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## Memphis Delegates Attend the 39th 2025 World Zionist Congress



**Rabbi Micah Greenstein and Pace Cooper represent Memphis as delegates at the 39th World Zionist Congress.**

The 39th World Zionist Congress (WZC) took place in Jerusalem from October 28–30, 2025, convening over 1,400 delegates from various Jewish movements – from Israel, the U.S., and other Diaspora countries – to discuss and strengthen the future of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

These delegates serve as the supreme body of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). As the “parliament of the Jewish people,” the Congress sets policy, allocates budgets for institutions like the Jewish Agency for Israel and Keren Kayemeth Le-Yisrael (KKL), and elects leadership positions.

They participated in discussions, committees, and votes on a range of issues including Jewish unity despite differences, recovery after recent crises, resource allocation for Jewish programs, upholding democratic values and religious pluralism, and Diaspora-Israel relations.

## Lemsky Israel Program Grants Reopen, Offering Life-Changing Israel Experiences



**Benjamin Freiden with his Summer 2024 Israel trip cohort.**

The opportunity for Memphis’s Jewish youth and young adults to embark on transformative journeys to Israel is once again within reach. As of November 1, 2025, Memphis Jewish Federation has

opened applications for its Lemsky Endowment Fund’s two signature grant programs, both designed to strengthen the connection between the Memphis Jewish community and Israel.

**By Pace Cooper as Mizrachi Representative**

Attending the World Zionist Congress (WZC) in Jerusalem last month was an extraordinary experience – one that reminded me how wide, vibrant, and yet deeply connected the Jewish world truly is. Representing the Mizrachi movement, I found myself among hundreds of delegates from across the globe – Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular alike – all gathered with a common purpose: to strengthen the future of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

The WZC, founded by Theodor Herzl in 1897, was the original political engine of modern Zionism. It helped lay the groundwork for the establishment of the State of Israel and continues to meet every five years as the democratic parliament of the Jewish people. Through spirited debate and resolution, delegates guide the policies and priorities of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), which helps fund and shape Jewish education, aliyah, and cultural life in Israel and throughout the Diaspora.

To sit in the same room with Jews of every stripe – from across continents and movements – is a powerful reminder that Zionism is a living, evolving conversation. Each delegate brings a distinct perspective, yet beneath the differences runs a shared devotion to our collective future.

One of the personal highlights for me was reconnecting with my long-time friend, Rabbi Micah Greenstein of Temple Israel here in Memphis, who attended representing as part of the Reform movement’s delegation known as Arzenu. Though we represent different

branches of the Zionist family – Mizrachi, the party of religious Zionists and Arzenu, the party of Reform, Progressive and Liberal Zionists – our friendship and mutual respect transcend those boundaries. Throughout the Congress, we kept passing each other and remained true to our respective perspectives, but I know we both share a vision for a strong, inclusive, and ethical Israel, and those shared values leave us with more focused on what we have in common than what divides us.

That, to me, captures the essence of the World Zionist Congress. It’s for sure not about everyone agreeing – but it’s about everyone showing up. Zionism has always thrived on passionate debate, on Jews taking responsibility for their destiny together, even when we approach it from different angles.

Leaving Jerusalem and the World Zionist Congress, I felt proud to represent Memphis, proud to stand with Mizrachi, and proud to join hands – figuratively and literally – with fellow Jews from every background who care deeply about Israel’s future. Herzl’s dream was that the Jewish people would take their fate into their own hands. Sitting in those Congress halls more than 125 years later, it was clear that his dream is still very much alive – growing, adapting, and uniting us as Am Echad b’Lev Echad – one people, with one heart.

*Pace Cooper is a Memphis business and community leader who participated as part of the Mizrachi movement to the 2025 World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem. HW*

Established through the generosity of the late Abe Lemsky z’l, the Lemsky Endowment Fund has long been a cornerstone of support for immersive Israel experiences. These grants provide critical financial assistance for programs that range from summer trips and semester-long studies to gap-year and beyond adventures, all aimed at fostering a lifelong bond with Israel.

Federation considers immersive Israel experiences essential to nurturing a strong and enduring connection to Jewish identity and heritage. In reflections written after their trips, teens consistently describe the profound impact of their time in Israel. Lauren Paz, who used her Teen Israel Experience (TIE) grant to help offset the cost of attending Alexander Muss High School in Israel last spring, shared: “I went to Israel with a long list of things I’d use to describe my-

self, with Jewish/half Israeli being quite far down on that list. But as I got on that plane back home – if I can even call it that anymore – I couldn’t think of anything else to put at the top of my list but proudly and unapologetically Jewish.”

The Teen Israel Experience Grant is tailored for Jewish students in grades 9 through 12 who reside permanently in Memphis. Whether attending a summer program, a high school semester abroad, or participating in an organized trip through groups like, though not limited to, Jacobs Camp, Camp Ramah, BBYO, NCSY/JSU, or B’nei Akiva, eligible teens may receive up to \$3,000 toward their experience. Grants are paid directly to the program provider, and limited need-based scholarships of \$1,000 are also available. Applications are accept-

(See Lemsky Page 2)

## Jewish Historical Society Kicks Off New Programs with Board Instillation



JHSMM President Greg Siskind and VP and President-elect David Bearman



JHSMM Board and Committee Chairs: (from left) Greg Siskind, David Bearman, Lorraine Wolf, Lynnie Mirvis, Janet Shipman, Shoshana Cenker, and Sandy Friedman.

By Shoshana Cenker

On Sunday, Oct. 19, the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & the Mid-South (JHSMM) gathered at the Memphis Jewish Community Center for a board meeting to install its new slate of board members and discuss upcoming plans. Founded in 1986 JHSMM collects, preserves, presents and interprets the history of Jews in Memphis and the Mid-South.

After JHSMM President Greg Siskind called the meeting to order, Lorraine Wolf, past president and chair of the nominating committee, gave the nominating committee report and thanked community members who were leaving board and chair positions: Ida Eleazer, David Krueger, Elaine Stegman, Susan Labovitz and Freda Brode.

Then, the group passed a motion to accept the incoming officers and committee chairs:

- President, Greg Siskind
- Executive VP & President Elect, David Bearman
- Treasurer, Sandy Friedman
- Recording Secretary, Robin Tauer
- Corresponding Secretary, Linda Bedrin
- Membership Chair, Mimi Clemons

- Program Chair, Janet Shipman
- Communications Chair, Shoshana Cenker
- Social Media Chair, Lulu Abdun
- Archives and Oral History Chair, Lorraine Wolf
- Special Projects Chair, Lynnie Mirvis

After Marcia Levy, past president, founding member, and former editor and writer of JHSMM's newsletter installed the officers, David Krueger provided the treasurer's report. Greg continued the meeting with JHSMM news. He shared several updates including details about the upcoming "Jews of Memphis Part 2" film; the Tenn. State Archives and Library's work to digitize the *The Hebrew Watchman* newspapers; the revitalizing of a cemetery project; and info about archives and oral histories projects.

