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Powerfully Meaningful 63rd Annual Yom HaShoah Commemoration



Keynote speaker and second-generation survivor, Anna Salton Eisen. Credit: Gregory Campbell

By Shoshana Cenko

More than 500 people gathered at Temple Israel on Wednesday, April 23, under heavy security, to honor those who perished in the Holocaust, survivors, and Oct. 7’s tragic victims and hostages. This year’s Memphis Jewish Federation event, “80th Anniversary of Liberation – Echoes of Liberation: Intergenerational Implications,” featured an incredible keynote speaker, second-generation survivor Anna Salton Eisen.

Laura Linder, president and CEO of Jewish Community Partners (JCP), opened the moving program. She thanked the many JCP and Federation staff involved in the event, as well as the volunteer Holocaust committee, local politicians and clergy in attendance. She added that Federation facilitates sending Holocaust speakers to schools throughout Shelby County, reaching 2,300 stu-

dents last year.

Next, a choir of fourth-generation kids, organized by Jessica Baum Sukhodolsky, led the audience in “The Star-Spangled Banner,” guided by Rabbi Cantor David Julian of Or Chadash Conservative Synagogue.

Father-and-daughter team Harry Diamant and Michelle Diamant co-chaired this year’s commemoration. They shared moving and tragic details about their family’s Holocaust experiences, even reading some of what Harry’s mother had shared at the 1962 Memphis Yom HaShoah event. They also recognized first place essay winner, Amit Zalman, and second place winner, Ben Freiden, both from Cooper Yeshiva High School for Boys, as well as first place art winner, Adriana Canady, second place winner, Evelyn Sparks, both from University Middle School, and



2025 Yom HaShoah Co-chairs, father-and-daughter team Harry Diamant and Michelle Diamant. Credit: Gregory Campbell

third place winner, Ari Kanowitz from Grahamwood Middle School. Robin Webb, art teacher at University Middle School, and Kyle Tingley, teacher at White Station High School, received the Belz-Lipman Award from the TN Holocaust Commission.

Following the co-chairs’ remarks, as fourth- and third-gen survivors, my kids, Aiden, Kivi and Lyla, and I were honored to read brief bios of six Holocaust survivors, as third-gen Adam Exelbierd helped the survivors or their second-gen family member light a lovely candelabra. Community shlichah, Tal Nezry, then lit another candle in remembrance of Oct. 7. A solemnly beautiful musical reflection of “Meyn Zis Kind” by violinist Diane Zelickman-Cohen and clarinetist Rena Feller further set the somber yet hopeful mood of the evening.

Keynote speaker and second-gen sur-

vivor, Anna Salton Eisen’s presentation was incredibly compelling, with unbelievable photos throughout. Focusing on intergenerational responsibility and resilience through her family’s stories, here are some of the highlights.

The daughter of survivor parents, Ruth and George (OBM), who changed their names after the war to “bury the past,” she never heard them even utter the word Holocaust growing up. The accidental discovery of two stunningly frightful paintings by her father, illustrating the horrors, led Anna on an astonishing journey of research, discovery and truth as an adult.

Finally, after 30 years of silence, Anna’s dad opened up, began painting again, and agreed to go back to his home country of Poland together “to finally see

(See Yom HaShoah Page 2)

Temple Israel Holds Historic 171st Annual Meeting, Honors Vision, Leadership and Legacy



Billy & Robin Orgel, Mark & Diane Halperin, Nancy and Richard Robinson.

Temple Israel hosted its 171st Annual Congregational Meeting, marking a pivotal moment in the history of the congregation. President Wendy Rotter officially called the meeting to order and set the tone for an evening of gratitude, celebration and vision for the future.

Following an opening prayer from Associate Rabbi Ross Levy, Rotter delivered a powerful message, reflecting on the congregation’s progress and reaffirming the urgency of continued investment in Temple Israel’s future.

“This has been an extraordinary year of re-investment,” she stated, highlighting the surge in member growth and engagement and the momentum behind Vision 2026: Shaping Our Future Together, the congregation’s bold initiative to renew and expand its sacred spaces, the flagship Barbara K. Lipman Early Learn-

ing Center and the Temple grounds.

Rotter acknowledged the leadership of the past by honoring Temple’s living past presidents and their spouses and drew parallels between Temple Israel’s current moment and the transformational story of Passover.

“We are writing a new chapter for our congregation,” she said. “Vision 2026 is more than a design plan. It’s a strategic investment in our Jewish tomorrow.”

With Phase 1 construction already underway, including enhancements to Danziger Chapel, Greenstein Sanctuary and social spaces, Rotter shared that Phase 2 will expand the Barbara K. Lipman Early Learning Center and introduce outdoor worship and gathering spaces.

(See Meeting Page 11)

Yom HaShoah...
(Continued From Page 1)



More than 500 people gathered at Temple Israel on Wed., April 23, to honor those who perished in the Holocaust, survivors, and Oct. 7 victims and hostages. Credit: Gregory Campbell



Nearly two dozen second-generation survivors leading Mourner's Kaddish. Credit: Gregory Campbell

our history.” As they walked the streets of Tyczyn, his hometown, he shared details about his family, real name (Lucjan Salzman), birthdate, school, the eventual ghetto. A hard worker, Anna’s dad miraculously survived deathly boxcar train rides, shooting rampages by hiding in mud, and 10 camps, digging graves, working in mines and quarries. At one point, a note from his brother, who was hiding in the woods, even got into George’s hands.

Audible gasps erupted from the crowd when Anna shared the shocking story of her dad switching uniforms with his ID number with another prisoner, Joseph Singer, who was being deported to another camp, in an effort to protect him. Sadly, Joseph was murdered. Because he had on George’s uniform and number, Yad Vashem had a death record for George, until Anna shared the story with

Yad Vashem, which then corrected the record.

On May 2, 1945, George was liberated by the 504th 82nd U.S. airborne division, which stumbled upon his camp by accident. After two years in a displaced persons camp, he took a ship to be with his uncle in New York, “speaking no English, without any other family, and only a fifth-grade education to start a new life.” He and Anna eventually wrote his memoir.

