

The New York Jewish Week/end

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Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett walks back to his hotel after attending services for Shemini Atzeret at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in Manhattan, Sept. 27, 2021. (Alexi Rosenfeld/Getty Images)

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● NEWS

'I Love New York a Lot': Naftali Bennett Spends Jewish Holiday at Upper East Side Synagogue

By Shira Hanau

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had a homecoming of sorts on Manhattan's Upper East Side Monday evening.

Observing the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, the final holiday of the Jewish fall festivals, Bennett visited Kehilath Jeshurun, the Orthodox synagogue he and his wife Galit attended when they lived in the neighborhood in the early 2000s.

The prime minister had traveled to New York to address the United Nations' General Assembly on Monday morning, leaving him without enough time to travel back to Israel before the start of the holiday. Bennett, who is Orthodox, does not travel on Jewish holidays or on Shabbat.

Bennett addressed the congregation during a short break in the services and reportedly recounted the story of how the synagogue originally attracted him and his wife — with the promise of free food after services. Speaking with journalists a few hours earlier, Bennett recalled his years in New York fondly. “I love New York a lot,” he said, according to the Jerusalem Post.

After the Monday night service, Bennett walked the mile-plus trek back to his hotel, accompanied by a motorcade.

This was not the first time Bennett had to extend a trip in the United States because he could not travel back to Israel without violating a Jewish holiday. Bennett had to remain in Washington, D.C. for a Shabbat in August after deadly attacks on U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan delayed a planned meeting with President Joe Biden, leaving him without enough time to travel back to Israel.

● NEWS

Israeli PM to American Jewish Leaders: ‘We Have to Redesign Our Relationship’

By Ben Sales

NEW YORK (JTA) — The first thing Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said, facing a room full of the leaders of the American Jewish community: “I wish my mom were here.”

The son of American immigrants to Israel, Bennett, like his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu, speaks a fluent, nearly accentless English, and spent years living in the United States as both a child and an adult.

But in other crucial ways, Bennett sounded different from Netanyahu in his first public address to American Jewish leaders as prime minister. The speech, delivered in Manhattan a couple hours after he addressed the United Nations, was given to dozens of heads of the Jew-

ish federation system, leading rabbis and other organizational bigwigs. It was the first time many of them had seen each other since the start of the pandemic.

They received him warmly. In recent years, the relationship between Netanyahu and major American Jewish groups had soured, particularly after he froze an agreement to expand a non-Orthodox prayer space at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 2017. A month before Netanyahu left office, one of his closest aides said at an Israeli conference that Israel “should be spending a lot more time doing outreach to evangelical Christians than you would do to Jews.”

Bennett struck a different tone. Just like he did at the U.N. earlier on Monday, Israel’s current prime minister drew a contrast in style from his predecessor without mentioning his name. He talked about how much Israel could learn from American Jews, and how important it was for the two poles of the Jewish community to have a mutually respectful conversation.

“You have our back, and it just means a lot,” he said. He added later, “It doesn’t mean we’re going to agree on everything. We’re not. But we’re going to talk to each other and we’re going to listen to each other.”

He also suggested that Israel and American Jewry should enter a new era. For decades, American Jews gave tens of millions of dollars to support Israel’s development. Now, Bennett said, Israel is doing fine on its own and should move beyond acting just as a refuge for persecuted Jews.

“Since the inception of Israel, and actually it predates the inception of Israel, Israel has been the project of the Jewish people, but we’re doing OK,” he said, citing Israel’s economy and tech sector. “Now, we have to redesign our relationship.”

What that might look like in practice remained vague. Bennett didn’t make any concrete promises when it came to enshrining religious pluralism in Israeli policy, an issue that has historically been important to the people he was addressing. He hit the same notes on Iran as Netanyahu, vowing to prevent it from obtaining a nuclear bomb and saying Israel “will not outsource our security to anyone, even to our best friends.”

In addition, as in his speech at the U.N., he didn’t discuss

the Palestinians, and is on record, over and over, opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state, which most American Jews support.

And it was clear that Israel is worried about its standing in the U.S. Both Bennett and Israel's U.N. ambassador, Gilad Erdan, mentioned the attempt by a handful of progressive Congress members to block additional funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system (it ended up passing the House of Representatives by a vote of 420-9, with two members voting "present").

While Bennett said that the episode was "telling" and didn't elaborate on the flap, Erdan was much harsher, saying that the Congress members who opposed Iron Dome were "either ignorant or antisemitic."

