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New York Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul, center, in yellow jacket, meets with leaders of New York City's Jewish community to discuss a nationwide rise in antisemitic attacks, May 9, 2019. (Office of the Lieutenant Governor)

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● NEWS

What Jewish New Yorkers Need to Know about Kathy Hochul, Who Will Replace Cuomo as Governor

As lieutenant governor, she was among the first politicians to call out a recent spate of antisemitism in the state.

By Stewart Ain

Kathy Hochul, who will succeed Andrew Cuomo as governor of New York, is no stranger to the New York Jewish community.

Cuomo resigned Tuesday, a week after a state investigation concluded that he sexually harassed 11 women. He had faced intense pressure to step aside, including from President Joe Biden, or face impeachment.

Cuomo enjoyed a warm working relationship with Jews across the denominational spectrum. As Cuomo's surrogate, Hochul has made it a point to keep up with the issues and concerns of Jews, local leaders say, visiting Jewish day schools, meet regularly with Jewish community officials and touring Orthodox neighborhoods with local community leaders.

"We have brought hundreds and hundreds of students and activists to Albany [to meet her], and most recently – last March — she spoke at our virtual mission to Albany," said Maury Litwack, the former director of state political affairs at the Orthodox Union. "And for years she has been speaking and addressing our leadership missions to Albany."

Earlier this year, Hochul visited Jewish day schools in Brooklyn and Queens, touring the schools and meeting their leaders as well as community leaders, Litwack recalled.

"The Jewish community and Kathy Hochul have a long-standing relationship," he said. "She likes to see things and go places and learn about people and their issues, and the Jewish community is definitely a stop for Kathy."

A native of Buffalo, Hochul, who will turn 63 this month, was Cuomo's running mate in 2014 and reelected in 2018. In New York, the governor and lieutenant governor are elected separately.

Hochul (pronounced hoe-kool) was among the first politicians to call out a recent spate of antisemitism in the state, in May 2019. When the number of antisemitic incidents nationwide began to spike that year, she convened a meeting in the city with Jewish leaders to address the situation and wrote on Facebook that "Anti-Semitism has no place in New York."

Among those at the meeting were David Pollock, associate executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York. The meeting demonstrated that "she is clearly sensitive to the issue and supportive of the community's concerns," he told *The Jewish Week*.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, executive vice president of the New York Board of Rabbis, also attended and said the meeting was just one of several times Hochul has reached out to the Jewish community.

"I have attended a number of meetings she conducted

and I find it very important that she is an ardent listener," he said. "That is a great quality. She wants to hear the concerns of Jewish leadership."

Hochul has also visited the Yeshiva of Flatbush, a Modern Orthodox day school in Brooklyn. Its executive director, Jeffrey Rothman, said she has been a champion of state aid to private schools for the purpose of hiring qualified instructors to teach science, technology and math courses.

Devorah Halberstam, co-founder and director of External Affairs at the Jewish Children's Museum in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, said she has "known Kathy for a very long time," seeing her at meetings about antisemitism and when Hochul visited the museum.

A visit three years ago was followed a week later by her appearance at the annual event marking the anniversary of the 1991 Crown Heights riots, in which Black residents of the neighborhood, angered after a car in the motorcade of Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson accidentally struck and killed a Black child, attacked Hasidic Jews they encountered. A Hasidic student, Yankel Rosenbaum, was stabbed to death.

"I have found her to be very personable, in touch with what is going on and very aware of the different communities," Halberstam said.

In the fall of 2019, members of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council took her on a walking tour of their largely Hasidic neighborhood, including the Chabad Lubavitch movement's headquarters on Eastern Parkway.

"She felt very comfortable being in our Hasidic community," recalled Jacob Goldstein, a retired chair of Community Board 9, who accompanied her on the tour.

Married and the mother of two, Hochul holds a bachelor's degree from Syracuse University and a law degree from Catholic University. She was an aide to Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and served as a member of the Hamburg Town Board and as clerk of Erie County.

As a Democrat, she won a special election in 2011 to fill the seat of Rep. Christopher Lee. Lee resigned after a photo of him shirtless was emailed to a woman he met on Craigslist and was published online. While in Con-

gress, Hochul fought to protect the Affordable Care Act, reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights.

The district, representing Buffalo and Niagara Falls, was considered the most Republican in the state. Hochul lost when she ran again in 2012.

Hochul was essentially the governor's representative when he couldn't make it to an event, observed Ezra Friedlander, CEO of the Friedlander Group, a public affairs and public policy consulting group.

"She didn't have an independent role but was an extension of the governor and the administration," he said. "In the Cuomo administration she was not regarded as the go-to person when you wanted something done legislatively. ... Although she was lieutenant governor, she wasn't an insider and cannot be held accountable for the governor's tsuris."

"For many years she has been waiting for this moment to be her own person. She is ambitious and wants to be governor."

But at the same time, she has used her position to travel throughout the state, visiting each of its 62 counties and attending various civic functions and getting to know community leaders.

"She knows what she's doing," Friedlander said. "For many years she has been waiting for this moment to be her own person. She is ambitious and wants to be governor. She has relationships she has built upon. It will be interesting to see if she can parlay that into her own term. ... I think she will make a strong push to get elected in her own right. She will not go quietly into the night."

After New York State Attorney General Letitia James released the results of her office's investigation into Cuomo last week, multiple Democrats, including President Joe Biden, called on Cuomo to step down. The New York Assembly's Judiciary Committee said it would hold hearings this month to decide if it will recommend that legislators move forward with impeachment.

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● NEWS

The Reform Movement Is Investigating Itself Over History of Rabbinic Sexual Misconduct

By Asaf Shalev

After a series of high-profile revelations about sexual misconduct within its ranks, the world's largest Jewish denomination has initiated three separate independent investigations into how it deals with allegations of abuse.

In an unprecedented move, the Reform movement's seminary, rabbinical association and synagogue network have each hired different expert law firms to investigate allegations of cases of harassment and abuse with a focus on policies and practices that have failed to ensure accountability.

