raena Maday, Marcia Menuskin with her great-grandchildren, Dylan and Lilah Steinberg, Melissa Reyna, David Ross and Julie Ross, Susan Ross, Cheri Rubenstein, Lisa Shipowitz and Sara Slovis. **HW**

Synagogue, Jewish Homes Vandalized with Jew-Hate Graffiti in France

(JNS) – Police in Paris announced the defacement of at least 10 Jewish homes and businesses in the French capital, as well as a synagogue and a rabbi’s home in the northern city of Rouen.

Last Sunday and Monday, antisemitic graffiti appeared on buildings in the Paris suburbs of Vincennes, Saint-Mandé and Fontenay-sous-Bois.

A wall in front of the Rouen synagogue was also defaced with a swastika and the words “Jews pedophiles, rapists to be gassed,” while another wall nearby was tagged with a swastika and the words “Hitler player.” The synagogue had been the target of an attempted arson last May and was previously

sprayed with graffiti in December.

“All these attacks are taking place in a context of rising antisemitism in France,” said Natacha Ben Haïm, the president of the Israelite Religious Association of Rouen, who manages the synagogue. “I don’t want to stay quiet. I want this to be known.”

Officials told CNN that the prosecutor’s offices of Rouen and the Paris suburbs have opened investigations into the graffiti.

“The Jewish community represents less than 1% of the population and is the victim of 57% of all anti-religious attacks,” said Bruno Retailleau, the French minister of the interior, in response to the vandalism. **HW**

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. Monthly Luncheon is at noon.

Monday, January 20
Speaker: Kevin Payne, local Humana Representative

Topic: Hope and Faith
Kevin usually brings a really nice program where everyone enjoys and learns something. Come have a nice lunch and enjoy the company. Hope to see you there.

Wednesday, January 22
Big Senior Monthly Luncheon with Entertainment

January’s Luncheon will feature one of our best and most-requested performers provided in partnership with Creative Aging. The Double D Band will be entertaining the group during a terrific lunch. The Double D Band plays a wide range of songs and genres, but especially music from the 50s. Playing guitars and mandolins, they’ve appeared on MTV, BBC, and have been a part of the music scene in London, England, and New York City, having lived and performed in both. The crowd is usually clapping and singing along to these two terrific performers. Come have a really nice time and enjoy the company of old and new friends. The cost, as always, is only \$5 for the lunch and the entertainment. The MJCC also has transportation available for only \$2 for those that live around 15 minutes from the Center. Call Steve Kaplan at 901-259-9220 for more information.



The Double D Band

Monday, January 27
Special Art Project with Mid-South Hobbies

Mid-South Hobbies on Summer Avenue, will bring us an art project that each person will have to do on their own! Everyone really enjoyed the last two projects; a Pop-Up Flower Vase complete with Butterflies and a Wooden Snowflake Garland! Each of these projects came with their own color markers. If the people did not finish the project here, they took them home with the markers, to finish! It was really an enjoyable time. Please make a reservation for lunch and the Art Project so that we will have enough projects for everyone. Call the front desk at 901-761-0810 to reserve your spot. There is no charge for the Art Project.

Wednesday, January 29
Rabbi Talk with Rabbi Abe Schacter-Gampel, the Director for the Center of Jewish Life and Learning at the Memphis Jewish Community Center.

Topic: Exploring Exodus
Rabbi Abe always has a unique way of looking at any subject. We usually have a larger-than-normal turnout, so be sure and make your reservations early and join us for lunch!

Please join us Monday through Friday for a delicious kosher lunch from the kitchens at Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required the day before by 1 p.m. by contacting Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator, at 901-259-9220 or stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org or by calling the front desk at 901-761-0810. Steve works Monday thru Thursday 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. **HW**

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Adamah “ReTreat Yourself!” Initiative Launches Retreats for Jewish Communal Professionals

Thanks to generous funding from Maimonides Fund, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, Crown Family Philanthropies, the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Foundation, and the Jim Joseph Foundation, Adamah is hosting a series of 10 retreats for Jewish communal professionals across the country. “ReTreat Yourself!” aims to support Jewish communal professionals who devote themselves to creating impactful experiences for others, sometimes at the expense of their own wellbeing. Retreat participants will receive the gift of spending three days in nature away from the demands of their full-time jobs, at no cost to them. The first two retreats were oversubscribed, with Adamah receiving over 250 applicants for 140 spots.

With each retreat capped at 70 professionals, Adamah is planning eight more, to be held at their two retreat centers, Pearlstone and Isabella Freedman, and at other Jewish retreat centers around the country. The next two retreats are scheduled for March 7-9, 2025, and August 11-13, 2025, each focused on a different theme: Jewish Mysticism & Meditation and Farm-to-Table for Jewish Educators.

“At Adamah, we believe immersive retreats are a powerful remedy to help heal mind, body and soul. There is nothing quite like it. Experiencing the magic of our retreat centers at no cost is something we are excited to provide to the hard-working leaders of the Jewish community,” said Jakir Manela, Adamah CEO.

ReTreat Yourself! is not modeled after “traditional” professional development where people come together to discuss technical skills directly related to job productivity. In addition to the rejuvenation aspect of the retreats facilitated with guest chefs, massage therapists, fitness coaches, and yoga instructors, these professionals are also given the opportunity to engage in Jewish learning with dynamic scholars-in-residence. The goal is for participants to emerge with a broader network of friends and allies in the field, new Jewish wisdom sources for inspiration, and renewed motivation, passion, and commitment to their work.

“We have such deep gratitude for Jewish communal professionals, especially for their tireless work since October 7th, 2023,” said Aaron Saxe of the Jim Joseph Foundation. “They have helped keep our communities functional, whole, and connected. The ReTreat Yourself! experience is a timely initia-

tive that offers inspiration and rejuvenation to go back into the field with a renewed sense of purpose.”

The inaugural retreat at Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, an Adamah campus in Falls Village, Connecticut, featured Rabbi Shai Held of Hadar as the lead educator, with the theme of Elul.

