

The New York Jewish Week/end

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A view of Hunter College in New York City. (Matthew Rutledge/Flickr Commons)

Must read

Brooklyn Judaica Store Drops Children's Books by Author Accused of Sexual Misconduct / Page 4

Buy This Catskills Bungalow Colony and Own a Piece of the Borscht Belt / Page 5

This Israeli Play Is Being Performed Across New York City — But Only in People's Living Rooms / Page 5

Editor's Desk / Page 7

Opinion / Page 8

Sabbath Week / Page 11

Musings, David Wolpe / Page 12

Arts and Culture / Page 13

Events / Page 15

● NEWS

The Latest Battleground in the War Over Whether Colleges Are Safe for Jews: Hunter College

By Ben Sales

Is the social work school at Hunter College coddling antisemitism, or is it part of an institution that's deeply committed to protecting Jews from prejudice?

That question has come to the fore after a pro-Israel organization filed a federal complaint alleging a "pervasively hostile campus climate for Jewish students" at the New York City school and its Silberman School of Social Work, in particular.

And, as is often the case, the answer depends on whom you ask.

The complaint made on behalf of students by the California-based StandWithUs, filed last week with the federal Department of Education, was made under Title

VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination in federally funded programs. It paints a dire picture of the way Jewish students are treated at the school.

The StandWithUs complaint lists a series of alleged antisemitic incidents that it says the administration has not responded to adequately, including a disruptive anti-Israel protest during a Zoom class in May. According to the complaint, the alleged incidents have the effect of “leaving Jewish students with the clear impression that they are not equal members of the Silberman/Hunter campus community, and [are] therefore unable to participate fully in campus life.”

The complaint comes during a year when the CUNY system as a whole became embroiled in allegations of antisemitism. In April, the student government engaged in a heated debate over how to define antisemitism. In June, the faculty union passed a resolution calling Israel a “settler-colonial” state, and condemned it exclusively for its conflict with Hamas in Gaza in May. At least 50 professors resigned from the union in protest.

But speaking to The Jewish Week, Jewish stakeholders on campus, including the Hillel, have praised the Hunter administration’s work combating antisemitism — while they acknowledge tension and hostility over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A student leader told The Jewish Week that while she doesn’t feel targeted by overt antisemitism on campus, Jewish students often feel uncomfortable sharing their opinions on Israel for fear of drawing backlash, and that, at times, anti-Israel rhetoric does veer into antisemitism.

“As a Jewish person I’m not discriminated against,” said senior Jennie Reich Litzky, the Hillel student president, who is not a student in the social work school, and spoke for herself and not on behalf of Hillel. “I think there is definitely tension with the Israel-Palestine situation that makes it more difficult. But I feel like as a Jew, if I don’t share my political stance, I’m usually OK.”

Hunter, a campus on the Upper East Side of Manhattan that’s one branch of the City University of New York system, has approximately 23,000 students. According to Hillel, approximately 10% of them are Jewish.

Other Jewish organizations dispute StandWithUs’s characterization of Hunter, and say the school has gone above and beyond in defending Jewish students. Both the

campus chapter of Hillel, the international Jewish student organization, and Hunter’s Jewish Studies Center, whose director has been a vocal opponent of anti-Israel activism, said they did not know the complaint was coming.

“I have felt profoundly the sense of support from the administration, who really, really understand how important this is on all levels,” said Leah Garrett, a Jewish historian and the Jewish Studies Center’s director. She was one of the professors who resigned from the CUNY union and wrote a column in July explaining that decision.

“I’ve never felt this kind of support from [another] administration in terms of me being a strong public voice, fighting, in every way possible, antisemitism,” she added.

The complaint is the latest in a series of similar filings under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act that pro-Israel groups have submitted to the Education Department. The complaints allege antisemitism at schools nationwide, including at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and University of California, Los Angeles. In 2019, President Donald Trump signed an executive order mandating “robust” enforcement of civil rights protections for Jews on campus.

StandWithUs’s complaint centers on a pro-Palestinian protest during a Zoom class on May 20, the day the most recent fighting in Israel and Gaza ended. According to the complaint and Fox News reporting at the time, during a class in the social work school with around 200 attendees, a group of students changed their on-screen names to “Free Palestine: Decolonize” and took turns reading a 20-minute long manifesto accusing Israel of apartheid, ethnic cleansing and, according to the complaint, genocide.

In the chat accompanying the Zoom class, one protester reportedly wrote, “The Holocaust has been used as a tool. The fear of anti-Semitism as the fear of ‘this could happen again’ is being used preemptively to oppress and kill others.”

At least one professor allegedly participated in the protest. The professor in question was named by an anonymous student in the Fox News article, but not quoted. The professor did not respond to a Jewish Week request for comment.

The students and alumni named in the StandWithUs

complaint also declined or did not respond to requests for comment, which were made directly by a reporter and via StandWithUs.

After the protest, according to the complaint, another professor defended the protesters. The complaint also says that while the school said it would investigate the incident, the complaining students were never contacted by the administration.

