

New York The Jewish Week/end

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An estimated 25,000 people protest the rising number of anti-Semitic hate crimes in the city at a rally that began in the plaza in front of City Hall, Jan. 5, 2020. (Jewish Week)

Must read

At Least 150 Sex Abuse Lawsuits Filed Against NY Jewish Institutions Under Child Victims Act / Page 3

These NYers Were Annoyed by Anti-Vaccine Holocaust Comparisons. So They Wrote a Song. / Page 5

Shuls, Zooms and Nightclubs: Where to Do High Holiday Services in New York City in 2021 / Page 6

Remembering Joshua Mitnick, an Israel Reporter with a Soft Touch in a Harsh Region / Page 8

Opinion / Page 10

Sabbath Week / Page 12

Musings, David Wolpe / Page 13

Tradition / Page 14

Events / Page 16

● NEWS

Antisemitic Crimes Dropped in New York in 2020: FBI

The pandemic partly explains a decrease in attacks.

By Ben Sales

The latest FBI report on hate crimes tallied 179 antisemitic bias crimes in New York State in 2020, compared to 325 the year before.

The dip is found in a 2020 report that tallied the largest number of hate crimes since 2008, including spikes in the number of anti-Black and anti-Asian hate crimes.

Nationwide, anti-Jewish hate crimes dropped from 953 in 2019 to 676 last year, a decrease of 29%. Anti-Jewish crimes again made up the majority of hate crimes based on religion in the annual report, which scholars and officials have cautioned not to view as a comprehensive reflection of the state of hate crimes in America.



As we reflect on the past year, we're filled with gratitude for the strength and resilience that helped so many of us get through this most challenging time in our collective memory.

At UJA, thanks to you, we're doing all we can to help our community and our city come back stronger than before, and we're more determined than ever to build a better world.

As we enter 5782, our heartfelt wish is that the year ahead be a brighter one, filled with blessings of good health, happiness, and peace for us all.

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The number of Jewish incidents decreased last year relative to 2019, a year that was punctuated with three lethal antisemitic attacks and a wave of antisemitic street harassment in New York City. Those incidents became far less common in 2020 once street life, and in-person gatherings at synagogues, largely ceased during the pandemic.

The report looked only at 2020, before the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in May 2021 drove a spike in reports of antisemitic incidents.

The FBI relies on reports of hate crimes from more than 15,000 police precincts nationwide, and a report from the Department of Justice last year found that 87% of precincts reported zero hate crimes in 2017. A book on the subject from this year by two criminal justice professors said the annual number stands at 89%.

Both the FBI and the Anti-Defamation League reported that incidents targeting Jews nationwide decreased in 2020 from the previous year — but the ADL, which includes non-criminal as well as criminal complaints, found the decrease to be minor (4%) compared to the FBI's 29% figure.

In an audit released earlier this year, the ADL reported more than 2,000 incidents of antisemitism in 2020, a slight decrease from 2019.

On Monday, ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt said the lack of reporting by police precincts is “simply not credible.”

“Data drives policy and without having a complete picture of the problem, we cannot even begin to resolve the issues driving this surge in hate and violence,” he said.

The FBI recently embarked on a national campaign to encourage people and police to report hate crimes to its 56 field offices around the country.

“We know that hate crimes are underreported,” the FBI told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in a statement earlier this month. “It is our goal to increase this reporting, from law enforcement agencies and the public alike, so we can gather more information to identify trends and take action to stop these crimes from occurring.”

In total, the FBI announced Monday that it recorded 7,759 hate crimes nationwide in 2020, a slight rise from the 7,314 it recorded in 2019. There were 2,755 anti-Black hate crimes in 2020, up from 1,972 the previ-

ous year, and 274 anti-Asian hate crimes, up from 161 in 2019. Asian-Americans drew attention last year to a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while the increase in anti-Black racism came against the backdrop of last year's racial justice protests.

● NEWS

At Least 150 Sex Abuse Lawsuits Filed Against NY Jewish Institutions Under Child Victims Act

By Asaf Shalev and Ella Rockart

At least 150 child sex abuse lawsuits were filed against Jewish institutions in New York over the past two years under a special law that temporarily lifted the statute of limitations barring old claims, according to an analysis of the New York court system by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

This look-back window for reviving allegations was created by the Child Victims Act of 2019 and it led to a dramatic wave of lawsuits that peaked just ahead of the Aug. 14 deadline. Survivors took advantage of the CVA window to file nearly 11,000 civil suits against individuals and institutions, according to data provided by the New York's Office of Court Administration.

Only a small fraction of the total involve Jewish institutions, but the number is high enough to reflect a widespread desire among Jewish survivors to hold officials accountable and expose policies and practices that allegedly enabled the abuse.

The number is also a function of the fact that New York is home to almost two million Jews, far more than any other state, and is where nearly all major Jewish institutions are headquartered. The bulk of cases involving Jewish institutions were filed in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

The lawsuits feature accusations across virtually every denomination of Judaism. The institutions named include summer camps, elementary and high schools, youth movements, community centers, providers of services for disabled people, foster care agencies and synagogues.

While some of the institutions targeted by new lawsuits appear not to have been associated previously with child sex abuse claims, many others have been the subject of allegations for some time.

There are at least 11 lawsuits, for example, against SAR Academy, a Modern Orthodox school in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, which has been embroiled for years by accusations that two former teachers had molested students in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the teachers, Stanley Rosenfeld, has admitted to molesting hundreds of boys throughout his life.

After the SAR Academy revelations, two other New York schools that had employed Rosenfeld, the Ramaz School in Manhattan and Westchester Day School in the northern suburbs, launched sexual abuse investigations. Both schools are now also subject to multiple CVA lawsuits.