For the vital cemetery project, JHSMM passed a motion brought by Peggy Jalenak to establish the JHSMM Cemetery Committee to ensure all Memphis cemetery records are entered into the Jewish Gen data base for worldwide burial data. There was also lively discussion, initiated by Harry Jaffe, about planning an event to cele-

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## Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Nov. 7, 2025 / 16 Cheshvan, 5786.....4:41 p.m.  
Havdalah, Sat. Nov. 8, 2025 / 17 Cheshvan, 5786 ..... 5:38 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Vayeira

brate JHSMM's 40th anniversary in the  
spring of 2026. An updated JHSMM  
website is also in the works.

JHSMM is currently working on  
several other exciting programs that  
the community will be invited to in the  
coming months. Through programs,  
communications and projects, the  
Society offers connection, understanding  
and pride in the achievements of the  
generations of Jews that preceded us.  
JHSMM's mission is to preserve and  
share this valuable history for the  
generations of the future. Continue to check  
*The Hebrew Watchman* for more program-  
ming details to come. [HW](#)

Lemsky...

(Continued From Page 1)

ed on a rolling basis.

A parent of a recent TIE grant recip-  
ient shared: "Thank you so much for  
this opportunity. My daughter gained so  
much from her summer program in Isra-  
el and would not have been able to par-  
ticipate without Federation's Lemsky  
grant."

Teens are required to engage in 15  
hours of community service either for  
a Jewish organization in Memphis or  
under the auspices of one, attend a pre-  
trip orientation, and upon their return,  
submit a reflective essay on their Israel  
experience for publication.

For those who have graduated high  
school and are up to age 32, the Lemsky  
Next Stop Israel Grant program of-  
fers support for gap-year, semester or  
summer programs. Applicants must be  
Jewish permanent residents of greater  
Memphis and enrolled in a qualifying  
Israel program. Grants of up to \$4,000  
are available, though individuals who  
previously received a Teen Israel Ex-  
perience Grant may be eligible for up to  
\$1,000. Like the teen grant, funds are  
sent directly to the program provider and  
do not cover travel or incidental costs.  
Need-based scholarships of \$1,000 are  
also offered, and applications are re-  
viewed on a rolling basis.

Applications for both grants  
are available at [jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund](http://jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund). For further  
information, contact Lorraine Wolf at  
[lwolf@jcpmemphis.org](mailto:lwolf@jcpmemphis.org). [HW](#)

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## The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

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

Monday, November 10

Special Speaker Program

Tal Nezry, MJCC Community Shlucha

Topic: The Day the Hostages Were Released in Israel

Tal was a behavioral diagnosis scientist in the Air Force. The tremendous effect it had in Israel was amazing. This will be one of the most interesting talks of the year. As the room is small, please make reservations to make sure that everyone has a seat.



Wednesday, November 12

Field Trip to Hillels of Memphis

Hillels of Memphis enriches the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world. Hillel envisions a world where every student is inspired to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning, and Israel. As a pluralistic Jewish student organization, Hillels of Memphis strives to make this vision a reality at University of Memphis and Rhodes College. A student's involvement with Hillel is one of the strongest predictors of future Jewish leadership – stronger than Jewish day school enrollment, Jewish camp experiences or membership in a Jewish youth group. As the leading authority on Jewish campus life, Hillel reaches, engages and equips tomorrow's leaders today. This should be a great opportunity to see the excitement that Hillel creates on college campuses. We will have a personal tour by Phoenix Goldberg, the Hillels of Memphis director. Dessert refreshments will be served following the tour! Come for the daily lunch at the MJCC and join us on the MJCC bus for the tour, leaving at 12 p.m. This should be a fun excursion.

Wednesday, November 12

Help with Medicare part D for 2026

The staff from the Tennessee Department of Aging will help people with their Medicare part D for 2026. This is a free service that they provide every year. They will be at MJCC from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. No appointments are necessary. Please bring a list of all medications, dosage and frequency. There may be a wait, so please come as early as possible.

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

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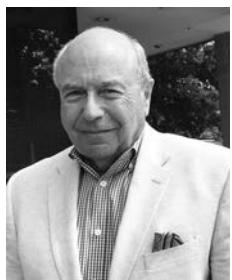


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## Your Health Preparing for the Holidays?

Healthy Holiday Tips: How to Stay Well, Eat Smart, and Feel Your Best By Cindy Katz, DNP

The holiday season is just around the corner! Whether you're hosting a celebration or traveling to visit friends and family, this time of year brings joy, connection—and often, the temptation to overindulge. Maintaining your health during the holidays doesn't have to be stressful.

### 1. Bring a Nutritious Dish

When attending a gathering, consider bringing a healthy option, such as a mixed green salad, roasted vegetables, or a lean protein dish. This guarantees you'll have something nourishing to eat and helps others make healthier choices too.

**Tip:** Include colorful produce rich in antioxidants—like berries, spinach, and sweet potatoes—to support immune function and fight inflammation.

### 2. Eat Mindfully and Listen to Your Body

Your body often needs about 20 minutes to recognize fullness. Eat slowly, savor your food, and stop before you feel overly full. Overeating can lead to indigestion, fatigue, and blood sugar spikes, leaving you feeling sluggish.

**Medical Insight:** People with diabetes or metabolic syndrome should pay special attention to portion sizes and carbohydrate intake to prevent post-meal glucose surges.

### 3. Practice Portion Control

Start with small servings and use the "plate method:"

½ plate of fruits and vegetables  
¼ plate lean protein (like turkey or fish)  
¼ plate whole grains or complex carbs

This helps balance nutrients, stabilize blood sugar, and prevent overeating.

**Tip:** Avoid "saving calories" all day for one large meal—it can lead to excessive hunger and poor food choices later.

### 4. Stay Active Together

Encourage your family or guests to go for a post-meal walk or play an outdoor game. Even light activity improves digestion, circulation, and mood.

**Medical Insight:** Studies show a short 15–20-minute walk after eating can reduce blood sugar spikes and improve cardiovascular health.

### 5. Stay Hydrated

Drinking plenty of water throughout the day can help curb hunger and prevent dehydration.

**Tip:** Keep a water bottle handy and drink a glass before meals. Add lemon or cucumber for flavor without calories.

### 6. Be Mindful of Liquid Calories

Festive beverages such as sweetened lattes, and cocktails can be surprisingly high in calories and sugar.

**Healthier Choices:** Try sparkling water with fresh fruit, herbal tea, or a light spritzer made with sparkling water and a splash of cranberry juice.

**Medical Insight:** Excess sugar from beverages contributes to weight gain, insulin resistance, and inflammation.

### 7. Support Emotional Health

While holidays are joyful, they can also bring stress or feelings of loss. Take time for self-care—rest, meditation, or connecting with supportive friends.

**Tip:** If you feel persistently down or anxious, speak with your healthcare provider. Mental health is just as important as physical health.

