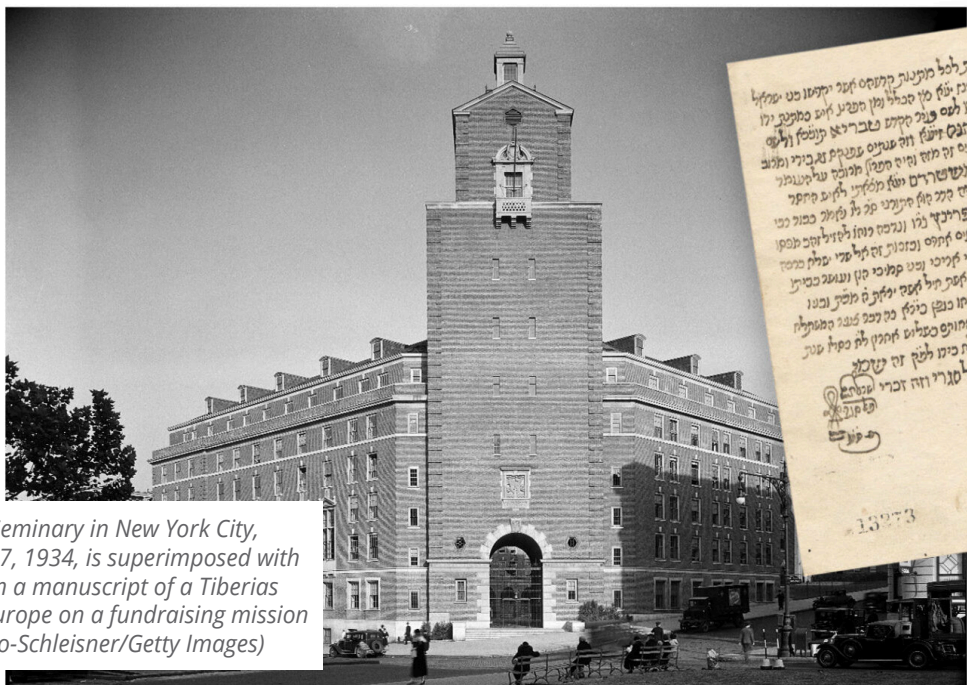


# The Jewish Week/end

New York

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The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, photographed on Oct. 17, 1934, is superimposed with an image of a page from a manuscript of a Tiberias rabbi who traveled to Europe on a fundraising mission in 1807. (MCNY/Gottscho-Schleisner/Getty Images)

● NEWS

## The Jewish Theological Seminary Sold Some of Its Treasures. For Some Librarians and Scholars, That's a No-no.

*A rare Hebrew ledger showed up at auction, sparking an investigation by an amateur sleuth.*

By Asaf Shalev

When an auction house recently unveiled a new catalog of rare Jewish books and manuscripts, Rabbi Elli Fischer was among the many who rushed to examine the goods.

An Israeli-American university researcher, Fischer was particularly intrigued

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by an old handwritten journal — opening bid: \$100,000.

The journal, known as a ledger, or “pinkas,” belonged to a rabbi from the holy city of Tiberias who had toured Jewish Europe some 200 years ago to raise money for his community. Fischer was fascinated to read the names of towns and rabbis visited on the tour. He even spotted the signature of one of his own ancestors, a German rabbi.

As Fischer looked through the digitized images of the ledger, he noticed a number stamped at the bottom of one page. The stamp, showing a faded “13723,” told Fischer that this manuscript, now being sold by an anonymous owner on the private market, had once been part of a collection, probably at a public institution.

“There’s something really curious, perhaps even suspicious, about one of the most remarkable items on auction,” Fischer would later write in a series of tweets.

Fischer turned on his detective’s brain, and what he would discover would soon scandalize the world of Judaica experts, help expose a controversial practice by a flagship institution of Jewish learning and raise questions about the commitment of the Jewish community to preserving its own history.

All he had now, however, was a serial number. Fischer decided to type the number into the search bar of the catalog for the National Library of Israel — and got a hit. A description matching that of the auction noted that the manuscript was available in microfilm and digital formats on the library website.

But the item did not belong to the National Library, nor had it ever. Instead, the manuscript was described as part of the world-renowned collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York.

“You read this right: A unique and valuable manuscript that was part of the [JTS library’s] magnificent collection is now on the auction block,” Fischer would later tweet. “How did it get there?”

Fischer also noted that a search for the item in the library’s own catalog yielded no results, only another question: Had someone removed the entry from the catalog?

One possibility was that the manuscript had been stolen from the seminary at some point and was now resur-

facing. The other possibility — even more worrying to some — was that the seminary was quietly selling the manuscript and perhaps other precious items from its celebrated collection.

The library had sold off items in the past, doing so openly. The items were either duplicates and therefore less valuable, or works printed in Latin, a language that many other institutions better specialize in.

This manuscript was a distinctly Jewish and Hebrew text, and since it was handwritten, by definition it was unique.

As word of Fischer’s findings spread, librarians at JTS and elsewhere grew alarmed, according to interviews with about a dozen people, all of whom spoke on condition of anonymity.

With the library shut down since 2016 for a campus redevelopment project and the books sitting in a warehouse, rumors had been circulating. Many suspected the library used the cover of renovations to make the controversial move of selling collectibles.

Fischer had delivered a “smoking gun,” as several Jewish book experts described his discovery that an item had been removed from the library. One person called it a “catastrophe.” Another expert said the sale of the manuscript was as if Hadassah had removed the Chagall windows from its hospital in Jerusalem. The subsequent removal from the catalog was as if Hadassah had been asked about the windows and responded, “Windows? What windows?”

Located in Upper Manhattan near Columbia University, the Jewish Theological Seminary is the academic and spiritual heart of Conservative Judaism. Its library is arguably the most important repository of Jewish knowledge in the world, featuring some of the very first books printed in Hebrew, a letter written by Maimonides about 800 years ago, and thousands of other rare and unique texts.

## A WORLD-CLASS COLLECTION

A tension between the institution’s mission of ordaining rabbis for Conservative congregations and its expensive archival responsibilities has existed for more than 100 years, going back to the moment when wealthy New York Jews envisioned a “Hebrew book museum” at the

seminary to rival the collections of imperial Britain.

“We should hold in view the purpose to make our collection as nearly complete as the resources of the world may render possible, and in so doing, we should spare neither thought nor labor nor money,” said Mayer Sulzberger at the dedication of a new building for the seminary in 1903.

