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Former Hostage Or Levy: ‘The Fact People are Still There Haunts Me’



Freed hostage Or Levy reuniting with his three-year-old son, Almog.
Credit: Courtesy.

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Or Levy, who spent 491 days as a Hamas hostage, spoke out last week about his ordeal and the pain of knowing others remain captive in Gaza.

Levy, 34, was freed in February, his pale, frail frame shocking the world. Nearly all his captivity was spent underground, shackled and starving.

“It’s hard to understand how difficult it is to live on one pita a day for 491 days ..., no human should live like that,” he

told CNN this week.

Levy was kidnapped on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israel. His wife, Einav, was killed in the attack, though he only knew for sure after his release. His first question to Israeli officials was about her.

“I asked about my wife. I said that I think I know, but I’m not 100% certain, and that I want to know,” he recalled.

While in captivity, Levy never asked his captors if his wife had survived. In-

stead, he focused on his son, Almog, then two years old.

His will was strengthened by fellow hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin, an American-Israeli later executed by Hamas.

Goldberg-Polin shared a mantra with Levy: “He who has a ‘why’ can bear any ‘how,’” a quote linked to Friedrich Nietzsche and, more recently, philosopher and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl.

Almog was Levy’s “why.”

On Almog’s birthday last year, Levy spent the day crying, quietly singing “Happy Birthday” underground. He promised himself he would be home for the next one.

Two weeks ago, Levy kept that promise, celebrating Almog’s fourth birthday at home near Tel Aviv.

He later tattooed the life-saving mantra on his arm – the same place he would touch in captivity to keep hope alive.

Levy’s reunion with his son was filled with fear that Almog wouldn’t recognize him. But the embrace washed away that worry. “I remember seeing him, hugging him, hearing his voice ... crazy,” he said.

The former hostage now devotes himself to being a full-time father, answering Almog’s growing questions about the “far place” where his dad was held

and about his late mother.

“We told him that a big bomb happened and that unfortunately, mom is dead, and I was taken to a far place,” Levy explained.

Almog often asks why his mother died and why his father didn’t take him along. Levy responds by reassuring his son that his mother loved him deeply. He keeps her memory alive through stories and photos.

“Even when it’s hard, it’s harder for him to not remember his mother.”

Yet Levy’s ordeal isn’t truly over. “The fact that people are still there haunts me in the night,” he said.

Watching the slow, uncertain progress of ceasefire negotiations is painful. Levy said that when talks stalled, Hamas would often worsen the hostages’ conditions.

“Very easily, I could have been there still,” he noted.

One of those who remain in Gaza is Alon Ohel, 24, an aspiring musician with whom Levy shared most of his captivity.

“I think that nothing is worth more than getting those people home,” Levy said. “I know that we need to push on to get a deal that gets everyone home and finish everything. Finish everything.” **HW**

‘Kill All Jews,’ Elmo’s X Account Says During Antisemitic, Conspiracy Theory-Laden Spree



Sesame Street Muppet Elmo attends the Sesame Workshop’s 13th Annual Benefit Gala at Cipriani 42nd Street on May 27, 2015, in New York City.
Credit: Paul Zimmerman/WireImage

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) – The social media platform X is filled with antisemitism, according to watchdogs and even a casual exploration. But it was still shocking for users late last Sunday when the account associated with the “Sesame Street” character Elmo began spewing hate.

“Kill all Jews,” the Elmo account

tweeted as part of a spree focused on “the Epstein files,” the documents purportedly kept by the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein that have re-emerged as a major political issue six months into the second Trump administration.

Trump had promised to release the

Department of Justice’s files on Epstein as part of his campaign but reversed course after the department said [the week prior] that Epstein did not maintain a client list. Last Saturday, Trump posted an impassioned call on Truth Social, his own platform, for people to stop paying attention to the Epstein issue. The post has fueled speculation among some in his base that Trump is named in the files, which the pro-release crowd believes contain details about clients of Epstein’s alleged international sex trafficking ring.

Elmo’s spree began with a tweet calling on Trump to release the files. It also contained another tweet laden with antisemitic conspiracy theories, in the syntax that the beloved red Muppet is famous for: “Elmo says ALL JEWS SHOULD DIE. F-K JEWS. DONALD TRUMP IS NETANYAHU’S PUPPET BECAUSE HE IS IN THE EPSTEIN FILES. JEWS CONTROL THE WORLD AND NEED TO BE EXTERMINATED.”

Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit that operates “Sesame Street,” said in a statement that Elmo’s account had been

hacked.

“Elmo’s X account was compromised today by an unknown hacker who posted disgusting messages, including antisemitic and racist posts. We are working to restore full control of the account,” it said.

The posts were subsequently removed.

Conspiracy theories connecting Epstein, who was Jewish, and the Israeli government, have percolated widely in the years since his arrest by federal authorities in July 2019. (He was found dead in his jail cell the following month in what was ruled a suicide.) Tucker Carlson, the erstwhile Trump supporter, alleged during a speech last weekend at a conservative youth conference that Epstein had been working for Israel’s Mossad intelligence service.

