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## Memphis Jewish Community Center Names Jeremy Weiser President & CEO



**Jeremy Weiser**

The Memphis Jewish Community Center (MJCC) announced in late De-

ember that Jeremy Weiser has been selected as its next president & chief executive officer. Weiser will become just the fifth chief executive in the MJCC's 77-year history.

His appointment was approved by a unanimous vote of the MJCC Board of Directors, following a unanimous recommendation from the CEO Search Committee.

Weiser is widely known throughout the community as a smart, passionate and mission-driven leader who believes deeply in the power of the MJCC to strengthen connection, inspire engagement and enrich Jewish life in Memphis.

"This is truly a full-circle moment for me," said Weiser. "The MJCC helped shape who I am, and I am deeply hon-

ored to be entrusted with leading an institution that means so much to me and to our community. I look forward to building on the strong foundation already in place and continuing the great work being done by our talented staff, dedicated board and passionate members as we move the MJCC forward together."

Weiser's connection to the MJCC began early. After his family moved to Memphis when he was a toddler, his father, Barrie Weiser, went on to serve three decades in transformative leadership roles at the MJCC. Jeremy quite literally grew up at the Center, giving him a lifelong connection to the organization and its mission.

Professionally, Weiser brings a rare

blend of national experience and deep institutional knowledge. His career includes leadership roles at the JCC in St. Louis and the Siegel JCC in Delaware, before returning to Memphis 12 years ago to serve as chief operating officer under President & CEO Larry Skolnick.

MJCC Board Chair Jacob Samuels expressed enthusiasm for the future under Weiser's leadership.

"I am incredibly excited to work alongside Jeremy as we continue to strengthen the MJCC's mission and impact," said Samuels. "His energy, vision and commitment to community will serve the MJCC well, and I am confident he will help ensure the JCC remains the center of Jewish life in Memphis for generations to come." **HW**

## Get Off Computer and Meet with Legislators, Police, Pro-Israel Activist Matthew Taub Tells Canadians



**Matthew Taub. Credit: Courtesy. By Dave Gordon**

(JNS) – As he observed a pro-Hamas convoy of cars roll past his quiet, north Toronto street, blaring Arabic music and Palestinian anthems one night in late 2023, Matthew Taub realized that he was done watching Jewish fear play out from the sidelines.

The Jewish recovery coach and addiction podcaster, who had just self-published a book and was quietly marking 18 years of sobriety, told JNS that he posted on social media, to tens of thousands of followers, that "we have to be unapologetically Jewish."

That phrase – "Unapologetically Jewish" – became the name of a national advocacy group that he created, challenging Canada's institutions, police and political class to protect Jews with the same urgency that they show toward other minorities.

In the weeks and months before Oct.

7, 2023, Taub's life revolved around coaching clients in recovery, running a popular mental health podcast and promoting his book on addiction.

The Hamas attack didn't trigger him to drink again, he told JNS. "I was triggered to the darkness, and I went dark," he said. Sleepless nights followed, as did the gnawing sense that Canadian Jews were increasingly exposed.

In mid-December 2023, pro-Hamas protesters gathered at the Highway 401 overpass at Avenue Road, close enough that their slogans and noise carried to Taub's home. He realized that the conflict had arrived at his doorstep.

Unable to sleep, Taub scrolled through social media feeds in the early morning hours, gathering police files on repeat protest attendees, whose faces he began to recognize each week. He was known in WhatsApp groups as a pro-

lific, behind-the-scenes organizer, but he stayed faceless online when sharing posts and videos.

That changed when he was asked to serve as lead marshal for a Toronto rally for the Israeli hostages in April 2024 – his first public, visible role in the country's burgeoning pro-Israel street movement.

At the rally, he filmed a protester, Razaali Bahadur, delivering what he said were "horrific statements." The next morning, Taub dug into Canada's criminal code and thresholds for hate speech. He called Project Resolute, the Toronto Police Service's hate task force, to ask if Bahadur's comments were prosecutable.

What followed stunned him, the Toronto native told JNS.

He said he filed a detailed complaint on a Tuesday, and police officers called that Thursday to say that Bahadur had been arrested on hate-crime charges. On Oct. 10, 2025, Bahadur was sentenced to a year in prison and two years probation.

B'nai Brith Canada said Bahadur had yelled "blood libel" things, including "that Jews enjoy killing children and are, as a collective, responsible for killing Jesus Christ."

Taub thinks the evidence he gathered put the offender on the police's radar, and that the conviction two months ago was the first in the country under that hate-speech provision, setting what he thinks is a precedent.

"Get down here and do it"

A stranger, who turned out to be Daniel Tate, founder and executive director of the nonprofit IntegrityTO, contacted Taub and said that he was the only Jew to attend monthly police board meetings.

"Stop doing the online stuff only and get down here and do it," Tate advised.

In the following meeting, Taub confronted Toronto police board members about how the police service had handled anti-Israel protests and Jewish safety. He did the same at seven more such meetings.

He clipped selections from the video streams of the meetings and posted them on social media, because "nobody was speaking for the Jewish community out loud," he told JNS.

Almost a year to the day after the first meeting he attended, Taub stood in Ottawa in October to announce the launch of Unapologetically Jewish and to reveal that the new organization had just served a sweeping legal challenge through the Human Rights Tribunal against Toronto, its police board and chief of police, as well as parallel institutions in Montreal and Quebec.

Led in Ontario by Taub's team and in Quebec by lawyer Jacki Lewis in collaboration with the Tafsik legal network, the complaint alleges systemic racism and antisemitism in the way law enforcement has handled anti-Jewish hate.

"I started Unapologetically Jewish because I've got tired of hearing, 'I'm scared, and I don't know what I need to do,'" he told JNS.

An important moment for Taub came when he shared a graphic suggesting that anti-Israel and Muslim groups held six times as many meetings with parliamentarians as did Jewish organizations.

As a response, Unapologetically Jewish registered as a non-profit with provincial and federal lobbying status from the outset, so that Taub and his team

(See Legislators Page 3)

# My Teen Israel Experience



Gavi Lichter camel riding.

By Gavriel Lichter

Gavriel Lichter, son of Rabbi Ian and Katie Lichter, 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 Mach Hach Ba’aretz 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 [jepmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund](http://jepmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund)

My time in Israel was not only incredibly fun but also profoundly meaningful. Before traveling to Israel this past summer, I already felt close to Hashem (God) and spiritually inspired, yet I had never been entirely comfortable in large groups of people. I tended to keep to myself and often felt shy in new social settings. As I prepared for the trip, I set a clear intention: to build as many friendships as I could and to grow as close as possible to Hashem through davening, Torah study, and the life lessons the experience would inevitably offer. The morning shiurim quickly became the cornerstone of each day. Each session was filled with insight and warmth, setting a positive tone and giving me strength and inspiration to approach the rest of the day with energy and gratitude.

