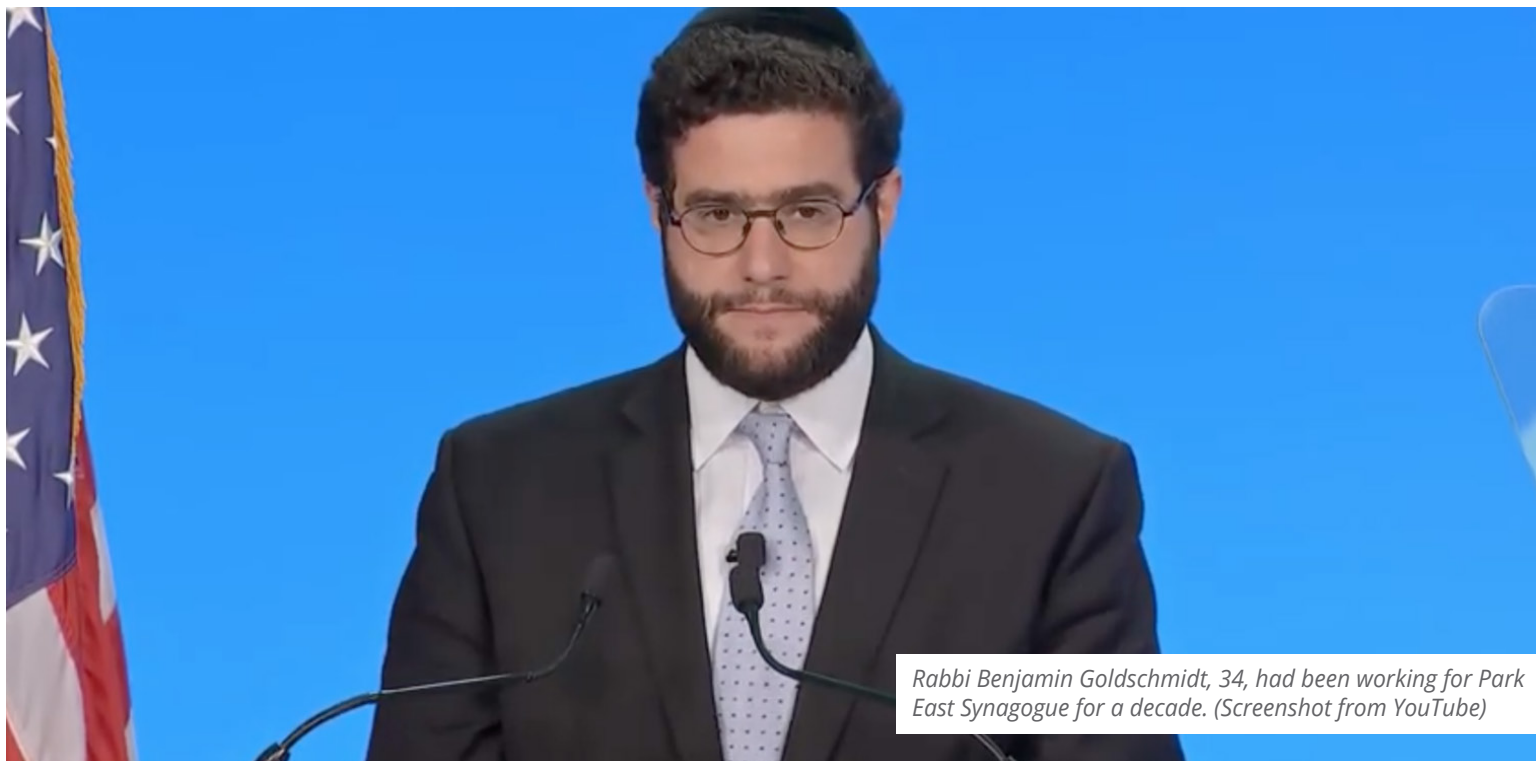


The New York Jewish Week/end

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Rabbi Benjamin Goldschmidt, 34, had been working for Park East Synagogue for a decade. (Screenshot from YouTube)

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● NEWS

Park East Synagogue Pushes Out Assistant Rabbi, Sparking Protest

By Ben Sales

NEW YORK (JTA) — Park East Synagogue, a Modern Orthodox congregation on Manhattan's Upper East Side, fired its popular assistant rabbi after the long-time head rabbi rebuffed a congregant-led push to "revitalize the synagogue."