Elmo’s spree has spurred another conspiracy theory: that X’s owner, Elon Musk, had something to do with it. Some of Musk’s critics have referred to him as Elmo on the platform. Musk is a longtime advocate of the release-

(See **Elmo** Page 3)

Bar Mitzvah



Bennett Lubin

Israel here we come! Bennett began developing a vision for his bar mitzvah after his big sister, Celia, became a bat mitzvah in July 2022. And then when his cousin, Rose Lubin, was killed on duty in Israel, Bennett was adamant that the family plan a simcha in Israel as soon as possible.

What better way to celebrate than Bennett’s bar mitzvah in Eretz Yisrael on July 24th!

Bennett has attended Beber Camp in Wisconsin for three summers. As a rising

7th grader at Bornblum Jewish Community School, Bennett is a leader in student government and enjoys science and World Civilization classes. Bennett is a member of the National Junior Honor Society and participates in Temple Israel’s JYG. Singing and guitar lessons at Song Shack keep him busy beyond the school day.

Bennett is the grandson of David and Paula Bennett, Alla and Nathan Lubin, and Eva Marx of blessed memory. Celia and Ari are his proud siblings. Bennett is the son of Ryan and Brooke Lubi. [HW](#)

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. July 25, 2025 / 29 Tammuz, 57857:50 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. July 26, 2025 / 1 AV, 5785 8:49 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Matot-Masel

By Aliza Wiener

If someone were to tell me three weeks ago that I would be in Israel on July 8, I wouldn’t have believed you. But if Give has taught me anything it is to be grateful for your experiences and believe in Hashem’s plan.

Even though it’s been less than a week, I feel like a completely different person, both spiritually and mentally. In chabura we’ve been learning about humility and just how applicable it is to our lives. Not only are the topics interesting but they’re also impactful. Give is also all about חסד, every single program so far has been amazing, but one that real-

ly stood out to me was volunteering at an old age home. Immediately after we walked into the room, we saw a blind man playing the accordion, his joy was radiant and everyone in the room could feel it. We sang and danced with the elderly men and women, played games, and made conversation. We learned that one of the men had just turned a hundred years old but was still dancing to the music with a smile on his face. I left the old age home in awe of the impact we made by just showing up and hanging out with them. It’s not every day that you see the result of your kindness.

Lastly, we’ve been touring all over Israel, stopping at places like the Kotel, Eir David water tunnels and the Blind Museum, which have all affected me in many different ways. Give has taught me so much in just a few days, I can’t wait to see how many more lessons I’ll learn and lives I’ll change over the next four weeks. [HW](#)

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

Monday, July 28
Special Edition of Team Trivial Pursuit with host Josh Goldin

The last session was one of the largest we’ve had, and the room was full! Several newcomers stated they had a great time. Come test your memory and your knowledge of past events! Prizes will be given to both the winning team and the other team! Please make your reservations early as space is limited.

Wednesday, July 30
Speaker: Lisa Shurden
Topic: Great Life Experiences

This is an interactive talk with those in the group sharing the different experiences they’ve had in their life, along with some of the incredible stories that Lisa will share. The last time she visited was one of the most uplifting times the seniors had. Come have fun and share some of your own Life Experiences. Reservations are required for the 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 through Thursday 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. HW

Monday, August 4
Rabbi Talk with Rabbi Ian Lichter
Baron Hirsch Synagogue senior Rabbi
Topic: Why does the Torah have Two Sets of Ten Commandments!

Rabbi Lichter’s talks are always some of the most interesting and always lead to good discussions. There is a question-and-answer period that follows. Rabbi Lichter is always open to off-topic questions. If you have any questions about Judaism that you were interested in getting answers too, bring them to the discussion. Have a nice lunch and enjoy a learning experience after.

Wednesday, August 6
Speaker: Jonathan McCarter, MAT
Mr. McCarter is the new Cultural Arts Director & Conservatory Artistic Director at the MJCC.
Topic: Why is Thornton Wilder Interesting?

As the Conservatory Artistic Director of the MJCC Theatre, Mr. McCarter’s talk is a departure from some of the usual following the senior lunch. This should give everyone a different perspective on theatre and plays in general. Come have some fun and learn some new ideas from this talented gentleman.

A Thought on the Parsha IMAGINE EVERY DAY A HOLIDAY

By Rabbi Levi Klein
Chabad of Tennessee

This Shabbat we will be reading 2 Torah Portions, Matot and Masei, one focusing on the constants and the other on our journeys, what’s the lesson we can learn from their combination?

Our day is comprised of a mesh of constants and variables. Getting out of bed every day: a constant. What time we get up: a variable.

We eat constantly (if only we didn’t!), but what we eat varies. Most of us surf the net daily, but how long our eyes are glued to the screen depends on our level of boredom.

In Judaism, as well, we have the constants: daily prayer and study, ethical behavior, kosher, and boring speeches. And we have the variables: holidays, ceremonies, Yom Kippur, a guest speaker.

Isn’t change preferable over the predictable? Can we all agree with the teenage motto, “Normal is boring”?

So who needs constants? Why don’t we have a holiday every day? (My kids would love that.)