“I had a chance to meet with others who shared the same values as me in both professional and personal religious paths. It made me feel like the path I’m on is the right path and gave me strength to move forward with new energy in my work and personal life,” said Lakota Lustig, engagement coordinator at Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York.

Pearlstone, the headquarters of Adamah in Reisterstown, Maryland, hosted the second retreat in November 2024, with a focus on “The Torah of Nourishment,” featuring Rabbanit Dasi Fruchter of the South Philadelphia Shitebel as the lead educator. Alan Shusterman, executive director of Hill Havurah in Washington, D.C., attended the retreat at Pearlstone. When asked why he signed up, he responded, “I know my Jewish work could use a renewing replenishing break. I mean, come on, it’s a no-brainer to want to attend. I’m tired of all the things I’ve tried: conferences, workshops, trainings; they’re not designed to be a break, and this is actually a designed break for us, where we can do activities in groups or by ourselves.” After the retreat Mr. Shusterman added, “I believe this has been very healthy for me in multiple ways and the healthier I am, the better I will be at my job.”

Eligibility for these retreats require participants to have been working full time in the Jewish communal world for 2+ years. They must be working in their current role for 6+ months and be able to cover the cost of their own transportation to and from the retreat.

In 2026, Adamah will be partnering with Ramah Darom in Northeast Georgia, URJ Camp Newman in Northern California, and other sites in Southern California and the Midwest to offer this experience to more professionals in different regions.

For more information and to apply, visit <https://adamah.org/retreat-yourself>

About Adamah

Adamah cultivates vibrant Jewish life in deep connection with the earth, catalyzing culture change and systemic change through immersive retreats, Jewish environmental education, leadership development, and climate action. **HW**

Unraveling the Mysteries of the Talmud: New Course Offered in Memphis



Rabbi Levi Klein of Chabad in Memphis

This winter, Rabbi Levi Klein of Chabad in Memphis will offer *Decoding the Talmud*, a new six-session course by the acclaimed Rohr Jewish Learning Institute (JLI). The course aims to demystify the intricate world of the Talmud, the monumental classic that has shaped Jewish learning for centuries.

Despite being one of the most essential texts in Judaism, many Jews struggle to explain what the Talmud really is. When asked about the Talmud, they find themselves at a loss for a clear answer. For a new learner, the Talmud can be intimidating and inaccessible, remaining a closed book for the masses.

Decoding the Talmud aims to change that.

Beginning Tuesday, February 4 at 7 p.m., students will meet its main characters, explore its dynamic history, and engage in authentic Talmudic study. They will learn the key terms, logical principles, and historical context required to decipher the text of this 1,500-year-old work and discover how it has survived and thrived, continuing to fill Jewish

study halls to this day.

As Dr. Leib Moscovitz, professor of Talmud at Bar Ilan University, explains, the course addresses a critical need: “The Talmud is a difficult work, one which is extremely different from modern works of the law, yet at the same time, it has exerted a decisive influence on Jewish life and practice throughout the generations.”

Dr. Moscovitz further highlights the importance of this course: “*Decoding the Talmud* seeks to open the door to this remarkable work for students of all ages and backgrounds. As such, it makes an educational contribution of the highest importance for anyone who is and who should be interested in understanding and appreciating the Talmud.”

“The Talmud is the beating heart of Jewish scholarship – maddening, fascinating, even addictive. It’s a world of self-contained logic where questions are more important than answers, and no premise goes unchallenged.” Rabbi Shmuel Phillips, author of “Talmud Reclaimed,” noted, “The chance to partake in an introductory course in Talmudic literacy is an opportunity that should be grasped with great enthusiasm!”

Like all JLI programs, this course is designed to appeal to people at all levels of knowledge, including those without any prior experience or background in Jewish learning. All JLI courses are open to the public, and attendees need not be affiliated with a particular synagogue, temple, or other house of worship.

Interested students may call 901-754-0404 or visit www.myJLI.com for registration and other course-related information. JLI courses are presented in Memphis in conjunction with the Chabad Center for Jewish Life. **HW**

Young Israel Shared Chanukah Pizza with IDF Soldiers



Hard-working IDF soldiers receiving Chanukah pizza from the Young Israel of Memphis.

Chanukah has always been a time in which we share Tzedakah in a generous fashion. Chanukah is also a terrific time to reach out and share some love with the brave Chayalim (soldiers) of Israel’s Defense Forces (IDF). After all, they are doing their best to protect our brothers and sisters in Israel – while away from their own homes, friends, and families.

Before and during Chanukah, YI’s Rabbi’s Discretionary Fund (RDF) was involved in sharing some Chanukah warmth with many deserving individuals and causes. While I’m not able to share the identities of those individuals our Shul was able to assist, I’m happy to identify one terrific cause that Young Israel supported.

This Chanukah, YI once again partnered with www.BasketstoIsrael.com to supply a unit of active-duty IDF soldiers with some delicious Chanukah pick-me-ups. Initially, we had planned to share Sufganiyot (donuts) with the soldiers.

However, when BasketstoIsrael reached the officer in charge of this busy IDF unit, he thanked us for our generous offer – and asked if we’d consider supplying his hard-working troops with a pizza dinner instead of a snack of donuts. How could we turn down such a request (opportunity)?

Thanks to this year’s generous group of sponsors, YI was able to share a delicious pizza dinner with a unit of hungry IDF soldiers!

Knowing that a caring Shul in far-away Memphis, Tenn., was thinking of them on Chanukah surely provided those IDF soldiers with a much-appreciated morale boost!

Yasher Koach to all of Young Israel’s RDF supporters who enable this fund to engage in so many meaningful good deeds!

Young Israel of Memphis’ Rabbi Akiva Males can be reached at rabbi@yiom.org **HW**

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Peter Yarrow, of the Folk Trio Peter, Paul and Mary, Dies at Age 89



The band Peter, Paul and Mary perform at the civil-rights March on Washington, D.C., on Aug. 28, 1963. Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration/National Archives at College Park via Wikimedia Commons.

(JNS) – Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary – an iconic folk-rock band that was popular in the 1960s and early 1970s – died on Jan. 7 at his home in New York City. He was 89 years old.