As the summer unfolded, I began to notice a striking change within myself. Day by day, I felt myself becoming more and more of a “people person.” In the past, I had often preferred being alone,

but suddenly I found myself drawn to spending time with others – talking, learning, laughing, and connecting on a deeper level. I went from simply joking around with people to actively trying to make their days brighter – whether through kindness, encouragement, or a small gesture to show I cared. I started to realize how fulfilling it was to uplift someone else, even in small ways.

One of the highlights of the summer came on the final day when I shared a short thought with the group. To my surprise, several people told me afterward that they could see me becoming a public speaker in the future. Given that my dad is a rabbi and does it weekly, I could see myself doing that in the future. Their feedback planted a seed of confidence and possibility in me that I still carry. It taught me that words, when spoken sincerely, can have an impact and that perhaps I have something valuable to offer others.

Toward the end of camp, my counselor took me aside and shared some of the most uplifting words I had ever heard. His message – that I should keep being myself and never feel pressured to change for anyone – left a lasting impression. It affirmed the growth I had experienced that summer and reminded me to stay authentic even as I continue to evolve.

Throughout the trip, my friends also reminded me of qualities I hadn’t fully appreciated in myself. They told me that I have a genuinely good heart and a great sense of humor – two traits I will always treasure and strive to embody. These compliments, though simple, felt like confirmation of the person I was be-

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## Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Jan. 9, 2026 / 20 Tevet, 5786 .....4:47 p.m.  
Havdalah, Sat. Jan. 10, 2026 / 21 Tevet, 5786 ..... 5:47 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Shemot

coming and gave me even more motivation to live up to those values.

Looking back, I could not be more thankful for my time in Israel. It deepened my relationship with Hashem and drew me closer to Him. It helped me grow into a more open and confident person and filled me with gratitude for the friendships and lessons I gained. It is an experience I will never forget, and one I would do anything to relive.

Thank you to Memphis Jewish Federation’s Lemsky Endowment Fund for making my incredible Israel experience possible. **HW**

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**Legislators...**

(Continued From Page 1)

could walk into offices of parliamentarians and provincial parliamentarians as recognized advocates, rather than as individuals.

The organization is not set up as a charity, which allows Taub to be partisan when necessary and, he says, means that the government can't cancel it, as it has done with Jewish National Fund and Herut Canada.

Taub's docket of current files appears to reflect willingness to operate where others hesitate.

For five months, he has been working quietly on a legal response to Davide

Mastracci's "find an IDF soldier" list on the website the Maple, which shares personal information about those listed. He is also responding to its list of Greater Toronto area schools and camps that are linked to Canadian Israelis and Zionists.

"If we're going to do something, we have to make sure that we're going to win," he told JNS. "Because this sets precedence."

His group is also creating educational materials about anti-Zionism, which he said became more urgent when he learned that Palestinian Families in Canada secured a federal grant of about \$70,000 US dollars "purposely to promote anti-Zionism."

He is also meeting with federal and provincial legislators, working closely with Conservatives who have been "holding the water for Jews for years," he said. He aims to tell legislators, including those hearing from a Jew for the first time, "what Jews are dealing with, as well as what Western civilization is fighting against."

In December, Taub traveled to Israel for the first time in 40 years.

Standing at the Kotel at 52 – the same age his late father had been when the two visited the Kotel together – he wrapped tefillin and felt what he calls a full-circle moment of generations fighting for Israel.

The trip also reinforced his thinking that Canadians must stop venting privately.

"Every Jew, stop going on Facebook, stop going into the echo chamber, into these WhatsApp groups and complaining," he said. "Call your MP's office and go into their office."

He advises Jews and Israel supporters to come to police board meetings, ask for sit-downs with chiefs and division commanders and refuse to accept the "Palestinian tax," extra costs and anxiety that Jews bear to protect themselves from a globalized anti-Israel movement.

"We have to be as vocal as we can. We have to call it out," he told JNS. **HW**

**Mamdani Deletes Social Media Posts about Israel, Jew-Hatred from Mayoral Account**



New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani attends his Inauguration at City Hall on Jan. 1, 2026. Credit: Michael Appleton/Mayoral Photography Office.

(JNS) – Mark Goldfeder, director of the National Jewish Advocacy Center, wrote to Zohran Mamdani on the latter's inauguration day as mayor of New York City, informing him that he was violating city records law by deleting posts from his predecessor about Israel and about Jew-hatred.

"At a moment of unprecedented antisemitic intimidation, violence and exclusion in the city, the decision to erase official statements affirming the safety and protection of Jews is not merely tone-deaf; it is shameful," Goldfeder wrote on Jan. 1.

After the official mayoral account transitioned from Mamdani's predecessor, Eric Adams, screenshots circulated showing Mamdani's name appearing over Adams-era posts supporting Israel and condemning antisemitism. These posts were later deleted from the account.

Goldfeder noted that posts from the mayor's official social media account

"are not personal commentary, they are official City records," adding that, under New York law, "public records may not be destroyed or otherwise disposed of except pursuant to an approved records-retention schedule."

He called on the mayor to affirm the city's commitment "to protecting Jewish New Yorkers, not as a favor, but as a fundamental obligation of office."

"Your first days in office will define your administration," Goldfeder wrote. "This is not how that definition should begin."

U.S. Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon wrote in response to Goldfeder's letter that the attorney general's office "will be extremely vigilant as to any and all violations of religious liberties in NYC."

"We will investigate, sue, and indict as needed," she stated.