Rabbis, cantors, synagogue congregants, rabbinical students and anyone else with relevant information are being encouraged to come forward and speak to specially trained attorneys, who promise confidentiality and sensitivity.

"Something historic is happening," Rabbi Mary Zamore, who has been pressing the movement to make changes, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "I never thought I would see this day."

The investigations have the potential to bring long-buried misconduct to light and to change the movement's policies about how it handles complaints about its rabbis and employees. Some are seeing an erosion of a culture of silence around sexual misconduct that advocates and community leaders say has pervaded the denomination and sometimes prevented allegations involving rabbis from coming to light.

As executive director of the Women's Rabbinic Network,

a group that bills itself as the “conscience of the Reform movement,” Zamore has long pushed for the #MeToo reckoning that she says is now underway.

She said many of the roughly 600 rabbis in her network have observed for decades how survivors who complained through official channels were often ignored or dismissed. She believes they would be treated differently if they come forward now to participate in the investigations.

“All three institutions have really committed to independent investigations done by high quality, trauma-informed law firms,” said Zamore, who has been acting as an informal advisor to Reform leaders in their efforts. “They have all indicated they will be engaging in the process of teshuva [or repentance] and enacting changes.”

The current wave of soul searching began in late April and early May after reports surfaced about sexual abuse by Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, who was president of the Reform rabbinical school between 1996 and 2000 before resigning abruptly. The behavior dated back to his time as a pulpit rabbi in the 1970s and ‘80s.

The violations that led to Zimmerman’s resignation were not fully disclosed at the time, and many observers were left with the impression that he was guilty of nothing more than having consensual affairs. In fact, a Reform movement internal investigation had found a pattern of sexually predatory behavior by Zimmerman including that he fondled and kissed a teenager.

With those findings obscured from public view, he went on to work as vice president of the Birthright Israel program and rabbi of the Jewish Center of the Hamptons. The investigation’s findings were not revealed until this year, when New York City’s Central Synagogue, where Zimmerman had been rabbi from 1972 to 1985, investigated its own history.

The revelation triggered outrage and generated a new call to action by activists in the Reform movement.

“Internal mechanisms have failed to bring justice and healing to so many victims and accountability to the Reform Jewish community writ large,” Zamore’s Women’s Rabbinic Network said in a statement on April 28.

Within days, the movement’s main organizations announced that they were hiring outside law firms.

The movement’s seminary, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, hired the law firm Morgan Lewis. The Central Conference of American Rabbis is working with Alcalaw, and the congregational network, the Union for Reform Judaism, has Debevoise & Plimpton for its investigation.

In addition, two other major Reform congregations, Temple Emanu-El in Dallas — where Zimmerman served as senior rabbi from 1985 to 1996 — and Stephen Wise Temple in Los Angeles, have since launched their own internal investigations.

Each institution had acted on its own accord but all three movement groups were responding to the same news, according to Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, which represents some 850 synagogues in the United States and more than 2 million congregants.

“The decision made by the URJ’s leadership to retain outside counsel to conduct an impartial investigation was made independently, although it is a response to the same public reports of sexual misconduct within the Reform Movement that have led the HUC-JIR and CCAR leadership to also have investigations conducted,” Jacobs wrote in response to questions from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Rabbi Hara Person, executive director of CCAR, also cited the press reports but added that her organization had begun discussing the issue last fall when it decided to revise its ethics process. She said that past updates had not produced a code that reflects current ethical standards and practices.

“It was a system that was created for a different time, a quieter time, before #MeToo, with different mores, in a pre-social media world,” Person said in an interview. “Historically, there’s been a lot of shame and reluctance of people not wanting to come forward and that’s really changed in recent years.”

Meanwhile, at Hebrew Union College, officials declined to answer questions, saying that it would be inappropriate to comment on details while the investigation is ongoing.

“Earlier this year, HUC alumni shared accounts of inequitable and dismaying experiences at HUC and in the field

over the past decades,” the seminary said in a statement. “We are anguished and upset by what we have heard, and take these accounts very seriously.”

Rabbinic ethics committees across denominations — not just Reform but also Conservative, Reconstructionist and Orthodox — at times have seemed ill-equipped to police their own members. Indeed, the Reform movement is not alone in its array of scandals or its history of institutional failures, said Elana Wien, the executive director of the SRE Network, a Jewish advocacy group focused on equity and workplace safety issues.

“Issues of sexual harassment and discrimination are not unique to the Jewish community nor to the Reform movement,” Wien said. “Whenever you don’t have healthy culture and policies and training reporting mechanisms, inappropriate behavior is able to continue.”

Zamore and other advocates have hope that this round of reckoning will be meaningful. They point out that all three investigations are examining not just cases of wrongdoing but are also studying how improper behavior had been handled by those in power.

What’s helping inspire confidence, for them, is that the Reform movement has for the first time outsourced the investigatory work to expert law firms with reputations for integrity.

“Here you have three organizations that have affirmatively reached out for new information and they are investing the resources — it’s not cheap to find out the truth of what happened over decades,” said Chai Feldblum, a lawyer who served on the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump and was responsible for enforcing laws against workplace discrimination.

Jacobs, the head of URJ, said it’s still early in the investigation but promised there would be a public component to its process and that the URJ would heed the advice of the lawyers it had hired.

“Key findings of the investigation will be shared with the community and the URJ will act on the recommendations from the Debevoise investigative team,” he said in an email.

Some activists remain skeptical that the latest investiga-

tions will get to the root problems.

“Investigations like these are a drop in the bucket, and don’t address the broader problem in the organized Jewish community in which there are no widely recognized standards on how institutions should treat people against whom there are credible allegations of misconduct,” said Rafael Medoff of the Committee on Ethics in Jewish Leadership.

Medoff, a Holocaust historian, is one of four Jewish academics steering the committee, a loose group that promotes “the values of accountability, transparency, democracy and fairness in American Jewish organizations and institutions.”