The group consisted of Yarrow, Paul Stookey and Mary Travers. Their debut album, “Peter, Paul and Mary,” was produced in 1962 by Warner Bros.

The next year, they released the song “Puff the Magic Dragon,” which reached No. 2 on the Billboard charts. Other well-known hits included “If I Had a Hammer,” “Lemon Tree” and “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?”

The trio participated in the 1963 March on Washington and covered major artists, such as Bob Dylan and John Denver, in addition to writing original songs. The band broke up in 1970 to pursue individual careers.

That same year, Yarrow was convicted of taking “indecent liberties” with a 14-year-old girl and served three months of a maximum three-year prison sentence. Years later, in 1981, he was pardoned by President Jimmy Carter, according to “The New York Times.” “The Washington Post” reported the pardon didn’t receive much media attention as the news came “just hours before the American hostages in Iran were freed.”

‘Advancing the causes of human rights’

The son of Ukrainian Jewish immigrants, singer/songwriter and guitarist Yarrow grew up in Manhattan. A student at New York’s High School of Music and Art, he graduated from Cornell University in 1959.

Yarrow began singing in college and was an early advocate of social justice. He started a campaign to help free Soviet Jewry in the 1970s and ’80s, and wrote the Chanukah song “Light One Candle,” which he sang on the U.S. Capitol steps in 1987 during a march for the cause.

Among his music and other honors, Yarrow received the Allard K. Lowenstein Award in 1982 for his “remarkable efforts in advancing the causes of human rights, peace and freedom.” He won the Tikkun Olam Award from the Miami Jewish Federation in 1995, according to the official Peter Paul and Mary website.

He also headed a nonprofit group called “Operation Respect” to combat bullying and promote tolerance among children. Congress recognized him in 2003 for those achievements.

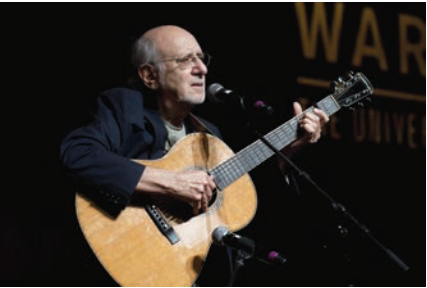
His son and daughter, Christopher Yarrow and Bethany Yarrow, asked family, friends and fans to contribute written stories, videos and audio mes-

sages before their father’s passing about how he “touched their lives in ways big and small” to be viewed while he was in hospice, according to the official website.

“These words and contributions are more than just stories – they are his true legacy, which will endure long after he is gone. Puff the Magic Dragon is forever,” they said.

Mary Travers died in 2009 at 72, making Stookey the last surviving member of the group.

In addition to his children, Yarrow is survived by his wife, Marybeth McCarthy, a niece of 1968 Democratic presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy. [HW](#)



Peter Yarrow, April 28, 2016. Credit: LBJ Presidential Library Credit: Marsha Miller via Wikimedia



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Pasadena Synagogue Burns Down as Fires Rage Across Southern California



A menorah is surrounded by flames from the Pacific Palisades fire along Sunset Boulevard, near Chabad of Pacific Palisades, on Jan. 7, 2025. Credit: Genaro Molina/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) — A synagogue with more than 100 years of history in Pasadena, California, burned down overnight as fires swept across parts of Southern California.

The fate of a Chabad center about 40 miles away near the coast was unclear as a major fire flared in the Pacific Palisades, one of three different blazes destroying structures and threatening lives in multiple pockets of the greater Los Angeles area. Additional Jewish institutions lay in evacuation zones, while others took preparations in case of further spread.

The Pasadena Jewish Center and Temple burned for hours as fire spilled out of the Eaton Canyon, fueled by strong winds. The 434-family congregation had

operated from the Mission-style building, which had a wooden Torah ark carved by the Jewish artist Peter Krasnow, and three outbuildings since the 1940s.

“It’s a massive center, it’s just crumbling with the intensity of the heat,” a KTLA reporter said while broadcasting from the scene. She added, as flames shot through the synagogue’s roof, “It looks like the concrete and the metal is just melting. ... It’s just a total loss.”

Added a neighborhood man whom the newscaster said used to go to the synagogue, “I feel numb to this. It’s like a bad, bad horrific dream. To see that it’s not going to be here tomorrow ...” His voice broke.

The newscaster, Tracy Leong, showed

fire trucks driving past the synagogue but said she had not seen any attempt to quell its burning while she was on the scene. “It’s really hard to get a handle on this fire,” she said. “There are so many structures burning and they’re doing what they can, and there’s just not enough of them right now.”

The congregation’s executive director told “The New York Times” overnight that everyone employed by the synagogue was safe.

“We are devastated, but our staff are safe, and we managed to get our Torahs out safely as well, while ash was coming down in our parking lot,” said Melissa Levy, who said she had been evacuated from her own home.

Southern California has long been vulnerable to devastating fires, but climate change has altered weather patterns that in the past largely limited fire season to only parts of the year.

Earlier in the night, the Pasadena fire was not the major one on the radar for residents of the region. A larger fire in the Pacific Palisades, located on the Pacific coast north of Santa Monica, was under an evacuation order as strong winds spread a fire there. A third fire later erupted several miles north.

Zibby Owens, the publisher and bookseller who recently put out an anthology titled “On Being Jewish Now,” posted footage on Instagram showing that her family’s home in the area had been lapped by flames before losing its camera feed.

Kehillat Israel, a Reconstructionist

synagogue in Pacific Palisades, was also under an evacuation order and closed starting last Tuesday.

And the Chabad of Pacific Palisades evacuated 100 children from its preschool last Tuesday as fire neared the property, Rabbi Zushe Cunin told local TV news. He and other rabbis posed with the community’s Torahs as they removed them from the fire’s path last Tuesday evening.

“The night is still a very long one, and the winds are still raging,” the center said on Instagram. “We need all of your prayers to overcome this dangerous fire.”

The center is located squarely inside the evacuation zone for the Palisades Fire. None of the three fires was contained last Wednesday morning, with continued strong winds expected to fuel them throughout the day.