Rabbi Benjamin Goldschmidt, 34, had been working for the synagogue for a decade and was known for his outreach to Russian-speaking families. He began at Park East as a rabbinic intern and congregants told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that many hoped he would lead the synagogue one day.

But his tenure there abruptly ended with an email from Senior Rabbi Arthur Schneier that went out to community members on Monday. Schneier wrote, "Assistant Rabbi Benjamin Goldschmidt is no longer employed by our Syna-

gogue,” but did not elaborate on the decision.

The firing is making waves in the venerable 133-year-old congregation, which is linked to a day school named for Schneier. More than 200 people have signed a petition protesting Goldschmidt’s termination, but their identities have been hidden after a note said the first 70 signatories “were receiving harassment for speaking up.” The synagogue claims a membership of 700 households.

Neither the synagogue nor Goldschmidt responded to requests for comment. Goldschmidt’s biography on the synagogue website, which was active as of the beginning of the week, has been deleted.

Reached by phone Wednesday, the synagogue board president, Herman Hochberg, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that he was not at liberty to discuss why Goldschmidt was fired, but said it was not “because we don’t like him.”

Goldschmidt is the son of Moscow Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and has written in a number of publications about his work as well as Israeli politics. His 2014 wedding to the journalist Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt was the subject of a feature in the New York Times’ “Vows” section.

Goldschmidt’s firing follows a contentious exchange of emails to the synagogue membership by members and Schneier. On Oct. 4, a group of four synagogue members sent an email out to the membership list titled “The future of Park East Synagogue.” The email praised Schneier, 91, who has led the synagogue for more than 50 years. But it also expressed concerns about the synagogue’s trajectory.

“As congregants, we are concerned about the state of our beloved synagogue and what the future holds,” it said. “Our overall synagogue attendance has declined; while Shabbat services used to bring in several hundred worshippers, now they bring in far smaller numbers, with few younger individuals and families (unless there is a special event).”

The email announced that the signatories would form a committee to work with Schneier, Goldschmidt and the Park East leadership on how “to revitalize the synagogue.”

In his own email, sent two weeks later, Schneier inveighed against that email and another, sent to the synagogue’s

affiliated day school, which he said were “not authorized by me.” He defended his record at length, and then, without any segue, announced Goldschmidt’s termination.

“When I became the Rabbi of our beloved congregation, there was a single building and approximately forty members,” he wrote. “Under my leadership, and with the help of the wonderful team around me, we have grown by leaps and bounds to become a vibrant center for Jewish life in New York City.”

According to the petition launched Oct. 19, signatories “were shocked and disheartened” by the decision.

The organizer of the petition did not respond to a request for comment, but a string of comments below the petition express outrage at Goldschmidt’s firing.

“I’m devastated by this shocking and uncalled for news,” wrote Aliza Licht, the former president of the parents association at Rabbi Arthur Schneier Park East Day School. “Rabbi Goldschmidt and Avital are nothing but bright lights and beacons of all that is good in this world. They have our full support and deep appreciation for all they have done and will continue to do.”

● NEWS

Jewish Actor Declines Off-Broadway Role as Syrian Immigrant Amid Conversation About Representation

By Emily Burack

An Off-Broadway show about an undocumented Syrian immigrant will open without the Jewish actor who was slated to play the part.

“The Visitor,” starring the Tony Award-winning actor Ari’el Stachel, was set to open Off-Broadway at New

York's Public Theater in April 2020 and is only now in previews following the COVID-19 shutdown.

Stachel had previously expressed misgivings about his casting in the musical, in which he plays an undocumented Syrian character who is sent to a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center. Earlier this year, he told *Playbill*, he asked the production team why his character — who was raised in the United States — would speak with an accent.

The start date of "The Visitor" had been delayed this fall, with the theater citing "conversations and commitments around equity and anti-racism."

Requests for comment from Stachel's representatives were not immediately returned.

"The Public Theater and Ari'el Stachel have made a mutual decision that he will step away from THE VISITOR and his role in the production," the theater said in a statement posted Oct. 20 to its social media channels. "We are grateful for his artistry and participation over the past six years. We wish Ari well in his future endeavors."

"The Visitor" previews began Oct. 16, but in the show's early preview performances, including one attended by JTA, Stachel's role had been filled with an understudy.

The stage musical is adapted from the Oscar-nominated 2007 film of the same name. It tells the story of Walter, a white college professor, who travels to New York City to find Tarek and Zainab, a young, undocumented couple staying in his apartment. After Tarek, who is Syrian, is arrested due to a misunderstanding and subsequently sent to an ICE detention center, Walter gets entangled in their lives trying to help him stay in America.