Medoff says the historic moment ushered by the #Me-Too movement demands the Jewish community do more to contend with sexual harassment and abuse.

“There have been serious cases of sexual harassment and abuse across the political and denominational spectrum,” he said. “It’s one of the great tragedies of the American Jewish community.”

● NEWS

Guess Who Came to Shabbat Dinner? The Drama of ‘Real Housewives of New York City.’

By Philissa Cramer

Many people have curbed or curtailed their big Shabbat dinners during the COVID-19 pandemic, but not the cast of “The Real Housewives of New York City.”

On the episode that aired Tuesday, the cast of the Bravo reality TV series about socialites in the city is shown attending a drama-filled event described as “Black Shabbat” by its host.

Eboni Williams, the show's first Black cast member, hosted the dinner at the home of Archie Gottesman, chief branding officer of Manhattan Mini Storage and a founder of JewBelong, a nonprofit that set out to "re-brand Judaism" and recently took out billboards in several cities in an effort to combat antisemitism. Williams, who has described a 2016 trip to Israel as transformative, became close friends with Gottesman after a different Shabbat dinner some years ago.

The attendees noshed on challah and expressed appreciation after Leah McSweeney, a cast member who is in the process of converting to Judaism, recited a blessing in Hebrew via Facetime (having been exposed to COVID-19, she joined remotely until audio issues caused the women at the table to hang up on her). Gottesman led the group in what she referred to as a "Shabbat shot" of liquor. And during the meal, Williams initiated a conversation about Black and Jewish relations in the United States.

But fans of the show have focused mostly on the behavior of one cast member, Ramona Singer, who tries to steer the conversation to her own Italian identity. She also mistakenly calls the dinner a "Black seder" (leading one New York Magazine commenter to write, "How can these women have lived so long in NYC and know so little?") and, in what feels like a made-for-reality-TV moment, criticizes Gottesman's mismatched napkins.

"If you had asked me before the show what would have been the thing everyone was talking about, it would not have been napkins," Gottesman told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Made from fabric she purchased in Guatemala, "my napkins are the best but maybe they are not for everyone," she added.

Gottesman said she had jumped at the chance to host the dinner, which took place last December at her home in Summit, New Jersey, because of her belief — baked into JewBelong's programming — that Shabbat meals are ideal venues for meaningful conversations. She said the discussion at her table had been more in depth than was depicted in Tuesday's episode and noted that the Aug. 17 episode is also slated to include Shabbat content.

Gottesman also said she was grateful to Williams and McSweeney for representing Jewish life in popular media, especially after they told her that they received antisemitic messages after the show aired. There are

currently no Jews on the local cast, although there have been in the past.

"What's interesting and fabulous about Ebony is that when she pitched Shabbat [to the show's producers], she said they had never been pitched Shabbat before," Gottesman said. "There have been Jewish Housewives and Jewish producers on the show, and I think it's really beautiful that it's a non-Jewish Black woman who said this should be on TV. It was brave."

● NEWS

Desus and Mero Get a Bar Mitzvah (of Sorts), with the Help of Eric Andre and an NYC Rabbi

By Gabe Friedman and Philissa Cramer

At the start of a clip from their Showtime series' latest episode on Thursday, comedy show hosts Desus Nice and The Kid Mero proclaim outside a synagogue that they don't "know that much about Jewish culture."

But that's not entirely true — The Kid Mero, whose real name is Joel Martinez, is raising four children with his Jewish wife Heather. And the non-Jewish Jamaican-American and Dominican-American pair have often cited tidbits from Jewish culture in earlier iterations of their popular late night comedy show, which was hailed as a Black alternative to the mostly white world of late night.

When the duo felt the need to celebrate a bar mitzvah of sorts on TV, and they called in one of their Jewish friends to help them prepare: the wild child comedian Eric Andre, who often uses Jewish humor in his standup routines.

In the clip, the group heads inside Andre's synagogue, The Village Temple, a Reform congregation in downtown Manhattan, and meets with Rabbi Diana Fersko to learn the basics of the coming-of-age ritual — before

engaging in a debauched afterparty.

Fersko told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that she accepted the invitation to be part of the segment because she knew that by appearing on “Desus and Mero,” she would be reaching many people she strives to engage.

“They have a significant Jewish audience and I think it’s essential to meet people where they are,” she said. “One of my goals is to show that rabbis look different than many people might assume or imagine and to have meaningful conversations about Judaism.”

But Fersko said she was surprised by some of the questions she got during taping — such as the question about whether cocaine is kosher. (Andre says it is if it’s blessed by a rabbi; Fersko remains silent. In fact, whether a product is kosher depends on how it is produced, not the blessing of a rabbi.)

“This is not at all what I talk about with bar mitzvah children,” Fersko said. “You can see the look on my face shows that I was uncomfortable at times, but I think they tried hard to walk that line between comedy and respect and deliver something that was fun.”

As for the afterparty held in the synagogue’s social hall (the first during the Covid era), Fersko didn’t attend, though she said she assumes that as the rabbi, she was invited.

“What I wanted to say about the party is it’s a commandment to be joyful in Judaism,” she said. “So the party is not necessarily a frivolous expression. It’s actually the fulfillment of something much deeper: communal joy and pride.”

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● NEWS

Nach Waxman, New York City Cookbook Store Owner and Jewish Text Enthusiast, Dies at 84

By Shira Hanau

Nach Waxman, owner of the beloved New York City cookbook store Kitchen Arts & Letters, as well as a maven of both Jewish cooking and Jewish texts, has died. He was 84.

Although Waxman had struggled with his health in later years, his death on Wednesday was sudden, according to an announcement by his Upper East Side shop.

“He built the store into a worldwide haven for people who were serious about food and drink books,” the announcement read. “He encouraged the best authors, respected the passion and curiosity of cooks and readers at all levels, and never lost a sense of pleasure and wonder at discovering the myriad ways people wrote about cooking, eating, and drinking. All of us who worked with him will miss him deeply.”