On the other side of Topanga State Park from Pacific Palisades in Calabasas, the Reform synagogue Congregation Or Ami was taking precautions in case conditions changed.

“We have removed Torah scrolls and other sacred/business-critical items from Congregation Or Ami. It’s without power now. We have people whose homes are endangered, people who have friends/relatives who lost homes. In a holding pattern for the moment,” Rabbi Paul Kipnes wrote on Facebook, noting that the Palisades fire was just 17 miles away with winds gusting up to 100 miles per hour at times. “Distances here feel large yet small.” **HW**



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Senators Criticize Biden Administration’s Release of Guantanamo Detainees



A guard tower over the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, on Sept. 12, 2007. Credit: Army Sgt. Joseph Scozzari via Wikimedia Commons.

(JNS) – Sens. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and John Thune (R-S.D.), the U.S. Senate Majority Leader, released statements last Tuesday opposing the Biden administration’s decision to free 11 detainees from Guantanamo Bay.

The U.S. Department of Defense announced on Jan. 6 the resettlement of the 11 Yemeni men from the detention facility at Guantanamo to the Government of Oman.

“In the wake of an ISIS-inspired terror attack in New Orleans last week, it is appalling that President Biden would pursue an 11th-hour attempt to release the same detainees that were rejected for transfer on a bipartisan basis in 2023 after Hamas’ terrorist attack on Israel,” Thune stated.

“This release unnecessarily jeopardizes our national security, and the

American people deserve better from our nation’s leaders,” he continued.

Thune called on Biden “to halt any plans to release the additional Guantanamo detainees during the final days of his administration.”

“ISIS just inspired a terrorist attack in New Orleans, yet Joe Biden wants to release 11 terrorists on his way out the door, adding to his sorry legacy of coddling America’s enemies and endangering our people,” Cotton said.

The Defense Department stated that the release of the 11 men was part of “ongoing U.S. efforts focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and ultimately closing the Guantanamo Bay facility.”

There are currently 15 remaining detainees at Guantanamo Bay, the fewest since 2002. [HW](#)

Bedouin Father Taken Hostage on Oct. 7 Found Dead in Gaza; Evidence Suggests Son was also Killed

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) — Israeli troops have retrieved the body of a Bedouin Muslim father of 19 who was taken hostage by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023.

It was not immediately clear how and when Youssef Ziyadne died, but authorities said his body had been found in a Hamas tunnel in Rafah and that evidence indicated “grave concern” about his son, Hamza’s, fate.

The father and son had been taken hostage while tending to cows on a kibbutz near their home in the Bedouin city of Rahat where Youssef Ziyadne had worked for nearly two decades. Two of Youssef Ziyadne’s other children – Aisha and Bilal, then 17 and 18 – were also abducted before being released on the last day of a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023.

The father and son, who were 52 and 22 when they were taken hostage, had been seen by other hostages and had previously been assumed to be alive. The retrieval brings to 99 the number of hostages who remain in Gaza, as pressure intensifies on Israel and Hamas to reach a ceasefire deal that would secure their release.

“The emerging agreement comes far too late for Youssef – who was taken alive and should have returned the same way,” the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement. “Every day in captivity poses an immediate

mortal danger to the hostages who have managed to survive for 15 months and threatens the possibility of returning the deceased for burial.”

The family had lobbied widely for Youssef and Hamza’s release, with Youssef’s brother confronting a Palestinian representative at the United Nations to petition on their behalf last year.

A cousin of the family gained renown for rescuing dozens of Nova music festivalgoers on Oct. 7, drawing attention to the Bedouin minority that remains marginalized and disadvantaged in many ways within Israeli society. “After this, the government needs to do a better job of looking after us because we’re also part of this nation,” the cousin, also named Youssef Ziadna, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in October. “We are one people – we are Israelis. We live here together, and we need to go hand in hand.”

Israeli troops rescued another Bedouin from Rahat, Farhan al-Qadi, in August during an operation in southern Gaza. The father of 11 had been taken hostage while working as a security guard at an Israeli kibbutz.

Shortly afterwards, Hamas announced “new instructions” for its operatives to kill hostages if Israeli troops neared. Soon after, Israeli troops located the bodies of six hostages in Rafah who they said had been only recently executed. [HW](#)

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In March 2023, two of the largest bank failures in history alarmed savers who worried their own bank accounts could be at risk and investors who feared a wider financial crisis. To help restore confidence in the U.S. financial system, the federal government pledged to make all depositors whole and to support other banks that might face liquidity issues stemming from the rapid rise in interest rates.¹

These events brought renewed attention to how banks operate and the risks they take to earn money on customer deposits, as well as the government’s role in regulating and supervising bank activities.

Interest rate risks remain

Between March 2022 and July 2023, the Federal Reserve raised the benchmark federal funds rate rapidly (from near 0% to a range of 5.25% to 5.5%) in a quest to bring down inflation.² Banks earn money by investing customer deposits, often in relatively safe long-term Treasuries and other government-backed bonds. U.S. Treasury securities are backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government as to the timely payment of principal and interest. But as interest rates rose, bonds lost value on the secondary market. And in early 2023, this became a problem for banks that had to sell bond holdings before they matured to meet customer withdrawals.

With interest rates staying elevated longer than expected, there are concerns that a similar fate could befall regional banks with distressed commercial real estate loans in their portfolios. Already,

many commercial lenders have set aside large reserves to help cover future losses from nonperforming assets (primarily office and retail buildings with high vacancy rates).³

Focus on the FDIC

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) is an independent agency backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government. FDIC insurance is intended to reassure depositors and offer protection in case an insured bank becomes insolvent, is liquidated, or experiences other financial difficulties. Most banks in the United States are insured by the FDIC, which protects deposits up to \$250,000 (per person, bank, and account category). A joint account with two named owners qualifies for up to \$500,000 of coverage. When a member bank fails, the FDIC issues payments to depositors (typically up to the limits provided by law) and takes over the administration of the bank’s assets and liabilities. Generally, the FDIC will try to arrange for a healthy bank to take over the deposits of a failed bank. If no bank assumes that role, the FDIC taps a fund that is financed by premiums paid by insured banks.