Anna also learned her mother’s real name, that she was sent to Siberia before returning to Poland, and that Ruth was heavily involved with the “bricha” movement to help find Jewish children who were hidden during the war. Researching and discovering photos of bricha children and sending them to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., is one of Anna’s

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. May 9, 2025 / 11 Iyar, 5785.....7:34 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. May 10, 2025 / 12 Iyar, 5785 8:34 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Acharei-Kedoshim

“most meaningful things I’ve done in my whole life.” Another collective vocal shock from the crowd came when a survivor in the audience called out that he was from the same Polish hometown as Ruth.

Anna, who has two brothers, found and befriended soldiers from the 504th. Of the 465 prisoners who were with her dad moving from camp to camp, only 30 survived. Of those 30, she found and gathered together the seven surviving members, sharing the photos from that momentous day.

After reading a liberating soldier’s impactful message about the desperate

need to honor those lost by continuing to talk about the atrocities, Anna closed by saying, “it’s important to care ... and we must do more than remember, we must learn” from the Holocaust.

The moving commemoration ended with Rabbi Micah Greenstein of Temple Israel leading a recitation of Tehillim/Psalms; nearly two dozen second-gen leading Mourner’s Kaddish; Cantor Ricky Kampf of Baron Hirsch Congregation reciting Kel Maleh Rachamim; Beth Sholom Synagogue’s Rabbi Sarrit Horwitz offering a beautiful closing benediction; and finally HaTikvah by local rabbis, cantors, heads of schools, former IDF soldiers and pianist Diana Stein Kabakoff.

Anna Salton Eisen is the executive producer of the upcoming film, “In My Father’s Words,” based on her books “The 23rd Psalm: A Holocaust Memoir” and “Pillar of Salt: A Daughter’s Life in the Shadow of the Holocaust.” A licensed social worker, she practiced as a therapist specializing in mental health trauma, worked on Steven Spielberg’s USC Shoah Foundation’s testimonial project, and was a founding member of Congregation Beth Israel, the site of the 2022 antisemitic terror attack in Colleyville, Texas. Today, she advocates for Holocaust education, speaking at schools, churches, civic orgs, synagogues and media outlets.

Together, we continue to honor the six million Jews and millions of others who were lost in the tragedy of the Holocaust. May their memories be a blessing. HW



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Anti-Israel Activists Claim Drones Hit Hamas-Linked Ship Bound for Gaza



The “Mavi Marmara.” Credit: Free Gaza Movement via Wikimedia Commons.

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – The Hamas-linked Gaza Freedom Flotilla Coalition said last Friday that one of its ships heading for the Strip was targeted by attack drones in international waters near Malta overnight last Thursday.

The Flotilla Coalition claimed that the vessel was struck twice by suicide drones 17 nautical miles (19.5 miles) east of the island country, “causing a fire and a substantial breach in the hull.

“The drone strike appears to have deliberately targeted the ship’s generator, leaving the crew without power and placing the vessel at great risk of sinking,” according to the statement last Friday morning.

The coalition noted in the statement that its latest attempt to breach Israel’s maritime blockade of the Strip had been organized “under a media blackout to avoid any potential sabotage.”

Volunteers from 21 countries were aboard the ship, “including prominent figures,” it said.

Maltese authorities sent a tugboat and brought the flames under control, local media reported. There were no casualties from the strikes and the ship’s passengers refused to be taken ashore, the reports said.

“The ship remains outside territorial waters and is being monitored by the competent authorities,” Valletta said in a statement last Friday.

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition – which includes anti-Israel and Islamic NGOs linked to Hamas – stated some four months ago that “in 2025, we are determined to take to the seas to break the siege of Gaza.” The coalition vowed to “continue acquiring vessels and securing crew and participants.”

The umbrella group includes several Turkish NGOs, among them the Humanitarian Relief Foundation and the Mavi Marmara Association, responsible for the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, in which nine activists were killed after they attacked Israeli naval commandos. **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, May 12
Speaker: Milton Logan

Milton was the driver for the senior activities and is now an employee at the MJCC. For several years Milton was a boxer in Las Vegas! Milton has told several of us of some of his experiences in Vegas, so we asked him to share with the group several of these stories. Come listen and enjoy hearing some stories of a life very few of us get to hear about. There will be a question-and-answer period following his talk.

Wednesday, May 14
Rabbi Talk with Rabbi Abe Schacter-Gampel
Topic: The Relevance of Lag Ba’Omer Today

Rabbi Abe always makes each talk enjoyable and fun. Reservations are not needed for the talk. Come have a good lunch and learn something too!

Monday, May19
Rabbi Talk with Rabbi Ian Lichter.
Topic: A Time of Seeing G-D: Between Lag Ba’omer and Yom Yerushalayim

Rabbi Lichters talks are always a highlight of the week and always give us something to think about. Everyone is invited to join in the lunch and the 12 p.m. talk.



Deborah Swiney
Wednesday, May 21
MJCC Larissa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Monthly Luncheon

The Monthly Luncheon features one of our favorite entertainers, Deborah Swiney and her accompanist. Entertainment is sponsored by Creative Aging and lunch is sponsored by Opus East Memphis. Deborah Swiney has earned the title of a true chanteuse. Throughout her performance, you get to enjoy a trip back to Harlem to experience the iconic era of Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald, dance across the Great American Songbook, and take a flight to Rio where you could close your eyes and imagine relaxing on the Copacabana or Ipanema Beach. Being a Memphis native, you might even get a splash of blues.

Deborah’s affinity for music started at an early age with piano lessons and being musically active in both church and school. Growing up in a musical family, music had no borders. In addition to touring internationally, Deborah has worked as a backup vocalist with the legendary Al Green and performed on the Oprah Winfrey Show, the Today Show and at Carnegie Hall. More recently, she released the highly praised co-produced debut album, “I Remember Rio,” a Brazilian-inspired album with “Memphis-Soul seasoning” (All about Jazz). Transcending the standard definition of a jazz songstress, her melodic and sultry approach to Bossa Nova and other Brazilian stylings are natural without betraying her Bluff City roots. Come hear this incredibly gifted singer and have a terrific meal.

