

Q&A WITH JOHN IRVING | JEWISH BOOK MONTH | HANUKKAH COOKING AND GIFTING

Hadassah

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

Magazine

'AN UNLIKELY RABBI'
Angela Buchdahl on
her journey of faith
and belonging

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FOR ISRAEL?**

Rachel Goldberg-Polin
on the hostages' return
Moving beyond trauma
and into healing



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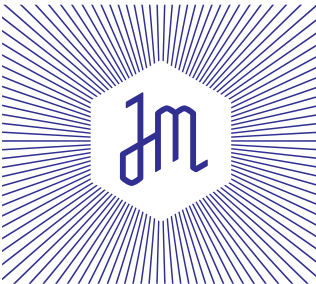


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HADASSAH



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Angela Buchdahl, senior rabbi of Central Synagogue in Manhattan. See story, page 16. Photo by Lorin Klaris.

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14 FINDING A WAY BACK TO NORMAL

By Uriel Heilman

On one hand, Israelis are trying to find their way back to normal after two years of heavy rocket fire, fighting in Gaza, wars in Lebanon and with Iran, and the devastating attack of October 7, 2023. On the other hand, Israel isn't the same nation it was before the war, and it's not clear what the new normal will be.

16 'AN UNLIKELY RABBI'

By Gary Rosenblatt

Rabbi Angela Buchdahl's love of family, deep spiritual faith and determination in "breaking a stained-glass ceiling" of male rabbinic gatekeepers has made her one of the best-known and most admired rabbis in America.

22 SACRED COLLABORATION

By Hilary Danailova

Female scribes join the women, almost exclusively from Judaism's liberal denominations, who, over the past 50-plus years, have broken ground as rabbis, mohels and other clerical positions that, for millennia, have been entirely male.

64 RACHEL GOLDBERG-POLIN

By Jessica Steinberg

The bereaved mother of murdered hostage Hersh Goldberg-Polin reflects on the joy of the hostages' return and on families finding some kind of closure after two years of anguished torture.



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(CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM) FROM 'LOST AND FOUND HANUKKAH'; ILLUSTRATION BY LISA ANCHIN; MIRIAM ALSTER/FLASH-90; COURTESY OF THE JEWISH MUSEUM SHOPS



Table of All Ages

Hadassah, too, is a manifestation of l'dor v'dor

By Carol Ann Schwartz

ONE OF THE MOST ENDURING themes of Jewish teaching is expressed through the phrase *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation—the mandate to pass our heritage and values on to our children, maintaining an unbroken link from antiquity and into the future. As Thanksgiving and Hanukkah approach, this concept merges with mental images of my family's holiday table over my lifetime, surrounded by grandparents and parents, children and grandchildren, seamlessly connecting love, history and tradition.

Hadassah, too, is a manifestation of *l'dor v'dor*. We are dedicated to restoring a homeland in which the Jewish people can thrive and reach our full potential and also—to use the words of the United States Constitution—to help “form a more perfect union” on American shores. I think back to my mother going to Hadassah events, inviting women to become members and drafting notes for invitations that she would later write out by hand. I still have some of those writings, cherished links in my own generational chain.

Just as we nurture future generations in our homes, Hadassah nurtures Israel's future through our institutions of healing and education. But no matter how much we want to do our work in peace, too often we have to pursue our mission amid war's dangers and tensions.

Since the October 7, 2023, terror attacks and the war in Gaza began, professionals at Hadassah hospitals have been treating and healing injured

soldiers and civilians, rehabilitating those in need of long-term care, fortifying buildings when necessary, hastening openings of new facilities and fostering hope.

HADASSAH NURTURES ISRAEL'S FUTURE THROUGH OUR INSTITUTIONS OF HEALING AND EDUCATION.

IN A RECENT EPISODE OF THE *Hadassah On Call* podcast, Shiri Ben-David, chief psychologist at the Hadassah Medical Organization, addressed the issues confronting the nation's mental health professionals, including our own. One thing she emphasized was that even for a country experienced in dealing with war and terrorism, the post-October 7 landscape has presented unparalleled new challenges. “Having the traumatic event ended,” Ben-David said, “is a major characteristic of treating post-trauma. Telling a person...‘the trauma is no longer happening’ is a major core of being in a safe place and starting to restore a sense of self....”

Now that the war has presumably ended, a new stage of the healing journey can begin.

At our hospitals and youth villages, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, therapists and social workers are working with young people exposed to extraordinary stress. Indeed, the Israeli

Pediatric Association has reported that more than 80 percent of the country's children have experienced emotional stress—including post-traumatic stress disorder—since the war began.

Despite the obstacles, most children adapt. At our youth villages in particular, the traditional structure of study and therapeutic activities, plus the availability of counseling, helps teens manage the pressure. Earlier this year, several students from our villages shared their experiences at the 2025 Hadassah National Conference in Aventura, Fla. Darya Dubrovsky, an 18-year-old who came to Meir Shfeyah from Ukraine, talked about the difficulty of adjusting to “the new people, the new language, the new culture,” adding that it has also been exciting. “There's a lot of support at Shfeyah. Support is the most important thing.”

Hana Shvarzman, 17, said that without Meir Shfeyah she would have ended up on a different path, but that she now has the support to succeed in her new country.

Sometimes Hadassah physicians become part of a chain linking generations. That was the case for Dr. Simcha Yagel, senior obstetrician at Hadassah Hospital Mount Scopus. Twenty-four years ago, he delivered a baby named Ruhama, born 13 weeks premature and weighing just over one pound, who spent six months in the neonatal intensive care unit. Dr. Yagel kept in touch with Ruhama and her family over the years and was present recently when she gave birth to a baby boy weighing six times his mother's birth weight.

In this holiday season, may all our tables be weighted with joy. **H**

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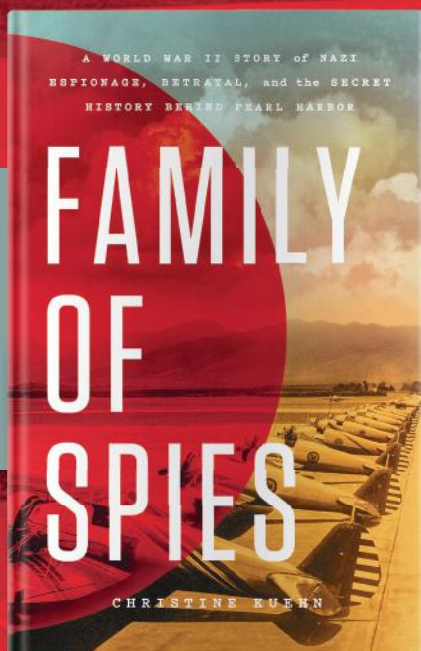
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THE EDITOR'S TURN

Happy Reading, Happy Hanukkah



Sharing our obsession with Jewish stories | By Lisa Hostein

IT'S NO SECRET THAT WE AT *HADASSAH Magazine* are obsessed with books. But it's not often that we devote nearly a whole issue to the subject, highlighting a diverse range of works that represent many facets of the Jewish story. And what a rollercoaster story we are living through these days!

So, as Jewish Book Month approaches (the month leading up to Hanukkah, which this year begins the evening of December 14), we start with some basics. Ilana Kurshan describes how, from the youngest age, “Sacred and secular texts give texture to our lives” (page 12), and we close with our annual roundup of outstanding children's literature (page 48), including a story about Fanny Goldstein, the Boston librarian who created Jewish Book Week, the precursor to the monthlong celebration.

In between, our pages feature a profile by Gary Rosenblatt of Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, one of America's most influential spiritual leaders and the author of a new memoir (page 16), as well as the journey of female scribes writing new editions of perhaps the most important book of all—the Torah scroll (page 22).

We bring you self-help books that combine wellness and Jewish texts (page 28); a cookbook with fried Greek delights perfect for Hanukkah (page 38); and, of course, a whole section of book reviews that includes an interview with the iconic John Irving. You'll be delighted by the story behind his latest novel, which

will be of special interest to our Hadassah readers (page 54).


Along the way, you'll learn tales of the Jews of the Silk Road in our travel piece on Uzbekistan, Georgia and Armenia (page 34), and you can try your hand at our Hanukkah-themed crossword puzzle (page 47).

Many books already have been written about October 7, 2023, and its aftermath, several featured in past issues of the magazine, and many more will surely follow in the months and years to come. For now, we are continuing to bask in the joy of the return of the living hostages and the presumed end of the war in Gaza.

Yet there is still much uncertainty ahead for Israel, as Uriel Heilman writes in “Finding a Way Back to Normal” (page 14). But the reflections and strength of Rachel Goldberg-Polin, whose son, Hersh, was murdered by Hamas, continue to inspire us (page 64), as they have for the past two years.

Even amid the questions about what's next for Israel and the Jewish people, there is much to be thankful for as we approach Thanksgiving and Hanukkah. That includes the Jewish joy and pride that have spread, sometimes to the most unlikely places.

Some of that joy is found in our annual gift guide, filled with many delightful gems, including ways to further enrich your reading (page 40).

On behalf of the entire magazine staff, I wish you Happy Thanksgiving, Happy Hanukkah and, in the spirit of this issue, Happy Reading! 

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THE THRIFTER'S BUG

I read with delight “The Spiritual Side of Thrifting” (July/Aug 2025 issue) by Deborah Fineblum, and not only because she and I hail from the same corner of New Jersey and our parents are still close. I also share an incurable love of rummaging through other folks’ castoffs.

I am not sure if it was in Massachusetts, where my hobby started while in college, or later during my time in Maryland, but I definitely remember acquiring a pair of Wrangler jeans for a buck and an absolutely divine vintage camel-hair coat for a pittance. These treasured finds now live only in my memory or, with luck, in someone else’s closet.

Today, I help run a free secondhand (or *yad shniyah*) shop on my kibbutz in Israel and happily frequent other such stores in the area. One of my greatest joys is finding the perfect item for someone else and infecting friends and family with what I call the thrifter’s bug.

*Melissa Milgram
Kibbutz Gezer, Israel*

Many years ago, my mother, Gloria Dravin, was a member of the Pascack

Valley, N.J., chapter of Hadassah. She lived in Westwood, which then had a Hadassah thrift store. She always saved goods that she wanted to donate for the Hadassah shop, especially in the years during which thousands of Russians arrived in the United States and needed to furnish entire apartments. I was so surprised to read in *Hadassah Magazine* that there is only one remaining Hadassah thrift store, in Maryland.

*Linda Pearl
Estero, Fla.*



I bought this vintage Whiting & Davis bag and matching comb at the Hadassah thrift shop in Brighton, Mass., years ago. The bag is large enough for the comb, a lipstick and a

tissue but not a cell phone. It was made well before our digital age!

*Amy Goldstein
Needham, Mass.*

‘CLOUDY’ IN MIAMI?

I was very interested in the July/August travel story “Miami Reinvents Itself—Again” because I partially grew up in Miami Beach. My grandparents moved there in 1946 from Jacksonville when my mother was 3. According to my grandmother, they arrived to signs on some businesses reading “No Blacks, No Jews, No dogs.” My grandfather and she both worked in teaching in Jacksonville but struggled to find jobs in Miami Beach.

My family joined Temple Emanuel during the early years of Rabbi Irving Lehrman’s long tenure at the Conservative congregation. According to accounts, my mother was the

first bat mitzvah at the synagogue, in 1956. There’s so much Jewish history in Miami, and no doubt much has changed. But I think my family’s experience came with some clouds.

*Shayna M. Steinfeld
Atlanta, Ga.*

WOMEN'S HEART HEALTH

I am a three-time marathoner, a distance swimmer and, like my mother, a life member of Hadassah, and I want to share a recent experience with readers. I am almost 78, my weight is good, and I am still very active. But a few months ago, I started to feel lightheaded and extremely tired. I went to a cardiologist at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City and, after a series of tests, my doctor scheduled me for an angiogram.

Imagine my amazement after the procedure when I learned that I had three 80 to 90 percent blockages of my main artery. I now have two stents, and I feel so energetic that I can’t stop cooking and baking.

Please, Hadassah sisters, don’t wait to find out if you have heart disease. (For related reading, see “Partners of the Heart” in the March/April 2024 issue of *Hadassah Magazine*, which explores the gap in awareness about women’s heart health.) My mother had four heart attacks, open heart surgery and a pacemaker. With mazel, I will skip the heart attacks, and I hope that you do, too!

*Barbara Barran
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

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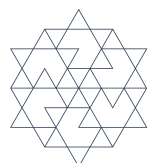
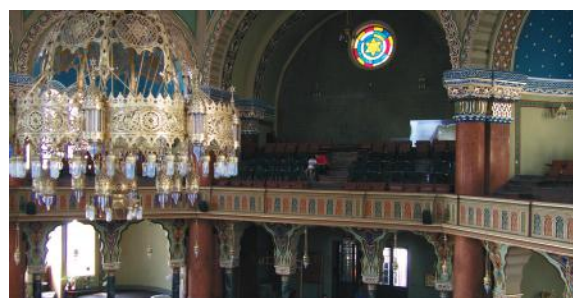
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A Chess Champion Moves All Her Pieces to Israel

"I just followed my intuition to come here now, despite the war," said Tícia Gara, a Budapest native and international chess champion who made aliyah in May, one of 23 Hungarians who made the move between October 2024 and September 2025, according to Israel's Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. "I felt I had to be here."

Six weeks after she arrived, the conflict with Iran erupted.

"Suddenly, there is a war within another war. I never expected or experienced such a thing," said Gara, who lives in Tel

Aviv. "I had to adapt fast."

Fortunately, strategic thinking under pressure is a well-honed skill for this three-time Hungarian women's chess champion.

Gara earned the international Woman Grandmaster title in 2002, when she was only 18. She triumphed in Hungary's national championship in 2006, 2007 and 2019, and helped Hungary win gold at the 2015 Women's Mitropa Cup. The previous year, in 2014, she spent two months in Israel vol-

unteering through the Jewish Agency for Israel, working with adults who have disabilities. She even played a number of matches with a vision-impaired Israeli who loved chess.

During the Covid pandemic, Gara transitioned to online coaching and then spent a year in Manhattan teaching chess. While there, she visited several synagogues and Jewish communities. "It was a nice experience connecting with American Jews," she said.

In January 2024, she was named a Coach of the Month by Chess.com.

Though she's now moving away from competition, she agreed to represent the Queens Maccabi Ramat Gan club in the Israel Women Elite Chess League tournament in Netanya in May. She's also coaching young players at Chess4All in Savyon, in central Israel.

Gara noted that Israelis and Hungarians share the cultural qualities of directness, openness and warmth.

"Maybe in Hungary people are a

COURTESY OF TÍCIA GARA; (OPPOSITE PAGE) SHUTTERSTOCK



Tícia Gara

New Digital Tools Address Rising Antisemitism

Our phones are always with us, from checking the weather in the morning to the moment we finally call it a night after texting family and friends. Now, a new app gives users the chance to do something else with their phones—directly report antisemitic incidents.

The Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) recently launched the Report It app, which allows witnesses of antisemitic acts, such as graffiti, vandalism, harassment, incitement, threats and violence, to document and upload photos and videos of incidents. The app is the first of its kind in the United States to enable the reporting of antisemitism that occurs both offline and on the internet. CAM, an advocacy and research coalition, verifies and assesses each incident and then forwards relevant reports to local leaders, law enforcement, media outlets and community organizations.

"Report It gives everyone a quick, safe and secure way to take action, rather than stand

by," said CAM CEO Sacha Roytman. "This tool ensures that no act of hate is dismissed or ignored and transforms private experiences into collective accountability."

The Report It app and similar online tools come at a critical time. In 2024, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) recorded 9,354 antisemitic incidents, a 344 percent increase over the past five years. As part of its tracking efforts, last year the ADL released the Jewish Policy Index, which assesses all 50 states' policies in response to antisemitism.

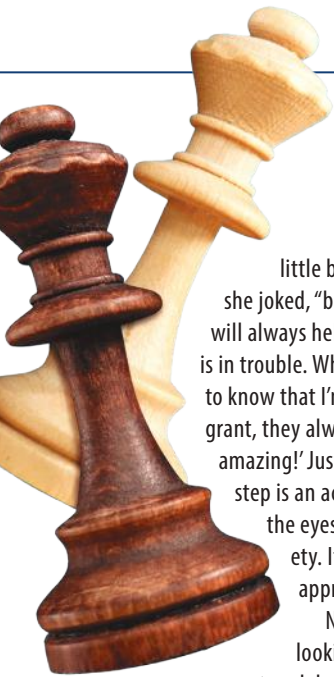
For college students, Hillel International developed the website Campus4All, which offers a free legal hotline, educational tools to equip students to engage in informed conversations online as well as a list of trusted media sources. To report antisemitic incidents, Campus4All directs students to Report Campus Hate, a website created in conjunction with the ADL and the Secure Community Network.

Also geared to students, the app Emissary4All curates articles from pro-Israel and pro-Jewish voices, providing users with content to share on their own social media pages.

Abroad, digital tools include B'nai Brith Canada's Anti-Hate app, which allows Canadians to document and submit evidence of Jew hatred on- and offline. As antisemitism surges across Europe, last year, the World Jewish Congress released Hate Online:



SHUTTERSTOCK



little bit more polite,” she joked, “but Israelis will always help if someone is in trouble. When they get to know that I’m a new immigrant, they always say, ‘Wow, amazing!’ Just making this step is an achievement in the eyes of Israeli society. It’s nice to be appreciated.”

Now, she is looking forward to celebrating her favorite holiday, Hanukkah, in her new homeland.

“I love the song ‘*Maoz Tzur*’ that I used to sing with my father and mother back in Hungary since I was a child lighting the candles,” she said. “It’s as if this song is somehow a connection to Judaism and to Israel. And I’m so happy that this is going to be my first Hanukkah in Israel.”

—Abigail Klein Leichman



Preparedness and Empowerment in a mobile app and browser extension formats. The digital platform enables users to report online hate speech as well as calls for violence, demonization of Israel and other harmful content. The information is then shared with community representatives and public authorities. Digital tools to combat antisemitism will continue to grow and evolve, Roytman predicts. “We’re committed to using technology and AI to outpace antisemitism,” he said. “This includes sharper data analysis, stronger connections between communities and resources, and new educational platforms.”

—Alexandra Lapkin Schwank



‘Talking About Death Won’t Kill You,’ And It Might Help

Death is difficult to talk about, but JADE, the Jewish Association for Death Education, exists to make those conversations a little easier. The organization was founded in January 2023 by Susan Kramer and David Zinner with the mission of guiding Jewish individuals and families through advance planning, dying, death, mourning, grief and even discussions about the afterlife by providing education, resources and support.

Zinner is the founder and recently retired executive director of Kavod v’Nichum (Honor and Comfort), a Jewish nonprofit dedicated to training pluralistic *chevra kadisha*, or Jewish burial societies, across the United States and Canada. He met Kramer at a *chevra kadisha* conference that she was attending in her capacity as a fundraising consultant.

Taking in the panels and talks being staged for hospice workers, palliative care doctors, funeral home professionals and others, Kramer found herself turning to Zinner at the event and asking, “Who educates mere mortals like me?”—those with no expertise in death and dying. “The answer was no one.” And so, JADE was born.

JADE stages in-person workshops in cities across the country led by community-based experts such as rabbis, funeral directors, death doulas—non-medical professionals who provide holistic end-of-life support—hospice workers and *chevra kadisha* members. Online, the organization offers a clearinghouse for

all things related to Jewish death and dying, including its signature Hineni tool that provides information about *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick), *viddui* (deathbed confession), caskets and garments, grieving and preplanning, which can include details like writing an ethical will, registering to be an organ donor, purchasing a gravesite and picking favorite poems or music for funerals.

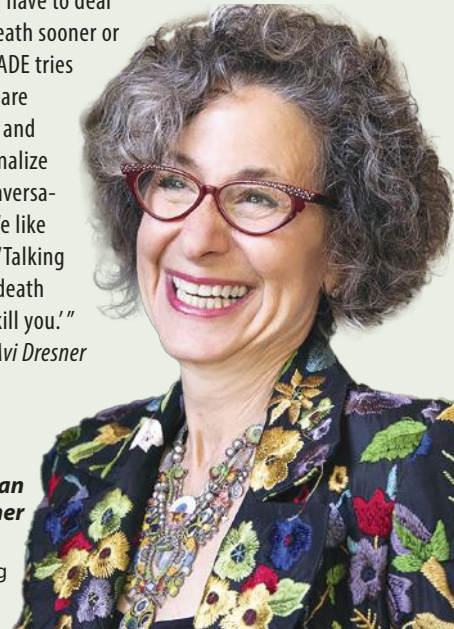
JADE also sponsors several virtual events each month in addition to its ongoing Death Schmooze series on Zoom, co-presented by Kramer, which she describes as a storytelling opportunity for regular people to talk about their lived experiences with death.

“We’re all going to die,” Kramer said.

“We all have to deal with death sooner or later. JADE tries to prepare people and to normalize the conversation. We like to say, ‘Talking about death won’t kill you.’”

—Avi Dresner

Susan Kramer



ADRIAN SEAL/ALAMY (TOP), COURTESY OF SUSAN KRAMER



Reading and Re-reading

Sacred and secular texts give texture to our lives

By Ilana Kurshan

NOW THAT MY YOUNGEST child has started school, I have begun reading him chapter books with text that is geared for slightly older readers and without illustrations on every page. Though I was excited to share with him many of my favorites from my own childhood, initially he could not hide his disappointment.

“Why aren’t there more pictures?” Yitzvi asked, poring over the lone full-color illustration on the cover—Charlotte hanging from her web, or Willy Wonka in a top hat and bow tie standing proudly before the entrance to his chocolate factory. My 5-year-old son, raised on a steady diet of Sandra Boynton, Dr. Seuss and William Steig, is experiencing a kind of sensory deprivation. Why are there pictures only every five pages or so? And why are they in black and white?

I try to explain that he can make pictures in his head. While I read the story, he can illustrate it, drawing on his imagination.

I wonder if this was what it was like for Abraham, the first monotheist, who worshiped not a statue carved in stone but a God whose presence had to be felt and intuited,

and for the Israelites, who were told by Moses that “you saw no picture when God spoke to you at Sinai out of the fire” (Deuteronomy 4:15). The Israelites, too, found it difficult to worship a God with no physical form, which explains why they rushed to fashion a calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. “Why aren’t there pictures?” they presumably wondered.