Many years ago, G d had a home in Jerusalem: the Holy Temple. Throughout the day, animals, flour, oil and fowl would be offered on the altar. No two days were the same; one day someone brought an atonement offering, the next day a wealthy tycoon came with a thou-

sand animal donation, followed by a beggar who came with a meager handful of flour. Unpredictable.

Amid all the change was a pillar of stability: the Tamid sacrifice. Tamid actually means constant, and every morning the Tamid (part one) would inaugurate the Temple service, and the Tamid (part two) would wrap up the hectic day. Nothing was offered before the morning Tamid or after its evening counterpart.

We each have a Holy Temple inside of us. We each need our Tamids, our constants.

Change is great, but only within the framework of stability. Too many variables in life, like the “celebrity life,” put one on the front cover of tabloids. There have to be certain aspects of life that are etched in stone. Your commitment to your marriage, children, ethics, G d, your health, the world.

Once you have stability as your bedrock, then, by all means, shake the applecart, take a vacation, do something abnormal (like calling up a friend from high school), buy an unusually beautiful pair of tefillin. Live it up.

After all, having no variables in life can lead you to count the pieces of cereal in your bowl, living as an automaton in a human laboratory. HW

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Elmo...

(Continued From Page 1)

the-files stance, reiterating that position last Saturday after Trump’s Truth Social Post. “Just release the files as promised,” he tweeted, referring to the Epstein files as Trump’s “Achilles’ heel.”

Antisemitic speech surged on X after Musk’s acquisition in 2022, as he relaxed moderation standards and invited high-profile antisemites who had been banned to return to the platform. HW

Jeffries Calls on Mamdani to Reassure Jewish New Yorkers of Their Safety

(JNS) – House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) has called upon New York Democratic mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani “to reassure Jewish New Yorkers that he plans to prioritize their safety,” according to The Hill.

Jeffries, who has yet to endorse Mamdani, plans to meet with him this week.

Mamdani has come under fire from Jewish communities for his anti-Israel stances and refusal to condemn the phrase “globalize the intifada.” In a recent interview with Punchbowl News, Jeffries said that would be “part of our discussion.”

Mamdani won the Democratic primary for mayor in New York City in an upset against former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo on June 24. HW

Jewish Metal Singer Booed for Supporting Israel at Black Sabbath Show

By Inbal Chiat

(Israel Hayom via JNS) – At Black Sabbath’s farewell event held July 5 at Villa Park stadium in Birmingham, the guest appearance of David Draiman – the Jewish lead singer of the metal band Disturbed – became the center of a public controversy.

Draiman, 52, who was invited to participate in a celebratory tribute show alongside major names from the metal world, took the stage to perform Black Sabbath’s “Sweet Leaf” and Ozzy Osbourne’s “Shot in the Dark.”

Before he could sing a single word, loud boos erupted from the audience, continuing throughout his performance. According to reports and testimonies from the event, the booing did not stem from Draiman’s musical performance but as a reaction to his political positions and open support for Israel, especially since the beginning of the Gaza war.

Draiman did not remain indifferent and addressed the crowd from the stage, asking, “Are we going to start with this now?” – a clear message that he would not bow to criticism.

Despite the charged atmosphere, he continued his performance, refused to surrender to hatred, and completed his part in the show alongside senior musicians from bands Anthrax, Megadeth, Faith No More, Extreme and others.

The storm did not end in the venue. Earlier this week, Draiman shared a series of particularly sharp tweets on X with his millions of fans, writing, “As you can see ... I wasn’t ‘booed off stage’ as so many people in the press and CERTAINLY #FreePalestine crowd, would have you believe. Yes, there were a few boos when I walked out, but I came to pay homage to my teachers, my idols, the mighty Black Sabbath, and I wasn’t about to let a few Jew-hating morons

deter that. It’s all about feeding their narrative, generating clickbait and inciting hatred of Jews.”

According to his claim, the live broadcast from the event showed positive reactions from the audience, and he emphasized, “There’s even a track being passed around out there that added enhanced booing to the performance just to add fuel to the fire. Pathetic. The live stream shows the truth. Both songs went over great. It’s truly pathetic when people peddle lies.”

Draiman did not settle for self-defense and went on the attack. “I will ALWAYS stand up for my people, and I won’t be deterred, intimidated, or shamed,” he clarified.

Draiman, considered one of the prominent voices in world metal since the 1990s, maintains close ties with Israel. In recent years – and especially since the Hamas massacre on Oct. 7, 2023 –

he has become one of the most prominent musicians in the world expressing public, consistent, and articulate support for Israel and the IDF. He has visited the country several times, met with hostage families, connected with Yarden Bibas after his return from captivity and his family’s funeral, published videos in Hebrew, and even signed IDF artillery shells with the inscription “F**k Hamas.”

His positions are not received in silence. He suffers attacks from anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian audiences; some colleagues distance themselves from him, and some boycott him. Despite this, he refuses to apologize or remain silent. “I can’t stay quiet. I won’t lose my soul for the entertainment industry,” he said previously, assailing artists such as Roger Waters and Kanye West for their antisemitic positions. **HW**

Khamenei: Iran ‘Ready’ to Deal ‘Bigger Blows’ to U.S.