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‘Night And Day’ Between Trump and Biden in Terms of U.S.-Israel Ties, Say JNS Panelists

By David Isaac

(JNS) – If speakers on the JNS International Policy Summit in Jerusalem’s “U.S. Israel Relations: A New Day” panel agreed on one thing, it was that the Trump administration was a vast improvement over that of former U.S. President Joe Biden.

The sentiment was perhaps best expressed by Sarah Stern, founder and president of the Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET): “I think that we are far better off with Donald Trump in the White House than we could have ever been with Kamala Harris.”

It’s been “night and day” compared to the Biden administration, agreed Michael Makovsky, president and CEO of the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA), citing a host of issues on which he said Trump had pursued more effective policy, from the Gaza war to the Houthis in Yemen, against whom Biden “did almost absolutely nothing.

“I think the president’s instincts are often very good,” he added.

Makovsky noted that Trump also deserves credit for the decision during his first term, in January 2021, to transfer Israel from the responsibility of the U.S. military’s European Command to its Central Command.

“If you talk to any IDF general, even before Oct. 7, they will tell you it’s been a game changer in how this brought the two militaries working closer together,” said Makovsky, pointing to the defense of Israeli airspace by the Israeli and U.S. jets during the April 2024 Iranian missile and drone attack on the Jewish state.

Eugene Kontorovich, of George Mason University School of Law and the Jerusalem-based Kohelet Policy Forum,

said, “When things are bad, you feel them intensely, and then when they get good, you forget that it was ever bad and you forget what the bad felt like.”

He reminded the audience that the Biden administration had taken “one of the most hostile actions any U.S. administration has ever taken by sanctioning Israeli citizens, creating a sanctions program aimed solely at a democratic ally. The only one of its kind, that threatened to essentially put Israel in the category of Libya and North Korea.”

The Biden regime even sanctioned U.S. citizens, which is illegal under foreign sanctions laws, he noted.

Kontorovich was referring to several rounds of sanctions the Biden administration imposed on Jews living in Judea and Samaria who the administration alleged were involved in violence against Palestinians. They included dual U.S.-Israeli citizens.

“Trump lifted those sanctions on day one,” said Kontorovich. (On Jan. 24, U.S. President Donald Trump rescinded former Biden’s February 2024 executive order authorizing the sanctions.)

The panelists’ main concern centered around Iran and Trump’s decision to enter into talks with the Islamic Republic.

“You can argue that Trump has earned some trust from the pro-Israel community and from Israel, but where is this heading?” asked JNS Editor-in-Chief Jonathan Tobin, who moderated the panel.

According to Makovsky, there appears to be a division within the administration between those calling for restraint and more traditional Republicans, such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz.

Makovsky didn’t venture to say where the talks are headed. “It’s possible God will harden Pharaoh’s heart here and make the Iranians’ demands just too much for this administration to bear,” he said.

“I think people shouldn’t forget the leverage that the administration has in these talks has been created by Israel and Israeli blood, not by the United States,” he added.

While he gave Trump credit for his maximum-pressure campaign against Iran, he argued that it had no impact in the short term.

It was Israeli actions, starting with its decision to enter Rafah in the Gaza Strip in May of last year, that opened the way for Iran talks, he said. But the existential nature of the nuclear threat means that if necessary Israel should attack alone, he added.

“Israel has no choice but to act in its national interest and that might be right now, even if that creates a little friction with President Trump,” said Makovsky.

Stern was concerned about developments within the Republican Party. “Unfortunately, there are the Tucker Carlsons of the Republican Party, this neo-isolationist trend, which is very scary,” she said.

Kontorovich expressed less concern about the Iran talks, saying while it was natural for Israelis to be worried given Iran’s oft-stated goal of annihilating Israel, Trump “deserves the benefit of the doubt.”

“I think he’s going about things in a wise and deliberate manner. It’s completely unrealistic to expect a president who also has a domestic agenda, who

also has another foreign policy agenda outside of Israel, outside of the Middle East, to begin or tolerate a serious military confrontation in his first 100 days in office,” he said.

“He’s being deliberate. He’s checking the boxes. He’s making sure he’s gone through the process and can speak to all wings of his party and explain that he’s had no choice [but to take military action],” said Kontorovich.

In his final question to the panelists, Tobin asked about the future of U.S.-Israel ties after Trump.

“We need to be looking for policies that lock in change,” Kontorovich said, such as sanctioning “out of existence” the International Criminal Court and other hostile international bodies.

Otherwise, pro-Israel supporters would not see permanent change but only “a four-year vacation.”

Stern expressed fear that Democrats may take the House and Senate in the next mid-term election in Nov. 2026. “I have to say, to be very honest, that I’m very worried we might have a two-year window to get a lot accomplished in Congress,” she said.

Makovsky shared Stern’s concerns about the isolationist trend among Republicans. He said the long-term future might depend in large part on what happens in the short term, explaining that Trump’s success will impact the party’s direction for some time to come.

“My hope is that if President Trump could be somewhat internationalist, work with close allies like Israel, and that is perceived in the Republican Party as successful, I think that will be very good,” he concluded. **HW**

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Winners of the 2025 Holocaust Art and Essay Contest 2025 Holocaust Art and Essay Contest.

Amit Zalman, a junior at Cooper Yeshiva High School for Boys, won first place in Memphis Jewish Federation’s 16th Annual Holocaust Essay Contest. Below is the full text of his winning essay.

She ran into the forest, tears streaming down her face, searching for a place to hide. She ran until her feet ached, her lungs burned, and exhaustion clawed at her every step. Crouching beneath a bush, my great-grandmother lay trembling on the cold ground. Then, she was caught.

November 29, 1940, Zakrzówek, Poland: Bluma Herlich was born into a family of twelve, struggling to sur-

vive. They were forced into the Warsaw Ghetto – twelve people in a one-room apartment, food a luxury. Yet Bluma refused to let cruelty define her world. Even in the ghetto, she trusted that humanity was not all lost, that there were still hearts capable of compassion.

October 7, 1942, Oświęcim, Poland: Polish collaborators stormed the apartment. “Run!” echoed through the walls, and she did, with her family trailing behind. One by one, she heard the screams as her siblings were captured. Hiding beneath a bush, she cried. Then, grabbed by rough hands, darkness swallowed her, the train came, and Auschwitz awaited.