According to *Playbill*, "recent discussions have included the concern over the centering of a middle-aged white man as a protagonist in a story largely about immigrant experiences as well as assurances that cast members have access to resources to fully participate in telling these stories."

The COVID-19 shutdown of New York theater coincided with the protests over the police killings of African-Americans, forcing many theater and arts companies to confront issues of representation and inclusivity.

Stachel has been with the show since early workshops,

and his frustration over his character's accent has been one of the more contentious issues of the show.

"I got to the point where I couldn't separate the experiences I was having in the world with what I was doing on stage. It is not enough to just play a role and have fun, it really needs to exist and align politically, spiritually, artistically, for me," Stachel told *Playbill* in April. "I thought to myself, 'my brown body needs to be not seen as an "other" anymore,' so I'm actually trying to morph this opportunity."

Stachel previously won a Tony for his role as Haled, an Egyptian musician, in "The Band's Visit," the smash-hit stage adaptation of the 2007 Israeli movie. Stachel's father was born in "an immigrant absorption tent city" to Yemeni Jews and his mom is Ashkenazi, from New York.

"In third grade, someone told me I was too Black to be Jewish," he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in 2017. By high school, said Stachel, "I started avoiding being seen in public with my father. I didn't want to be seen with somebody who looked like an Arab." "The Band's Visit," about an Egyptian band stranded in an Israeli backwater, helped him connect with his Middle Eastern and Arab identity.

When auditioning for Haled, Stachel explained to *Playbill*, he "felt this was actually our only shot and, at the time, it was exhilarating to just have a job on Broadway. By the time I got around to 'The Visitor,' actually, I started having an issue with the fact that all of the roles I was playing had accents."

● NEWS

Rabbis Arrested Demanding Climate Action by Wall Street Giant's Jewish CEO

By Julia Gergely

Three rabbis and six Jewish teenagers were among those arrested Monday at a climate protest at the Manhattan headquarters of BlackRock, the largest investment man-

agement company in New York.

The demonstration, organized by the Jewish Youth Climate Movement with support from the interfaith organization GreenFaith, demanded the firm stop its investments in and cut ties with companies that fund the fossil fuel industry, which include Enbridge, Inc., Formosa Plastics and Shell.

Rabbis Rachel Timoner and Stephanie Kolin of Congregation Beth Elohim in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster, vice president of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, were among those arrested.

"Judaism's highest priority is saving lives," said Timoner in a statement. "The Jewish youth who are leading us today understand that we are in a life or death moment, that we must divest from fossil fuels now in order to save lives."

The Jewish Youth Climate Movement, founded by the Jewish environmental group Hazon in 2019, is a Gen Z-led movement dedicated to combating climate change and environmental injustice from a Jewish lens.

The demonstration was one of 500 demonstrations across 41 countries taking place over Oct. 17-18 as part of the "Faiths 4 Climate Justice" campaign organized by Greenfaith. The campaign was set for two weeks ahead of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), which will take place in Glasgow, Scotland, starting on Oct. 31.

The activists specifically called on Larry Fink, BlackRock's founder and CEO since 1988, "to stand by his Jewish values and end BlackRock's funding of the fossil fuel industry and end human rights violations," according to a news press release.

"BlackRock is the biggest funder of climate destruction in the world. It's time for Larry Fink to live up to his talk and divest from the fossil fuel industry and end BlackRock's human rights violations," said Morgan Long, one of the organizers of the event.

Fink, in a 2021 "Letter to CEOs," said BlackRock was taking steps to ensure that the companies its clients are invested in "are both mitigating climate risk and considering the opportunities presented by the net zero transition," that is, emitting no more carbon dioxide than they remove from the atmosphere by 2050.

● NEWS

The Thomas Jefferson Statue Removed From New York City Council Chambers Was A Gift From A Jewish Military Officer

By Shira Hanau

The statue of Thomas Jefferson that will be removed from the chambers of the New York City Council at the urging of Black lawmakers was a gift in 1834 from one of the first Jewish officers in the U.S. military.

The city's Public Design Commission decided to remove the statue following complaints from Assemblymen Charles Barron, Councilwoman Inez Barron and others that Jefferson was a slaveholder.

The statue, which has stood in the city council's chambers for over a century, was commissioned by Uriah Phillips Levy, a lifelong fan of Jefferson's. Levy was a member of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in New York City.