Reading these books is an exercise in imagination. It is also a sacred activity. Reading reminds us that the world as we experience it through our senses is not all that is out there. There are, for instance, scientific realms we can only intuit, like the non-visible wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum.

WE JEWS BELIEVE THAT THIS world, the world we readily perceive, is only a fraction of the totality that God perceives. Perhaps *Olam HaBah*, the world to come, is like the chapter books I have begun reading my son, or like the ultraviolet and gamma rays our eyes cannot detect: We can comprehend them, but we cannot apprehend them.

This is not the first time I’ve

shifted from picture books to chapter books with one of my children. Yitzvi, the youngest of five, is hearing many of the same books I once read to his siblings. But as the Talmudic rabbis teach, no two reading experiences are the same. “It is impossible to compare one who has read a text one hundred times to one who has read a text one hundred and one times” (Hagigah 9b).

The book may look the same, but the interaction between the book, the parent and the child’s imagination is different each time. So, while I love buying new titles—a book is the best Hanukkah present, and it’s no coincidence that Hanukkah falls during Jewish Book Month—I rarely tire of revisiting the books, both sacred and secular, that have given texture to my decade-and-a-half as a parent. When we read to our children, we are also learning how to read our child.

This same phenomenon applies to the ways Jews read Torah. In the Jewish liturgical cycle, we read through the Torah from start to finish every year. Just minutes after reading about the death of Moses in the Torah’s final chapter we turn back to the creation of the world. As a result, we are always in the middle of reading the Torah. It is the book Jews never stop reading, like the countless books I’ve read to my children.

And yet each time we read Torah, we absorb it somewhat differently, because we ourselves are different. We discover new meaning in the text in light of our experiences, and new meaning to our experiences in light of the text. It is not just the Torah we are reading and re-reading, but ourselves. **H**

Ilana Kurshan is the author of *Children of the Book* and *If All the Seas Were Ink*, winner of the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature.



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Finding a Way Back to Normal

Israel's long road to recovery is marked with uncertainty

By Uriel Heilman

ABOUT A WEEK AFTER ISRAEL'S last 20 living hostages were released from Gaza, I was at a wedding near Jerusalem watching the chuppah ceremony when some jarring news flashed across guests' phones. Though the euphoria of the hostage release day had passed, the mood in Israel was still buoyant, pregnant with hope that perhaps the country's longest war was nearing its end despite the fragility of the United States-brokered ceasefire with Hamas.

Under the chuppah, the groom's sister noted the circumstances and voiced a prayer for healing for the war's wounded and for the safety and success of Israel's soldiers. The bride's brother, who emceed the ceremony, had spent several months of the war in combat in Gaza.

As the nuptial blessings were being recited, murmurs rippled through the crowd. The Israel Defense Forces had just issued a bulletin announcing the deaths of two soldiers in Gaza.

Both were from Modiin—the hometown city of the bride and groom and a large portion of the guests, including me. One of the dead was from my neighborhood, and many of the wedding guests knew his family.

This study in contrasts—celebration and tragedy coinciding, two young people flush with excitement about their future together while calamity struck two of their neighbors, ages 26 and 21—encapsulated in a single moment the complexity of life in Israel as it seeks to move beyond the Gaza war.

On one hand, Israelis are trying to find their way back to normal after two years of heavy rocket fire, fighting in Gaza, wars in Lebanon and with Iran as well as the devastating Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, that triggered a prolonged hostage crisis. On the other hand, Israel isn't the same nation it was before the war, and it's not clear what the new normal will be.

Returning Home? *Rebuilding has begun at Kibbutz Nir Oz, near the Gaza border.*

THE WAR'S HUMAN TOLL LEAVES Israel a scarred nation. The war killed about 1,900 Israelis, including nearly 1,200 on October 7, and left at least 945 Israeli soldiers severely wounded and 1,557 others moderately wounded. Many have lost limbs, suffered traumatic brain injuries or will face significant lifelong medical problems. The rehabilitation wards at Israeli hospitals lack sufficient space to meet all the needs. (This urgent situation prompted the early opening of the Gandel Rehabilitation Center at Hadassah Hospital Mount Scopus, which has treated 2,050 patients since its opening in January 2024—including 365 war-related patients, 91 percent of whom are IDF soldiers and security personnel.)

Then there's the war's immense psychological toll. Millions of Israelis are struggling with grief, trauma and mental health troubles, with those worst afflicted including those grieving the loss of loved ones, the wounded, former hostages and their families, displaced residents whose homes were destroyed and traumatized survivors.

Multiple survivors of the Nova music festival massacre on October 7 have committed suicide, one shortly before the release of the remaining living hostages.

An estimated 580,000 Israelis are suffering from at least one severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom as a direct result of the war, according to an Israeli State Comptroller's report earlier this year, and up to three million adults may be suffering from other forms of war-related stress disorders, depression or anxiety.

Israeli media is filled with reports of IDF soldiers returning hollow-eyed after long deployments, their family members lamenting their altered states. The longer the deployments, the heavier the toll on mental health, relationships, livelihoods and the ability to reintegrate into civilian life.

More than one-third of wives of reserve soldiers deployed up to 50 days reported experiencing marital troubles, according to a survey by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, with the number rising to 57 percent among those whose spouses served for at least 200 days. In 2024, the divorce rate jumped 6.5 percent, according to the Israeli Rabbinate, which oversees all Jewish divorces in

the country. Over half of the spouses in the survey also cited a negative turn in their children's mental health due to their fathers' deployments.

The stress shows up everywhere in daily life. Road rage is higher; traffic fatalities are on pace to be Israel's highest in 18 years, according to the National Road Safety Authority. Meanwhile, there's hardly a person in the country whose heart doesn't race when they hear the sound of a motorcycle revving, which echoes the ominous sound of an air-raid siren.

Repairing the infrastructure damage wrought by the war may be easier, but that, too, will take time.

Over 90 percent of the residents of southern Israel who were evacuated from their homes near Gaza during the war have returned, joined by some 2,500 from around the country, according to the government agency responsible for the area's rehabilitation. But large swaths of the communities hardest hit by Hamas's destruction remain uninhabitable. Most of the surviving residents of Kibbutzim Be'eri, Kfar Aza, Nahal Oz and Nir Oz are still living elsewhere, with the government estimating they won't be able to move back until sometime next year. For them,

the trauma is ongoing.

Recovery is also far off in northern Israel, which endured a year of attacks by Hezbollah following October 7—until Israel crippled the terror group's command and control with an offensive that included the

ingenious beeper and walkie talkie attacks and an IDF ground invasion. Destroyed neighborhoods in Metula and Manara have yet to be rebuilt; some evacuees who left for central Israel during the war don't plan to return; and the area's economy, which relies heavily on tourism, has yet to rebound.

On the environmental front, devastation and damage to agricultural infrastructure in both Israel's North and South is still widespread.

DESPITE ALL THESE CHALLENGES, Israel has much weighing in its favor. The war demonstrated that the country's prewar social divisions were not deep enough to prevent closing ranks against a common enemy. Israelis showed both themselves and their foes that they are resilient, resourceful and robust.

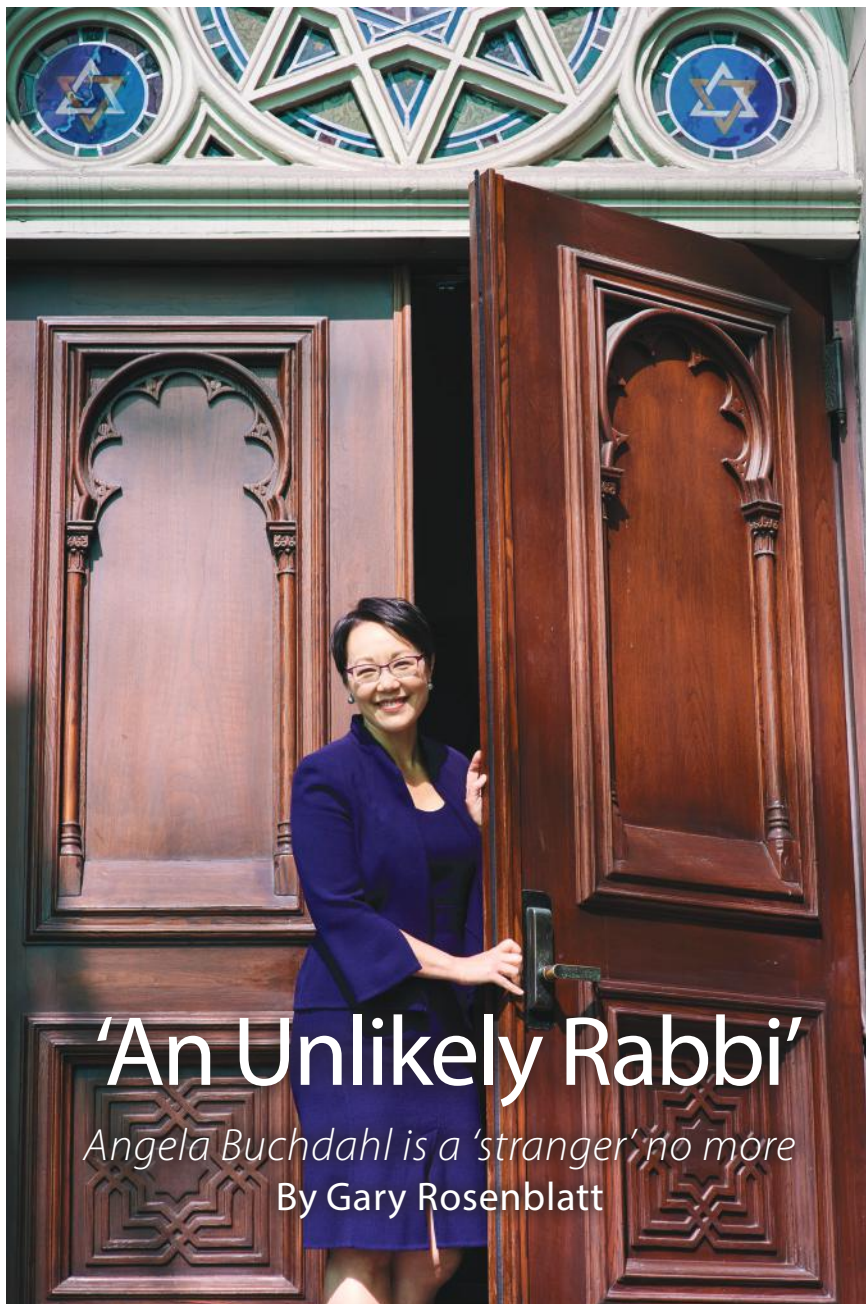
While the war upended life for millions in myriad ways, the conflicts with Iran and Hezbollah ended up killing far fewer Israelis and destroying far less infrastructure than military experts had forecasted in their scenario planning. Moreover, Israel's overwhelming victories against Hezbollah and Iran altered the balance of power in the region and have opened up new opportunities that may yet reshape the Middle East—including, possibly, Israel's relationships with Syria and Saudi Arabia. Israel's international reputation may be battered, but its most important ally, the United States, is standing steadfastly behind it.

There remains much uncertainty about the future, and there's much work to be done. But one thing is clear: Israelis are adept at meeting challenges. As Theodor Herzl famously said, "If you will it, it is no dream." **H**

Uriel Heilman is a journalist living in Israel.



Human Toll A soldier injured in the war receives care at Hadassah Hospital Mount Scopus's new Gandel Rehabilitation Center.



'An Unlikely Rabbi'

Angela Buchdahl is a 'stranger' no more
By Gary Rosenblatt

TWO LINES START FORMING about an hour before synagogue services, one leading up to the front doors at the top of the steps of the majestic structure, the other leading down to a side door around the corner. The early birds are a mix of ages, talking quietly among themselves amid an air of anticipation. Alice, a friendly older woman next to me in line, says she has been a regular since 1982. She loves the music and the singing and comes early to avoid the rush when many hundreds of others arrive.

What draws the crowd to this corner in midtown Manhattan on a hot Friday evening in July is not a major museum exhibit or Broadway show but a religious experience—a 90-minute weekly Shabbat service that combines music and prayer in a joyful, welcoming way that touches the soul, congregants say.

They are far from alone in their praise. In addition to those who fill much of the 1,400-seat sanctuary, an estimated 50,000 people across the country and around the world livestream the service every Friday

evening. On the High Holidays, the numbers approach a million and reach audiences in more than 100 countries.

Welcome to Central Synagogue, a Reform congregation whose roots go back almost two centuries. Over the last two decades, it has undergone a transformation in ritual and engagement, highlighted by innovation and inspired congregational singing. In the process, it has become the largest synagogue in the world, doubling its number of member households to approximately 3,400—with a thousand more on its waiting list. At a time when sociologists note the steep decline in religious affiliation and worship among American Jewry's liberal denominations, Central, as it's known, is thriving.

A key reason for the synagogue's remarkable success is its spiritual leader and former cantor, Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, 53, who describes herself as "an unlikely rabbi," given that she is the daughter of a Buddhist Korean mother and Jewish American father. Born in Seoul, she was raised from the age of 5 in her father's hometown of Tacoma, Wash., where few Jews lived.

Young Angela was blessed with a beautiful alto singing voice, and at the age of 10, was drawn to religion through Jewish music and prayer. She says that when she sang, "I came alive and felt like God heard me." Fully accepted in her community's small Reform congregation, she grew up unaware that her religious identity—as the child of a non-Jewish mother—was not recognized by a significant segment of the Jewish world.

Even Reform Jews have taken "one look at my face and questioned how I could possibly be a real Jew," Buchdahl notes, adding that "the only response I've ever found is to continue to do what I do."

WHAT SHE DOES IS SHARE—from her synagogue pulpit and now, in a moving memoir—her belief that Judaism has deep spiritual teachings that can be accessible and relevant to all in today’s fractured world through prayer, writings, music and interpreting sacred traditions for modern times.

Beautifully written and steeped in Jewish values, *Heart of a Stranger: An Unlikely Rabbi’s Story of Faith, Identity, and Belonging*, describes the stumbling blocks she experienced as a mixed-race Jewish girl from a small Pacific Northwestern outpost. It explains how the love of family, deep spiritual faith and determination in “breaking a stained-glass ceiling” of male rabbinic gatekeepers has made Buchdahl one of the best-known and most admired rabbis in America.

She has spoken at White House Hanukkah candlelighting ceremonies held by Presidents Barack Obama in 2014 and Joe Biden in 2023. In 2022, she made national headlines when an armed man seeking the release of a female terrorist in a Texas prison took four hostages at a small synagogue in nearby Colleyville and called Buchdahl as “an influential rabbi” he’d heard of “who had connections,” she writes in the book, to negotiate their release.

In a lighter vein, she was, as she notes in the introduction to her memoir, featured as a clue on *Jeopardy!* in 2021. The category was “I Am Woman,” and a photo of Buchdahl in a prayer shawl was shown, accompanied by the clue: “Korean-born Angela Buchdahl is the first Asian American to be ordained cantor as well as this leader of a Jewish congregation.”

The question, of course: “What is rabbi?”

Rick Jacobs, president of the Union



From the Pulpit Buchdahl prefers to be a ‘moral and spiritual teacher, not a political pundit.’

for Reform Judaism, the movement’s congregational arm, and a former senior rabbi of Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, N.Y., where Buchdahl served as cantor and assistant rabbi for 12 years, observes that she is “the face, literally and figuratively, of 21st-century Jewish life” in a changing American Jewish world.

Across the denominational spectrum, she is aligned with Modern Orthodox Rabbi Adam Mintz in championing conversion work in the Jewish community, often referring potential converts to each other out of a shared belief in strengthening the Jewish future. “Angela is the perfect rabbi” for today, Mintz says, noting that she possesses a commitment to Jewish peoplehood as well as an appeal to a more diverse generation of American Jews.

Jonathan Sarna, a leading scholar of American Jewish history, says Buchdahl “will be seen as an historical figure,” adding: “We’re lucky to have her as a rabbi at this key moment.”

At a time when Israel has, until recently, been embroiled in its longest and possibly most challenging war following the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, when antisemitism is a daily threat to Jews around the world and American society may be more deeply divided than ever, Buch-

dahl says she is fervently committed to “building up a community of Jewishly educated, joyful and confident” men and women rather than bemoan the very real threats at hand.

Buchdahl has had first-hand knowledge of those threats, based on her January 2022 encounter with the Texas gunman. In one of a series of interviews, she described it to me as “a confrontation with evil” that shook her fundamental belief in humanity and heaven. She said that hearing the man tell her repeatedly on the phone, “I love death more than you love life” was so nihilistic,” she added. She was left “looking down an abyss of darkness” and sought therapy for a time afterward.

“I get angry with God” at times, she says, “and I cry out to God,” wondering how the world could be as chaotic as it is. She says the incident made her realize that “people, including Jews, don’t understand” the power and dangers of antisemitic tropes like “all Jews have influence,” which the gunman said to her. She told her congregants in a sermon the Shabbat after speaking with the gunman that “if you are a Jew in America today and you are not feeling unsettled, you are not paying enough attention.”

Still, “I won’t spend my rabbinate fighting antisemitism,” she told me.

“In the end, I don’t think we can get rid of it. It’s been with us for centuries. And I don’t want to use our best talent and resources to fight haters, but to build the strongest Jewish community.”

CLOSE UP, IT’S CLEAR THAT the pressures of her public position as well as the praise from congregants and peers have not gone to Buchdahl’s head. Sitting across from me over tea in a midtown Manhattan diner one afternoon, she speaks in soft, even tones about the great satisfaction she has in feeling “divine spark energy” in her work, whether it’s leading a service or having a one-on-one conversation with a congregant in need. “I feel that God is in this,” she says.

Buchdahl is accustomed to being approached by strangers who recognize her, chiefly from Central’s streaming Friday night services. Artfully produced and buoyed by an ensemble of professional musicians, the services became hugely popular during Covid, when in-person events were shut down everywhere.

On the Friday evening in July when I was at Central, I sat next to a middle-aged couple visiting from Los Angeles. The wife said she had been livestreaming the Friday evening services almost every week for five years. “The whole experience is very spiritual for me,” she said, noting with a smile that, given the time difference, Shabbat starts for her at 3 p.m. on Fridays.

The young couple sitting in front of me said they had moved to Manhattan a few months earlier from North Carolina and were attending services in the city for the first time. They, too, had been taken with the virtual Friday evening services and were “looking to connect with our



Chag Sameach *The rabbi attended White House Hanukkah celebrations with President Joe Biden and President Barack Obama.*

faith,” explained the young man, a Birthright Israel alum.

Within moments, the service started and Buchdahl and her rabbinic, cantorial and musical colleagues—the synagogue currently employs 13 rabbis and cantors—had everyone wishing each other a Shabbat shalom. Soon, the hundreds of men and women were singing the prayers in Hebrew as they welcomed Shabbat with full voice.

BUCHDAHL’S PATH TO THE rabbinate was far from simple. There were even times when she was ready to give up on Judaism. In her book, she writes how her doubts began at 16, when she had a life-changing experience in Israel that both strengthened and challenged her Jewish identity.

Bright and highly engaged in local Jewish activities in Tacoma, Buchdahl was chosen as one of 25 high school students in the country by the Bronfman Youth Fellowship, a selective summer program in Israel focusing on Jewish learning and Israeli history. (Her aunt had seen an ad for the program in *Hadassah Magazine*.) During her finalist interview, she learned that traditional Jewish law defines one’s identity through matrilineage. This came as a shock to Buchdahl, given

her previous experience of acceptance in her home community. While reaffirming that the Reform movement accepted patrilineal Jews as well, the rabbi who broke the news to her cautioned Buchdahl that “there may be Jews on this trip who do not consider you a Jew.”

Sure enough, it was Buchdahl’s Orthodox roommate on the program who made it clear to her early on that, according to halacha, Buchdahl was not Jewish because her mother is not Jewish. Decades later, she recalls that the encounter—and similar incidents that summer in Israel when she was made aware that others questioned her Jewish status—was “extremely painful and destabilizing.” It was particularly painful because it was during that trip that she fell in love with Jewish learning and text study in a country, she writes, that “felt like a home that had been waiting for me to return.”

She writes poignantly of her ongoing inner struggle as a teenager over her identity, wavering between a deep desire to be a rabbi and the “soul crushing” awareness of being “an outsider” to others. It came to a head several summers later, when Buchdahl was back in Jerusalem on a fellowship to do research for her senior thesis at Yale University on women in the

cantorate. Feeling “marginalized and invisible,” she called her mother in tears, ready to stop being a Jew. Her mother’s simple response—“Is it possible?”—stopped her cold. It was only then that she realized that “I couldn’t stop being Jewish any more than I could stop being Korean or stop being a woman. It is wholly who I am.”

Soon after, she made the decision to immerse in the ritual waters of a mikveh, calling it a “reaffirmation ceremony” rather than a conversion, since the Reform movement already identified her as a patrilineal Jew. “It was a way of ritualizing the internal journey I’d been on,” she writes in the memoir.

AS A RABBI, BUCHDAHL SEES her primary role to be “a moral and spiritual teacher, not a political pundit, and my inclination is to talk from a spiritual space.” She notes that Central’s clergy “could give a political sermon every week,” but those who attend synagogue “can’t get Shabbat” elsewhere. A common theme in her sermons and in how she conducts herself, she says, particularly important in these binary times, is to seek common ground, to hear two opinions and strive to find a third way.

Given the size and diversity of her congregation and international audience online, Buchdahl knows that she can’t—nor does she want to—please everyone with her views. Her goal, she says, “is to hold a community with strong political and ideological differences and find ways to transcend those differences through song and prayer together.”

Buchdahl has traveled to Israel five times since the October 7 massacre, and she notes that the mood feels different each trip, from the initial shock to ongoing trauma, and from

national unity to a fraying over the length and ultimate goals of the war.

She acknowledges that before the ceasefire and hostage release deal in October that saw the return of all the living hostages, she had been “quieter” on the topic of the Israel-Gaza war in the last year, in part because she felt Israelis were still in trauma and she didn’t want criticism, however well-intentioned on her part, to be aligned with Jerusalem’s enemies.