Bluma was one of the few children spared immediate execution. She was forced to watch, helpless, as her innocent family – her siblings, her father – dug a large pit, unaware that it would become the very pit in which they would be murdered. Auschwitz broke Bluma’s body, but not her will. She clung to the belief that goodness still existed. Trust became her lifeline, the one thing she refused to let them take. She chose to trust that life could still hold meaning, kindness, and that she could rebuild. She believed without trust, there was nothing left to fight for.

January 27, 1945: Liberation. Bluma survived. She grew up. She rebuilt.

Her name was Bluma Herlich, but to my mother, she is Safta Bluma. I never met her. Yet I know her – her strength, her pain, her lessons. My children will know her. Their children will know her and how Safta Bluma spoke of trust and forgiveness. “The world stands on trust,” she told her children. “We must forgive to heal.” Instead of harboring resentment, she focused on building a loving home, treating people with kindness regardless of their background. To outsiders, she seemed unbroken, but her obsessive cleaning told a different story – a scar left by trauma. My mother says it was proof enough. I can only imagine her scrubbing the floor with tears in her eyes, trying to erase specks of dust only she could see. They broke part of her, and yet, she trusted – because trust was the only thing that kept her human.

Safta Bluma believed the world was good, that every person deserves respect, kindness, and trust. Lately, however, I have found myself struggling to regain my trust in humanity. With the horrors of October 7 – exactly 78 years after Safta Bluma’s attack – so indelibly burned into my brain, I wonder: how can we ever truly trust again? Trust makes us vulnerable, but it also blinds us. Perhaps the Jewish people have learned, in the harshest of manners, that being trusting, in today’s times, may simply be too risky.

In my moments of turning away from openness, I find myself turning back to Safta Bluma’s words. My mother always tells me that even while enduring the horrors of Auschwitz, Safta Bluma would remind herself, “Hashem, the world feels so dark. But I trust you, I trust that you will turn the lights back on.” Her ability to hold onto trust in the darkest moments inspires me and helps me see a different perspective.

I still wrestle with trust. I still question if the world deserves it. But then I think of Safta Bluma. If she, after witnessing the worst of humanity, could still choose trust – if she could rebuild, love, and believe in goodness – then maybe I can, too. Maybe, in holding onto trust, I am not being naive but rather honoring the strength my Safta Bluma passed down to me. Maybe trust is not a risk, but a responsibility. And maybe, just maybe, it is how I, too, can help turn the lights back on. **HW**

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***Chabad's Lag Ba'omer
Family Fun Day BBQ with
Skateboarding Stunt Show for
Memphis Jewish Community***



Participants watching the BMX Stunt Show at last year's Chabad Lag Ba'omer BBQ event.



Andrew and Brad Magdovitz at the Grill at last year's Chabad Lag Ba'omer BBQ event.

Chabad will be having a community-wide Lag Ba'omer Family Fun Day on Thursday, May 15.

Lag Ba'Omer, the 33rd day of the Omer Count, is a festive day on the Jewish calendar, traditionally celebrated with outings, cookouts, bonfires and other joyous outdoor events all over the world.

“The Family Fun Day here in Memphis will have a delicious BBQ dinner with all the trimmings and will also have colorful snow cones, cotton candy and much more,” said Mrs. Rivky Klein co-director of Chabad of Tennessee. “In addition to the delicious food, there will be an awesome Skateboarding Freestyle

Stunt Show by members of the Later-skaters of Memphis.

There will also be inflatables, music and fun for all to enjoy.

The Family Fun Day will take place at The Chabad Center of Jewish Life at 2570 Kirby Parkway and starts at 5 p.m. The cost is only \$15 for adults and \$12 for children and includes all food and activities.

Reservations should be made by Monday, May 12 by visiting www.JewishMemphis.com/BBQ or by calling Chabad at 901-754-0404.

“Come join us and bring your friends.” Rivky concluded. “It will be Lots of Fun.” **HW**

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The Four-Day Workweek: Is It Destiny or a Distant Dream?

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

Since the startling capabilities of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) first shook the world in 2023, more of us are wondering: could the four-day workweek come sooner than we thought, or is that just wishful thinking?

Once considered a far-fetched notion, the prospect of a four-day workweek (with no loss in pay) is now being taken seriously by companies around the world. This is largely due to changing attitudes towards work-life balance and surging optimism over AI.

Experiments in progress

It's easy to imagine how a four-day workweek could improve the quality of life for stressed-out full-time workers. With an extra day off each week, there's more time for rest, family, exercise, hobbies, or just kicking back and relaxing. This not only enhances the mental and physical well-being of employees but also fosters a more engaged workforce and less turnover. Experiments conducted in Iceland, New Zealand, Sweden, Japan, the United Kingdom, and even the United States – all countries where companies have tried out a four-day workweek – suggest that employees and employers could see benefits. In a survey of 100 large-company leaders, nearly one-third of U.S. CEOs said they were exploring this idea.¹

Moreover, a four-day workweek can help increase productivity. One explanation for this is called Parkinson's Law, which contends that work will expand to fit the time available for completion. In other words, when time is limited, people tend to focus better and cut out the fluff. Given the opportunity, employees may be able to "work smarter, not harder." In 2019, when Microsoft tested a four-day workweek in Japan, it reportedly resulted in a 40% jump in productivity.²

For the four-day workweek to really take off, there's still a lot that would need to change, including new laws, the expansion and success of pilot programs, and major adjustments in corporate culture.

Enter the game changer — artificial intelligence

AI is poised to boost workplace productivity, which could speed up the shift to a four-day workweek. Think about how much time workers spend on repetitive tasks – things that AI could handle in seconds. Tools powered by AI can help manage projects, perform research, produce content, and even take over customer service roles with chatbots. For people using AI tools, this could mean less time stuck in mundane routines and more time for meaningful and creative work – or eventually some extra time off each week.

Of course, a four-day workweek may never work for every industry and all jobs. For some types of roles, squeezing five days of work into four could lead to burnout for employees, especially if employers have unrealistic expectations.