Waxman was a mainstay of a small group of friends who met every Sunday morning for more than 25 years at his Upper West Side apartment to study Jewish texts.

As much as he loved studying Torah, Waxman was equally devoted to traditional Jewish foods, especially schmaltz and liver, and kept a collection of his own Jewish cookbooks in the back of his store.

Joan Nathan, the Jewish food writer and author of multiple Jewish cookbooks, said Waxman helped her find Yemenite and Sephardic cookbooks — often synagogue and community cookbooks from all over the United States — before those styles of cooking became popular among Ashkenazi cooks.

“We clicked right away, and clicked over brisket because

he really liked brisket,” said Nathan, who first became friends with Waxman in the 1980s.

Waxman grew up in Vineland, New Jersey, a town that was once home to a community of Jewish farmers. According to a 2011 profile in the *Forward*, Waxman’s father sold real estate insurance to Jewish poultry farmers in the area.

Waxman attended a Jewish day school in Philadelphia, which meant traveling by train early each morning and returning home late in the evening. But the long commute did not prevent him from falling in love with Judaism.

He set out after college on the academic track, studying for a doctorate in anthropology but moving into the publishing industry and working as an editor. His love of literature extended to the Bible.

Rita Falbel, a friend and member of the Sunday morning study group, said Waxman brought an editor’s eye to the text and a food enthusiast’s hunger for knowledge.

“Interested in everything, wanting to know about everything, he was that kind of person,” Falbel said. “He would never let anything go until he figured it out.”

The group originally began with a few parents who met at the Stephen Wise Temple while their children attended Hebrew school. The meetings eventually moved to the Waxmans’ apartment, where the group would usually nosh on bagels and lox while they studied. On holidays, however, Waxman would prepare a special breakfast like latkes for Hanukkah and matzah brei for Passover.

“He was a wonderful cook,” Falbel said, before correcting herself and adding, “Chef, actually.”

“They have a total love of study, they had a great intellectual curiosity and a sense of wow isn’t that amazing,” said Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky of Congregation Anshe Chesed, where Waxman and his wife, Maron, were members.

Kalmanofsky said the Waxmans arrived exactly on time for services each Saturday morning and stayed through the end. Waxman’s son, Joshua, is a Reconstructionist rabbi in New Jersey and has taught at the same school his father attended as a child. The Waxmans also have a daughter, Sarah, and several grandchildren, about

whom Waxman frequently boasted about at the study group and at synagogue.

Leah Koenig, a food writer and author of several Jewish cookbooks, met Waxman when she found his recipe for rassel, a fermented beet broth made by Russian Jews to add to borscht, in an Anshe Chesed community cookbook. She visited Waxman at his home in 2019 to learn how he made the broth in his mother’s old ceramic crock used exclusively for that purpose each spring in preparation for Passover.

“Growing up, we kept the crock in a special cabinet in our cellar where the Passover dishes were stored,” Waxman told Koenig. “It was something you waited for. There was real excitement when the crock came out and the beets were done.”

Waxman described rassel in the Anshe Chesed cookbook as the dish that “heralded, as clearly as a shofar blast, that change was on the way — that we were beginning the countdown to Pesach,” according to Koenig.

“I think he’s somebody who understood the importance of cookbooks as literature and understood the importance of food books to telling cultural stories,” Koenig told JTA.

But the Jewish recipe Waxman will be best known for is his brisket. The onion-heavy recipe — developed as a hybrid of his mother and mother-in-law’s techniques — was first published in the 1989 “New Basics Cookbook.”

Nathan said Waxman’s work was a labor of love.

“There’s nobody like Nach — in a way it’s just a different time now. People are more entrepreneurs. He did this for the love of it,” she said.

On Sunday, Waxman’s study group will not meet during the shiva period. Falbel said she didn’t know when the group would get together next, but she knew Waxman and his enthusiasm — for food, cooking, literature, culture and Torah — would be sorely missed.

“He always had something to say, as most of us did, but he would say it with such enthusiasm,” she said.

● EDITOR'S DESK

'Fauda' Meets 'Shtisel' Meets 'Srugim' Meets 'Unorthodox'

Imagining life in the Israeli television series multiverse.

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

I don't have the time or the sitzfleisch for binge-viewing, so I have been working my way slowly through the big Israeli TV series. We started with "Srugim," the gentle dramedy about young Modern Orthodox Jews trying to find love in their claustrophobic Jerusalem neighborhood. We allowed ourselves to be traumatized by "Fauda," about an Israeli commando team that works undercover in the occupied territories. And we're engrossed in "Shtisel" and its wry, melancholy examination of the lives of haredi Orthodox Jews.

Each show is a window into Jewish life in Israel, but a narrow window. The characters in the shows all live in the same country at about the same time but might as well live on separate planets. That's not necessarily a distortion: Although Israel is a small country, its religious and secular populations are often segregated by choice. Even the religious community is divided between the haredi, or ultra-Orthodox, population and the Modern, or "religious Zionist," Orthodox seen in "Srugim." All the cohorts send their kids to separate schools and tend to live in distinct neighborhoods.

Which is why I dream of a supercut of all the Israeli shows. Imagine the accurate mosaic of Israeli society that would emerge if "Fauda," "Srugim," "Shtisel" and "Unorthodox" were edited into one long series, or the artistic possibilities of a single Israeli television multiverse:

EPISODE ONE:

The show opens in Jerusalem's Katamon neighborhood,

where gentle Amir, a schoolteacher at a Modern Orthodox yeshiva, shares an apartment with the sardonic Nati, a physician. Amir tells Nati that he plans on asking their mutual friend Yifat to marry him as soon as he gets back from his Army reserve duty.