This tension was evident in her Rosh Hashanah sermon this year when she acknowledged at the outset that in the 25 years of her rabbinate, “I’ve never been so afraid to talk about Israel.” She said that if she spoke of her unconditional love of Israel, “some of you will stop listening and decide I’m no longer your rabbi.” And the same would apply among other congregants if she addressed the suffering of Gazans and settler violence in the West Bank.

The war in Gaza is “tearing this community apart” and has been “the most painful experience of my rabbinic life,” Buchdahl said in her sermon. This is a time of deep polit-

ical divide when “any expression of empathy for the other side is considered threatening or disloyal.” But her message was clear: Citing the holiday’s Torah reading of an angel saving Ishmael, Abraham’s first-born son, from starving in the desert, she asserted that Judaism calls on us to expand our hearts, not harden them. That is “our superpower,” she continued, to “show empathy for all God’s children.”

On October 13, the day when all the living hostages were reunited with their families, she and her fellow clergy sent a message of joy to Central’s community, thanking the Trump administration for keeping the release of the hostages as “an unwavering priority and for reaching this historic ceasefire.” May this “be the beginning of a new story for our beloved Israel, for the Palestinian people and for the region,” the message ended.

Buchdahl will also at times speak out on controversial issues like immigration and racism, sometimes using her personal story to underscore her belief that Jewish peoplehood is a family, not a race. She encourages greater empathy for and engagement with Jews of Color, like her, who



Showing Up Buchdahl spoke at a hostages’ rally in New York City a year into the war.

RON ADAR/SOPA IMAGES/SPA USA/ALAMY

make up about 15 percent of American Jewry.

HER MEMOIR, *HEART OF A Stranger*, follows Buchdahl's clerical career, which began with her 1991 investiture as a cantor and 2001 rabbinic ordination, both from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. In 2006, she decided to leave the comfort of the suburban congregation of Westchester Reform Temple to become senior cantor at Central. She became senior rabbi in 2014, following the retirement of the much-admired Rabbi Peter Rubinstein, who brought more Jewish ritual and tradition to Central during the nearly three decades he served.

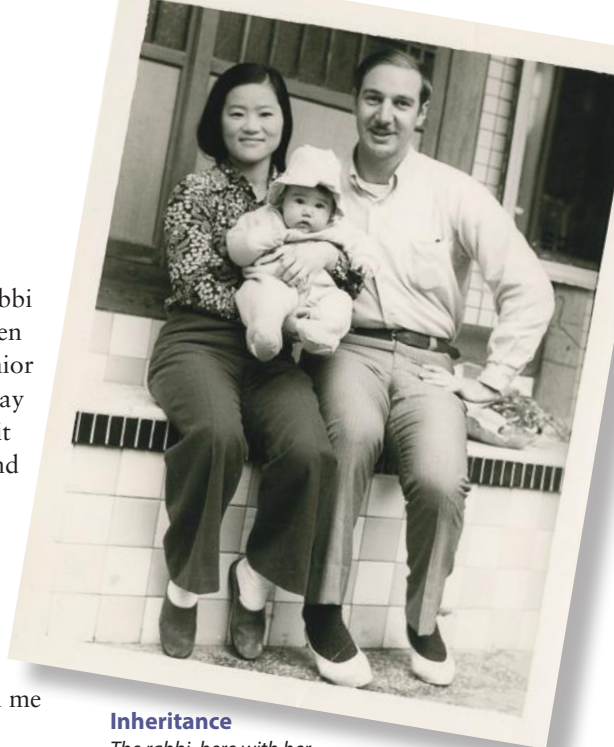
Though Buchdahl has made it to the top of her field, she notes that five

decades after the first female rabbi in America was ordained, women are still underrepresented in senior rabbinic positions. She cites a pay gap, a job structure that makes it difficult for working mothers and a subtle double standard that questions whether women have the gravitas to lead a large congregation. "One thing about me," she says, "is when you tell me I can't do something, it triggers the survivor/fighter in me to say, 'Yes I can.'"

Buchdahl finds trust and warmth in the deep friendships she has with a small circle of highly accomplished fellow Upper West Side women she describes in a chapter of her book titled "Female Posse." They, along with their families, serve as "a lifeboat" for her, and have provided a safe space and respite on Shabbat afternoons for more than 15 years. She takes pride in the fact that the friendships include their husbands as well as their children, who have grown up together.

Each of the women in the group I spoke to said Buchdahl brought spirituality into their lives. Ariela Dubler, head of school at the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, calls Buchdahl "a believer who lives and expresses that belief in ways that draw people in." Ilana Ruskay-Kidd, founder and head of Shefa, a Jewish school for children with language-based disabilities, says Buchdahl is "the hardest working person I know, but she does it quietly, no kvetching," attributing that quality to "the Buddhist, non-complaining part of her."

Buchdahl, in her memoir, describes her close friend, author Abigail Pogrebin, as her "book doula, master editor and lifelong *chavruta*" (study partner). Pogrebin says that when she first heard Buchdahl sing at a bat



Inheritance

The rabbi, here with her parents, was born in South Korea.

mitzvah at Central in 2006, "I felt in her presence that God had entered the room." Almost immediately, she convinced her husband that they should become members of Central.

"I saw that Angela was building a worship experience for what people need," says Pogrebin, who served as president of Central for three years, starting in 2015.

ANOTABLE ELEMENT OF BUCHDAHL'S memoir is that it manages to offer a universal message through the lens of Jewish wisdom. Each chapter of the book describes a piece of Buchdahl's life and is followed by a brief *dvar Torah* whose theme connects the two. For example, a chapter dealing with Buchdahl's dilemma in balancing her manifold obligations as senior rabbi of Central with allotting quality time for her husband, Jacob, an attorney, and their three children, Gabriel, 25, Eli, 23, and Rose, 20, is followed by her observations on *tisomet lev*, Hebrew for "attention."

Buchdahl writes that a range of new technologies have "made our flexibility a priority over our focus.... We have lost our ability—maybe even our will—to give anything every-

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Angela and Jacob Buchdahl

thing.” She notes that “attention is perhaps our highest form of care, excellence and love. Our most precious commodity. The Hebrew word for attention, *tisomet lev*, literally means to ‘place your heart.’ When

you give something your full regard, you direct not just your eyes, ears or mind but also your heart.... Ultimately, our lives will be the sum of what we’ve given our attention.”

Buchdahl says she wrote her memoir with a wide audience in mind. A meditation enthusiast, she suggests that “maybe having a Buddhist mother, I am translating Judaism through multiple lenses to make it accessible.”

She also notes in the book that the core values of her rabbinate are grounded in her, and her mother’s, experience as immigrants, and their struggle for wider acceptance while clinging to a steadfast belief in each person’s unique place in the world—and the responsibility to improve it.

During her late teen years, Buchdahl writes, she never felt “fully Jewish,” always the outsider. But over time, she began to embrace her multiracial heritage and identified with the biblical “mixed multitudes” who traveled from Egypt with Moses and the Israelites in the desert in search of freedom and a spiritual path.

She came to recognize that everyone feels like an outsider in some way, as she notes in her book: “Feeling like a stranger might be the most Jewish thing about me.” **H**

Gary Rosenblatt, a Pulitzer Prize finalist, was editor and publisher of *The Jewish Week of New York* from 1993 to 2019. Prior to that, he was editor of the *Baltimore Jewish Times*. He writes a column, “Between The Lines,” on Substack.

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(5326)



SACRED COLLABORATION

Women are rewriting the role of Torah scribe

By Hilary Danailova

PATIENTLY AND WITH TOTAL focus on the individual in front of her, Torah scribe Jen Taylor Friedman positioned a woman's hand on her own. Together, they drew the Hebrew letter "hay" on the parchment in front of them, as fellow congregants looked on and sunlight shone through the soaring sanctuary windows at Beth Am Israel in Penn Valley, Pa., a Philadelphia suburb.

The woman looked up and smiled as she completed her own contribution to the Torah, which has been commissioned to celebrate the congregation's 100th anniversary.

Taylor Friedman, the first known woman to complete an entire Torah scroll and arguably the world's best-known *soferet*, the term for a female scribe, is writing this Torah over the course of a year, mostly from her home in Cambridge, England.

But in April, and again in October, she spent a long weekend in residence at the Conservative shul, illuminating the ancient Jewish art of *sofrut*—scribed works of scripture—for congregants who, in a growing trend for liberal Jewish communities, penned a letter of the scroll with Taylor Friedman's guidance. In April, the oldest member, dressed in holiday finery for the occasion, was in her 90s; the youngest, just 5, skipped down the synagogue hall afterward.

From the sanctuary's focused hush, participants walked out describing how the simple act of putting quill to Torah felt transcendent.

"The rabbi told us it's a mitzvah to write a Torah in your lifetime, and if you write one letter, it's as if you wrote the whole Torah," Cindy Rozenberg, a Beth Am Israel congregant, said following her own turn with Taylor Friedman. "So everyone is get-

ting to fulfill that mitzvah of writing a whole Torah by participating."

"The best are the ones who are like, 'Oh, I'm just coming along here because my mum dragged me along. She's 80, and I'm 40, and I'm too old for this crap,'" chuckled Taylor Friedman weeks later, back home in England. "And then they do it, and they're like, 'Whoa...'"

THE FEELINGS THAT COME with writing a Torah have special resonance for Jewish women, who were historically excluded from this most solemn undertaking. Since Taylor Friedman penned her first Torah in 2007, several dozen women have followed suit, scribing numerous scrolls and creating an entire professional category that did not exist a generation ago. Their exact number is elusive due to the fluidity of the small community.



Total Focus Together with *soferet* Jen Taylor Friedman (opposite page, right), congregant Tobie Hoffman pens a letter in a Torah scroll for Beth Am Israel, a congregation near Philadelphia; Taylor Friedman introduces children at Beth Am Israel to scribal arts.

Most train informally, without earning specific diplomas, and *sofrot*, the plural of *soferet*, typically balance Torah projects with roles as artists, rabbis and teachers.

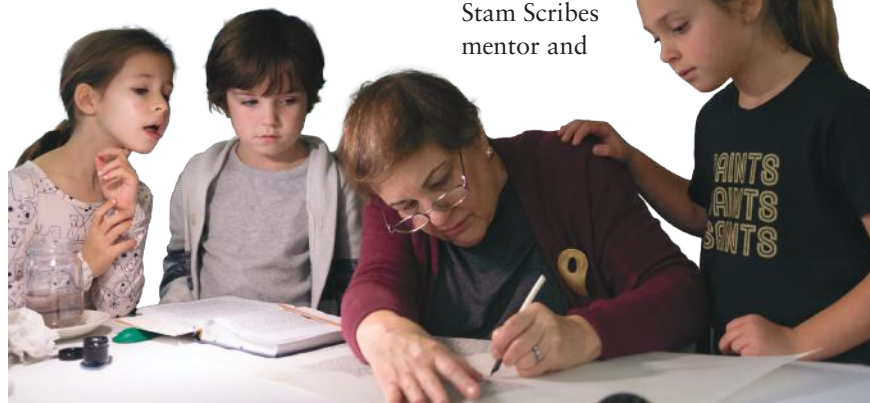
They join the women almost exclusively from Judaism's liberal denominations who, over the past 50-plus years, have broken ground as rabbis, mohels and other clerical positions that, for millennia, were held entirely by men.

"In the broader context of social change, we've got women [synagogue] presidents, we've got egalitarian congregations, we've got women counting in the minyan," reflected Taylor Friedman, who is in her 40s. "From that perspective, it was only a matter of time before you had women doing all the things."

Sofrot have not only broadened Jewish tradition, they have also created a community, at once global and local, of Jewish women ranging from teen apprentices to retirees drawn into sacred collaboration. The scribes include Linda Coppleson, a New Jersey Jewish educator, calligrapher and sometime Taylor Friedman collaborator; and Bec Richman, a Cleveland-based rabbi and artist mentored by Taylor Friedman who is now scribing her first scroll.

There is also Rachel Reichardt

of Brazil, the first woman in Latin America to receive a scribal diploma, from the Latin American Rabbinic Seminary in Buenos Aires; Linda Motzkin, a retired rabbi living in Eugene,



Enriching Tradition *Soferet* Linda Coppleson is a longtime Jewish educator; a detail of her work.

Ore., who has led myriad congregations in scroll production through her Community Torah Project; and Shoshana Gugenheim Kedem, a Portland, Ore.-based American Israeli scribe and artist and the founder of numerous Jewish feminist art projects.

Virtually all are members of the international collective Stam Scribes. STaM is the traditional abbreviation appended to the title of *sofer* and stands for "*sefer* Torah, tefillin and mezuzah," the three principal scribal products.

On a WhatsApp group, at informal in-person gatherings and as long-distance collaborators, the women of Stam Scribes mentor and



Ritual in Action In 2011, Anne Shore became the first bar or bat mitzvah to read from the scroll completed by the Women's Torah Project a year earlier.

learn from each other, stepping in to lend a hand, literally, on complex endeavors.

AMONG THE BEST-KNOWN OF these endeavors was the Women's Torah Project (WTP), a landmark enterprise that, between 2003 and 2010, produced the first-ever Torah to be entirely scribed and embellished with ornamentation by women, created for the Kadima Reconstructionist Community of Seattle.

"There were a number of women who sort of became interested in it and started to find their own path to it around the same time," recalled Copleson. She was one of the WTP

scribes and, now in her 70s, is among the *sofrut* movement's senior members.

"I don't think that I went into it to be a flag-bearer for feminism," she added, though she was primed for such a role, having grown up in the Young Judaea movement and having celebrated her bat mitzvah some 60 years ago, when the rite was less common, particularly at a Conservative synagogue. She noted that women today "enrich the tradition, because they approach it in a different way."

Copleson was a longtime educator at the Golda Och Academy (formerly the Solomon Schechter School), a West Orange, N.J., Conservative-affiliated institution where she taught Jewish history, rabbinics and, as her interest in Jewish calligraphy deepened, Jewish scribal arts. Seeking to go deeper, she began a formal study of *sofrut* in 2003 with Rabbi Eric Ray, a legendary British *sofer* who dreamed of opening an egalitar-

ian scribal academy.

"His reputation was such that it was said that he could tell where and by whom a Torah was written within 50 miles of its creation," she recalled.

From Ray, she learned the mechanics—"the formation of letters, cutting the quill, the rules about writing and spacing," she said. After he died in 2004, Copleson formed a study partnership with Taylor Friedman, reviewing the meticulous halachic tenets of *sofrut* weekly for several years.

"There are myriad rules of writing: how to make corrections—and there are so many corrections—the rules about erasing and about re-scribing the lines," Copleson explained. "It's all very detailed." Scribes must utter blessings before writing any of the names of God. And any mistake, one as small as a miswritten letter, could render an entire scroll unkosher.

There are also rules about scribes



Home Office Taylor Friedman is based in Cambridge, England.

themselves: Women (along with heretics, gentiles, those with disabilities and anyone under the age of 13) are barred from writing a Torah scroll under traditional halacha, and there are no female Orthodox scribes. While halacha does not require a mikveh visit before scribing, many scribes, including men, dip ceremonially before sitting at what are typically angled, well-lit desks to write with the required ink and quills or reeds. On most scribes' desks sit blades for sharpening quills and materials for correcting mistakes on the parchment used for the scrolls, such as erasers and sandpaper.

TAYLOR FRIEDMAN GREW UP in Southampton, England, and credits her pioneering role in *sofrot* to her intellectual training as a math student at Oxford. “‘This, and therefore, logically, this other thing’—that’s the structure of analysis I am familiar with,” she noted. “Talmud is a lot like math, but with exciting twists and turns because people are human.” The tangible nature of *sofrot*

attracted Taylor Friedman “because it connects you into something that’s much, much larger.

“The rabbis of the Talmud said even writing just one letter,” she continued, is something that everyone should do “because it’s not the same as just reading it or listening to it or talking about it. You are creating a thing, and it’s something that we have been doing for two and a half thousand years, which is pretty amazing.” (Though the Talmudic rabbis were of course

referring only to men.)

After studying at a yeshiva in Israel, Taylor Friedman moved to New York City with her first husband, where she became known for her scribing of megillot. It was prominent *sofer* Neil Yerman who recruited Taylor Friedman to write her first Torah in 2007, a commission for United Hebrew Congregation, a St. Louis Reform synagogue.

Settled back in the United Kingdom with her second husband, Taylor Friedman, a busy mom of one, is now working on multiple scrolls concurrently. Each will take about a year, a timeline that is typical for full-time scribes. Like most others in the field, Taylor Friedman, a member of Cambridge’s Beth Shalom Reform Synagogue, also consults on scribal projects and teaches the craft online to both male and female aspiring scribes. (Apprenticeship is the primary way most men and women train.)

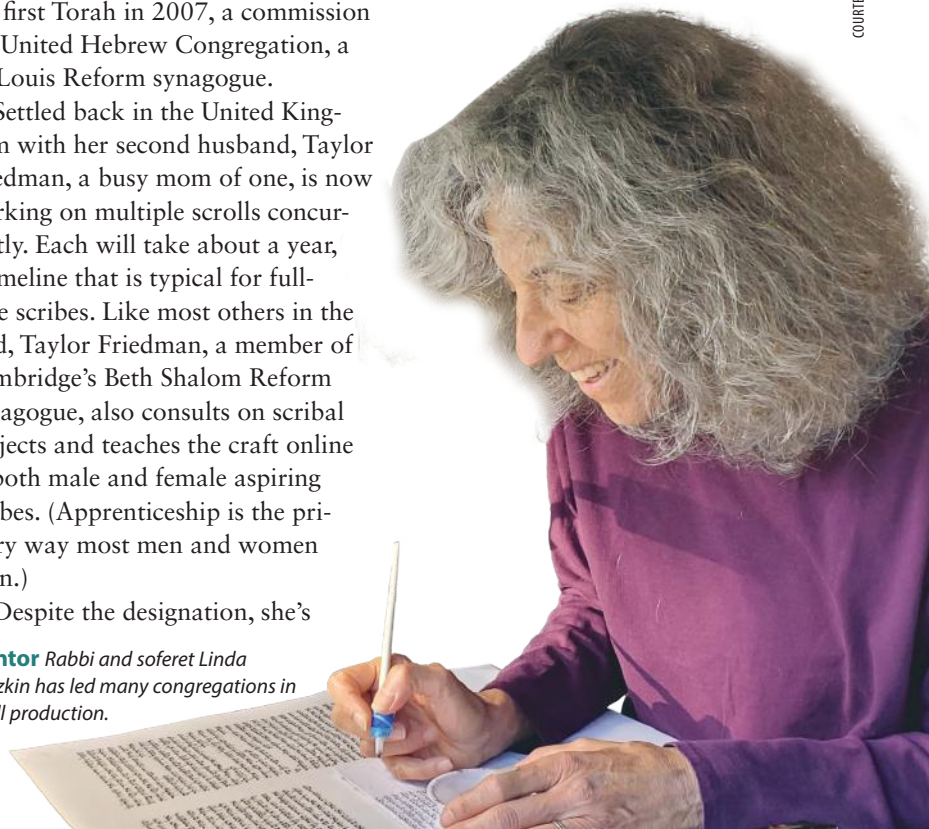
Despite the designation, she’s

Mentor Rabbi and *soferet* Linda Motzkin has led many congregations in scroll production.

pretty certain that she wasn’t the first woman to complete a Torah. “I’m just the first one whose name we know,” said Taylor Friedman, who added that one of her current projects probably is a first—a megillah scribed on giraffe parchment.

Taylor Friedman was part of the WTP for the Kadima congregation in Seattle—a galvanizing event for the fledgling *soferet* community. Nearly two decades later, those involved still marvel at the sense of mission that bonded the global feminist enterprise.

In the end, six *sofrot* contributed to the WTP from their far-flung studios, including Coppleson, Gugenheim Kedem and Reichhardt; Taylor Friedman helped check the work. Seven Judaica artists from across the United States, Israel and Latin America contributed elements, including a *yad*, the pointer used to guide the Torah reader; a decorative clasp; and a pomegranate-themed patchwork Torah covering to which congregants contributed scraps of fabric.



COURTESY OF JEN TAYLOR FRIEDMAN (TOP); COURTESY OF RABBI LINDA MOTZKIN



Next Generation Rabbi Bec Richman is scribing her first Torah scroll for her Cleveland congregation.

“All these individual pieces came together to become something so much greater than a Torah,” said Wendy Graff, a longtime Kadima congregant who coordinated the project. “It became this opportunity for women and men to work together

to change the world.”

That change is already evident in the popularity within liberal synagogues of participatory, congregation-commissioned Torahs and in the number—still modest but no lon-

ger novel—of those Torahs penned by women. Rabba Sara Hurwitz, the first woman to be ordained by an Orthodox seminary, suggests that it could be only a matter of time before an Orthodox *soferet* emerges.

“Being able to learn from and follow the trajectory of women in the other denominations has been very useful and helpful,” said Hurwitz, the co-founder and president of Yeshivat Maharat, a Modern Orthodox seminary for women. “The writing of a Torah scroll is a holy endeavor, and there are Jewish law requirements at every step of the way, from acquiring the parchment to how it’s sewn together and how to ink the letters. The fact that women didn’t have access to this knowledge for so long, and now they do—it’s inevitable that they would want to take that knowledge and put it to use.”

And when they do, *sofrot* say they approach the process of writing a scroll a bit differently than their male counterparts.

“When you open up things to women, the communal nature of it

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shifts,” reflected Linda Motzkin, who, in her 60s, is part of that first generation of female scribes.

RABBI BEC RICHMAN, IN HER 30s, is among the youngest generation of scribes. She is now working on her first Torah, for Beth El-The Heights Synagogue in Cleveland, where she is a member. She’s also writing a book about *sofrut* and teaching others in short-term scribal residencies.

Interested in art since her early childhood, Richman found her niche while studying to become a rabbi at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College near Philadelphia. Delving into the tradition behind each Hebrew letter “became a central part not only of my rabbinic learning, but also of my understanding of Judaism as a whole,” Richman said. “We’re a people of the book, but also a people of the hand. We are so tactile in the ancient practices that we have engaged in ritually throughout time.”