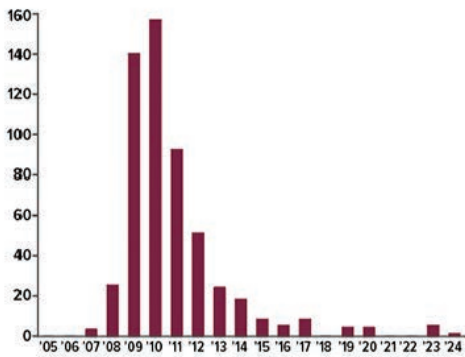
Are your savings protected?

If you have multiple accounts at one bank, you might check to see who is listed as the owner(s) of each account, what category it falls into, and whether it overlaps with other categories that might affect the amount that’s covered. Ownership categories consist of individual accounts, joint accounts, retirement accounts, trust accounts, and business accounts, among others. You can’t increase your coverage by owning dif-

ferent product types (a checking account, savings account, or CDs, for example) within the same ownership category. A tool on the FDIC’s website (**FDIC.gov**) can help you estimate the total FDIC coverage on your deposit accounts. If your assets aren’t fully insured, you might consider shifting them to increase your coverage.

If you are married, for example, you could expand your total coverage up to \$1 million at one bank by opening two separate individual accounts in addition to a joint account. If you have personal or business account balances that regularly exceed \$250,000, you might consider dividing your holdings between multiple financial institutions – or possibly rethink your cash-management strategy altogether.

Number of bank failures



Source: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 2024 (data through May)

- All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal.*
- 1) Federal Reserve and Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 2023
 - 2) Federal Reserve, 2023–2024
 - 3) “The Wall Street Journal,” April 19, 2024

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The Most Anticipated Jewish TV of 2025

By Lior Zaltzman

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2024 was truly an unparalleled year for Jewish movies and TV. We had one of the most profound Holocaust dramas ever made in “We Were the Lucky Ones,” which centered Jewish family in a really moving way. We saw a Jewish national hero in “Masters of the Air.” We got Natalie Portman as a complex Jewish housewife in “Lady in the Lake,” an incredibly dense and profound period show that more people should be talking about, one that even features some Hebrew and Yiddish. We got “Nobody Wants This,” the Adam Brody hot rabbi show nobody wanted to stop talking about. We got lots of great reality TV representation in shows like a “Real Housewives” featuring an adult bat mitzvah and the funniest catfishing Jewish mom on “The Circle.” We even got a “Knuckles” Shabbat episode (hearing Idris Elba talk about gefilte fish is something you’ll never forget).

Going into 2025, it certainly feels like no year will surpass 2024 when it comes to the expansive representation of Jews on TV. Yet there is still a lot to look forward to in the next calendar year.

Here are my most anticipated Jewish shows of 2025:

“Kugel” (Early 2025, Izzy)

OK, so this “Shtisel” prequel technically happened in 2024. The first season of “Kugel,” which focuses on Shulem and Libbi Shtisel’s life in Antwerp’s ultra-Orthodox Jewish community before they moved to Jerusalem, is already airing in Israel to rave reviews and much fanfare. While “Shtisel” was a pretty big Netflix hit, the streaming service dropped the show in 2023, and smaller streamers have since picked it up. Izzy, a streaming platform, which centers Israeli content, is slated to premiere the show sometime in 2025, and watching the trailer, I can already tell it will be one of the best Jewish shows premiering stateside this year.

“SNL50: The Anniversary Special” (February 16, NBC)

Last year, we celebrated the Jewish roots of SNL in the excellent “Saturday Night.” Here’s hoping this year’s live 50th-anniversary special will also feature a lot of funny Jews, from odes to Gilda Radner and cameos from Adam Sandler.

“Suits L.A.” (February 23, NBC)

As an OG “Suits” aficionado, I am really excited for this reboot. “Suits” gave us a really fascinating, funny and maybe a bit problematic Jewish character, the one and only Louis Litt played by Rick Hoffman, who also makes for a pretty adorable Hallmark Hanukkah movie dad in “Round and Round.” Will “Suits L.A.” offer Jewish representation? I think a show about lawyers in L.A. has to include Jewish lawyers (I mean, our current VP is a Jewish L.A. lawyer after all), but we don’t know that for sure yet. What we do know? That it will feature jaddy (that’s Jewish zaddy for you!) Bryan Greenberg, a real-life Jewish dad and proud Jew – who also happened to be Hoffman’s co-star in “Round and Round.” He plays Rick Dodson, who Greenberg calls the “moral compass” of the show.

“House of David” (February 27, Amazon Video)

The biblical story of King David is such fertile grounds for drama that I’m honestly surprised it’s taken TV makers

this long to make a big production based on it. Yes, there was the 2012 Brazilian “King David” and the 2019 modern retelling “Kings,” but the upcoming Amazon MGM Studios show “House of David” promises a more epic feel than those, one worthy of the most fascinating and famous Jewish kings. The team behind it, Jon Erwin and Jon Gunn, are known for their Christian films, which means this series might not be as friendly for the Jewish viewer. “The once-mighty King Saul falls victim to his own pride, as an outcast shepherd boy, David is anointed as the second king,” reads the tagline. The cast is incredibly diverse, featuring veteran Israeli actress Ayelet Zurer as Queen Achinoam, “Tattooist of Auschwitz” star Yali Topol Margalith (yes, that’s Chaim Topol’s granddaughter!) as Mirab, and “Star Trek: Discovery’s” Oded Fehr as Abner. Egyptian-born Michael Iskander, who recently starred in one of my favorite Broadway musicals “Kimberly Akimbo,” plays David.

Netflix has really gotten into the business of biblical retellings with shows like the streaming hit “Testament: The Story of Moses,” and it will definitely be interesting to watch this Amazon MGM venture into the genre.