While on duty, Amir is mistakenly assigned to the Mista'arvim unit, and is immediately sent undercover into the Palestinian city of Ramallah. His partner is Doron, the fanatical commando who looks like a cross between Don Rickles and a trash can. After a fierce gunfight with Hamas, the two escape back across the Green Line in time for Shabbat, where Amir shares a tense dinner with Yifat, Nati and Hodaya where much is left unsaid.

EPISODE TWO:

Akiva Shtisel, a moony young haredi Orthodox man living in Jerusalem's Geula neighborhood, dreams of being an artist, despite the disapproval of his loving but overbearing father, Rabbi Shulem. On a visit to the Jerusalem Zoo, he runs into Yifat, who has paused outside the monkey cages to consider Amir's marriage proposal. The attraction between Akiva and Yifat is obvious, even though Akiva's father would never approve of him marrying a Modern Orthodox girl. Yifat, meanwhile, still has feelings for Nati, even though he has commitment problems and still shares an apartment with Amir despite his doctor's salary.

EPISODE THREE:

While interrogating a Palestinian terror suspect, Doron remembers the lovely young woman he met while working undercover as an Arab custodian at Hebrew University. Hodaya clearly grew up Modern Orthodox but has left the religious life. Doron plans on giving her a call, as soon as he smokes a few dozen cigarettes and stares moodily into space.

EPISODE FOUR:

Despite his father's disapproval, Akiva Shtisel plans on asking Yifat to join him on a shidduch date in the lobby of a Jerusalem hotel – as soon as he finishes smoking a few dozen cigarettes and staring moodily into space. His thoughts are interrupted by a phone call from his sister, who explains that her teenaged daughter Ruchami is missing and may have run away to Germany.

EPISODE FIVE:

A young woman who looks suspiciously like a shaven-headed Ruchami – that is, like a cross between Scarlett Johansson and a tennis ball — is seen at a music school in Berlin, where only a few new friends know that she has run away from her strictly Orthodox life back in Israel. Her hopes for surviving outside of her former life rely entirely on her getting into the prestigious music school — as opposed to, say, working in a coffee shop. Her thoughts are interrupted when she spots Akiva Shtisel and his hapless friend Farshlufen getting out of a taxi – obviously sent by her grandfather to bring her home.

EPISODE SIX:

Back in Israel, the “Srugim” crowd is having another tense Shabbat dinner when Nati gets a call from the hospital saying that he must come in and treat an Israeli commando who was injured in a botched mission in a Palestinian village. When he gets to the hospital we see the patient is Doron, who is sitting at the window moodily smoking a cigarette. “You can’t smoke in a hospital,” Nati tells Doron, who immediately snaps and puts Nati in a chokehold. Just then Yifat walks in carrying a covered casserole dish, the leftovers from dinner. She is humiliated for Nati’s sake, but is strangely attracted to the bullet-headed stranger who is strangling him.

SEASON FINALE:

On a crowded bus, we see all the cast members: Amir and Yifat are headed into town to look at wedding rings, Akiva Shtisel and his father are smoking cigarettes, Nati is refusing to commit to yet another lovely young woman, and Doron and Hodaya are sharing meaningful looks while Doron holds the bus driver in a chokehold.

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

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● OPINION

We Asked People About Their Experiences as Jews of Color. Here’s What They Told Us.

By Ilana Kaufman

Jewish culture is deeply rooted in traditional core values, structures and norms often held by our American Jewish organizations. At the same time, today’s American Jewish community is more diverse and represents more backgrounds than ever.

Yet this diversity is not equitably reflected in our communal spaces. Based on national and local population studies, my organization found in 2018 that one in seven Jews in the United States identifies as a person of color. Other recent estimates have varied, but one thing is clear: Jews of color are underrepresented in organizational boardrooms, executive leadership teams and even in those groups whose explicit aim is to engage in the work of justice. This absence of Jews of color, and by extension the absence of knowledge about our experiences and perspectives, shapes — in truth, distorts — not only organizational missions, visions, values and programs, but how we see our Jewish world.

With the newly released study “Beyond the Count: Perspectives and Lived Experiences of Jews of Color,” our community and our leaders have new tools to inform, shape and move our community toward one that authentically and powerfully engages the diversity of all Jews. Just as important, “Beyond the Count” includes self-reflections by Jews of color — 1,118 to be exact — that offer insights about their experiences, both positive and negative, in Jewish spaces.

As a longtime advocate for Jews of color who now runs the Jews of Color Initiative, I found the experiences described by many of those we talked to resonant of my own. My ambition is that when reading this study, Jews

of color will feel seen, reflected, affirmed and validated.

Beyond being the first large-scale examination of the lived experiences and perspectives of Jews of color in the United States, “Beyond the Count” is noteworthy for being led and authored by a multiracial research team housed at Stanford University. A majority of its members are Jewish and Jews of color. Along with the efforts of the Jews of Color Initiative, which commissioned the study, that team garnered responses from more than 1,000 Jews of color representing 47 states and Puerto Rico.

These community members reflected on Jewish identity, engagement in Jewish communities, systemic racism in Jewish spaces and the moments in which they feel the deepest sense of safety and belonging. They shared their experiences, views, perspectives and pain points.

The findings, which are captured in the study, are revealing, troubling and hopeful all at the same time:

Two-thirds of survey respondents say they have felt disconnected from their Jewish identities at times, and nearly half have altered how they speak, dress or present themselves to conform to predominantly white Jewish spaces.

The vast majority of Jews of color (80%) have faced discrimination in Jewish settings, particularly in spiritual or congregational environments.

Slightly over half of respondents have felt a sense of belonging among white Jews, and 41% say they have found opportunities to express all sides of themselves in predominantly white Jewish spaces.

Taken together, these findings reveal where our community can and must do better.

Jews of color feel scrutinized for their race in some settings and their Jewishness in others. As a result, many point to gatherings of Jews of color as unique opportunities to experience the sense of belonging and solidarity that is unavailable to them in other areas of Jewish communal life. Many described such gatherings and relationships built with other Jews of color as profoundly healing.