Richman noted that a few years ago, Linda Coppleson, the New Jersey Jewish educator and artist, became the first woman to have a grandchild read from a Torah she had personally scribed. In a decade or so, Richman expects her own children to do so for their b’nei mitzvah. “That, for me, is a huge and important element of ancestry and inheritance and relationship to the matrilineal line in Judaism,” she said.

“All of us know that we’re not welcome in the traditional men’s scribing spaces,” Richman said. “And so, over the years, we’ve made our own sacred circle, with this unabashed determination: Torah is as much ours as it is for anyone else.” **H**

Hilary Danailova writes about travel, culture, politics and lifestyle for numerous publications.

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Old Truths, New Healing

Timeless Jewish wisdom for modern wellness

By Alexandra Lapkin Schwank

WHEN LEVI SHMOTKIN WAS an 18-year-old student at Yeshiva University, he found himself sinking into feelings of negativity and insecurity. He described the experience as a kind of “black water” that enveloped him and made it difficult to focus on his studies, but he was never formally diagnosed with depression or anxiety.

Searching for relief, Shmotkin turned to the writings of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the revered leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, known as the Rebbe. During his lifetime, Schneerson penned tens of thousands of letters to people seeking guidance on issues ranging from loneliness to overeating, many of them available through Chabad resources.

Those letters, Shmotkin said, helped him shift his mindset and rediscover a sense of hope. About a decade later, as an educator and rabbi living in Brooklyn, he decided to share that wisdom more broadly in his book, *Letters for Life: Guidance for Emotional Wellness from the Lubavitcher Rebbe*.

Reflecting on Jewish resilience through difficult times, Shmotkin said in an interview that what held Jews “together were the texts that we carried. It’s empirical to say that there is value in this ancient wisdom.”

For generations, Jews have turned to spiritual and rabbinic texts for help navigating contemporary chal-

lenges. A recent wave of books continues that tradition, including titles such as *Letters for Life*, *The Jewish Way to a Good Life*, *Mussar in Recovery* and *Torah for Mental Health*. Their authors use Jewish sources to offer time-tested pathways toward meaning, strength and inner peace, with an emphasis on community. Along the way, they also clarify that what many today call “self-help” has deep Jewish roots.

AS HE EXPLAINS IN HIS PROlogue, Shmotkin focuses on the Rebbe’s letters that give practical, actionable recommendations on living a good life. Divided into two parts—“Essentials for a Healthy Life,” which focuses on building beneficial habits, and “Overcoming Darkness,” on combating negative emotions and behaviors—the book has inspired Orthodox study groups across the country. But the simple advice contained in the letters Shmotkin shares is universal.

For example, a section that unpacks the social benefits of getting involved in one’s community discusses the story of Soviet refugee Taibel Lipskier, who fled to the United States in 1947 and later sought the Rebbe’s guidance for her persistent sadness. His response was disarmingly direct: “Go to as many weddings as possible and dance—and inspire other people to dance, too.”

Shmotkin cites Lipskier’s grandson,

Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson, who said the Rebbe’s prescription not only lifted his grandmother’s spirits and those around her, it also integrated her more deeply into her community. “She lived in Brooklyn, where many young women getting married had little or no family present,” Jacobson said of the Crown Heights Chabad community, which was home to many women impacted by the Holocaust or whose families had rejected them because they had become observant. “My grandmother would show up and dance—sometimes for hours—with the bride and her friends, bringing immense joy to the wedding.”

Rabbi Shira Stutman likewise focuses on joy in *The Jewish Way to a Good Life: Find Happiness, Build Community, and Embrace Loving-kindness*. Stutman explains that in Judaism, joy is inseparable from community. “The notion of being happy in your ivory tower, all alone—that’s entirely foreign in the Jewish tradition,” Stutman, senior rabbi of Aspen Jewish Congregation, a Reform synagogue in Colorado, and co-host of the podcast *Chutzpod!*, said in an interview.

Across 10 chapters, on topics from *ahava*, love, to Shabbat, in which she discusses the idea of resting, Stutman explores Jewish values through personal anecdotes and traditional texts and customs, showing how core Jewish ideas balance individual fulfillment with communal connection.

She, too, visits the topic of dancing at weddings, in her chapter on *simcha*, happiness. Stutman recalls the exuberant circle dance at her own wedding and contrasts it with the more solitary “first dance” tradition common in American ceremonies. “Happiness centers the community; the self comes second,” she writes.

“The Jewish idea of happiness is one part mosh pit, one part sweat—but all parts joy and celebration together,” Stutman said.

A fusion of emotional wellness and connection guides Rabbi Tal Sessler’s *Torah for Mental Health: Jewish Wisdom for Psychological Growth*. Sessler, the rabbi of Temple Beth Zion, a Conservative congregation in Los Angeles, has long seen the “therapeutic component of rabbinic life” as essential to his work in providing spiritual care.

Sessler’s book, composed of accessible mini-chapters, blends rabbinic and Jewish teachings with reflections from secular thinkers and practical advice. Topics range from dealing with anxiety regarding politics to gratitude and mindfulness.

“The first two words that Jews are encouraged to say upon waking are *modeh ani*—‘grateful am I,’” Sessler writes in one chapter. “Gratitude isn’t just a feeling. It’s a practice.”

In addition to encouraging readers to cultivate gratitude daily, whether through prayer or journaling, he notes that modern research echoes Jewish tradition—that gratitude and happiness are deeply intertwined.

“I always recite my own gratitude list,” he writes, explaining how the practice restores his emotional equilibrium as he himself wrestles with political turmoil. “I created this daily ritual, which I am very strict and meticulous about, because we human beings are prone to ‘negativity

bias’—a notorious human disposition to focus more on that which is lacking and not working in our lives.”

FOR HANNAH L., A MOTHER FROM Atlanta, the centuries-old Jewish spiritual practice of *mussar* became a lifeline when her son battled a drug addiction. And when, she admitted, she became “addicted to fixing him.”

Hannah (she omits her last name in keeping with the anonymity in recovery communities) found support through Al-Anon, a sister organization to Alcoholics Anonymous designed for loved ones of addicts. While the experience was valuable, she decided to seek a Jewish framework to explore the principles in the recovery program and discovered *mussar*, a spiritual discipline focused on cultivating character and ethical behavior that today has found resonance with Jews of all kinds.

Together with Harvey Winokur, rabbi emeritus of Reform Temple Kehillat Chaim in Roswell, Ga., as well as a facilitator for The Mussar Institute, she co-authored *Mussar in Recovery: A Jewish Spiritual Path to Serenity & Joy*, a book that weaves Jewish ethical teachings with the 12 steps in recovery programs.

“When we view ourselves through a *mussar* lens,” they write, “we see that we are simply human—not uniquely bad.”

Hannah emphasizes that cultivating self-love and self-acceptance is essential—especially for those in recovery from addiction. That inward act is also mirrored in AA’s Step 4: “Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

Mussar teaches the importance of finding a healthy balance: too little self-love can lead to shame, too much to arrogance. Every person contains

both a *yetzer tov* (inclination toward good) and a *yetzer hara* (inclination toward harm), Hannah explains. The goal is not perfection but balance between the two inclinations, and refining character traits through self-awareness and discipline.

Emunah, or faith, plays a crucial role in countering addiction. “*Emunah* is pivotal to recovery,” she writes. “All of us show up in life as imperfect beings, some more imperfect than others. Faith provides a pathway to self-acceptance and self-love.”

SHMOTKIN, AUTHOR OF *LETTERS for Life*, notes that self-acceptance and self-love are essential not only for emotional wellness but also for fighting antisemitism. The Rebbe, he said, saw love of one’s Jewish identity as a psychological anchor. When Jews assimilate too deeply into surrounding cultures, we leave ourselves vulnerable—psychologically and spiritually, Shmotkin explained.

The antidote, the Rebbe taught, was to strengthen one’s “Jewish home” through community, mitzvot and shared purpose. “When you have that,” Shmotkin said, “you’re less shaken by the antisemites. This people, this tradition, this wisdom—it’s so much greater than the ups and downs of the world around us.” **H**

Alexandra Lapkin Schwank is a freelance writer living with her family in the Boston area.

Go to [hadassahmagazine.org/books](https://www.hadassahmagazine.org/books)

for more reviews of books that utilize Jewish thought to explore health and wellness, including *The Lost Wisdom of Rambam: A Practical Guide to Ancient Wisdom for Body and Soul* by Remi Haik Weinberg, which outlines nutrition, healthy eating and emotional practices using the writings of Maimonides.



Nursing the Nation

Hadassah responds to Israel's nursing crisis

By Wendy Elliman

ON A TYPICAL DAY, THEY WORK an eight- or nine-hour shift, continually on their feet and often skipping breaks. They assess patients, administer medications, collect samples, manage catheters and drains, prep for procedures and respond, as needed, to emergency codes. They comfort and inform patients and families, coordinate with physicians and other medical personnel and check stock and equipment.

They are today's hospital nurses, women and increasingly men who are no longer assistants at the margins of health care but highly trained clinicians as well as educators and researchers. While their role in modern health care is critical, there are too few of them on hospitals wards worldwide, with the World Health Organization reporting in 2023 a global shortage of 5.8 million nurses.

In Israel, there are 6.97 nurses per 1,000 people, a number well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 9.4, ranking Israel as 21st among the 38 OECD member countries. "This shortfall is undermining the entire health care system and putting patient health outcomes at risk," said Dr. Yoram Weiss, director-general of the Hadas-

sah Medical Organization.

Israel's health care system needs at least 1,000 more nurses over the next decade. "Years of underfunding, long hours, high patient-to-nurse ratios, compounded by the Covid pandemic and two years of war," have led to shortages and burnout, said Dr. Weiss.

Not all hospitals in Israel are experiencing the same level of shortages. It is most acute in the country's periphery and in specialized medical settings such as the intensive care unit or cardiac care. The multi-pronged problem requires recruiting and training additional nurses as well as supporting those currently working in the field.

WITH NURSES CENTRAL TO quality of care and patient outcomes, Hadassah is working to meet this need," Dr. Weiss added. HMO, he explained, is tackling the shortage on several fronts, from growing its nursing school to offering degree programs for those choosing nursing as their second career—with vital support from Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America.

Situated in the center of the country, HMO has no difficulty recruiting nurses, according to Rely Alon, dep-

uty director-general of Nursing and Health Professions at HMO and a certified nurse practitioner and midwife. "We're constrained only by budget," she explained, noting that shortages are mainly due to government underfunding of nursing positions. "Nurses are drawn to Hadassah by the clear career path we offer them—from professional development programs, to master's and Ph.D. tracks, to teaching, research and innovation opportunities. Twenty percent of our 2,552 nurses have MSNs—master's degrees in nursing."

HMO is also home to the Middle East's first nursing school, and Israel's Health Ministry has now called on the Henrietta Szold Hadassah-Hebrew University School of Nursing to increase its capacity by 25 percent.

"Our goal isn't solely to address workforce shortages," said Nurit Zusman, director of the nursing school. "It's also to advance academic excellence and to train a more diverse and empowered generation of nursing leaders."

The nursing school is now upgrading its infrastructure to accommodate larger cohorts. Most prominent is the Jean Goldwurm Auditorium, renovated into a 170-seat, high-tech, wheelchair-accessible learning center, made possible with over \$1 million raised by HWZOA's Nurses and Allied Health Professionals Council as well as contributions from the Health Ministry.

There are also key recruitment efforts, among them second-career programs at the nursing school. One is an accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) for candidates with undergraduate degrees in other fields who want to train as registered nurses. "Because of their academic background," explained Zusman, "they complete their the-

oretical and clinical training in two and a half years instead of the four years of the BSN program. We're also now launching Israel's first master's level second-career program for those pursuing leadership and management roles in nursing."

Olivera Hay, 41, saw an ad for Hadassah's second-career nursing track in 2019. "I had a bachelor's in economics and sociology from Bar Ilan, but I'd been home with my four children and hadn't done much with it," she said. The ad made her recall her earlier interest in the medical field.

She enrolled at Hadassah. For the next two and a half years, she commuted from Gush Etzion to Jerusalem, studying and starting her clinical placements—all during a global pandemic. "After qualifying, I was accepted as a cardiology nurse at Hadassah Hospital Ein Kerem," she said. "I loved the work, and stayed there for three years, until I felt myself burning out."

Moving to the maternity ward renewed her energy and satisfaction. "I'm responsible for eight mothers and eight newborns as well as handling admissions and discharges," she said. "It's a full patient load and I usually get home shattered. But I don't regret moving to nursing for an instant!"

Another Hadassah response to Israel's nursing shortage addresses socioeconomic disparities in the Ethiopian Israeli community. The program, called Achotenu (which means both "our sister" and "our nurse" in Hebrew), offers aspiring Ethiopian Israeli nurses full scholarships, academic help, housing, stipends and one-on-one mentoring. Since Achotenu launched in 2016, it has graduated 128 nurses.

"Like many of us from Ethiopian backgrounds, I scored too low on the

psychometric tests for acceptance, even though I was a good student," said Achotenu graduate Yehudit Armias, 26. Armias is among thousands of Ethiopian Israelis who struggle with Israel's SAT equivalent due to cultural bias and language barriers.

Hadassah's nursing school also trains clinical nurses for the Israel Defense Forces medical corps in a three-year track known as Pisgah ("summit" or "pinnacle"). According to Zusman, "Pisgah and Achotenu students together comprise about 30 percent of our student body."

BYOND FILLING ISRAEL'S NURSING ranks, HMO helps its nurses achieve advanced academic degrees. "There's critical need for nurses with MSNs and Ph.D.s to lead, teach and innovate," Alon said.

This focus helps retain top professionals and creates teachers and role models, particularly important as nursing faculty at HMO and elsewhere in Israel approach retirement. Israel's only integrated master's in Advanced Practice Nursing (APN), combining academic coursework with clinical training in a single structured degree, is offered at HMO. And in December 2023, the nursing school took another step forward when it opened the country's first Nursing Research Center. "The center will advance quality of patient care as well as boost both nurse retention and professional prestige," Alon said.

The Nursing Research Center, like the Goldwurm auditorium, was made possible by HWZOA's Nurses Council. The first national Jewish nurses' organization in the United States, it was founded in 1990 by nurses Nancy Falchuk, a past Hadassah national president, and Rachel Albert to support Hadassah's nursing

school. Today, it has some 7,000 members in 35 local chapters, offers mentorship and networking, and advocates for health care issues—especially women's health—as well as advanced nursing in Israel.

"Nursing is a common language, which transcends cultural, language and geographic barriers," said the Nurses Council's current chair, Robin Shuman. "By sharing creative approaches to challenges faced by all, everyone benefits."

"We embrace this collaboration" between the council and the nursing school, said Dr. Weiss, HMO director-general. "Our multifaceted strategy—upgrading infrastructure, academic leadership, inclusive programs, strategic recruitment—underscores the long-term commitment of Hadassah in both Jerusalem and the United States to remedying Israel's nursing shortage." **H**

Wendy Elliman is a British-born science writer who has lived in Israel for more than five decades. She is the author of the new book, *The Outsiders Who Built Irish Entertainment: Maurice and Louis Elliman*.

HADASSAH ON CALL



Decode today's developments

in health and medicine, from new treatments to tips on staying healthy, with the *Hadassah On Call: New Frontiers in Medicine* podcast. In each episode, journalist Maayan Hoffman, a third-generation Hadassah member, interviews one of the Hadassah Medical Organization's top doctors, nurses or medical innovators. Catch up on recent episodes, including a conversation with Dr. Ofer Gofrit, chair of HMO's Urology Department, about prostate cancer and other men's health concerns. Subscribe and share your comments at [hadassah.org/hadassahoncall](https://www.hadassah.org/hadassahoncall) or wherever you listen to podcasts.



This Is What Resilience Looks Like

Strength in numbers, strength in our support for Israel

‘MY ZIONISM IS NOT SEPARATE FROM MY JUDAISM’

By Stephanie Z. Bonder

WE OFTEN HEAR THAT ISRAELIS are resilient. They endure terror, loss and hardship, yet they keep moving forward, even after the horrific Hamas massacre of October 7, 2023. The story of Jewish resolve is a familiar one, going all the way back to the Maccabees and their defeat of the Assyrian Greeks, commemorated in the celebration of Hanukkah.

Today, being a Zionist requires resilience, too. Love of Israel—and the belief that Jews deserve self-determination in their biblical homeland—has come under attack. Zionists are harassed, silenced and targeted.

I feel it daily. Nevertheless, when Hamas still held living hostages, I wore a “Bring Them Home” dog tag along with my Magen David neck-

lace. I advocate for Israel through calls, emails and my writing. My Zionism is not separate from my Judaism; it is central to my identity.

But in a climate of rising antisemitism, visibility carries risk. On a family trip to Montreal, friends urged me not to wear my Magen David for fear of becoming a target. As a compromise, I switched to a quieter symbol, a hamsa,

COURTESY OF STEPHANIE Z. BONDER

THE METRICS BEHIND HADASSAH’S SUCCESS

Despite ongoing challenges in Israel and the United States, Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America, has been unwavering in advancing its mission. From helping soldiers and civilians heal, to medical innovation at the Hadassah Medical Organization, to speaking out when women’s voices were being silenced about rape and torture, to standing tall against a tidal wave of antisemitism, HWZOA has remained steadfast in its work, as outlined by an array of impressive metrics that define the organization’s success in 2024. To learn more about the stories of the inspiring individuals and cutting-edge research behind the numbers, read HWZOA’s 2024 Impact Report at annualreport.hadassah.org.

MEDICAL INNOVATION AT HMO

1 MILLION patients served annually at two hospital campuses

1,900+ clinical trials

950 research papers published

60% of European Union grants awarded to Israeli hospitals went to HMO researchers

40% of Israel Science Foundation grants awarded to Israeli hospitals went to HMO

260+ patents awarded to HMO researchers

\$6 MILLION+ secured by Hadasit, HMO’s technology transfer and innovation company, for applied research

10,000 patients will be treated annually at the Gandel Rehabilitation Center, which, when complete, will feature **140** inpatient beds and an outpatient clinic able to serve **250** patients a day

COLLECTIVE VOICE

50,000+ people took **103,000+** actions through our National Action Center. Nearly **400** Hadassah advocates met with congressional representatives from **25** offices

45+ group letters advocating for policy changes at the United Nations; in federal, state and local governments; and at corporations and professional organizations were led or joined by Hadassah

130,000+ petition signatures gathered from **118** countries and **116** organizations as part of our #EndTheSilence campaign, demanding that the United Nations support an independent, unbiased investigation into Hamas’s weaponization of rape and gender violence on October 7, 2023, and beyond.

MOURNING AND MEMORY

800+ Hadassah households across the country gathered virtually on the eve of the one-year anniversary of October 7. **500+** Hadassah supporters this year commemorated victims of the attack and ensuing war in a virtual event on October 9

26 first-degree relatives of HMO staff and five members of Hadassah’s Youth Aliyah vil-lages lost their lives on October 7 and in the Israel-Gaza war, through 2024



Stephanie Z. Bonder visited the Kotel with her husband, Alan (left); after October 7, she volunteered in the south of Israel.

along with the dog tag, which features a Jewish star on its reverse side. I understand the need for caution, but I refuse to hide who I am.

And who I am is a proud Hadassah Zionist; a lay leader in the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ, where I lead a team that focuses on partnerships with Israel and Ukraine; a trustee of my deeply Zionist synagogue, Congregation Agudath Israel in Caldwell, N.J.; and an active member of the advocacy initiative End Jew Hatred.

Yet it is exhausting to face relentless hatred. My rabbi recently spoke of learned helplessness—the sense that nothing we do will change an outcome. Many Jews feel this way, but we must resist it.

Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur, in a recent Hadassah Magazine Presents podcast episode, reminded us that our forefathers persevered despite their handicaps: Abraham's initial childlessness, Isaac's blindness, Jacob's limp, Moses' speech impediment. Despite brokenness, they carried out God's mission.

My husband's parents were Holocaust survivors. They lost everything, yet when they reached the displaced persons camps, they and their families worked to earn enough money to immigrate to America. Starting with nothing, they built families and businesses, a living testament to resilience.

The same is true of Israel. From a barren, poverty-stricken land under Ottoman and British rule, Jews built a flourishing state.

Today, Jews around the world are under attack. We must not cower. We must not hide. Zionists must remain resilient—just as we always have—so that our children and grandchildren

inherit a Jewish future of strength, pride and hope. **FI**

Stephanie Z. Bonder recently completed her master's in Jewish education at Hebrew University's Melton School of Education. She's a member of the Hadassah National Board, chair of Hadassah's Speakers Bureau and was named to Hadassah's 2025 list of "18 American Zionist Women You Should Know."



A Sigd celebration in Jerusalem

ZIONISM...DID YOU KNOW

Positioned on the Jewish calendar between the High Holidays and Hanukkah is the celebration of Sigd, sometimes called Mehllela or Amata Saww. It is one of the many unique religious traditions of the Jews of Ethiopia, or the Beta Israel (House of Israel). Since 2008, Sigd has been an official Israeli state holiday, and its history and customs are taught in public schools, including some of these details:

- Sigd means "prostration" or "bowing down" in Ge'ez, an ancient Ethiopian liturgical language. Sigd evolved to be a commemoration of the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai and the yearning for Jerusalem.
- Traditionally, Jews in Ethiopia would observe the day by fasting and ascending a mountain-top in the morning, where they would listen to religious leaders, or *kessim*, read from the community's Torah, known as the Orit, including passages from the Book of Nehemiah. In the afternoon, after descending the mountain, the Beta Israel would break their fast.
- In the mid-1800s, community leaders changed the timing of Sigd so that it is observed 50 days after Yom Kippur, on the 29th of Cheshvan, which this year begins on November 19. Those 50 days mirror the span between Passover and Shavuot.
- In Israel, after the rescue of the Beta Israel began in 1984 with Operation Moses, the new Israelis celebrated Sigd for many years by climbing Mount Zion in Jerusalem, surrounded by leaders holding colorful umbrellas. In recent years, public ceremonies have moved to the Armon Hanatziv Promenade, where thousands of Ethiopians from across Israel, some fasting till the afternoon and carrying umbrellas, gather to hear *kessim* read from the Orit. Sigd carries a theme of Jewish unity, and Jews from all heritages are welcome to join the festive atmosphere.