### 8. Prioritize Preventive Care

Don't skip routine checkups, flu shots, or other vaccinations. Winter months bring increased exposure to viruses, and staying up to date can help protect you and your loved ones.

**Medical Insight:** A strong immune system, supported by adequate sleep, balanced nutrition, and hydration, helps your body fight off seasonal illnesses.

### 9. Sleep and Stress Management

Holiday schedules can disrupt sleep patterns. Aim for 7–8 hours of rest per night to allow your body to recover and regulate hormones that control appetite and mood.

**Tip:** Create a calming bedtime routine—limit screens, dim the lights, and practice meditation or deep breathing before sleep.

### 10. Enjoy in Moderation

If you indulge in your favorite holiday meal or dessert, enjoy it guilt-free. One day of celebration won't undo your progress. The key is to return to healthy habits the next day.

Stay healthy, stay active, and celebrate the season with balance and gratitude. HW

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# Maker Mania: A Day of Kid Creativity at Bornblum

Creativity is taking center stage at Bornblum Jewish Community School. On Sunday, November 23, 2025, from 1-4 p.m., families are invited to Maker Mania: A Day of Kid Creativity – a free, hands-on community event designed to spark imagination, inspire innovation and celebrate the joy of making.

Maker Mania will fill Bornblum's new Design Hallway with creative energy as children ages 3-12 explore stations that blend art, technology and problem-solving. From laser-cut menorahs and chocolate babka bear molds to printmaking, sound and video exploration, and a prototype playground, every space will invite young makers to roll up their sleeves and bring their ideas to life.

The event showcases Bornblum's growing Design Thinking Program, which teaches students to imagine, test and build solutions for real-world challenges. This expansion of design spaces was made possible through generous grants from Legacy Learning Labs and the Herbert Shainberg Foundation, whose commitment to creative learning continues to open new doors for young innovators.

"We want every child to feel like an inventor," said Daniel R. Weiss, Ed.D., Bornblum's head of school. "Maker Mania gives kids the chance to dream big, explore boldly and see how creativity connects to the world around them."

Design thinking is at the heart of

Bornblum's educational philosophy – an approach that encourages curiosity and hands-on learning across all grades. At Maker Mania, families will see this in action as students and visitors tinker, test ideas and celebrate both the process and the product of creation. Each activity station is built to show that design isn't just about art or science – it's about learning how to think differently.

"Our new design labs are changing how children learn," shared Jill Cross, Bornblum's director of curriculum and instruction. "They're building confidence, creativity and teamwork every single day."

In addition to the fun, Maker Mania offers families a welcoming introduc-

tion to Bornblum. Visitors can meet teachers, explore the new design spaces and see firsthand how Bornblum blends academics with innovation. Whether families are new to the school or long-time friends, everyone is invited to experience this afternoon of creativity and community.

"When children are free to make and explore, they discover their own potential," said Miriam Beeber, a member of Bornblum's design faculty. "That's what Maker Mania is really about – celebrating imagination together."

Maker Mania is free and open to everyone, but registration is required. Families can register at [www.bornblum.crowdchange.co/maker](http://www.bornblum.crowdchange.co/maker). **HW**

## Why the Middle School Years in Jewish Day School Matter So Much

*By Daniel R. Weiss, Head of School, Bornblum Jewish Community School*

Parents often ask me why I believe the Middle School years in a Jewish Day School are so important. Years ago, when I taught Jewish history and text to Middle Schoolers, I saw firsthand how powerful those years can be. I watched students grow in confidence, identity, and community. Those experiences built deep, lasting relationships that I still have with many of my former students today. That's why I've devoted my career to schools that include Middle School – it's a truly transformative time.

When parents think about whether to keep their children in Jewish Day School through Middle School, I often hear similar concerns:

- Our school feels too small.
- It's not like the "real world."
- My child needs stronger sports opportunities.
- Or my personal favorite: You've done such a great job – our child is al-

ready ready for what's next.

These are all thoughtful concerns. But after decades of watching what happens when students stay – or leave – I believe the benefits of a Jewish Day School Middle School far outweigh any challenges. Let me share my thinking with you about these concerns.

### "We want our child in a bigger school."

Many families feel drawn to the idea of a large school, especially as their children get older. But when it comes to Middle School, smaller is actually better. A smaller environment means your child gets personal attention. Teachers can adjust lessons to meet each student's needs, and no one slips through the cracks.

Instead, students form deep, genuine connections – with their peers and with adults who truly know them. Those relationships help kids build confidence,

resilience, and self-advocacy skills that carry them through high school and into productive lives.

Middle School is a time of enormous emotional and developmental change. Being in a nurturing, attentive community during these years helps students learn to self-advocate and make safe and healthy choices based on a value system that is a powerful tool for their growth.

### "Our child needs to experience the 'real world.'"

Let's be honest – the "real world" can be overwhelming and scary. It's full of social pressures, online drama, and sometimes harsh realities. Our kids will spend plenty of time in that world. Middle School should be a place where they can grow stronger before facing it head-on.

In Jewish Day School, students explore identity in a safe and supportive environment. They learn about antisemitism and how to respond to it thoughtfully and confidently. They study Israel's history and modern society, culminating with the unforgettable eighth-grade trip to Israel.

By the time they move on to high school, they don't just know who they are – they're ready to navigate the "real world" with purpose and pride. Families who stay through eighth grade consistently tell us how grateful they are that they did.

### "My child loves sports."

It's true – many Jewish Day Schools, including Bornblum, don't have extensive competitive sports programs. But that doesn't mean our students miss out. Our kids play in leagues at the MJCC and join competitive teams across the city. We celebrate their achievements both inside and outside of school. Those sports experiences give them social opportunities, chances to practice teamwork, and a gentle introduction to the wider community. They get to "dip a toe" into the real world before jumping in the deep end while they are still just learning to swim.

### "My child is ready to be a leader."

Exactly – and that's why Jewish Day School Middle School is the best place for them.

We don't just talk about leadership; we give students real opportunities to practice it. By Middle School, our students lead Kabbalat Shabbat, assemblies, and school events. They mentor younger students, plan programs, and take charge of passion projects through Design Thinking.

Students who transfer to larger schools for Middle School often fall back into the shadows. Leadership opportunities can be limited or reserved for a few, and those that do exist are shared by a much larger pool of students resulting in fewer opportunities for each

student. In Jewish Day Schools, every Middle Schooler has a chance to shine. And when they move on to high school, they often become core student leaders – because they've already been leading for years.

### "We want to make the high school transition earlier."

Transitions are part of growing up – but too many can be destabilizing. Moving schools after fifth grade adds an unnecessary transition during a time when kids crave consistency.

Even in larger private schools, students still have to adjust to new buildings and expectations multiple times between Lower, Middle and High School. At Bornblum, students make one transition – from eighth grade straight to high school.