In another high-profile case, Yeshiva University was accused of harboring child sex abusers at its affiliated high school in the 1950s through the '80s. Dozens of men came together to sue the institution in 2014, but their suit was rejected because of an expired statute of limitations. Now, Yeshiva University has been named in at least a dozen CVA cases.

Non-Jewish institutions that had previously been the subject of highly publicized abuse claims also saw many more filed during the lookback period. Thousands of lawsuits against Catholic clergy appeared, leading four of the eight dioceses in New York to file for bankruptcy protection over the last two years. Another thousand lawsuits name the Boy Scouts of America, whose record on child abuse has also been a focus of extensive news coverage.

Initially, the window to revive cases that had been barred because of how much time had elapsed since the alleged abuse was set to last one year and end in August 2020. But because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruption of the justice system, New York lawmakers extended the deadline for another year. They also changed the statute of limitations for future instances of abuse and made a variety of other amendments to lift

restrictions on legal actions by survivors.

While the CVA triggered a spike in public allegations, it's impossible to extrapolate from the data how prevalent child sexual abuse is in the Jewish community or particular Jewish movements. Experts say that in the Jewish community as well as the wider world sexual abuse is far more common than what appears in law enforcement statistics or the court record.

Trauma and feelings of shame combine to discourage survivors from coming forward. The skepticism baked into the rules and norms of the justice system is also a factor. Statutes of limitations can cause survivors to lose opportunities for recourse; the CVA offered an opportunity, but any survivors who filed lawsuits had to have known about the look-back window and felt compelled to use it.

Advocates for sexual abuse survivors in the Jewish community worked to raise awareness about the look-back period and watched with anticipation as lawsuits entered the New York court system ahead of the Aug. 14 deadline.

For Asher Lovy, who heads the survivor advocacy group Za'akah and lobbied lawmakers in support of the look-back window, learning of the final tally of cases elicited a mixed reaction.

"I feel two ways about it," Lovy said. "I am gratified many victims are availing themselves of the CVA, especially since I spent so many years fighting for its passage. But there remain a lot of abusers who are not going to be held to account. There are survivors who will have never known that CVA existed and those will never feel empowered to come forward."

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● NEWS

These New Yorkers Were Annoyed by Anti-Vaccine Holocaust Comparisons. So They Wrote a Song.

By Philissa Cramer

It was a quiet Shabbat afternoon when the frustration that had been building up inside Michal Schick spilled out in a song.

For months, Schick had been keeping a tally in her head — and sometimes on Twitter, where the New York City screenwriter is active — of pandemic-related Holocaust comparisons that, to her and many others, made no sense at all.

There were the people who said staying home made them feel like Anne Frank. The politicians comparing mask requirements to the Nazis' race laws. And, increasingly, the yellow stars worn by anti-vaccination activists.

Around the world, these images and ideas have alarmed Jews and others who don't understand how measures aimed at preserving health can be likened in any way to the Nazis' successful effort to murder 6 million Jews in the Holocaust. Antisemitism watchdogs including the Anti-Defamation League have called repeatedly for the analogies to stop, saying that they trivialize a tragedy of incomparable proportions.

Schick took a different approach. She scribbled down some lyrics and reached out to her friend Avishai Weinberger to ask if he knew anyone who played the ukulele.

"It's a more fun way to process it than just to be screaming in your head all the time," she said.

The result of their collaboration is "The Anti-Vaxxer's Lament," a two-minute song that pillories Holocaust

comparisons in the COVID-19 era. In a video posted this week, Weinberger's mother, a children's musician named Naomi Weinberger, strums an upbeat tune as he sings Schick's words, written from the perspective of someone who rejects vaccines.

"My life is like the Holocaust. I say this with great pride," one verse goes. "Cause public health and safety are the same as genocide."

Later: "Nazis had a problem with the Jewish folks existing. But ghetto life was nothing to the stuff that I'm resisting!"

Schick said she was inspired by "snarky internet songs" like the ones popularized by the comedy-folk duo Garfunkel and Oates, who went viral in 2009 when they satirized opposition to same-sex marriage.

Weinberger, a screenwriter who lives in Brooklyn, said he was reminded more of Tom Lehrer, the satirist whose songs included one in which Wernher von Braun, the Nazi rocket scientist who was brought to the United States, blithely muses about bombs falling.

"There's something to be said, I think, for if you're really angry, turning it into something where you get to be calm about it and someone else gets to be upset," Weinberger said. "We're totally unbothered, but we have opinions about the people we're singing about, and hopefully they're a little bothered by it."

The song is a deeply Jewish response to a disturbing trend, Weinberger said, and he doesn't expect it to change anyone's mind.

"When Jews have to deal with people who put them down, in whatever form it is, there's a long tradition of dealing with it via humor," he said. "The song isn't how to fix the problem. I think it's what you do when you're tired of having to fix the problem. It's more for us than for them."

According to family lore, Weinberger's paternal great-grandfather escaped the Nazis by entering a cafe in Germany, placing his coat on a chair as though he planned to keep the seat, and exiting through a side door that opened into French territory.

Naomi Weinberger, whose own father moved from Poland to Argentina at age 4, said she leapt at the chance

to accompany her son because of how clever she found Schick's lyrics and approach.

"Invoking the Holocaust is such an over-the-top thing to do. You can't meet it where it's coming from because it's so absurd," she said. "But you can respond by putting out something other than just an eye roll, which Michal brilliantly articulated. I was thrilled to be part of it."

So far, Schick and Weinberger say they've gotten only positive responses. "A handful of people have said it's been cathartic for them to watch, and I really appreciate that because it was cathartic to write," Schick said.