Despite experiences of being othered and eschewed, Jews of color have still found connection to their greater Jewish communities, particularly through a sense of shared history, collective memory and Jewish values.

When the environment is open and welcoming, Jews of color are able to actively contribute to the continuity of Jewish tradition and peoplehood in ways that are powerful and meaningful to them and the larger Jewish community. Jews of color feel very connected to Judaism, and want to be connected to, engaged in and part of Jewish communities and Jewish communal life.

For anyone who cares about sustaining and building a strong Jewish community, the data in “Beyond the Count” should be both concerning and energizing. Racism connected to our communal institutions and our individual actions has caused harm, and this harm has sometimes pushed away Jews of color and detached them from Jewish identity, from Jewish community and ultimately from what should be an unobstructed pathway to Torah.

On the other hand, we now have the gift of knowledge and perspective. Leaders used to ask how many Jews of color there are — and in 2018 we answered that question. But our communal conversation needs more than a demographic count to understand how to move forward to a place of equity and justice. With “Beyond the Count,” we have a new set of knowledge that can guide us there. These findings, beyond serving as a starting point for important conversations in our community, must actively and thoughtfully inform community and organizational missions, visions, strategies, spaces, resource allocations and pathways to leadership.

The Jews of Color Initiative will now begin to engage in conversations around these findings with communal partners and leaders. These conversations are one important way we can ensure our ecosystem of organizations, day schools, synagogues, program partners and funders hear directly from Jews of color.

“Beyond the Count” isn’t a panacea for making our community more inclusive and less racist. But it does help us understand what has kept people away from Jewish communal spaces and helps to identify the tools not only to inform and educate, but to address serious obstacles to community engagement.

Working together, we can retire the old paradigms and structures that marginalize and sometimes harm Jews of color. Informed by “Beyond the Count,” we are the ones to build the new strategies, the new structures to

ensure unencumbered, inspired access Jewish life — a sense of belonging, a shared community and a sustainable path forward for our people.

Ilana Kaufman is Executive Director of the Jews of Color Initiative.

● OPINION

I'm a Rabbi With Mental Illness and I'm Done Trying to Hide My Pain

There are so many others out there who, like me, are suffering in silence. You are never alone.

By Avram Mlotek

Content warning: suicidal ideation

I live with bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder. As a rabbi, cantor, actor and author, that's not how I usually introduce myself. But this summer I spent three and a half weeks at an in-patient facility tending to my mental health and that was how I usually identified myself.

Now, of course, each of us is larger than the sum of our parts. Our illnesses needn't identify us nor do our failures. But for someone like myself, it felt so freeing to finally speak so honestly about being in such pain.

What's ironic is that I've written openly before around my depression. I've strived to serve as an ally for members in my community who experience mental illness, creating support groups around their own wellness. As a rabbi, I've always felt it was my duty to ensure that everyone in my community felt comfortable talking about their mental health with me. But as many who live with mental illness know, our sickness is insidious and comes in waves. To make matters worse, I have not been vigilant in my own self-care; the past year of COVID-19 introduced a whole new level of loneliness and anxiety

with all in-person gatherings pausing for the time being. And the bottom line was that I did not prioritize my mental health as I served others. I neglected it. I abused it.

To say I felt like a fraud or an imposter is an understatement. As a counselor, I constantly remind those who do seek my counsel just how precious they are, just how important their own self-care is. But here I was unable to admit just how much pain I was in, just how difficult it was for me to get out of bed in the morning, just how close to suicidal despair I was. It was far easier for me to tend to others' broken hearts than it was to honor my own.

I am blessed with a family and a robust social network; why was it so hard for me to speak up and be honest around my own suffering? Social stigmas certainly played a role. Even though I had rabbis in rabbinical school tell me that if the rabbis of the Talmud were alive today, they would have instituted blessings to be said over antidepressants, I never felt fully comfortable talking about my own suffering with them. Perhaps, I thought, if I bolstered down, I could persevere. What complicated matters, in my particular case, was that I did not know I suffered from bipolar disorder, nor did my initial care providers.

Simply put: Bipolar disorder is a beast, and with the wrong medication it can make things much worse.

That happened to me, and it was a terrifying place to live, not being able to experience the joys in my that were so abundantly apparent to others, and even to myself sometimes. I lived regularly with high highs and low lows, with little to no sleep, with mania, confusion and torment mixed in. And because I like to think I'm a half-decent actor, coupled with my own shame of sharing, many people did not notice.

Fortunately, I have been on a new medication for the past couple of months and it feels strange to admit this, but I feel cautiously optimistic — and even hopeful — as it reaches its therapeutic dose. I know bipolar disorder is heavily researched and treatable, and finally, I feel like I am reaping the benefits of that scientific research. It is because of this, because that dark cloud has seemingly lifted and because I was in such a dark place of depression, that I feel compelled to write about it now, openly, with the gloves off.

The way we battle stigmas is by talking about them — this much I know and it is important to remember. But that's not the only reason why I am choosing to share publicly now. I share my experience now because I know there are so many others out there who, like me, are suffering in silence, who may contemplate suicide, who are at the darkest points of near despair.

I write this to you to let you know: I am like you. And to tell you: You are never alone. And I promise you, as many a friend and counselor promised me, it gets better. It is not immediate. It is not as quick and painless as we might want or need it to be. And there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. But through therapy, through medicine, and through open channels of communication, you can survive and thrive.

One final note: I want to state the obvious, something I learned the hard way. If your physical vision wasn't allowing you to see clearly or easily, wouldn't you say something? If your stomach was causing you physical harm, wouldn't you seek to get well? In 2021, we ought to be able to speak this way of our own mental illnesses without fear and judgment. So, if this piece has moved or inspired you in any way, and if you struggle with these illnesses in your own way, please do the world a favor and share that. Share it privately. Share it publicly. Share it on the rooftops. Or whisper it to just one friend.