Sulzberger and the rest of the era’s mostly German Jewish donor class made good on that promise. Alexander Marx was tapped to head the library in 1903, and he embarked on a buying spree that lasted for decades.

“Marx was the bibliographical equivalent of a kid in a candy shop,” said David Selis, a historian studying the library. “He would buy anything that has any relationship to Jews in any language.”

But as it turned out, money for a museum of the Hebrew book did not remain as readily available in the 21st century.

In 2015, the seminary signed real estate deals that saw the library building demolished and replaced with a luxury residential tower. The proceeds, some \$96 million, boosted the institution’s endowment and paid for a campus redevelopment project featuring a new library with a much smaller footprint, as well as a new dorm and auditorium.

After having been closed for construction for years, the library is set to reopen in the coming months, COVID permitting, with only a fraction of the books available on site. The rest can be called up from a distant warehouse.

In the world of Jewish books, the real estate deal was widely understood as a divestment by JTS from book custodianship in favor of its mandate to train rabbis. But most have refrained from saying so publicly, according to interviews, because they do not want to be seen as disparaging or undermining an institution that remains essential for serious scholarship about Judaism.

While the seminary was tapping its real estate for cash, it also decided to cultivate another revenue stream.

As many had suspected, and seminary officials confirmed to JTA, the library had quietly sold off rare items from its library.

The ledger of the rabbi from Tiberias went to a private collector in 2017 and eventually wound up on the auction block, served up by a Jerusalem-based firm called Genazym. The auction takes place on Wednesday.

“The sale of this piece was deemed to be of minimum impact to the collection and financially prudent for the institution,” JTS spokesperson Beth Mayerowitz said in an email to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency providing the first public confirmation of such a sale.

In an interview, the seminary’s chief librarian, David Kraemer, described the instructions he had received from his superiors: The administration and the board of the seminary wanted him to sell items of his choosing in order to raise a specified amount of money. Kraemer did not disclose the dollar figure.

“I asked, ‘What in my collection would raise that amount without harming the core mission of the institution?’” Kraemer said, recalling a conversation with a few in-house experts whom he declined to name. “It had to be an item we had digitized and that we deemed relatively low research value.”

The task facing Kraemer was not as unusual as it might seem. Libraries and museums periodically sell items, a practice known as deaccessioning, often to raise money for the purchase of other items but sometimes under financial duress.

Because the library at JTS was founded on almost indiscriminate buying, it had come to possess multiple copies of many books, even remarkably rare ones published at the dawn of printing.

In fact, the library had once held an extra copy of the first printed Hebrew book to be illustrated, Meshal ha-Kadmoni, or Fable of the Ancients, by Isaac ben Solomon Abi Sahula, printed in 1491 in Italy.

In 1986, the book was sold as part of an auction through Christie’s, fetching the highest price ever paid for a printed book in Hebrew at the time. The library sold 95 items in that round and raised a total of \$700,000.

In the decades since, the library has gained a reputation for sometimes undervaluing its possessions. In 1998, for example, a copy of the first printed edition of the Torah in Hebrew that the library deaccessioned in a \$50,000 deal quickly went on to sell for \$310,000 at an auction.

## SELLING A GUTTENBERG

By 2015, when JTS was reportedly amid a financial crisis going back years, the seminary again mined its library and set up an auction, this time through Sotheby's. But now the library wasn't offloading duplicates.

JTS put up a series of works in Latin that are so old that they are not called books but incunabula, a designation for items printed before 1501. The sale included a 1455 edition of the Book of Esther from a Gutenberg Bible — it had been among the items showcased for donors on private tours of the library. The eight pages, “handsomely rubricated in red and blue,” sold for nearly \$1 million, far beating expectations.

Kraemer explained that books in Latin are outside of the library's “core mission” and scholars rarely come asking for them. The money collected went to a fund to buy more relevant rare books, he added.

An academic library like that of JTS has the legal right to sell anything it owns for any reason without publicizing it. In practice, libraries turn to deaccession only when they are facing budget shortfalls or have an opportunity to trade up, and they tend to publicly announce they are doing so. There are different views on what's appropriate, but even those who frown upon particular deaccession decisions can accept the overall practice.

It was the lack of transparency around the sale of the manuscript that especially riled Judaica librarians and consultants, many of whom wondered what other items might have slipped away unnoticed.

Indeed, other such private sales have taken place in recent years, according to seminary officials.

“The sale of Pinkas Shadar of Israel Hayyim Raphael Segre (1807-1809) and several other items took place in a private sale in 2017 and was one of a few sales that occurred since 2015,” Mayerowitz said.

Among the items that went, she added, were several volumes of the Bomberg Talmud printed on blue paper and a copy of the Prague Haggadah on parchment.

“Those of us who are book people in our blood, we see this and we get pissed off,” a former library employee said. “These books don't belong in a private collection.

If JTS had been transparent I could almost understand. But they are selling books out the back door. The seminary is using the library as a cash cow.”

Kraemer rejects the idea that the sale and subsequent removal from the online catalog were inappropriate.

“The sale wasn't announced because it was a private transaction,” he said. “People will interpret it how they will interpret it.”

Part of the reason why it's hard to evaluate whether the seminary acted properly is that it doesn't have a set policy on deaccession. The library at nearby Columbia University has a blanket policy against it, as does Yeshiva University, another Jewish institution of higher learning with a substantial albeit lesser Judaica collection.

Absent laws and mutually agreed-upon rules, each institution sets its own policy. That's different from the related field of museums. The powerful Association of Art Museum Directors lists guidelines against deaccession, which were temporarily relaxed at the start of the coronavirus pandemic because of the anticipated budgetary shortfalls.

Some librarians would like to see a change in their field.

“There aren't norms and guidelines around deaccession, and that's a problem,” said Michelle Margolis, the incoming president of the Association for Jewish Libraries.

Margolis, a librarian at Columbia, said she's part of a group that's working on a solution. Common ethics would make it easier to identify bad actors and suss out theft.

For all their desire to obtain what's in the public domain, thieves, as much as private collectors, need institutions to exist and thrive. By warehousing precious books, libraries create scarcity on the market, allowing the few items that do circulate to fetch high prices.

Kraemer said he knows of no plans to sell more rare books, and the seminary says it is financially healthy. Like many institutions dependent on donations, the seminary was making emergency cuts at the start of the pandemic. But 2020 turned out to be one of its best years for fundraising in the past decade, according to Mayerowitz, the JTS spokesperson.



