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An Israeli firefighter extinguishes a burning car after a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed in the city of Ashkelon, May 11, 2021. (Tomer Neuberger/Flash90)

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● NEWS

With Andrew Yang Tweet, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Spills Into New York City Mayoral Race

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

The crisis in Israel and Gaza spilled into New York City's mayoral race after a leading candidate, Andrew Yang, tweeted in support of Israel.

"I'm standing with the people of Israel who are coming under bombardment attacks, and condemn the Hamas terrorists," Yang, a businessman and former Democratic presidential candidate, tweeted Monday.

His tweet, coming after Hamas fired rockets into Israel and Israel responded with attacks on Gaza, was condemned by local pro-Palestinian activists as pandering. He was disinvited from a local event marking the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.



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The Democrats' biggest local star, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, tweeted that it is "utterly shameful for Yang to try to show up to an Eid event after sending out a chest-thumping statement of support for a strike killing 9 children, especially after his silence as Al-Aqsa was attacked."

Yang has been actively courting the Jewish vote, especially in the haredi Orthodox communities, where he has picked up some key endorsements ahead of next month's Democratic primary.

Two other centrists in the race also weighed in on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Businessman Ray McGuire tweeted a message saying, "I stand proudly with Israel," and Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams said, "I stand shoulder to shoulder with the people Israel at this time of crisis."

Yang, however, appears to hold a slight lead in the polls and as a political neophyte has drawn more scrutiny and skepticism than his rivals.

One progressive candidate also weighed in. Dianne Morales, a former nonprofit executive, tweeted, "Our world needs leaders who recognize humanity and the dignity of all lives. Whether in NYC, Colombia, Brazil or Israel-Palestine, state violence is wrong. Targeting civilians is wrong. Killing children is wrong. Full stop."

Despite some praise from Republicans, Yang released a statement Wednesday morning saying that "my tweet was overly simplistic in my treatment of a conflict that has a long and complex history full of tragedies." He added that he "failed to acknowledge the pain and suffering of both sides."

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● NEWS

TikTok and Twitter Videos Bring Images of Israel-Gaza Conflict Home to American Jews

By Shira Hanau

For some Americans watching the escalating violence in Israel and Gaza in recent days, the most striking image from the conflict came in a video of Israeli men at the Western Wall, singing and dancing as they watched a fire burn outside the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Others can't look away from videos of Iron Dome, Israel's missile defense system, which shoots rockets out of the air mid-flight, lighting up Israel's skies like a fireworks display.

Both images have gone viral as Israel and Gaza descend into the most intense exchange of rocket fire since 2014.

As in past conflicts between Israel and Gaza, social media has emerged as a battleground, far from the actual fighting, for activists on both sides to trumpet their opinions. But perhaps more than in any previous conflagration with Gaza, social media has enabled those outside of the region to see what's happening almost in real-time. And activists across the spectrum have recognized the power these images have to shape the narrative on the ground.

Pro-Palestinian activists say the social media posts are making their cause more visible. Tasha Kaminsky, a nonprofit consultant and frequent Twitter user, said the videos make it harder to look away from the costs of what's happening to Israelis and Palestinians. Kaminsky's current name on Twitter is "#SaveSheikhJarrah," a hashtag used by pro-Palestinian activists protesting the potential eviction of Palestinians from a neighborhood in East Jerusalem.

"It's one thing to read a story...but to see it is a very different experience," she said. She pointed to the "availability of video in a way that's so easy to consume and the immediacy of seeing that in real-time" as something that made the conflict's costs more apparent.

Yonah Lieberman, a co-founder of the Jewish activist group IfNotNow, which was formed during the 2014 Gaza war to protest Israeli government actions, also notes the growing role of social media in the conflict. Videos like the one of the fire on the Temple Mount help expose a tendency in the media, he said, to say "both sides are equal."

"Seeing images for yourself of Al-Aqsa Mosque being tear-gassed or thousands of Jews chanting for the death of Palestinians are much more jarring and cut through a 'clashes between Israelis and Palestinians' headline," he said. Referring to the fire video, he added, "When that was shared it was immediately so visceral and cut through the idea that only Palestinians are violent."

To Sara Hirschhorn, a visiting professor of Israel Studies at Northwestern University, the video of the fire showed the limitations of social media. She felt it suggested that the men at the Western Wall were responsible for setting the fire, even though Israeli police said it was started by fireworks lit by Palestinians and burnt a tree, not the mosque.

"That's sort of an act of disinformation that is troubling. It's being tweeted as, 'Here are ultra-nationalist Jews jumping up and down and dancing and singing as Al-Aqsa burns in the background,' and it's not what's happening in that photo," she said.

From his home in Jerusalem, Avi Mayer, a prominent pro-Israel advocate on Twitter, agreed that social media was playing a more important role than ever in helping people outside of the conflict see what was happening.

He pointed to social media posts about an Israeli driver who hit a Palestinian on the sidewalk outside the Old City of Jerusalem. Security footage released later showed protesters pelting the car with rocks before the car ran onto the sidewalk and hit the Palestinian. The Israeli driver was also injured in the incident and was interviewed by Israeli media with a bandage on his head and a bloodstained shirt. Mayer felt such videos provid-

ed necessary context.

"I actually think that is a benefit that we have that we didn't have previously," said Mayer, who is managing director of global communications for the American Jewish Committee.

But he also worried that people might take the wrong lessons from the videos of Israel's Iron Dome system successfully shooting down rockets coming from Gaza. The videos could lead viewers to believe that Israel was not at risk of serious harm from the rockets. One video that emerged, for example, shows Iron Dome's fire-works-like display set to the Star Wars theme song.

"It sometimes paints a misleading picture," Mayer said of the Iron Dome. "It's not a panacea. Quite a few rockets have managed to get through the system."

Some footage "has not been interpreted in the way that Israeli hasbara has hoped," Hirschhorn said, referring to pro-Israel activists. But she added that people should focus their attention on the actual war — not on the Twitter battles it has inspired.

"There are no stakes to be had on social media," she said. "The stakes are for people in their bomb shelters tonight or who lack one on the Palestinian side."

● NEWS

'It Looks Dire but I'm Hopeful': Jewish and Arab Coexistence Activists Respond to the Violence in Israel's Streets

By Ron Kampeas

This has not been an easy week for Lama Abuarqoub, a Palestinian from the West Bank who has worked for years to build understanding between Israelis and Palestinians.

A teacher and mother of five, Abuarqoub speaks regularly with Jews through Encounter, a group that brings Jewish Americans on tours of the West Bank to meet Palestinians. She also been active in efforts to bring Jewish and Palestinian women together to push for peaceful coexistence.

Yet on Wednesday, she was thinking not about peace but about the current conflict, posting on her Facebook page pictures of two Palestinian youths, one from near her village, who she said were killed this week by Israeli soldiers. It was a sign of how quickly her hopes had fallen.