But even this week, the Holocaust comparisons appears to be accelerating, and spreading, as tensions over COVID-19 vaccines deepen in many places. A Republican lawmaker in Kentucky posted an image of a survivor's concentration camp tattoo to criticize vaccine requirements. Weinberger heard about someone in his own circle likening restaurant workers checking vaccine cards to Nazis. And Schick described how a member of a costume-focused YouTube community she's part of posted an anti-vaxx Anne Frank meme, then followed up with a tearful apology after facing fierce criticism.

"For me, [the problem] is seeing this kind of thinking bleed into people and places that you don't expect. It's not just seeing people with yellow star signs at rallies," Schick said. "It's this insidious reminder of the ignorance and baseline dehumanization that exists even in spheres where you think you can be comfortable."

Schick and Weinberger say that while their goal is for the absurdity of the analogies in their song to strike a chord with someone, they aren't necessarily holding out hope.

"An effort could be made to try to stop the tide of ignorant people who use our mass trauma," Weinberger said. "Maybe at the end of the day it'll work and maybe it won't. But one thing that will for sure work is helping us get through it."

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● NEWS

Shuls, Zooms and Nightclubs: Where to Do High Holiday Services in New York City in 2021

Our second annual (gulp) guide to safe and spiritual celebrations.

By Jewish Week Staff

No one expected a guide to virtual High Holiday services to become an annual thing. Last year, synagogues and other institutions had little choice but to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur remotely, in small "backyard" (or outdoor) minyans or under strict occupancy guidelines.

Now, with the surge of the COVID-19 Delta variant, rabbis and lay leaders are back to planning services that mark the holidays in meaningful ways while keeping congregants safe. Most synagogues and alternative institutions in New York are planning to have at least some in-person options; most are limited to their members, but we list some of the more welcoming and interesting options below.

And while few if any Orthodox synagogues will be using the technology that allows services to be streamed live, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and independent communities will once again offer streaming services via Zoom, YouTube, Facebook and other platforms.

All of these institutions have been working all summer to make their services, however and wherever they are held, authentic, powerful, uplifting -- and safe -- spiritual experiences. For our list of synagogues livestreaming services, please go to <https://rb.gy/2hrjqb>.

One exciting aspect of Jewish life in New York City is that there are pop-up efforts to offer new experiences all the time. That's true even during a pandemic. We've round-

ed up a few of the non-synagogue options for High Holiday worship here.

A MUSICAL SERVICE IN A BROOKLYN CHURCH: Rabbi Zach Fredman, who led the New Shul in the West Village until 2020, is launching a new enterprise called the Temenos Center for Art and Spirit. Its first major events will be High Holiday services held in Manhattan and Brooklyn, including Yom Kippur services in a historic Unitarian church in Brooklyn Heights. Expect ethereal music from Fredman's band, the Epichorus, as well as a heavy, and heady, dose of spiritual content, as Temenos promises "a home for ritual and creativity that honors the wild humanity of all people." Tickets, which are required along with proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID test, are available at a variety of price points. Visit <https://temenosnyc.com/high-holidays>.

A JAZZ SERVICE IN A NIGHTCLUB: Rabbi Steven Blane worked in synagogues for years, but over time he became disillusioned with traditional structures of American Jewish life. Now, he leads the Sim Shalom Jewish Universalist Online Synagogue, which bills itself as "liberal in thought and traditional in liturgy." Backed by a jazz quintet, Blane will be leading services at the Bitter End, the Greenwich Village nightclub, on the first day of Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur. For Kol Nidre and a prefast meal, the group will be meeting at Silvana, an Israeli restaurant in Harlem. Tickets range in price and are required for all services including on Zoom; the city's vaccination rules for nightclubs and restaurants will be observed. Visit <https://simshalom.com/high-holidays-2021>.

A CANTORIAL REUNION IN A BOWLING ALLEY: Starting a decade ago, a musician named Jeremiah Lockwood, the grandson of a noted Chicago cantor, began performing during High Holidays services held by the group Because Jewish. After a hiatus, Lockwood and his band, the Sway Machinery, are getting back together this year for services that will be streamed on Fans.com as well as accessible in person during Rosh Hashanah only, at Williamsburg's Brooklyn Bowl. Rabbi Daniel Brenner will serve the event's spiritual leader; on Yom Kippur, the Yiddish singer Anthony Russell will join the festivities. In-person tickets range from \$20 to \$50 per service. Visit <http://www.becausejewish.com>.

AN OUTDOOR SINGALONG IN BROOKLYN: Shir

Hamaalot is an independent minyan that, before the pandemic, met regularly in person in Brooklyn for traditional, egalitarian services rich in communal singing. In recent months, the minyan has held COVID-safe outdoor services several times, and it's planning in-person High Holidays services, too — potentially the only all-outdoor, not-on-Zoom-too non-Orthodox services in the area. Space is limited, so advance signup is required, and the group is asking anyone who attends to donate \$18 — and help lead services if possible, too. Visit <https://bit.ly/2Ym6LEi>

A 20S + 30S HIGH HOLIDAYS EXPERIENCE: Together with B'nai Jeshurun, the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan will welcome the New Year through song, prayer, social gatherings and mindfulness, including an inaugural 20s + 30s High Holidays experience offered in person. The JCC is also offering in-person (with limited seating, at JCC Harlem) and livestreamed services for the High Holidays this year. For more info and to register, visit <https://bit.ly/3DLryS2>.

A FAMILY SERVICE ON THE ROOF: Rebecca Schoffer, director of Jewish Family Engagement at the 92nd Street Y, will lead in-person family services on the Y's Penthouse Rooftop (<https://bit.ly/3DFFkFv>). The 92Y is also offering online services free of charge this year, led by Rabbi Elka Abrahamson and cantorial soloist Elana Arian. Visit <https://bit.ly/3DDANUh>.