A strong fundraising year would appear to come on the heels of years of consistent growth for the seminary's endowment. Tax audits disclosed through the IRS show an increase every year for which data is available, going from \$113 million in 2015 to \$142 million in 2019.

Mayerowitz also said that the seminary's strong position is evident in its redeveloped campus with a performance space, residence hall and library, which she called "an investment in the future of not only JTS, but the entire Jewish community."

A reminder of the cost of that investment presents itself against a slice of sky above the seminary. Where stacks of books once took up space, there are now 33 floors of luxury apartments — the towering Vandewater building is one of the tallest Manhattan buildings north of Central Park.

The bulk of the library's books will now forever be stored in a remote warehouse, with any item available for recall within one business day. That's common practice for research libraries, Kraemer noted, adding that the most commonly requested books as well as the entire special collection — rare books and manuscripts — will be housed on campus.

He said the decision to downsize the real estate and sell certain items was about being prudent and not a retreat from the 120-year-old promise to make the library the best of its kind in the world.

"The library will never fail," Kraemer said. "It's so valuable that it will always find supporters. I am very optimistic about the future."

### STATUS-SYMBOL PURCHASES

Against the optimism projected by seminary leaders are two long-standing countertrends in American Jewish life.

Judaism's Conservative denomination, which counts the seminary as one of its essential institutions, was the largest Jewish denomination in the 1950s and '60s. It is no longer and is shrinking still. In 1990, the percentage of American Jews affiliated with the Conservative movement was estimated at 38%. A study from earlier this year pegged the number at 17%.

Meanwhile, Jewish librarians and historians of Jewish li-

braries speak with reverence and affection of benefactors past. They name-drop library donors who died early in the last century, such as "Judge" Sulzberger, Jacob Schiff and Felix Warburg. Nostalgia abounds for an era when philanthropists — rich secular and liberal Jews — were committed to preserving Jewish cultural memory as a service to the Jewish people.

"There just isn't money for Jewish culture like there used to be," said Selis, the historian of Jewish libraries. "A generation has passed. The culture has shifted in American Judaism."

That a rabbi's 200-year-old travelogue could fetch \$200,000 at auction suggests demand for Jewish artifacts has not exactly dissipated as much as shifted somewhat. The marketing materials for the manuscript, published by the Jerusalem auction house Genzaym, speak to the change.

After a nod to the ledger's historical value — like documentation of the era's communal fundraising system — the marketing message focuses on the "priceless and exceedingly rare collection of autographs" of great rabbis visited on the tour of Europe. These rabbis, who signed the ledger to certify their donations, are named, described and, in some cases, illustrated in the auction's catalog.

With its signatures, the ledger belongs to a class of books that have seen demand skyrocket, according to bookseller Israel Mizrahi of Brooklyn.

"The market for books with provenance of important rabbinical figures, as well as anything signed or autographed by such figures, has exploded in recent years, with prices more than doubling every decade in the last few decades," Mizrahi said.

The increased competition for such titles is being driven by "the growing upper class" of Orthodox Jews, who see them as an investment but also as something else.

"In the Orthodox Jewish world, many of the status-symbol purchases common in the secular world would be frowned upon, but items of religious significance are viewed in a positive light," Mizrahi said. "There is widespread belief that owning something that was used or written by a righteous person will bring good will to its owner."

It's perhaps too early to tell what the rising influence of Orthodox collectors will mean for the ideal of public scholarship and communal memory in the digital era. Will more items disappear into the thicket of private vaults without notice, or will the archives persevere and somehow find new patrons?

If Orthodox Jewish researchers like Fischer have their way, the spirit of collective heritage will win.

"These are treasures of the Jewish people, not of individuals," Fischer said. "It's important people have access to them."

## ● NEWS

# 50 CUNY Professors Quit Union Over Resolution Calling Israel a 'Settler-colonial State'

*Jewish faculty are said to be "fearing for our safety."*

By Ron Kampeas

At least 50 professors at the City University of New York have quit their union following passage of a resolution condemning Israel.

The resolution, passed by the the Professional Staff Congress June 10, was introduced in the wake of the Israel-Gaza conflict the previous month and referred to Israel's "establishment as a settler-colonial state in 1948" — language often used to reject Israel's existence as a Jewish state.

Yedidiah Langsam, the chairman of Brooklyn's College's Computer and Information Science Department, urged other faculty to resign from the union. He said the resolution made Jewish faculty feel unsafe.

"By endorsing this resolution you have made many Jew-

ish faculty and students uncomfortable with being associated with Brooklyn College and CUNY to the point of fearing for our safety," he said in a letter to James Davis, president of the union, according The New York Post. "Have you and your colleagues forgotten the exponential increase in anti-Semitic attacks against Jews in the NY City area?"

Davis confirmed the resignations or the faculty members' intention to resign in an interview with the Post. The union represents academic staff at CUNY.

Davis suggested that there was an effort to bring back the disaffected professors.

"We are in active dialogue with members who have expressed concern over the resolution," he told the Post.

The resolution describes the events leading up to the renewed fighting in May and during the conflict only in terms of Israeli attacks without referencing Hamas attacks on Israel.

Hamas, the terrorist group that controls the Gaza strip, launched the Gaza portion of the conflict with a barrage of rocket attacks on May 9.

The resolution also calls on the union to consider joining the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel.

The CUNY system has 25 colleges spread across New York City's five boroughs.

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**● NEWS**

# De Blasio: Get Vaxxed by Monday to Be Protected by Rosh Hashanah

*A surge in COVID-19 cases in the city is being driven by the Delta variant.*

By Shira Hanau

Mayor Bill de Blasio has a message for Jewish New Yorkers: If you want to be fully vaccinated by Rosh Hashanah, you need to get your first Pfizer shot by Monday.

"If you get the first one by Monday and then you follow up on time, you will be fully vaccinated by the start of the holiday," de Blasio said Thursday. "So yet another incentive." Rosh Hashanah begins on the evening of Sept. 6.

De Blasio's comments came as the city began rolling out carrots and sticks to encourage vaccines in response to a surge in COVID-19 cases in the city driven by the Delta variant. New York City will offer \$100 to anyone who gets their first dose at a city-run vaccination site, and all city workers will have to be vaccinated or go through strict weekly testing protocols.

The mayor touted the city's star-studded "homecoming" concert on Aug. 21 in Central Park, saying tickets would be made available only to New Yorkers who show proof of having received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine. Paul Simon and Bruce Springsteen are among the headliners of the concert, which is meant to celebrate the city's rebound from the worst of COVID-19.