“My first thought was that we’ve been working years and years for building bridges between the two people, for trying to make peace,” she said, referring to her feelings after Monday night, the first night of Hamas rocket attacks and Israeli retaliatory bombings. “And it took us years to take, like, three steps forward, and in one night — 10 steps backward.”

The past few nights have indeed been grim for Abuarqoub and others who work for a shared society in Israel, as weeks of clashes in Jerusalem have given way to a heated, lethal conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza that has spilled over into the streets of many Israeli cities.

On Tuesday, Arab protesters in Lod, an Arab-Jewish city in central Israel, burned synagogues, shops and cars. There were raucous Arab protests in other cities as well.

On Wednesday, crowds of Jewish protesters took to the streets chanting “Death to Arabs” and vandalizing Arab-owned stores. Jews and Arabs in different cities were sent to the hospital with injuries, including one Arab man beaten brutally by Jewish rioters on live TV. And on Wednesday night, the Israeli ambulance service Magen David Adom reported that one of its fleet had been attacked in Lod while providing first aid to somebody there.

The unrest continued on Thursday night in Israel as well, as a police officer was shot in the Arab-Jewish city of Ramle.

For those who have worked to build ties between Israel’s Arabs and Jews, the scenes offered a stark contrast to others that grabbed headlines over the last year. During the pandemic, visible cooperation between Arab

and Jewish first responders and medical staff helped propel within Israel the notion that shared society could work, according to Mickey Gitzin, the Israel director of the New Israel Fund, a group that helps fund a number of coexistence groups.

“There was a feeling we were going forward,” Gitzin said. Instead of simply advancing broad notions of equality, NIF recently introduced programs advocating for increased Arab leadership in the public sector.

The outbreak of violence this week, he said, exposed the fragility of the shared society enterprise.

“We feel that we’re very successful,” Gitzin said. “And all of a sudden, that happens and it kind of, like, shakes everything.”

And yet Abuarqoub, Gitzin and other coexistence activists say they aren’t giving up. Already, the New Israel Fund has organized two forums to discuss coexistence during the crisis. And despite the carnage, they feel like their work is bearing fruit: The infrastructure they created to advance coexistence in times of crisis is up and running. By mobilizing local networks of allies, activists say, they’ve been able to help shape the national conversation and, hopefully, restore calm.

“The past couple of years, we had a serious shift in the notion of Arab-Jewish partnership within civil society, a shift that is very, very important,” said Sally Abed, a Palestinian Israeli citizen who is a leader of Standing Together, a civil society group. “I don’t think that shift will change — if anything I think it will anchor and it will help us, actually help us, try and impact the conversation that’s happening right now.”

The coexistence groups build leverage in a variety of ways. Grassroots groups rally popular support for initiatives favored by local politicians. Think tanks provide strategic advice to local leaders on integrating their towns.

One such think tank, the Abraham Initiatives, was behind a letter this week from local Arab and Jewish politicians urging calm in their cities, including Lod and Haifa. John Lyndon, the executive director of ALLMEP, an umbrella body for some 150 coexistence groups, said statements from senior Israeli lawmakers urging calm were due indirectly to efforts like that letter and another

one like it, from a different network of local politicians.

“Many of our members have strong relationships with local mayors in towns and in shared cities,” he said. When Israeli leaders condemned the Arab-Jewish fighting, he said, “A lot of that is from the ground up, from those local leaders saying no, we need you to be out here in front of this.”

On Wednesday, a broad spectrum of Israeli leaders all echoed that call in one way or another, from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Ayman Odeh, the leader of the Joint List, an Arab Israeli party. Similar statements came from centrist leader Yair Lapid and Mansour Abbas, an Islamist politician who has emerged as a political kingmaker in Israel.

“Nothing justifies Arabs lynching Jews, and nothing justifies Jews lynching Arabs,” Netanyahu said Wednesday night. “We won’t take it. That isn’t us — not this violence, not this wildness. We will return governance and order to Israeli cities everywhere. To all the cities. To mixed cities, to Jewish cities, everywhere.”

On Thursday, which is also the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, Jewish and Arab Israelis began to come together publicly, at the grassroots, to call for coexistence and an end to the violence. Local officials from both communities in Israel’s south met to jointly demand an end to the violence. Around Jerusalem as well as in Israel’s north, areas that have large Arab and Jewish populations, hundreds of people demonstrated for coexistence, handing out flowers to passing drivers and singing “Give Peace a Chance” to the accompaniment of a ukulele.

Activists say they’re in a better place than they were in 2000, when there were similar scenes of unrest across Israel at the start of the Second Intifada. Back then, coexistence projects all but collapsed. Gilad Halpern, a podcaster for the Tel Aviv Review, wrote on Twitter that the landscape had radically changed in the decades since.

“I’m old enough to remember the dreadful feeling of an irreparable rupture between Jews and Arabs in October 2000,” he wrote. “Yet we are at a much better place today, in terms of inter-communal relations, than we were then. It looks dire but I’m hopeful.”

In an interview, Halpern listed one sign he sees of an integrated society more likely to survive this week’s vi-

olence: routinely hearing Arabic in Tel Aviv outside the confines of Jaffa, and on the Tel Aviv University campus. “That’s something I never heard as a teenager and a young adult,” he said. “It’s just anecdotal, but I think it means a lot.”

Still, coexistence advocates know they are working amid fraught conditions. Gitzin outlined a number of vulnerabilities, including persistent inequality of opportunity for Arab youth, police actions that discriminate against Arabs, a government funding program launched a few years ago that prioritizes Arab cities, but not Arab populations in shared cities.

Another vulnerability, he said, is a reluctance among Israelis to understand that many Arab citizens identify with the Palestinian populations in the Gaza Strip, and will criticize the Israeli army — which many Jewish Israelis revere — for a bombing campaign that has so far killed dozens of people, including children.

Television panels bringing together Israeli Jews and Arabs this week have erupted into shouting matches, with Jewish Israelis accusing Arab citizens of treason for sympathizing with the victims of the Israeli raids. Abed said she had endured such a panel on Tuesday night, but also saw it as an opportunity to show Jewish Israelis that Palestinians and Arab Israelis identify with each other across borders.

“We, after all, belong, and feel affiliated,” she said. “I identify as Palestinian, and that what happens in Gaza and what happens in Eastern Jerusalem and what happens in the West Bank, affects us deeply, as a society here.”

Lama Abuarquob said she feels that, despite the recent violence, Israelis and Palestinians still had only one choice — to keep getting to know each other in the land they share.

“We have to start putting plans and making programs, working on more practical and deeper procedures that would lead to more communication between the two peoples,” she said. “Because if people get together, talk to each other, they will listen to each other.”

● CRISIS IN ISRAEL: IN BRIEF

Jewish organizations rally in support of Israel

UJA-Federation of New York said more than 1,600 people dialed into Wednesday's Zoom rally in support of Israel and hundreds more watched on Facebook. The Jewish Community Relations Council of NY and the Israeli Consulate were co-sponsors.

Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-Bronx) gave perhaps the most impassioned remarks, saying Israelis were "experiencing a level of trauma and terror that most of us, including myself, cannot begin to even imagine," and decrying an "endless propaganda war that has taken on a new intensity, especially here in the United States." (Jewish Insider posted his full remarks.)

Torres has come under attack on Twitter for his support of Israel.

The speakers included Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-Queens/Long Island), Acting Consul General Israel Nitzan and UJA-Federation President Amy Bressman. Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens) sent a message of support.

Pro-Palestinian, pro-Israel supporters clash

A Jewish man was hit in the head with a metal chair and bloodied as hundreds of pro-Palestinian supporters descended on Times Square Tuesday for a "rally to save Palestine." A video tweet by a journalist shows a police officer escorting a man with a bloodied head.

After meeting outside the consulate, demonstrators marched toward Times Square, shutting down 42nd Street, Times of Israel reports. Among the crowd were members of Neturei Karta, the haredi Orthodox sect that opposes Zionism.

Nadler is critical of both sides in conflict

Some pro-Israel Democrats, including Rep. Jerry Na-

dlar of New York, called on both sides of the conflict to back down.

In a statement, Nadler started out by condemning Hamas. But then the Jewish lawmaker added: "I remain deeply concerned by the violence in Jerusalem, including Israeli police violence, and I urge all parties to exercise restraints."

Rep. Grace Meng (D-Queens), vice chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, did not criticize Israel. "My heart is with both Israeli and Palestinian families who have spent the night sheltering from bombs and incendiary balloons launched by Hamas. Israel has every right to defend itself from Hamas's terrorist attacks and from rocket fire that threatens the lives of Israelis," read her statement.

Progressives were more typically critical of Israel. "Enough of Black and brown bodies being brutalized and murdered, especially children. Enough of the inhumanity. The White House must act," tweeted Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-Bronx/Westchester).

● NEWS

New Pew Study Shows 75% of Orthodox Jews Identify as Republicans, up from 57% in 2013

By Shira Hanau

Among the findings of the Pew Research Center's new survey of American Jews is one that has become increasingly self-evident in recent years: Orthodox Jews in the U.S. overwhelmingly affiliate with the Republican Party.

According to the newest study, 75% of Orthodox Jews surveyed said they were Republicans or leaned Republican. In 2013, the last year in which Pew conducted a sur-

vey of American Jews, 57% of Orthodox Jews said they were Republicans or leaned Republican.

The Pew survey was conducted between Nov. 19, 2019 and June 3, 2020, a period of dramatic polarization across America in the leadup to the 2020 presidential election. It found a large political polarization by denomination in American Jewry: Among all Jews, 71% are or lean Democratic, and 26% identify more with Republicans.

While Orthodox Jews have been moving rightward politically for years, the data from Pew suggest that politically progressive Orthodox Jews are not just outnumbered but are a shrinking minority within their communities. And it demonstrates the strikingly different ways that Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews viewed Donald Trump's presidency.

Read more about what the 2020 Pew study reveals about American Jews at www.jta.org/tag/2021-pew-survey

While non-Orthodox Jews largely disapproved of Trump's handling of nearly every aspect of the role, Orthodox Jews were the only ones to overwhelmingly approve of his job performance, particularly on Israel. Among Orthodox Jews, 86% rated Trump's handling of policy on Israel as "excellent" or "good," compared to 40% overall of respondents who rated his handling of Israel policy as good or excellent.

Matt Williams, director of the Orthodox Union's Center for Communal Research and an adviser on the new Pew study, said that Orthodox Jewish affinity with the Republican Party should not be attributed entirely to the party's stance on Israel.

"If you look at the Pew lines on things like same-sex marriage, you see significantly strong alignment between the Orthodox community and what we think of as the Republican platform or conservative value or ethos on that score," Williams said.

The new Pew numbers come with a giant asterisk, as the researchers worked from a small sample size of 430 Orthodox Jews nationwide out of 4,718 American Jews surveyed overall. Due to the sample size, the margin of error among Orthodox Jews is 8.8 points — nearly three times as large as the margin of error for the data on all American Jews. The new study also was conducted using a different methodology than the 2013 study, making

it harder to draw direct comparisons between the two data sets.

But, according to Williams, the data showing the jump in Republican affiliation among Orthodox Jews from the 2013 study to this year's survey are large enough to rely on.

"It definitely overcomes the methodological difference between the two reports," Williams said, calling the 18-point increase "huge."

The Trump administration embraced the Orthodox Jewish community with an unusual warmth. From its start, Orthodox Jews such as U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, special envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner held important roles.

There was even a minyan on the White House lawn at the signing of the Abraham Accords, deals of cooperation between Israel and several Arab nations, in September.

And Orthodox Jews were among Trump's most ardent supporters as the incumbent falsely claimed he won the 2020 election and called on his supporters to take back the presidency. On Jan. 6, a number of Orthodox Jews were among his supporters who stormed the U.S. Capitol while Congress voted to certify the election results — some even traveled to Washington, D.C., on specially chartered buses. Some of those Orthodox backers were arrested, including the son of a Brooklyn judge and former president of the National Council of Young Israel, a synagogue organization that took a sharply pro-Trump turn during his administration.

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● NEWS

Most Children of Intermarriage are Being Raised Jewish. Their Parents Hope Jewish Institutions Notice.

By Ben Sales

Years ago, Jodi Bromberg met a woman at a Jewish event who said she had to call 65 rabbis before she found one who would officiate at her wedding to her non-Jewish husband.

It was a story Bromberg understood. Bromberg's wife is Catholic, and earlier in their marriage "it was a struggle," she said, to find a synagogue that was the right fit for their family.

Sixteen years after getting together with her wife, Bromberg hasn't left Judaism. Her family is active in their non-denominational Massachusetts synagogue, and Bromberg is the CEO of 18Doors, an organization that helps interfaith families find a place in Jewish life. She knows, though, that there are other families like hers who gave up on trying to fit into a Jewish community.

"The number of times that we hear stories about people being rejected outright because their family has said something untoward, or these microaggressions around being a member of an interfaith couple or an interfaith family that often happen in Jewish life and institutions, that's where the work has to be done," Bromberg said. "We're still here, but there are lots of folks who aren't because they thought, you know what, it's not worth it."

Bromberg and her wife are part of a growing group of interfaith couples who are trying to assert themselves in a community where some view families like theirs as an urgent threat to the continued survival of the American Jewish community. Jewish leaders once assumed that

Jews who intermarried, and their children, would be forever lost to the Jewish people. At a 1991 conference of the Jewish federations, intermarriage was compared to the Holocaust.

But intermarried Jews and the scholars who study them say that isn't the case, that they largely want to remain part of the Jewish world and raise their children in the Jewish community. Now, data from the Pew Research Center's new study on American Jews backs up that contention.

According to the study, most Jews who have married in the past decade have wed non-Jewish partners. But most current intermarried couples with children are raising those children Jewish, with another 12% raising their kids partly Jewish.

All together, the study found, two-thirds of intermarried couples are raising their kids with some Jewish identity, a rate that seems to have risen over time. In addition, nearly half of adults under 50 with one Jewish parent still identify as Jewish.