“The Studio” (March 26, Apple TV+)

Evan Goldberg and Seth Rogen co-created this show in which Rogen plays Matt Remick, the new head of the movie studio Continental Studios. Shenanigans and Jewish men in fine suits ensue as Remick and his team of execs try to “juggle corporate demands with creative ambitions as they try to keep movies alive and relevant,” according to Apple TV+. The cast here is phenomenal, worthy of any star-studded movie. There’s Bryan Cranston, former TV rabbi Kathryn Hahn, “Schitt’s Creek’s” Catherine O’Hara, Martin Scorsese, Ron Howard, Charlize Theron, Zoe Kravitz and fellow Nice Jewish Actor Ike Barinholtz. How Jewish will this show be? We don’t know yet, but it doesn’t feel like there could be a show about a Hollywood studio without having some Jews in (from lawyers to Hollywood, I’m really leaning into Jewish stereotypes here, aren’t I?). And Remick could potentially be a Jewish name, as could Barinholtz’s Sal Seperstein.

“The Last Of Us” Season 2 (Early 2025)

I am a big video game player, and no video game moment has touched me like the synagogue scene in the post-apocalyptic game “The Last Of Us: Part II.” Jewish players don’t often get to see themselves represented in video game characters, yet in this particular

moment, Dina, Ellie’s partner in the game, talks about her sister, Talia, who used to take her to synagogue as the two explore an abandoned synagogue in Seattle. Dina talks about what it means to her to come from a long line of Jewish survivors in this barren landscape. It’s especially moving when you realize the game’s creator, Neil Druckmann, was born in Israel, and the game itself asks such pertinent questions to Jewish life right now. You can even find a particularly moving letter from the synagogue’s former rabbi about the nature of allyship, resilience and community during gameplay.

The much-anticipated season two of the TV adaptation of “The Last Of Us,” on which Druckmann serves as executive producer, is coming later this year, and Dina will be played by Isabela Merced, who, like the actress who voiced the game’s Dina, is not Jewish. We still don’t know if Dina’s Jewishness will make it to the story of season two, but I truly hope it does.

“Nobody Wants This” Season 2 (Netflix, maybe late 2025?)

Yes, a season two of “Nobody Wants This,” the hit Netflix show about a hot rabbi (Adam Brody) who falls for a “shiksa,” Joanne, played by Kristen Bell, is officially coming. When we last left Joanne and Rabbi Noah, the latter was willing to give up his dream job for their romance. In season two, we’ll see how that pans out, but we’ll also get to see a lot of fun developments for our favorite side characters, from Justine Lupe’s Morgan to Emily Arlook’s Rebecca.

“The Rehearsal” Season 2 (Max, sometime in 2025)

The top contender for the trippiest Jewish show ever made is Nathan Fielder’s “The Rehearsal.” In 2022 it gave us one of the most out there episodes on interfaith parenting, and here’s hoping that season two of the Jewish comedi-

an’s show will also give us similarly refreshing Jewish moments.

“Tehran” Season 3 (Apple TV+)

When is season three of the hit spy thriller “Tehran” coming to Apple TV+? We don’t know, but we really hope it does soon. In the meantime, it’s airing on the Israeli broadcast channel Kan11, and it features the incredible Hugh Laurie, who was apparently a big fan of the show set in the Iranian capital about an Israeli spy trying to infiltrate the country. Laurie plays Eric Peterson, a nuclear inspector, in the season.

“Too Much” (Netflix, sometime in 2025)

Lena Dunham’s newest British series is a collaboration with her husband, musician Luis Felber, and appears to be, like her hit show “Girls,” somewhat autobiographical. According to Netflix’s Tudum, the show “follows Jessica, portrayed by comedian Megan Stalter, a New Yorker who heads to London in the wake of a painful breakup. There, she meets Felix, played by “White Lotus” Will Sharpe. The pair build a connection that surprises Jessica... but is impossible to ignore.” It will star many actors who you saw on “Girls,” including Andrew Rannels and Michael Zegen, who told ‘Kveller,’ “I really feel like it’s a true follow-up to ‘Girls,’ and I’m really excited to hear what everyone has to say about it.”

“I have always played Jewish characters, because I’m a Jewish person,” Dunham told ‘Kveller’ in June of last year. “And the characters that I wrote came from Jewish families, which is what I relate to, and what I connect to, but always in a way that was very cultural. It was about the way that they communicated. It was about their sense of humor. It was about the way that their aunts argued and yelled at each other. It was about the way that people ate dinner together. It was about an occasional reference to Jewish summer camp.” **HW**

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Commentary

Bornblum Jewish Community School

By Cathie Jacobs

As I read “The Hebrew Watchman” article, “Bornblum Mishpachot Kick Off New Year,” about Bornblum Jewish Community School, I kept asking myself the same question. Why can’t every child go to a school like Bornblum?

So, I called my friend, Sally Baer, assistant head of the school and told her how impressed I was with the article, and the next day I was at Bornblum getting a tour. Sally told me about the school’s Mishpachot program, which is based on cooperation and grounded in Jewish values. Each student is assigned a Mishpacha, or family made up of other students. It gives each child a sense of belonging from their first moment in the school. The younger kids feel a sense of security. She showed me pictures of the families displayed on one of the school walls.

Sally took me into a classroom to meet some students. When I walked into the room, she introduced me, and a child immediately came over to me and asked me if I would like to sit down in a chair a few feet away. I thought, wow, this child just showed me empathy; she was thinking of my feelings.

Sally told me that every Thursday the middle school students learn about and practice Design Thinking, where they develop empathy by examining chal-

lenges that others face, and the students design solutions to these problems.

She said, “There is an empathy crisis in our country. Design Thinking teaches students to solve problems, but more importantly, it teaches students to approach the world with empathy and experience life’s challenges from the perspective of others.”

After touring the Bornblum School and seeing that these children are being taught how to have empathy, I thought about my son, Ethan, who was murdered in May 2007. You might wonder why my thoughts went to my son, Ethan? The young man who shot Ethan was a passenger in a car with others. Ethan did not know him. A witness said he asked Ethan a question and then shot him.

I believe, with all my heart, that if the young man, who killed Ethan, could have gone to a school like Bornblum, where they teach empathy and compassion for others, then he may have found a different way to meet his needs.