NOW YOU KNOW...MORE ABOUT THE HOLIDAY OF SIGD



The Trading Domes in Bukhara



Coursing a Route Through Uzbekistan, Georgia and Armenia

An exotic Jewish journey sparked by a kippah | By Joyce Eisenberg

IN 1997, MY SON BEGAN STUDYING for his bar mitzvah with Rabbi Yitzhak Nates, whom he had met at Boy Scout camp. I was struck by the rabbi's warmth and his enthusiasm—and by his vibrant, bowl-shaped kippah embroidered in colorful silk.

"It's Bukharan," he told me. I had no idea where Bukhara was, but the name, and the kippah, stuck with me.

Years later, I'd found Bukhara on the map, in Uzbekistan. On a food tour in 2023 in Queens, N.Y., home to more than 50,000 Bukharan Jews, I also savored the region's delicious cuisine. That taste reignited my long-ago spark of curiosity, resulting in a travel plan for my husband, Ted, and me.

We set off for Uzbekistan in September 2024. We visited Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent, important hubs on the Silk Road, the ancient trading network that spanned 4,000 miles from China to Rome. Since we would be "in the neighborhood," we added Georgia and Armenia to the itinerary.

Uzbekistan, Georgia and Armenia may seem an unlikely trio, spread across Central Asia and the Caucasus Mountains, each with distinct languages,

faiths and cultures. Yet all three were absorbed into the Soviet Union in the early 1920s and gained independence when it collapsed in 1991. It would be fascinating to see how the countries had navigated the post-Soviet years.

STAYING AT THE AMELIA Boutique Hotel in Bukhara helped set a Jewish focus on our trip. Built in the late 1800s for a wealthy carpet merchant, the hotel is in the city's old Jewish quarter, the Mahalla-i Yahudiyan (Arabic for the Jewish quarter). Its airy interior courtyard surrounds rooms embellished with carved wood and painted plaster. The breakfast room is lined with shelves of Aladdin's lamps and Bukharan kippahs—just like the one Rabbi Nates wore.

We soon learned that in Central Asia, nearly all men wore a head covering, and along the Silk Road, dyes, silk and skilled embroidery were plentiful. Muslims wore the *doppa*—a small, snug-fitting, square-edged cap. Bukharan Jews adapted it into a larger, rounder, more ornate version, now known as the Bukharan kippah.

Bukhara's Jewish history stretches back at least 1,500 years, when Persian Jews migrated east after the Babylonian exile. Many became traders; they spoke Bukhori,

a mix of Persian, Tajiki and Hebrew. Before a synagogue was built, Jews and Muslims shared space in a mosque, praying in separate corners. By 1900, Bukhara was the heart of Central Asian Jewry, home to about 25,000 Jews and 13 synagogues. Today, two synagogues and fewer than 150 Jews remain.

The mahalla is a compact maze of narrow streets, now mostly populated by Muslim families.

Its centerpiece is the Bukhara Synagogue, built in 1620 and considered the oldest surviving synagogue in Central Asia. At 75, Abram Iskhakov is still busy as its cantor and caretaker. Shabbat services follow the Sephardi tradition, introduced by Rabbi Yosef Maman in place of Persian religious customs. He traveled from Safed to Bukhara in 1793 with prayerbooks for this isolated community.

The Bukharan kippah is adapted from the popular *doppa* hat.

SHUTTERSTOCK





A Place for Prayer *The Bukhara Synagogue dates to 1620.*

In 1800, when Maman returned to Bukhara to settle permanently, he helped establish a second synagogue. Ohel Itzhak was named for its patron, merchant Itzhak Zanbur. With a loftier ceiling and larger prayer hall, it reflected the community's growing prosperity. The Soviets converted it into a textile factory in 1938; the Jewish community reclaimed it 50 years later.

Over 10,000 Bukharan Jews are buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery, about two miles south of the synagogue, where some gravestones date to the 1500s. It's one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Central Asia still in use.

We met Jama, our guide and the Amelia hotel owner, on our second day. Over tea, he shared his story: His mother was Muslim, his father was Jewish—and a respected doctor. “When I was a child, my father had me study the Koran,” he said. “It was a way to blend in—protection, if it was ever needed.”

Jama knew everyone in town. In the Trading Domes, the series

of marketplaces where 16th-century Silk Road jewelers, hat sellers and textile merchants once gathered, he introduced us to blacksmiths shaping hot steel into knives and tea vendors making custom blends for tourists and locals.

When it was time to leave Bukhara, the high-speed Afrosiyob train whisked us east in under two hours to Samarkand. The city's crowning jewel is the 500-year-old Registan, the grand square where royal decrees were made, merchants bartered and students learned in three colossal madrasas, which are now popular landmarks rather than study halls. Each time our guide Amin said “madrasa,” Ted and I thought “mid-rasha,” the Hebrew word for a place of study. Different traditions, same Semitic root—meaning “to learn” or “to study.”

The Jewish mahalla, a 15-minute walk northeast of Registan, was home to nearly 40,000 Jews before World War II. Once there were Jewish schools, markets and 30 synagogues; today, only the Gumbaz Synagogue remains. Plain outside but ornate within, its domed ceilings display intricate mosaics and Stars of David. It hosts Sephardi Shabbat and holiday services for the few dozen local Jewish families.

Our last stop in Samarkand was the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum, the final resting place of Amir Timur, the 14th-century Mongol conqueror also known as Tamerlane. His grand, glittering tomb is said to have inspired the Taj Mahal.

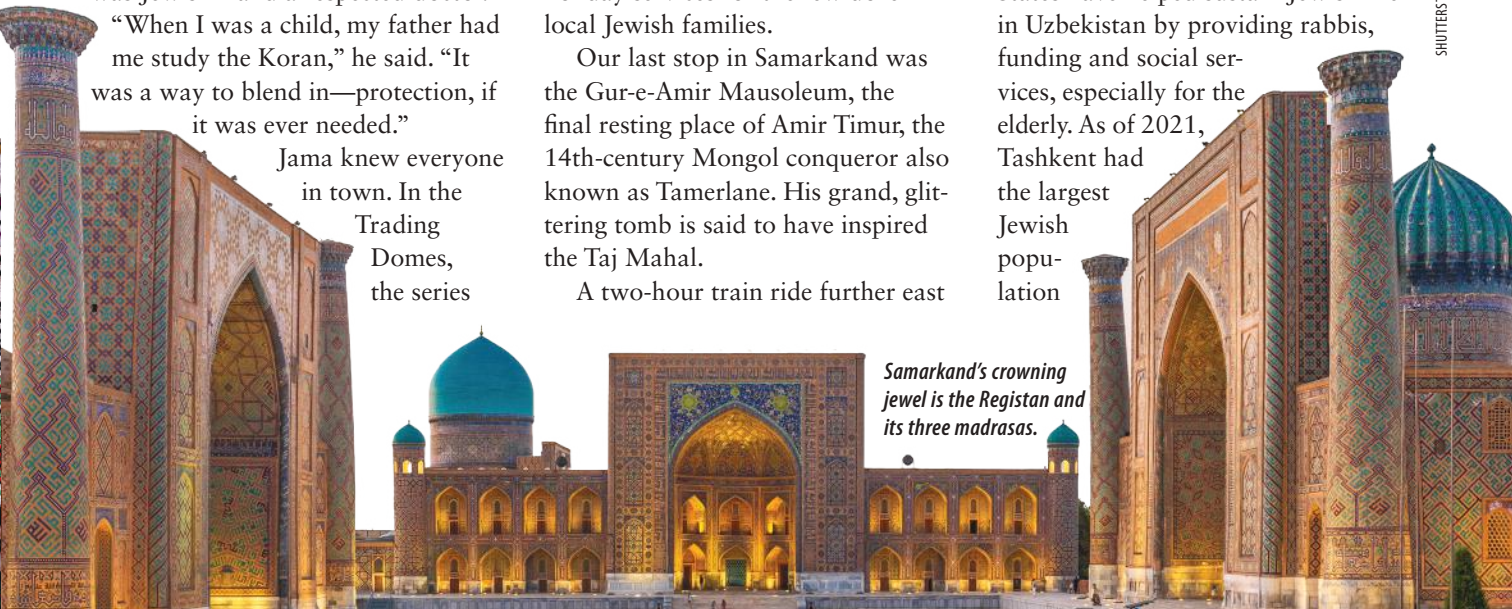
A two-hour train ride further east

brought us to Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital. With its massive government buildings, wide boulevards and enormous public squares, the city's 70 years under Soviet rule are clearly visible.

Soviet grandeur is visible underground, too. The Tashkent Metro, Central Asia's first subway system, opened in 1977. Each station is a work of art, with opulent chandeliers, mosaics and themes honoring cosmonauts, poets and the local cotton industry.

We dove into the Chorsu Bazaar, a huge market beneath a turquoise dome. The aisles overflowed with giant melons, apricots and tomatoes; the air smelled of cumin, saffron and paprika. Here, in the late 1800s, Jewish merchants traded silk, spices and textiles, and their prosperity funded synagogues, schools and houses with courtyards in the mahalla, a 20-minute walk north of the market.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the subsequent mass emigration of Jews from all parts of the region, mostly to Israel and the United States, Chabad and the mostly American donor-supported Federation of Jewish Communities of the Commonwealth of Independent States have helped sustain Jewish life in Uzbekistan by providing rabbis, funding and social services, especially for the elderly. As of 2021, Tashkent had the largest Jewish population



Samarkand's crowning jewel is the Registan and its three madrasas.

in the country—about 3,700 by census count, though community groups estimate closer to 8,000. The local Jewish scene is vibrant, with seven synagogues, a community center, a day camp and cultural programming.

WHEN WE REACHED TBILISI, Georgia's capital, the contrast with Uzbekistan was immediate: While the latter's Silk Road cities arise from flat desert plains, Tbilisi lies in a steep river valley with cliffs and hilltop landmarks.

The country is predominantly Christian, under the umbrella of the Georgian Orthodox Church, whereas Uzbekistan is majority Muslim. Jews have lived in Georgia for over 2,600 years, and today Tbilisi is home to more than 3,000—a mix of native-born Jews and a growing community of Israeli and international expats.



Georgian Sights Sunlight pours into Tbilisi's Great Synagogue.

We stayed at the Communal Sololaki Hotel—truly communal, with a shared breakfast table where we met sisters from Kazakhstan, a Russian wedding guest and a man from Kashmir now living in Sweden. From the central Freedom Square, the Sololaki neighborhood winds up a steep hillside; its faded 19th-century mansions are being transformed into trendy cafes, galleries and wine bars.

On a Culinary Backstreets walking tour, our guide Maka introduced us to a variety of Georgian specialties,

including the beloved khachapuri, the boat-shaped, cheese-filled bread topped with an egg that alone makes the trip to Tbilisi worthwhile.

Before World War I, Tbilisi had about 15 synagogues; three remain. The grandest is the Great Synagogue, built in 1903 in the Moorish style, with a women's balcony, beautifully carved wooden ark and a mikveh. Two other synagogues have been repurposed—one as the Royale District Theatre, the other as the David Baazov Museum of the History of the

WHAT TO SEE



MIR Corp and Silk Road Treasure Tours

both offer tours to the "Stans"—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—and the Caucasus region. For private tour guides in Uzbekistan, World Jewish Travel is a good resource.

UZBEKISTAN

Bukhara is compact and easy to navigate. At its center is the **Lyab-i Hauz**, a shady pond surrounded by mulberry trees and teahouses where families gather for ice cream and halva. Just south, in the old Jewish quarter, is the **Bukhara Synagogue**, which possesses centuries-old deerskin-parchment Torah scrolls tucked behind gold-embroidered tapestries. Next door, the **Old Jewish House and Gallery** displays Bukharan crafts, Judaica and historical photos of local Jewish families.

A Hebrew and Russian memorial at the **Old Jewish Cemetery** honors local World War II soldiers.

Four miles from the city center is the **Sitorai**

Mokhi-Khosa Palace (The Palace of Moonlight), a 1912 country residence of the last Emir of Bukhara. It dazzles with Venetian mirrors, crystal chandeliers, elaborate tilework and peacock-filled gardens.

At the **Registan in Samarkand**, be sure to hire an English-speaking guide who can lead you through its nooks and crannies and reveal the behind-the-scenes stories of its three madrasas. For a more hands-on experience, try a cooking class; you'll make the ubiquitous rice dish plov, dine with a local family and learn a bit about daily life. **Viator** offers reliable options.

Just one and half miles from the Registan, on a bank of the Siab River, sits the **Jewish cemetery**; the 15,000 graves have Hebrew, Russian and/or Tajik inscriptions. Stones show Stars of David and local floral motifs. Just uphill is the **Tomb of the Prophet Daniel**. Legend says that Tamerlane, the Mongol conqueror, brought the relics of the biblical prophet here from Susa (in present-day Iran). It's one of the few places in the world where Muslims, Jews and Christians pray at the same site.

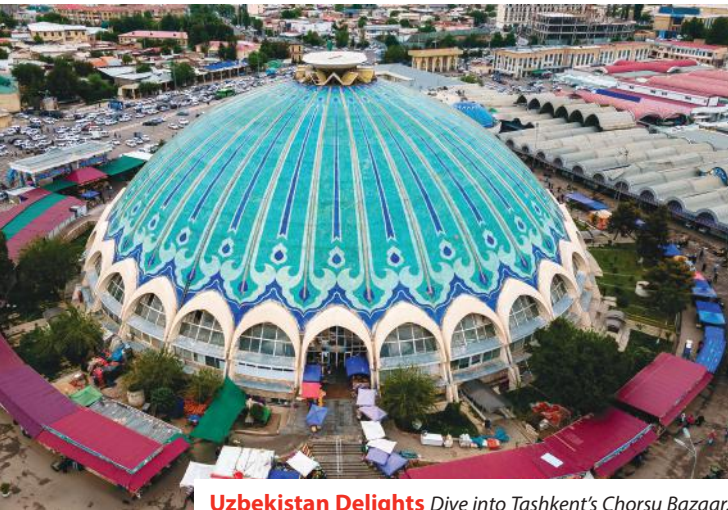
The **Amir Timur Museum** in Tashkent displays maps, coins and weapons that tell the story of his rise to power and of the craftsmen, scholars and artists he brought to Tashkent, making it a center of Islamic scholarship and artistic innovation.

Among the seven synagogues in Tashkent are the **Great Synagogue**, which follows Sephardi rites, and the diminutive **Tero Street Synagogue**, which feels like a family prayer house. Its ark holds Torah scrolls more than 250 years old. Arkadiy Isakharov, Tero Street Synagogue's chairman, shares stories and artifacts with visitors.

Beneath grand arches outside and Uzbek artistry inside, the **Alisher Navoiy Theater** stages opera, ballet and symphonic performances. When Uzbekistan's first opera, *Buran*, premiered here in 1939, one of the standouts was Fotima Borukhova, a mezzo-soprano from a Jewish family in Samarkand who went on to be named People's Artist of the USSR.

ARMENIA

At the **Armenian Genocide Museum**, eye-



Uzbekistan Delights Dive into Tashkent's Chorsu Bazaar.

Jews of Georgia. Named for the Georgian rabbi and Zionist leader who died one year before the establishment of Israel, it houses a remarkable collection of manuscripts, ritual items and photographs. Highlights include national costumes and paintings by avant-garde artist Solomon Gershov, who studied at a Vitebsk art school in Soviet Russia under Marc Chagall.

We ended our journey in Yerevan, Armenia's capital. Our hotel rooftop had a stunning view of Mount Ararat, the biblical resting place of Noah's

Ark. Like Georgia, Armenia is a Christian country. Before our visit to the Armenian Genocide Museum, Ted and I knew little about that tragic period. Between 1915 and 1916, at least half of the Ottoman Empire's Armenian Christians, between 664,000 and 1.2 million, died on forced marches through the Syrian desert or from massacres and starvation as the Ottoman government sought to secure Muslim Turkish dominance in the region.

Armenia's Jewish community, which numbers about 500, is centered in Yerevan and gathers at the Mordechai Navi Jewish Center—the country's only functioning synagogue.

witness accounts, maps and photos make the horrors feel immediate. Outside, an eternal flame and tree-lined memorial honor the victims.

Visitors are warmly received at the **Mordechai Navi Jewish Center**, but since the entrance is tucked away off Tigran Mets Avenue and hours are limited, it's wise to arrange a visit in advance.

Among the 23,000 works at the **Matenadaran, the Museum of Ancient Manuscripts**, are gem-crusted religious texts, early medical books on surgery and Euclidean geometry. Its Hebrew collection features 126 Torah scrolls brought from Ukraine in 1986; three *Megillat Esther* scrolls (one in a silver cover); and fragments from Psalms, Song of Songs and Job.

Don't miss the **Cascade Complex in Yerevan**—a terraced garden with sweeping staircases, modern sculptures and panoramic city views. Inside is the Cafesjian Center for the Arts, which features contemporary art and glassworks.

GEORGIA

In Tbilisi's Old Town, **Beit Rachel**—also known as the Ashkenazi or little synagogue—was

built in the 1910s and rebuilt after earthquake damage in 2009. The two-story structure features stained-glass windows, a women's gallery and a 150-year-old Torah ark. It hosts daily and Shabbat services, and visitors are welcome; it's best to stop by during prayer times.

Try Tbilisi's **sulfur baths** in the Abanotubani district, at the edge of the Old Town. The city's name comes from the old Georgian word "tbili," meaning warm, which is fitting for its natural hot springs. Rich in hydrogen sulfide, the warm waters are said to ease skin, joint and respiratory issues.

The **Georgian National Museum's Exhibition of the Soviet Occupation** is chilling; there are KGB documents, interrogation equipment and stories of people who resisted the regime. There's also a remarkable collection of hominid fossils dating back 1.8 million years. Nearby, the **Dry Bridge Market** is a treasure trove of Soviet relics, antique jewelry and colorful local art. Vendors here are eager to share personal stories of life under Russian rule.

The Chabad-affiliated congregation holds Shabbat services when a minyan is present.

On our final night, we walked to Republic Square in the city center to see the dancing fountains, whose columns of water erupt from a reflecting pool in concert with music and colored lights.

When Aretha Franklin's "Respect" came on, we danced. The crowd cheered, not for our dance moves, but for our tangible joy. Just like Rabbi Nates, who inspired our travels, they were warm and enthusiastic. **H**

Joyce Eisenberg is the co-author with Ellen Scolnic of the *Dictionary of Jewish Words* and *The Whole Spiel: Funny essays about digital nudniks, seder selfies and chicken soup memories*. She lives in the Philadelphia area.

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Hen Mazzig (left) and Marc Jorden at their Santorini wedding



Overlapping Cultures Israeli food personality Shaily Lipa draws on her Greek Jewish heritage for Hanukkah cooking.

Modern Maccabees and Menus

Fried Greek delicacies for Hanukkah | By Adeena Sussman

AS I TOUCHED DOWN IN GREECE recently for my friend Hen Mazzig’s wedding to his partner, Marc Jorden, I couldn’t help but draw a comparison between Mazzig and the ancient Maccabees of the Hanukkah story—Jewish freedom fighters who resisted the attempts of a Greek king to force them to reject their heritage in place of pagan customs.

Born in Israel to an Iraqi mother and a Tunisian father, Mazzig eventually found his way to London. There, he rose to prominence as a digital content creator and writer focused on advocacy around Mizrahi Jewish life, in the process preserving the unique traditions and perspectives of the nearly 1 million Jews who left or were forcibly exiled from Middle Eastern and North African countries after Israeli independence in 1948.

“The stories of Mizrahi Jews are an essential part of our history,” said Mazzig, who grew up eating his mother’s Moroccan sfinje doughnuts on Hanukkah. “Whether they’re oral histories or recipes passed down from generation to generation, they serve as a vital bridge between the Jewish past, present and future.”

Since the Hamas terror attacks of October 7, 2023, Mazzig’s mission has broadened beyond the protection of Jewish heritage. Through his platform of nearly 400,000 Instagram followers—and hundreds of thousands more on X, TikTok and Meta’s Threads—his voice has emerged as a centrist one in a polarized social media atmosphere. His nuanced posts provide context intended to help Jews explain their pro-Israel leanings in the face of rising antisemitism as well as commentary and explanations

for non-Jewish followers. Some have featured criticism of the Israeli government and sympathy for the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. Prominent celebrities including Debra Messing, Mayim Bialik and Gal Gadot have shared Mazzig’s posts, leading *The New York Times* to title an article about him “A Whisperer to the Stars on the Middle East Conflict.”

His Jewish wedding to the British-born Jorden was held in Greece primarily to accommodate family flying in from Israel and England. (The couple live in London.) Beyond its geographic accessibility, Mazzig said, “Greece was the natural choice for our wedding because the food and culture felt so familiar; the overlap between Greece and Israeli cuisine is remarkable.”

HANUKKAH CUSTOMS AND cuisines in Israel often feature overlapping cultures as well, and in the case of one well-known food personality, are similarly Greek inspired. Israeli cookbook author Shaily Lipa, whose ancestors come from Salonika in Greece, celebrates the eight-day festival that begins this



year on December 14 with some of the recipes featured in her new cookbook, *Yassou: The Simple, Seasonal Mediterranean Cooking of Greece*.

“Greeks love to make fritters, in part to use up things in the kitchen and not waste,” said Lipa, who lives in

Raanana. “And we fry everything in olive oil, which during Hanukkah also honors the miracle of the oil that lasted in the Holy Temple for eight days.”

Her vegetarian tomatokeftedes (Santorini Tomato Patties, recipe available online at hadassahmagazine.org/food) make great use of tomatoes past their prime. They make a bright addition to a Mediterranean Hanukkah menu, or in place of starchier latkes. And Lipa’s loukoumades—traditional Greek doughnuts soaked in honey after frying—are a crowd-pleasing substitution for the more routine jelly doughnut. *B'teyavon!* 

Adeena Sussman is the author of *Shabbat: Recipes and Rituals from My Kitchen to Yours* and *Sababa: Fresh, Sunny Flavors from My Israeli Kitchen*. She lives in Tel Aviv.