For intermarried families and their advocates, all of those numbers suggest that doomsaying about intermarriage is inappropriate — and that efforts to make Jewish communities more inclusive of interfaith families may be paying off.

"Intermarriage and Jewish identity transmission are not mutually exclusive," said Keren McGinity, a professor who was the inaugural director of the Interfaith Families Jewish Engagement graduate program at Hebrew College in suburban Boston. "Younger adult [children] of intermarried parents by definition would have been born more recently and would have experienced the influences of those who were advocating for a more nuanced, and better, and more accurate understanding of intermarriage."

That influence has been widely felt outside of Orthodoxy, which strictly forbids intermarriage. Major Jewish institutions have shifted their attitudes, and many now actively reach out to interfaith families. The Reform movement, which represents more than a third of U.S. Jews, accepts intermarried families and its rabbis conduct intermarriages.

While the Reform movement recognizes children born of either a Jewish father or mother as Jewish, the Conservative and Orthodox movements recognize only matrilineal descent, one potential barrier to including interfaith families.

But the Conservative movement, home to 17% of American Jews, has recently taken steps to be more inclusive, allowing non-Jews to be synagogue members and, in 2018, allowing its rabbis to attend interfaith weddings, though they still can't officiate at them. Most recently it hired McGinity as its interfaith specialist, tasked with helping rabbis and congregations be more welcoming to intermarried couples.

"When a Jew marries someone of another faith or cultural background, their identity can be cast into high relief," McGinity said. Being the only Jewish parent in a relationship, she said, gives them "the potential to strengthen their own identity."

In a sign of the changing times, two years ago, a range of American and Israeli leaders criticized Israel's education minister for repeating the intermarriage-Holocaust comparison.

The Pew study did find differences in the Jewish identities of children raised by intermarried parents compared to those of children whose parents are both Jewish. Couples in which both spouses were Jewish, the survey found, raise their children Jewish at higher rates than intermarried couples, and more often with the markers that Pew associates with religious affinity.

Nearly all children of "in-married" Jewish couples, 93%, are being raised with a Jewish religious identity. Among intermarried couples, 28% are raising their kids with a Jewish religious identity, while an additional 29% are raising their kids as what Pew calls "Jews of no religion," or secular Jews.

Bromberg said the relatively low numbers of kids of intermarriage raised "Jewish by religion" speaks to how unwelcoming Jewish religious spaces have historically been.

But Samira Mehta, who studies interfaith families, said the causality works in the other direction: The Jews who intermarry were less likely to practice religion to begin with.

"For a lot of people, part of the reason that it doesn't seem like a big deal to marry across religious lines is because you're not somebody who really wants to necessarily orient your life around that kind of religious belonging," said Mehta, the author of "Beyond Chrismukkah: The Christian-Jewish Interfaith Family in the United States." "I don't think the problem is interfaith couples. I think the question is whether synagogues and, quite frankly, churches are doing a good job of helping people understand why it is that they are relevant in contemporary society."

At the same time, she said, younger Jewish adults who marry non-Jews or those are from interfaith families may be more eager to identify as Jewish than previous generations because Jewishness allows them to feel distinct in the United States. Older adults, by contrast, were raised to believe in the United States as a "melting pot" that prized assimilation.

"For people over 50, really the goal in a lot of ways was to assimilate," Mehta said. "But for those of us under 50, who were raised in the era of identity politics and multiculturalism, this gave you a way of being an ethnic American."

Some intermarried Jews who are raising Jewish kids still celebrate Christian holidays in some form, like family Christmas dinners or Easter egg hunts.

"I think there are a lot of people who identify as just Jewish but who have traditions around Christmas or other holidays," said Rabbi Denise Handlarski, a secular humanist rabbi in Toronto who is intermarried and raising her children Jewish. "That doesn't feel like a conflict."

Mehta said intermarried couples who celebrate Christmas and Easter may feel that it doesn't get in the way of raising Jewish kids because those holidays are so ingrained in American culture. In other words, reading Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" in December may be seen as a normal American thing to do as opposed to an active expression of Christian identity.

"Having a seder feels like participating in Judaism," she said. "If you're doing Christmas with Dickens and not with the Gospel of Luke, you're likely to say, 'We're not teaching our kids Christianity.'"

Regardless of what intermarried families do in Decem-

ber, the survey numbers show that the right approach is to actively involve them in Jewish community, said Len Saxe, director of Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. The dire predictions, he said, have not been borne out.

"It hasn't been the end of Jewish life," said Cohen, who advised on the Pew study. "And what we see is that when we provide people with meaningful experiences, with education and so on, they engage in Judaism. They raise Jewish children."

● NEWS

A Survivalist Summer Camp for Orthodox Jews is Planned for New York — and Vaccinated Folks Aren't Invited

By Shira Hanau

With summer coming and COVID-19 vaccines being deemed safe for children as young as 12, some camps are talking about the possibility of a mask-free summer for vaccinated campers.

But one Jewish camp being planned for the summer is taking a different approach: barring any vaccinated camper or staff from attending at all.

Advertisements for Camp Hikon, planned for upstate New York, appeared on email listservs popular in the Orthodox Jewish community just days after a private school in Miami made news for discouraging teachers from getting the vaccine and telling children they were not to have contact with vaccinated people.

The camp's announcement also comes as posters encouraging people not to get the COVID-19 vaccines appeared in Midwood, Brooklyn, the Orthodox neighborhood where one member of the founding team runs a

natural foods store.

The developments suggest that anti-vaccination sentiment and COVID misinformation are taking new forms in Jewish communities where skepticism and non-compliance with public health regulations has been relatively high.

Camp Hikon is aiming to prepare yeshiva boys for what it calls the "political, environmental and economic" changes to come. Despite its stated interest in preparing campers for "natural disasters," it will not allow any vaccinated campers or staff to attend.

Naftali Schwartz, the Brooklyn-based self-described "health coach" with no formal training in medicine or public health who is launching the camp, said the rule is unlikely to keep anybody away.

"Because of the kinds of demographic that I'm drawing from, most people who are coming will not have taken the vaccine," Schwartz told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Drawing on a debunked theory spread by the anti-vaccination movement, the camp's website cites the "experimental nature" of the COVID-19 vaccines. According to the false theory, living in close quarters with vaccinated people could "enhance" the spread of the coronavirus. The website refers readers to a site called NutriTruth, which claims vaccines are a "biological weapon," and to a livestreamed discussion between several notable anti-vaxxers.

"We regret that we will be unable to accept campers or counselors who have already received any of these injections," according to the website.

Schwartz said he made the rule because of "suspicious symptoms that occur to unvaccinated people who have spent a lot of time in the company of vaccinated people."

"It's also been reported to me from parents of my to-be campers that this is a real thing and it's worrisome," Schwartz said.

The idea that unvaccinated people can be harmed by spending time with people who have received the COVID vaccines is not true. Vaccinated people cannot shed particles from the vaccine that would affect someone in their vicinity.