Along with the deletions, one of Mamdani's first actions in office was to revoke all executive orders issued since Sept. 26, 2024, which included the city's formal adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism and an order barring the city from participating in boycotts of Israel. **HW**

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# A YIDDISH CROSSWORD

By Erwin Williamson ©

*Let's try this again!*

*We tried this last week and it printed too small.*

*Yiddish has been the everyday vernacular of the Jewish diaspora for hundreds of years. Because it evolved primarily as a spoken language, the written spelling of Yiddish terms can vary from region to region. Keep this in mind when solving the puzzle – a schmo can be a shmo, already.*

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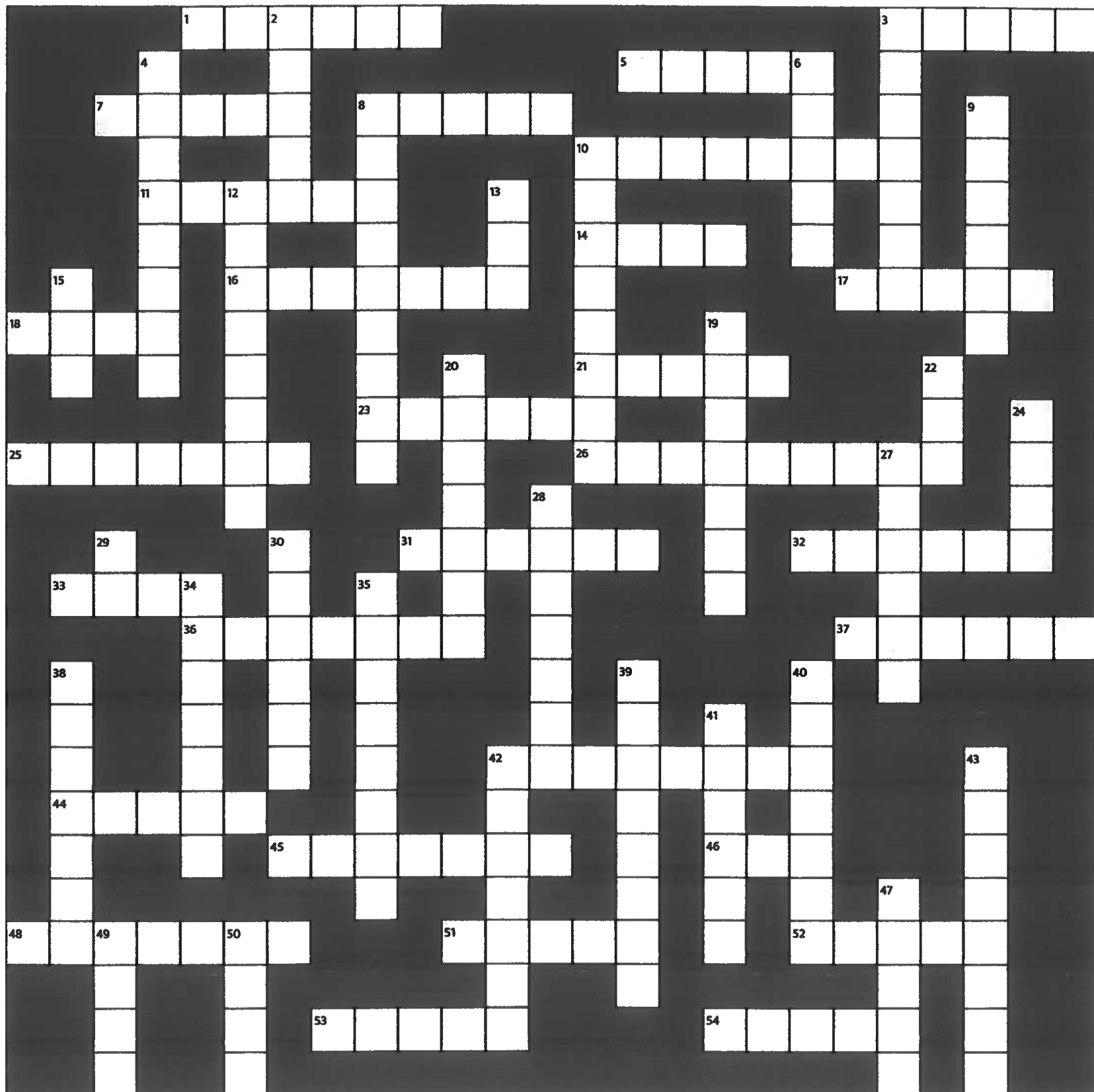
## ACROSS

- 1 a pest
- 3 Five Books
- 5 ill-mannered
- 7 a potato pancake
- 8 an expert
- 10 crazy
- 11 get nothing
- 14 be quiet!
- 16 little grandmother
- 17 to carry
- 18 a snack
- 21 expression of dismay
- 23 a detective
- 25 wedding canopy
- 26 triangular little cake
- 31 to paint or spread
- 32 a small, plain cookie
- 33 a bum
- 36 egg noodles
- 37 curls
- 42 comedian Jerry
- 44 a sales pitch
- 45 informal group of wandering musicians
- 46 exclamation of surprise
- 48 an insignificant person
- 51 order of the service
- 52 expression of admiration or astonishment
- 53 exile
- 54 term of respect for an older man

## DOWN

- 2 junk
- 3 term of endearment
- 4 confused
- 6 donut with a college education
- 8 insane
- 9 fit to eat or authentic
- 10 a big mess
- 12 system of Jewish mysticism
- 13 I'm not impressed
- 15 not a Jew
- 19 a teacher
- 20 an entertainer
- 22 an all-encompassing expletive
- 24 a yoke
- 27 an outdoor booth for Sukkot
- 28 stuffed fish
- 29 So?
- 30 a ritual bath
- 34 a braggart
- 35 a simpleton
- 38 bargain basement find
- 39 knock on wood!
- 40 analysis of the Holy Scriptures
- 41 a cry
- 42 coins
- 43 of poor quality, lousy
- 47 a crook
- 49 a person of great energy
- 50 the goat of a joke

**Answers on page 9**



# Learn About the Complicated Relationship Between Jews and Romans in Ancient Times at Beth Sholom Lehrhaus Lecture on January 13

The relationship between Jews and Romans in ancient times was full of contradictions, says Susan Satterfield, PhD, an associate professor and chair of Ancient Mediterranean Studies at Rhodes College. The community is invited to learn more about this complicated history when Dr. Satterfield discusses Judaism in the Roman World on Tuesday, January 13 at 7 p.m. as part of Beth Sholom Synagogue's popular Lehrhaus Lecture Series.

"In some ways, Judaism was respected and favored by the Roman State, which admired the antiquity of the Jewish religion and identified Yahweh with the Roman god Jupiter," Dr. Satterfield

says. "But antisemitism was also widespread in the Roman Empire. Rome sometimes enacted dramatic violence against the Jewish people, most famously in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE."

In her lecture, Dr. Satterfield will explore the myriad political and cultural tensions that surrounded Judaism in the Roman Empire. She will include not only Greek and Roman attitudes toward the Jewish people, but also the attitudes of the Jewish people toward Hellenism – the Greek culture that pervaded the ancient Mediterranean. She says both groups shaped each other, adding that "We will trace some ideas

– both positive and negative – that persist today."