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Iran is “ready” to respond to any renewed military action against it and has the capabilities to deal “even bigger blows” to the United States and other militaries, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei warned last Wednesday.

The Islamic Republic “not only does not fear America – it instills fear in it,” Khamenei declared, speaking to the country’s judiciary officials in his second public appearance since the June 13-24 war with Israel.

“Although we consider the Zionist regime [Israel] a cancer and the U.S. a criminal due to its support of that regime, we did not seek war,” he said. “Yet whenever the enemy attacked, our

response was forceful and firm.” Iran was “brought to its knees” by Iran and “desperately turned to the U.S.” to strike the regime’s key nuclear facilities on June 22, Khamenei claimed, adding that Jerusalem “realized it cannot handle” Tehran.

The Iranian supreme leader described Tehran’s counterattack to the U.S. airstrikes as “significant,” adding that “once media censorship is lifted, it will become clear how great a blow Iran delivered.” He added: “Of course, even bigger blows could be dealt to the U.S. and others.”

Tehran “possesses all necessary tools, from logic to military power – and whether on the battlefield of diplomacy or in military conflict, we will enter, Al-

lah willing, from a position of strength,” Khamenei stated.

Jerusalem’s June 13 opening strikes in the Islamic Republic wiped out Tehran’s top military command, including the chief of staff of its army, with more officials killed during the subsequent 12 days of fighting.

After the United States joined the war, striking the Natanz, Isfahan and Fordow nuclear sites on June 22, Iran launched 14 missiles at the U.S. military’s Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. Doha said it downed 13 of the projectiles and that the Iranian attack resulted in no casualties.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain agreed in a phone call last Monday that they would give Tehran until the end of August to reach a new nuclear deal, Israel’s Channel 12

News outlet reported last Wednesday, citing three sources.

The report came a day after French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot told Reuters that Paris, Berlin and London would activate the snapback mechanism by the end of August if no concrete progress has been made.

Reimposition of the U.N. sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear program will lead to an “appropriate and proportionate response,” the Iranian regime warned earlier this week.

“The threat to use the snapback mechanism lacks legal and political basis and will be met with an appropriate and proportionate response from the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Reuters quoted Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei as saying at a press conference. **HW**

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Fire Destroys A Lifetime Of Memories

A fire in the attic of Tom and Mary Johnson’s home was quickly brought under control, after they smelled smoke and called 911. Mary’s dolls and Tom’s baseball card collection, that they had been saving for their grandchildren, were gone forever. Unfortunately, the pictures of their first and subsequent years of dating, proms and graduations, plus their wedding photos were also destroyed, along with their kids’ birthday parties, school plays, vacations, trips, sporting events, and more...GONE, but not forever!

Fortunately, THERE IS A HAPPY ENDING TO THIS STORY.

As luck would have it, Tom and Mary just had Hal Jaffe digitize all of their pictures, some even created by Hal 50 years ago, to digital files. They sent the zip drive full of digitized files to a local photo lab and had them all printed! So, after a 50 year career of creating images for families to love and cherish, Hal is now digitizing family’s photos so they can live on for many generations to come!

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Estate Planning

One Big Beautiful Federal Estate Tax Reform (For Now)

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

In a sweeping legislative move, Congress recently passed, and President Trump signed into law, the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB) – a landmark piece of tax reform that has sent ripples across the financial and estate planning landscape. Among its many provisions, the new law significantly alters how Americans approach estate planning and what’s commonly referred to as the death tax, or the federal estate tax.

Key Changes to the Estate Tax

One of the most notable aspects of the OB BB is the substantial increase to the federal estate tax exemption. Under the previous law, the estate tax exemption stood at \$13.61 million per individual for 2024. Had Congress not acted, the exemption was set to “sunset” or drop significantly at the end of 2025. The OB BB has now extended and raised the exemption to \$13.99 million per individual for 2025. This means married couples can utilize a total exemption of \$27.98 million to shield their assets from federal estate taxes in 2025. Starting January 1, 2026, the exemption will increase to \$15 million per individual or \$30 million per couple. This means that the vast majority of estates – already exempt under the old threshold – are now



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completely outside the reach of federal estate taxation. Essentially, the lifetime exclusion amount that an individual has left and unused on any given date represents the value of the property that the individual could give away to anyone or leave after death to anyone without having any gift tax or estate tax imposed on the transfer of that property.

This change significantly reduces the estate tax burden on wealthy families and essentially eliminates the tax for all but the ultra-wealthy. The estate tax rate, which was previously 40% on the value above the exemption, remains unchanged. However, with fewer estates subject to the tax, the number of taxable estates is expected to plummet. For Tennesseans this is even better news, because the State of Tennessee does not currently have any state imposed Estate Tax whatsoever.