Other debunked theories were listed on posters that appeared this week in Midwood, a heavily Orthodox neighborhood in Brooklyn. The posters, which were unsigned, discouraged Orthodox Jews from being vaccinated due to potential risks to fertility (another debunked theory), among other reasons.

“Many, many Rabbonim who have thoroughly researched the COVID vaccine are urgently saying NOT to take it,” one flyer read, using the Yiddish word for rabbis.

The flyer included a link to an online pamphlet with the names of rabbis who have allegedly come out against the coronavirus vaccines. It also promoted medications for the treatment of COVID such as hydroxychloroquine that studies have shown to be ineffective. The medication had been promoted by Dr. Vladimir Zelenko, an Orthodox physician who, until last summer, worked in the Hasidic enclave of Kiryas Joel and whose treatment protocol was promoted by Donald Trump when he was president.

The online pamphlet claimed that people did not die because of the coronavirus. “They died either from lack of proper treatment of corona, or from other neglect or improper treatment at the hospital,” the pamphlet said.

Anti-vaccine sentiment is persistent in pockets of the Orthodox Jewish community, which suffered from an outbreak of measles in 2019 after a child who had traveled to Israel spread the disease among other unvaccinated children in Brooklyn and upstate New York. The outbreak was brought under control after New York City’s health department imposed fines on parents who refused to vaccinate their children and threatened to close yeshivas that allowed unvaccinated children to attend. New York State ended nonmedical exemptions to vaccination requirements in schools, leading to an increase in vaccinations.

According to COVID vaccination data from the New York City Department of Health, only 18% of residents in Borough Park are fully vaccinated with 28% partially vaccinated. In Midwood, only 22% of residents are fully vaccinated and 30% partially vaccinated. By comparison, among residents of the Upper West Side’s 10024 zip code, one of the more highly vaccinated areas of the city, 54% of residents are fully vaccinated and 65% are partially vaccinated.

Whether Camp Hikon actually gets off the ground re-

mains to be seen. So far, no children are signed up and Schwartz has yet to obtain a permit to operate the camp.

But he has a clear vision of what will happen there. Masks will not be encouraged at the camp; as to how the camp would fight the spread of COVID-19, campers would be treated “with an abundance of vitamin D and other prophylaxis,” according to the website.

The camp appears to combine survivalist training with Torah study. The primary goal of the camp, Schwartz said, is to prepare campers for a future in which political instability, economic instability and unusual weather events could create supply chain issues that would interfere with everyday life. Campers will build their own shelters, according to the website, and the camp plans to provide special footwear intended for survival settings.

“We’re catering to a demographic of families that are awake, who understand that the years in the future will not be similar to years in the past,” Schwartz said.

● NEWS

Pleading Guilty to Inciting a Riot in Brooklyn, Heshy Tischler Sentenced to 10 Days of Community Service

By Shira Hanau

Seven months after Heshy Tischler was charged with inciting a riot in Brooklyn’s Borough Park, the Orthodox activist and provocateur has been sentenced to 10 days of community service.

Tischler, a radio host who is now running for City Council, was arrested in October on charges of unlawful imprisonment of a journalist and member of the Hasidic community. He pled guilty to inciting a riot, one of four

charges that he drew during a week of turbulent protests in Borough Park last fall when the heavily Orthodox Brooklyn neighborhood was placed under tighter restrictions due to rising COVID-19 cases there.

Explaining his decision to plead guilty, Tischler told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Friday, "I did it for the community."

The charges were dated Oct. 7, the night when Tischler led a group of young Orthodox men in surrounding Jacob Kornbluh, a member of the Hasidic community and a journalist who had criticized Tischler. The crowd surrounded Kornbluh, backing him against a brick wall, and screamed the word "moser" at him. The term means an informer and carries the connotation of a threat.

Video of the incident posted to Twitter by Jake Offenhartz, a reporter for Gothamist, showed a large crowd gathered around Kornbluh with Tischler at the center, shouting in Kornbluh's face while unmasked. "You're a moser," Tischler is seen screaming. "Everybody scream moser!" Tischler had called Kornbluh a "moser" and a "rat" in a video he posted to Instagram earlier that day from a cemetery.

At a protest the night before, where protesters at points burned masks and blocked a city bus from passing, Tischler encouraged the crowds to defy the public health orders imposed on the neighborhood's schools and synagogues. "We will not close," he told the crowds. Later, he told protestors, "You are my soldiers. We are at war."

In a virtual court appearance Friday afternoon, Tischler was sentenced to 10 days of community service. The terms of the sentencing mean that if Tischler completes his community service according to the terms set by the court, the judge will remove the charges from his record.

Tischler, who attained his public persona in Borough Park in large part due to his volunteering, downplayed the severity of the community service requirement, saying it was "not a sentence."

"I will do 10 days of community service even though each week I do about four, five or six days of community service," he said.

"Heshy loves helping people and he does community service every day," said Sara Shulevitz, one of Tischler's lawyers.

Kornbluh reacted to the sentence in a statement posted to Twitter. "I welcome the fact that Mr. Tischler acknowledged in the court of law that he incited a riot against me and has been held accountable for his actions. I am looking forward to continuing my work in journalism undeterred," he said.

The Brooklyn District Attorney's office, which prosecuted the case, also asked for an order of protection on behalf of Kornbluh. Tischler said that he would ask for an order of protection against Kornbluh.

Tischler is running for City Council in District 48, which includes several Orthodox neighborhoods in south Brooklyn. The seat is currently held by Chaim Deutsch, an Orthodox politician who was recently expelled from the council after pleading guilty to tax fraud.

In a video posted to Instagram Wednesday, Tischler appeared with City Councilman Kalman Yeger, who represents Borough Park, and State Assemblyman Simcha Eichenstein, two of the most prominent Orthodox elected officials in Brooklyn. Yeger and Eichenstein smile and joke with Tischler in the video, which is branded with Tischler's campaign logo.

● IN OTHER NEWS

State delays yeshiva regulations until fall

The state Education Department said it will wait until the fall before releasing revised regulations about teaching secular subjects at yeshivas and other parochial schools.

The department issued a report Monday summarizing feedback on an issue that has become a factor in the mayoral race: whether or not yeshivas are providing their students with "substantial equivalence" in subjects like math and English.

The state gathered feedback from some 500 people in six regional meetings late last year. One parent said the curricula of most yeshivas is "highly academic," while an alumnus of a yeshiva said that he, his family and their friends "had been unaware of the Regents exams."

"We have an obligation to make sure every child is prepared to be successful in life and be active participants in society, no matter where they attend school," said Board of Regents Chancellor Lester W. Young, Jr., in a statement.

Yeshiva advocates responded by reiterating their calls for independence. "On the legal front, 'substantially equivalent' is an abstract term, and state leaders can't redefine it in a consequential way just because people on social media demand so," Yossi Gestetner, executive director of the Orthodox Jewish Public Affairs Council, told Hamodia.