And they make it beautifully. Our graduates tell us how smooth their high school transitions feel. They're confident, grounded, and academically prepared. They know who they are, what they believe, and how to handle pressure and choices responsibly. They make friends easily, excel in sports, music, and academics, and often tell us they've already learned high school materials at Bornblum. Students who complete Jewish Day School score high on ACTs, SATs, and AP exams, and they get into outstanding colleges and universities.

So why do I believe so strongly that students should spend Middle School in a Jewish Day School? It is because the Middle School years – grades six through eight – are some of the most important and challenging in a child's life. It's when they begin to think independently, form opinions, and explore who they want to become. In a Jewish Day School, they do all of that in a community that celebrates their values, strengthens their identity, and keeps them safe – physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Middle School is a bridge – between childhood and the young adult your child is becoming. In a Jewish Day School, that bridge is built on purpose, belonging, and pride. Surrounded by teachers who see them, friends who know them, and a tradition that anchors them, students grow into young people who lead with courage and compassion. These are the years when they don't just learn who they are; they begin to believe they can shape the world around them – and that's the kind of education that lasts a lifetime.

### Further Reading:

"Inside Jewish Day Schools: How should North American Jews be educated?"

"Five reasons why a Jewish education in the middle grades prepares students for success."

"Why Jewish Day Schools?"

"Seven Advantages of the Immersive Nature of Jewish Day Schools." **HW**

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# Silverfield Named to Paul "Bear" Bryant Coach of the Year Watch List

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (Oct. 15, 2025) – University of Memphis head football coach Ryan Silverfield has been named to the Paul "Bear" Bryant Coach of the Year watch list.

Twenty-eight college football coaches make up the American Heart Association's 2025 Paul "Bear" Bryant Coach of the Year Award watch list, a list of current coaches in consideration for the annual top honor. The award is given each January to a college football coach for contributions that make the sport better for athletes and fans alike by demonstrating grit, integrity and a winning approach to coaching and life – both on and off the field.

Silverfield has led the Tigers to a 6-0 start this season, the best since the 2015 season, and was the first program this season to become bowl eligible. During his time at the helm at Memphis, Silverfield has racked up 48 wins – the most by any Memphis coach in that span – and has helped the Tigers to 11 consecutive bowl appearances, the seventh-longest active streak nationally and the longest outside Power Four conferences.

This season, Memphis is ranked in the top 25 in the nation in red zone offense (1st), passes intercepted (6th), defensive touchdowns (9th), rushing offense (10th), teams tackles for loss (11th), scoring offense and red zone defense (13th), rushing defense (15th), time of possession and scoring defense (16th), punt return defense (17th), fewest penalties (19th) and first downs defense (25th).

Silverfield is one of four American Conference coaches named to the list, including Alex Golesh (South Florida), Brian Newberry (Navy) and Jon Sumrall (Tulane).

Now in its 40th year, the Coach of the Year award winner will be presented Wednesday, January 21, 2026, during the Association's annual Paul "Bear" Bryant Coach of the Year Awards ceremony, in Houston, Texas. The ceremony, presented by Memorial Hermann Health System, will be broadcast on the CBS Sports Network.

The watch list, finalists and Coach of the Year recipient are voted on by the National Sports Media Association, the Bryant Awards' Executive Leadership Team and the Bryant Family.

The 2025 Watch List includes (in alphabetical order):

Bret Bielema – University of Illinois – Big Ten Conference  
Curt Cignetti – Indiana University – Big Ten Conference  
Mario Cristobal – University of Miami – Atlantic Coast Conference  
Ryan Day – The Ohio State University – Big Ten Conference

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Kalen DeBoer – University of Alabama – Southeastern Conference  
Eliah Drinkwitz – University of Missouri – Southeastern Conference  
Tony Elliott – University of Virginia – Atlantic Coast Conference  
Mike Elko – Texas A&M University – Southeastern Conference  
Matt Entz – Fresno State University – Mountain West Conference  
Willie Fritz – University of Houston – Big 12 Conference  
Alex Golesh – University of South Florida – American Conference  
Josh Heupel – University of Tennessee – Southeastern Conference  
Brian Kelly – Louisiana State University – Southeastern Conference  
Brent Key – Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) – Atlantic Coast Conference  
Lane Kiffin – University of Mississippi – Southeastern Conference  
Dan Lanning – University of Oregon – Big Ten Conference  
Clark Lea – Vanderbilt University – Southeastern Conference  
Joey McGuire – Texas Tech University – Big 12 Conference  
Dan Mullen – University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Mountain West Conference  
Brian Newberry – United States Naval Academy – American Conference

Lincoln Riley – University of Southern California – Big Ten Conference  
Scott Satterfield – University of Cincinnati – Big 12 Conference  
Ryan Silverfield – University of Memphis – American Conference  
Kalani Sitake – Brigham Young University – Big 12 Conference

Kirby Smart – University of Georgia – Southeastern Conference  
Jon Sumrall – Tulane University – American Conference  
Brent Venables – University of Oklahoma – Southeastern Conference  
Kyle Whittingham – University of Utah – Big 12 Conference **HW**

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# Your Best Self

## A monthly column by Greg Graber (Graber Performance Coaching LLC)

### "Coach Yourself Up"

I was working with a professional soccer player the other day. No matter how hard she tried, she kept messing up. I asked her what she was thinking while this was happening, and she said, "I wanted to quit, because I was having negative thoughts, like I wasn't good enough to be on the team."

Her situation is not uncommon. Often when we feel like we have failed at something or have fallen short on a task, that little voice in our head (the ego) belittles us.

This happens because it is the ego's job to protect us from threats, whether real or imagined. The ego wants us to avoid what it considers to be dangerous or embarrassing situations. The ego's intentions are in the right place, but it often goes overboard. From an evolutionary perspective, the ego, by always protecting us from perceived "right around the corner" dangers, has helped our species to survive for thousands of years. This was especially helpful in primitive times when our ancestors feared being attacked by a rival tribe or a pack of large stampeding animals.

However, in today's modern society, we don't have to worry about being on

"red alert" for daily survival, but we are still wired this way.

So, what can we do about it, you ask? We can start paying attention to what our ego or inner voice sounds like when we get stressed out. It's important that we do not try to resist it. This will only make the voice stronger. If we find that the voice is being harshly critical of us when something isn't going our way, we can do what I told my soccer player to do: "Coach yourself up."

When I told her this initially, she looked at me as if I were crazy. Then I explained it by asking her this, "How do you speak to a teammate that is having a rough time on the field?" She responded by saying, "I encourage them." I told her that's what I wanted her to do with herself from now on. It makes no sense that when we mess up, we are hard on ourselves, but when a teammate messes up, we try to lift them up. We need to start doing this with ourselves as well.

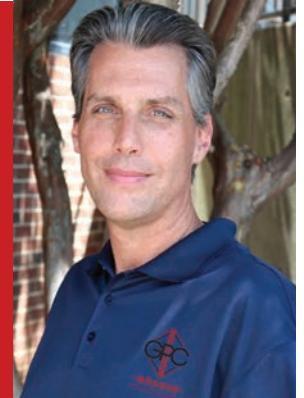
Don't get me wrong. I like that she is not happy when she makes a mistake on the pitch. This means she is competitive, and soccer is meaningful to her. However, I want her to get upset about it, process it quickly, coach herself up,

and move on.