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● REMEMBERING

Remembering Joshua Mitnick, an Israel Reporter with a Soft Touch in a Harsh Region

A regular contributor for the Jewish Week was known for his insight and empathy.

By Dina Kraft

TEL AVIV -- On a blistering summer day a few years ago, journalist Joshua Mitnick and his Palestinian translator, Nuha Musleh, were out reporting a story about an East Jerusalem village. The Palestinian residents were protesting the Israeli security barrier that was being built there, cutting them off from the rest of the city.

The two marched for several kilometers alongside the villagers. Musleh, refraining from both food and water because it was the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, urged Mitnick to drink water, but he demurred, saying, "No, you are fasting and we are working together so I'll do the same as you."

"I'll never forget that," Musleh said.

Mitnick, a journalist who covered the Israeli-Palestinian story for over two decades with the deep insight, knowledge and empathy of someone who knew and lived its intricacies, died Saturday in Tel Aviv. He was 50.

The cause was a rare and aggressive form of lymphoma.

What set Josh apart, according to colleagues and friends (including this writer) was his kind, unassuming nature — he was there to listen, to understand what was happening on the ground and then translate it to the outside world, not to bolster his own ego or be abrasive.

He also had a keen eye not just for reporting but for analy-

sis, rooted in his thoughtful study of the societies covered.

Mitnick grew up in Highland Park, New Jersey, and developed his journalism skills as managing editor of The Michigan Daily when he was a student at the University of Michigan. He moved to Israel in 1997.

Mitnick began his journalism career in Israel writing for Bloomberg News, covering financial stories. But itching to tell the broader political story, he became a correspondent for a series of top-tier American publications including The Christian Science Monitor, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times and Foreign Policy.

For many years he also wrote for The New York Jewish Week.

"Josh and I worked together for years, and week after week he provided me and our readers with a crash course in the complexities of modern Israel," said Robert Goldblum, the longtime managing editor of The Jewish Week. "His stories had the texture and close-to-the-ground feeling that only a writer with a keen eye for detail — and a sense for the complicated arc of Israeli history — could deliver."

Goldblum remembered a story Mitnick wrote in 2015 about a grocery store — "more boxy warehouse than fancy market," Mitnick wrote — serving Jews and Arabs near the Etzion bloc of settlements outside of Jerusalem.

"When Josh traveled there, a wave of terrorist attacks targeted the intersection," Goldblum recalled. "But he found hope in the Israeli and Palestinian employees of the market who worked side by side at the perilous junction. Given all that Josh experienced during his years covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it must have been a hard-won hope. I cherished our working relationship, and I'll miss him."

"Chronicling the unfolding history of a region with so many conflicting passions and challenges, Josh wrote with a depth of understanding and compassion that highlighted the humanity of his subjects," said Amelia Newcomb, managing editor of The Christian Science Monitor. "In so doing he furthered the ecumenical goal of the Monitor, which at its core is one of tikkun olam, repairing the world. We are so grateful for Joshua Mitnick's work, and for him."

“Josh was the nicest journalist I know,” said Yossi Klein Halevi, the American-born Israeli author and journalist. “It’s true that the competition isn’t stiff. We are not known as a nice profession. We are a good profession, but not nice.”

Mitnick sought quotes from Halevi, a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, on Israeli elections, religious pluralism and the rise of the nationalist right.

“Josh was both good and gracious and considerate and when he would ask a question it would be in an almost diffident matter, as if he was reluctant to intrude on your time,” said Halevi. “But the paradox of Josh is after I had given him the quote, he wanted to keep talking. Josh wanted the context. Josh wanted to understand what brought me to that opinion and so it was more a learning experience for him than just an interview.”

Daniel Estrin, NPR’s Jerusalem correspondent, considers himself a student of Josh’s work, which ranged from stories on the politics of Israeli soccer and Palestinian power struggles to the battle for Israeli democracy and the lives of haredi Orthodox Jews.

“Josh set the gold standard in crisp writing, sharp analysis, and the grit and humor it takes to stick out our vocation, and passion. His insightful work made me a jealous admirer,” said Estrin. “I was privileged in recent months to fully appreciate the example he and his family have set in living meaningful and caring lives here, with all of its complexities. Josh saw the real Israel, the real Palestine, and pursued it as a story worth telling deeply. I hope to carry the Josh Mitnick method with me in my own work.”

One of the people Mitnick worked with most closely over the years was Musleh, a Palestinian “fixer” who helped arrange interviews and translate for him during his many reporting trips in the West Bank.

Musleh says she was always struck by Mitnick’s empathy to those he interviewed, from grieving families to those who had just lost their homes to a house demolition.

“It was very easy for me to bring him to any setting because I know he’s a man of values,” she said.

Musleh described their relationship as one where they both taught and mentored one another on the inner workings of their respective societies.

“He was also my guide inside Israel. He was my eyes and ears if I ever needed any help in Jaffa or Tel Aviv,” said Musleh.

Their professional relationship became a friendship. Mitnick would sometimes bring his wife Lesley Benedikt and their three children for festive meals at Musleh’s home. She was taken by how he encouraged his children to learn about Muslim and Arab tradition and culture.

Mitnick’s interests were vast, but he cultivated a special love for good food. He would often end a day of reporting in the West Bank in search of his favorite masabacha — hummus with tahini, lemon, olive oil and garlic.

He loved music — especially jazz and hip-hop — and he had a special expertise in Israeli music. Often, talk of politics would turn to shared love of music with the experts he was interviewing for an analysis piece.