YAFFED, a group seeking to improve secular education at yeshivas, was disappointed by the timing. "This decision will delay the implementation of regulations that would protect New York's students until at least 2022," it said in a statement.

Social services hub serves Boro Park's Orthodox

Met Council opened a new social service hub in Borough Park to address the needs of Orthodox families struggling in the wake of the pandemic and the economic downturn.

With support from UJA-Federation of New York, the Chesed Center, at 4319 14th Ave., will provide free kosher food and groceries, assistance with applying for benefits and entitlements, job program enrollment and legal aid, as well as support for seniors.

"After so many jobs and small businesses were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, this new hub will allow us to ensure that everyone in the frum community is getting the benefits they need," said David G. Greenfield, the CEO of Met Council, at Wednesday's grand opening.

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● OPINION

If You're Asking American Jews If They're Religious, You Don't Understand American Jews

By Rachel B. Gross

In Sheldon Oberman's children's book "The Always Prayer Shawl," a grandfather passes on his tallit to his grandson along with the sage advice, "Some things change and some things don't." At public readings, Oberman wore his grandfather's tallit, which had inspired the story. When a non-Jewish author told him that she wished she could tell stories the way he did, he placed the tallit on her shoulders and told her, "You can! You can do it."

This story illustrates how religion functions in complex ways in the lives of North American Jews. Was Oberman's tallit a religious object? Was he using it in religious ways?

The new study of American Jews by the Pew Research Center, too, reflects the complicated and often contradictory ways that Jews employ the concept of "religion" as well as the way "some things change and some things don't" in both American Jews' practices and sociological studies of them. Like the 2013 Pew study of American Jews, "Jewish Americans in 2020" divides Jews into "Jews by religion" and "Jews of no religion." Jews by religion say their current religion is Jewish. According to Pew, 27% Jewish adults do not identify their religion as Jewish but consider themselves Jewish ethnically, culturally or by family background. Among Jews 18-29, that number rises to 40%, twice that of Jews ages 50-64.

Some may wring their hands over what they see as dwindling participation in Judaism as a religion, as commentators did after the last survey. But what I see in this survey is evidence of the innovative and ever-changing ways Jewish religion is practiced, not grounds for panic.

Although the authors inform us “religion is not central to the lives of most U.S. Jews,” the concept of religion, as most Americans use it today, is a modern, Protestant creation, and Jewish practices fit uncomfortably in the category. Despite the best efforts of Jewish thinkers to separate religious and cultural aspects of Jewish practice, the boundaries have never been clear. Traditional understandings of “religion” have rested uneasily with Jewish realities, which have a greater focus on communities and practices. Only 20% of survey respondents said that their “religious faith” provides a great deal of meaning and fulfillment, perhaps because American Jews rarely use the language of faith.

But the study does reveal the many ways that American Jews of all kinds create Jewish meaning in their lives. These include practices traditionally understood as religious, such as attending a seder (62%), and those understood as cultural, such as cooking or eating traditional Jewish foods (72%).

In my book, “Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice,” I argue that making sense of Jews’ practices requires us to employ a broader definition of religion. Following religious studies scholar Robert Orsi, I think religion is best understood as meaningful relationships and the practices, narratives and emotions that create and support these relationships. Understanding religion as relationships makes our interactions with families, our attachments to our ancestors, our connections to communities and the narratives we use to explain our place in the world central to religious activity. It lets us see Jewish religion flourishing in a wide variety of practices and in unexpected sites — in ways that its practitioners might not themselves identify as “religious” because of the way religion is so often narrowly construed.

I applaud the authors of this study for asking far more questions about Jews’ everyday practices than the 2013 study did, as well as for noting that cultural activities complement so-called religious ones. This study finds that, in large numbers, Jews eat foods they recognize as Jewish, visit Jewish historic sites when traveling, read books and articles about Jewish topics, listen to Jewish music, and watch TV and film with Jewish themes. What all of these activities have in common is that they allow Jews to place themselves within narratives that provide existential meaning. I wish that the study had asked

about visits to Jewish museums, which are increasingly important spaces of Jewish community, or genealogical research, a wildly popular pastime that helps Jews place themselves within family and communal histories that cross time and space.

I suggest we pay more attention to what Jews do than to what they name as “essential” to their identity, as the study continues to ask, echoing the 2013 study. Only 20% of American Jews consider eating traditional Jewish foods to be essential to what being Jewish means to them. But the wording of the question does not reflect Jews’ realities. Eating foods recognized as “Jewish” may be a meaningful part of a Jew’s life, but it may be too quotidian, too easily overlooked, to be recognized as essential or important according to traditional metrics of religion. Commonplace activities such as eating foods that remind us of our families, our communities, and our histories are often quietly fundamental to religious identities rather than explicitly identified as essential to them.

Likewise, the study finds that large numbers of Jews own Jewish ritual objects. The fact that 24% of “Jews of no religion” own a Hebrew-language prayer book should give us pause. As religious studies scholar Vanessa L. Ochs finds, American Jews unobtrusively enact important parts of their identities through the material objects they have in their homes, including items they rarely if ever use. Oberman’s unconventional use of his tallit reminds us that Jews can find new and sometimes surprising meanings in ritual objects, even outside of traditional contexts.

Some things change, and some things don’t. American Jews continue to find meaning in emotional connections to their families, communities, and histories, though the ways they do so continue to change. Expanding our definition of “religion” can help us better recognize the ways in which they are doing so.

Rachel B. Gross is assistant professor and John and Marcia Goldman Chair in American Jewish Studies in the Department of Jewish Studies at San Francisco State University. She is the author of “Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice.”

● OPINION

I Grew up in a Mixed Jewish-Arab City. Violence There Frightens Me More Than Rockets From Gaza.

By Tomer Persico

When I was growing up in Haifa, the city's mixed population was a steady background, often overlooked rather than noted with wonder. Jews and Arabs lived, worked and raised children side by side, at times together. As part of a secular family, I remember driving to the Arab neighborhoods to buy pita bread during Passover, when supermarkets in Jewish neighborhoods are forbidden by law to sell it. Winter included heading to the Christian area on Christmas to enjoy the decorations and catch a whiff of cosmopolitanism.

As an Israeli, the events of the last few days in Lod, Jaffa, Acre and other mixed cities are much more worrying than another round against Hamas, however horrendous. Over the last decade the conflict with Hamas has taken the shape of a clash between two states, however asymmetrical the balance of power is. It is a war of attrition that no Israeli expects to come to an end when this particular round of violence is through.

What's happening in Israel's cities is fundamentally different — as the Israeli military is apparently acknowledging, with reports that it is prepared to end Gaza cross-border fighting to quell Jewish-Arab clashes within the country.

Quite beyond the disintegration of public order, with Jewish cars set ablaze by Arab rioters and Arab shops smashed by Jewish extremists, the very fabric of our society is torn. As of now, Lod has borne the brunt of the attacks, with synagogues torched and Jewish families hiding in their own houses for fear of violence from

their neighbors.