Professor Satterfield, whose primary fields of research include Roman republican religion and history, earned her BA in Classics from the University of Alabama in 2002 and her PhD in Classics from Princeton University in 2008. She joined the Rhodes faculty in 2008.

Lehrhaus lectures at Beth Sholom are free and open to the community. Light refreshments are served. Lehrhaus at Beth Sholom takes its inspiration from The Free Jewish House of Learning, the school for Jewish studies and adult education founded by Franz Rosenzweig in Frankfurt in 1920. **HW**



Susan Satterfield, PhD, is Chair of Ancient Mediterranean Studies at Rhodes College.

# Your Health... Wellness Trends for 2026: How Are You Doing With Your New Year's Resolutions

By Cindy Katz, DNP

Happy New Year! As we close the chapter on 2025 and welcome 2026, it's the perfect moment to pause, reflect, and reassess. Did you set personal health goals or make any New Year's resolutions? If so, now is a great time to evaluate your progress – and refine your approach.

There is much to recap and refocus on as we enter 2026.

## Diet & Metabolic Health

### GLP-1 Receptor Agonists for Weight Loss:

Many individuals are using GLP-1RA medications such as semaglutide, liraglutide, dulaglutide, and tirzepatide to support weight loss and metabolic health. These therapies are highly effective, but long-term success also depends on maintaining behavioral habits – structured nutrition, resistance training, adequate protein intake, and ongoing follow-up with your healthcare team. How are you preparing to sustain your progress, especially if you taper or discontinue treatment?

### Sugar Intake Awareness:

Do you know how much added sugar you consume daily? Excess sugar contributes to insulin resistance, weight gain, fatty liver disease, and cardiometabolic risk. Monitoring your intake and choosing whole, unprocessed foods can significantly improve metabolic markers.

### Heart-Healthy Nutrition:

Are your dietary patterns supporting cardiovascular health? Emphasizing fiber-rich vegetables, lean proteins, omega-3 fats, and minimizing processed foods aligns with the American Heart Association's dietary guidelines and helps reduce long-term CVD risk.

### Exercise & Musculoskeletal Health

Regular physical activity remains one of the most impactful wellness strategies. Set your goal on getting a minimum of 150 minutes per week of cardiovascular exercise.

### Muscle and Bone Strengthening:

Are you incorporating strength training at least 2–3 times per week? Resistance exercises improve muscle mass, bone density, insulin sensitivity, and longevity.

### Mind–Body Practices:

Have you explored the restorative benefits of yoga? Yoga and Pilates enhance core stability, flexibility, and stress regulation through breathwork and improved vagal tone.

### Stress Management

How are you supporting your mental and emotional well-being?

Chronic stress increases cortisol, blood

pressure, systemic inflammation, and risk for cardiometabolic disease. "Lightening the backpack" may involve better boundaries, therapy, mindfulness practices, or simply making time for joy and rest.

### Sleep Health

Are you getting restorative sleep?

Technology – such as sleep apps,

smart mattresses, and wearable trackers – provides insight into sleep stages, heart-rate variability, and recovery. Understanding your sleep patterns can help uncover issues like poor sleep hygiene, insomnia, or symptoms of sleep apnea.

Consider all the elements that help you feel whole – physical health, emo-

tional stability, social connection, purpose, and joy.

Don't hesitate to reach out to your healthcare providers for individualized support. Partnering with professionals can give you the tools, accountability, and medical insight you need to make lasting changes. **HW**

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# Young Israel Shared Chanukah Donuts with IDF Soldiers



Happy IDF soldiers receiving the Sufganiyot that Young Israel shared with them for Chanukah.

By Rabbi Akiva Males

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

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

This Chanukah, YI once again partnered with [www.BasketstoIsrael.com](http://www.BasketstoIsrael.com) to supply active-duty IDF soldiers with Sufganiyot (donuts) to enhance their Chanukah. Thanks to this year's generous group of sponsors, YI was able to

share Sufganiyot with 100 soldiers at two different IDF bases!

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

A relative of mine delivered YIOM's donuts and sent me the following message:

*"We delivered the donuts today and the soldiers were thrilled. Many remarked how difficult it was to be very far from their families – especially on Chanukah. They were so happy to receive the fresh donuts, and they said that this went a long way towards helping them enjoy the Chanukah holiday."*

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

Young Israel of Memphis' Rabbi Akiva Males can be reached at [rabbi@yiom.org](mailto:rabbi@yiom.org) [HW](#)

# Memphis Jewish Federation's Community Relations Council



As part of its ongoing efforts to learn about and strengthen relationships with other communities in Memphis, Memphis Jewish Federation's Community Relations Council heard from Mauricio Calvo, president & CEO of Latino Memphis. He shared insights into Memphis's diverse and rapidly growing Latino community, which includes individuals from many countries and reflects a wide range of heritages, traditions and languages.

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# North Carolina Man Arrested for Alleged ISIS-Inspired Terror Attack Planned for New Year's Eve

Christian Sturdivant, 18, of Mint Hill, N.C., was arrested and charged with attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization after allegedly planning a terrorist attack in support of ISIS on New Year's Eve, the U.S. Department of Justice announced on Jan. 2.

According to the department, Sturdivant allegedly began communicating online with a covert law enforcement officer on Dec. 12, believing he was speaking to a member of ISIS. During those exchanges, Sturdivant told the individual that "I will do jihad soon" and sent a voice recording pledging support to ISIS.

Sturdivant also allegedly told the covert agent that he planned to attack a grocery store and a fast-food restaurant in North Carolina using knives and hammers.

On Dec. 29, law enforcement officers searched Sturdivant's residence and found handwritten notes titled "New Year's Attack 2026." The documents stated that he wanted to stab as many people as possible and included a "martyrdom op" section in which he wrote that he planned to attack police when they arrived at the scene so he could die as a "martyr."

In addition to the notes, authorities also seized hammers and knives from

under Sturdivant's bed.

Russ Ferguson, U.S. attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, said during a Friday press conference that, based on the seized notes, Sturdivant "was targeting Jews, Christians and LGBTQ individuals."

James C. Barnacle Jr., the special agent in charge of the FBI Charlotte field office, said at the press conference that Sturdivant was initially on the FBI's radar in January 2022, when he was in contact with an unidentified member of ISIS overseas via social media.

Barnacle said Sturdivant had received instructions to "dress in all black, knock on people's doors and attack them with a

hammer." Although Sturdivant did dress in black and leave his home with a hammer, his family intervened, and he subsequently underwent psychological care.