Mitnick’s love of the land is evident in a scroll through his Instagram feed, a visual TripTik of the region that ranged from views of the Sea of Galilee to the starting line in Bethlehem of the first marathon in the West Bank.

Weekends were for exploring with his family and friends, often on hikes in Israel’s verdant northern forests.

Mitnick was buried Sunday in the hills of Tivon, a town in the foothills of the Lower Galilee. It’s the place where he first fell in love with Israel as a recent college graduate.

Mitnick is survived by Benedikt and their three children, Tal, Maayan and Eli; his parents Joan and Stuart Mitnick; and sisters Carrie Mitnick and Julie Leber. He is also survived by his grandmother, Florence Thaler.

His wife Lesley paid tribute to him saying, “Life with you has always been romantic, curious, inspired and inspiring, and down to the basics. From the minute I began to love you, all we had to do was open the windows and put on some tunes, and all was good: A winter beach day, our millionth Tel Aviv sunset, the smells and sounds of every new and old place we went, those were our blue skies. Hosting friends, family at our apartment, parties in the old days, dinners and brunches more recently, biking around town, taking the kids to the neighborhood park, appreciating the quiet of Friday afternoon/evening in Tel Aviv, making the best of friends together, those were our sunny days.”

● OPINION

Has Israel Let You Down? Its Minister of Diaspora Affairs Wants You to Talk About It Over the High Holidays.

By Nachman Shai

To the rabbis and religious leaders putting the finishing touches to your High Holiday sermons, I'd like to make a suggestion: Use this Jewish New Year to talk about Israel from the pulpit.

And not just Israel. Talk about the bonds between us, as a Jewish people, about our shared past and imagined future. Talk about the challenges, but also the opportunities.

Share with your congregants that we in Israel are slowly but surely taking responsibility for our side of the relationship in a way that you have never seen, that we realize we have disappointed you and are doing teshuvah, repentance, with a sincere desire to make things right in the future. Share with them that this new government is committed to bringing back a Kotel Compromise — that is, formalizing an egalitarian prayer section at the Western Wall. It is committed to learning and understanding how our actions impact your communities. Tell them that we believe in you, and that we are ready for both your critique and your ideas.

Most importantly, share with your communities that Israel desires to be your partner, to not let our politics or diverse identities serve as barriers to our fundamental belief that we are a people with a common fate and destiny.

I know this message might not be easy to convey. I've lived long enough to see how Israel has turned from a point of pride to tension. And it's understandable. Generations built their Judaism around the ideal of Israel and the promise of peace as the focal point of Jewish

identity and Zionist hope. So when Israel disappoints, organized Jewish frameworks can also disappoint, intensifying political divides within communities, especially among the rising generation. So why would a rabbi waste his or her precious annual moment with a quiet audience on a subject that increasingly causes more controversy than connection?

I believe the answer is simple. Despite the very significant challenges that stand between us, the truth is that we need each other, and I am convinced ultimately want to be in relationship with each other.

The last year highlighted just how intertwined we are as a people, when Israel's summer military operation in Gaza led not only to a frightening rise in antisemitism but significant stress and frustration within communities. It is becoming increasingly imperative for us to work together to ensure ongoing safety, security and communal cohesion.

We also still have the ability to bring out the best in each other. Israel needs your clarity and backbone to empower us to make the bold decisions that will ensure our continuity as both a Jewish and democratic state. We need your justice-minded values to assure Israelis that moving toward two states for two peoples is the only solution, both for our security and our soul. We have room to be inspired by your models of pluralism and diversity, and of organized Jewish communal life within our own religious practice.

On the other end, Israel continues to be the proud manifestation of the Jewish people's 2,000-year-old-dream. Israel — the state, the land and its people — with all of its complexities, deserves to remain a central component of Jewish identity-building and experiences around the world.

Finally, you and I have a mutual mission to elevate not only our own people but the entire world through the development of shared projects on climate change as well as biomedical and technological innovation.

But before we can make progress toward true peace, revitalized pluralism in Israel and the next great global initiative, we must begin with a basic conversation about peoplehood — who we are, what are our common values and language. You have the opportunity to lead

your communities with these questions.

As Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan wrote, “The individual Jew who regards this world as the scene of salvation depends upon the Jewish people to help [them] achieve it. For that reason, [they] must be able to feel that in investing the best part of [themselves] in the Jewish people, [they are] investing in something that has a worthwhile future, and thereby achieving an earthly immortality.”

From the pulpit, let us wrestle with these ideas and imagine this worthwhile future together.

Nachman Shai is Israel's Minister of Diaspora Affairs.

● OPINION

Rabbis Are Struggling to Protect Jews' Physical and Spiritual Health. They Deserve Support, Not Shame.

By Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein

Over the past year, I have led efforts to teach, guide and coach rabbis and other clergy of every Jewish denomination. We have worked with over 500 individual members of the clergy, serving hundreds of thousands of people since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

So let me say this to my dear clergy colleagues: As we celebrate another High Holiday season under the shadow of the pandemic, I know that there is nothing you need more than support in making (or when prevented from making) impossible decisions about vaccinations, masks, social distancing and the integrity of worship.

Which is why I am baffled as to why some would add to your burden with irresponsible, pain-inducing criticism that could only worsen the challenge, trauma and

moral injury that our clergy are experiencing at this moment, and which I spend all of my professional time trying to lessen.

I agree that mitigating all risk at the expense of our Jewish way of life is untenable, and there are certainly appropriate ways to debate safety measures during a public health crisis. Yet second-guessing rabbis like you, as you work overtime to protect the physical safety while meeting the spiritual and communal needs of your communities in ever-changing ways, is not one of them.