"This has been an ongoing problem," said Carly F. Gammill, the director of the StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism. "The continued lack of meaningful response from the administration really was the impetus for why this is happening now, obviously in light of the most recent incident in May."

The school, as well as the Hillel and the Jewish Studies Center, do not dispute that the May 20 protest occurred, but tell a different story of the administration's response. Hunter told The Jewish Week in a statement that it did conduct an investigation after the incident, which "resulted in formal reprimands." But the school would not say who was reprimanded, what those reprimands entailed or whether Jewish students who complained were contacted by the administration.

Following the May conflict between Israel and Gaza, which sparked an uptick in antisemitism across the U.S., members of Hunter's administration met with Jewish students to make sure they understood how to file formal complaints of antisemitism. Administrators also held a lengthy meeting with the Hillel board and offered to beef up security around the Hillel building.

In a statement to The Jewish Week, Hillel pointed to a condemnation of antisemitism from Hunter's president, Jennifer Raab, who is Jewish, which was posted to Hunter College's web site six days after the protest. Raab said the school is "deeply troubled by the recent outbreak of hateful anti-Semitic speech" and later added that "We can and must do our part to dispel hatred, particularly in our own community—online as well as in person."

"The administration was quite responsive when we explained that our students were feeling unsafe and bullied online," Merav Fine Braun, the Hillel's executive director, said regarding reports of campus antisemitism in the wake of the May conflict. "They responded to each of the students' complaints individually and as a group."

In a statement to The Jewish Week, the social work school characterized the May 20 incident as an exchange of "strong and, at times, heated opposing viewpoints and sentiments about the recent conflict in the Middle East" that temporarily disrupted the class. The statement also said the school "takes very seriously any allegations of anti-Semitism" and has been examining its "curriculum, programs, and school environment to ensure it is devoid of anti-Semitism in all of its forms."

The social work school posted Raab's statement on its own site as well. But the StandWithUs complaint faults the social work school for not putting out its own public statement against antisemitism, as it has regarding anti-Black and anti-Asian racism. And Gammill said that the fact that students told StandWithUs they didn't know about the school's investigation "speaks volumes about the lack of transparency of this administration."

The complaint also lists a series of other alleged incidents, including two allegations in which faculty members suggested to Orthodox students that their being Orthodox would hinder their ability to work with patients. A Hunter spokesperson told The Jewish Week that the school had not been aware of those allegations and would investigate.

Multiple allegations center on Students for Justice in Palestine, an anti-Zionist group. One item in the complaint, which made news at the time, concerns a 2015 rally at Hunter co-organized by SJP that featured chants of "Zionists out of CUNY" and "Long live the Intifada." A report on antisemitism commissioned by CUNY and published the following year said, "There is evidence that some members of the crowd shouted 'Jews Out of CUNY' and 'Death to Jews.'" Hunter and CUNY leadership condemned the antisemitic remarks at the time.

Students for Justice in Palestine at Hunter did not respond to an email seeking comment.

One section of the complaint alleges that a professor publicly called a student "Rachel," which is not her name, after the student said she wouldn't be able to eat non-kosher pizza at an event. The complaint adds that the incident was "eerily reminiscent" of a Nazi policy to rename Jews with the names "Israel" and "Sara." Gammill said she stands by that comparison as "explanatory information for anyone reading the complaint, certainly anyone who might be investigating the complaint, to un-

derstand that background.”

Garrett, the Jewish Studies Center director, said that Hunter has supported her department in public-facing efforts regarding antisemitism, including a monthly speaker series that has often addressed the topic as well as an upcoming program in which student fellows will study antisemitism and create programs to combat it. In December 2020, an adjunct Jewish studies professor spoke to social work faculty about the history of antisemitism.

“I always feel lucky to be at an institution that is so deeply protective of Jewish faculty and Jewish students,” Garrett said. “It’s been a nonstop sense since I’ve been hired, nearly four years ago, that it was really, really important to have a broad approach to antisemitism to make students here feel safe.”

Reich Litzky, the Hillel student president, said that she has seen antisemitic speech from Hunter students on social media. And while she understands that the school is limited in how it can police online spaces, she wants the administration to be more active on the issue and says it should take “some responsibility” to address online antisemitism among its student body.

“I think the administration has been supportive,” she said. “I definitely think that they’re acknowledging what’s happening. I don’t know if they’re doing something about it.”

● NEWS

Brooklyn Judaica Store Drops Children’s Books by Author Accused of Sexual Misconduct

By Shira Hanau

A Judaica and Jewish books store has stopped selling a series of popular children’s books after accusations of sexual misconduct surfaced against the books’ author.

Eichler’s Judaica, located in Borough Park in Brooklyn, made the announcement Tuesday evening, several days after the Israeli newspaper Haaretz published an investigation into alleged sexual abuse by Chaim Walder, the author of the “Kids Speak” series. The books, which have been published since the 1990s, tell stories about Orthodox Jewish children and emphasize a child’s perspective on the the problems they face in their lives. The books are popular among school-age children in Israel and the United States.