The FBI thought Sturdivant no longer had access to social media, per Barnacle. However, in December, the agency learned that a TikTok account expressing support for ISIS belonged to him.

"This investigation highlights the very real threat posed by people who self-radicalize online and are inspired by jihadist ideologies espoused by foreign terrorist organizations," Barnacle said.

Sturdivant, who remains in federal custody, faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted. **HW**

# Trump Vows U.S. Action If Iranian Regime Cracks Down on Protests

By Joshua Marks

(JNS) – The United States will intervene if Iran violently suppresses anti-government demonstrations, President Donald Trump warned last Friday.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump wrote that if "Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters," Washington will "come to their rescue," adding that the U.S. is "locked and loaded and ready to go."

Demonstrations over Iran's plunging currency and soaring inflation, the largest in three years, have widened nationwide and turned deadly as security forces clash with protesters.

Israel's Persian X account posted in Farsi in support of the protests, writing, "The rise of the lion-men and lion-women of Iran for the battle against darkness. Light is victorious over darkness."

The Israel Defense Forces is expediting preparations for a multi-front war with Iran in light of the internal unrest in the Islamic Republic, Hebrew media reported last Wednesday.

Trump said last Monday that his country would "knock the hell out of" Iran's government if it attempted to rebuild nuclear sites targeted by the United States and Israel in June. Trump spoke during

a press conference in Florida alongside visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In remarks to reporters, Trump agreed to military action alongside the Israel Defense Forces if Tehran continued with its missiles and nuclear activities.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian last Tuesday threatened a "harsh" response to possible renewed Israeli or U.S. attacks on its nuclear program or ballistic missile arsenal.

In an interview published last Saturday, Pezeshkian told an official publication of the Islamic Republic: "In my

opinion, we are in a full-fledged war with America, Israel and Europe. They do not want our country to stand on its feet."

Asked by JNS about Pezeshkian's war remarks, Blue and White Party leader Benny Gantz last Monday urged the international community to step up pressure on Iran, calling the Islamic Republic a "global" challenge and a direct threat to Israel.

"It seems as if the president of Iran is actually admitting that Iran is indeed what I said about it," Gantz, a former Israeli defense minister and IDF chief, said at a Knesset faction meeting. **HW**

# Former Israeli Hostages Engaged to Marry



Former captives Ilana Gritzewsky and Matan Zangauker at "Hostage Square" in Tel Aviv, during a rally calling for the release of Israelis held by Hamas in Gaza, Nov. 1, 2025. Credit: Miriam Alster/Flash90.

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Former Israeli hostage Matan Zangauker and his girlfriend, former hostage Ilana Gritzewsky, have become engaged.

Zangauker's mother, Einav Zangauker, who was one of the most vocal voices among the families of the hostages held in Gaza, posted a photo last Sunday night of Matan, 26, and Ilana, 32, drinking champagne in front of a "Will you marry me" sign inside a flower-bedecked wreath in the form of a heart.

"My picture of victory," Einav wrote. "Ilana & Matan."

A large guitar-shaped building in the background placed the photo at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel near Hollywood, Fla.

The couple were abducted separate-

ly from their home in Kibbutz Nir Oz during the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel.

Matan endured 738 days in captivity, while Ilana was released after 55 days, after which time she fought tirelessly along with Matan's mother for his release and that of all the hostages being held in Gaza.

The news of the engagement, coming three months after Matan was released from captivity, was also tweeted on Monday by Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

"Dear Matan and Ilan: From unimaginable pain you chose life, love and hope," Herzog wrote on X. "Your decision to build a life together is a moment of profound light for the people of Israel." **HW**

# Trump to JNS: If Israel had Wrong Prime Minister, it Wouldn't Exist

"He's a wartime prime minister," the U.S. president told JNS. "Israel, with other people, might not exist right now."

(JNS) – U.S. President Donald Trump credited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last Monday for guiding the Jewish state to victory over a "force the likes of which very few countries could have handled."

JNS asked Trump about his relationship with the Israeli premier.

"He's a wartime prime minister," Trump said of Netanyahu. "He's taken Israel through a very dangerous period of drama."

Standing alongside Netanyahu at a press conference outside the president's

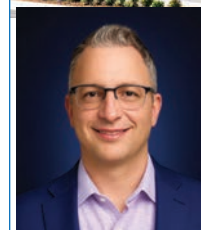
Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Fla., Trump said that under other leadership, Israel "might not exist right now."

"That's a pretty big statement, but it's true," Trump said. "If you had the wrong prime minister, Israel right now would not exist."

Trump expressed surprise that Netanyahu has yet to receive a pardon from Israeli President Isaac Herzog over the premier's ongoing trial for alleged bribery.

"How do you not give a pardon?" Trump said. "I spoke to the president. He tells me it's on its way." **HW**

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# Why Young Savers Should Adopt A Long-Term Mindset

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors

Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com • fa.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael-stein

Four key considerations could help young adults create a mindset to succeed with saving and investing for the future.

Michelle Wan, Wells Fargo Investment Institute senior wealth investment solutions analyst, has met many younger clients who have had reservations about investing. “Young investors may find themselves delaying investing for retirement because it seems so far in the future. Alternatively, they may enjoy trading volatile investment instruments for rapid profits,” she says. “They don’t realize how important it is to methodically develop planning and investing goals at a young age. Time is a young saver’s greatest ally.”

Here, Wan shares four key considerations for young savers when it comes to prioritizing long-term savings and investment plans.

### 1. Adopt a planning mindset

One key factor is having a planning mindset – a positive and proactive stance that could set savers on a path to positive financial outcomes. A planning mindset can provide a road map that can help strengthen a person’s financial future.

### 2. Start with small changes

Small changes in your financial behavior today could have a big impact on long-term success. Creating a budget, building healthy financial habits, and becoming more comfortable and familiar with investing could go a long way in contributing toward achieving long-term financial goals.

Some practices to consider:

- Automatically transferring part of your income into a savings account or an investment account
- Paying down student loans to avoid

late fees and damage to credit scores

### 3. Begin saving and investing now

Start saving for retirement as soon as you can. The sooner you start, the more time every dollar saved has the potential to grow. If dollars saved early in your working years generate investment gains year after year, they can have a much bigger impact on the size of your account balance at retirement than you might think. Thanks to the power of compounding, as the dollars invested potentially earn returns, those reinvested returns can start earning returns, and so on – year after year.

“For younger investors, compounding returns become especially powerful given their longer time horizon, so an early start can make a dramatic difference in helping investors reach their financial goals,” says Wan.