Those of us actually paying attention have seen your tremendous creativity and labor to ensure that our people have meaningful spiritual and communal ways to learn, to observe and to be connected to Torah and each other, even as COVID has precluded or restricted large in-person gatherings. I see you toiling to create innovative outdoor or remote opportunities for our unvaccinated children to engage in Jewish learning and living, and to feel a sense of belonging. I see you teaching congregants to lead backyard minyans; managing complicated technology to lead interactive remote services and study groups; introducing walking meditations and Torah treks and prayerful hikes and countless other new ways of helping our people to engage with each other and practice our traditions while reducing health risks.

I hear your trauma at having buried the many older members of your shul who have died miserably alone this year. I know that when you gather again, the seats of so many “regulars” will be tragically empty. I understand your fear that the immunocompromised and younger, unvaccinated members may be endangered by the high risk that in-person gatherings can pose this year. I know that this informs your decisions as the Delta variant wreaks havoc, especially but not only when unvaccinated people gather.

I listen to you agonize as you balance the calls for individual choice and/or trust from some in your community with your desire to have proof of vaccine and/or testing and mask mandates to protect the vulnerable, especially in locations where this is culturally unacceptable (and often the same places where hospitals are now failing under the burden of illness).

You tell me about working with your professional colleagues, lay leaders and local experts as you carefully

enact decision trees informed by Jewish values, COVID-era rabbinic opinions and public health experts. Many of your communities model remarkable shared leadership as clergy, boards and medical advisors together make decisions carefully. Others of you suffer, having to carry out and even be blamed for decisions that you fear are dangerous. With every change, we see you creating backups to backups, even as it means having to do twice the work, ignoring your exhaustion and pastoring to flocks who require your help as they, too, deal with their justified angst.

And I know that you are experiencing moral injury and burnout from this reality, and that you also fear for your own and your family's health while also feeling a loss of spiritual connection as a result of your inability to pray in groups, to sing with full voice or to facilitate the mitzvah observances, simcha celebrations, prayer obligations and mourning rituals that give your own life meaning.

Life under COVID is full of difficult calls, weighing physical well-being against mental health; our children's education against the threat of an insidious virus; the risks of gathering or singing in our beloved sanctuaries versus the atrophying of our communities and our souls. No one wants to needlessly undermine centuries of tradition and our religious choices and obligations.

But you, our clergy, know that preserving life is the paramount value of the Torah, and that our tradition is rife with examples of moderating our observances to protect our well-being. You have contributed to and read the myriad rabbinic opinions offering halachic and ethical ways to adapt beloved customs for this emergency situation. You do not need to be cut off at the knees while you run this ultra-marathon, all the while carrying the heavy weight of existential Jewish decisions. Your detractors may be loud, but I hear the quiet cheers of the many who want only to offer you water as you continue the race.

My dear colleagues, please know: You are enough. You are doing enough. You can and you must make decisions that are the best and safest you can make, to preserve the lives and the health of your beloved members (and yourselves). Ignore the naysayers, especially those simply looking for clickbait who care not for your health or well-being. I pray that those who see how hard you are working will raise their voices and bolster you with

love. With all of the hugs, love and hope for your spiritual renewal.

Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein is executive director of the Center for Rabbinic Innovation, a project of the Office of Innovation.

● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT NITZAVIM

How to Take Control After a Difficult Year

Rosh Hashanah is a time to make new choices, and repair old relationships.

By Rabbi Rachel Ain

I have been thinking a lot about the concept of return, especially this year. In just a few days, many people will return to synagogues, or other prayer gatherings, in person, perhaps for the first time in over 18 months. There will be trepidation, excitement, anticipation and nervousness, all emotions that are exactly normal for this time of year, a time where we are supposed to engage in a spiritual return, known as teshuvah.

In this week's Torah reading, Nitzavim, we realize that teshuvah begins now. We read in Deut. 29:9-14:

You stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, Your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water; That you should enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into God's oath, which Adonai your God makes with you this day.

What does it mean to read these lines, just a few days before the High Holidays?

First, I would suggest that engaging in Jewish life overall, and spiritual teshuvah in particular, is in the reach of all of us. It isn't just for those who have been active Jewishly, throughout the year. It is for anyone who is able and willing to return (physically or virtually) and re-enter, in a myriad of ways, but certainly spiritually to a life of mean-

ing, substance, and fulfillment.

Each of us is given this opportunity every year because there is always more ways to learn, always more ways to grow. It also means that Jewish communities must be open to those who are spiritual seekers, trying to find a path to engaging in Jewish life, even if it isn't always so clear how someone might arrive at that moment.

No one is expected to do this on their own. Rabbi Nach Jaffe, the Lekhivitzer rebbe, taught that “all that the Creator demands is that a person make a beginning in the right direction; thereafter, God will aid him/her to continue on the right path.”

So how does that happen? To me, it happens with the help of the community. In Deut. 13:5, it says, “After the Lord your God shall you walk.” One of my favorite teachings in the Talmud asks what this verse means. It answers by suggesting all the ways we can follow in divine ways:

Just as God clothes the naked, as it is written: “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21), so too, should you clothe the naked. [Just as] the Lord “appeared unto [Abraham] by the terebinths of Mamre” (Genesis 18:1), so too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, consoles mourners, as it is written: “And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son” (Genesis 25:11), so too, should you console mourners. (Sotah 14a)

Each of us should play a role in helping one another on life's path and on a journey of teshuvah. We should open our hearts as others do as well. We should look for the good in people. We should give people the benefit of the doubt, and if done sincerely, we should give people the opportunity to seek forgiveness from us.

We should, in short, walk in the ways of God.