This obviously has practical implications that reach far beyond the soccer pitch. We can't always depend on others to lift us up when we need it, but we can learn to become more self-sufficient at doing it for ourselves. It's a self-regulation skill that is worth practicing, because while we can't always control what happens to us, we can control our response. There is great power in this. **HW**



**Greg Graber**, the author of *Slow Your Roll-Mindfulness for Fast Times*, is an internationally respected coach who helps teams, schools, organizations and individuals thrive. From NBA coaches to soccer moms, he offers mental performance coaching, wellness counseling and executive coaching. For more information (and *The Hebrew Watchman* discount), email Greg at [info@greggraber.com](mailto:info@greggraber.com), or visit his website at [www.greggraber.com](http://www.greggraber.com).



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## FBI Stops 'Potential Act of Terror' in Michigan Ahead of Halloween

By Aaron Bandler

(JNS) – Kash Patel, director of the FBI, told JNS that the federal bureau stopped a "potential act of terror" last Friday via "swift action and close coordination with our local partners."

"The vigilance of this FBI prevented what could have been a tragic attack, and thanks to their dedication, Michigan will have a safe and happy Halloween," the agency leader told JNS.

Patel stated on social media that "multiple subjects" were arrested. Me-

dia reports circulated that the alleged plot was tied to ISIS. (JNS sought comment on that from the FBI.)

Jordan Hall, public affairs officer for the FBI Detroit field office, told JNS that "members from the FBI in Michigan were present in the cities of Dearborn and Inkster this morning conducting law enforcement activities."

"There is no current threat to public safety," Hall said. **HW**

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# The Bronfman Fellowship Announces Applications are Open for Its 40th Cohort Deadline: December 2, 2025

**Renowned Program Embarking on 40th Year of Transformative Program for Intellectually Curious High School Students from Diverse Jewish Backgrounds**

New York, N.Y. – October 2025. The Bronfman Fellowship is pleased to announce that applications are now being accepted for its historic 40th cohort. Every year, The Fellowship selects 26 outstanding North American teenagers from a wide range of Jewish backgrounds for a free, intellectually challenging year of programming, beginning with an immersive summer experience in the U.S. and Israel in between the Fellows' junior and senior years of high school. For nearly 40 years, the program has educated and inspired exceptional young Jews to have a significant impact on the world as community builders, deep thinkers, moral voices and cultural creators. The nonprofit Fellowship was founded by Edgar M. Bronfman, z"l, formerly CEO of the Seagram Company Ltd. and a visionary Jewish philanthropist.

Applications for the 2026 Fellowship are due December 2, 2025, and are available online at [bronfman.org](https://bronfman.org). High school students in the U.S. and Canada who identify as Jewish and who will be in 11th grade in the fall of 2025 are eligible to apply. The Bronfman Fellowship is a pluralistic program for Jews of all backgrounds; prior Jewish education is not required.

"The Fellowship is an opportunity for dynamic personal and intellectual growth in a group of carefully chosen teens," said Becky Voorwinde, CEO. "In a world that is increasingly polarized and divided, we seek to increase communication and understanding between young people from across the spectrum of Jewish life, including fostering bonds between Jews in North America and Israel. This program serves as a creative force that has inspired some of our best Jewish young adults to become leaders in their communities, and to develop their unique talents to change the world for the better."

"My father, Edgar M. Bronfman, placed enormous faith in young people's ability to see the world not just as it is, but as it ought to be," said Adam R. Bronfman, president of The Samuel Bronfman Foundation. "He believed that young people energized by their Judaism were best equipped to both shape a Jewish 'Renaissance' and improve the world."

For the past three decades, Bronfman Fellows have built a pluralistic community through a transformative, intellectual and deeply personal journey in which they have the opportunity to see the world through a lens broader than their own. Fellows expand their perspectives as they build community with those representing different backgrounds, worldviews and approaches to Jewish life and practice. Inspired by a stellar faculty of rabbis and educators, Fellows explore a wide range of Jewish texts, from classic religious works to contemporary poetry and philosophy, using these sources to engage with stimulating existential questions and achieve a deeper understanding of themselves and one another. Bronfman educators create a welcoming space where Fellows can explore ideas freely, share diverse perspectives and have challenging conversations built on openness and respect.

In addition to learning with faculty members, Fellows also have the unique opportunity to engage with speakers who are leading intellectuals, artists and religious and cultural leaders. Past speakers have included journalist Mat-

ti Friedman; author and professor Dr. Mara Benjamin; musician and Yiddish scholar Anthony Russell; and Torah scholar Dr. Avivah Zornberg. Additionally, Fellows participate in the Fellowship's arts tracks: workshops in areas including poetry, dance, drama, visual narrative and music, taught by leading innovators in the field of Jewish art. Requiring no previous training, the workshops allow Fellows to immerse themselves in creating art, providing deeper context for understanding the lives and narratives of others and empowering them to add their voices to the rich tapestry of Jewish culture and ideas.

The Fellowship year begins with extensive programming in the U.S. and a 10-day trip to Israel, where the Fellows interact with a group of exceptional Israeli peers who were chosen through a parallel selection process by the Israeli branch of the Fellowship, Amitei Bronfman. Following their immersive summer, Fellows have monthly virtual meetings and two in-person seminars in the U.S., in which they explore major themes in Jewish life, and embark on projects to bridge the ideas and questions from their Bronfman summer with their daily lives and home communities.

The Bronfman Fellowship alumni community includes some of today's leading Jewish voices. There are now over 1,500 Bronfman Fellowship alumni across North America and Israel. Among them are nine Rhodes Scholars, four former Supreme Court clerks, and 20 Fulbright Scholars. Leaders of note among Fellowship alumni include Daniel Handler, a.k.a. Lemony Snicket, author of the best-selling "A Series of Unfortunate Events" children's books; Jonathan Safran Foer, author of "Everything Is Illuminated;" and Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdahl, the first woman to be named Senior Rabbi at New York's Central Synagogue and the first Asian-American person to be ordained as a rabbi and cantor. Others include Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, renowned opera singer; Anne Dreazen, principal director for Middle East Policy at the Department of Defense; Dara Horn, author of "People Love Dead Jews;" Itamar Moses, Tony award-winner for "The Band's Visit;" Raphael Rosen, co-founder and CEO of Carbon Lighthouse; and Rabbi David Wolkenfeld of the Ohev Sholom Congregation in Washington D.C. Alumni also include entrepreneurial Jewish leaders who have founded organizations like Keshet, Sefaria and YidLife Crisis; and serve in central leadership roles at major organizations like The Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, the Jewish Women's Archive, Central Synagogue, Hillel International and The Foundation for Jewish Camp, to name a few.