Despite a recent poll showing Jews as the most likely of religious groups to be vaccinated, Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods tend to have vaccine rates significantly below the national average.

De Blasio stressed the importance of being vaccinated before gathering with family for the High Holidays. Last

fall, COVID cases increased around the time of the Jewish New Year, likely arising from the large number of people gathering in homes and synagogues to observe the holidays.

"That's a great thing to do looking forward to the holidays, make sure every family member who's going to be in the room is fully vaccinated," de Blasio said.

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**● NEWS**

# NY Yeshiva Students Die in Ukraine Plane Crash

By Asaf Shalev

Three Jerusalem yeshiva students and their pilot died when their small plane crashed into a house in western Ukraine on Wednesday, according to reports in Ukrainian and Haredi media.

Media reports have identified the three Jewish passengers as Amrom Fromowitz of Monsey, New York, Hershy Weiss of London, U.K. and Lazer Brill of Brooklyn, New York.

The three young men were fellow students at Mir Yeshiva, an Orthodox yeshiva in Jerusalem.

They were in Ukraine on a tour of Jewish holy places and had taken a sightseeing flight on Wednesday afternoon, The Yeshiva World reported.

Their plane struck a house near the village of Sheparivtsi in the Prykarpattia region. The cause of the crash isn't yet known.

Jewish community representatives in the United States are in touch with local authorities about ensuring a timely religious burial for the three Jewish men.

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**● NEWS**

# Of Course Muriel Mandell Got Vaccinated: At 99, She Has So Much to Do

*When she isn't writing or reviewing children's books, a former war-time correspondent for JTA teaches tech classes.*

By Lori Silberman Brauner

Muriel Mandell, whose 100th birthday is Aug. 19, shows few signs of slowing down.

The former wartime reporter-turned children's book author-turned tech-savvy senior continues to lead a very active life in her late 90s, as a reporter learned while recently visiting her at her Greenwich Village apartment.

teacher, she began writing children's books, including "A Donkey Reads," right. (Lori Silberman Brauner)

Muriel Mandell, whose 100th birthday is Aug. 19, shows few signs of slowing down.

The former wartime reporter-turned children's book author-turned tech-savvy senior continues to lead a very active life in her late 90s, as a reporter learned while recently visiting her at her Greenwich Village apartment.

She is still reviewing children's books and taking classes. And as a founder of SeniorTechNYC at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan and its predecessor, the SeniorNet Learning Center, she teaches classes in animation, photo editing and Microsoft Word. During the pandemic, she has continued teaching the classes on Zoom.

In May, she received a "16 over 61" award from the JCC, given to those who display "the creativity, leadership, and initiative of older adults who exemplify our collective values."

"Muriel masterfully coordinated this important program for many years and continues to develop varied and interesting classes and related curriculum," Susan Lechter, director of the JCC's Wechsler Center for Modern Aging, wrote in an email to The Jewish Week. "She has taught hundreds of older adult students over the last two decades and has been a phenomenal asset to the JCC older adult programming. It is a privilege to have her in our midst."

Mandell also achieved a bit of fame in January when she received her first COVID shot at Manhattan's Jacob Javits Center on the first day it opened as a mass vaccination site. She was approached by WNYC and the Associated Press, and her picture appeared in newspapers and web sites around the country, including the New York theater blog run by her son Jonathan.

Yet the pandemic was anything but easy for Mandell. She was unable to get too close to family members, including her granddaughter, before vaccinations became available.

Born in Manhattan, Mandell lived in Queens and Brooklyn before later moving to Paterson, N.J., with her family. She attended East Side High School, and as a senior, was selected by teachers as its representative for the Paterson Morning Call newspaper. "I was paid three cents a word, and I made as much as \$3 a week," she recalled.

When she applied for college, she sat down for Brooklyn College's entrance exam — only to be told that she had already been accepted, before spilling the bottle of ink she was supposed to use for the test.

"Of course I worked on the newspaper there," said the former associate editor of the Brooklyn College Vanguard. After college, she enrolled at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism before moving to Washington, D.C. There she worked for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, and its offshoot, the Overseas News Agency, which was formed during World War II. Her byline then was Muriel Levin.

"I covered everything, the State Department, the White House, the Pentagon, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the works," she said. In a March 1944 dispatch, she reports on a visit to the White House by Rabbis Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver. The two



leading Zionists got President Franklin D. Roosevelt's assurance that he didn't approve of the White Paper, the British policy limiting immigration to Palestine.

When asked about the dire situation for European Jews during World War II, as well as Roosevelt's response to the Holocaust, she said. "We knew and we didn't know — it was a combination." Although JTA provided the first and sometimes only reports on the unfolding genocide, "it took years before you really realized what was really happening." During those wartime years, FDR was also idealized as a president.

She does not consider her role as a woman journalist particularly groundbreaking. "There were a bunch of us" involved in reporting in the 1940s. But after a couple of years, she got married and quit that post, "maybe stupidly," she said with a chuckle. She followed her husband back to the New York area, becoming a police reporter at the Long Branch Record on the Jersey shore before later working as a publicist.

A former English major, Mandell had also taken education courses. After her two sons went off to college, "I went into teaching because my writing was not making a lot of money. And so I taught for a lot of years actually."

She also worked as a coordinator for writers' manuals for the New York Board of Education. She later retired from teaching, returning her focus to writing children's books. Among her more than 12 titles are the fictional "A Donkey Reads" and "Jonathan's Sparrow" and non-fiction books designed to spark children's curiosity, including "Fantastic Book of Logic Puzzles," "365 Simple Science Experiments with Everyday Materials" and "Make Your Own Musical Instruments."

She is also active as a member of the Bank Street College of Education Children's Book Committee, staying up on current children's literature and contributing reviews to the committee's annual collection of best children's books. "I read children's books," she said, "'til they come out of my ears."

She became computer savvy in 1994, after her husband passed away, and through the international organization SeniorNet acquired computer literacy skills to the point where she was able to educate others through the JCC. "I've been teaching computers ever since," she said.

As if that were not enough, her children's writing found a new platform: digital apps. "When I was 90 years old, for the first time I learned what an app was, and I wrote about 50 stories — adaptations mostly, but some originals" for a children's app known as FarFaria (a play on "far, far away").

As an active member of the Bank Street children's book committee, she has a strong opinion about the market for Jewish children's books: With the preponderance of titles that focus on the Holocaust or Anne Frank, "there aren't enough about the rituals that are positive and how the Jewish family exists," she said. "Not enough of that."