Implications for Estate Planning

For individuals and families, this increase in the exemption shifts the estate planning landscape in several ways:

- 1. Simplified Planning for Many:** With fewer people affected by the estate tax, there is less need for certain complex trusts or tax shelters designed solely to minimize estate tax exposure. For estates under the new exemption threshold, rather than tax avoidance, planning can now focus more on probate avoidance, ease for heirs and beneficiaries upon death or disability, asset distribution, charitable giving, and family legacy.
- 2. Review of Existing Trust Structures:** Many individuals who previously established irrevocable trusts or other sophisticated vehicles may find that these structures are no longer necessary, or even counterproductive. We are advising clients to revisit existing strategies in light of the new law.
- 3. Shift in Focus to Income and Capital Gains Taxes:** With estate tax concerns diminished, we are turning more attention to income tax implications and the step-up in basis rules, which, importantly, were preserved and retained in the bill. If properly planned for and protected, assets passed on at death will still receive a step-up in basis


to their fair market value, minimizing capital gains taxes for heirs.

Political Risk

Many Americans were and are not in favor of the new legislation. If a political backlash and a change of control of the Congress were to occur in 2026 or 2028, a future Congress and a future administration could enact new legislation that would repeal or reduce the increase in the basic exclusion amount.

As was the case with prior tax reforms, political shifts could lead to either an extension, further expansion, or a complete rollback of the exemption. Therefore, estate plans must remain flexible and should be reviewed regularly. For now, however, unlike the previous law, the OB BB is “permanent” and does not have an automatic sunset or expiration date. The increased basic exclusion amount will not be decreased in any future year unless a future Congress and President enact and sign future legislation to specifically scale back or change the exclusion amount.

The passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill marks a turning point in estate tax policy. While it provides significant tax relief to wealthy individuals and simplifies planning for many, it also underscores the importance of proactive, adaptable estate planning strategies. **HW**



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Paying Down Debt vs. Investing

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors
Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com
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The debt dilemma
Paying down debt is often difficult, and even more so in a challenging economic environment. You may be wondering which to tackle first — pay down your debt or invest for the future?

Balance is best
A balanced approach to wealth management serves both today’s needs and tomorrow’s goals. For some that may mean paying off some debt today while simultaneously investing for the future.

Your own needs and circumstances will be unique. The following guidelines can help you evaluate alternatives and find an approach that fits your situation and goals.

Don’t forget your emergency fund
In addition to paying down debt and settling on an investment strategy, make it a priority to set up an emergency reserve. Traditional “rules of thumb” suggest setting aside three to six months or more of living expenses in traditional savings or very short-term, highly liquid, low-volatility investments.

While ideal, that goal may not be realistic for everyone. Start by building up a reserve of a month’s expenses, and make it a goal to increase your emergency fund over time as resources permit.

Your future first
When making decisions about debt and investing, be a long-term thinker. Consider “what position do I want to be in 10 or 20 years from now?” Then evaluate what actions today will be most effective in helping you achieve your long-term financial goals.

For example, if you have high-inter-

est debt that is compounding, this could eventually become a serious impediment to reaching your long-term goals. In contrast, you might not be in a hurry to retire low-interest debt, if the potential return on long-term investing would be greater.

When making decisions about debt reduction vs. investing, keep in mind that the need to eventually pay off principal is certain, but investment returns are not. Investment performance will vary over time, and it’s possible to experience losses as well as gains. At the same time, it is well known that investors who start earlier benefit from compounding and “time in the market.”

If you have the opportunity to participate in a retirement plan at work, and your employer makes matching contributions, that could be a compelling reason to prioritize investing up to the amount that the employer will match.

But there are no magic numbers. That’s why it’s important to work with your financial advisor to create an investment strategy that fits your financial expectations for the future.

Prioritize your debts
With your emergency fund and investment strategy in place, you can begin deciding on a strategy for reducing your debts. But how do you decide which debts to pay down first?

Mathematically, it makes sense to focus on paying off high-interest debts like private student loans and credit card debt first. Federal student loans and mortgages might be lower priorities because their rates are often lower and

their terms longer. Vehicle loans might fall somewhere in the middle. Tax considerations may also come into play.

An alternative approach is to start with the smallest debt first. It might be motivating to get a “quick win” by paying off a smaller debt before beginning to chip away at a larger one.

Once you pay off one debt, add that payment amount to a different debt payment amount to accelerate its pay off.

It’s personal
One last tip: Don’t discount your emotions. If paying off a certain debt will help you feel more secure, you may want to follow your gut. Or discuss with your financial advisor before you decide. Also, identify some key milestones that you want to reach, and celebrate (modestly) when you achieve those goals!

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Pittsburgh-Area Man Indicted for Telling Official ‘Go Back to Israel or Better Yet, Exterminate Yourself’

By JNS Staff
(JNS) – A federal grand jury indicted Edward Arthur Owens Jr., 29, of Elizabethtown, Pa., in the Pittsburgh area, for making an antisemitic threat to harm a public official and making false statements to the federal agents, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania said last Thursday.

Owens, who was arrested on May 30, allegedly told a “local public official,” whom the U.S. Justice Department didn’t name, that “we’re coming for you” and “be afraid,” adding a German flag image.

“Go back to Israel or better yet, exterminate yourself and save us the trouble,” he allegedly wrote to the official, using an antisemitic phrase that suggests Jews have been expelled from 109 countries.