Mordy Getz, the owner of Eichler’s in Borough Park, announced the decision in a letter posted to Twitter and Instagram.

“It is with a heavy heart that we inform you that we will no longer carry the books of Chaim Walder in our stores due to shocking allegations recently revealed,” Getz wrote. “This decision was not made lightly and will no doubt come at a heavy financial cost, as these books were bestsellers — but as a business that cares about our community, we cannot ignore the pleas we have received on behalf of the alleged victims.”

In addition to his writing, Walder also works as a therapist and was honored in 2003 with the Israeli prime minister’s “protector of the child” award. According to the investigation by Haaretz, several women accused Walder of initiating sexual relationships with them when they approached him for counseling.

One girl told Haaretz that the alleged abuse began when she was 13, eventually progressing to weekly sexual encounters in a rented hotel room. Walder told another woman, who was 20 when he began a sexual relationship with her, that their sexual encounters “gave him the power to write to the children of Israel,” according to Haaretz.

Walder, who lives in Israel and is a popular speaker in the haredi Orthodox community there, is also a regular columnist and radio host for several Israeli Orthodox publications. He was suspended from two of those publications, Yated Neeman and Radio Kol Hai, on Wednesday in the wake of the allegations, according to Israeli news site Arutz Sheva.

Getz pointed to the contact Walder has with children through his work as a reason to stop selling the books

at Eichler's.

"Given that the access to alleged victims was largely by way of the author's books and work, we believe that this decision is an essential step in protecting our children and building a safer, healthier community," Getz wrote.

● NEWS

Buy This Catskills Bungalow Colony and Own a Piece of the Borscht Belt

By Lisa Keys

Immortalized by pop-culture phenomena like "Dirty Dancing" and "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," New York's Catskill Mountains were once the go-to summer destination for hundreds of thousands of Jewish New Yorkers.

According to the Catskills Institute at Northeastern University, "by the 1950s a half-million people each year inhabited the 'summer world' of bungalow colonies, summer camps and small hotels."

And now, a little piece of Catskills history is up for grabs: A bungalow colony in Ulster County is currently on the market for \$795,000. The property is located in the hamlet of Kerhonkson, about 100 miles north of New York City.

Known as Kalaka Village, the 77-acre property features an assortment of small cabins, totaling 10 bedrooms and 10 bathrooms. Communal amenities include an in-ground pool, tennis courts and a hiking trail. However, the cabins and the amenities require some serious work: According to Realtor.com, the cabins are "ramshackle" and "the pool appears drained and tired, and the tennis courts will need to be cleared of vegetation."

So who is buying up the Catskills' former bungalow colonies? In recent years, summering in the bungalow colonies has become a "mostly Orthodox ritual," as The Jewish Week reported last year, with Hasidic and yeshivish

Jews spending their summers away from Brooklyn or New York City's northern suburbs. Young folks, including non-Orthodox Jewish families, have bought bungalows as second homes or as year-round getaways.

Still, for the right buyer, the bungalow colony is an opportunity to revive, if just a tiny bit, the heyday of the Borscht Belt era, when families (read: mothers and children) would spend their summers in "the mountains," fathers might visit only on weekends, legendary Jewish comedians like Mel Brooks and Joan Rivers would perform, and everyone would enjoy a good game of "Simon Says."

● NEWS

This Israeli Play Is Being Performed Across New York City — But Only in People's Living Rooms

By Julia Gergely

"Welcome back to live theater!" Yoni Vendrigger says, standing before the audience before the show begins. It is, I realize, the first time I've seen a play in a theater since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

Except the theater, in this case, is an apartment in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, and the "stage" is, for most of the show, the living room couch.

About 15 of us make up the audience, most of them friends of the apartment's residents. Everyone in the room is in their 20s, and it feels more like a house party than a play as we get drinks and snacks and introduce ourselves. When the play is about to begin, we sit against the back wall in folding chairs and on extra couches. Vendrigger, the show's producer, gives the standard directives: silence our cell phones, try not to use the bathroom, enjoy.

We're here to see "Divorced," the American version of

the Israeli play “Grushim,” which was developed last year by Tel Aviv’s Cameri Theatre during the height of COVID lockdowns. Cameri, which receives funding from the Israeli government, is one of two main theaters in Israel, and is the official theater of Tel Aviv. The theater produces Hebrew adaptations of mainstream international plays as well as intimate, original Israeli plays that tour around the country.

“Grushim” is part of “Out of the Box,” an initiative by the theater to make art and theater accessible to more people during the pandemic. Some of the plays were performed over Zoom and/or live streamed; others, like “Grushim,” were produced to be performed in people’s homes or backyards, where audiences can maintain their bubbles.

“The idea was, if people can no longer go to the theater, then Cameri will bring the theater to them,” Vendrigger told the New York Jewish Week.

“It sounded fun. I’m friends with Yoni and he told me about it, so I offered to host and invited my friends to buy tickets,” said that evening’s host, Zach Schaffer, before the show. Other hosts find out through social media or word of mouth; their addresses are not revealed until the tickets are purchased.