In Ethan’s memory, I hope and pray that more schools in Memphis and in communities throughout the world, will soon follow the example that Bornblum is setting for its students by teaching them how to be empathetic and to solve their problems peacefully. **HW**

U.S., French Generals View Seized Hezbollah Weapons During LAF Visit



The international Israel-Lebanon ceasefire monitoring mechanism led by U.S. Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers observes Lebanese Armed Forces 5th Brigade operations in southwest Lebanon on Jan. 7, 2025. Credit: U.S. Embassy in Lebanon.

By Joshua Marks

(JNS) – U.S. Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers and French Brig. Gen. Guillaume Ponchin viewed confiscated Hezbollah weapons during a visit to the Lebanese Armed Forces 5th Brigade headquarters in southwest Lebanon last Tuesday.

According to statements from U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, the weapons stockpiles, which they referred to as belonging to “unauthorized armed groups,” will be destroyed in the coming days.

Jeffers praised the LAF for what he described as its decisive actions, expertise and leadership, particularly commending its engineer corps for safely handling unexploded ordnance.

Jeffers, of the U.S. Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT), arrived in Beirut on Nov. 27 to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the 60-day Israel-Lebanon ceasefire that went into effect the same day.

He is serving as a co-chair of the ceasefire’s implementation and monitoring mechanism alongside senior U.S. presidential envoy Amos Hochstein until a permanent civilian official is named.

The mechanism is chaired by the United States. It consists of the Lebanese and Israeli militaries, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and France.

Israeli forces have begun withdrawing from the Lebanese border town of Naqura, Hochstein told reporters during a visit to Beirut last Monday.

“The Israeli military started its withdrawal from Naqura ... and back into Israel proper today, south of the Blue Line,” Hochstein said, according to AFP, referring to the U.N.-demarcated border between Lebanon and Israel.

“These withdrawals will continue until all Israeli forces are out of Lebanon completely, and as the Lebanese army continues to deploy into the south and all the way to the Blue Line,” he said.

Since March 23, 1978, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has based its headquarters in Naqura.

The Israeli withdrawal takes place midway into the ceasefire, which ended nearly 14 months of hostilities with the Iranian-backed terror group in Lebanon, which launched near-daily rocket, mortar and drone attacks in support of Hamas terrorists in Gaza after that group’s Oct. 7, 2023, massacre.

According to the agreement, Israeli forces are to gradually withdraw from southern Lebanon, where they have been operating since early October. During the conflict they reached as far north as the Litani River for the first time since 2000.

As the IDF withdraws, Lebanese army forces are to enter these areas and ensure that Hezbollah retreats north of

the Litani, located some 18 miles north of the border with Israel.

Israel has carried out several strikes in southern Lebanon since the deal was signed to counter what it says are Hezbollah violations of the agreement.

“The IDF continues to be committed to the understandings regarding the ceasefire in Lebanon, is deployed in southern Lebanon and will act to remove any threat to the State of Israel and its citizens,” the IDF said.

Lebanese sources: Israel plans to establish military bases

Hezbollah-aligned media in Lebanon claim that Israel, with U.S. backing, intends to establish three military bases in strategic locations in southern Lebanon, despite the imminent conclusion of the 60-day ceasefire agreement.

The bases, near Naqura, Jabal Balat and Al-Hamamas, would allow Israel to oversee wide areas and launch operations if necessary, according to the report.

IDF commander: Hezbollah’s return to border villages unavoidable

IDF Northern Command Maj. Gen. Ori Gordin has expressed doubts about the Lebanese Army’s ability to meet ceasefire agreement goals and warned of continued Hezbollah influence and potential rocket fire, Channel 12 reported last Wednesday.

Despite stated plans for northern Israeli residents to return home by March 1, Gordin admitted in a recent conversation with Galilee residents that the IDF cannot prevent Lebanese citizens, including Hezbollah operatives, from returning to villages near the border.

The Lebanese Army has shown some progress in enforcement but continues to collaborate with Hezbollah, he said. Gordin acknowledged challenges in maintaining security and enforcing restrictions in sovereign Lebanese territory, emphasizing the need for operational freedom and vigilance.

Five Hezbollah weapons storage facilities dismantled

The IDF said last Wednesday that troops in southern Lebanon had located and dismantled five Hezbollah weapons storage facilities.

The facilities contained over 200 mortar shells, loaded rockets launchers, military vests and a rocket launcher concealed underground, according to the IDF. The weapons were confiscated and destroyed.

Soldiers also discovered a truck concealed in mountainous terrain carrying three medium-range rocket launchers. The trucks and rockets were confiscated.

The IDF said that it was continuing “defensive activities to neutralize threats and dismantle terrorist infrastructure in accordance with the ceasefire understandings between Israel and Lebanon.” **HW**

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Trump Again Threatens ‘All Hell Will Break Out’ Over Hostages as Envoy Signals Optimism on a Deal



Donald Trump and his Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, speak at a press conference on Jan. 7, 2025. (Screenshot)

By Ben Sales

(JTA) – Donald Trump repeated his threat that “all hell will break out” if Hamas doesn’t release the hostages it is holding in Gaza as his Middle East envoy signaled optimism about a ceasefire deal that would see some of the captives go free.

The president-elect and his chosen envoy, real estate magnate Steve Witkoff, made the comments at a wide-ranging press conference last Tuesday, 13 days before Trump returns to office. Although he is not yet in the White House, Witkoff appears to be taking a role in the negotiations.

“I think we’re making a lot of progress, and I don’t want to say too much, because I think they’re doing a really good job back in Doha,” the capital of Qatar, where talks are being held and where Witkoff said he would fly shortly. “I think that we’ve had some really great progress, and I’m really hopeful

that by the inaugural, we’ll have some good things to announce on behalf of the president.”

Getting a hostage and ceasefire deal done is a shared priority of outgoing President Joe Biden and Trump, though negotiations have gained momentum in the past only to then falter amid mutual recriminations. At the press conference, Trump issued a threat to Hamas to release the approximately 100 captives, dozens of whom are thought to be dead, before he takes office on Jan. 20.