For the most part, Bennett seemed happy to forgo policy discussions in favor of a charm offensive. He sought points of commonality with the crowd, talking about everything from how his mom couldn't find American cereal when she moved to Israel to how he was in New York City on 9/11. At the end of the speech, he repeated an anecdote about Israeli politeness (or lack thereof) that had also drawn a laugh from an American audience in Tel Aviv in 2012, at the beginning of his political career.

If he wanted to charm the crowd, it appeared to work. When he ended the speech by saying "I love you," he got a standing ovation.

● NEWS

The Vast Majority of Progressives Overwhelmingly Backed Iron Dome Funding — But With a Caveat

By Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON — After the controversy last week surrounding a progressive push to block extra Iron Dome

anti-missile funding for Israel, the final vote to pass it was lopsided: 420-9.

And in the end, most progressives backed it: Of the 95 members of the Democrats' progressive caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives, 85 voted yes.

At first glance, that resounding progressive "yes" to the \$1 billion in additional funding to replenish the system's batteries — depleted from the latest Gaza conflict in May — would seem to put to rest the narrative that the Democratic Party's largest caucus was discarding pro-Israel tradition.

But last week did mark a significant change: the way the funding was ultimately approved, in addition to statements from some of the progressive caucus members who voted yes, made clear that from now on, Israel can no longer expect a blank check for defense assistance, at least from progressives.

Last week the progressive caucus forced Democratic leadership to pull out the \$1 billion from an unrelated emergency government funding bill that came before Congress on Sept. 21.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus who led the push to separate the Iron Dome funding from the larger spending bill, said it was absurd to shove through such an amount of money without first debating its merits.

"That just isn't the way things work around here," she told CNN the following day, after the House passed the spending bill, sans Iron Dome. "There was no discussion about it."

After the critique, Democratic leadership moved quickly. There was a debate last Thursday, and it seemed to have been persuasive: Jayapal was among those who voted yes, and so were some of Israel's toughest critics in the progressive caucus, among them Mark Pocan of Wisconsin, Betty McCollum of Minnesota and Jamaal Bowman of New York.

Bowman told Bloomberg News that his problem with the original effort to approve the Iron Dome funding had nothing to do with Israel and everything to do with the rush to get it voted on without traditional debate.

"It's not about Israel, it's about, once again, leadership,

throwing something on our table last minute and expecting us to decide in five minutes what to do with it, that's the bigger problem," he said.

The eight Democrats who voted against funding, and the two who voted "present," got plenty of political and media attention — Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's lengthy and anguished explanation of her "present" vote late Friday made many headlines, in part because of the tears she admitted to shedding on the House floor. Republicans in Congress tried to paint them as the true face of the Democratic Party (a single Republican, Thomas Massie of Kentucky, was among the small group that voted no on the final funding bill).

But many of the progressives who spoke during the debate were reportedly unequivocal in agreeing with their more moderate colleagues that the Iron Dome was purely a defensive measure, and deserves support because it saved lives.

"The legislation before us ensures that Israel can fully defend all its citizens, a necessary condition for lasting peace," said Rep. DeLauro, D-Conn., the progressive who is the chairwoman of the House's most powerful committee, Appropriations, in remarks reported by the Foundation for Middle East Peace.

Still, while Iron Dome may have been an easy "yes," progressives otherwise made clear that the days of unquestioning approval of Israel's defense requests were over.

Just hours before the vote Thursday, Rep. Andy Levin, D-Mich., convened a press conference outside the Capitol to announce a bill that would enshrine the two-state outcome as U.S. policy. But it includes restrictions on how Israel could spend U.S. funding, with explicit bans on spending on West Bank settlements.

"The bill makes clear that assistance to help Israel to address its very real security challenges should continue at not one dollar less, but it cannot be used in a manner that violates internationally recognized human rights, or for activities that perpetuate the occupation or enable de facto annexation" of parts of the West Bank," said Levin, who is Jewish.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency asked the five co-sponsors present at the press conference whether they planned to vote for the Iron Dome funding, and each

said yes.

Rep. Sara Jacobs, D-Calif., who is Jewish, underscored the defensive nature of the antimissile system in explaining her vote.

"I'll be voting for it; I think what this bill that we're talking about calls for is the legitimate use of our support for the security of Israel, and that's what Iron Dome does," she said. "And it's time for a new chapter and a new approach, where we're making sure that this defensive equipment is used in furthering that."

● NEWS

The Last Jew of Afghanistan Grants Wife Divorce and Wants to Come to Queens

Zebulon Simantov left the country after the Taliban takeover with help from a Brooklyn rabbi.

By Ben Sales

Zebulon Simantov, who was the last Jew living in Afghanistan, granted his wife a Jewish ritual divorce after refusing to do so for decades, according to reports.