Levy served in the U.S. Navy, including during the War of 1812, eventually earning the rank of commodore. Having faced antisemitic prejudice in the Navy, Levy fought against religious discrimination and commissioned a bronze sculpture of Jefferson that stands in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, in honor of Jefferson's support for religious freedom. The New York version is a copy. Levy even purchased Monticello, Jefferson's mansion in Virginia, in 1836 and restored it.

It is not yet clear where the statue will end up after it is removed from the city council chambers. Possible new locations include another place within City Hall or at the New-York Historical Society, where it can be displayed

with historical context.

In the same week that the decision was made to remove the Jefferson statue, a statue of a Jewish woman was put up in New York City. A life-size bronze of Diane Arbus, a photographer who was born on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 1923, was erected in Central Park, where she took some of her most famous photos. The statue, only the second sculpture in the park to honor a real-life woman, will be on display until August 2022.

● EDITOR'S DESK

What the Tree of Life Shooting Revealed About American Jewry

A new book about the massacre in Pittsburgh is a celebration of Jewish community, and a lament for fading Jewish connections.

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

A few years ago a colleague called to interview me for a book he was writing about journalists who worked for Jewish publications. I told him that it would be the first book in history whose readership would overlap 100% with the people being interviewed.

That's a little bit how I feel about books that look deeply into the ins and outs of Jewish communal affairs: the admittedly small genre of synagogue tell-alls, studies of Jewish philanthropy, scholarly work on how Americans "do" Judaism. Of course, I eat these books up – it's my job and passion. But I suspect I am a distinct minority within a minority.

I also suspected Mark Oppenheimer's new book, "Squirrel Hill: The Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting and the Soul of a Neighborhood," might be similarly narrow in its scope and audience. In some ways it is, but that is also

its strength: In describing the Oct. 27, 2018 massacre of 11 Jewish worshipers in Pittsburgh and how individuals and institutions responded, he covers board meetings, interviews clergy, takes notes on sermons and reads demographic studies by Jewish federations. The result is a biopsy – or really, a stress test – of American Jewry in the early 21st century, the good and the bad.

And as a result it tells a bigger story about and for all Americans in an age of mass shootings, political polarization and spiritual malaise.

First the good: The Squirrel Hill in Oppenheimer's book is a model of Jewish community building – home to the rare American Jewish population that stuck close to its urban roots instead of fleeing to the far suburbs. The neighborhood boasts walkable streets, a wide array of Jewish institutions, a diverse public high school and local hangouts that serve as the "third places" so elusive in suburbia. Oppenheimer credits a federation leader, Howard Rieger, who in 1993 spearheaded a capital project that kept the community's infrastructure – "from preschool to assisted living" – in place and intact.

The universal outpouring of support after the shooting also showed American Jewish life at its best. Offers to help flooded in from Jews around the country and the world. Non-Jews rushed to assure Jews that they were not alone. Barriers fell between Jewish denominations, and people put politics and religion aside to focus on the qualities and threats that unite them.

The downside is a photo negative of all that's right about Squirrel Hill and American Jewry. The diversity and demographics of Squirrel Hill are a reminder of the more typically segregated way of American Jewish life — religiously, racially and economically. Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews spin in separate orbits. Many white Jews rarely interact with people of color who aren't cleaning their homes or taking care of their kids.

As for the support that flowed in: Oppenheimer also describes the ways the offers of help could feel both patronizing and self-serving, as outside Jewish groups and "trauma tourists" rushed in without considering the needs or feelings of the locals. One New York-based burial society sent "experts" to help the provincials tend to the bodies of victims; they were not-so-politely told that the locals had it under control. There's a sad and hilarious profile of

an Israeli medical clown who, like so many clowns, ends up sowing more confusion than comfort.

Oppenheimer also complicates the rosy portraits of Pittsburgh's "Stronger Than Hate" response to the shootings. While the Jewish community remains mostly grateful for the shows of solidarity, there were missteps and miscommunications along the way. Even one of the most iconic images of the shooting – the Kaddish prayer written in Hebrew characters on the front page of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – has a complicated back story that ended with the departure of the newspaper's editor.

Internal divisions are on display as well: Jewish progressives who protested President Trump's visit to Squirrel Hill after the shooting argued with "alrightniks" who either supported Trump or felt his office should be respected. The political divide among Jews is a recurring theme: Victims' families reacted angrily after a local rabbi dared bring up gun control during an event on the one-year anniversary of the shootings. The rabbi later apologized for appearing to break an agreement that his speech would not be "political."