And as Maimonides teaches in the Laws of Teshuvah, “Don't doubt that we human beings have the capacity to choose good over evil. For as Moses said, ‘See, I set before you this day life and good, death and evil.... I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life — so that you and your children after you will live.’” (Deut. 30:15, 19)

This has been a hard year. Much has been out of our control. And yet, there are things that we can manage, choices we can make, relationships we can repair. As Dr. Arnold Eisen, the former chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, wrote:

Moses is aware that much remains beyond our control of individuals. We have to play the cards we are dealt, as they say. We cannot change the past. But there is so much we can change, so much we do control, and in that immense space of possibility — like a Land beyond a narrow river — lies the chance for a life well lived, a person who receives and bestows blessing, a community that practices goodness and mitigates suffering.

So as we enter this new year, and return to what we hope a meaningful, healthy, complete life can be, may we do it with the strength to embark on this journey ahead with confidence and humility, strength and support, love and compassion, to encounter what we need to as we re-enter, together.

Rabbi Rachel Ain is rabbi of Sutton Place Synagogue.

● MUSINGS

Listen to This!

By David Wolpe

The mitzvah is not to blow the shofar, but to listen to it. That may be because only one person can blow and many listen, but I would like to think that it is teaching the Jewish version of why we have one mouth but two ears. Because as much as we need to say things, we need to hear things even more.

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Elul 26, 5781 | Friday, September 3, 2021

- **Light candles at:** 7:07 p.m.

Elul 27, 5781 | Saturday, September 4, 2021

- **Torah reading:** Nitzavim, Deuteronomy 29:9–30:20
- **Haftarah:** Isaiah 61:10–63:9
- **Shabbat ends:** 8:04 p.m.

We live in a culture that prizes self-expression. There are classes in creative writing, journaling, speaking, all the ways in which we can bring forth what is inside of us. But few and far between are those who instruct us in how to listen. The shofar reminds us that the greatest lessons have already been taught, the wisdom exists in the world, and the trick is not to reinvent but to discover. And we discover best by listening.

So as we listen to the shofar this year, may it be a spur to listening. The world offers a symphony of sounds and many wonderful words. Sh'ma — hear them, O Israel.

*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.*

● TRADITION

Why a High Holidays Prayer Book Is Still Going Strong After 70 Years

By Yosef Lindell

When a local Orthodox synagogue asked me to lead Yom Kippur prayers six years ago, one aspect of the request stood out: Was I comfortable using the “High Holyday Prayer Book” translated and edited by Philip Birnbaum?

The archaic spelling of “Holyday” is a tipoff to the book’s longevity. First published in 1951 by the Hebrew Publishing Company, this Hebrew-English prayer book, or machzor, has been used by multiple generations of worshippers in Orthodox and, to a lesser extent, Conservative synagogues. It is the prayer book I used as a child; my earliest High Holidays memories include counting the number of pages in the Birnbaum machzor until services would end.

In the ensuing years, a bounty of new translations has appeared, with modern typefaces, helpful commen-

tary, user-friendly language and supplemental readings meant to “open doors” into prayer for the uninitiated or easily distracted.

Yet come Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I will lead the services from a Birnbaum covered in brown paper and penciled notations of what to say and what to skip. Remarkably, 70 years after its publication, the Birnbaum Machzor is still here, outlasting its publisher, author and even its own copyright. On the occasion of its anniversary, we ought to consider its remarkable longevity and what its future might hold.

Philip (or Paltiel in Hebrew) Birnbaum immigrated to the United States from Poland in 1923 at the age of 19. While teaching Hebrew school in Birmingham, Alabama, he obtained an undergraduate education at the Southern Baptist-affiliated Howard College (now Samford University). After moving to the East Coast, he received his doctorate in Jewish history from Dropsie College in Philadelphia in 1942.

Throughout his career, Birnbaum forged connections with rabbis and academics affiliated with both the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Orthodox Yeshiva University. In 1944, the Hebrew Publishing Company — a fixture on the Lower East Side of Manhattan that printed everything from prayer books to greeting cards to Yiddish translations of Jules Verne — published his abridged version of “Mishneh Torah,” Maimonides’ seminal code of Jewish law. Given the success of the volume, the company’s president asked Birnbaum to translate the siddur, or daily prayer book.

Birnbaum’s edition of the siddur, first published in 1949, outsold every other English translation and turned Birnbaum into a household name among Orthodox synagogue-goers. His 1951 machzor had a similar trajectory, rapidly becoming a High Holidays mainstay. In the 1960s, Birnbaum’s publisher reported that he saw the machzor on the shelf in faraway Hong Kong and Tokyo

A few years ago, when my grandfather gave me a small 1903 machzor that had been in the family, I began to understand the appeal of the Birnbaum machzor. The 1903 prayer book, with the unwieldy name “Form of Prayers for the Day of Atonement,” is hardly usable. It includes a hodgepodge of Hebrew and Yiddish instructions and inconsistently sized texts that sometimes

lack vowels. Its head-scratching English rendition of the “Song of Glory” (Shir HaKavod or Anim Zemirot) begins, “Sweet hymns I will sing, and songs will I indite, for unto thee my soul panteth.”

To make matters worse, it sent me flipping frantically back and forth searching for the next prayer to say.

Birnbaum’s introduction to his translation speaks directly to my experience with the 1903 machzor and its ilk.

“The worshipper is not called upon to search from page to page and to commute from reference to reference,” he wrote about his own work. Birnbaum lamented the “gross carelessness” of earlier machzorim that included pages “broken up by several type sizes which have a confusing effect on the eyes of the reader” and translations that were “a vast jungle of words from which a clear idea only rarely emerges.”