This catastrophic eruption of aggression could have been foreseen, but was by no means inevitable. It has to do with long-term neglect of the Arab citizenry in Israel by the state, but that's really only the very broad background. The fire was sparked at Jerusalem. On the one hand it was brewed by the incremental seizure, through technically legal but profoundly inequitable means, of Arab houses by Jewish settlers in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah; on the other, the Al-Aqsa mosque became a battleground. Palestinians amassed rocks and firecrackers to throw on Jewish worshipers at the Western Wall below it, and the Israeli police raided the compound on Monday and dispersed the crowds, leaving 21 police and more than 200 Palestinians injured.

These last events brought feelings of resentment and national frustration to their boiling point. Al-Aqsa mosque is not only the third-holiest site for Sunni Islam, but a fundamental element of the Palestinian national identity. After its conquest in the 12th century by Saladin, the Arabs in and around Jerusalem were entrusted with the protection of the holy site. Today the Jerusalem Palestinians, and by extension all Palestinians, see themselves as heirs to that trust.

A perceived affront or infringement to the site by Israel brings tension that, if not abated, breeds violence. The bloody "Al-Aqsa Intifada" of 2000 to 2005 got its name for a reason. For Palestinians a struggle around the holy compound is much more than a question of hurt religious feelings or national pride. It is a part of their identity, an abuse of which incites a visceral reaction.

The breakdown of coexistence in Israel's mixed cities, however, pushes similar buttons in the Jewish psyche. When Jewish Israelis hear about Jews locking themselves up in their homes, helpless; about gangs of rioters walking the streets, seeking Jews; about synagogues vandalized and set on fire — layers of centuries-long trauma are exposed.

Among the elements constituting the Jewish identity is, tragically, a sense of vulnerability and the acute fear of violence from one's neighbors. The reasons for this are clear, and the historical response to it was, among other things, Zionism. This week, Israelis found themselves reliving (vi-

curiously, for most) the same reality that they hoped they would “Never Again” encounter. Once more, we have an intrusion into the deepest sediments of identity, an abuse of which, of course, incites a visceral reaction.

The results are disastrous: a collapse of the social fabric and indeed of law and order. Lynch mobs from both peoples are pursuing victims in the streets, and families who were only a week ago living peacefully side by side are terrified of each other.

Since neither population is going anywhere, Israelis will learn to live together. Life has its ways, and neighbors find theirs to coexist. The collision of identity and historical hurt, however, unavoidably engenders an intense trauma. Right now Israel’s Jewish and Arab citizens are pressing each other’s deepest points of suffering, deepening the anguish.

The long process of healing requires an honest attempt at a more equitable relationship between the state and its Arab citizens. But each side must learn to recognize and be much more attentive to the others’ identity and sensitivities.

Tomer Persico is the Koret Visiting Assistant Professor at the Helen Diller Institute for Jewish Law and Israel Studies at UC Berkeley, and the Shalom Hartman Institute Bay Area Scholar in Residence.

● SABBATH WEEK / SHAVUOT

The Book of Ruth Taught Me that True Friendship Can’t Be Explained

Our attachments with others remain a beautiful mystery.

By Rabbi Dr. Stu Halpern

“The thought of leaving my friends was decidedly the most painful thought with which I had to contend. The

love of them was my tender point, and shook my decision more than all things else.”

So wrote Frederick Douglass in his autobiography, of his considerations before escaping the bondage of slavery. Being apart from friends can be heartbreakingly hard, even amidst the worst of circumstances.

While Douglass had to part with his friends to survive, in the book of Ruth, the opposite decision is made.

The story, read on Shavuot, begins with the widowed Israelite Naomi’s farewell to her Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, also widows. Since family ties no longer bind them, Naomi doesn’t expect the women to follow her home to her native Bethlehem.

“Go return, each to your mother’s home,” Naomi instructs Orpah and Ruth. “May the Lord grant you rest, each in the house of a husband.”

Ruth makes the unexpected, even inauspicious, decision to accompany Naomi. By doing so, she offered an immortal lesson in the inexplicable nature of friendship.

The two women, one an elderly bereft widow and another an immigrant, also without a husband, didn’t stand much of a chance in the economic, political and social Wild West of the Ancient Near East that was the period of Judges. Without the protection and sustenance provided by a caring spouse, the women wouldn’t last long. Naomi, of course, knew this: Upon her return to Bethlehem, she instructs its inhabitants not to call her “Pleasant” (“Naomi” in Hebrew), but “Bitter.”

And yet Ruth stood by her decision.

Ruth’s commitment to bind herself to Naomi is never fully explained. Her much-quoted pledge of allegiance does not articulate a reason for the unending devotion: “Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.”

Even at the end of the book, the reason for that devotion is not articulated, but its fruits are shown. The women of Bethlehem tell a restored Naomi that Ruth, “who loves you, is better than seven sons.” Naomi embraces the child of Ruth and her cousin Boaz, whose line will eventually produce the Messiah. Friendship, the book of Ruth seems to be saying, need not be justified to bestow

its salvific effects.

The French philosopher and essayist Michel de Montaigne, reflecting on his friendship with Etienne de la Boétie, mused that, “If a man should importune me to give a reason why I loved him, I find it could no other-wise be expressed, than by making answer: because it was he, because it was I. There is, beyond all that I am able to say, I know not what inexplicable and fated power that brought on this union.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, too, considered true friendship to be inarticulable:

A friend, therefore, is a sort of paradox in nature. I who alone am, I who see nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own, behold now the semblance of my being, in all its height, variety, and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.

The contemporary public intellectual Nassim Nicholas Taleb, in his “The Bed of Procrustes,” puts it pithily: “If you find any reason why you and someone are friends, you are not friends.”

The coronavirus, preventing our usual interactions with companions and confidants, has reminded us how crucial deep friendships are to our very survival. Our interdependence with friends, despite or perhaps because it is often not explainable, has become clearer than ever.

It is no wonder, then, that the Talmud describes blessings that one should recite upon seeing a friend after an extended separation:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One who sees his friend after thirty days have passed since last seeing him recites: Blessed . . . Who has given us life, sustained us and brought us to this time. One who sees his friend after twelve months recites: Blessed . . . Who revives the dead” (Berakhot 58b)

As Dr. Erica Brown has aptly noted, “True friendship is a work of art, a thing of holiness. Its absence creates a void. Its renewed presence is worthy of prayer.”

Most of us are familiar with “ruthless,” but not its opposite: ruth, “compassion for the misery of another,” as Merriam-Webster defines it. After all, it was Ruth who

first taught us that deep human connection and compassion, despite its paradoxical, unexplainable character, can be the source of our individual and national redemption.

Rabbi Dr. Stu Halpern is senior advisor to the provost, and senior program officer of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, at Yeshiva University. He is the editor of “Gleanings: Reflections on Ruth” (Maggid Books).

● MUSINGS

From Beyond the Grave

By David Wolpe

The poet Langston Hughes asked that a particular Duke Ellington song be played at his funeral: “Do Nothing Until You Hear From Me.”