Perhaps most of all, "Squirrel Hill" describes American Jewry at a crossroads, with Tree of Life as a potent symbol of its communal demise and future possibilities. The synagogues that shared space in the building drew and still draw relatively few worshippers on a typical Shabbat, and those who come tend to be older. While the Tree of Life shooting galvanized a discussion about whether Jews could ever feel safe in America, America's embrace of Jews has left non-Orthodox synagogues empty or emptying. Tree of Life will apparently be rebuilt as a complex that will be "part synagogue, part Holocaust museum, part 10/27 memorial." Whether anyone will come is another story. In his High Holiday sermon a year after the attack, Jeffrey Myers, Tree of Life's rabbi, offered "a brutally candid assessment of the state of the synagogue, a plea for help, a challenge" for twice-a-year Jews to show up for programs and services, lest the synagogue cease to exist in 30 years.

That's not just a Pittsburgh, or Jewish, thing. As Myers puts it, "low attendance at regular worship services was not a Jewish problem but an American problem."

Oppenheimer does bring more hopeful stories, starting with the bustling Orthodox synagogues and including

people and congregations offering spiritual, political and cultural alternatives for a generation of disenfranchised seekers. How "sticky" these alternatives will be — to borrow a term from Silicon Valley — remains to be seen.

"Squirrel Hill" is both inspiring and deflating. It's a reminder of the persistence of one of the world's oldest hatreds and of the resilience of its targets. It's a celebration of an American Jewish community, and a lament for fading Jewish connections.

And it is also a useful corrective for me, someone who is paid to cover these issues. After the one-year anniversary event, a local Jewish leader tells Oppenheimer that "she felt that the narrative of strength and unity had obscured how much people were still hurting." Her words and Oppenheimer's book are a reminder that there is always more to the story.

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

● OPINION

The 'Jewface' Debate About Casting Non-Jews as Jews Betrays an Ashkenazi Bias

By Manishtana

Actress and comedian Sarah Silverman, in comments on her Sept. 30 podcast, railed against the practice of casting non-Jews as Jewish characters in TV and films. She referred to the castings as "Jewface," a play on the historically racist practice of donning "blackface."

Silverman pointed to a series of Jewish women portrayed by non-Jewish actresses, including Rachel Brosnahan in "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," Felicity Jones as the late Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in "On the Basis of Sex" and Kathryn Hahn's upcoming turn as Joan Rivers in "The Comeback Girl."

"There's this long tradition of non-Jews playing Jews, and

not just playing people who happen to be Jewish, but people whose Jewishness is their whole being," Silverman opined. "One could argue, for instance, that a gentile playing Joan Rivers correctly would be doing what is actually called 'Jewface.'"

Silverman goes on to say that "if the Jewish female character is courageous or deserves love, she is never played by a Jew. Ever!"

Now, I'm not here to comment on whether Hollywood's portrayal of Jewish women as being controlling, nagging or whiny is a problem (it is), nor to question the dubious wisdom of Silverman speaking out against "Jewface" and anti-Semitic misogynist tropes when she herself has flippantly engaged in racist portrayals of other ethnic groups, including herself donning "blackface," without holding herself accountable.

Silverman's own shortcomings aside, she's not the originator of the problematic term "Jewface" nor the first Jewish woman to raise the issue. This is a valid discussion and problem to be discussed, which speaks to representation, who gets to tell their own stories and the very same "identity politics" that Silverman, ironically, finds to be "f-king annoying."

However, what I find interesting is the centering of Ashkenormativity in the term itself, and the curious fact that the specter of "Jewface" has — without fail — only reared its head when white actors portray white Jews, and otherwise largely ignores when the characters or actors are non-white.

In a recent Twitter thread, I pointed out various Jews of color who have been portrayed on screen. Dr. Christina Yang of "Grey's Anatomy" is Jewish. The actress who plays her, Sandra Oh, isn't. Ato Essandoh isn't Jewish, yet he's played both Dr. Isidore Latham on "Chicago Med" and Kwesi Weisberg-Annan on "Away." Luke Youngblood isn't Jewish, but Sid from "Galavant" is. Where is the dialogue and outrage about "Jewface" in those cases?

(Interesting aside: While Tracee Ellis Ross' character on "Black-ish" isn't Jewish, the actress is, and the actors who play her siblings are also Black and Jewish: Daveed Diggs and Rashida Jones.).