### 4. Take full advantage of retirement savings plans

If your employer offers a 401(k) plan, be sure to participate – and max out any kind of matching-contribution offers. They are the equivalent of free money.

Roth IRAs – to which you contribute after-tax dollars – are also worth a closer look because they offer tax-free growth potential. Investment earnings are also distributed tax-free in retirement if specific requirements are met.

“Another savings vehicle to consider is a Health Savings Account (HSA), which offers tax benefits to qualified investors,” Wan says.

A discussion with an investment professional about your investment goals can help you develop a long-term plan and strategies to potentially help you achieve those goals.

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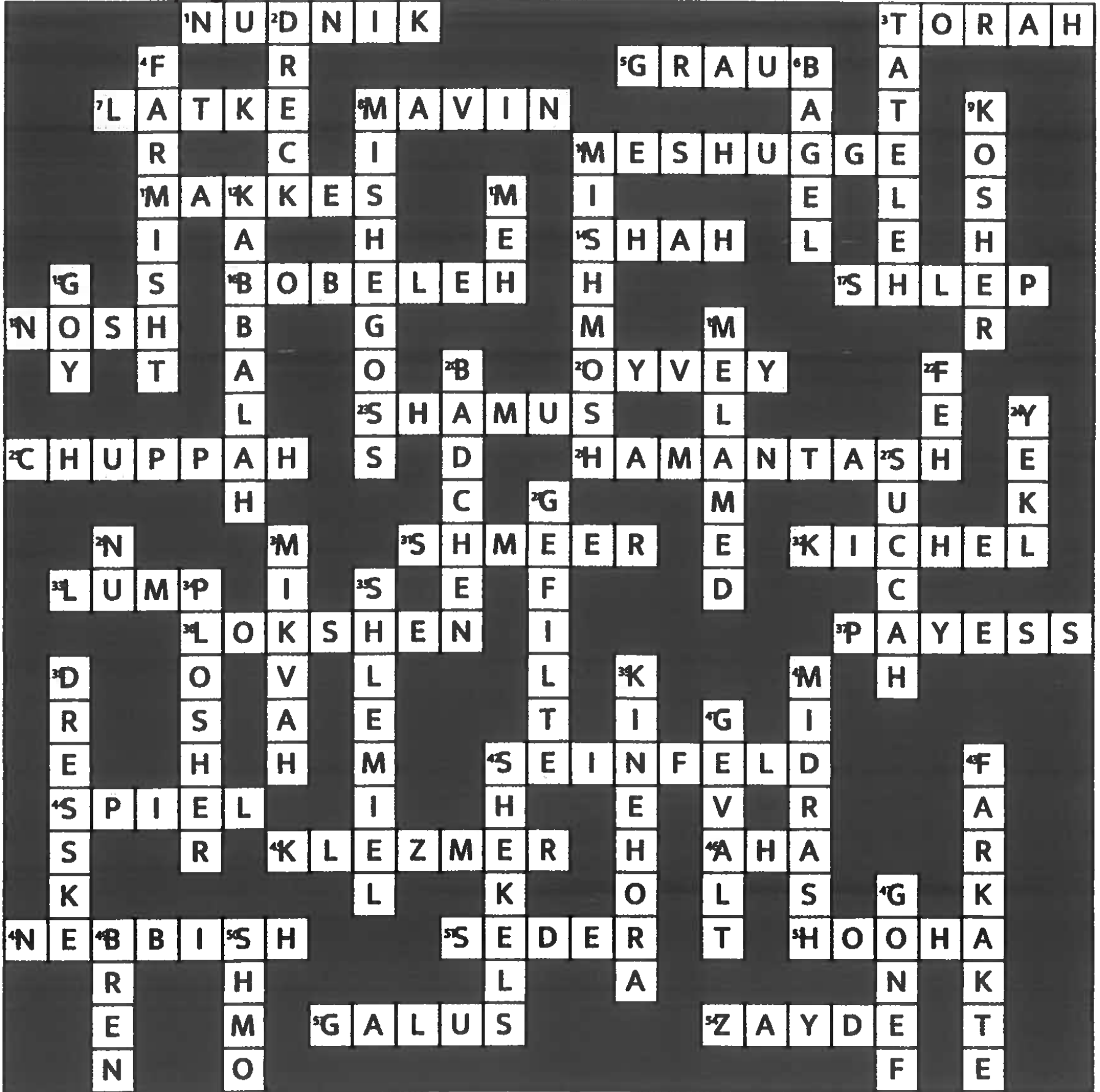
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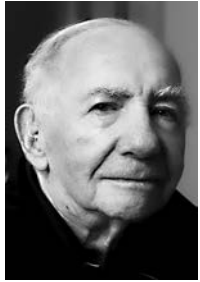


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# A Bar Mitzvah Boy Speaks



*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**

(7/18/12) It couldn't be that tough – so many had entered the tunnel and come out alive on the other side. But maybe it was like those Disneyland rides where you come out alive, but inside the fear and trembling had pushed your stomach north of your heart and your eyes were road maps and your hands trembled like when you accepted the soccer trophy.

The Bar Mitzvah boy was appraising his duties. A heavy lump of lead that lay on his back. Conduct several services, sing his Haftorah, sing his Torah portion, make a speech. Smile at all the guests – tell Ms. Greenberg he'd always wanted a genuine Indian beaded belt that all the kids would envy. So cool! And don't forget the names.

Good thing his father was his teacher – he knew how much homework also had to be done. Hey, maybe Pop, big-hearted papa, would do his homework for him! Now there's an idea.

Oh well, six months to go. May as well get started on his Haftorah trope. It wasn't so hard. Squiggly little notations like punctuation marks signaled the tune for each word. Oh, I can do that, I felt. . . until that ominous day when they told me, "Zevie, the same punctuation marks are used in the Torah – BUT THEY HAVE A DIFFERENT TUNE."

Now they tell me. Oy, as Zayde would say – this is no small piece of cake. Two different tunes for the same trope mark. In the Haftorah one goes "Tra La La La" (down on the last note). The other, the Torah, also "Tra La La La" but UP on the last La. Goodbye soccer, hello trope practice.

And all the time a hundred pair of eyes watching my hands tremble, a hundred pair of ears listening like bats to make sure the Haftorah trope ended down and the Torah trope ended up. I wonder if they'll stop me if I get the tune wrong? Let's see: Mapach Pashtah Zokaaaaaf Koton.