Bolstered by AI advancements, experiments with the four-day workweek are gaining momentum, but widespread adoption could still be many years away. Evidence-based strategies, thoughtful implementation, and a willingness to rethink how we work will be essential.

1) Bloomberg Businessweek, June 21, 2024; 2) CNBC, November 3, 2019

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Chef Marisa Baggett Almost Gave Up Cooking — Then Came ‘Morimoto’s Sushi Master’



Courtesy of Roku

By Evelyn Frick

April 30, 2025 — This originally appeared on HeyAlma and is reprinted with permission.

HeyAlma Editorial note: Light spoilers ahead for season two of “Morimoto’s Sushi Master.”

Chef Marisa Baggett was in her own personal mitzrayim, or “narrow place,” she tells me. The seasoned sushi chef had recently closed Zayde’s NYC Deli, her Memphis, Tennessee-based kosher catering business, and even more recently announced her retirement from the food industry all together. She had taken down her sushi website, intending to focus on making Jewish art, when an email popped into her inbox.

“Are you the sushi chef Marisa Baggett?” The first line read. “We’ve been looking for you.” The email was from producers of the Roku Channel’s reality cooking competition series “Morimoto’s Sushi Master.” They wanted her to audition. Marisa took it as a sign to continue on in the industry and accepted. She was cast on the show in December 2023 and the show was filmed in early 2024.

Season two of “Sushi Master” just dropped on the Roku Channel last Friday, and it’s clear to see how fateful it was that Baggett is back in the kitchen.

“I call her my silent assassin,” Michelin star-winning chef and judge Phillip Frankland Lee says of Baggett in episode three. “She always has the cleanest station, she’s always quiet and [it] looks like nothing’s going on and then she gives you a great dish.”

He’s not wrong. Chef Marisa might not make a ton of noise in the “Sushi Master” kitchen. But among the seven other contestants on the show’s second season, all of whom are top sushi chefs from across the United States, she stands out. Her technical skills and mastery from nearly two decades in the culinary industry — did I mention that Baggett was the first Black woman in the United States to graduate from professional sushi training? — are on full display. The way she cleanly carves a giant slab of blue fin tuna in episode one and fries a perfect tamagoyaki (a layered Japanese omelette) in episode two are impressive feats on their own. But so, too, is her culinary verve evident. Head judge Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto likens Baggett’s colorful and balanced sushi platter to “a small garden,” and her bento box is filled with unexpected yet delicious elements like chopped liver and Japanese-inspired custard sweet potato.

She also stands out in another way:

Baggett isn’t afraid to serve up her Black Southern Jewish identity to the judges and viewers alike. Immediately upon introducing herself in the first episode, Baggett shares that her sushi is influenced both by the Southern cuisine she grew up with in Mississippi (and is surrounded with in her current home of Tennessee) as well as kosher elements stemming from her Jewish identity. In the first Kesshou challenge of the season (each episode is divided into a non-elimination Ikouze, meaning “let’s go,” challenge and an elimination Kesshou, or “final,” challenge), Baggett prepares a sushi platter featuring chuturo tartare, yellowtail sashimi, shrimp tempura roll, yellowtail and scallion roll, yellowtail nigiri and ikura gunkan. But instead of the traditional wasabi on the yellowtail nigiri, she spices the fish and rice with zhug, a zesty Yemenite hot sauce common in Israeli kitchens.

In the next Kesshou challenge, Baggett uses her bento box as a perfect (and tasty) reflection of herself. First, chef made a custard sweet potato as an ode to her Aunt Joyce, explaining that sweet potato is an important food in the American South and that her aunt was “the sweet potato matriarch of our family.” Then, drawing from her kosher catering past, she created a chopped liver on challah toast that went over huge with the judges.

I won’t spoil the show for you, because you absolutely should watch “Morimoto’s Sushi Master” season two. But, I did get a chance to catch up with Chef Marisa Baggett over email to talk about her culinary journey from a kosher deli to a reality TV sushi-making competition, why it was important to her to bring her Black Southern Jewishness to the Omakase table and Jewish banter with the judges.

This interview has been lightly edited and condensed for clarity.

How did you come to be on “Morimoto’s Sushi Master”?

Very ironically, actually. Not long before, I had officially announced I was retiring from food. I was leaning into what I thought would be my next chapter making Jewish art. I had even taken down my sushi website. One afternoon, I was sitting in a coffee shop working on an art proposal when an email popped into my inbox through my Jewish art website, of all places. The first line read, “Are you also the sushi chef Marisa Baggett? We’ve been looking for you.”

A few interviews and a video test later (where, for reasons I still find hilarious,

I demonstrated peeling a Japanese radish using a very classic and hard technique while talking about gefilte fish) I got the call that I was cast. I guess you could say sushi wasn’t quite done with me yet.

I loved the moment in episode three where you’re making the curry shrimp gyoza and you exclaim, “My two nemeses, shrimp and pork, in the same dish!” Was there any more Jewish banter that got cut from the show?

Some of my favorite moments didn’t make the show, especially the Jewish banter with the judges. There was one moment where I served a sushi platter with a Yuzu Shiso Schug instead of traditional wasabi. Probably because of nerves, I pronounced the “ch” sound in schug with the perfect guttural flair. Chef Phillip asked me to repeat it... and before I knew it, I was giving an impromptu pronunciation lesson in the middle of a sushi competition. We went back and forth, with me coaching him on how to nail that throaty “ch.” The entire studio was cracking up.

Another great moment was when I made chopped liver with challah toast for the bento box challenge. The judges and I spent time discussing why chopped liver is different from pâté. Off camera, they kept eating it. It even got to the point where the host, Lyrica [Okano], snatched the plate from the judges and ran off to a corner to polish it off herself.

Those off-screen moments made me feel so seen.

Before being on “Morimoto’s Sushi Master,” you owned Zayde’s NYC Deli in Memphis. You’ve written in your newsletter about being cast on the show and still dealing with the “emotional aftermath” of the deli closing. Can you talk about that?