Silverman isn't alone in erasing Jewish women of color, or implying that when we say "Jewish" we mean white

and Ashkenazi.

Too often, white Jewish women are cast as Jews when playing comic relief or Jewish Mother stereotypes (thanks Philip Roth), and too often aren't seen as desirable or bankable when it comes to playing Jewish heroines, protagonists or historical figures. Yet on the flipside, actresses like Tracee Ellis Ross, Rashida Jones, Maya Rudolph, Tiffany Haddish, Laura London, Zoe Kravitz, Lisa Bonet, Sophie Okonedo and Jurnee Smollett are seen as attractive, strong and lovable, but only as black women, not as Jews.

Even fictional characters are subjected to this bifurcation of identity. Jewish-but-not-Black actress Jenny Slate famously stepped down from the role of voicing the Black and Jewish character of Missy Foreman-Greenwald on "Big Mouth," yet her replacement, Ayo Edebiri, is Black but not Jewish.

However, judging from the replies to my Twitter thread, instead of engaging holistically in the conversation about which aspects of identity and Jewish representation are important, the mainstream American Jewish community would rather do anything but acknowledge Ashkenormative centering.

In my original thread, I apparently made the egregious mistake of off-handedly mentioning that a significant contingent of Jewish "Star Trek: The Next Generation" fans considers the possibility that the Klingon officer Worf is Jewish. Which do you think generated more dialogue: the general issue of "Jewface" ignoring Jews of color, or whether or not Worf's parents were coded as Ashkenazi or Russian?

In other instances, debates arose around whether the actors I listed were "real" Jews (despite me having made no reference to halachic definitions of Jewishness) or whether the characters I listed were "really" Jewish.

One commenter declared that Dr. Christina Yang "barely identified" as Jewish, despite the character's famous line of "I'm Jewish. I know food and death" and her frequent habit of giving detailed explanations of Jewish ritual and tradition to her co-workers. (Meanwhile, the white Jewish characters on "Friends," Ross and Monica Geller — with three mentions of Chanukah and a bat-mitzvah rap between them — and Rachel Green — whose Magen David necklace makes one appearance — somehow es-

cape the branding of “barely identifying” as Jewish. Also curiously, Ross and Monica, whose mother is not Jewish, are considered “real” Jews by fans who might otherwise question the Jewish authenticity of certain Jews of color. An interesting double standard.)

The additionally problematic layer to this dialogue is how in too many Jewish communities “blackface,” “brownface” and “yellowface” frequently raise their head — whether in acclaimed and historic pieces of Jewish representation such as “The Jazz Singer,” or in costumes seen every year during the holiday of Purim. The term and debate around “Jewface” (as opposed to simply referring to the practice as “whitewashing”) comes off as not only performative, but also derails what is a larger and more important conversation about what it means to “look,” represent and simply be Jewish.

None of us will be correctly cast until all of us are correctly cast.

Manishtana is the pen name of Shais Rishon, an African-American Orthodox rabbi, activist, speaker and writer. He has written for *Tablet*, *Kveller*, *The Forward*, *Jewcy* and *Hevria*. His current project is “B’Esh Sh’chorah/In Black Fire: A Commentary and Anthology on the Torah” due out in 2022.

● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT VAYERA

How to Survive the Test of a Frayed Relationship

Abraham had faith but not blind faith, which he drew upon when God proposed the unthinkable.

By Rabbi Jill Hausman

The Binding of Isaac in this week’s Torah portion, Vayera, is often read as an isolated story. However, reading it in the context of Abraham’s relationship with God puts this episode in a new light.

Abraham, who argued and bargained when God condemned the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah to death, is completely silent when God asks him to bring his son Isaac up to Mt. Moriah as a sacrifice. The silence is deafening. Why doesn’t Abraham protest?

When God first spoke to Abram (as he is called before Genesis 17:5), God promised that if Abram would leave his native land and follow God, that he would become “a great nation,” having many descendants. (Gen. 12:2) Then God promises, “To your offspring I will give this land.” (Gen. 12:7) More promises of descendants follow:

- “I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth.” (Gen.13:16)
- “‘Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He added, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” (Gen. 15:5)
- “I make you the father of a multitude of nations.” (Gen. 17:5)
- “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac, and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come.” (Gen. 17:19)
- “It is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued.” (Gen. 21:12).

God promises Abraham many descendants five times, and says twice that all these offspring will come through Isaac: seven promises.