“If those hostages aren’t back – I don’t want to hurt your negotiation – if they’re not back by the time I get into office, all hell will break out in the Middle East, and it will not be good for Hamas, and it will not be good, frankly, for anyone,” Trump said. He added that relatives of hostages who have been killed had called him to help recover their loved one’s bodies. **HW**

Massachusetts Man Arrested for Antisemitic Threats had Nazi Flag, Guns and Ammo



Police tape stretching across a road in front of a crime scene. Credit: Getty Images

By Ben Sales

(JTA) – A Massachusetts man who was arrested last Saturday for threatening antisemitic violence had a gun, ammunition and a Nazi flag, police said.

Local outlets reported that Matthew Scouras, 34, had allegedly threatened to rape Jewish women and called for people to be shot outside of synagogues.

The FBI alerted police to the threat, and when they searched his home in Beverly, Massachusetts, north of Bos-

ton, they reportedly found the Nazi flag, six boxes of ammunition, several guns and numerous other firearm parts. He also had \$70,000 in cash.

Scouras faces a range of charges related to illegal possession of firearms and a count of threats to destroy a place of worship. He has been arraigned and his next hearing is scheduled for next week. He is being held without bail. **HW**

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For Women Using IVF to Screen Embryos for Genetic Diseases, these Peers Can Offer Support

By Eric Berger

(JTA) – In March 2020, around the time B. and her husband started planning to have children, they learned they each carried genetic mutations with significantly elevated risks for a variety of cancers.

BRCA genetic mutations, which are 10 times more common among Ashkenazi Jews than among the general U.S. population, significantly increase the risks of developing breast cancer and ovarian cancer – and also melanoma and prostate and pancreatic cancers. If either parent carries the BRCA mutation, each child has a 50% chance of inheriting it. If both parents carry it, as in B.’s case, the likelihood is even higher.

The couple had to make a decision: They either could try to conceive naturally and bear the risks or use in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and test the embryos for the BRCA mutation before implanting. This type of procedure is called preimplantation genetic testing, or PGT.

Sometimes, PGT is unsuccessful, and people are left without viable, mutation-free embryos to implant.

B., who underwent a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy to reduce her own risks after her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, opted for IVF with PGT. It all made for a very emotionally and physically challenging experience.

Fortunately, B. said, she was able to lean on Sharsheret, the international Jewish breast cancer and ovarian cancer organization, for help connecting with other Jewish women who had undergone the same procedures. Now a mother of two, B. is paying it forward by volunteering in Sharsheret’s peer support

network – and providing unique counsel based on her experiences.

“We are all going through the same thing, and we all have these same thoughts, like: How am I going to fit this all in? How am I going to be able to do the IVF while going through these surgeries?” said B., who asked for anonymity to preserve her privacy.

Sherry Helfand Wiener, a former Jewish day school teacher and grandmother with the BRCA gene mutation in her family, recently donated money to Sharsheret to help expand its program that connects women to peers who have gone through the experience of preimplantation genetic testing.

“I have had experience with PGT – a very beautiful experience – and I have two extraordinary grandchildren because of it, and we are not going to be passing the BRCA gene mutation anymore,” said Helfand Wiener, who lives in Westchester County, New York. “There is so much in life we don’t have control over, but we can control this.”

Peggy Cottrell, Sharsheret’s genetic counselor, said the peer network is critical because, due to the private nature of the issue, it’s very hard for women to find others whom they can ask questions. Sharsheret often receives calls from women seeking clarification about IVF and preimplantation genetic testing.

“Sometimes people think when they get an appointment with a reproductive endocrinologist their eggs will be retrieved that day,” said Sharsheret’s chief operating officer, Devorah Silverman. “But there is a long and intensive process women must undergo before any eggs can be harvested for IVF and PGT.”

When women learn that they can use PGT to avoid passing on the BRCA mutation to their children, it’s often a great relief to them, according to Cottrell. But there also can be ambivalence about the idea of weeding out embryos with the gene – because if their parents had done so they wouldn’t have been born themselves.

The financial burden is another big thing to consider. The average cost in the U.S. of successfully conceiving a baby and carrying it to term using IVF and PGT ranges from \$30,000 to \$47,000, according to a 2021 study in the Journal of Fertility and Sterility. Most insurance does not fully cover these procedures.

Sharsheret does not provide financial subsidies but connects callers with organizations that may offer help.

Another woman who carries the BRCA mutation, A., said she decided to do PGT despite the cost and the fact that it’s “physically, emotionally and mentally wearing on your body.” Both she and her mother carried the BRCA mutation, and her mother died of ovarian cancer in 2014.

“I certainly didn’t want my children to experience what my mother faced,” A. said. “We lost her way too young.”

After five IVF cycles and PGT testing, A. successfully conceived a girl and a boy, neither of whom carries the BRCA mutation.

“I have two beautiful, amazing, rambunctious children, and I have the family that I always wanted, and I am so grateful for that,” she said.

But the process was grueling, and A. hadn’t known about the peer support Sharsheret offers. Now she serves as a peer counselor and has spoken about her

experience with about 15 women over the last couple of years.

Women ask her everything from what the daily IVF routine is like to how it might impact their relationship with their partner. A. says it’s important to establish a support system and lean on friends and peers.

B. said she also found parts of the process very difficult – such as having to give herself injections to prepare for having her eggs removed, which she found scary. It was also hard waiting for nurses to call back with results, she said.

Despite the hardship, B. says she’d love to have another child. She’s also considering having her fallopian tubes and ovaries removed once she is done having children to protect against an ovarian cancer diagnosis.

As a volunteer in Sharsheret’s peer support network, B. has spoken with eight women about her experience. The importance of peer support is invaluable, she said.

“Finding a community of women that are going through that – I feel like that’s very special,” she said.

Sharsheret offers oncofertility and PGT education, clinical support and peer support. These resources are made possible by the generosity of Sherry Helfand Wiener. For more information and to speak to a licensed social worker or genetic counselor, contact clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org.

This article was sponsored by and produced in partnership with Sharsheret, the national Jewish breast cancer and ovarian cancer organization. This article was produced by JTA’s native content team. [HW](#)



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