Our Israeli alumni have also ascended to positions of influence in government, civil groups, the private sector and cultural institutions. Amitei Bronfman alumni include attorneys at the State Justice Department, noted journalists, successful filmmakers (including a Tribeca Film Festival winner), political advisers to Members of Knesset, members of elite IDF units and university lecturers.

To learn more about The Bronfman Fellowship, and to apply, visit <https://bronfman.org/>. **HW**

## OBITUARIES



**Rhonda Leigh Saslawsky**

It is with deep sorrow that we announce the passing of Rhonda Leigh Saslawsky on October 26, 2025. Rhonda passed away peacefully, surrounded by her loving family and friends.

Rhonda was born on May 7, 1957, in Little Rock, Arkansas. She was raised in Memphis, Tennessee, where she attended White Station High School. Rhonda excelled academically and was admired by her peers, being voted Basketball Queen. A young woman of remarkable grace and beauty, she was crowned Junior Miss Tennessee during her high school years.

Rhonda continued her education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she majored in marketing and advertising. During her undergraduate years, she won a national competition that led her to her dream job at Leo Burnett Advertising in Chicago, Illinois, marking the beginning of a distinguished professional journey.

After beginning her career at Leo Burnett, Rhonda thrived as a media buyer and account executive, managing national campaigns. After seven years, she accepted the position of director of marketing for Morton Salt, a division of the Morton Thiokol Company.

When Rhonda and her husband relocated to Memphis to pursue his medical career, she joined Archer Malmo Advertising and led a national marketing campaign. She later served as executive assistant to the president of Kraft Food Ingredients.

After taking a brief hiatus from the corporate world to raise her children, Rhonda redirected her talents toward real estate, earning her license and luxury market certification with Keller Williams Realty. She built lasting relationships with clients who admired her integrity, professionalism and warmth. To her clients, she was not just buying and selling houses but helping them to create a home. Rhonda continued her work there until illness required her to retire.

### Constance (Connie) Furchgott Solmon

Constance (Connie) Furchgott Solmon of Memphis passed away on October 30, 2025, at the age of 73. She was predeceased by her parents, Charles and Jane Furchgott of Savannah, Georgia, and is survived by her husband, William (Billy) Solmon, and her brother, Charles Furchgott, Jr. and his wife, Lynda.

While incapacitated for over 30 years, Connie is remembered by those who loved her as a vibrant, caring and unselfish individual. She is and will be missed.

Services will be held graveside at 12:30 p.m. on March 8, 2026, at Bonaventure Cemetery, 330 Bonaventure Road, Savannah, Ga. In lieu of flowers, the family requests charitable donations to Congregation Mickve Israel, Savannah, Ga., Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab, or a charity of your choice.. **HW**

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Rhonda was deeply committed to her community. She was an active member of the Memphis Jewish Federation, where she served on several committees, organized major fundraising events and was recognized as a Lion of Judah.

Rhonda and her husband participated in several missions to Israel, experiences that held deep personal meaning for her. During one of those trips, she was inspired to bring an Israeli fashion show to Memphis. With her characteristic enthusiasm, she empowered many of her friends to model in the show, helping to make it a joyful and successful event.

Rhonda also loved traveling the world with her husband, exploring new cultures and cuisines. They delighted in recreating favorite dishes from their travels, sharing them with family and friends around their table, an expression of warmth, creativity and love for connection.

Rhonda was the beloved daughter of Dr. Maurice Petrovsky and Sandra Cook both of whom preceded her in death. She was the second of four sisters: Teri Graber (Larry), Suzanne Baum (Scott) and Laurie Smith (Sheldon). Family was always at the center of Rhonda's life.

She married her husband, Mark Saslawsky, on December 26, 1982, while he was completing medical school. They moved together and lived in Chicago for five years and enjoyed theatre, fashion, cuisine and urban lifestyle. They brought their modern life and aesthetic back to Memphis where they raised their three sons, Adam Saslawsky (Emily Roberts Saslawsky), Jordan Saslawsky (Katerina Olsen Saslawsky) and Kevin Saslawsky, teaching them courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit.

One of Rhonda's greatest wishes was to dote over her grandchildren, Ellie, Michael and Maddie Saslawsky, the cherished children of Adam and Emily, as "Lovey." Unfortunately, her illness deprived her and her family of the full experience and those precious years together.

Rhonda will be remembered for her intelligence, beauty, strength and quiet determination. She faced every stage of life with grace and purpose, meeting challenges with courage and an unshakable sense of self. To her family and friends, she will always be remembered for her warmth, generosity and sense of style, a woman who brought light and energy wherever she went. Her presence filled every room, and her absence leaves a space that can never be replaced. Though illness took much, it never took her spirit.

Her funeral was held at Beth Sholom Synagogue Cemetery on October 27, 2025. **HW**

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# I Wonder About the Temple



*Editor's note:  
This story is being  
reprinted in memory  
of Ted Roberts in  
appreciation of his  
longtime service  
as a newspaper  
columnist.*

**By Ted Roberts**

(9/11/12) – I think G-d has a sense of humor. Pardon me if you think that's blasphemous, but until I learn more – when I stride through those pearly gates – I'll stick with that theory. Let's take one example. Our Creator, when he first meets up with our forefathers – especially Moses – plays one theme over and over. Do not, He says, mingle with the people of the land I shall give you. It is a repetitive theme. Don't eat with them (especially at the Annual Canaanite Carnival). Stay away from their cheeseburger booth; don't eat their fat pork cutlets. In fact, eat none of their improperly slaughtered livestock. But that's just the prelude to the ban on any cultural comingling. Obviously, stay away from their women. The point is non-arguable – treat the people of the land as though they are all infected with the plague. Separation is the theme. I am a jealous G-d, says the author of the Chumash. Don't mess with these barbarians and especially their gods. He obviously abhors their multiple deities.

Stick with me, says the Creator of Jews and Canaanites.

So many of the mitzvahs have as their purpose a fence between us and them. And it's not because Joe Philistine and Jimmy Jebusite are inferior creatures – it's because their god is not our G-d. Their religious system is barbaric; involving multiple sins such as Temple prostitutes, child sacrifice, idolatry, and other assorted immoralities. And besides that, remember – and you should have no trouble, since it's repeated eight times – remember, says the Chumash, "I am a jealous G-d."

Having said this, let's flip a few pages further in our Chumash and what do we find, but page after page of detailed instruction as to the home that our G-d shall occupy and detailed instructions on sacrifice. A Temple – like a celebrity's mansion in Hollywood Hills. It's a 20 million shekel spread – like Brad Pitt or George Clooney would order from some architect to the stars. Do you really believe that pleases Him? And in its insistence on sacrifice, it smells of paganism. Their hilltops and groves are polluted with temples.