God has presented Abraham with a splendid paradox: Either Isaac will die childless, which would mean that every promise that God has ever made to Abraham will not be kept, or Isaac will live and have children. Both conditions can’t be true.

We are told at the beginning of this incident that it is a test. The five promises of many descendants and the two statements that they will come through Isaac are not the only reassurances that God has given Abraham going into this test. When Abraham argued for sparing the lives of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham asks, “Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?” (Gen. 18:25). Abraham is really asking two questions: First, what kind of God are you — a loving, merciful God, as I have come to know that you are, or is

there a terrible, destructive side to you? Second, is there a benefit for being a good person in this world? Abraham receives the answer to both questions: When God agrees to spare Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of just 10 righteous men (Gen. 19:32), it demonstrates that God cares about and protects the righteous.

So far, God has kept every promise of prosperity, protection and offspring made to Abraham. He must have wondered whether the flow of blessings would continue.

Going into this great test, Abraham is almost sure that Isaac will live. However, there is that little bit of doubt, hence Abraham's silence. There is a teaching in Judaism and in Hinduism that if you always speak the truth your word becomes law in the universe. (Isaiah 55:11; Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, 2) The Chassidic Koznitzer Rebbe said that "if one is careful of what he says, making sure that none of his words are meaningless, 'whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.' (Num. 30:3) God will do as the person says. All blessings will be fulfilled and their words become like edicts to be implemented." (Soul of the Torah, p. 304)

In other words, God enlists our partnership through our belief, words and actions. However anxious he may be, Abraham's words reflect his faith in God. He says to his two servant boys, "stay here and we will return to you." When Isaac asks his father, "Where is the sacrifice?" Abraham answers that God will provide the sacrifice. These words come true.

"God enlists our partnership through our belief, words and actions."

Abraham follows God with perfect faith, but not with blind faith. It is a trust informed by the intimate relationship between them, developed over years. Abraham knew God and God knew Abraham, a relationship of in-

timacy and even love. We, too, are given more support than we know going into our tests. The midrash teaches that no one is given a test he cannot pass (Ex. Rabba 34:1), and further that the word for being tested (nisa) is related to the word flag (nes), flown high over a ship, teaching us that tests are meant to elevate us. (Gen. Rabba 55:6)

By giving Abraham this paradox, we learn that God helps us with every choice, arranging the circumstances, guiding us and enlisting our participation through prediction and prophecy, so that not only will we choose correctly, but that we will keep moving upward and forward, growing in goodness. Our tests are given with love and respect for us and our ability to choose growth. It was Abraham's strong faith, informed by the seven promises, that allowed him to act with courage, trusting God and the goodness of life. The paradox he received had the power to strengthen his relationship with the Divine, his intuitive trust in God and his deep knowing that he would always be cared for and blessed.

Jill Hausman is the rabbi and cantor of the historic Actors' Temple in Manhattan.

● MUSINGS

Bring Back the Noise

By David Wolpe

For years, we had a problem at morning minyan. There is a day school in the synagogue building, which is a great blessing. The kids arrive around the time of the minyan, which is less of a blessing. People trying to pray would be distracted by a sudden onrush of noise – parents dropping off their children, children shouting to one another, and an occasional frantic student running into the chapel to replace the kippah he'd left at home. The minyan attendees were a very tolerant bunch, but sometimes it was not easy.

Then of course, the pandemic struck. Not only did we miss the minyan at first, but even after it resumed, and procedures were altered or only certain classes were in person, things were quiet. And I realized I missed the noise.

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Cheshvan 16, 5782 | Friday, October 22, 2021

• **Light candles at:** 5:47 p.m.

Cheshvan 17, 5782 | Saturday, October 23, 2021

• **Torah reading:** Vayera, Genesis 18:1–22:24

• **Haftarah:** Kings II 4:1–37

• **Shabbat ends:** 6:45 p.m.

I wonder how many things that we think of as problems we would miss if they were taken away. Sometimes underneath what we consider difficulty there is emptiness. I remember the woman in the assisted living facility who was asked by sociologist Barbara Myerhoff why she fights with the other residents so often. She answered, “We fight to keep warm.”

Bring back the problems. Bring back the noise.

*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.*

● NEW YORK ARTS

Lockdown Inspires an Artist’s Loving Tribute to an Older, Grittier New York

By Julia Gergely

Growing up in Roslyn, Long Island, Sam Sidney’s frequent trips to New York City meant lunch at Sammy’s Noodles in the West Village and hanging around the vintage clothing stores and antique flea markets in Chelsea. It was a little dirty, a little dangerous and always exciting.