He left Afghanistan earlier this month, following the Taliban's takeover of the country, after at first rebuffing efforts to get him out. He now wants to start a new life in the New York City borough of Queens, where he has relatives, the New York Post reported on Saturday.

"I am a businessman, I'll do business there," Simantov said in an interview with the Post.

Simantov recently granted his wife, who is living in Israel with their children, a get, or Jewish ritual divorce, according to reports in Israeli publications. The Jewish

legal ceremony took place via videoconference, according to the Times of Israel.

He had refused to grant the divorce for more than 20 years. According to Jewish law, both spouses must agree to a divorce in order for it to take effect. In the vast majority of known cases, women have been the ones who are refused a get, which prevents them from getting remarried.

● NEWS

Rabbi Moshe Tendler, Whose Thinking Shaped Orthodox Views on Organ Donation, Dies at 95

By Shira Hanau

Rabbi Moshe Tendler, an expert in Jewish law and medical ethics, died Tuesday at age 95.

A dean of the rabbinical school and a professor of Jewish medical ethics and biology at Yeshiva University, Tendler was considered an expert in issues of Jewish law and medical ethics.

But he was most famous for the fierceness with which he advocated for the Jewish legal position that brain death constituted death, thus allowing Orthodox Jews to donate and receive organ transplants for organ donation in the case of brain death.

He was also known for the sometimes dismissive attitude with which he regarded those who disagreed with him on that question and others. When a group of rabbis issued an opinion concluding that the cessation of heartbeat, rather than brain death, constitutes death, he denounced them publicly, in an act unusual in the typically sober world of Orthodox Jewish law decisors.

"You say a thing, I believe you're ignorant on this topic," Tendler told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in 2011.

"That's not an insult. It's a fact."

Born and raised on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Tendler was immersed in the dual pursuit of rigorous secular and religious studies from a young age under the tutelage of his mother, a law school graduate, and his father, head of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph yeshiva.

Tendler grew up just a few blocks away from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the most important Orthodox rabbinic authorities in the United States in the 20th century. Tendler eventually became Feinstein's son-in-law. He met Feinstein's daughter, Shifra, when she approached him at a public library in the neighborhood to ask him a question about chemistry.

"After that, somehow I managed to come more often to the library to study," Tendler recalled. He studied at New York University, was ordained at Yeshiva University in 1949 and earned a doctorate in microbiology from Columbia University in 1957. In his tenure teaching biology and Talmud at Yeshiva University, he taught hundreds of doctors and rabbis.

In addition to teaching, Tendler also served as the rabbi of the Community Synagogue in Monsey, New York from 1967 until his death.

Tendler became an important influence on Feinstein's positions on questions of Jewish law and medicine and served as a bridge between the scientific experts and the experts in Jewish law and ethics, writing articles in the top medical journals as well as for Jewish scholars.

"I remember him telling me how he used to sit with Rabbi Feinstein and he would describe the science behind it. Rabbi Feinstein would ultimately make the rulings but Rabbi Tendler was his interpreter of much of the scientific knowledge," said Alan Jotkowitz, a professor at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, director of the Jacobovits Center for Jewish Medical Ethics and director of the Medical School for International Health and Medicine.

Jotkowitz, who was a student in Tendler's biology and Talmud classes at Yeshiva University, described Tendler as a major influence for himself and other Orthodox doctors, whom Tendler empowered to be scholars of both Judaism and science.

"He was a personal role model, that there's no conflict

between scientific knowledge and Torah....he said you could see God's wisdom in the Torah, but Rabbi Tendler also thought you could see God's wisdom in nature and studying nature," Jotkowitz said.

Tendler's funeral, which was delayed because he died on the first day of a two-day holiday, was held Thursday afternoon at the Community Synagogue in Monsey. He is survived by eight children.

● FOOD

Impossible Pork Is Here — But the Plant-Based Meat Won't Be Certified as Kosher

By Jacob Gurvis

Impossible Foods, the plant-based meat company, is releasing a long-awaited new product — but unlike the wildly popular Impossible Burger, it won't be certified kosher by the Orthodox Union.

The largest and most influential certifier of kosher products in the world has declined to endorse Impossible Pork, even though nothing about its ingredients or preparation conflicts with Jewish dietary laws.

"The Impossible Pork, we didn't give an 'OU' to it, not because it wasn't kosher per se," said Rabbi Menachem Genack, the CEO of the Orthodox Union's kosher division. "It may indeed be completely in terms of its ingredients: If it's completely plant-derived, it's kosher. Just in terms of sensitivities to the consumer ... it didn't get it."