Written by Gur Koren, the leading dramaturge at the Cameri, “Divorced” is the story of two characters, Maya and Ben, who share a child together and had split up five years previously. Maya’s most recent boyfriend has just broken up with her, and Ben is the only person who knows her well enough to help her move through it. It’s an intense and comedic story about a friendship and a connection that nothing — even new loves — can break.

“This play was born from this need, this desire, to bring art and connection into people’s homes,” said Vendrigger, who produced the American version through his non-profit organization, the Israeli Artists Project.

The Israeli Artists Project, launched in 2018, aims to produce and promote Israeli art, theater and music throughout the New York area. The project connects Israeli artists living throughout the area and showcases their work across the city, as well as producing its own shows, some with original music.

For Vendrigger, producing this particular play meant

finding a director, casting two sets of actors to alternate performances and translating the Hebrew version into English and making it feel more local to New York.

The play’s four actors, all in their 30s — Maia Karo, Ron Orlovsky, Emilly Bènamì and Matan Zrachia — are members of the Israeli Artists Project, so Vendrigger had worked with them before. They perform the show in both its English and Hebrew versions depending on the night.

In Israel, audiences can now see the play in theaters. But since its arrival in New York City in June, “Divorced” has relied on people to host the show in their apartments, as it was originally intended. Some months, the show runs six times, in six different apartments. Some months there are only two willing hosts. “It’s really up to however many we can organize,” Orlovsky, who alternates the male lead with Zrachia, told me.

“We created a play that can take place in any setting, without any lighting, without any space,” said Zrachia, who also directed the New York adaptation. “It’s just two people, having a conversation.”

Though apartment-based theater became something of a phenomenon during the pandemic, I had yet to experience such a production. I was excited — and, if not quite skeptical, at least slightly unconvinced about the whole premise.

Until it started, that is. I fully forgot I was in a stranger’s apartment while I was watching the show. The room was small enough that I could hear every word, every inflection, every sigh. I was the closest I’d ever been to a “stage” — only a few feet away — and I could see every wince, smile or eye roll.

“You were so into it,” Karo, the lead actress that evening, tells me after the show when I go up to give her a hug. “The energy of the audience makes a huge difference. I was like, ‘I must be doing a great job.’”

Honestly, the experience brought a whole new meaning to live theater. By the end, I was not only willing to watch the whole play again, I also wanted to host a production in my apartment.

Vendrigger said the show will run as long as it can.

“I don’t necessarily see an end in sight,” he said. “Even as Broadway opens up, there will always be people who pre-

fer not going into a theater with strangers, or people who still want to see small, intimate experiences. When you watch a play like this with your friends and family, or even people you don't know, it becomes a meeting place and a gathering place for people with similar interests to arrive at a specific location and share the experience together."

● EDITOR'S DESK

John Oliver Just Celebrated 'Look for the Union Label,' a '70s Labor Jingle with Deep Jewish Roots

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

If you watched television in the 1970s and early 1980s, chances are you can sing a few bars of "Look for the Union Label," a jingle sung on commercials for the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. The infectious song was meant to prop up what was then the sagging American-made clothing industry, and the ads featured actual union members singing the praises of union-made garments.

The song was more memorable than effective: Labor unions never recovered from a host of trends that shifted power from organized labor to management, as John Oliver explained on Sunday night's episode of his "Last Week Tonight" show on HBO. Oliver began his segment on union-busting with a clip of "Look for the Union Label," an early version showing a multicultural cast of women singing the iconic lyrics:

Look for the union label, when you are buying that coat, dress, or blouse,

Remember somewhere, our union's sewing, our wages going to feed the kids and run the house,

We work hard, but who's complaining? Thanks to the ILG we're making our way,

So always look for the union label, it says we're able to make it in the U.S.A.!

The song always felt vaguely Jewish to me, especially that line, "but who's complaining?" — which sounds like it was translated directly from the Yiddish. It turns out I was right, up to a point. While the Yiddish trade union roots of the ILGWU are undeniable, and the song's lyricist was a pioneering Jewish advertising executive, the jingle also has a back story that touches on gender, feminism and the civil rights movement.

The song was discussed in 2019 at an exhibit at the New-York Historical Society, "Ladies' Garments, Women's Work, Women's Activism." ILGWU, founded in 1909 to unionize workers who made women's garments, was instrumental in organizing immigrant women, particularly Jews, who worked in the "rag trade." David Dubinsky, a Russian-born Jew who came to New York as a teenager, served as its president from 1932 until 1966.

As the NYHS show explained, the union reached the height of its power in 1959, when it claimed nearly a half-million members, mostly in the New York area. But by the 1970s, unionized shops were closing throughout the United States and work was being shipped to factories overseas.

As Nicholas Juravich, at the time a postdoctoral fellow at the NYHS's Center for Women's History, explained in an essay, "the new 'union label' campaign was imagined as a national, industry-wide strategy to build support for the ILGWU beyond its traditional strongholds." In 1975, he writes, only 1.7 billion garments left union shops, a decline of nearly 40% in just seven years.