After closing Zayde’s, I had to face a level of burnout I’d never experienced before — physically, emotionally and spiritually. Once I started to recover physically, I found myself asking a really uncomfortable question: Is food still part of my future?

It was disorienting. Food had been my life’s work for over two decades — it shaped how people knew me, and how I knew myself. But at that moment, I couldn’t see a path forward that didn’t feel overwhelming. So I started exploring other things, like Jewish art. I needed to remember that I could still create beauty and meaning outside of the kitchen. But if I’m honest, I was also grieving. I missed food — but I didn’t know if it would ever feel good again.

The invitation to be on “Sushi Master” surprised me. It felt like a sign saying: You’re not done yet.

Also based on your newsletter, it seems like you approached “Morimoto’s Sushi Master” with a Passover-esque mindset, full of questions about yourself and your future. Would you say that’s accurate?

In a lot of ways, I was very much in my own personal mitzrayim with my health, my emotions and my spirituality. Walking onto that set felt like stepping into a big unknown. I knew I needed to be there. I knew it was time to walk forward. But what I didn’t know was what would it mean to be truly free in the kitchen? What would I do with that freedom? What were my responsibilities? I wasn’t just preparing to cook; I was clearing space and making room for a new kind of relationship with food. And so I walked on set full of questions I didn’t have an-

swers for yet.

Why was it important to you to explicitly bring your Jewishness to the table on the show?

On cooking shows, they always say, “We want to see you on a plate.” But when someone asked me, “What does Marisa look like on a plate?” I mean, where do we begin? I’m a Black Jewish sushi chef from Mississippi. For most of my career, I kept those identities in separate kitchens: one Japanese-influenced, one Jewish-influenced, and the Black Southern part often pushed to the side entirely. I was tired of explaining myself. Tired of splitting myself up.

So for this experience, I decided to just be me. And since my life is so deeply rooted in Judaism, I knew if that part didn’t show up on the plate, it wasn’t a plate I wanted to serve.

You’ve lately moved to making plant-based sushi. What inspired that transition?

I was carrying a lot emotionally when I stepped on set. One question in particular weighed heavily on me, even though I was afraid to ask it out loud: Was keeping kosher still important to me?

I knew avoiding shellfish and pork wasn’t going to be an option, so I made a very intentional choice in the first challenge: I picked shrimp. I figured if I was going to pull the band-aid off, I might as well do it fast. (And honestly... it was good. Sorry, Rabbi!)

And one very intense day filled with oysters, bacon, pork and shrimp, all in one go, forced me to confront what I actually believed. After the cameras stopped rolling, I realized something: Keeping kosher was no longer important to me. But neither was eating meat. What was calling to me was the creativity and discipline of plant-based sushi. It was the beginning of an amazing new chapter.

Kosher sushi is such a big phenomena among the Orthodox Jewish community. Do you have a favorite kosher sushi dish?

I have a special place in my heart for my Mushroom Spider Roll. It’s my take on the sushi bar classic that usually features a whole fried soft-shell crab. I originally created it for a kosher wedding where the groom had grown up eating everything and the bride kept kosher. They wanted sushi that really felt like it came from a sushi bar.

The texture and flavor are so close to the real thing that I had more than one guest pull me aside and ask, “Are you sure this is kosher?”

That has become one of my signature sushi rolls.

What’s next for you?

I’m starting to write a memoir about my path to becoming a sushi chef from Mississippi to sushi school in Los Angeles. It’s part culinary adventure, part identity story and very much a love letter to the wild ride that brought me here.

I’m also finishing a certificate program through Judaism Unbound’s Un-Yeshiva, which has deepened the way I think about Jewish identity and storytelling. After I complete the program, I want to help others reflect on what their own Jewish stories might look like on a plate because we all carry flavors, memories and meanings that are worth naming and sharing.

And for the first time in a long time, I’m not trying to pick just one path. I’m saying yes to the full story. **HW**

The Fires in Israel are Under Control — But Debate is Raging Over their Cause



An Israeli police officer evacuates a child from the wildfires. Credit: Israel Police/X

By Ben Sales

(JTA) – The wildfires that erupted outside Jerusalem, burning vast swaths of forest and blighting Israel’s Independence Day, have been brought under control.

But as the fires were contained, discourse in Israel focused on who or what was responsible for them. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, publicly suggested that they may have been an act of arson, but the country’s police and fire department pushed back on those claims. Israel’s president highlighted the role of climate change in the fires.

While dozens were reported injured, and thousands of residents of the towns in the hilly area around Jerusalem were evacuated from their homes, no one has been reported killed from the fires, which burned some 5,000 acres, most of them forest. Residents have been given the all-clear to return home.

The fires, estimated to be the worst in Israel’s history, began last Wednesday, marring Israel’s Memorial Day, a solemn occasion, as well as Independence

Day, which began last Wednesday night. Israelis on social media questioned whether the flames, coming amid war on a national holiday, were a criminal or terrorist act. Yair Netanyahu, the prime minister’s son, suggested without evidence on social media that his father’s left-wing critics could be responsible.

Last Wednesday night, the elder Netanyahu shared footage of a meeting in which he attributed the fires to “a combination of very strong winds, dryness, and open areas that have forests, which create a lethal combination,” as well as a “a possibility of arson.”

By last Thursday, Netanyahu and Ben-Gvir were amplifying the arson claims. Speaking at a teen Bible trivia contest held annually on Independence Day, Netanyahu claimed that 18 people had been arrested who were “suspected of arson, including one caught in the act.” He then hinted that Palestinians were literally and figuratively fanning the flames.

“Our neighbors, who claim to love this land, are prepared, in their propaganda, in their incitement, on the Pales-

tinian networks – they talk about burning the land,” he said. “We are the ones who love the land. We protect the land.”

And Ben-Gvir announced last Thursday that he had established a “counter-incitement” task force to stop arson as well as incitement to arson on social media. “These are terrorists for all intents and purposes,” he tweeted. (Ben-Gvir is lobbying for Israel to introduce the death penalty for terrorists.)

But by last Thursday night in Israel, police and fire services were telling a different story. After Netanyahu’s speech, police clarified to Israeli media that three people had been arrested, not 18. And in the evening, Israeli Channel 13 reported that according to the fire department’s assessment, the main burns were due to negligence, not arson – though the report added that arson could have played a role in subsequent fires that erupted.