The Justice Department also alleges that Owens lied and told FBI agents that “his firearms – which included a .22 LR caliber rifle, an AR-15 style rifle and a 9mm caliber Smith & Wesson pistol – were all in the custody of his mother, that he did not know where the firearms were and that he did not have access to any of them.”

Per the indictment, “Edwards did, in fact, know that his 9mm caliber Smith & Wesson pistol was still in his custody and control – located inside of the vehicle Edwards drove immediately prior to making his false statements to the FBI agents – that he still had access to this pistol, and that the pistol was not in his mother’s custody,” per the department.

Owens faces up to five years in prison and up to \$250,000 in fines. [HW](#)

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Member of Antisemitic Hate Group Arrested for Alleged Assault of Jewish Man in Tennessee

(JNS) – Louis Edward Dunn, 43, a member of the Goyim Defense League, is expected to be returned to Tennessee to face a grand jury indictment charging him with civil rights intimidation and assault, the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department announced last Thursday.

Dunn, who was visiting Nashville when the alleged altercation took place on July 13, 2024, is currently being held

as a fugitive in the Maricopa County Jail in Phoenix, Ariz., following his arrest last Sunday at the request of the MNPd’s Specialized Investigations Division.

Dunn, with accomplice Ryan Scott McCann, 30, are charged with assaulting and intimidating a 20-year-old Jewish man, according to the division’s investigation. Police stated that members

of the GDL antagonized and taunted the man when McCann attempted to strike.

As the victim attempted to flee, Dunn allegedly grabbed and pinned him against a truck with McCann in pursuit. The victim said “he was struck in the neck and legs during the altercation,” according to the investigation.

“Nashville and our police department will not let stand hatred that translates

into criminal conduct,” Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake said. “I am grateful to the team at the Specialized Investigations Division for their months of work to hold GDL members accountable.”

McCann was indicted on civil rights intimidation and assault charges earlier this year and was convicted in criminal court last month. **HW**

Students at Netanyahu’s Pennsylvania High School Want Him Ejected from the Alumni Hall of Fame



Benjamin Netanyahu as pictured in his high school yearbook at Cheltenham High School in Cheltenham, Pennsylvania. Credit: File photo

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) – More than 200 students at Cheltenham High School in suburban Philadelphia have petitioned for the school’s alumni hall of fame to eject Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who graduated from the school in 1967.

Officers of the school’s alumni association [were] meeting with school district officials last Friday to consider the petition, according to a report in The New York Times, which said the association’s secretary privately said the group was inclined “to keep Netanyahu up, but maybe with an update in his biography.” Netanyahu was added to the hall of fame in 1999, during his first stint as prime minister.

The petition, submitted last month by roughly 15% of students, cited Netanyahu’s criminal indictment and arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court accusing him of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, the newspaper reported. Netanyahu denies the criminal charges against him and Israel rejects the allegation that it has committed war crimes in Gaza, where it has been battling Hamas since Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

“When students see these alumni on the wall of fame as we walk past every day, we understand that these are people we should look up to, and we strive to be like them one day,” two of the students wrote when they submitted the pe-

tition last month, according to The New York Times. They added, “As such, we feel it is not right for him to continue to be recognized in our school.”

Netanyahu lived in Cheltenham twice, from 1956 to 1958 when he was in elementary school, and from 1963 to 1967 when he was in high school, while his father taught at a local Jewish studies institute. At Cheltenham High, he participated in soccer, debate and chess clubs and reportedly skipped his graduation ceremony to return to Israel to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces. He recently joked on Fox News with another graduate, the conservative pundit Mark Levin, about the alumni hall of fame, which does not include Levin. **HW**

‘Passover Coke’ Could Become Obsolete as Trump Says Coca-Cola Will Use ‘REAL’ Sugar in U.S. Soda

(JTA) – A uniquely American Passover tradition could become a thing of the past, after President Donald Trump announced that he had successfully pressed Coca-Cola to change the formulation of its signature drink in the United States.

“I have been speaking to Coca-Cola about using REAL Cane Sugar in Coke in the United States, and they have agreed to do so,” Trump wrote on Truth Social, his social media platform, last Wednesday. “I’d like to thank all of those in authority at Coca-Cola. This will be a very good move by them – You’ll see. It’s just better!”

Such a change would obviate Coca-Cola’s special runs for Passover – and the fervent searches that some kosher-keeping Jews undertake to secure the scarce “yellow-cap” bottles of Coke that result.

Tok, the appeal of yellow-cap Coke has gone viral. Last year, influencers urged their followers to stock up on the kosher-for-Passover Cokes and traded tips about where to find the scarce bottles.

If Coca-Cola begins using the same corn syrup-free formulation all year long, special runs will no longer be needed for Passover.

The company did not immediately confirm the change that Trump announced but posted an oblique statement on its website. “We appreciate President Trump’s enthusiasm for our iconic Coca-Cola brand,” it said. “More details on new innovative offerings within our Coca-Cola product range will be shared soon.”

The company also replied to some social media posts about Trump’s announcement to rebut the idea that cane-sugar Coke tastes better or is healthier.