But waitaminute. That ain't all. The speech. Like Bubbe's cabbage soup – not too sour, not too sweet. Not too long – not too short. (And not too good or the rabbi will see me as a competitor. He might jump out of his seat on the Bema. "No, the Tree of Life was first, not the Tree of Knowledge." I could be the first Bar Mitzvah kid to fail my Bar Mitzvah.

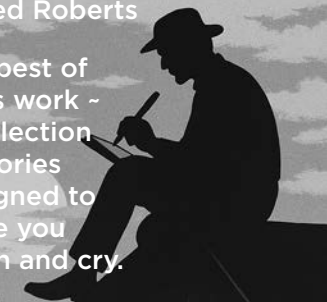
And then there's all the "thank yous." Aunt X, in a clunker, drives from California – does she deserve more praise than Uncle Harry, who spent his monthly gambling allotment flying from Virginia? And what about the Maryland Highway Department who smoothed that rough patch of road outside Potomac for the comfort of my guests? Don't they deserve a mention?

And not to forget – keep the speech short. My teacher told me that a non-barmitzvahee named Mark Twain said nobody, after the first 10 minutes, could recall a single word spoken by a minister or rabbi unless it was his own name. (And he's talking about pros, so how 'bout me, a 13-year-old kid talking to a hungry mob with lunch on their minds). But I bet they're listening close-

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ly because this is the only part of my Bar Mitzvah recitation that's in flat out English. And look up. Don't read it. But don't look at your cousins in the second row who are trying to make you giggle. Wow, this is not going to be a piece of cake.

*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*

# ISRAEL INSIGHTS Behind the Scenes

**By Howard Weisband**

The photo ops could not have been more pleasing. Winter, December 29, sunny Florida, President Donald Trump welcomes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach. Both men dressed in dark business suits, white shirts, bright red ties, they warmly smile and clasp hands in friendship. In fact, in the big picture, they symbolize the deep friendship between the United States and Israel.

This was the unprecedented sixth face-to-face meeting between the President and the Prime Minister since the beginning of President Trump's current term which began on January 20, 2025, just over 11 months ago.

As the two leaders heaped loving praise on one another, they demonstrated that there was no daylight between them, a figure of speech, with negative intent in my opinion, that entered the lexicon during President Obama's tenure in the White House.

President Trump states openly "America First" within all domestic and international issues, while genuinely supporting Israel to such an extent that the Prime Minister is quick to repeat "Israel has never had a better friend in the White House." Where there are differences of opinion, such as Israel's policies in Judea and Samaria, i.e., the West Bank,

they are quick to say, at least in the President's opinion, we will find solutions.

A December 31 Jerusalem Post editorial was headlined "Despite awkward moments, Netanyahu, Trump aligned at Mar-a-Lago on Gaza and Iran" looked at various geopolitical issues, and concluded: "Despite those real differences that will pose challenges in the near future, the Mar-a-Lago summit can only be seen as a triumph for Netanyahu and Israel for the consensus items of a Hamas-free Gaza and a defanged Iran. At this juncture in time, those are the issues that matter the most."

But behind the scenes, are those the immediate issues that really matter the most to Bibi?

The Prime Minister returns home knowing that at some point in 2026, at the latest 10 months from now, national elections will take place in Israel. He has stated his intent to run again, feeling that his leadership and experience can still chart Israel's future far better than anyone else on the political map.

Bibi left Mar-a-Lago with some clear and important differences with the President. The aforementioned issues in the West Bank: new settlements, settler violence, Hamas presence and terrorism, and a dysfunctional Palestinian Authority... all represent a challenge not only

in and of themselves, moreover they impact progress in phase two of the Gaza agreement and expansion of the Abraham Accords.

Those very issues directly affect the Prime Minister's coalition, which has often been described as fragile. Given the far-right members of the coalition, the Prime Minister walks a tightrope that could significantly impact his ability to reform a coalition in the coming months should he again be given that mandate by the voting public.

Perhaps the most critical internal issue that will significantly determine which parties and politicians the voters will support is the Haredi draft. After more than two years of war, including extraordinary reserve duty, voters will demand to know where candidates stand on this matter. Every sector of the population, secular and religious, haredi and modern Orthodox, will want answers. The matter is so sensitive, both practically and emotionally, that the current coalition has withdrawn draft legislation, resulting in the haredi parties leaving the Government.

Returning to Mar-a-Lago, astute observers will see important differences of opinion yet remaining within the geopolitics of the Middle East. President Trump expressed trust and confidence

in the leadership of Syria and Turkey. The Prime Minister did not. In fact, the Israeli position is clear regarding both countries.

Full analyses are not possible within this column, but in brief, Israel and Syria disagree regarding demilitarized zones, as is the case in Lebanon, perhaps even more seriously given the threat that Hezbollah still presents.

The most sensitive issue perhaps revolves around Turkey, a NATO nation. Turkish President Erdogan hosts Hamas leadership, and he desires to be part of the Trump plan for peace in Gaza and the Middle East. There are no diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey, and for valid reasons there is no trust whatsoever. Israel wants "no Turkish boots on the ground" in Gaza.

All of which is to say that it is important to look "behind the scenes."

*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*

## OBITUARIES



**Helen Rosen Kirschner**

Helen Rosen Kirschner, 94, of Memphis, Tennessee, passed away peacefully on December 19, 2025. Born in Memphis on May 17, 1931, to Esther and Oscar Rosen, Helen was known for her wit, confidence and spirituality, touching the lives of all who knew her.

Helen had a lifelong love of music and participated in Humes High School's music program alongside Elvis Presley. She played the violin – an instrument Elvis often jokingly called a "fiddle." With her trademark humor, Helen would always correct him, insisting that she played only the violin, a story she delighted in sharing for years.

After high school, Helen worked at Bry's Department Store, where her impeccable fashion sense, charm and friendly nature made her a favor-

ite among colleagues and customers. She later married Gilbert Kirschner, and they shared 58 years of marriage together. Helen devoted much of her life to raising their children. She volunteered in their classrooms and supported their education in any way she could. She and her sister, Libbie, enjoyed bringing their families together frequently, especially for holidays and special occasions. Once their children were grown, Helen joined Gilbert in his distinguished fur salon, Gilbert Kay Furs, where her style complemented his work.

Helen enjoyed traveling the world with her husband, visiting Israel, the Far East, Europe and Africa, returning with lasting memories. In retirement, Helen treasured spending time with Gil-

bert and keeping close ties with their families, especially the grandchildren and great-grandchildren, all of whom brought them immense joy. Helen will be deeply missed by her family, friends and all who knew her.