Waitaminute – I thought we were supposed to stay away from this kind of theological excess. Our G-d is everywhere. But this is like the kind of residence that would please Baal and all his idolatrous kinfolks. And this estate is manned by a thousand-man union of

Levites. Hmmm, besides the smell of barbecued beef, I also smell the strong possibility of graft. I give you a lamb to sacrifice and you take the tenderloin home for supper and maybe the smoke of chuck steak ascends to Heaven. And remember only the smoke goes to Heaven. The chuck steak still sits – all crispy and juicy (unless you overcooked it) on the grill. It'll make a fine supper. If I was a Levite in 900 BCE, I would take a large cooler to work.

But the overall irony here is that the recipient of lamb smoke, ox smoke, and other delicacies tells us not to behave like Jebusites and their kin and then tells us in the case of sacrifice HOW to behave like the Jebusites and their kin. Flip some more pages to the Psalms and Prophets and we get lectures on sacrificial disapproval, biting sarcasm about our perception of a G-d who likes barbecue! For example, try Psalms, Chapter 50, verse 23 and Chapter 51, verse 16 who constantly din into our ears a civilized doctrine of a G-d who delights in goodness, not lamb smoke, and needs no physical home other than your heart.

Was a playful G-d being ironic when He specified His Hollywood hilltop accommodations? The prophets certainly think so. Maybe that's why we don't rebuild the Temple now. Maybe its day has faded in the light of today's Judaism. Ask your rabbi how the Temple, in the face of such biting criticism, has at-

# SCRIBBLER ON THE ROOF

By Ted Roberts

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tained such shining, historical stature in our dazzled eyes.

Why? And in line with today's Rabbinical-based instead of Temple-based morality, why not substitute goodness for barbecued chicken and various livestock. A good deed for a guilt offering. Generosity to our fellowmen to please our G-d. A specific list of golden deeds to make amends for our errors. Which do you think would please the King of the Universe more? Smoke or good deeds? We've transcended barbecue grills, don't you think?

*The syndicated humor of Ted, the Scribbler on the roof, has appeared in newspapers around the U.S., on National Public Radio, and numerous websites. HW*

## Alabama Man Arrested for Allegedly Planning Attacks on Synagogues

**By Grace Gilson**

(JTA) – An Alabama man was arrested last week for allegedly planning attacks on synagogues in Alabama and surrounding states as well as public figures.

Jeremy Wayne Shoemaker, 33, of Needham, Alabama, was arrested last Monday after the FBI and local agencies were alerted of "credible threats of violence" he made to local synagogues, the Clarke County Sheriff's Office announced in a post on Facebook.

During his arrest, law enforcement

also seized "weapons, more than a suitcase full of ammo, body armor and other items related to the plans of violence" in Shoemaker's possession, the office said.

Following an investigation, the Clark County Sheriff's office said they believed Shoemaker had "intentions of not being taken alive" and potentially planned to attack "public figures" as well.

While the sheriff's office said that federal charges were "likely," Shoemaker was locally charged during his arrest

with resisting arrest and certain persons forbidden to possess a firearm. It was not clear if prosecutors were seeking hate crime charges.

The Birmingham Jewish Federation appeared to call attention to Shoemaker's arrest in a post on Facebook, writing that there was "no credible threat to our community at this time."

"We are deeply grateful that swift and coordinated action by the FBI, state investigators and local law enforcement

prevented what could have been a devastating act of violence," the post read. "This incident is a sobering reminder that threats motivated by antisemitism and hate persist."

In 2023, at least five Jewish congregations in Alabama received emailed bomb threats. In 2024, the state saw 67 antisemitic incidents overall, including four incidents where Jewish institutions were targeted, according to the Anti-Defamation League's annual antisemitism audit. HW

## ISRAEL INSIGHTS Trust and Mistrust

**By Howard Weisband**

A mere two weeks after my last column describing "A Momentous Day" as our 20 living hostages returned home from over two years of mental and physical torture, and starvation in the terrorist tunnels of Gaza... the Trump 20-point plan may be unraveling.

The evil, duplicitous, cynical actions of Hamas continue during these days – their refusal to return all remains of deceased hostages and their attacks upon IDF soldiers outside the new agreed upon yellow line, resulting in the death of an Israeli soldier – all lead me now toward this conclusion.

That conclusion is bolstered by editor David Horovitz' strong column today (October 29) in The Times of Israel: "How to regain the upper hand over Hamas, as it withholds hostages' bodies, attacks IDF, plots revival."

Horovitz asks "Why is Hamas now manifestly stalling the return of the final deceased hostages....?"

"Well, for one thing, because it can: The signed October 9 agreement (is) a striking and inexplicable departure from the original unsigned September 29 Trump 20-point Gaza peace plan.... Where the 20-point plan conditioned the release of the prisoners on the release of all hostages, living and dead, the operative October 9 agreement did not, instead giving Hamas a degree of wiggle room..."

"And now that implementation of the Trump plan has begun, Hamas would like to believe that its cause – survival, revival and ultimate return – is best served by stalling on the release of the deceased hostages even as it resumes the deadly targeting of Israeli troops, reemerges and murders its (Gazan) rivals... and delays and ultimately prevents the implementation of the further elements in the Trump plan.

Readers know that I have attributed my concerns in great measure to a lack of western and more specifically American understanding of radical Islamist jihadist aims and tactics. Jihadist ideology toward Israel, America, Jews and Christians, and all infidels including moderate Moslems, is rooted in the current Iranian regime and its proxies: Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. Candidly, that ideology is rooted as well in language more acceptable to western culture and diplomacy in Qatar and Turkey. Even the governments of Egypt and Jordan are influenced by similar radical elements within their borders such as the Moslem Brotherhood.

President Trump has repeated often, including during his recent visit to Israel, that he is a deal maker... and that he is, often quite successfully. However, when he makes a business or political deal, as I've pointed out, it is within his

western culture that generally requires a win-win condition, even within his America first priority.

The Middle East more often is based in a win-lose negotiating culture that requires I win, you lose. Therefore, the evil, duplicitous, cynical actions of jihadist Hamas are quite normal in their culture, and thus they continue largely unabated.

President Trump today, speaking on Air Force One, said "We made a deal with Hamas, and they must behave. If they don't behave, we'll have to take them out, which we can do quite easily."

The October 9 agreement was signed in a framework of trust, a required part of any deal on the part of one partner working with the other. Did President Trump and his Middle East envoys, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner honestly trust Hamas? I don't know, but hopefully they all agreed to the deal with a basic sense of mistrust.

My research led me to a July 2016 article by Timur Kurian, Professor of Economics and Political Science at Duke University, published by Project Syndicate, titled "The Roots of Middle East Mistrust." Kurian has a Turkish American background and serves as a Professor of Islamic Studies at Duke. He writes: "The mistrust that pervades

Middle Eastern societies is hard to miss. As controlled experiments confirm, Arabs have substantially less trust in strangers, foreign or domestic, than, say, Europeans. This hampers progress on many fronts, from business development to government reforms."

He describes the causes as rooted in Islamic law and concludes: "What the Middle East needs today is not Islamic law, but wide-ranging efforts to rebuild trust among and within communities, and in private organizations and government. Reviving Islamic law would only deepen a trust deficit that is a key source of the Middle East's current economic underdevelopment and political failures."