Around the same time, Netanyahu posted footage of his Bible contest speech from earlier in the day – with the erroneous arrest numbers edited out.

Ayman Odeh, an Arab member of Knesset, Israel’s parliament, accused Netanyahu and his allies of manufacturing allegations of terrorism to distract from criticism of his leadership.

“There is no one like the Jews, who know well how dangerous false accusations are, from the Black Death, through blood libels to economic crises,” Odeh tweeted. “But this government learns nothing from history: neither about the dangers of incitement, nor about responsibility. Netanyahu was and remains the national instigator.”

Other Israelis pointed to the cause Netanyahu had spotlighted last Wednesday night – climate conditions. Dov Khenin, a former left-wing lawmaker, posted a fire-tracking map from NASA that showed fires breaking out across the eastern Mediterranean region. “For

all those spreading conspiracy theories, NASA’s fire map shows: when there is a situation of extreme dryness accompanied by winds, large fires occur,” he tweeted. “This is what the climate crisis looks like.”

Avner Gross, a climate scientist at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheva, tweeted last Wednesday that he was at a climate conference in Vienna when an acquaintance called him and told him his town was on fire, though residents had evacuated safely. “Thank you to the fire department, perhaps the only force that is taking climate change seriously,” he tweeted.

“This fire is part of the climate crisis, which must not be ignored,” Israeli President Isaac Herzog said at an Independence Day event. “It requires us to prepare for serious and significant challenges and to make decisions – including appropriate legislation.”

Israel just completed its driest winter on record, according to its Water Authority.

Irrespective of the cause, several prominent Israeli civic rituals on Independence Day involve fire – and were canceled or tamped down because of the wildfires. The national torch-lighting ceremony, due to honor public figures including conservative American pundit Ben Shapiro – was called off, with a dress rehearsal airing on TV instead. Fireworks and an airshow were nixed. And authorities banned one of the core festivities of the day – barbecues in the park.

But as the flames burned, some voices still projected hope on what is usually a celebratory day.

“Every burnt tree hurts,” the Jewish National Fund, which owns many of the destroyed areas, posted on Facebook last Thursday. “Every damaged acre is a reason to keep fighting – and to know that we will yet again grow the greenery.” **HW**

Trump Fires Doug Emhoff and Other Biden Appointees from Holocaust Museum Board



Second gentleman Douglas Emhoff lays wreaths honoring victims of the Holocaust during the International Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp in Poland, Jan. 27, 2023. The day was created by the United Nations and takes place on the anniversary of Auschwitz’s liberation. Credit: Omar Marques/Getty Images

By Grace Gilson

(JTA) – Douglas Emhoff, the Jewish former second gentleman, was fired from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council last Tuesday along with a number of other board members appointed by former President Joe Biden.

Emhoff, Kamala Harris’ husband, was the first Jewish spouse of a vice president, one of the most prominent Jewish figures in the Biden administration and a leading national voice in fighting antisemitism. He criticized the firings, which The New York Times were first to report last Tuesday, as a slight to the Holocaust’s victims.

“Today, I was informed of my removal from the United States Holocaust Memorial Council,” Emhoff said in a statement. “Holocaust remembrance and education should never be politicized. To turn one of the worst atrocities in history into a wedge issue is dangerous – and it dishonors the memory of six million Jews murdered by Nazis that this museum was created to preserve.”

Emhoff was appointed to the council, which oversees the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, in January by Joe Biden shortly before the end of Biden’s presidential term. Typically, a council

seat has a tenure of five years. There are 55 board members appointed by the president, 10 from the House of Representatives and the Senate, and three more from the president’s cabinet.

Emhoff took on the role after serving as the face of the Biden White House’s efforts to combat antisemitism. He launched the initiative that culminated in Biden’s national strategy to counter antisemitism and took a high-profile working trip to Jewish and Holocaust sites in Poland and Germany.

Jewish critics of the Trump administration castigated the decision to dismiss Emhoff. Amy Spitalnick, CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said the move was of a piece with other efforts that politicize the fight against antisemitism.

“This administration appears to be doing everything in its power to turn antisemitism into a political wedge – and it makes Jews, and everyone, less safe,” Spitalnick wrote in reaction to the news in a post on Bluesky.

Halie Soifer, CEO of the Jewish Democratic Council of America, called the decision “unprecedented and reprehensible” in a statement. She added, “Membership on the Museum board is a solemn non-partisan obligation, which should not be viewed through a political lens.”

Emhoff was dismissed alongside Ron

Klain, Biden’s Jewish White House chief of staff; Tom Perez, the former labor secretary; Susan Rice, Biden’s top domestic policy adviser who also took part in its efforts to combat antisemitism; and Anthony Bernal, a senior adviser to Jill Biden.

The officials were told of their immediate termination from the council in an email last Tuesday morning, days after Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, according to The New York Times.

“On behalf of President Donald J. Trump, I am writing to inform you that your position as a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council is terminated, effective immediately,” wrote Mary Sprowls, who works in the White House Presidential Personnel Office, in an email obtained by the Times. “Thank you for your service.”

Days before the dismissal, in commemoration of Yom Hashoah, Emhoff posted photos from his trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau on social media.