***"You don't want to just take up space. You want to have something to contribute."***

As for her own Jewish identity, she describes herself as strongly "cultural."

"I'm proud of being a Jew," she said, "I wish I knew more... but my background is limited, and I know it."

Asked about the secrets of longevity, she focused on the quality of life, not the quantity of years. Recognizing the challenges of old age, she said, "You don't want to just take up space. You want to have something to contribute, otherwise why, why do you still exist? So it's tough."

She continues to enrich herself, taking United Federation of Teachers-sponsored classes for retirees, including playwriting, Spanish and watercolors.

"You keep busy," she said.

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## ● EDITOR'S DESK

# Where Do You Stand on the Ben & Jerry's Settlements Boycott? Take Our Taste Test.

*The ice cream maker's foray into Mideast politics inspires a sampler dish of Jewish reactions.*

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

The uproar over the decision by Ben & Jerry's to stop selling its ice cream in "occupied Palestinian territories" is a sort of Jewish personality test. How you reacted is a good indication of what you think about the Israel boycott, Israel's control of the West Bank and the future of the conflict.

Think of it in terms of, I don't know, ice cream orders:

### CHOCOLATE AND VANILLA

For you, it's a black and white issue. This is a boycott plain and simple, and any economic pressure put on Israelis is tantamount to antisemitism in that it applies a double standard to the world's only Jewish state. What others call the "occupation" isn't really the point, because it's up to Israel to determine its own fate, and Jews have a right to live where they choose in lands they control.

You agree with Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations and the United States, Gilad Erdan. He views the company's decision as "the de-facto adoption of antisemitic practices and advancement of the de-legitimization of the Jewish state and the dehumanization of the Jewish people."

Or as Israel's newly installed president, Isaac Herzog, said, "The boycott of Israel is a new sort of terrorism, economic terrorism. Terrorism tries to harm the citizens of Israel and the economy of Israel. We must oppose this boycott and terrorism in any form."

### CHOCOLATE AND VANILLA SWIRL

You fully support the settlements and reject the whole idea that there is a distinction between Jewish communities on either side of the Green Line. You think Ben & Jerry's deserves a taste of its own medicine.

You probably agree with The Yesha Council, which represents the Jewish communities in Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley: "We urge you to avoid doing business with companies boycotting hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens and offer our support for those companies who have refused to boycott a significant portion of Israelis."

### CHOCOLATE AND VANILLA, SOFT-SERVE

You respect the right of people and individuals to criticize Israeli policy but believe even a targeted boycott of the Jewish settlements aids and abets the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), which seeks to delegitimize Israel and erase a sovereign Jewish state from the Middle East.

You'd share a cone with the Anti-Defamation League, which tweeted, "We are disappointed by this decision from @benandjerrys. You can disagree with policies without feeding into dangerous campaigns that seek to undermine Israel."

### FREEDOM'S CHOICE ICE CREAM, ANY FLAVOR

You think like a lawyer, and feel Jewish settlers have a civil right to buy Ben & Jerry's ice cream. You are urging states to enforce anti-BDS laws and executive orders that punish businesses that cooperate in this form of discrimination.

"Ben & Jerry's is discriminating against Jewish customers in Israel by eliminating the ability for customers to buy their product based on where they live," as Hadasah put it. "Businesses should not cater to the whims of hardliners who believe that only certain people from certain places are fit to be customers."

### BANANA SPLIT

You actually oppose the occupation but think even a targeted boycott focusing on the settlements is self-defeating, because it emboldens the Palestinians and hardens the Israeli right.

"The Palestinians will say, 'We do not have to make any

fundamental concessions; we will let the world pressure Israel,' and the right-wing in Israel will only be strengthened with its endless claim of 'See, the whole world is against us, the whole world is antisemitic,'" writes Marc Schulman in Newsweek.

### DOVE BAR

You are a critic of the Israeli settler movement and consider the occupation illegal and immoral. You believe the expansion of settlements is an impediment to the only solution that could guarantee security and self-determination for both Israelis and Palestinians: two states for two peoples. You also believe putting economic pressure on Israel, especially the settlements, is a legitimate, nonviolent form of political activism.

"Ben & Jerry's decision is a legitimate, peaceful protest against the systemic injustice of occupation and a reminder that the settlements are, in fact, illegal under international law," said J Street's Jeremy Ben-Ami.

Separate Cones Please — One Israeli, One Palestinian

You oppose the BDS movement but worry that Israel is on the road to a one-state solution that will be either Jewish or democratic but not both. You support the Ben & Jerry's move because you insist on a distinction between Israel within the Green Line and the West Bank territories it has controlled since the Six-Day War.

You might even belong to one of seven progressive Jewish organizations that sent a letter asking U.S. governors not to use state anti-boycott laws to punish Ben & Jerry's. "Like Ben & Jerry's, we make a clear distinction between the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories it militarily occupies," the groups write. This differentiation "is rightly recognized and maintained in various ways by official US policy and the constitutionally-protected actions of private individuals and organizations."

### CHERRY GARCIA, CHUNKY MONKEY, WHATEVER YOU GOT

You do not take a unified stance on BDS, Zionism or a just solution to the conflict, but believe the occupation denies Palestinians freedom and dignity by depriving them of civil, political and economic rights.

In other words, you are the Jewish group IfNotNow, which tweeted: "This is an important victory for the

movement for Palestinian freedom. After years of pressure from Palestinian organizers, Ben & Jerry's is modeling one way to hold the Israeli government accountable for the occupation."

### BEN & JERRY'S SWEET LIKE SUGAR

You fully support the BDS movement and see the Ben & Jerry's decision as a major victory in your anti-Israel campaign. You feel it is working; otherwise, why would Israel be working so hard to denounce, isolate and even criminalize the company for its actions?

"Our major #BDSsuccess with @benandjerrys sent shock waves through apartheid Israel reiterating its fear of the nonviolent BDS movement & its growing, strategic impact worldwide on isolating Israel's regime of oppression against the Indigenous Palestinians," tweeted the official account of the Palestinian BDS National Committee.

### GOOD HUMOR

You are a satirical newspaper and find the whole situation absurd. You explain that Israel is protesting by pulling its ambassador out of the Ben & Jerry's factory in Vermont. "At press time, Häagen-Dazs agreed to act as a third-party mediator to help resolve the conflict," The Onion reported.