Now, post-pandemic, Sidney thinks there might be an opening for that version of New York — what she called the “quintessential” New York of the ‘80s — to return, and she wants to celebrate it.

“We have entered a new New York, a revival period,” said the artist and teacher. “Things can be amazing again.”

Her new exhibit, “New York Never Felt So Good,” is a collection of 23 felt portraits, ranging in size from a 16” x 20” bagel and lox to the 40” x 30” Lady Liberty. The pieces pop off the wall at Eerdmans New York on E 10th St., somewhere between childlike cartoons and Picasso renditions.

Iconic blue-and-white coffee cups, a MetroCard and a box of Italian cookies all get their moments to shine, alongside iconic New Yorkers of the last half century: fashionista Iris Apfel, writer Fran Lebowitz, Joan Rivers, John Lennon.

The origins of the project are humble: an early pandemic project to cure boredom and sustain artistic inspiration. In April 2020, Sidney committed to doing one art project a day with her four kids in Charleston, South Carolina, where she has lived for 15 years. She would document their work on Instagram to hold herself accountable. Working with felt was easy for her kids of varying ages — it wasn’t messy and the cut pieces could be put back into a box and reconfigured into new designs the next day.

When Sidney posted a felt self-portrait on Instagram, people “went crazy for it,” she said. A friend commissioned a series of nine musicians, and what started as a pandemic project evolved into an art style, a business and now a gallery exhibit.

For Sidney, being Jewish and being from New York are one and the same — there’s an unspoken, mutual understanding between the two identities. “I think I’d have more in common with any non-Jewish New Yorker than a Jewish person from Charleston,” she told The Jewish Week.

Sidney studied art at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York and later got her master’s degree in art education at NYU. Living in Gramercy Park in her 20s, she exhibited her work at various galleries. After moving to Charleston she stopped exhibiting her work publicly.

“I never wanted to leave New York,” Sidney said, “and I’m always thinking about when I’m going to move back,” even though, she admitted, her return is unlikely. (On trips back to the city to visit family or drop off her kids at summer camp, there is always a food agenda: a real bagel and a good slice of pizza.)

The felt pieces are reminders of the people and culture that defined the gritty, artsy, intense, version of New York that existed in Sidney’s adolescence. They insist that New York can never die, even through a pandemic, even if you move across the country.

New York Never Felt So Good is on view at Eerdmans New York until Nov. 6.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The New Jew**October 24 | 3:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.** \$10

YM & YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood presents an in-person screening of the first episode of “The New Jew,” followed by a conversation and Q&A with series creators Guri Alfi, Asaf Nawi and Moshe Samuels. “The New Jew” is a four-episode TV documentary series showcasing the cultural and political influence of the Jewish community in the United States from the perspective of a secular Israeli comedian.

Get tickets at <https://ywhi.org/jewish-life/the-new-jew>

October 25 | 7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. \$15

UJA-Federation invites you to explore “The New Jew,” a new, four-part Israeli documentary series highlighting the variety of alternative models for living a rich Jewish life. The Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan presents two full episodes of “The New Jew,” followed by a panel discussion with Guri Alfi, the star of “The New Jew,” and series creators Asaf Nawi and Moshe Samuels. Hear the many ways that the show is already changing the conversation in Israel about American Judaism.

Get tickets at <https://cinematters.eventive.org/schedule/613f74f92f2507009be8a7f5>

“Soros”**October 26 | 3:00 p.m.** Free

Join the Museum of Jewish Heritage for a virtual screening and discussion of “Soros,” a new film that follows financier and philanthropist George Soros across the globe and pulls back the curtain on his personal history, private wealth, and public activism. Featuring director Jesse Dylan and producer Priscilla Cohen, and moderated by Jessica Shaw, host of EW Live on Sirius XM. Attendees will also receive a private link to stream the film online from October 21 to October 27.

Register at <https://mjhnyc.org/events/soros-screening-and-discussion>

Getting Started with Ashkenazi Jewish DNA**October 28 | 5:00 p.m.** Free

The Center for Jewish History will live stream a discussion, “Family History Today: No, You Don’t Really Have 7,900 Fourth Cousins – Getting Started with Ashkenazi Jewish DNA.” Jennifer Mendelsohn, a journalist and professional genealogist, will help those with Ashkenazi heritage learn how to make sense of their DNA results.

Register at <https://programs.cjh.org/tickets/family-history-today-2021-10-28>

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