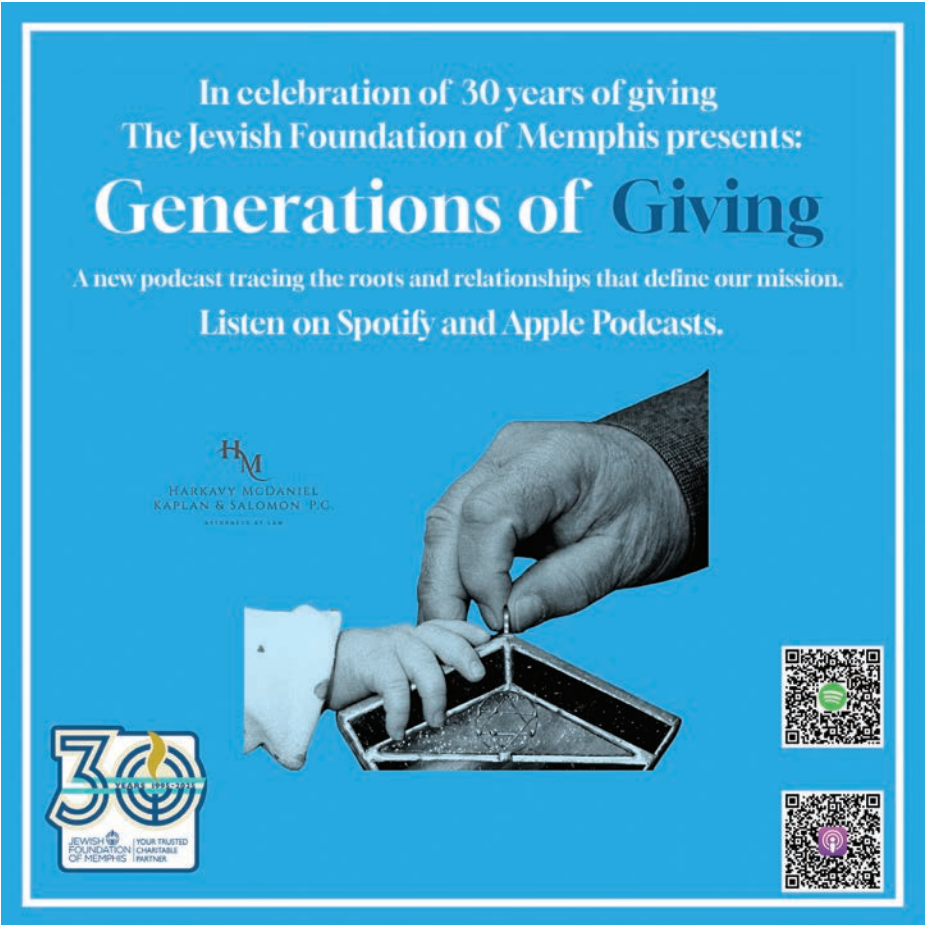
“On Yom HaShoah, we remember the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust and honor the survivors who carry forward their stories,” he wrote. “I will never forget my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau—that indelible memory fuels my continued commitment to fight antisemitism and hate in all forms.” **HW**



Celebrating 30 Years of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis



This week, the Foundation recognizes Lawson Arney for his leadership and continued engagement ensuring the success and wellbeing of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis. Lawson currently serves as Vice Chair of Finance, Co-Chair of the 30th Anniversary Planning Committee and as a valued member of our Professional Advisory Group.



Meeting...
(Continued From Page 1)

“We are growing,” she noted. “We are vibrant. We are out of room. And the time to act is now.”

The evening also included the presentation and approval of the 2025–2026 operating budget by Treasurer Elise Jordan with a motion to approve the budget that passed unanimously.

Immediate Past President Leigh Mansberg then recognized outgoing trustees Leah Gafni, Virginia Palacio and Marcy Stagner and presented the 2025-2026 slate of officers and trustees including new trustees Lenny Feiler, Terri Struminger and Ralph Yaffe for the upcoming year, which was unanimously elected by the congregation.

In a momentous and emotional highlight of the evening, the congregation elected Mark Halperin as Temple Israel’s 8th Honorary President. In her introduction, Rotter shared that Halperin joins an elite group of seven historic civic leaders including in recent decades Sam Cooper, Abe Plough and Rudi Scheidt, Sr., all of blessed memory.



Helen Scheidt, Wendy Rotter and Laurie Meskin

“Mark Halperin has been a guiding light for this congregation and the Reform Movement. His leadership has strengthened Temple Israel and enhanced our ability to serve the broader

community, the impact of which will be felt for generations to come,” she said.

Past President Billy Orgel presided over the tribute to Halperin featuring

remarks from Orgel, Headmaster Emeritus of MUS Ellis Haguewood, Senior Rabbi Micah Greenstein and a musical tribute offered by Cantorial Soloist Eleanor Tallie Steinberg.

Rabbi Greenstein said it best “Perhaps the most extraordinary dimension to Mark’s Temple leadership, is that unlike some who choose to focus on the past, others concentrated on the future, and the rest worrying most about the present, Mark has always cared about it all: past, present and future.”

Halperin then addressed the congregation, accepting the honor with humility and vision.

The meeting concluded with Rotter’s heartfelt thanks to clergy, staff and congregants, and an invitation to continue the evening at a celebratory reception in the Atrium Under Glass.

Congregants made their way to a joyful reception, hosted by a gracious host committee: Robin & Billy Orgel, Nancy & Richard Robinson and Carol & Henry Levy.

“Together, we are shaping the future of Temple Israel,” Rotter said in closing. “Let’s make this a great year for our community.” **HW**

Israel’s Population Tops 10 Million Ahead of 77th Independence Day on the Eve of the Country’s 77th Birthday.

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – As Israel geared up to celebrate its 77th Independence Day, data released by the country’s Central Bureau of Statistics last Monday revealed that the country’s population has reached 10.094 million. This marks a growth of 135,000 people (1.4%) since last year’s holiday.

Of the total population, 7.73 mil-

lion (77.6%) are Jews or classified as “others,” including non-Arab Christians and individuals without religious classification. Arab citizens account for 2.11 million (20.9%), while foreign workers make up 248,000 (2.5%). In the past year, some 174,000 babies were born, 28,000 new immigrants arrived, and 50,000 people died. The

number of Israelis living abroad resulted in a net negative immigration balance of 56,000.

Since the state’s founding in 1948, when the population stood at 806,000, Israel has grown more than twelvefold. More than 3.5 million immigrants have arrived, nearly half of them since 1990. Around 45% of the global Jewish popu-

lation now resides in Israel, with about 80% of Israeli Jews having been born in the country.

Looking ahead, Israel’s population is projected to reach 15.2 million by its 100th Independence Day in 2048.

The nation remains demographically young, with 27% of residents under age 14 and 13% aged 65 and older. **HW**



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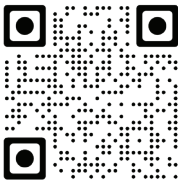
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