**Andrew Silow-Carroll** (@SilowCarroll) is the editor in chief of *The Jewish Week*.

## ● OPINION

# Simone Biles and the Jewish Value of Protecting a Life

By Hannah S. Pressman

When I woke up on Tuesday, at first it seemed like any other morning. I had to get two kids ready for camp (fill water bottles, slather sunscreen, pack the snacks), and I had to get myself ready to attend Ladino class over Zoom (finish a worksheet, slurp coffee, practice rolling my r's). Since I live on the West Coast, I'm used to being

a little late on breaking news. As I yawned and stuffed Pirate's Booty into a bag, I noticed a one-word text from my sister: "Simone."

At first I was confused. Then I remembered that the Olympic women's gymnastics team final had started four hours earlier — and I suddenly had half a world of things to catch up on in the wake of Simone Biles' withdrawal from the competition. What followed was a day of real-time drama, U.S. teammate heroics, Hoda Kotb appearing distressed and so many hot takes (*so many*) about Biles' decision to scratch (i.e. exit the competition) after performing a vault and losing her air awareness partway through.

Despite all the words already spilled about the situation, I'm here to offer another take informed both by Jewish tradition and by my personal gymnastics fandom.

Like many women (and men), I've been a gymnastics fan since forever. This is not related to any personal involvement or skill in the sport; the most I've ever been able to do is a crooked cartwheel. However, since the 1992 Olympics, my sister and I have been hooked. That year we recorded the women's gymnastics team final and literally wore out the VHS tapes replaying them. I can still hum every note of Shannon Miller's floor routine, and I remember a television profile that showed Miller tapping her feet on the floor while studying at school — a superstar athlete for the aspiring quiz bowl set.

As each Olympic cycle approaches, my sister and I watch all the coverage of the gymnastics trials and analyze everything together. We have become well-versed in the sport's lingo of tucks, pikes and twists; we have absorbed the back stories of our favorite competitors, like Dominique Dawes, Shawn Johnson, Aly Raisman (who didn't kvell at her "Hava Nagila" routine?), Laurie Hernandez and Simone Biles, considered by most to be the greatest champion the sport has ever seen. As we have aged from tweens to teenagers, from young women to adult moms, my sister and I have continued watching other young women — just like us but with glitter-streaked hair and killer abdominal muscles! — face unbelievable pressure to perform perfectly.

For fans of the sport, it has been amazing to watch the U.S. evolve into a global gymnastics superpower, winning Olympic team medals at every cycle since 1992 and fre-

quently producing gymnasts who could win all-around and event titles at the world championships. We've been watching long enough to know that, historically, it was not always such a given that the American women would win anything, much less piles of gold medals.

So my sister and I, like many young women around the world, were watching in 1996 when Jewish gymnast Kerri Strug performed a second vault, while clearly injured, to ensure that the U.S. would clinch the gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics. We watched as Bela Karolyi carried her in his arms, his mustachioed glee contrasting sharply with her pale, drawn face. Many years later, we watched as revelations emerged about the various abuses gymnasts endured while training at the Karolyi's Texas ranch; about accusations, coverups and willful negligence by USA Gymnastics; about the physical and emotional toll the abuse scandal has taken on a generation of American gymnasts. We watched as some of our gymnastics heroes bravely took the stand to accuse a vaunted team doctor (whose name, like Haman, should be drowned out in a chorus of boos) of physically abusing them under the guise of treatment, sometimes with their own mothers in the room.

Strug's effort — hailed 25 years ago as the ultimate athletic sacrifice for her team, replayed as a gooey "inspirational moment" in network montages of past Olympic glory, and landing her on lists of Great Jewish Olympians — plays very differently now. Today, athletes in many disciplines are beginning to speak about coach abuse, sponsor mistreatment, pay inequalities, and other injustices in their sports.

We are witnessing the dawn of a movement wherein athletes are setting boundaries to preserve their mental and physical health — creating their own version of *pikuach nefesh*, the Jewish principles of preserving life above all else. Earlier this summer, Naomi Osaka famously stepped back from the French Open after a dispute with the tennis powers-that-be about appearing for press conferences. Citing her history of depression and social anxiety, she also skipped Wimbledon to continue focusing on her mental health. For an athlete as globally influential as Osaka, the decision sent ripples beyond professional sports, prompting questions about how employers and organizations respond when someone requires support for mental health challenges or



expresses a need for self-care.

Biles' withdrawal yesterday sent similar shockwaves around the world, and was greeted by the same contrasting views that greeted Osaka's timeout (essentially, "she rocks!" versus "she's a quitter"). These athletes' recognition of their need to step back runs counter to the typical narrative of athletic heroism, but Osaka and Biles are comfortable writing a whole new story of self-advocacy. This is not the story of someone in a sparkly leotard who limps her way through a vault to please her overbearing coach, or someone who fights through her anxiety to answer invasive questions from a reporter. Instead, this is about strong women who know exactly what they need to thrive, and who can recognize when a situation is too much for them — or their *nefesh*, their soul — to handle safely.

Biles acknowledged that her anxiety resulted in the disorientation that gymnasts call "the twisties," and her refusal to perform when her head wasn't in it was an admirable measure of self-protection. Any coach knows that being even slightly off, especially on the highly difficult maneuvers Biles is capable of, can result in serious injury. It's tempting to conjecture about the factors that may have contributed to her reaching that point: being the face of Team USA, the financial apparatus of sponsors, incessant media coverage, and the pressure of creating an Olympic viewing experience that rests on (and often exploits) the perfect performance of female bodies.

Add to all that the fact that Biles was consciously competing in order to convey her support for the sexual abuse survivor community — despite being traumatized, misled, and mistreated by the people in the USA Gymnastics who were supposed to protect her. When there is so much you are trying to transcend, is it any wonder that flying through the air becomes a nightmare?

My sister and I kept texting throughout the day yesterday as more information emerged about the team competition. We cheered for the three remaining U.S. teammates who hit their routines to earn silver, and watched as they congratulated the gold medalists from the Russian Olympic Committee, with all the layers of gymnastics history that both teams represent. (Speaking of history: Shoutout to bronze medalist Great Britain, earning their first gymnastics team medal since 1928!)