Not all of Birnbaum’s predecessors were guilty of these faults. The 1904 British machzor translated by Arthur Davis and Herbert Adler, which also was used in the United States, was well-organized and exquisitely translated. Yet it came in three hefty volumes and still suffered from a generous dose of what Birnbaum derided as “Bible English.” To a lesser extent, these archaisms also plagued the one-volume machzor published by Morris Silverman in 1939 and which for decades was the official machzor of the Conservative movement.

The Birnbaum machzor took hold because it outshone its competition, but its staying power can be explained by simple economics. Once a synagogue purchased copies for its congregants, switching to a different book was an expensive proposition. Further, the machzor is used only a few times a year, so it wears out at a fraction of the rate of a Shabbat prayer book or synagogue Bible.

Also, unlike much of its competition, the one-volume Birnbaum machzor includes the services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. While the ArtScroll daily siddur, published in 1984 by Mesorah Publications, quickly replaced the Birnbaum siddur in a vast number of Orthodox congregations, the ArtScroll machzor, with separate volumes for Rosh Hashanah (1985) and Yom Kippur (1986), did not meet with quite the same success. I suspect that a number of congregations could not justify the expense of purchasing so many new books when their Birnbaums were holding up just fine.

Indeed, when Dr. Birnbaum died in 1988, heralded in The New York Times as “the most obscure bestselling author,” his machzor was still going strong. The Hebrew Publishing Company continued to reprint it into the mid-1990s. The publisher ceased to exist sometime around the turn of the 21st century and the machzor’s copyright was not renewed. It is now in the public domain and can be perused online. What other book enjoys such widespread popularity 25 years after going out of print?

Yet without much chance of being reprinted, the machzor’s reign may at last be drawing to a close. Birnbaum’s frequent use of “thee” and “thou” sounds archaic and off-putting. Rabbi David Wolkenfeld of Anshe Sholom B’nai Israel in Chicago put it well when he wrote in 2016 that the Birnbaum prayer books “were state of the art when they were first published and have been sanctified by the prayers of three generations of worshippers,” but the translation “now appears stilted.” And unlike more recent translations, “there is virtually no commentary that might help the novice or veteran worshipper find deeper meaning in the unfamiliar holiday prayers.”

Extensive commentary and contemporary readings for the “novice or veteran worshiper” are a signature of newer translations like “Mahzor Lev Shalem” (2010), which has replaced Birnbaum, Silverman and the 1972 Jules Harlow machzor in Conservative synagogues within the past few years. The Orthodox Koren Publishers at last released a one-volume machzor in 2018, with commentary by the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. I suspect many Orthodox holdouts will abandon the Birnbaum for the Koren sooner or later. Some have already begun.

But although congregants may of course opt to bring a different machzor, there’s been no official change yet at the synagogue where I will again lead the services this year.

“For nearly two thousand years,” Birnbaum wrote in the machzor’s introduction, “the Hebrew prayers have helped to keep the Jews alive, saving them from losing their language and identity.”

Indeed, on the Days of Judgment, when we contemplate a turbulent past and an uncertain future, the prayer book is a stable text to which we can attach our hopes, dreams and aspirations. But the prayers are also complex and confusing, even to the initiated. For 70 years — indeed, for a lifetime — the Birnbaum machzor has

been a sure-footed guide.

And that's perhaps another reason why it has lasted as long as it has. When everything around us is changing so rapidly, we often find solace in those things that stay the same. Just as there are certain tunes we associate with the Days of Awe, there are also certain books. For many, the Birnbaum machzor has long been among them.

So this year, I will take comfort in the venerable book whose tearstained pages have weathered tragedy, war and illness as I pray for the people of this fractured world to be inscribed in the Book of Life.

Yoself Lindell is a lawyer and writer living in Silver Spring, Maryland. He is an editor of the Lehrhaus and his work has been published in the Atlantic, the Forward, and Moment Magazine, among other places. His website is yoseflindell.wordpress.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 6 | 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Free

10Q: 10 Days. 10 Questions – Rosh Hashanah + Yom Kippur

Answer one question per day in your own secret online 10Q space. At the end of the ten days, hit a magic button and send your answers to the secure online 10Q vault for safekeeping.

One year later, the vault will open and your answers will wing their way back to your email inbox for private reflection. If you want to keep them secret, perfect. You can also choose to share any of them, anonymously or with attribution, with the wider 10Q community. Next year, if you so desire, the whole process begins again. Make your answers serious. Silly. Salacious. However you like. It's your 10Q.

Sign up at <https://bit.ly/2Wg2pO4>

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 6 | 9:30 a.m. Free

Shofar Around the World

Listen to the blast of the shofar from people all over the world. The shofar blowing will stream on My Jewish Learning's Facebook every morning during the month of Elul, until Rosh Hashanah.

Watch at <http://fb.com/myjewishlearning/live>

September 9 | 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. Free

Book Talk: Women, History and “The Weight of Ink”

Join us for a discussion with acclaimed author Rachel Kadish about her novel “The Weight of Ink” — a literary page-turner about two women living centuries apart.

Register at <https://bit.ly/2WqmEZQ>

September 10 | 7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. \$18

“This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared”

In 2003, Rabbi Alan Lew published “This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared: The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation,” which outlines the path from terror to acceptance, confusion to clarity, doubt to belief, and from complacency to awe in the period leading up to the High Holidays. Weaving together Torah readings, Buddhist parables, Jewish fables, and stories from Dr. Lew's life, he draws on ancient rituals to awaken our souls and transform us. With Rabbi Nora, take a deep dive into the book as you embark on your own journey during the Days of Awe. You'll have the opportunity to reflect on the book's themes and discuss how they relate to your own experiences.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3sYR5lu>