Lipa's Tips for Successful Frying

- When frying in olive oil, select a good-quality brand.
- Lower the handle of a wooden spoon into hot oil; if small bubbles form around the handle, the oil is ready for frying.
- Place a carrot in the oil during frying to regulate the temperature and draw impurities out of the oil.
- Strain the oil between batches and replace it altogether after 2 or 3 uses.
- Drain fried patties and doughnuts on a rack set over a baking sheet, allowing oil to drip away. Alternatively, drain on paper towels.

Greek Doughnuts

Makes about 24 small doughnuts

FOR THE SYRUP

- 1 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup water
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1 cinnamon stick

FOR THE DOUGHNUTS

- 1 1/2 cups lukewarm water
- 2 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/4 packed cup cornstarch
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 cups vegetable oil, approximately, for frying

1. Prepare the syrup:

In a medium saucepan, mix together the 1 cup sugar, 3/4 cup water, 1/2 cup honey and cinnamon stick. Bring to a boil over medium heat, reduce the heat to low and simmer uncovered for about 5 minutes, until the sugar and honey dissolve completely and the syrup is clear. Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature. Remove and discard the cinnamon stick.

2. Prepare the doughnuts:

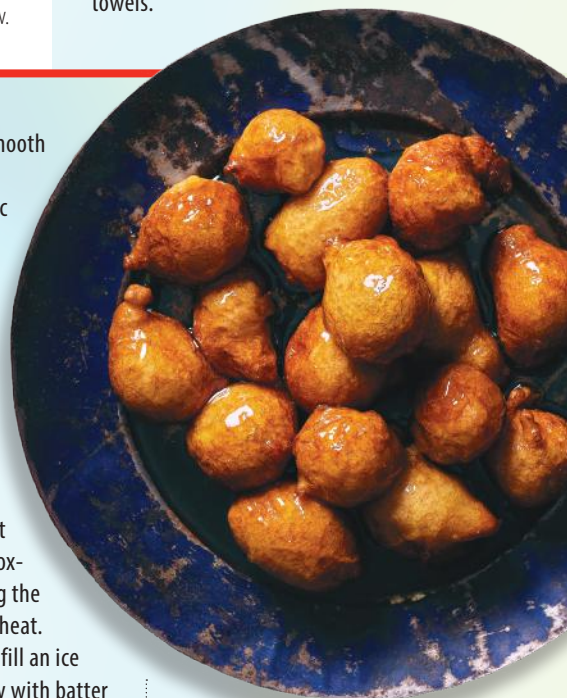
In a medium bowl, mix the 1 1/2 cups lukewarm water, yeast, 2 tablespoons honey and 1 tablespoon sugar until everything is dissolved. Let sit for 10 minutes until the mixture is bubbly.

3. In a large bowl, mix the flour, cornstarch and salt. Add the yeast mixture and vanilla and whisk

until the batter is smooth and uniform. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let it sit at room temperature for 50 to 60 minutes, until the batter doubles in size.

4. Cover a medium skillet with vegetable oil at least 3-inches deep, approximately 4 cups. Bring the oil to medium-high heat. Working in batches, fill an ice cream scoop halfway with batter and carefully drop it into the hot oil. Portion out about 6 or 7 doughnuts like this, being careful not to overcrowd the pan, and fry for 2 to 3 minutes on each side, until golden, using a slotted spoon to turn them over.

5. Take the doughnuts out and drain them. Repeat with the rest of the batter. Transfer the hot doughnuts to a serving plate and pour the reserved syrup over them. Serve immediately.



Colorful, Meaningful, Jewish

JEWISH STRENGTH, RESILIENCE AND CONTINUITY ARE EMBODIED THROUGH expressions of joy and the passing down of traditions, along with a touch of chai and chutzpah—living a Jewish life with unapologetic audacity. This year’s Hanukkah gifts echo that spirit, featuring bold necklace pendants, book subscription boxes, Judaica for teens and tweens and Star of David home goods that honor heritage, soothe the spirit and cast a light on faith and Jewish practice. For more information and gift ideas, go to hadassahmagazine.org.



WEAR JEWISH

Show your Jewish and Zionist pride with SaltSparkleShalom’s bangles, with messages in Hebrew or English, such as a prayer for the State of Israel and Am Yisrael Chai. Available in stainless steel or yellow- or rose-gold plated (from \$39.95 each; saltsparkleshalom.com).

READ JEWISH

One of the best ways to connect with Jewish identity is by reading, or gifting, a great Jewish book. Two new subscription boxes make it easier than ever to discover your next favorite read. The Jewish Joy Box pairs romances and other titles with bookish- and Judaic-themed swag (left, from \$130 per box or \$452 for an annual subscription, which includes four boxes a year; thejewishjoybox.com). Nu Reads, a new initiative from the Jewish Book Council, is a bimonthly box featuring a signed book, a letter from the author and discussion prompts (from \$154; nureads.org).



PRETTY IN PINK

Star of David and hamsa pendants come in soft shades of pink, turquoise and white and vibrant blue and gold in the enamel jewelry collection by designer AlefBet by Paula. The gold-plated charms bring a clean, modern take to traditional Jewish charm necklaces (from \$65 each; alefbet.com).

PRAY JEWISH

The Women’s Prayer Card set by Israeli author and educator Aliza Lavie, a former Knesset member, revives lost Jewish women’s prayers. Each of the 100 cards features a prayerful quote, some from as early as the 16th century, a reflection prompt and an archival image (from \$65; esek.biz).



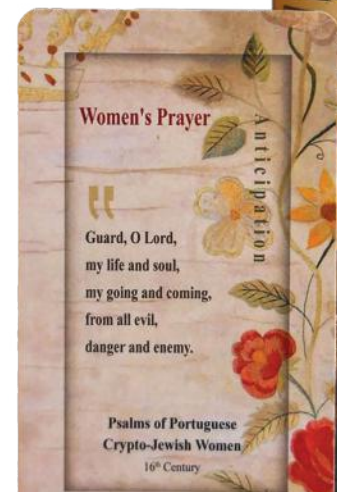
BIG CHAI

Trendy jeweler Year of the Flood debuts limited-edition 14K gold YOCO (“You Only Chai Once”) pendants, like this Chagall-inspired piece (right, from \$2,600; yearoftheflood.store), while Israeli boutique Heiman offers a Jewish Compass charm in 14k rose gold (from \$1,047; heimanjewelry.com).



FLORA FANCY

The hand-painted porcelain Seven Species Dreidel by Zvezdin’s Workshop showcases figs, grapes and other crops mentioned in the Torah that are connected to the Land of Israel (from \$175; shop.thejewishmuseum.org).





BREW JEWISH

Chutzpah Coffee Co. not only specializes in flavorful blends with quirky names, like the medium-to-dark roast Bubbie's Blend (from \$18), an ode to bold grandmothers everywhere, it also collaborates with Jewish artists on mugs (from \$20) and T-shirts (from \$36; chutzpahcoffeeco.com).



TABLETOP IN BLUE AND WHITE

Pottery Barn's latest Hanukkah ceramic dinnerware collection and serving platters feature gorgeous and intricate blue, white and gray patterns, centered around the Star of David. Highlights include the Medallion Stoneware Appetizer Plates (from \$99.50) and the Medallion Lazy Susan with a wood base and removable sections (from \$129; potterybarn.com).



STAR WARMER

Looking for a cozy blanket that wraps you in the warmth of tradition? Adara Rituals' Jewish Heritage Blanket is an elegant way to express culture and connection, available as a throw (above, from \$178) or a light blue-and-white or pink-and-white baby blanket (from \$136; adararituals.com).

BLOOMING JEWISH

Small metallic buds and pastel enamel blossoms with interwoven stems form Michael Aram's hand-sculpted brass Wildflowers Menorah, part of the designer's newest Judaica collection. Set on a marble stand and inspired by vintage botanical prints and illustrations, the delicate, naturalistic menorah brings a warm whisper of spring to any winter-time Hanukkah tableau (from \$295; michaelaram.com).



TAKE A BOW

Cute, fun and fanciful, the large resin-and-metal Crystal Bow Menorah is part of an ongoing collaboration between Jewish-owned New York City lifestyle brand LoveShackFancy and Pottery Barn. Adorned with bows and dripping with sparkling crystals, it brings a touch of glamour and whimsy to Hanukkah candlelighting—perfect for the girliest teens and tweens and their moms (from \$179; pbteens.com).



THE JEWISH COOK

The *Hadassah Magazine* apron features an illustration that celebrates the joy of Jewish books. Receive or gift the apron with a donation of \$250 or more to the Hadassah Magazine Circle (hadassahmagazine.org/make-a-gift).



Henrietta Szold Through a Personal Lens

At the 'intersection of her broken heart and all the good work she did' | By Sue Fishkoff

ABBY GINZBERG HAS A UNIQUE perspective on the story of Henrietta Szold. Not only is the Berkeley, Calif.-based documentary filmmaker a distant cousin of the Hadassah founder on her maternal side, but her paternal grandfather, Talmudic scholar Louis Ginzberg, was the man who broke Szold's heart.

"I stand at this intersection of her broken heart and all the good work she did," said Abby Ginzberg, 76, explaining what motivated her to make *Labor of Love: The Life and Legacy of Henrietta Szold*, which is now being shown at Jewish film festivals nationwide and was screened at the Hadassah National Conference in early August.

Labor of Love uses photos and video clips of Szold, combined with interviews and dramatizations of key moments in the life of the woman who pioneered health care for Jews and Arabs in British Mandate Palestine, saved thousands of Jewish children as director of Youth Aliyah and, in 1912, founded Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of

America. Broadway icon Tovah Feldshuh, who has previously played Golda Meir on stage, reads passages from Szold's meticulously kept diary, giving a highly personal touch to a story familiar to many Hadassah members.

GINZBERG BEGAN WORK ON THE project almost 20 years ago, then put it aside in favor of the social justice documentaries that comprise the bulk of her 35-year career. Among those documentaries is the award-winning *Barbara Lee: Speaking Truth to Power*, about the former congresswoman and recently elected mayor of Oakland, Calif. Ginzberg won a Peabody Award for *Soft Vengeance*, about the South African Jewish anti-apartheid activist and judge Albie Sachs.

She returned to the Szold project in 2022, making two trips to Israel to research and shoot scenes relating to Szold's life. As she got deeper into her research, a focus emerged: Szold as a feminist, activist and person who cared deeply about Jewish sur-

The Filmmaker and Her Subject Abby Ginzberg poses on Henrietta Szold Street in Jerusalem; Ginzberg's film describes the Hadassah founder's work to help children in British Mandate Palestine.

vival and identity but who also had a nuanced approach to Zionism.

One of the lesser-known facts found in the film is Szold's very public support for a binational state, where Jews and Arabs would share power equally. She, along with Judah Magnes and Martin Buber, was one of the founders of the Ihud Party in 1942, a small, binationalist Zionist political party that opposed the establishment of the Jewish state as proposed by the Zionist movement.

"Is it not our business to see the Arab side, too?" we hear from a 1942 entry in Szold's diary. "I believe there is a solution to the Arab-Jewish problem, and if we cannot find it, then I consider that Zionism has failed utterly."

Another filmmaker might have spent little time on Szold's doomed relationship with Louis Ginzberg in the early years of the 20th century, when the two worked together in New York City on his manuscripts, notably his multivolume opus, *The Legends of the Jews*. Szold helped to

translate his work from German into English while secretly falling in love. At 48, she was 13 years his senior and was devastated when he returned from a trip to Berlin in 1908 with news of his impending marriage to

Adele Katzenstein, a young woman of 22—and Abby Ginzberg’s future grandmother.

The filmmaker, however, dwells on that relationship, even recreating the final denouement using actors to give



CLOTHED WITH CONVICTION

Israeli fashion that mirrors the nation's mood
By Abigail Klein Leichman

The white gown carried the names of victims, hostages and destroyed communities, its fabric also marked with Stars of David and the words Am Yisrael Chai. Created by Israeli bridal wear designer Yaniv Persy, the ensemble was worn by fashion influencer Hofit Golan at a 2024 Academy Awards party.

The words printed on the gown spoke to the horrors of October 7, 2023, while also evoking Israeli resilience. Draped over Golan's shoulders was a shawl—part tallit, part keffiyeh—Persy's poignant expression of a prayer for coexistence.

Showcasing the dress was a “significant moment in my career,” said Persy, who has flagship stores in Tel Aviv, Dallas and Barcelona. “The dress made an impact. It gave a legitimate platform to other designers and artists to show what they really feel.”

Over the past two years, Israeli designers have turned fashion into a reflection of national emotion. Alon Livne's dress for Eden Golan at the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest resembled torn bandages; the yellow ribbon pins worn by those who advocated for the hostages' return

were first produced by industrial designer Shaul Cohen; and hostage dog tag necklaces were created by marketing executive Tamir Raicher.

“War influences fashion in various ways,” said Liraz Cohen Mordechai, Israeli fashion researcher and founder of Fashionating by Liri, a company that provides tours and educational programs around Israeli fashion. After the Hamas attacks, clothing and jewelry had messages of hope, solidarity and victory, she added. “Together we will win,” for example, was a popular slogan on T-shirts.

“We're in a different wave of feelings two years later,” she said.

“Israelis are looking for escape from the reality. We want our clothing to bring some joy.”

Many Israeli designers are now shifting to subtle messaging that nevertheless still reflects resilience and national pride.

The continued use of yellow is one example: Former hostage Noa Argamani appeared at *TIME* magazine's April 2025 gala in a butter

yellow maxi dress by Israeli designer Eli Tala.

“For Israeli designers, using the color yellow might be a double context,” said Mordechai, referencing the hostages as well as being cheerful and trendy.

She also acknowledged the hearts decorating Israeli designs in 2025. “Our heart is broken,” Mordechai said, “and now we need to mend it.” This past summer, for example, Tel Aviv-based fashion brand Stella and Lori created a “Lavi of Zion” T-shirt, which has an embroidered lion with a crack in its heart and a yellow ribbon tied around its tail.

Solidarity messages continue to feature prominently in T-shirt collections. American Israeli multimedia artist Yael Harris Resnick created an army green shirt with the word HERO in bold capital yellow letters and the Hebrew equivalent, *gibor*, embedded within the English letters, while Holyland Civilians' tops sport a single word—either HOLY or BELIEVE. And as the remaining hostages began returning to Israel in October, designers responded quickly. Stella and Lori, for instance, launched a “Time for Peace” T-shirt line featuring embroidered doves with yellow hair—a nod to President Trump's hairdo—holding olive branches.

Such messages are rooted in current events and Jewish pride. “It's not enough just to design beautiful clothes,” Persy said. “It's also important to bring out our beliefs and our message to the world.”

Abigail Klein Leichman lives in Israel and writes regularly for *The Jerusalem Post's Friday Magazine*, *the Jewish Standard*, *Hadassah Magazine* and other publications.



Yaniv Persy's gown, worn by Hofit Golan; 'Lavi of Zion' from Stella and Lori.



it particular emphasis because, she said, of her personal connection to both figures.

“That moment is so pivotal for Henrietta, and I tell it from her point of view,” she said. “I thought, well, that’s something I can do to add to what’s known about her.”

Unlike those who castigate Louis Ginzberg as a cad for leading her on, his granddaughter believes that he had no idea how Szold felt about him.

Her grandfather was, she said, “a total intellectual, definitely inexperienced.” Not only that, she added ruefully, “I think he really felt, of course she’s interested in me, because I’m so interesting.... The narcissism of the men in my family, that was easy to identify.”

Thank goodness for Szold’s unrequited love, the filmmaker said. If she had married Louis, or indeed anyone else, she would never have moved to pre-state Israel, never founded Hadassah—none of it.

“She would have ended up staying home and making matzah ball soup for him, and she would have been fine with that,” Ginzberg said. “She would have been fine, but the world would have been deprived of a lot of great work, of all the good things she did.” **H**

Sue Fishkoff is the former editor of *J. The Jewish News of Northern California* and the author of *The Rebbe’s Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* and *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America’s Food Answers to a Higher Authority*.

Open through the end of December, ‘Jewish Worlds Illuminated: A Treasury of Hebrew Manuscripts from The JTS Library’ at New York City’s Grolier Club showcases over 100 rare manuscripts. The exhibition highlights Jewish diversity and creativity through decorated books and documents, like this 1847 ketubah from the Sephardic community of Oran, today part of Algeria.

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The Feminist Hero of Hanukkah

By Jonathan Schmalzbach

ACROSS

- 1. “ ___ luck?”
- 4. Bullion unit
- 9. Laugh-a-minute folks
- 14. Baby’s first word, maybe
- 15. Nigerian Civil War site, 1967-1970
- 17. A product label could say that it’s pending: abbr.
- 18. This general went off his head with drink, before he lost it
- 20. Guarantee
- 21. Egyptian cross
- 22. Duct opening?
- 23. Fannie ___ (securities)
- 24. Our hero’s sobriquet in the Book of Judith
- 31. Sitcom full of Barr scenes
- 34. Kiwi’s extinct, flightless kin
- 35. “Able was I ___...”
- 36. Mem. of the senior business team
- 37. Letters for a struggling student: abbr.
- 38. The ethnic identity of 18-across
- 40. What Judith did to 18-across
- 44. Airport checkers: abbr.
- 45. The ___ Torah, or Torah sheba’al peh

- 46. Oak trees in Israel
- 48. “Stop right there!”
- 52. HMO alternative
- 55. Where Judith executed her act
- 58. Judith’s hill country home
- 62. Self starter
- 63. ___-tzu
- 64. Clark’s “Mogambo” co-star
- 65. Fargo college letters: abbr.
- 66. Grp. that goes to blazes
- 68. Boss of 18-across
- 72. Female ‘80s rocker ___ Ford
- 73. Always, in verse
- 74. Long, long time: British variant
- 78. Full legislative assembly
- 80. An Italian artist who painted Judith with the head of 18-across
- 84. VW model
- 85. Can or bottle follower
- 86. Matterhorn, e.g.
- 87. Kind of rug
- 88. “All the world’s a ___...”
- 89. Blonde’s secret, maybe

DOWN

- 1. Eastern pooh-bah
- 2. “High” time
- 3. Yellow egg part

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13	
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78	79						80			81	82	83			
84							85						86		
87								88						89	

- 4. Pugilists’ sanctioning grp.
- 5. Never, in Neuss
- 6. Long-jawed fish
- 7. Distinguished
- 8. Famed fountain in Rome
- 9. They left home
- 10. Japanese immigrant
- 11. Secret group in “The Da Vinci Code”
- 12. Toni Morrison’s “___ Baby”
- 13. Office address abbr.
- 16. “ ___ I care!”
- 19. “ ___ quiet!”
- 20. “Can you give me directions?”
- 25. Western Wyatt
- 26. The “A” of ABM
- 27. Bind
- 28. Hesitant sounds
- 29. “... ___ mouse?”
- 30. Former Chinese Premier ___ Jiabao
- 31. Try again
- 32. Done
- 33. Humane org.
- 38. The opposite of the B end of a rail car
- 39. Brother of Ari and Zeke Emanuel
- 41. Coleridge’s “sacred river”
- 42. Goya’s “Duchess of ___”
- 43. ___ the line
- 47. Prefix meaning split
- 49. Experienced
- 50. Vault
- 51. Fox or turkey follower
- 53. Timely
- 54. Designer Todd
- 56. Heart in Hesse
- 57. Gray ___
- 58. Outlaw
- 59. Cain raiser
- 60. Moses took two of these
- 61. “The Lady ___ Tramp”
- 66. Weasel’s cousin
- 67. Downer
- 69. Utah’s ___ Mountains
- 70. Art ___
- 71. Tide types
- 75. “Good grief!”
- 76. Greasy
- 77. Yep’s opposite
- 78. Bedwear, briefly
- 79. “Fantasy Island” prop
- 81. Santa ___ winds
- 82. Do nothing, with “out”
- 83. “ ___ we having fun yet?”

Answers on page 56

The more you know about someone's life, the harder it is not to like them.



From 'Fanny's Big Idea'

Dreidels and Dragons

Celebrating Shabbat, Hanukkah and Jewish contributions to America | By Alexandra Lapkin Schwank

THE PAST YEAR HAS SEEN A bumper crop of new Jewish children's books, with the tapestry of titles celebrating a wide array of peoples, places and Jewish traditions. Perhaps the abundance of titles expresses a communal need for more Jewish stories or a desire to delight in the cozy joy of reading a picture book with family when the outside world seems uncertain.

Whatever the reason, several themes stand out, from books on Shabbat to ones that, with the upcoming 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, reflect on Jewish contributions to the nation's history. Inspiring illustrated biographies introduce figures such as pioneering librarian Fanny Goldstein—who created Jewish Book Week, the precursor to Jewish Book Month—and Eddie Jacobson, Pres-

ident Harry S. Truman's old friend and confidant, who had a significant impact on the leader's support for the nascent State of Israel.

And for holiday gift-giving, books about Hanukkah light up children's imaginations in whimsical and creative ways, from stories of an imaginary dragon and festive felines to tales about carrying on old traditions while finding belonging in a new neighborhood.

The Peddler and the President

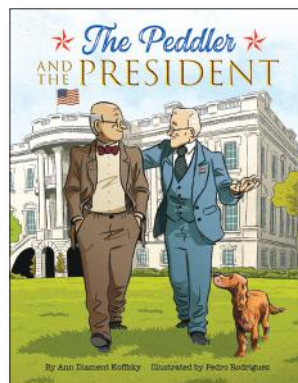
By Ann Diamant Koffsky. Illustrated by Pedro Rodriguez (Apples & Honey Press)

Harry (the future President Truman) and Eddie (Eddie Jacobson, child of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania) were lifelong friends from Kansas City, Mo. They served together in the army during World War

I and became business partners in a haberdashery shop after the war. When the shop fell on hard times during the Great Depression, however, they went their separate ways. Eddie became a traveling salesman who eventually opened his own clothing store, while Harry pursued politics.

With crisp linework and watercolor illustrations that evoke an earlier era, *The Peddler and the President* charmingly depicts their deep friendship, despite the antisemitism in Harry's family and even when work and family life kept them busy. "Sometimes they would meet at Eddie's house to play cards or music, go fishing on the Missouri River, or meet up at Dixon's Chili Parlor for ribs."