For Jews who keep kosher, the Impossible Burger has allowed some food experiences that would otherwise be off-limits because of the prohibition in dietary law on mixing milk and meat. For the last five years, Jews and kosher restaurants have been able to serve up cheese-topped chili, greasy cheeseburgers, and that quintessential American diner pairing: a hamburger with a milkshake.

"The Impossible Burger itself is a huge, huge success

and people really, really like it," Genack said. "It's a really excellent, excellent product in every respect."

With the new product, Impossible Foods wanted to give that same experience to Jews and Muslims who do not eat pork, along with others who are seeking to avoid animal products or reduce their environmental impact.

But Genack said he and others at the OU recalled what happened when they once certified "bacon" that wasn't made of pig.

"We still get deluged with calls from consumers who either don't get it or they're uncomfortable with it," he said.

The OU has held back certification for reasons other than food preparation before. In 2013, for example, it required a Manhattan restaurant to change its name from Jezebel, the name of a biblical figure associated with immorality, to retain its certification.

But the organization certifies other products that might seem to conflict with Jewish dietary law, explaining on its website that "a fish sauce may display a picture of a non-kosher fish, the OU may appear on artificial crab or pork, or there may be a recipe for a non-kosher food item on the label." It even certifies other products that aim to replicate the pork experience, such as Trader Joe's "spicy porkless plant-based snack rinds."

But ultimately agency officials decided that a product called "pork" just wouldn't fly, Genack said.

"We of course discussed it with the company and they understood," he said.

For Impossible Foods, the word "pork" is here to stay.

"While Impossible Pork was originally designed for Halal and Kosher certification, we aren't moving forward with those certifications as we wish to continue to use the term 'Pork' in our product name," an Impossible Foods spokesperson told JTA in an email.

The decision means Impossible Pork won't be on the menu at kosher restaurants, which must use only kosher-certified products in order to retain their own kosher certification. That includes kosher and/or vegan Asian restaurants with mainstay dishes that would typically include pork, such as the dumplings and dim sum that marked Impossible Pork's first outings this week in

New York and Hong Kong.

It also means that Jews who seek to follow traditional dietary rules will have to make their own freighted decisions about Impossible Pork — including whether to follow the OU's ruling.

"I don't think the OU labeling on it has a huge impact on me," said Rabbi Justin Held, the director of Jewish education at Herzl Camp and the University of Minnesota Hillel, who described himself as a "huge Impossible fan."

But he said he was concerned about *marit ayin*, or appearance to the eye, a concept in Jewish law that prohibits actions which appear to violate Jewish law, even if they technically do not. The concept raises the concern that someone who sees Held eating an Impossible Pork *banh mi* sandwich, for example, might think that he eats non-kosher meat.

A different concept, *lifnei iver*, or not placing stumbling blocks before the blind, could also come into play. The concept raises a related concern: whether someone who sees an observant Jew eating Impossible Pork dumplings could conclude that pork must actually be kosher.

For Held, the issues related to dietary law pale in comparison to the ick factor of consuming something that replicates one of Judaism's strongest taboos — and even that isn't enough to keep him away.

"The word pork is definitely a gross aversion to me," he said. "But knowing it's not [pork], I will try it."

Rena Kates, an attorney in Baltimore, isn't sure she will. Like Held, Kates keeps kosher and also uses ingredients, not an agency's certification, as her guide for whether food is acceptable.

An avid consumer of plant-based meat products, she doesn't think she can stomach Impossible Pork.

"I have this visceral reaction to it," she said. "There is something about pork that is just triggering."

It was that reaction, Genack said, that swayed the OU's decision-making — though he said Impossible Pork came close to carrying the agency's label, and still could one day.

"It could have gone either way, frankly," Genack said. He added, "This is something which we absolutely would be willing to review in the future."

● OPINION

My Militant Sister Campaigns Against Intermarriage. I Am Engaged to a Gentile. Here's How We Remain Family.

By Rachel Hartman

My sister and I grew up in a small settlement surrounded by Arab villages in the disputed West Bank. We have ended up, however, in very different places.

I am currently pursuing a PhD in social psychology, studying the science of moral understanding and how it can be leveraged to bridge divides. My sister is an activist and full-time employee at an Israeli organization that strictly opposes personal relationships, especially romantic ones, between Jews and non-Jews.

My research focuses on bridging divides, but I am somewhat at a loss for how to traverse the widening gulf between my sister and me. She faces a similar dilemma — she is becoming increasingly (in)famous in Israel for her rhetoric against intermarriage while her own sister is ... marrying someone who is not Jewish.