As Tuesday in Seattle came to a close, I found myself thinking more about what it means to celebrate an athlete's story. Removing herself from the competition may not be what the networks had in mind for Biles' TV-ready moment of Olympic glory, but the message she sent was more powerful than any vault she might have performed. She communicated to the world the fact that life is precious, our souls are precious and we must do whatever we can to keep ourselves safe. Everything else is commentary. (Kveller)

## ● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT EKEV

# Torah Commands Both Love and Vengeance. What's a Zionist to Do?

*A shared society is hard work, but it is the only way out of a vicious cycle.*

By Haviva Ner-David

KIBBUTZ HANNATON, Israel — Like Tikvah, one of the two main characters in my debut novel, "Hope Valley," I moved to Israel out of Zionist ideology. Growing up, I went to Zionist schools and summer camps, where I imbibed the narrative that after 2,000 years of exile and oppression, even genocide, we, the few, defeated the many evil nations who were out to destroy us, and created a third Jewish sovereignty here on this land promised to us by God.

But once living on this land, I slowly began to open my eyes, ears and heart, and realized I had only been told part of the story. Like Tikvah, who meets the Palestinian protagonist of my novel, Rabia (or Ruby), and hears her family's story, I began to form close friendships with Palestinians and to look beneath the surface of what I had been taught. I did my own research and listened to my friends' family stories, and I began to get a broader picture.

When I read this week's Torah portion, Ekev, I hear echoes of the Zionist narrative of my upbringing. Moses tells the Israelites as they are about to cross the Jordan River into Canaan:

If you shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love YaHWeH your God, to walk in all God's ways, and to hold fast to God, then will God drive out all these nations from before you, and you shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place where the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours; from the wilderness to the Lebanon, from the river, the River of Perat, to the uttermost sea, shall be your border. There shall no man be able to stand against you. (Deut. 10:22-24)

Moreover, we are told:

You shall consume all of the peoples which YaHWeH your God shall deliver to you. Your eyes shall not have pity on them, and you shall not worship their gods. For that will be a snare for you. (Deut. 7:15)

As I read this week's Torah portion, I want to close the book in dismay. If this is what my most sacred religious text tells me, then this religion is not for me. But then another verse in this week's Torah portion catches my eye: "And love the stranger because you were strangers in Egypt" (Deut. 9:19). I grasp onto this lone voice of collective memory that is not about vengeance but rather love and compassion.

These are the two voices I heard inside my head as missiles were falling on us weeks ago, and much of the world did seem to have turned against Israel and the Jews. There is an enemy who wants to wipe us out. There is antisemitism. There is an anti-Israel bias. Our collective trauma is not unfounded. How easy it would be to turn to this week's Torah portion for justification to close the heart I worked hard to open.

But how can I love the stranger if my heart is hardened? If I cannot have compassion on the stranger, how can I love her?

In this same Torah portion, we are told to love not only the stranger, but to love God — with all of our hearts and all of our souls. (Deut. 9:12) How can I love this vengeful God with my heart when my heart is a compassionate

heart? How can I love this jealous, power-hungry God with my soul when my soul is an expansive universalist soul? Does having no pity align with what we today call "Jewish values"? Perhaps for some it does, but for this human with this heart and this soul, it does not.

I am reminded of the powerful documentary film "Blue Box," directed by Michal Weits, great granddaughter of Yosef Weitz, the mastermind of the Zionist plan to create a Jewish majority in a sovereign Jewish State. The Jews were a minority on this land before 1948, which is why they were happy to accept the Partition Plan. When the surrounding Arab countries attacked, this was a license to change those demographics. When the Arabs left in fear, their villages were razed and they were not allowed to return.

According to the many diaries Yosef Weitz left behind, he carried out this plan with a heavy heart, as he did feel compassion for the Arabs refugees he was creating, but he felt at the time that it was "us or them." He assumed the surrounding Arab countries would absorb the Palestinians, whereas Jewish refugees had nowhere else to go.

But the Palestinian refugees were not absorbed, and he had a change of heart — especially in 1967 when occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip reversed much of what he had accomplished. With annexation, Palestinians would again be a majority on this land. With occupation, Jews would be mistreating the stranger. At that point in history, the Jews were no longer the powerless refugees they were in 1948. But matters were out of his hands.

This week's Torah portion tears me apart — if we are truly meant to read it as a recipe for how to live today. But what if we aren't? What if we are meant to read it as a recipe of what not to do today? What if instead of trying to repeat history, we are meant to correct it? The Jews were sovereign on this land twice already, and it did not end well.

As Ruby tells Tikvah about her mandala art in my novel: "These paintings combine the linear and the circular. As does life. We move forward as we spiral back to our core. Each reconnection to our essence strengthens us for the next spiral. Hopefully even correcting past mistakes, healing old wounds."

*"I am part of a growing movement in Israel to create a shared society, a true partnership of equals."*

Should we insist on the borders God promised us in Deut. 10:23, or should we take the spiral path forward, look beyond Deuteronomy, inward to our "hearts of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:29), and find a new way to live here in this land that does not pit "us" against "them"? I am part of a growing movement in Israel to create a shared society, a true partnership of equals. It is hard work, but it is the only way to spiral out of this vicious cycle dating back to the biblical Ishmael and Issac.

In my novel, when Tikvah and Ruby meet, they are suspicious and fearful of each other. But slowly, as they recognize each other's humanity and acknowledge each other's pain, they build a deep and true friendship which ends up being the corrective of the novel's backstory in 1948. Let's hope fiction can one day become reality.

*Rabbi Haviva Ner-David is a rabbi, writer and spiritual companion. She runs Shmaya: A Mikveh for Mind, Body and Soul, on Kibbutz Hannaton, where she lives. She is the author of two published memoirs and one forthcoming ("Dreaming Against the Current: A Rabbis' Soul Journey"). Hope Valley, which came out in April, is her debut novel.*

## ● MUSINGS

# Breaking The Glass

By David Wolpe

Before the groom steps on a glass to conclude the wedding ceremony, there is a tradition of reciting part of the 137th Psalm, "If I forget thee O Jerusalem...."

The most immediate explanation of this is that stepping on the glass commemorates the tragedies of Jewish history, particularly the destruction of the Temple. So as we mark the destruction and exile, we promise not to forget.

On a more subtle level is the reality that to fall in love is not only to fall in love with the person, but to love things in the world together. Even as they intensify their concern for another, couples must learn to transcend the duality of love and embrace the world, to share as one that which matters to them both. They must stand

face to face and shoulder to shoulder at the same time.

To affirm the memory of Jerusalem is to declare, "We will not forget and we will ever love this place, this idea, as a couple." It is an affirmation and a promise as they build a home among the Jewish people.