Trust is critical to good government and diplomacy, however in the Middle East it must include an appropriate mistrust that allows for necessary adjustments.

*Howard Weisband served as Assistant Executive Director (1975-77) and Executive Director (1977-84) of the Memphis Jewish Federation. Following Aliyah with his family in 1986, he served as Secretary General of the Jewish Agency for Israel through 1997, and then in other senior professional positions in Israel. Now retired, he and Kayla live in Jerusalem. He can be reached at hweisband@gmail.com HW*



## Celebrating 30 Years of the Jewish Foundation of Memphis

# My Teen Israel Experience



**Jack Ardestanie participating in writing a letter in Torah in merit of a fallen soldier.**

By Jack Ardestani

Jack Ardestani, son of Dr. Allen and Sarah Ardestani, is a junior at the Cooper Yeshiva High School for Boys. Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund provided him with a Teen Israel Experience grant to offset the costs of his NCSY Kollel Israel program. All rising juniors and seniors are eligible for grants of up to \$3,000 to attend a recognized teen summer or semester program in Israel. Teen Israel Experience applications for Summer 2026 are open and can be accessed at [jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund](http://jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund)

This summer, I had the privilege of spending several weeks in Israel, participating in an immersive learning program. My time there wasn't just about studying, it was a perfect blend of education and exploration, combining the richness of learning with the incredible experience of touring a land that holds so much history and significance. Israel isn't just a country; it's the heart of our Jewish heritage, a place that connects us to generations past, and a land that has shaped the Jewish people for thousands of years. Every day there felt like a journey into the very soul of my identity.

One of the most powerful aspects of my time in Israel was the connection I felt to my ancestors. I had the opportunity to visit their kevers (graves) and their hometowns, places that had only existed in stories and prayers up until that point. Standing at the gravesites of righteous men and women, I could feel the weight of their lives and the legacy they left behind. The history of our people wasn't something distant or abstract; it was alive, tangible, and right in front of me. In those moments, I realized that I was not just visiting a place, but walking in the footsteps of my family, and that realization was both humbling and inspiring.

Every prayer I said while I was in Israel had a new meaning. There, on the land that had witnessed the prayers of generations, I felt that my tefilot (prayers) were not just heard but absorbed by the holiness that surrounded me. It was as if every word had greater weight, and every breath I took was filled with a deeper sense of connection to God. I felt the presence of

the Divine in a way I never had before, as if the land itself was a conduit for my spirituality.

Whether I was praying at the Kotel (Western Wall), at a holy site, or simply walking the streets of Jerusalem, I felt enveloped in something larger than myself, a powerful spiritual force that connected me to all those who came before me.

Israel is also a land of constant reminder of the bravery and sacrifice of the Jewish people. While touring the country, I was moved by the many monuments and memorials that honor the Israeli soldiers who fought – and continue to fight – so courageously for the land and the people. I visited sites that marked important battles, memorials to fallen soldiers, and places that told the stories of wars fought for the survival and freedom of Israel. I was struck by the incredible courage and resilience of these individuals, who, for generations, have defended the land so that Jews like me could visit, pray, and live in safety. The courage I saw in the soldiers, whether in the past or present, left me in awe, and I couldn't help but feel immense gratitude for their sacrifice.

One experience that truly stood out was my time in the Old City of Jerusalem, particularly how Shabbat was experienced there. In the Old City, Shabbat isn't just a day; it's a full, immersive experience. The city begins to shift as the sun sets on Friday evening – there's a noticeable change in the air, as if the whole place is preparing to welcome the Shabbat Queen. There's a palpable sense of excitement and reverence, and it's contagious. People from all walks of life, of every background, share in this anticipation. The streets quiet down, the bustling markets close, and there's an almost sacred stillness in the air as everyone turns inward to prepare for the holiness of Shabbat. Watching this slow, collective transition from the ordinary weekday into the spiritual embrace of Shabbat was a breathtaking experience.

Davening at the Kotel was one of the most profound moments of my life. The Kotel is not just a wall – it's a symbol of our connection to God and to our people's history. Standing there, with thousands of people around me, all united in prayer, I felt an overwhelming sense of spiritual unity. The energy of the place was unlike anything I've ever experienced. Each prayer felt more intense, more meaningful, as if the walls themselves were absorbing every word and prayer that was uttered. To be so close to the holiest place on earth, where so many generations of Jews have poured their hearts out to God, was a deeply moving experience. I felt spiritually alive in a way I had never felt before, and I left the Kotel with a sense of peace and purpose that stayed with me throughout my time in Israel and beyond.

Another deeply moving experience was the virtual tour of the Beit HaMikdash (the Holy Temple) that I participated in during my trip. The Holy Temple

has been lost for centuries, yet the impact it had on the Jewish people is still felt today. The tour wasn't just an explanation – it was an immersive journey into the heart of Jewish history. I learned how the Temple was laid out, how its rituals were performed, and how the holiness of that place was a focal point for the entire Jewish people. I could almost see in my mind's eye what it must have been like to stand in the Temple Courtyard, to offer sacrifices, and to be part of the immense spiritual energy that permeated the site. The virtual tour made history come alive, deepening my understanding of the importance of the Temple, and strengthening my longing for its eventual rebuilding.

One of the highlights of my trip was visiting Ma'arat HaMachpelah, the Cave of the Patriarchs. Being there, I felt as though I was standing at the crossroads of Jewish history, in a place where the founding figures of our faith – Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Leah – are buried. As I stood before their graves, I felt connected to these giants of our tradition. I was able to pray at each of their sites, reflecting on their lives and the values they embodied. Each patriarch and matriarch represent something unique, and I found that being in their presence brought me insights into how to live my life with greater purpose. It reminded me of the importance of faith, dedication and moral integrity in everyday life.

One of the most special moments during my trip came when I had the rare

opportunity to participate in the mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah. To be a part of such an important project, especially one that would be used by a Jewish community for generations to come, was an incredible privilege. I had a letter written in my name in the Torah, and the significance of this moment struck me deeply. It was as if my name, and my contribution, would be forever linked to the Torah, a sacred text that has been a guide for our people for thousands of years. This mitzvah felt like I was helping to preserve our heritage, ensuring that future generations would continue to learn from and be inspired by the words of the Torah.

Looking back, every part of my experience in Israel was profound and transformative. From the simple joy of waking up in the holiest country in the world, surrounded by my people, to the deeply spiritual moments of connection with my heritage, my faith and my history, I felt like I was in the closest proximity to purity I have ever been. The land, the people and the experiences all came together to create a sense of spiritual elevation and connection that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. My time in Israel wasn't just a summer trip – it was a life-changing experience that has encouraged me to strive to be the best Jew I can be, to live with intention and to always stay rooted in my heritage.

Thank you to Memphis Jewish Federation's Lemsky Endowment Fund for making my incredible NCSY Kollel experience possible. **HW**

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