Conflict, of one form or another, has defined our entire lives. Our family moved from the United States to a settlement in the West Bank when I was five. We used to stop by Palestinian watermelon stands on our way back from Jerusalem. My brother became friends with the Arab workers who built our home.

At the turn of the millennium, everything changed and this sense of peaceful coexistence was gone. Riots broke out in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. My father bought bullet-proof vests for us to wear when we had to travel that same road to Jerusalem. The watermelon stands were gone. In their place, children threw rocks at cars that drove by. Two teenagers from our town went for a hike and never returned. Their bodies were found

in a cave, mutilated beyond recognition. We grieved, then grew angry. I was keenly aware of the Jewish side of the conflict: We were the rightful occupants of the land; they were our enemy. We were righteous; they were evil.

As a child I was unschooled. My mother was your typical “hippie liberal all-natural health nut” when we lived in the United States. Over time, however, my mother, and the rest of my family, became less and less liberal.

At 15, I enrolled myself into a Jerusalem high school. The narratives in my classes conflicted with my political and religious upbringing. I began to understand there were two sides to the story. After high school, I worked at a store where my closest friend was Palestinian. We shared lunches and gossiped about our co-workers, and through our interactions I realized how prejudiced I had been.

Months later, in the military, I led an intelligence team, gathering data to inform the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Aspects of intelligence-gathering may be morally questionable, but it gave me the unique opportunity to come as close as possible to reading another person’s mind. We spent long hours learning everything about the “enemy” only to discover that they ate, slept, fought and loved just like we did. There was a wide gap between my family’s beliefs about the enemy’s thoughts and their actual thoughts.

My experiences growing up in the midst of an ongoing conflict fraught with violence and political volatility motivated me to work on bringing people together. Whether the conflict is between Israelis and Palestinians, Black and white people, or liberals and conservatives, I’m looking for ways to move beyond dehumanization and toward empathy and compassion.

My youngest sister, who was born a few months before the second intifada broke out and has known nothing but conflict her entire life, has chosen a different path. Rather than resolving to bring people together, she is working hard to keep them apart. She works for Lehava, which means “flame” in Hebrew, but in this case is also an acronym for the Hebrew phrase “For the Prevention of Assimilation in the Holy Land.” Lehava fights to prevent “relationships between Jewish girls and Arabs, non-Jews, and foreign workers.” Lehava has been described on several occasions as a far-right and Jewish supremacist group, and elected officials in Israel have embarked

on the process of declaring it a terrorist organization.

Given my sister’s chosen career path, telling her that my non-Jewish partner had proposed was ... difficult. She had previously told me (on national television) that she would be happy if he broke up with me, since then there would be a chance of me marrying a Jewish guy. Needless to say, she refuses to come to the wedding.

The only solution I have is to try and pull her in, rather than push her away. As painful as it is to hear her talk about how my actions are a threat to the Jewish nation, I know that hating her for saying hateful things will result in nothing but more hate. Instead, I’ve chosen to focus on loving her. I love her for being passionate about her values. I love her for stepping outside her comfort zone. I love her for reasons unrelated to her jealousy — she’s smart, funny, caring and beautiful, inside and out.

During my latest trip to Israel, my sister and I didn’t shy away from tough discussions. We talked about our conflicting values and beliefs. She expressed sadness about the sinful life she thinks I live; I expressed similar sorrow at hearing her talk about Palestinians. We agreed to disagree, then disagreed some more. But we also talked about other things. She took time off work to be my personal chauffeur for the week because I’d gotten too used to American roads and driving in Israel terrified me. I beat her at multiple games of Scrabble. We prepared meals together. I teased her about being too picky in her search for a husband, but also gave her some stern sisterly advice about not settling for someone she doesn’t like.

In his excellent book, “The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World,” Jamil Zaki tells the story of Tony, a Canadian ex-neo-Nazi. One of the pivotal moments in Tony’s transformation is when he confesses his deeds to his (Jewish) therapist Dov, who accepts him with open arms:

Here was this man who loved me and wanted to heal me, and here was I, a person who had once advocated for the annihilation of his people.

Tony felt he didn’t deserve a shred of compassion from Dov, but Dov extended it nonetheless. This cracked Tony open. He’d created a surface of hatred to cover his shame and loneliness. Once someone accepted him

warts and all, he no longer needed it.

I don't live in fantasyland. I don't think my sister will drop her beliefs on intermarriage just because I love her and treat her kindly. But I do think that by responding with love, I might be able to prevent her extremism from getting worse. Perhaps by regularly exposing her to the fact that I'm in a relationship that makes me happier than I've ever been, she will soften her views, even just a little. Or at least, maybe she will continue talking to me rather than cutting me off entirely, as some family members do in such cases.