Then, in 1948, their friendship made history when Eddie convinced his old friend—now president of the United States—to back the creation of a modern Jewish state. Based on

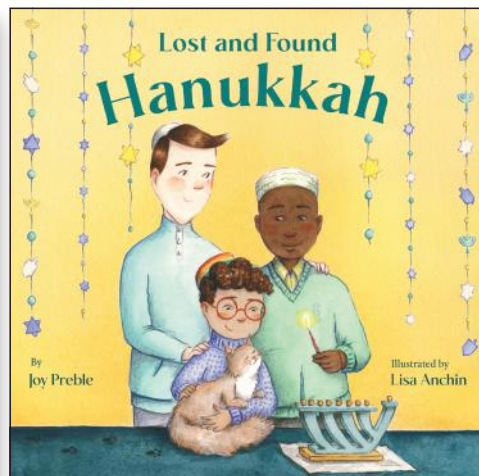
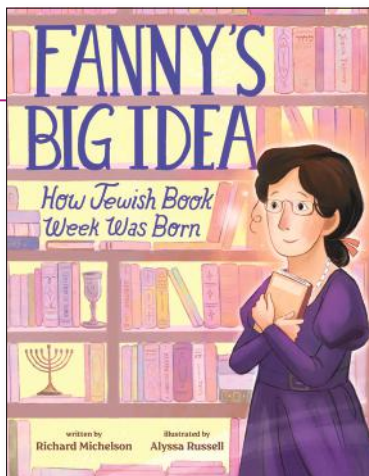


the true story of Truman and Jacobson's friendship, this book illuminates an important moment in American Jewish history.

Fanny's Big Idea: How Jewish Book Week Was Born By Richard Michelson. Illustrated by Alyssa Russell (Rocky Pond Books)

The first Jewish librarian to direct a branch of the Boston Public Library, Fanny Goldstein believed libraries should act as gateways to other cultures and ideas. At her West End branch, where she worked from 1919 to 1957, she stocked shelves with books in many languages and organized book clubs, turning the library into a gathering place for the neighborhood's Jewish, Italian and Irish immigrants. Indeed, as her grandmother told her back in Russia, before the family's move to America, "The more you know about someone's life, the harder it is not to like them."

Engaging and informative, *Fanny's Big Idea*, a standout even among this year's impressive class of new picture



books, describes how the librarian came to realize that many of her American-born Jewish patrons did not read about their own heritage. So she came up with something new: Jewish Book Week.

First held during Hanukkah 1925, the celebration featured books, food and community. Goldstein fried latkes, braised brisket and welcomed both Jewish and non-Jewish young readers from across Boston to join in a weeklong festival that mixed tradition with discovery. The event eventually turned into National Jewish Book Week and led to the creation of the Jewish Book Council of America. (Today, the annual observance has expanded beyond a week, falling the month before Hanukkah.)

Hanukkah, Eva takes more steps to build friendships, until the last night, when eight imaginary dragons, one for each new friend, soar through her living room. "My most magical Hanukkah ever," Eva thinks to herself.

Lost and Found Hanukkah By Joy Preble. Illustrated by Lisa Anchin (Chronicle Books)

Nate loves Hanukkah, especially "how it is always the same," but in Joy Preble's sweet story, he must learn to accept change. When his family moves to a new apartment, the movers lose a box containing his beloved menorah. When his two dads—Daddy

From 'A Dragon Called Spark: A Hanukkah Story'



A Dragon Called Spark: A Hanukkah Story By Lily Murray. Illustrated by Kirsti Beautyman (Kalaniot Books)

When Eva moves into a new home with her mom and sister, a small imaginary dragon named Spark helps her find the courage to talk to the other children in her neighborhood. It is Hanukkah, however, that works its greatest magic. Each night, as candles shine and her family welcomes new neighbors to share in the holiday, Eva's world grows brighter. With each passing night of

HADASSAH MAGAZINE PRESENTS: 'ANTISEMITISM, AN AMERICAN TRADITION' WITH PAMELA S. NADELL

In an upcoming episode of the *Hadassah Magazine Presents* podcast, *Hadassah Magazine* Executive Editor Lisa Hostein talks with award-winning historian Pamela S. Nadell, director of the Jewish studies program at American University, about her new book, *Antisemitism, an American Tradition*, uncovering centuries of prejudice—and Jewish perseverance—in America. Look for the episode on Spotify, Apple or wherever you listen to podcasts. For those in the Miami area, you can attend the event live at the Miami Book Fair on November 23 at 5 p.m. ET. Register at miamibookfair.com.

A DRAGON CALLED SPARK: ILLUSTRATED BY KIRSTI BEAUTYMAN

BOOKS



From 'Slow Down, Shoshi!'

and Abba—take him to a neighborhood shop to buy a new one, Nate ends up helping someone else find something that was lost and, in the process, makes a new friend.

“Hanukkah means rededication, which is beginning something again,” Nate realizes. “You miss what you had before, but you celebrate what you got back.”

Slow Down, Shoshi! It's Shabbat in Uganda By Shoshana Nambi. Illustrated by Moran Yogevev (Kalaniot Books)

Shoshi is a little girl growing up in a rural Ugandan Jewish community, where she lives on her grandparents' coffee farm. She cannot wait for the coffee trees to bloom so her grandfather can sell the beans to a cooperative. When the coffee is finally harvested, Shoshi, who is always in a rush, hurries to the market to shop for everything her family will need for Shabbat. “Slow down, Shoshi,” her grandmother reminds her. “No matter how fast you go, Shabbat will come at sunset.”

In time, Shoshi learns to pause and savor the day alongside her family and neighbors. Depicted through richly detailed drawings by Israeli illustrator Moran Yogevev, Shoshi's



ONCE UPON A HANUKKAH, FOR TODDLERS

ADORABLE BOARD BOOKS INTRODUCE JEWISH TRADITIONS

From 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Hanukkah'



Twinkle, Twinkle, Hanukkah By Talia Benamy. Illustrated by Aura Lewis (Workman Kids) Set to the familiar rhythm of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,”

this delightful board book reveals the joys of Hanukkah to the littlest members of our families. Lewis's vibrant illustrations capture children lighting the menorah, spinning dreidels, savoring latkes and sufganiyot and celebrating with song and dance. Benamy's playful rhymes—“Brightly, brightly candles shine. The shamash lights them in line”—turn the

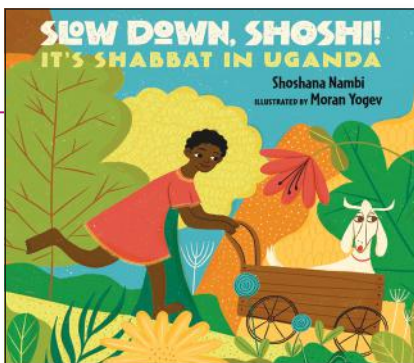
story into a cheerful, singalong read.

Happy HanukKAT By Jessica Hickman. Illustrated by Elissambura (Kar-Ben Publishing)

A family of cats celebrates the Festival of Lights in this silly, pun-filled rhyming board book. When hearing about the history of the holiday, the cats learn about the Maccabees' “courage and the customs that they saved. The cats agree the Maccabees were pawsitively brave.” Wearing Hanukkah sweaters and dreidel hats, the felines engage in holiday rituals, games and foods. A great way to introduce Hanukkah to young children, Jessica Hickman's rhymes and Elissambura's whimsical illustrations will be sure to amuse toddlers and preschoolers.



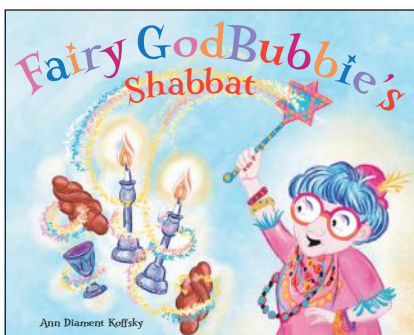
SLOW DOWN, SHOSHI! IT'S SHABBAT IN UGANDA: ILLUSTRATED BY MORAN YOGEV; TWINKLE, TWINKLE, HANUKKAH: ILLUSTRATED BY AURA LEWIS



story is endearing and no doubt relatable to the many children who struggle to sit still or wait for special celebrations like Shabbat.

Inspired by Nambi's own childhood in the Abayudaya Jewish community in the hilly Mbale District in Eastern Uganda, where her family cultivated arabica coffee beans, this vivid picture book captures the rhythms of farm life and tradition as well as the joys of slowing down.

Fairy GodBubbie's Shabbat *Written and illustrated by Ann Diament Koffsky* (Intergalactic Afikoman)



Sara Mazel and her parents are always glued to their phones, laptops and tablets. One day, the blue-haired, jewelry-bedecked Fairy GodBubbie, worried that no one in the family is “schmoozing, noshing and kibbitzing,” shows up uninvited and, with a flick of her wand, gifts Sara a pair of magical Shabbat candles that, when lit, freeze everyone's devices. With no screens to stare at, the Mazels have no choice but to celebrate Shabbat together. To their surprise, the three enjoy a nice meal, and the next day, they play board games and go for a stroll.

This humorous, whimsical picture book with its timely message about



ON YOUR SHELF: FAITH, COMEDY AND YIDDISH

By Sandee Brawarsky

Queen Esther

By John Irving (Simon & Schuster)

In his 16th novel in almost 60 years, the multi-award-winning author John Irving returns to the Maine orphanage where his best-selling novel of 40 years ago, *The Cider House Rules*, took place. Irving's characters are complex and memorable, and Esther, his latest protagonist, is no different. A Jewish immigrant from Vienna, she is orphaned soon after her arrival in the United States. From Maine, the setting of this absorbing work of historical fiction shifts to Vienna, then Mandatory Palestine and ultimately 1980s Jerusalem. (See our Q&A with the famed author on page 54.)

When Caesar Was King: How Sid Caesar Reinvented American Comedy

By David Margolick (Schocken)

In the 1950s, Sid Caesar's hilarious weekly television program *Your Show of Shows* attracted 20 million viewers. Born in Yonkers, N.Y., Caesar had a stable of New York Jewish writers, including Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner and Neil Simon. And still, more than 70 years later, Caesar's fast-paced, original comic style inspires and influences a new generation. *New York Times* and *Vanity Fair* writer David Margolick's lively biography probes Caesar's personality, wit and the ups and downs of his career.

The Shabbat Effect: Jewish Wisdom for Growth and Transformation

By Alan Morinis (Bloomsbury Academic)

This is a profound and practical guide to making the Sabbath a time to cultivate qualities such as awareness, peace, joy and harmony. As Alan Morinis explains, the drive to become a better human being—“more whole and more holy”—is meant to permeate not just Shabbat but the rest of the week as well. His teachings are based on the more than 1,000-year-old Jewish tradition

of *mussar*, enhanced with modern sources. A leading voice in the contemporary revival of the *mussar* movement, Morinis is the founder of The Mussar Institute.

Yiddish: A Global Culture: Bold Lives, Boundless Creativity

Edited by David Mazower (White Goat Press)

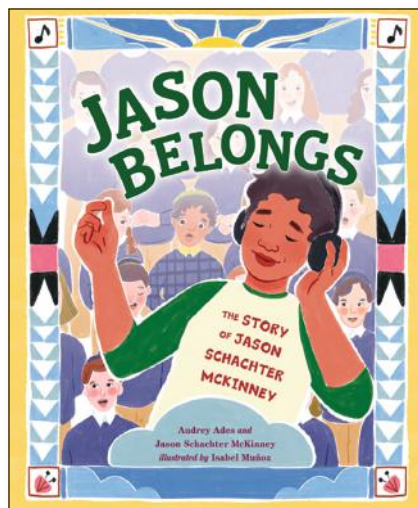
A companion to the permanent exhibition at the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Mass., this illustrated book chronicles the broad sweep and flowering of Yiddish culture—literature, theater, music, art and journalism—including women's voices. The strong graphics and photographs are accompanied by behind-the-scenes stories of Yiddish culture from the 19th century to today. Book editor David Mazower, great-grandson of Yiddish writer Sholem Asch and the center's research bibliographer, also curated the exhibit.

Tell Me I Belong: A Journey Across Faiths and Generations

By David Weill (Union Square)

A spiritual coming-of-age story with some unusual twists, David Weill's memoir details his search for identity. Now an author and renowned doctor specializing in advanced lung disease and organ transplants, Weill grew up in New Orleans in a home where religion was an unspoken subject. He felt like he “never quite belonged,” he writes, in either the Christian or Jewish communities. His agnostic Jewish father, a famed pulmonologist, left Germany as a child, and his mother was born a Southern Baptist. A crisis in his career and personal life led Weill to search for his roots.

Sandee Brawarsky is a longtime columnist in the Jewish book world as well as an award-winning journalist, editor and author of several books, most recently of *212 Views of Central Park: Experiencing New York City's Jewel From Every Angle*.



the importance of reducing screen time will delight children and their grownups with its playful focus on connecting face-to-face.

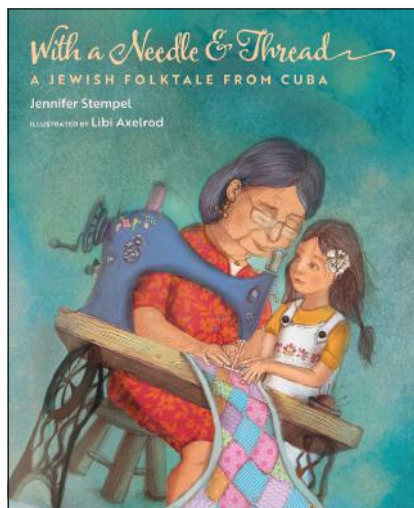
Jason Belongs: The Story of Jason Schachter McKinney By Audrey Ades and Jason Schachter McKinney. Illustrated by Isabel Munoz (Kar-Ben Publishing)

Jason is the son of a Jewish mother and an African American father who grows up attending a Jewish day school, where he sings in the choir. But as a teenager, whispers from classmates questioning whether he is really Jewish leave him feeling like an outsider.

Jason's story, as recounted in this new title, follows him as he leaves the Jewish community, enrolls in public school and stops going to synagogue. Meanwhile, his voice matures, "sinking down, down, down into a beautiful baritone, deep and sweet as a river of honey."

Years later, after traveling the world as a performer and exploring his spirituality, Jason finds his way back to Judaism—drawn one Friday evening by the sound of prayers at an old synagogue in Antwerp, Belgium.

Based on the true story of singer, actor and composer Jason Schachter McKinney, currently the musical



director at Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem, N.C., this poignant recounting combines lyrical storytelling with vibrant, striking illustrations to share a journey of identity, resilience and return.

With a Needle and Thread: A Jewish Folktale from Cuba By Jennifer Stempel. Illustrated by Libi Axelrod (Kalaniot Books)

Romi and her grandmother, who is a seamstress, live together in a Jewish community in Cuba. When Romi grows out of her dress, her grandmother saves the fabric and stitches it into a blanket for a new baby in their town. "In Cuba, nothing goes to waste," Abuelita says. Romi knows her abuelita can make magic from anything." Indeed, as the years pass, the fabric takes on new life as it is remade into a tallit for Romi's friend Manuel's bar mitzvah; a chuppah when Romi and Manuel marry; and finally, a tablecloth for neighborhood simchas.

Set against evocative watercolor-style illustrations, author Libi Axelrod plumbs her own rich Cuban Jewish heritage to explore the traditions and social fabric that weaves a community together through every season of life.

Alexandra Lapkin Schwank is a freelance writer who lives in the Boston area with her family.

FICTION

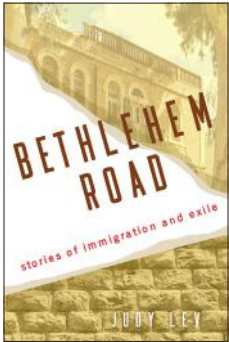
Bethlehem Road: Stories of Immigration and Exile By Judy Lev (She Writes Press)

Bethlehem Road in Jerusalem today draws visitors with its falafel stands, bakeries, sidewalk cafes, abundant greenery and magnificent Ottoman-era buildings. That atmospheric charm and vibrancy are perfectly captured in the 12 short stories in *Bethlehem Road*, the second book by Israeli American author and creative writing teacher Judy Lev (formerly Judy Labensohn).

In Lev's stories, which span the decades between the 1960s and 1990s, the rhythms of the south Jerusalem neighborhood of Baka feel keenly alive. Behind the buildings' stone walls, Lev's colorful characters struggle with love and family life, financial stability and illness. And this being Israel, they also face the outsized challenges of war and terror attacks, and the shared burden of building what was then still a new state while bearing the weight of four millennia of history.

Most of the characters in *Bethlehem Road* are new not only to the neighborhood, but to the country, too. Lev, born in the United States, is an immigrant to Israel herself, and she captures her protagonists' complicated lives with precision and grace: the naïve idealism, the arrogance, the loneliness, the ambivalence and, above all, the never-ending search for identity.

In "Ingathering of an Exile," John, originally from Chicago, accepts a stranger's decree that he become Yonatan. In "Simon, the Tale of an Aspiring Jew," the main character has a falling out with religion. In "Get Out of Jail," Pat, formerly Patsy, is now "Ema," mother in Hebrew, or



“wife of Hezi.”

Immigrants to Israel often measure their level of so-called Israeli-ness by keeping track of milestones—their first Yom

Memorial Day, in the country; the first time they take a child to *kita aleph*, first grade; or when a child receives an army recruitment notice in the mail. Lev skillfully adds to the well-known list those milestones left unspoken, for example, the confession of a protagonist named Laura in the opening paragraph of the story “Law of Return.”

“This was the first time I knew someone who knew someone who was killed in a terrorist attack,” Laura reveals. “It gave me a weird sense of belonging even though I came to build and rebuild, not to kill and be killed.”

There is steady forward movement in the collection. Lev sets her first story during the 1967 Six-Day War and the final story nearly three decades later. Likewise, the ages of the protagonists advance in years. The collection begins with stories of young love, courtship between partners, but also between a young country and its new citizens. As the book continues, each new tale features older and less optimistic characters. When the stories revolve around people who have reached old age, disillusionment with their lives and their country is evident. For example, some characters yearn for former homes in Cleveland or Baghdad or Marrakesh. And then there is the story of an encounter with an Arab man who claims his father

owns the home on Bethlehem Road that one character is about to purchase from a Jewish family.

Like its real-life counterpart, *Bethlehem Road* is a two-way street, simultaneously propelling the reader forward and backward in time. Per-

haps it also has the power to reach into our own complicated lives.

—Vivian Cohen-Leisorek

Vivian Cohen-Leisorek is an Israeli writer currently working on a memoir of her year volunteering with injured soldiers.

Hadassah Magazine Presents

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Hosted by Lisa Hosten, Executive Editor of Hadassah Magazine



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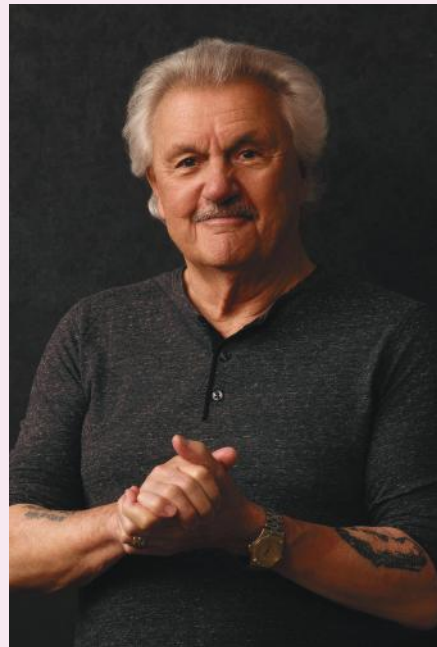
JOHN IRVING'S 'QUEEN ESTHER'

The famed novelist tackles antisemitism and Israeli history
By Sandee Brawarsky

Author John Irving's career is a spectacular one, with a long list of literary prizes and best-selling novels, including *The World According to Garp* and *The Cider House Rules*, for which he won an Academy Award for the film adaptation's screenplay. At 83, he has just published his latest novel, *Queen Esther*, which sensitively reflects on Jewish history, identity and antisemitism.

His protagonist, the orphaned Esther Nacht, born in Vienna in 1905, is eventually taken in by the Winslows, a generous and loyal family in New England, where Irving grew up and where many of his novels are set. Despite not being Jewish, the Winslows respect Esther's commitment to her roots. Like her namesake, this Esther is heroic, traveling as a young woman to Mandatory Palestine, where she plays an important backstage role in the building of the state.

Irving spoke to *Hadassah Magazine* from his office in downtown Toronto, where he is working on yet another novel. Before the conversation began in earnest, the author, who is not Jewish, said with a laugh, "I gave a moment's thought to the title, and I was tempted by 'Hadassah,' her original Hebrew name." This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.



What inspired *Queen Esther*?

For someone who is an ending-driven novelist as I always have been, it began where it ended: April 1981 in Jerusalem.

My first European publishers were European Jews with longstanding ties to Israel. When I first went to Israel in 1981 at the invitation of the Jerusalem Book Fair and my Israeli publishers, these European publishers, one Swedish and the other French, came with me. It was inspiring to be there. I took notes, I was learning. What I saw and heard, what was said to me and what I overheard, gave me a very firm but fearful apprehension of what might come next for Israel. You don't have that many experiences like that, that are so formative. It kept reverberating. I knew I had to come back.

You returned to Israel in July 2024 and told a Jerusalem audience, "I'm pro-Israel, I'm pro-Jewish and I'm for you. That may not necessarily mean that I'm in favor of your current leader."

No reason to change that. That's what I said.

How did you dream up the character of Esther Nacht?

I wanted my Esther to be the embodiment of the biblical Esther I imagined. In the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament, Esther is someone who hides herself well until it's time to come out. I wanted my Esther to be that kind of abiding but secret presence. I wanted her to be the puppeteer, managing things when not even on the page. If anyone has a reason to be Esther, it's this child whose life has been shaped by antisemitism.

In the novel, there's much discussion of antisemitism. Is that something you have witnessed?

I competed as a wrestler for 20 years and coached until I was 46. You are closer to your teammates than to anyone else. At Exeter, I heard stories from Jewish friends of things that had happened to them and about the experience of being Jewish. And when I studied in Vienna in the 1960s, my Jewish roommate opened my eyes to antisemitism. It would have otherwise gone over my head.