While the anti-corn syrup push could ease conditions for kosher-keeping Jews, some of the MAHA movement’s other ambitions could introduce complications. Changes to milk testing earlier this year briefly ignited concerns about

whether the FDA’s practices would still fall in line with a key determination of Jewish law, while an effort to end the use of synthetic food dyes could result in the wider use of dyes that are not kosher. Under pressure from the Trump administration, many U.S. ice cream producers announced last Monday that they would phase out synthetic food dyes by 2028. **HW**

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By Ted Roberts

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For the last four decades, Coke in the United States has been made with corn syrup, a sweetener that is reviled by many health advocates, including those who are part of the pro-Trump “MAHA” movement. But corn is not considered kosher for Passover according to Ashkenazi tradition, that is practiced by the vast majority of kosher-keeping American Jews.

So every year, the company has produced a kosher-for-Passover run of Coke made with cane sugar lest kosher-keeping Jews have to forgo the soda for the eight-day holiday.

The kosher-for-Passover bottles, which are prominently labeled as such but also come with distinctive yellow caps, become a hot commodity in some communities each spring. Not only kosher-keeping Jews but also those with a taste for the corn syrup-free sodas manufactured abroad hunt down the yellow-cap bottles in regions where they are distributed, typically those with large Orthodox Jewish populations.

In recent years, with the rise of Tik-



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He’s Back: Larry David Teams Up with the Obamas to Create New TV Comedy Series About American History



Larry David speaks onstage during the Variety Business Managers Breakfast in West Hollywood, Calif., Nov. 19, 2024. Credit: Tommaso Boddi/Variety via Getty Images

By Grace Gilson

(JTA) – After his beloved and extremely Jewish sitcom “Curb Your Enthusiasm” ended after 12 seasons last year, many fans undoubtedly had the same thought: Would this be the last of Larry David on TV? The notorious curmudgeon’s answer: Absolutely not.

Last Thursday, David announced that he will be partnering with Barack and Michelle Obama’s production company to create a six-episode sketch comedy series about American history. The 78-year-old David will star in, co-write and executive produce the new series, which will air on HBO, the home

of “Curb Your Enthusiasm.” Higher Ground, the Obamas’ production company, will produce it. “I’ve sat across the table from some of the world’s most difficult leaders and wrestled with some of our most intractable problems,” the former president said in a statement. “Nothing has prepared me for working with Larry David.” The official summary for the show reads: “President and Mrs. Obama wanted to honor America’s 250th anniversary and celebrate the unique history of our nation on this special occasion... But then Larry David called.” For decades, “Curb Your Enthusiasm” often brought Jewish humor and culture to the mainstream, poking fun at Jews of all stripes and even at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But it’s unclear how much of the new show will tap into American Jewish history – David’s statement focused on what seems to be a joke about a made-up hobby. “Once Curb ended, I celebrated with a three-day foam party. After a violent allergic reaction to the suds, I yearned to return to my simple life as a beekeeper, harvesting organic honey from the wildflowers in

my meadow,” David said in a statement. “Alas, one day my bees mysteriously vanished. And so, it is with a heavy heart that I return to television, hoping to ease the loss of my beloved hive.” “Curb Your Enthusiasm” writer and executive producer Jeff Schaffer will also write, direct and executive produce the currently untitled series, which will presumably come out in 2026, as it is meant to coincide with the nation’s 250th anniversary. “The characters Larry is playing didn’t change history. In fact, they were largely ignored by history. And that’s a good thing,” Schaffer said in a statement. Although exact casting details have yet to be announced, the new show is set to feature some “Curb Your Enthusiasm” actors and “noteworthy guest stars.” “It’s hard to remember a time before ‘Curb,’ or without Larry David’s perspective on modern life,” said Amy Gravitt, the head of HBO and Max’s comedy programming. “We’re thrilled that Larry is coming back to HBO, this time with Higher Ground, to give us a glimpse at our shared history as we celebrate our Semiquincentennial.” **HW**

In Images on Social Media, Kentucky Church Shooter Dons Keffiyeh

(JNS) – Social-media accounts tied to the suspect in the deadly church shooting last Sunday in Lexington, Ky., which killed two and injured three, showed him wearing a keffiyeh-style scarf, the

New York Post reported. Police said that Guy House, 47, was searching for the mother of his children when he barged into Richmond Road Baptist Church. After discovering that

his intended target was not there, he shouted, “Well, someone’s gonna have to die, then” before opening fire, according to witnesses. He was shot by police and pronounced dead at the scene. “More details emerge from last Saturday’s mass shooting in Lexington, Ky.: Gunman Guy House – often seen wearing a keffiyeh (now widely viewed as a symbol of violence post-10/7) shot a state trooper, carjacked a vehicle and stormed Richmond Road Baptist Church,” wrote the organization Stop Antisemitism on social media. “He also murdered two women and wounded three others before being neutralized by police.” That information was reposted by Leo Terell, chair of the federal Task Force to Combat Antisemitism. JNS sought comment about the case from the U.S. Department of Justice. **HW**

Army Vet, Who Posted Jew-Hatred Online, Sentenced to Two Years for Illegal Guns

“You not only illegally possessed extremely dangerous firearms, but you bragged about it and put on firearms trainings for others while doing so,” the district judge said at trial.