Though it is (arguably) easier to love someone if they're related to you, this approach might be helpful in other contexts. Many people would rather shut down or at least disengage from discussion with people whom they view as intolerant, whether the intolerance comes from their religiosity, political ideology, or some other driving force. But they should consider how counterproductive this approach is. It does nothing to change the intolerant person, and may even motivate them to become even more intolerant. Instead, approaching them with kindness, accepting them, and, yes, even loving them, may have a more positive effect.

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HELPING AFGHANI REFUGEES

Westchester Jewish Coalition for Immigration has teamed up with UJA-Federation, Shames Jewish JCC on the Hudson, Upwardly Global and JCC Mid-Westchester to collect needed items for newly arriving Afghan refugees. Nearly 30 regional synagogues have either signed up to be collection sites/drop-off locations, run their own internal drives or push the drive out to their communities by the Oct. 10 deadline. Go to <https://bit.ly/3mfeRXC> for list of participating institutions. or buy and donate items at <https://amzn.to/3AStHtZ>

● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT BERESHIT

In the Beginning, the Torah Is a Book About All of Humanity

When you see homo sapiens, you see the divine image.

By Jeremy Kalmanofsky

What does it mean to be created in God's image? Or to act in a God-like way?

I am a Jewish human being.

Human being, homo sapiens, is the broad definition I share with 8 billion people on earth. Jewish is the specific sub-category, the religious covenant and culture of a particular human family, which I share with some 15 million people today and a noble chain of our ancestors. Human being is what I am. Jewish is how I am human.

Those of us who are intensely embedded in Jewish community sometimes lose perspective on these wider and narrower categories. Consider our tribe's casual idiom about the world's population, as if there are only two kinds of people: "Jews," constituting almost .002 percent of homo sapiens, and "non-Jews," who account for a mere 99.998 percent.

Parshat Bereshit, the first few chapters of Genesis, provides a healthy reminder. From Genesis 12 to the end of Deuteronomy, the Torah focuses on the Jewish people: Abraham, Sarah and their children, their journey into and out of slavery, their covenant with God and with each other, learning God's wisdom and will through Moses' leadership, wandering toward their homeland.

But the first two portions are about the 99.998 percent. Before Abraham goes forth, Genesis' first 11 chapters depict a wider world and a whole human species.

These passages convey the Torah's most profound teaching on the religious meaning of human life: "In the image of God did God create humanity, male and fe-

male God created them” (Genesis 1:27). Tzelem Elohim, the divine image, stamped on each human being.

Notably, the Torah’s teaching about the infinite value of every human life appears in these early chapters and never again. Three times when addressing humanity as a whole – Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 5:1-3 in this week’s reading, and Genesis 9:6 in next week’s parashah – the Torah asserts the correlation of human life to its divine model. But once it shifts its focus to the subgroup of Israel, the Torah never once repeats this central teaching of religious anthropology.

The Torah, it seems to me, is extremely precise in presenting the concept of tzelem Elohim. The divine quality to human life is not one tenet among many; it is a premise upon which all subsequent religious or ethical culture depends, Jewish or “non-Jewish.” Recognizing tzelem Elohim is not a consequence of the historical experience of Abraham’s clan or Moses’ teaching. Rather, those cultural frameworks are the consequences of the sacred structure of human life that applies to all humanity, regardless of its ethnicity or culture.

Addressing us as Jews, the Torah commands ethical excellence based on our unique experience: “because you were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” Addressing us as human beings, the Torah commands reverence for human life based on our universal status: because every human bears the divine image.

Just what does it mean to bear the divine image? Judaism’s rich interpretive traditions have plenty to say about what might be the pshat, or literal meaning, of the Torah’s phrase, or what homiletical jewels might lie beneath its surface. Perhaps tzelem Elohim refers to humanity’s role as a divine viceroy who would “rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and the beasts who walk the earth” (R. Saadya Gaon). Perhaps it denotes a hu-

man faculty, like a rational mind (Maimonides), a heavenly soul (Nachmanides) or a free will strong enough to overcome our physical instincts (Mesech Hekhmalah). All these and more might be meaningful.

Additionally, here is a rich midrash that treats the term tzelem Elohim more literally. In biblical Hebrew, tzelem typically means something concrete, not conceptual. Ancient readers would have been unlikely to think of tzelem as an abstraction like “rationality,” as Rambam did, and instead would have thought of an idol, like those they saw from nearby pagans. In that case, tzelem Elohim would have sounded as if it meant “God’s statue.”