The lyrics were by the ad campaign's director, Paula Green. Green was a Jewish woman who moved to New York from California and became one of the first woman executives in the advertising industry when she founded what would become Paula Green Advertising. (At the famed Doyle Dane Bernbach agency in 1962, Juravich explains, she created the "We Try Harder" catchphrase and campaign for Avis, which the car rental company still uses.) The music was by Malcolm Dodds, a Brooklyn-born, African-American vocalist and choral leader who sang in the '50s doo-wop group The Tunedrops.

The campaign had to avoid a pitfall of earlier "union label" campaigns, which were often nativist and racist

in urging consumers to buy American instead of foreign-made goods.

“They really avoid that kind of ugly nativism conceit that, certainly in the ’70s and ’80s, was bubbling up in parts of the labor movement and in popular culture around jobs going overseas,” Juravich, now assistant professor of History and Labor Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, said in an interview Tuesday. “The campaign showcases the creativity and the multiculturalism of the union, and it puts workers and their faces front and center. Because so much of the rhetoric, even in the ’80s, around what happened to the American working class focuses on the white male worker. But the ILG ads are gloriously chaotic and full of people from all over.”

In other ways, too, the campaign fought clichés of unions as male-dominated, cigar-munching syndicates. “I felt particularly close to the women in the union,” Green told *The New York Times* in 2004. “They are real examples of women’s liberation.”

The song left a cultural imprint: Jimmy Carter called it one of his favorites, Al Gore sang it on the campaign trail, and both “Saturday Night Live” and “South Park” lampooned it. Cory Matthews sings the first line in an episode of the 1990s sitcom “Boy Meets World.”

And the Jewish stamp on the song is unmistakable, if not immediately apparent. Juravich cites the work of Daniel Katz, a labor historian at CUNY, who argues in his 2011 book “All Together Now” that Yiddish socialism helped create a distinctive workers’ culture that embraced various ethnicities and nationalities. “This socialist tradition infuses the ILG,” Juravich said.

Nevertheless, the song didn’t do much either to sell union-made products or bolster organized labor.

“It’s a great song. It’s a great history,” said Juravich. “The depressing thing is that it didn’t inspire the consumer activism it could have, which required policy-level interventions by the U.S. government. But I do think there’s some positives in the way it really engaged the workers and their story in a very public and deliberate way.”

Andrew Silow-Carroll is the editor in chief of *The New York Jewish Week* and senior editor of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (@SilowCarroll).

● OPINION

The Pandemic Disrupted the Morning Minyan. When Will Non-Orthodox Jews Like Me Gather Again for Daily Prayer?

By Neil Kurshan

I live in one of the most concentrated Jewish communities in the United States, the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and I no longer have a daily morning minyan to attend in person.

It seems that in my neighborhood, as well as many others, COVID-19 snuffed out the live morning minyan — the daily prayer service that needs a quorum of 10 Jews — in non-Orthodox settings. Pre-pandemic I had a choice of multiple minyans I could attend in a variety of egalitarian Jewish settings — synagogues and schools — but none of them is operating in-person now.

I worry that the minyan muscle has atrophied in my community, and the habit has been lost of rising early in the morning, getting out the door with prayer shawl and tefillin, and making it inside the beit midrash in time for prayer.

It’s not that non-Orthodox Jews in my neighborhood aren’t praying each morning. Many are, both alone and online, where services moved for non-Orthodox Jews last March. Zoom services were a necessary accommodation to a public health crisis, and it is unquestionably easier to tune in to services from home, but it hasn’t worked for me. Fifty disembodied faces on a screen feel less like a community to me than the 15 bodies draped in prayer shawls who huddle around the amud (leader’s table) at a typical in-person minyan. The on-key solo voice of the shaliach tzibur, the leader of the service, inspires me less than the multiple off-key voices of those

gathered live for prayers.

As Shabbat and holiday services have resumed, with precautions, in person, I thought the morning minyan would, too. But they have remained resolutely online. I am sympathetic to the reasons why, and to the difficulties of reconstituting the in-person morning minyan. It is hard work in many non-Orthodox synagogues to assure that 10 people will be present early in the morning six days a week. It is much easier and more convenient to get out of bed, hit a button on the computer and be transported instantly to the minyan. And without question Zoom has made it possible for those unable because of physical limitations and other reasons to attend an in-person minyan.

Yet there is so much that has been lost and that I miss. I miss my fellow “minyannaire” who each year before Rosh Hashanah brings me honey from the beehives on the rooftop of his apartment.

I miss the frail elderly Russian gentleman who stands to say Kaddish for himself because he is convinced that none of his children will say Kaddish for him after he dies.

I miss the mother and her grown son who start their day together sitting side by side and who kiss one another good-bye as they leave the minyan and go their separate ways.

And I miss the easy banter with my fellow minyannaires with whom I share vacation plans, exploits on the pickleball court and the most recent achievements of my grandchildren. I miss how the in-person morning minyan magically imbued the minute details of the mundane with the significance of the sacred.