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Kyle Christopher Benton, 29, was sentenced in district court to two years in prison for illegally possessing guns and using those weapons “to further his standing with various racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist groups and groups espousing white supremacy,” the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Washington stated last Thursday. Benton, of Snohomish, Wash., located some 30 miles northeast of Seattle, was arrested in November for having “both unregistered, short barrel rifles and machine guns, weapons capable of firing multiple rounds with a single trigger pull,” per the U.S. Justice Department. “You not only illegally possessed extremely dangerous firearms, but you bragged about it and put on firearms trainings for others while doing so,” Tana Lin, a judge in the Western District of Washington, said during sentencing. Per the Justice Department, the FBI investigated Benton after the U.S. Army discharged him and after he threatened to kill his wife. “The investigation revealed Benton operated multiple social media accounts where he posted violent extremist content, neo-Nazi propaganda and antisemitic materials,” the department said. He also took part in hate rallies in person in Oregon, Washington and in Idaho “in furtherance of his white supremacist views,” the Justice Department said. “Drawing upon his military training and veteran status, he led workshops about firearms for various white supremacy groups.” **HW**

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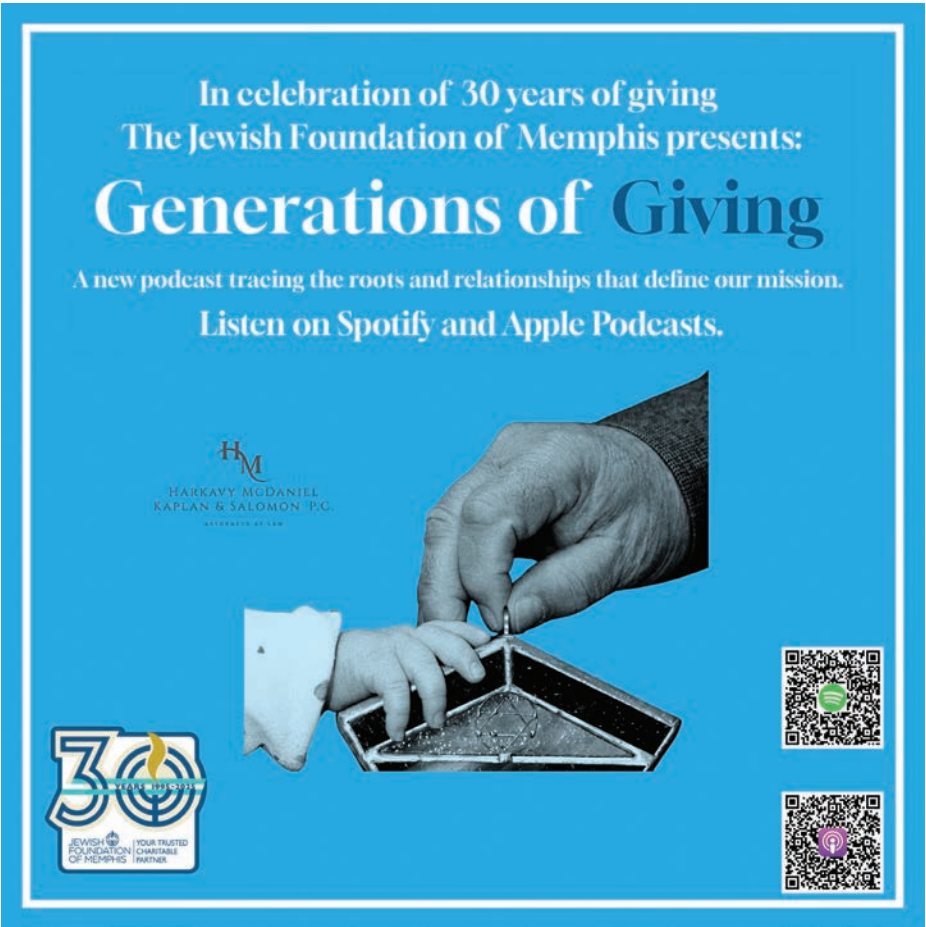
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Celebrating 30 Years of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis



As the first Executive Director of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis and a proud donor advised fund holder, Paula Jacobson helped shape a legacy of giving that continues to strengthen Jewish Memphis today.

“Being part of the effort to create the Jewish Foundation of Memphis was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life,” Paula shared. “I will always be grateful for the confidence placed in me and the opportunity to be part of something that will impact so many for generations to come.” Listen to an interview with Paula on the Foundation’s new podcast, “Generations of Giving,” available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

30 Years, 30 Moments

A Look Back at the Legacy of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis in Photos

In honor of the 30-year anniversary of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis, we are showcasing the Foundation’s history and impact through a content series across multiple platforms, including a photo series highlighting key moments in the Foundation’s history.

November 2005: The Jewish Foundation of Memphis doubles down on legacy giving by launching “Create Your Jewish Legacy” and its recognition tool, the Endowment Book of Life. Founders Ronna and Hal Newburger positioned the Foundation as the primary resource for legacy giving in the Memphis Jewish community.



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