“Everyone knows Judaism rejects idol worship utterly, right? But perhaps this is not quite correct.”

Here is how a midrash (Mekhilta BaHodesh 8) understands that connection:

How were the 10 Commandments arranged? A list of five on one tablet and a corresponding list of five on the other. On one was written, “I am the Lord your God.” Corresponding to that was written “You shall not murder.” This teaches that all who shed human blood have reduced the royal image. A parable: It is like a human ruler who enters a region and erects statues, makes idols and issues coins. Later, when people rebel, they topple the king’s statues, smash his idols, and destroy his coins. So too, anyone who sheds human blood reduces the royal image, as it is said: for God made the human in the divine image.

According to this midrash, all human beings, created in the divine image, are living symbols of God, whose image they bear. Just as Caesar’s rule is made visible through a physical image, perhaps Hashem’s dominion is likewise manifest in the human beings who bear the image. To murder a precious life, then, is to deny the existence of God, by destroying God’s statue.

Everyone knows Judaism rejects idol worship utterly, right? But perhaps this is not quite correct. For a pagan, a stone idol makes a worshiper think of Baal or Zeus. In Judaism, we are called upon to venerate one unique idol: When you see homo sapiens, you see the tzelem Elohim.

Jeremy Kalmanofsky has been a rabbi at Manhattan’s Anshe Chesed since 2001.

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Tishrei 25, 5781 | Friday, October 1, 2021

- **Light candles at:** 6:19 p.m.

Tishrei 26, 5781 | Saturday, October 2, 2021

- **Torah reading:** Bereshit, Genesis 1:1–6:8
- **Haftarah:** Isaiah 42:5–21
- **Shabbat ends:** 7:16 p.m.

● MUSINGS

The True Story of a Record-breaking Feat

By David Wolpe

In 1943, chess grandmaster Miguel Najdorf played 40 opponents simultaneously – blindfolded. As interesting as the feat itself is why he chose to do it.

Najdorf grew up in Poland as Mojsze Mendel Najdorf and became one of the leading players in the world. In 1939, he was representing Poland in the chess Olympiad in Buenos Aires when World War II broke out. He stayed in Argentina and could not communicate with his family.

Najdorf wanted to let them know how he was, and perhaps establish contact. He decided that if he did something that would make the newspapers all over the world, his family might see it and know that he was all right. To keep all those games in memory without a board is phenomenally difficult and no one had managed more than 34. Najdorf decided to break the blindfold record.

Sadly, although covered by the press all over the world, the feat did not bring him news of his family, who perished in the Holocaust. In 1947, seeking once again to find anyone who might have known him from his previous life, he increased the number to 45, a record that stood until 2011. A remarkable man who played blindfolded to get the world to see.

*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.*

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● TELEVISION

Isaac Asimov’s Epic ‘Foundation’ Series Is Now a TV Show. His Jewish Life Was Complicated.

By Stephen Silver

Today, following a pandemic delay, Apple TV+ will debut “Foundation,” the first-ever screen adaptation of Isaac Asimov’s bestselling, award-winning science-fiction book series. First announced in 2018 and produced in association with Skydance Television, the TV show is one of the Apple streaming service’s most expensive and ambitious productions to date.

The series, which follows a mathematician struggling to convince a galactic federation that their society is on the brink of collapse, blends anxieties of the 1940s and ‘50s, when the source material was originally written, with modern global concerns like climate change.

It was co-created by Josh Friedman and David S. Goyer. Friedman identifies as Jewish, while showrunner Goyer, son of a Jewish mother, wrote and directed the dybuk-themed 2009 horror movie “The Unborn.”

But what of Asimov himself, a biochemist at Boston University and one of the most influential sci-fi writers of all time? That’s a much more complicated question.

Isaac Asimov was born in Russia in 1920, and his family emigrated to the United States when he was 3 years old. He had Jewish parents who were themselves raised Orthodox, and they raised him in Brooklyn. However, Asimov gravitated to more humanist beliefs from an early age, and as an adult identified vocally with atheism until his death in 1992.

So on the one hand, Asimov became one of pop culture’s most prominent atheists; and on the other, he was open and prideful about his Jewish heritage.

The author addressed his beliefs and background in his posthumous 1994 memoir, "I, Asimov," stating that his father, "for all his education as an Orthodox Jew, was not Orthodox in his heart." While acknowledging that he and his father had never discussed such matters, he speculated that his father, having been "brought up under the Tsarist tyranny, under which Jews were frequently brutalized," had "turned revolutionary in his heart."