How is your own experience as a college student in Vienna echoed in the novel?

In the book, Jimmy Winslow, a Winslow

grandson, has an intrinsic foreignness. He doesn't quite belong anywhere, including where he comes from. I have that feeling. Most fiction writers, who live mostly in their imaginations, do. I felt like a foreigner when I was in New England. When I was a student abroad and was an actual foreigner, I had the feeling that I was finally in a place where I belong.

You lend your middle name, Winslow, to the family that takes in Esther. Is their generosity characteristic of your own family?

I certainly had a good one. It was intentional to use the name Winslow, my mother's maiden name.

It's a strange coincidence that two very important characters in my life, who have been early readers of my books—my Jewish roommate in Vienna and my stepfather, who was an early hero of mine (all the stepfathers in my books are heroes)—didn't live to read this book. These two were very much on my mind as I was putting the finishing touches on this book.

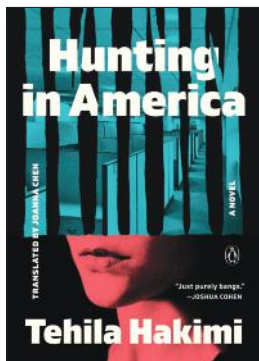
What has it been like for you to watch recent events unfolding in Israel?

I feel it's too soon to talk about what comes next. I don't do the future. I write about the past.



Hunting in America

By Tehila Hakimi. Translated by Joanna Chen
(Penguin Books)



I've never seen the popular Apple TV series *Severance*. However, I've read enough to know that it's

about employees at a biotech company who undergo a procedure so they retain no memories of their lives outside work while on the job—and vice versa. Yet I immediately thought of the central premise of *Severance* when encountering the unnamed narrator in Israeli author Tehila Hakimi's *Hunting in America*.

What we do know about the teller of Hakimi's tale is that she's an Israeli woman, around 40, and a recent arrival in the United States, where she's begun working at the American division of an unnamed Israeli tech firm. She doesn't divulge exactly where she lives, though we have a few clues: It's somewhere out west, has cold winters, and the nearest IKEA is about three hours away. For most of the novel, she reveals nothing about the life she left behind in Israel.

In her new environment, she has almost no life outside work. And, no matter what happens throughout this slim book, she seldom tells us how she feels, even about her newly discovered obsession—hunting.

What she does do, in clinical but somehow poetic microchapters, is describe in almost excruciating detail the oddity of being an Israeli woman navigating American office culture.

She recounts being told to smile more and eventually develops a sunny grin that, while necessary to American success, is alien and inauthentic to her previous life.

"The smile I'd acquired in Israel had something gloomy about it,

something incomplete," she thinks.

After similar coaching, she spends hours editing her emails to co-workers so they sound less aggressive.

She's eventually invited to join a group of male co-workers on a hunting expedition and impresses

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them—and, perhaps, herself—with her firearms skill, honed during her service in the Israel Defense Forces two decades earlier. The book comes alive most vividly in its graphic portrayal of hunting: “We approached

the dead buck, and David identified the points of impact. He looked carefully at the first point, bleeding at the center of the torso, and then he turned to me and said, ‘It was a beautiful hit.’”

Most of the novel centers on the narrator’s relationship with David, her hunting guide and married co-worker, who goes on regular hunting trips despite a past traumatic gun incident—one of the author’s many comments on America’s gun culture. Long after the reader senses it’s coming, she begins an affair with David. In their strange courtship, the boundaries between work and life become increasingly blurred.

At other times, the narrator seems to lose her grip on reality, seeing human heads on the bodies of animals she’s killed. It gets increasingly difficult for the reader to trust her telling.

Toward the end of the book, the narrative flashes back to her last weeks in Israel before emigrating. On one hand, it’s refreshing to see the narrator with a fuller life; she has parents, friends and a long-absent boyfriend attempting to win her back. Yet, as before, much about her is left unexplained.

Hakimi’s restrained, hyper-focused style makes for compelling, propulsive reading. The short chapters ensure the narrative never drags, and the novel’s ambiguous ending adds to the tale a genuine level of horror.

Yet with Hakimi’s minimalistic prose, too much is left off the page. I waited for a revelation or emotional self-reflection that never arrived.

With *Hunting in America*, Hakimi, already a noted poet, joins a growing cadre of Israeli authors like Maya Arad, Ruby Namdar, Ayelet Gundar-Goshen and Ayelet Tsabari who write about Israelis living in North America.

—Bryan Schwartzman

Bryan Schwartzman is a writer living outside Philadelphia. Follow his work at bryanschwartzman.com.

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Crossword Puzzle on page 47

NONFICTION

100 Objects: From the Collections of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

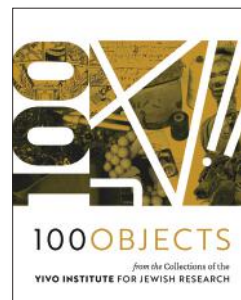
Edited and with introductions by Stefanie Halpern (YIVO)

The 1892 Yiddish translations of the United States Constitution and Declaration of Independence; the stark “Arrivals and Departures” ledger from Auschwitz Block 8; and acclaimed Yiddish author Chaim Grade’s Remington Rand Deluxe Model 5 Hebrew typewriter. These are among the items representing more than a thousand years of Eastern European Jewish life showcased in the book *100 Objects: From the Collections of the YIVO Institute for*

Jewish Research.

Published as part of the celebration of YIVO’s centennial, the coffee table book is at once a celebration of Yiddish culture and a call to remembrance. YIVO, originally the Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut, or Yiddish Scientific Institute, was founded on March 24, 1925, in Vilna, Poland (today’s Vilnius, Lithuania). Its mission was to document Jewish culture, often through volunteer *zamlers*, collectors in Yiddish, who gathered everything from books and newspapers to sheet music and Judaica.

That mission shifted abruptly to preservation when the Nazis occupied Lithuania in 1942. The now-famous Paper Brigade—a team of poets, scholars and archivists in the Vilna Ghetto



that included many former YIVO academics—risked their lives to smug-

gle books, documents and artifacts to the ghetto and hide them. After the war and with the help of the United States Army, many of the hidden items as well as crates of objects looted by the Nazis were sent to YIVO’s headquarters in New York City, where the institution had relocated in 1940.

Narrowing down the institute’s 24 million holdings to 100 items for the book was a challenge. “It was a big feat to choose the objects,” said Stefanie Halpern, director of YIVO’s archive, in an interview.

T"02

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“My colleagues and I each have our favorites,” she said. “We put them all on a list with the criteria that each one had to have a great story, an interesting provenance and strong visual appeal. Then came the hard part—whittling them down.”

The result is 10 thematic chapters—among them, “Beliefs and Customs,” the “Written Word,” “Labor” and “Immigration”—that together offer a sweeping portrait of Jewish life in Europe as well as of the descendants of those European immigrants in the United States. The book also features essays by 57 experts and academics, including Yiddish culture scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, professor of Yiddish literature David G. Roskies and American Jewish

historian Hasia Diner as well as contributions from YIVO staff.

Some of the selections in the book reveal unexpected corners of history. In the chapter on antisemitism, a 1922 letter from the Lake Mohonk Mountain House in the Catskills lays bare the bias of the era. The Feldbergs, a Jewish couple, had inquired about employment. Management replied the very next day: “...we wish to state that we do not employ people of your race.”

As YIVO CEO Jonathan Brent notes in his essay, this curt dismissal reflected “the most murderous set of ideas of the modern world: the quack genetics of race science.”

That letter as well as several other artifacts featured in the book are on

display at the Center for Jewish History in New York City through the end of December in the exhibit “Hail to the Zamlers! YIVO’s Collections at 100.” It is one of three centennial exhibits currently on display at the center.

Other objects highlighted in the book carry more personal significance. In the “Labor” chapter, readers encounter the furrier’s toolkit of Albert Snyder, son of Romanian immigrants, including cutting implements, thread and a metal box with sewing notions. Snyder, a fur designer and manufacturer, founded Contour Furs, Inc. in New York City after his service in World War II. For YIVO archive director Halpern, the metal box is a poignant reminder of her own grand-

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mother's box of sewing notions.

"That's what we want people to feel," she said. "To see themselves reflected in YIVO's history, in some way." —*Cathryn J. Prince*

Cathryn J. Prince is an adjunct professor in journalism at Fordham University and the author of the forthcoming book *For the Love of Labor: The Life of Pauline Newman*.

Body: My Life in Parts

By *Nina B. Lichtenstein* (Vine Leaves Press)

In Nina Lichtenstein's new memoir, *Body: My Life in Parts*, flesh and bones become an unusual gateway to contemplations of youth, middle age and menopause. Each chapter is named after a physical attribute and explores her emotional and spiritual connections to memories around different body parts, including eyes, nose, skin and breasts.

The author was born in Oslo and came to the United States as an au pair in 1988, at the age of 19. It was an exhilarating time for Lichtenstein, who would eventually meet the man who became her first husband and the father of her children. He was Jewish, she was not. But she soon fell in love with Judaism, converting before she married him.

In the first chapter, titled "Eyes," Lichtenstein writes that she was told in middle school that she resembled the Norwegian actress Liv Ullmann. Around that time, Lichtenstein was diagnosed as farsighted and chose aviator glasses in tortoiseshell frames. She could finally see the blackboard, but something deeper occurred.

"I imagined myself more bookish than I was.... I didn't have any concept of what an intellectual was, or that there was even such a thing," she writes, "but a palpable sensation

Continued on page 62

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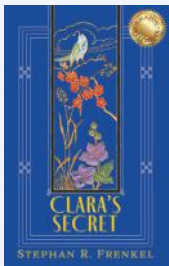
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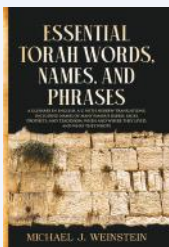
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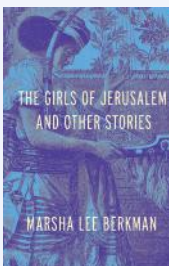
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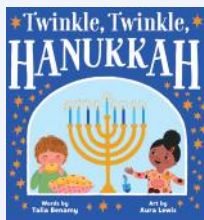
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Susan Weissbach Friedman

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Barbara Viniar

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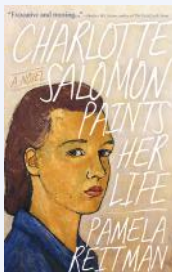


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This historical fiction depicts the encroaching terror of the Third Reich as it follows the young German-Jewish painter, exiled on the Côte d'Azur, alone and without identity papers, and haunted by a family history of suicides. Charlotte clings to her determination to become a serious modernist, to complete her masterpiece, "Life? Or Theater?," then risks her life for her legacy before capture by the Nazis.

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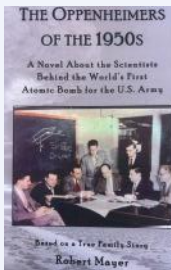
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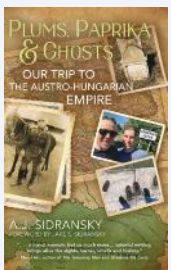
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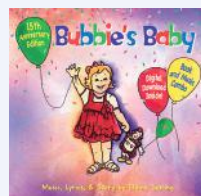
PLUMS, PAPRIKA & GHOSTS

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opportunity to know my son as an adult. Join us on a journey to a land that no longer exists, and to a better understanding of how that land still shapes us today. "This inspiring and enlightening experience is one that Sidransky proficiently shares. It's a history familiar to so many Jewish families and will emotionally resonate with them." —Jewish Book Council.

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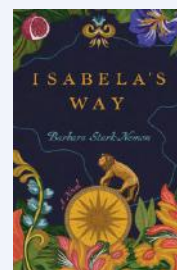
2 POPPINS LANE

Patricia Rohner

When you were growing up, do remember that house that you'd walk by... where everything always looked perfect? Did you imagine what it might be like to live there? At the corner of Poppins Lane and Main

St. there is a pink Victorian house that looks... you guessed it... perfect... but a look inside reveals some secrets about innocence stolen... and when the truth comes out, no one can escape it.

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ISABELA'S WAY

Barbara Stark-Nemon

Fourteen-year-old Isabela flees the dangers of the Inquisition in 17th century Portugal, with allies. A master of needlework, she soon learns that her embroidery pieces contain secret symbols to signal safety—or not—for other fleeing refugees. Kirkus Reviews said it's "A well-told story with all of the requisite narrow escapes and memorable characters." Independent.org said it's "a great read full of intrigue."

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of wisdom came over me when the plastic frames rested on my nose.”

In another chapter, “Skin,” Lichtenstein extols the history that her skin carries, including her post-pregnancy stretch marks that summon poetry. “In their unison,

these raised and dipping impressions on the skin of my belly will forever remind me of a sweeping time in my life, where not only my skin was stretched but my whole person as well.”

And about creating her Jewish

family, she writes that with “my

newly minted Jewish identity, I have literal skin in the game.”

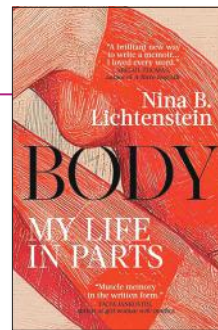
Having given birth to three sons in four years and breastfeeding those babies one after the other, Lichtenstein portrays her breasts as utilitarian and defining. Of nourishing her “Viking boychiks,” she writes, “the intimacy during nursing is like no other inter-human experience I’ve ever lived, our faces fewer than twelve inches apart, our senses hyper-focused on one another.”

Lichtenstein has kept a strictly kosher diet since she converted to Judaism more than 30 years ago. Her years of following Orthodox laws of mikveh and marital purity are detailed in “Vagina.” But she keeps her Norwegian roots close even as she revels in Jewish practice. For a time, she wrote a blog called “The Viking Jewess,” celebrating her “culturally blended” extended family.

Just as the parts of the body work in tandem in this memoir, so do the diverse cultures that immeasurably add to Lichtenstein’s full life. *Body: My Life in Parts* celebrates the way physical, emotional and spiritual components beautifully come together in a life.

—Judy Bolton-Fasman

Judy Bolton-Fasman is the author of *Asylum: A Memoir of Family Secrets*.



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Step Right Up

Escalators, stepladders and Israeli soldiers | By Joseph Lowin

IN ISRAEL THESE DAYS, THERE ARE BATTLES ON THE GROUND AND THERE are the battles between the state’s political and military echelons. In Hebrew, these domestic confrontations can be found in the root ד-ר-ג (*dalet, reish, gimel*), meaning to rank, grade, step or arrange in levels. Hebrew lexicographers derive the noun דֶּרֶג (*dereg*), echelon, from a very old Semitic root meaning “to go step by step.” And when they look even further into the past, they recognize the root in דֵּירוּג (*deirug*), tiered terrace farming.

The root is found only twice in Scripture. The prophet Ezekiel foresees an apocalyptic earthquake in which נִפְלוּ הַמְּדֵירוֹת (*naflu ha-madreitot*), “the sloping cliffs will collapse upon [Gog from the land of Magog],” whose invasion of Israel precedes the prophesied coming of the Messiah. In the Song of Songs, the lover entreats his beloved—when she is בְּסֵתֶר הַמְּדֵירוֹהָ (*be-seiter ha-madreitah*), hidden in a crevice—to allow him to behold her beauty.

These early derivations of our root were recalibrated during the Middle Ages in the writings of Moses Maimonides where he delves into the realm of prophecy. In *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides calculates that there are 11 מְדֵירוֹת (*madreitot*), degrees, of prophecy, from two pre-prophetic steps to a top level occupied only by the biblical Moses.

Masters of modern Hebrew literature added a classical flavor by using older Aramaic forms of the root. S.Y. Agnon’s wandering protagonist, Reb Yudel, in his Nobel Prize-winning *The Bridal Canopy*, descends דֶּרְגָא אַחַר דֶּרְגָא (*darga ahar darga*), “step after step,” only to find himself returned, almost miraculously, to the door of his home. Zionist figure Hayim Nahman Bialik—called Israel’s national poet even though he passed away before the birth of the modern state—uses our root to salute his contemporaneous literary pioneers, who have given a דֶּרְגָא אֲמִנוּתִית (*darga amanutit*), artistic status, to the renaissance of Hebrew literature.

One hears the root all over in Israel today, from שִׁדְרוּג (*shidrug*), upgrade, to the department store’s דֶּרְגוֹנֵעַ (*deragno’a*), escalator. Bookshelves too high? Use a דֶּרְגָרַג (*deragrag*), small stepladder. Diplomats מְדֵירוֹהָ הָרְאשׁוֹנָה (*mi-madreitah ha-rishonah*), of the highest rank, conduct peace talks. In the synagogue, the Torah is chanted with a traditional system of musical notation in דֶּרְגָא-תְּבִיר (*darga-tevir*), a high note followed by a low note, a phrase also used as the equivalent Hebrew idiom to “what goes up must come down.”

And then there is the off-color army expression that Israeli soldiers take home into civilian life. Resigned to being דֶּרוּגִים (*derugim*), graded, throughout their service, they recognize that יֵשׁ דֶּרֶג וְיֵשׁ זֶרֶג (*yesh dereg ve-yesh zereg*), “There are privileged generals and then there are privates”—private parts, that is. **H**

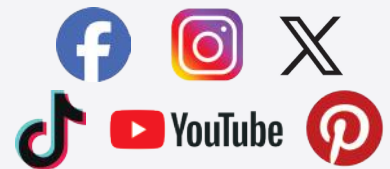
Joseph Lowin’s columns for *Hadassah Magazine* are collected in *HebrewSpeak, Hebrew Talk* and his most recent book, *Hebrew Matters*, available at gcr.org/gcrr-press/hebrew-matters.

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SEVEN SEAS CRUISES

A NEW LEGACY BEGINS

SEVEN SEAS PRESTIGE™

Arriving Winter 2026

Building on our long tradition of delivering unrivaled experiences, we have created a new paradigm for ocean travel — where legacy meets ultra luxury.



STRICTLY VACATIONS

Be among the first to discover Seven Seas Prestige 2026 Inaugural Season Itineraries.

To receive \$500 Shipboard Credit, please mention SV200 and contact

Steven Shulem

(805) 682-1022 or steven@strictlyvacations.com

CST#2118750-50

THE MOST INCLUSIVE
LUXURY EXPERIENCE®

Unlimited Shore Excursions

Exquisite Dining, Including All Specialty Restaurants at No Added Cost

Unlimited Beverages, Fine Wines, Craft Cocktails, Specialty Coffees and More

Customizable In-Suite Mini Bar Replenished Daily With Your Preferences

Unlimited Access to Spa Facilities

Pre-Paid Gratuities

Unlimited WiFi

Valet Laundry Service

24-Hour In-Suite Dining

Open bars and Lounges and Dynamic Entertainment and Enrichment Experiences

Butler Service in Penthouse Suites and Higher

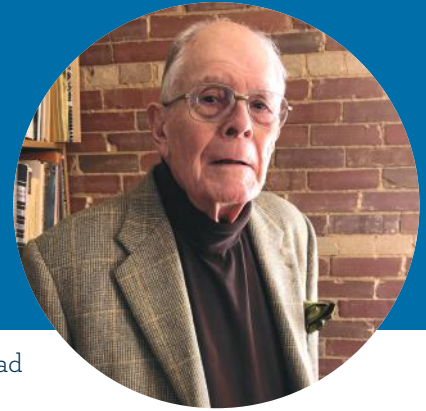
1-Night Pre-Cruise Hotel in Concierge Suite

A Smart Way to Support Israel

Charitable gift annuities allow you to supplement your retirement income while supporting Hadassah and the life-saving work of the Hadassah hospitals.

“At my age—90—I’m grateful for the income I get from my charitable gift annuities.”

— Albert Hinckley, Warrenton, Virginia



Albert Hinckley first visited Israel in 1959 when a trip to Italy fell through. After five days, he was so enthralled that he moved there the next year.

Although Albert isn’t Jewish, his two-year sojourn set the foundation for a lifelong connection. “There’s nowhere else like Israel,” he says.

During the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Albert made his first donation to Hadassah because he wanted

to help the country that had captured his heart.

Since then, Albert has established three charitable gift annuities with Hadassah. Like many of our donors, he appreciates receiving regular, fixed payments from his annuities. Charitable gift annuities can also be set up to benefit someone you wish to provide for, such as a spouse or a friend.

Check out our favorable rates!

Charitable Gift Annuity

ONE-LIFE RATES*

Age	Rate	Age	Rate
65	5.7%	80	8.1%
70	6.3%	85	9.1%
75	7.0%	90+	10.1%

Get Your Free Personalized Example

Charitable gift annuity payments depend on your age (or the age of the person who will receive the payments) and the amount of your gift. Contact us for a personalized example or to learn about ways to include Hadassah in your estate plan.

Minimum age: 65 | Minimum contribution: \$10,000.

📞 1.800.428.8884 ✉ giving@hadassah.org

👉 plannedgiving.hadassah.org

You may be eligible to fund a charitable gift annuity using your IRA. This option comes with special rules, so contact us to see if you qualify.

*Rates as of Sept. 1, 2025. Rates are fixed when annuity is established. Rates are also available for two-life gift annuities.

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The charitable solicitation disclosure on page 62 is incorporated in this advertisement.

Charitable deductions are allowed to the extent provided by law. Hadassah shall have full dominion, control and discretion over all gifts (and shall be under no legal obligation to transfer any portion of a gift to or for the use or benefit of any other entity or organization). All decisions regarding the use of funds for any purpose, or the transfer of funds to or for the benefit of any other entity or organization, shall be subject to the approval of the Board or other governing body of Hadassah.

California residents: Annuities are subject to regulation by the State of California. Payments under such agreements, however, are not protected or otherwise guaranteed by any government agency or the California Life and Health Insurance Guarantee Association. Oklahoma residents: A charitable gift annuity is not regulated by the Oklahoma Insurance Department and is not protected by a guaranty association affiliated with the Oklahoma Insurance Department. **South Dakota residents: Charitable gift annuities are not regulated by and are not under the jurisdiction of the South Dakota Division of Insurance.** Charitable gift annuities are not available in all states.

Planned Giving & Estates

HADASSAH, THE WOMEN’S ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA, INC.

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