It is only when we can name and face our hurt that we can possibly even begin to repair. As Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav taught us centuries ago, "If you believe you have the capacity to destroy, believe you have the capacity to repair." (Alma)

Avram Mlotek (he/him) is a rabbi, cantor, actor and writer. A grandchild of Holocaust survivors and Yiddish cultural icons, he is a founder of Base and the author of "Why Jews Do That" and "Passover in a Pandemic."

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Elul 5, 5781 | Friday, August 13, 2021

- **Light candles at:** 7:38 p.m.

Elul 6, 5781 | Saturday, August 14, 2021

- **Torah reading:** Shoftim, Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9

- **Haftarah:** Isaiah 51:12–52:12

- **Shabbat ends:** 8:39 p.m.

● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT SHOFTIM

It Takes a Community to Educate a Child

This week's portion suggests that teachers and parents must be partners in and outside of school.

By Elchanan Poupko

The heartbreaking reality in which students from low-income areas end up graduating into dead-end careers should trouble us all. It also offers a powerful lesson into what learning, teaching, and community should look like.

In her TED talk on this topic, Dr. Megan Olivia Hall describes how teachers and parents can help close the "opportunity gap" by reaching out to one another. Students flourish when schools, families and communities work together. "When teachers reach out to parents, and parents reach out to teachers, our connections bridge the gap," she declares.

The reason for that can be found in this week's portion, Shoftim.

The Torah says:

The Levitic kohanim, the entire tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; the Lord's fire offerings and His inheritance they shall eat. But he shall have no inheritance among his brothers; the Lord is his inheritance, as He spoke to him. (Deuteronomy 18)

We are used to seeing in the Torah privileges and benefits heaped upon the Levites. There is, however, one huge catch: Unlike the other tribes, they don't get a share of land. In a world in which land was everything — from a means to provide one's family, or even just eat, to a generational dwelling place — the Levites are left hanging without anything. Why do they deserve this lot? Why are Levites deprived of the most critical asset need-

ed to survive in an agriculture-based society?

Perplexed by this very same question, Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), arguably the greatest Medieval Jewish thinker, in his Mishneh Torah (laws of Shmittah 13:12), explains:

Why did the Levites not receive a portion in the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael and in the spoils of war like their brethren? Because they were set aside to serve God and minister unto Him and to instruct people at large in His just paths and righteous judgments, as [Deuteronomy 33:10] states: “They will teach Your judgments to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel.” Therefore, they were set apart from the ways of the world.

The Levites are not being punished, Maimonides states, but have a unique mission: to serve God and teach His people. Sure, in return, the people need to give tithes of food, clothing and other gifts to sustain the basic needs of the Levites and their families, but the life of the Kohanim and the Levites is a life of service.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), one of the most outstanding 19th-century scholars in Western Europe, highlights the contrast between the state of the Levites in the desert versus their state when coming into the land of Israel. In the desert, all tribes were camped around the Levites, who lived around the Tabernacle. Everything was centered around them. When entering the land of Israel, the exact opposite happened — the Levites were dispersed among the various tribes of Israel to live among them. In the desert where no one was too far from the sacred Tabernacle, the Levites can afford to sit at the center of the camp close to the place in which they serve. Once the Jews entered the land of Israel and were often days away from the Temple, it was the Levites’ job to live among them. The education they would provide could only take place in a community setting.

This is also why the Levites “eat off the table” of the community. The gifts they receive are food, wool and other items for immediate use. God wanted to make sure the teachers and the community never get too far.

As Carol Gestwicki points out in her must-read “Home, School and Community Relations,” education is most successful when the community, parents, teachers and students work together. When kids see the adults in

their lives, often in an informal setting, working towards a goal, aspiring for specific achievements and valuing the milestones that get them to their goals, they too can aspire in that direction. We can only dream of things we have heard of.

“If we would like to see Jewish education succeed, we must make sure it is never limited to the classroom or the synagogue, to one generation, or to one social class.”

In today’s world of hyper-specialization, it is more important than ever that we work to create more community, school and teacher partnerships. This is not limited to parents or teachers. Many Jewish communities have turned their schools into centers for adult education. They make sure teachers go out and teach in the community as well, set up weekend parent-child learning programs, and inspire intergenerational learning that will forever be part of the fabric of the community.

If we would like to see Jewish education succeed, we must make sure it is never limited to the classroom or the synagogue, to one generation, or to one social class. For Jewish life to succeed and endure, it must be intergenerational, community-based and accessible to every single individual, regardless of where they are. Judaism cannot afford teachers camped around the Tabernacle; like the Levites, they must come to teach and inspire where the people are.

Elchanan Poupko is a rabbi, writer, teacher, and blogger (www.rabbipoupko.com). He is the president of EITAN-The American Israeli Jewish Network and lives with his wife in New York City.

● MUSINGS

A Typical Jew?

By David Wolpe

The sinew of paradox runs through Jewish history. Were Jews and gentiles separate in the Middle Ages? Well yes, but there are also rules about hiring a gentile wet nurse on the Sabbath, which suggests a degree of intimacy between the two that would shock casual assumptions.

Were Jews pious? Well yes, except that from ancient times until today we find innumerable examples of assimilation and indifference and heresy. Jews are often thought of as powerless in their history, but in many cases they exerted great power, and spanned the range from unfathomable persecution to acceptance and security.

To speak of “the Jews” is as misleading as to declare “Judaism says” when one can almost always find authoritative Jewish sources that say the opposite. We are caught in the normal human condition of ambiguity and ambivalence, with instances of love and betrayal throughout times of faith and times of failure.

I have known many poor Jews, many wealthy Jews, many Jews surrounded with family, many Jews who were almost entirely alone. What I have never known is a typical Jew. Our tradition tries hard to inculcate traits of goodness, industry, scholarship and family, but we still come in all varieties of the human rainbow. Praise God.