Asimov did not have a bar mitzvah, which he attributed to his parents choosing to raise him without religion and not, as some suspected, "an act of rebellion against Orthodox parents." However, he said, he "gained an interest" in the Bible as he got older, although he eventually realized that he preferred the type of fictional books that would one day make him famous: "Science fiction and science books had taught me their version of the universe and I was not ready to accept the Creation tale of Genesis or the various miracles described throughout the book."

Having the first name "Isaac," in the 21st century, isn't necessarily a certain giveaway that a person is Jewish. But in Asimov's time, it almost always was. And while Asimov sometimes faced pressure to change his name for professional reasons, he always stuck with his given name.

"I would not allow any story of mine to appear except under the name of Isaac Asimov," he wrote. "I think I helped break down the convention of imposing salt-free, low-fat names on writers. In particular, I made it a little more possible for writers to be openly Jewish in the world of popular fiction."

Asimov is one of the most prolific authors in history, having written or co-written more than 500 books in his lifetime. And he did explore Jewish liturgy in such books as "Words in Genesis" (1962) and "Words from the Exodus" (1963). The bulk of his literary work, however, did not touch on Judaism.

His memoir also takes issue with an academic critic who, in 1989, accused Asimov of using "more themes in his work that derive from Christianity than Judaism."

"This is unfair," Asimov wrote. "I have explained that I have not been brought up in the Jewish tradition. I know very little about the minutiae of Judaism... I am a free American and it is not required that because my grandparents were Orthodox I must write on Jewish themes."

He went on to write that Isaac Bashevis Singer "writes on Jewish themes because he wants to [while] I don't write on them because I don't want to."

"I am tired of being told, periodically, by Jews, that I am not Jewish enough," he wrote.

Asimov also devoted a chapter in the memoir to antisemitism. He noted that his family never suffered from pogroms or other overt antisemitic terror either back in Russia or in the U.S., nor did antisemitism ever impeded his own personal success. But he did find it "difficult to endure... the feeling of insecurity, and even terror, because of what was happening the world," especially at the time of the Holocaust. He also told the story of a public argument he once had with Elie Wiesel, in which Wiesel said he did not trust scientists and engineers, because of their role in the Holocaust.

As for Israel and Zionism, Asimov was something of a skeptic. In his final book "Asimov Laughs Again," published around the time of his death, Asimov stated that he had never visited Israel and didn't plan to, although he attributed that in part to his habit of not doing much traveling.

"I remember how it was in 1948 when Israel was being established and all my Jewish friends were ecstatic, I was not," he wrote. "I said: what are we doing? We are establishing ourselves in a ghetto, in a small corner of a vast Muslim sea. The Muslims will never forget nor forgive, and Israel, as long as it exists, will be embattled. I was laughed at, but I was right."

Isaac Asimov died in New York City in April of 1992, at age 72. His family revealed years later that he had contracted HIV from a blood transfusion following heart surgery nearly a decade prior, which led in part to his death.

Asimov did not have a Jewish funeral, or any funeral at all — he was cremated. But at a subsequent memorial service, fellow author Kurt Vonnegut stated that "Isaac is up in Heaven now," later joking that "that was the funniest thing I could have said to an audience of humanists."

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UPCOMING EVENTS

October 4 | 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Pay as you wish

Antisemitism in NYC 2021: What's Really Happening?

Andrew Silow-Carroll, editor-in-chief of The New York Jewish Week, leads a discussion about antisemitic incidents in New York City, featuring Deborah Lauter, executive director of the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes; Scott Richman, regional director, ADL NY/NJ; and Leo Ferguson, of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice. Presented by Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan and hosted in partnership with the New York Jewish Agenda and The Center for Jewish Living. Register at <https://bit.ly/3AXyqtJ> for this virtual program. Monday, 7:00 p.m.

October 7 | 1:00 p.m. Free

Sholem Aleichem Rediscovered: The Newly Translated "Moshkeleh Ganev"

Originally published in 1903, Sholem Aleichem's "Moshkeleh Ganev" (Moshkeleh the Thief) was recently translated into English for the first time by Curt Leviant. Join Leviant in conversation with Dvora Reich about Sholem Aleichem and this newly re-discovered novel and its unique focus on the Jewish underclass.

Register at <https://yivo.org/Moshkeleh-Ganev>

October 7 | 7:00 p.m. Free

The Glass Negatives of Lublin, with Piotr Nazaruk

Hear the story behind the discovery of a treasure trove of thousands of glass plates that offer a glimpse into the everyday lives of Jews and Poles before 1939, with Piotr Nazaruk, curator at Poland's Grodzka Gate-NN Theatre.

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

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