But above all I miss what Abba Kovner, the late Jewish resistance fighter, called “the tug on the sleeve.” Kovner would tell the story of going to the Western Wall his first week in Israel after the end of World War II. He was about to leave when he felt a tug on his sleeve as he was asked to join a minyan that was forming for prayer. He tells of being inspired not so much by the prayers but more by the sense of belonging. More than anything else I miss knowing that my physical presence is needed to make a minyan.

For more than 40 years, I was responsible for making the minyan happen in my suburban Long Island synagogue.

There were many nights I did not sleep well worrying that 10 people might not show up the next morning, and I took too personally the days when only nine people attended and a mourner was unable to say Kaddish. Looking back at all the worry and frustration, I nevertheless feel that I was engaged in worthy work.

Many people, religious and not, yearn for places where they can gather, connect and socialize with other people outside of the home and workplace. Sociologists call these settings “third places,” and so many of them closed during the pandemic — bars, coffee shops, gyms, libraries — that experts fear the impact on people’s mental health and social well-being. As a psychology professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York put it at the height of the pandemic, “What’s lost is the sensory sense of being with other people. I don’t think we know yet what the consequences of that will be, except that I think people are going to remain more fearful and anxious.”

Many years after Abba Kovner was called to be the 10th for a minyan at the Western Wall, a museum known as Beit Hatefutzot, the Museum of the Diaspora, was built on the campus of Tel Aviv University. (It has now been overhauled and renamed Anu — Museum of the Jewish People.) Kovner designed a corner in the museum known as “The Minyan” represented by a variety of figures preparing to pray together. Just before the museum opened its doors for the first time someone noticed that there were only nine figures in the model. The museum frantically reached out to Kovner, but he calmly responded that nine was the correct number: There was supposed to be a missing person. The missing person was a call to each person who visited the museum to become the 10th.

When I do join the Zoom minyan of my synagogue community, I note the faces and names of my fellow participants. When it is a day I am observing a *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of a loved one’s death, I dutifully tap the “raise hand” button so I can be called upon to mention the name of the person for whom I am saying Kaddish. But I yearn to feel again the tug on my sleeve, and to be told to come inside because there are nine people who need me as the missing tenth.

Neil Kurshan is *rabbi emeritus of the Huntington Jewish Center in Huntington, New York.*

● OPINION

As Yeshiva University's Basketball Team Continues Its Winning Streak, It's Time for Their Fans to Step Up

By Ami Eden

Hey Yeshiva University fans, your high-flying basketball team needs you to step up!

Fans showed up Tuesday night at the Max Stern Athletic Center in Washington Heights expecting a 41st straight win from the Yeshiva University Maccabees and plenty of "oohs" and "ahhs" from the team's high-voltage motion offense. They got what they came for — it just took a little while. The team struggled out of the gate against College of Mount Saint Vincent, with sloppy passing, missed shots and defensive lapses. Nothing was falling for the dynamic duo of Ryan Turell and Gabriel Leifer.

Luckily for the Macs — and their #2 ranking and the longest current winning streak in men's college basketball — Eitan Halpert was on fire from 3-point range. Even his misses were paying off: At the end of the first half, his last-second corner 3 was in and out, but Turell swooped in from the opposite side for an above-the-rim put-back that sent Y.U. to the locker room with a 38-35 lead — and momentum despite their first-half struggles.

In the second half, the Macs came out with dominating defense — and nothing could save the opposing Dolphins. Final score: 81-49 (that's 43-14 in the second half).

"I loved our second half energy and defense," Y.U. coach Elliot Steinmetz said. "In a game where we didn't shoot the ball well, it was good to see our defense carry the day."

Steinmetz has turned Y.U. basketball into a top-level Division III program, with a winning system and a roster packed with smart and talented players — and a real

shot at winning a national championship. The team is attracting national attention.

But now the fans have to do their part. Sure, they love their Macs, and they get jazzed up over a big block, slam or 3-pointer. But overall, the crowd Tuesday night felt disorganized and lacked creativity. Where are the original chants — something beyond the predictable "Dee-fense"? Maybe, "Frum Jews can jump"? Or, "We can boogie, we can fight, we don't ball on Friday night"? Or how about singing, after every Turell big play: "Ry-an, melekh yisrael, chai chai vekayam"?

A few signs would be nice. And maybe some nicknames: Jordan Armstrong, a grad student new to the team, who already played three seasons at Oberlin as an undergrad, should hereby be known as The Matrix (if you check out his photo and don't get it, you're definitely not ready for the red pill). Oh, and something, anything, with latkes for goodness' sake.

In short: Watching this Macs team should feel more like big-time soccer (sans the fighting and racism) and less like a yeshiva high school game.

One person you can't blame is Turell's mom. She's up out of her seat, trying to organize the fans in some chants throughout the game. But, come on, Y.U. fans. She needs some help out there.