Is such a thing possible? The idea of hearing messages from beyond the grave has tantalized human beings for as long as can remember. The Jewish tradition certainly believes that this life is not all. The possibility that there is some sort of murky bridge to the beyond is raised repeatedly in Jewish texts.

In one famous episode in a medieval source, Rabbi Akiba meets a man who was cruel in his life and whose son does not know or wish to say the kaddish for him. Through Rabbi Akiba’s efforts, the son comes to say kaddish and grants the man’s tortured soul some peace. Many times in the Talmud the rabbis meet Elijah the prophet in the marketplace, and he is able to give them

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Sivan 3, 5781 | Friday, May 14, 2021

- **Light candles at:** 7:48 p.m.

Sivan 4, 5781 | Saturday, May 15, 2021

- **Torah reading:** Bamidbar, Numbers 1:1–4:20
- **Haftarah:** Hosea 2:1–22
- **Shabbat ends:** 8:54 p.m.

information on the doings up in heaven.

I have heard from many people over the years that they have been visited by relatives who passed away, sometimes in dreams, sometimes in visions. Although I have never had such an experience, I am aware that my own perceptions and understanding are limited, and it is not my job to insist to others that their experiences are unreal. Perhaps the membrane between here and there is thinner than we assume.

*Named the most influential Rabbi in America by Newsweek Magazine and one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world by the Jerusalem Post, **David Wolpe** is the Rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, California.*

● MUSINGS

This DIY Ricotta Recipe is the Perfect Shavuot Activity for Kids

By Lauren Manaker

Typically, my 4-year-old daughter gets her fill of Jewish learning when we go to the kid's Shabbat services at our local synagogue. The group does a wonderful job teaching lessons about holidays in an age-appropriate way — from crafts to songs, the staff and volunteers do a dynamite job of getting the children excited to celebrate Jewish traditions.

Thanks to restrictions due to Covid-19, however, I can't outsource my daughter's Jewish education anymore. I have to get creative and engage her myself if I want her to have an understanding of Jewish holidays and customs, especially as there are few other Jewish families where we live. And now, with the Jewish holiday of Shavuot — which commemorates the Jewish people receiving the Torah on Mt. Sinai — just around the corner (this year the holiday begins on the evening of Thursday, May 28), it looks like mama is going to have to get creative.

But what to do? Crafts are really not my thing; I'm ba-

sically the antithesis of a Pinterest mom. Fortunately, however, Shavuot is a holiday that encourages eating dairy and cooking: two of my specialties! I am a registered dietitian by trade and I love bringing my daughter into the kitchen to gain cooking skills. And, as for the dairy — well, let's just say that if you put any cheese in front of me, it will find its way into my belly.

Over the years, I have heard varying explanations as to why Jews eat dairy to celebrate Shavuot. Some explanations include that since the Torah was delivered on Shabbat, animals could not be slaughtered, because that is work. We assume the Jews ate a dairy meal on this day, and therefore we follow suit. Another explanation is that the Torah is compared to milk in the Song of Solomon, and therefore we eat dairy to commemorate this association.

Honestly, whatever the reason, if there's a Jewish holiday that is celebrated by eating delicious dairy foods like blintzes and cheesecake, I am here for it! (Much more enjoyable than fasting for a whole day like we do when we observe Yom Kippur, wouldn't you say?)

So, when it comes to our homegrown Shavuot celebration, my daughter and I could just make basic yogurt parfaits and call it a day. But I want to do something that is unique and a bit special, so I decided on a DIY ricotta cheese project.

Why ricotta? Well, it's a project that involves just a few steps and is therefore appropriate for a preschool-aged sous chef. Plus, making ricotta is a science lesson, too: Mixing milk with an acidic ingredient like vinegar or lemon causes some of the milk proteins to curdle. Watching the process first-hand opens an hand-on opportunity to discuss this scientific process, neat!

What's more, it's a wonderful ingredient that's very versatile. Ricotta cheese has a soft consistency which makes it perfect for something like lasagna or stuffed manicotti; some out-of-the-box ideas include a ricotta caramel apple salad, a wild blueberry pancake smoothie, and honey-sweetened fruit and ricotta toast.

Last but not least, it's super-simple — a crucial detail for whenever you're cooking with little ones. Homemade ricotta only involves three ingredients: milk, white vinegar, and salt. So, get those kids in the kitchen, and happy Shavuot! (Kveller)

DIY Ricotta Recipe

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups of whole milk
- 2 tablespoons of distilled white vinegar
- ¼ tsp. of salt

DIRECTIONS

1. Place a colander over a mixing bowl, making sure there is room for liquid to drain into the bowl.
2. Place 2 paper towel sheets inside the colander.
3. Combine milk, salt, vinegar in a microwave-safe bowl.
4. Microwave on high until milk is lightly bubbling around the edges. (This generally takes around 3 minutes.)
5. Using potholders, remove bowl from microwave and stir gently for a few seconds. Milk should quickly separate into solid white curds and transparent liquid whey.
6. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the curds to the colander and drain for at least 5 minutes.
7. The curd left on top of the paper towels is your ricotta cheese! Carefully spoon the ricotta into a container.

Yield: 2 cups of whole milk will result in approximately a 1/2 cup of ricotta cheese. Recipe adapted from The Dairy Alliance.

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 16, 8:30 p.m. – May 17, 5:00 a.m. Free

18th Annual Paul Feig z"l Tikkun Leil Shavuot

The Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan presents the 18th annual Paul Feig z"l Tikkun Leil Shavuot, a free night of virtual study, music, dance, learning, celebration, conversation, and deep thought. Highlights of the 2021 Tikkun Leil Shavuot include performances by The Bengsons, Elana Brody, a Eurovision concert, and Israel Story Live; conversations with

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mandy Patinkin and Kathryn Grody, Bret Stephens, Rabbi Moshe Waldoks, and Elisha Wiesel; and a culinary experience with Chef Tracy Wilk.

For scheduling details and more information, visit mmjccm.org/tikkun

May 19 | 2:00 p.m. Free

Color on My Mind: The Lafargue Clinic

The Lafargue Clinic was founded in New York in 1946 by a group of black intellectuals and German-Jewish doctors. The Leo Baeck Institute presents Dennis Doyle of the University of Health Sciences and Pharmacy in St. Louis, who has written extensively about the Lafargue Clinic and the history of mental health care in Harlem, in conversation with Martin Summers of Boston University, a fellow historian on the history of Black mental health care in the United States.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3ocXUNY>

May 23 | 1:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m. Free

Discussion and Bilingual Reading of 'The Canvas and Other Stories' by Salomea Perl

In 2021 BenYehuda Press published a bilingual edition of "The Canvas and Other Stories" by Salomea Perl, translated by Ruth Murphy. Workers Circle presents an online discussion these stories and the author, and present a bilingual reading of her work. With translator Ruth Murphy and Sheva Zucker, Yiddish scholar and Workers Circle instructor.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3uQGwBa>

Do you have an event coming up? Submit your events online at www.jewishweek.com/contact/submit-an-event