Helen was preceded in death by her parents, Esther and Oscar Rosen; her sister, Libbie Kalmowicz, and brother-in-law, Abe; and her beloved husband, Gilbert Kirschner. She is survived by her son, Allen (Gail) Kirschner; daughter Donna Lisogorski; six grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews. Burial took place on December 21, 2025, at Baron Hirsch Cemetery. Donations may be made to Baron Hirsch Synagogue, the Memphis Jewish Home or a charity of the donor's choice. HW

# With Rising Numbers of American Students Considering College in Israel, a New Program Offers Help



A growing number of American students are choosing universities in Israel for their college education. Credit: Tel Aviv University

By Elana Sztokman

(JTA) – With American Jews experiencing rising antisemitism, particularly on college campuses, a growing number of Jewish high school students are considering options in Israel for their college education.

“In Israel, being Jewish isn’t something you manage,” said Ariel Fromowitz, a New Jersey native who moved to Israel after high school and is now studying engineering at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheva. “It’s just who you are. No one notices it, and no one targets you for it.”

Against this backdrop, the Tzemach David Foundation has launched a new initiative, The Future is Calling, aimed at helping American students understand their options for college in Israel. The Future Is Calling seeks to provide American high school students, parents and guidance counselors with a clear framework for understanding Israeli higher education – all early on in the college applications process.

“A lot of students come to Israel for gap-year programs, learn about life here and find it really attractive,” said David Magerman, founder and president of the Tzemach David Foundation. “But by that point, they’ve already committed themselves to a college in America. They’re locked in.”

TheFutureIsCalling.org offers resources explaining how Israeli universities work, how applications differ from the U.S. system and what campus life is like in Israel.

“We’re trying to make people aware of what exists and to give them real choices,” Magerman said.

Tamar Krieger Kalev, executive director of the foundation, said the project is responding to a real need.

“What we saw very quickly was that there was a real interest in students wanting to go to college in Israel, but there were huge informational gaps, practical gaps and emotional gaps,” she said. “People didn’t understand how the system works, what campus life looks like or how their kids would actually integrate.”

In addition to offering resources for prospective students, the Tzemach David Foundation works more broadly with Israeli universities, gap-year programs, guidance counselors, and organizations that provide community and support on campus. The foundation’s goal is to transform education in Israel, with an initial focus on integrating new immigrants into Israel’s education system.

Given the anti-Israel climate on many U.S. college campuses, many American Jews considering education options in Israel are looking for normalcy.

“Parents want to know that their children can actualize their potential, be successful and be themselves without even thinking about it,” said Krieger Kalev.

Going to college in Israel is a very different experience than in America in myriad ways. Rather than applying to the university as a whole, for example, students must gain admission to a particular academic program. Admission is based almost solely on grades, rather than the more holistic approach of U.S. universities.

Campus life is also very different. Most Israelis start college later in life, after years of army service and sometimes travel. More than a few are already married and have children. They’re more focused on obtaining a degree than on experiencing campus life. Campus culture mirrors that seriousness.

“People here are older, more focused

and more serious about why they’re here,” said Fromowitz, who began his own college journey in Israel after a stint in the army.

Of course, in contrast to North America, students in Israel have no concerns about antisemitism or anti-Zionism on campus.

“At Columbia, everything about being Jewish felt exposed,” said Yisrael De Dekér Cohen, who spent a year as an undergraduate at Columbia University in 2023-’24 before transferring to Tel Aviv University.

While at Columbia, he said, he was subject to constant antisemitic harassment, including in the classroom. The situation ultimately became untenable for him. Now Cohen is completing a degree in political science and Middle Eastern studies at Tel Aviv.

“Studying in Israel means I don’t have to think about being Jewish all the time. I can focus on school and on my life, instead of on whether I’m safe,” Cohen said. “That difference changes everything. I don’t have to explain myself. I can walk to class, wear a kippah, speak Hebrew and just live. It feels normal. It feels like home.”

Magerman stressed that his foundation doesn’t want to make people afraid of antisemitism or worried about life in America. Rather, he said, “The mission is to shine a light on what’s great about Israel and let people make an intelligent choice.”

The Tzemach David Foundation supports programs that enable students to begin coursework in English while completing intensive Hebrew study before they transition into Hebrew-language programs alongside Israeli peers.

The foundation also supports campus

life – a critical component for students from the United States – including by funding expansion of the Orthodox Union’s Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus programs to Israeli campuses. Known by the acronym JLIC, the centers run programming for students, including Shabbat and social programs.

“Once JLIC opened here, it changed everything,” Fromowitz said about his experience in Beersheva. “There was a place for Shabbat, for people to meet, for life outside of class.”

“I feel like I’m where I’m supposed to be,” Fromowitz added. “I’m challenged academically, I have community, and I feel part of something larger.”

The Future is Calling also works with American Jewish day schools and guidance counselors, encouraging students to delay early decision commitments and consider applying to Israeli universities during their gap year in Israel.

“So much of American culture is about dressing up your résumé to get into the best university,” Krieger Kalev said. “What we’re saying is to think first about where you actually want to live and learn.”

Magerman sees the initiative as part of a broader historical shift.

“The future of Jewish life is in Israel,” he said. “That’s not a slogan for me. That’s a reality, and education is one of the clearest paths to get there.”

This story was sponsored by and produced in collaboration with the Tzemach David Foundation, which supports Israeli educational initiatives. To learn more about Israeli universities and how to navigate the journey of going to college in Israel, visit TheFutureIsCalling.org. This article was produced by JTA’s native content team. **HW**

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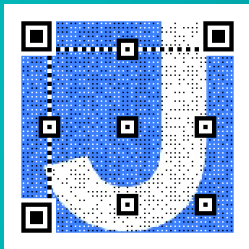
For more information or questions, please contact Carolyn Pruitt at  
cpruitt@jcpmemphis.org or (901)-767-7100.

# Memphis Night of Jewish Learning at the J

Saturday, January 24 • Doors open 7pm • Program 7:30pm  
\$25 Community / \$18 Member

Please register by January 20.  
(Walk-ins accepted based on availability)

Join us as we come together across the Jewish community to learn from Memphis Jewish community rabbis, leaders, and educators. Cost covers dinner and 1 drink ticket.



To learn more and register, scan the QR Code or go to [www.jccmemphis.org/JewishLife](http://www.jccmemphis.org/JewishLife)

Memphis Jewish Community Center  
The Center for Jewish Life & Learning  
6560 Poplar Avenue, Memphis, TN 38138  
[jccmemphis.org](http://jccmemphis.org) • (901) 761-0810



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