*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.*

## ● FOOD

# An Artisanal Gefilte Fish Purveyor Wants You to Eat More Vegan Food

*Ashkenazi food maven Jeffrey Yoskowitz is teaming with restaurants to deliver "plant-forward" meals.*

By Shira Hanau

Jeffrey Yoskowitz isn't exactly known as an advocate of vegan food.

The food writer and entrepreneur is probably best known as the founder of Gefilteria, which sells artisanal gefilte fish, or as the blogger behind Pork Memoirs, a blog exploring taboos, Jewish and otherwise, surrounding the other white (and decidedly not vegan) meat.

But even with that omnivorous past Yoskowitz, 36, recently started Papaya, an online food delivery platform offering fully plant-based meals from top chefs at vegan and non-vegan restaurants. Collaborating with New York City restaurants, the website will feature weekly meal "drops": a vegan meal prepared by different chefs will be delivered to your door.

The first drop features a meal by Einat Admony, the famed Israeli chef behind the Manhattan restaurant Bal-

aboosta, to be delivered on July 29. The meal, which is meant to feed one “generously” or two for a light meal, costs \$45.

While vegan food may sound like a far cry from the classics of Ashkenazi cuisine, like kugel (full of eggs), cholent (meat) and blintzes (milk, butter and cheese), Yoskowitz said vegetarianism has also had a historic role as part of Ashkenazi food culture.

For Yoskowitz, who lives in Brooklyn’s Crown Heights and frequently writes about traditional Ashkenazi foods, there’s almost always a historical connection to his food choices.

“Yes, I am Mr. Ashkenazi food,” Yoskowitz said. “But what you don’t know about me is that my grandmother was a vegetarian.”

His grandmother’s family was strictly vegetarian and spent summers at the Vegetarian Hotel (yes, that was its name) in the Catskills. Established by a Jewish family sometime before the 1920s, the hotel in upstate Sullivan County offered strictly vegetarian meals to a mostly Ashkenazi Jewish clientele.

And at one time, Yoskowitz points out, meat was a luxury for the average Jew.

“In the Ashkenazi tradition, it’s a special occasion food, and for holidays,” Yoskowitz said. “It was a very different story than we see in the Jewish deli today.”

For the first meal with Admony, Papaya customers will get a hummus plate, Asian sesame eggplant and a cabbage cake filled with freekeh, an ancient grain.

“Naturally, Balaboosta is doing a lot of dishes that may not be intended to be vegan or vegetarian, but they’re like that because that’s the type of cuisine,” said Admony, whose restaurant features Middle Eastern cuisine.

Yoskowitz sees his new project as part of a broader trend toward what he calls “plant-forward” eating. The target demographic for the project isn’t just vegans, it’s those who are interested in reducing their consumption of animal products but want to do so with creative meals. The project begins just a few months after Eleven Madison Park, a Michelin starred restaurant in Manhattan, announced it would forgo meat and seafood.

“We call them plant-curious eaters and people who are just trying to eat more plants, who are trying to maybe reduce the carbon footprints, who are just being thoughtful about some of their choices,” he said, counting himself among them.

Yoskowitz views Papaya as a way to challenge traditional restaurants to add more creative vegan options while spotlighting restaurants that are already vegan. He sees parallels between veganism and the kosher rules: Both are punctilious in describing what is and isn’t allowed.

***“Within the constraints of [veganism and kashrut] there are really creative ways of cooking and pushing cuisines forward.”***

“What we’re trying to do is showcase that within these constraints there are really creative ways of cooking and pushing cuisines forward,” he said. “Some of the really inventive Jewish dishes came about because of all of those constraints.”

For Rosh Hashanah, Yoskowitz plans to prepare a Papaya meal with his Gefilteria partner Liz Alpern and Libby Willis, the chef at KIT in Crown Heights. While the menu is being kept under wraps, Yoskowitz said it would include challah (made without eggs), as well as dishes that incorporate mushrooms and fermented vegetables.

While he wouldn’t comment on the possibility of making a vegan gefilte fish, Yoskowitz said substitutes for animal products were not the point of Papaya.

“There’s one approach that’s ‘just make it a Beyond Burger or beyond something,’” he said. “And I’m trying to actually push beyond that and try to elevate the space.”

#### CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

**Av 21, 5781 | Friday, July 30, 2021**

- **Light candles at:** 7:55 p.m.

**Av 22, 5781 | Saturday, July 31, 2021**

- **Torah reading:** Ekev, Deuteronomy 7:12–11:25
- **Haftarah:** Isaiah 49:14–51:3
- **Shabbat ends:** 8:58 p.m.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**August 3 | 2:00 p.m.** Free**Insider's Virtual Tour of East Jerusalem**

Danny Seidemann, founder of the Terrestrial Jerusalem NGO, uses Israel Policy Forum's new 360 platform to provide an on-the-ground view of East Jerusalem flash points like Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan. This interactive virtual platform incorporates original drone footage and high-definition photography, and the webinar will feature Danny Seidemann's commentary and analysis.

Register at [https://israelpolicyforum.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_5T1MN39dRsGW6RXkMqJEIA](https://israelpolicyforum.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_5T1MN39dRsGW6RXkMqJEIA)

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**August 3 | 7:00 p.m.** \$25-\$65**Putting It Together: Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine**

Mandy Patinkin and Bernadette Peters will be special guests at an intimate digital conversation event with playwright and director James Lapine and composer Stephen Sondheim. Moderated by actress Christine Baranski. The evening will celebrate the release of Lapine's new book "Putting It Together: How Stephen Sondheim and I Created 'Sunday In The Park With George.'"

Buy tickets at <http://thetownhall.org>

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**August 4 | 7:00 p.m.** Free**The Folio: Justice, Justice, Shall You Pursue**

UJA-Federation of New York and The Jewish Week present a conversation with Robert Abrams, the former attorney general of New York and author of "The Luckiest Guy in the World." He and moderator Sandee Brawarsky will discuss his journey in politics, his career and his life of public service.

Register at [https://www.ujafedny.org/event/view/folio-robert-abrams?utm\\_source=NYJW&utm\\_medium=NL](https://www.ujafedny.org/event/view/folio-robert-abrams?utm_source=NYJW&utm_medium=NL)

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**August 5 | 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.** Free**A Conversation with Donald Nobles**

Commonpoint Queens hosts a virtual conversation with Donald Nobles, an Air Force veteran, retired teacher and activist. Nobles will speak about his career, his personal experiences with racism, and his thoughts on how we can all play a part in making our own society a more welcoming place for people of all backgrounds.

Watch it at <https://www.facebook.com/SamFieldCenter>