A few additional notes from the game:

- Pretty certain 6-foot-7 Turell became the first player in Y.U. history to bump his head on the side of the backboard, courtesy of a lob gone wrong. Don't worry, he seemed fine — his kippah may have cushioned the blow.
- It was actually Turell's second blown alleyoop of the game, the other being a difficult back-to-the-basket put-in that rolled out just as the fans were about to explode.
- Even on an off-shooting night (just five points and several missed open looks), Leifer was finding ways to control the game (12 rebounds, nine assists, four steals).
- Speaking of Jews who can jump: Ofek Reef.
- Adi Markovich has more hustle than Bernie Madoff.

● **SABBATH WEEK**
PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

Thanksgiving Is About Taking From the Universe Only as Much as We Need

Jacob learns a lesson in gratitude.

By Rabbi Adina Lewittes

There's a profound irony in American culture that many of us barely notice. Every year on the fourth Thursday of November we gather over turkey to express our gratitude for all the blessings that fill our lives, our humble thanks for all that life has given us.

And then, at the crack of dawn the next day (if not later that same night), we mob the stores, often pushing and shoving one another, to acquire more and more and more. "Thank you for everything. Now move over, I need to get me some more."

Granted, we all have legitimate needs in life. Sometimes they take the form of new appliances. But most of us who brave the crowds on Black Friday to find the best deals are motivated by something other than need. And it might not be greed. It might be something even more dangerous, more sinister. It might be our tragic failure to achieve happiness with the plenty that many of us do, thankfully, have. Our inability to attain satisfaction in what we possess or what we've achieved is one of the more corrosive features of modern life.

Every so often we encounter a text that grabs our attention and lingers in our souls. Here's one that I carry around in me, sometimes more — and sometimes less — aware of its presence. In Sanskrit there is a teaching that goes like this: "Take from the universe only as much as you need; no more and no less." I learned it first from a yoga teacher who used it as a frame for our practice: Push your body to reap the benefit of the poses only as much as your body needs it. Don't push more; don't push less.

What if we were able to harness the power of this teaching in other areas of our lives? What if in our work we invested ourselves as much as we needed to in order to achieve success and financial security, no more and no less?

What if in our relationships — as friends, family members, community members, citizens -- we asked one another for as much as we needed to achieve happiness, stability and fulfillment, no more and no less?

What if in our spiritual lives we devoted ourselves as much as we needed to to feel connection, purpose, and growth, no more and no less?

Each extreme is painful and destructive. When we demand of ourselves or others more than we need and when we accept less than we need, that's when things break down.

This week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, illustrates this lesson in a poignant way. Jacob is making his way back to Canaan after having lived in exile for over 20 years with his uncle Laban. He had fled the wrath of his brother Esau after exploiting him to get his birthright and stealing his blessing from their father Isaac. Jacob ruptured his family when he connived to take more from the universe than was his to take.

In preparing to face Esau again, Jacob (now a rich man from working with Laban) sends ahead to his brother many expensive gifts — over 500 animals of different kinds — as a peace offering, but also to test Esau's demeanor. The encounter ends peacefully and they each go their separate ways.

When Jacob reaches the city of Shechem, the Torah says, "Vayavo Yaakov shalem" — Jacob arrived whole. Why does the text need to tell us that? What does it mean?

Rashi, the medieval French rabbi and commentator, offers three possible explanations:

- Jacob arrived physically whole, for he had healed from the limp which he got as a result from wrestling with the angel the night before he faced Esau.
- He arrived spiritually whole, for he had not forgotten any of his learning, his study of Torah, while in Laban's home for 20 years.

- Jacob was materially whole, for he had not lost anything as a result of the gifts he gave his brother.

Practically speaking, these recoveries seem a bit far-fetched. Could Jacob really have healed so quickly from his hip injury? Anyone who's suffered from sciatica knows better. Sometimes I can barely remember a sermon I gave last week, never mind one I might have given 20 years ago! And how and where could he have replaced those 500 animals he gave to Esav?

Maybe Rashi's deeper point is that while Jacob had clearly become diminished in these ways — physically, spiritually and materially — he retained enough of what he needed in order to feel whole, to feel complete and satisfied in his life. Maybe he had finally learned to seek and appreciate only as much as he needed from the world, without conspiring to take more, or conceding to having less.

"Jacob ruptured his family when he connived to take more from the universe than was his to take."

"Vayavo Yaakov shalem/And Yaakov arrived whole." Diminished physically by the lasting injury from his inner wrestling. Diminished spiritually by the long stretch of time since his last immersion into spiritual reflection. Diminished materially by his copious gifts to Esau. And yet whole. Complete. Feeling that he has enough, no more and no less, to return to his family and unfold the rest of his destiny.

As we continue to shop for gifts material, emotional or spiritual, let's take from the universe only as much as we need. No more. And no less. That's how we'll find the best deal of all.

Adina Lewittes is a rabbi and thought-leader who engages with contemporary questions of ethics, spirituality, identity and belonging. She can be reached at adinalewittes@gmail.com.

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Kislev 15, 5782 | Friday, November 19, 2021

- **Light candles at:** 4:16 p.m.

Kislev 16, 5782 | Saturday, November 20, 2021

- **Torah reading:** Vayishlach, Genesis 32:4–36:43
- **Haftarah:** Obadiah 1:1–21
- **Shabbat ends:** 5:18 p.m.