*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.*

● THE NOSHER

The Jewish History of Gold's Horseradish

By Stephanie Ganz

If you happened to be walking down the 800 block of Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn in the 1930s, you might have caught a whiff of horseradish in the air. From their Brooklyn apartment, two Jewish immigrants — Hyman and Tillie Gold, from Ukraine and Romania, respectively — were peeling the pungent roots at their kitchen table, filling bottles of prepared horseradish by hand and labeling them with homemade labels and paste made from flour and water.

The couple came into the horseradish business almost by accident. Hyman's cousin worked on the sidewalk in Borough Park, Brooklyn, peddling the freshly-peeled root in front of a busy store; but when he got into a dis-

pute that turned physical with the store owner, he landed in jail and called on Hyman to bail him out. Hyman's compensation was his cousin's horseradish grinder.

Having recently lost their business selling and repairing radios, the Golds were all in on horseradish, which Hyman sold, four jars at a time, to shops and delis in the neighborhood.

Horseradish is a staple of the Passover Seder because it has come to represent maror, bitter herbs, which symbolize the suffering of the Jewish slaves in Egypt. The Golds were gambling on one thing: that the predominantly Jewish families in the area would prefer for someone else to do the crying over their horseradish for the Seder. That bet paid off, with four generations of Golds eventually working for the family business.

As word of Gold's Horseradish grew, Hyman employed his three sons — Morris, Manny, and Herbert — to deliver bottles on their bicycles and via the train. One brother would wait at each stop while the third would stay on the train, shuttling bottles back and forth, to avoid paying multiple fares. Horseradish engulfed the Gold household. The family grew the galloping roots, weed-like and unruly, in their backyard, and they would fill the bathtub with the dirt-encrusted horseradish roots to wash them. The air in the small apartment was constantly tinged with the eye-watering fumes, which wafted from the open window to the streets below.

As they outgrew their home operation, the Golds moved the business to 4127 18th Avenue in Brooklyn, where, over the next two decades, they introduced automation that allowed them to speed up production and introduce new products, like borscht in 1948. According to third generation owner Marcus Gold, when they brought in a filling machine to fill the jars, his grandmother Tillie, who had filled jars by hand using a small funnel, in classic bubbe fashion, remarked, “Why did you buy a filling machine? I'm a filling machine!”

The family were used to doing all the work themselves — and by hand. At 6 years old, Marcus Gold remembers marking the boxes of beet horseradish with a fat red marker, his first task for the family business. As a teen in the 1960s, around the holidays especially, he and his cousins would be called in whenever someone didn't show up to work. The long days started at 7 a.m and went on nonstop with the brisk pace of an assembly line

in motion. “We always made sure we had enough to be used for the next couple of days, but we didn’t stock up. So when the production list was made, we had to get to that amount made,” he recalls.

By the mid-1970s, the third Gold’s generation — Steven, Neil, Howard, and Marc — took over under the leadership of their fathers, who were mourning the loss, in 1975, of their mother, Tillie. Over the next two decades, the brothers and cousins worked together to make every major decision for the brand, continuing to grow the product line and, in 1994, relocating to Hempstead, New York, in the western part of Long Island. Eventually, Steven’s daughter Melissa and Marc’s son Shaun joined the team, marking the fourth generation to contribute to the family business.

It was Marcus Gold’s father, Morris, who instilled in him the importance of advertising. Morris was responsible for introducing Gold’s jingle, “If it’s gotta taste great, it’s gotta have Gold’s,” punctuated by the ringing of a bell. From the business’s earliest days, Morris knew that name recognition mattered, so he brought signs and window decals for store owners to display, letting shoppers know that their store carried Gold’s products. “Advertising gave the appearance that you were bigger than you really were,” says Gold. In the early 1950s, Gold’s hosted Miss Horseradish contests to raise brand awareness. Gold’s also bought ad space in Haggadahs produced by local grocery chains to further emphasize their connection to the Seder table.

This insistence on name recognition stuck with Gold, an avid baseball fan and the founder of the Mets Fan Club. After the business made its final move to Hempstead, New York and began manufacturing specialty mustard, Gold saw an opportunity to get their mustard into Shea stadium. It was the chance of a lifetime for Gold, and after convincing the rest of his family (which required securing Mike Piazza to do a Gold’s bobble head doll promo), the brand began their conquest of baseball stadiums. To this day, Gold’s is the go-to condiment brand for stadiums around the country.

In 2015, the Golds sold the brand to LaSalle Capital, a Chicago-based investment firm. In early 2021, that company announced the closure of the Hempstead factory, but a representative from the company says production will continue undisturbed. Though Gold’s is no longer

made in Brooklyn, memories of the brand linger, in Brooklyn and beyond, any time someone opens a jar of horseradish for a Bloody Mary or their Passover Seder.

Sarah Rosen is a writer and filmmaker in Brooklyn.

UPCOMING EVENTS

August 13 | 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Free

Zen Shabbat

Lab/Shul and the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care invite you to a shared experience of sacred space and time, harmonizing Jewish and Zen traditions in the celebration of Sabbath spirit. Register at <https://bit.ly/3m2DacG>

August 17 | 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Free

The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem

Sarit Yishai-Levi discusses her debut novel “The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem,” and the new Israeli TV series based on it, with award-winning journalist and author Sandee Brawarsky. Yishai-Levi will talk about growing up in a 7th-generation Jerusalem family, her transformation from journalist to novelist and watching her characters come to life in an eagerly anticipated drama. Register for this Temple Emanu-El Streicker Center event at <https://bit.ly/3xjkQr8>

August 18 | 12:30 p.m. Free

Invisible Citizens? The Exclusion of Palestinian Arab Israelis from Israel’s Mainstream Media

Partners for Progressive Israel presents a webinar on the under-representation of Israel’s Palestinian Arab citizens on mainstream TV and radio in Israel. Featuring Eman Kassem Sliman, a veteran Israeli radio journalist, and Edan Ring of Sikkuy, who leads that NGO’s campaign to promote the representation of Arab citizens and Arab society in Israel’s media. Register at <https://bit.ly/3jKFbaK>