● MUSINGS

More Than One Way to Be a Slave

By David Wolpe

Pharaoh "intensified the labor" of the Israelites. The tyrant's motivation was deeper than random cruelty. In "Mesillat Yesharim," Path of the Upright, his famed book on ethical conduct, Rabbi Moses Luzzato writes that this was a measure to circumvent the possibility of rebellion. The Israelites would just be too busy to think and plan.

He goes on to say that the same principle applies in our own lives. Without the time to reflect on our souls, on our conduct, we are easily led astray and cannot break the bondage of the yetzer hara, the evil inclination. Who has not done things in a hurry that they wish they had done deliberately and therefore better? We all speak or act in haste, even though while we do it a part of ourselves whispers, "this is not wise."

Judaism builds pauses in our lives: daily prayer, blessings and Shabbat. Such times enable us to cool our tempers, consider our paths and operate from insight rather than impulse. As Rabbi Luzzato teaches, there is more than one way to be a slave.

*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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● **ARTS AND CULTURE**

Bestseller About a Once-Grand Jewish Family Inspires a Museum Exhibit in Manhattan

By Sandee Brawarsky

Edmund de Waal believes that objects, like families, are diasporic. They start in one place and end up in another, accumulating stories.

A master ceramist who exhibits his work internationally, de Waal is the author of the 2010 award-winning best-seller “The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance,” a memoir of the flourishing and fall of his European Jewish family’s banking and fine art dynasty.

Now the subject of an exhibition set to open Friday at The Jewish Museum in Manhattan, the book captured worldwide attention for its graceful and original storytelling, conjuring lost worlds of pre-Holocaust Europe through material objects and the stories they continue to tell.

On view at the museum are those objects: family photos, letters, mementos and art from the family’s collection, including paintings by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Berthe Morisot, Claude Monet, Gustave Moreau and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

At the heart of the exhibit is the eponymous hare, one of large collection of netsuke, tiny intricately carved Japanese figurines made of ivory and wood. Inherited by the author, whose Dutch-born father served as the Anglican Dean of Canterbury, the netsuke inspired his search and represent the family’s rise, rupture and resilience.

“There is this thing about tactility, about objects, about what they hold,” de Waal said in an interview from his London studio last week. “I honestly feel this idea that when you make something and pass it on, that there

is a transference of energy and emotion and imagination. I firmly believe that objects tell stories. If you are obsessive enough, you can work out the stories they might be telling.”

He continued, “No stories are straightforward. When you are trying to tell a story which is complex, like a family story, which is about memory and emotions and things which are explained and things which are withheld — it’s about secrets and silences as much as things that are passed down.”

In the style of the memoir, the exhibition traces the history of de Waal’s paternal family, the Ephrussi, an influential Jewish family whose roots were in Berdichev, a village in the Pale of Settlement in what is now central and western Ukraine. In 1840, Charles Joachim Ephrussi made his way to Odessa, where he was hugely successful in the grain trade, and then to Vienna, where the family further increased their wealth, prestige and philanthropy.

In the 1870s, a grandson of the family patriarch also named Charles Ephrussi, an art critic and collector (a cousin of the author’s great-grandfather), acquired a collection of 264 netsuke in Paris and kept them alongside paintings by his friends, including Renoir. The figurines were probably admired and handled by Charles’ friend Marcel Proust, who would visit his Parisian salon, before they were sent as a wedding gift to an Ephrussi cousin in Vienna.

In 1938, the Nazis looted and then occupied the Ephrussi’s grand Viennese palace and family members faced persecution, exile and death. The netsuke were secretly hidden in a mattress by an aide loyal to the family. After the war, when the netsuke were rediscovered, the author’s grandmother brought them to England, and later his great-uncle brought them to Japan, where Edmund first saw and touched this “very big collection of very small objects” in 1981.

At The Jewish Museum, the amber-eyed hare and the other miniatures, which de Waal describes as “seductively touchable” in the memoir, are behind glass. Most are signed by the artists who created them.

“I’m hoping the intimacy of the exhibition allows you to feel and sense that you are very close to them. You

can't touch them, but you can feel them," he says. He describes it as an immersive exhibition.

"The delicate process of excavation is part of the whole idea of the exhibition," he said. "It's about discovery ... a genuine attempt at storytelling."

Visitors to the exhibit will be able to hear de Waal reading from the memoir on an audio guide as they discover the netsuke as well as other objects.

They include a silk damask Torah parochet (Torah ark curtain) made from the wedding dress of a family member and pince-nez, or eyeglasses, made of glass and metal. The glasses belonged to Viktor von Ephrussi, who was born in Odessa in 1860 and died stateless in 1945.

Among the netsuke are a persimmon with a ladybird, a snake on a lotus leaf, three mice playing and a monkey eating a peach. There's also a 1978 portrait of de Waal's father, Victor de Waal, which the author says looks rabbinic.

Elizabeth Diller of Diller, Scofidio + Renfro designed the exhibition. The daughter of Holocaust survivors, she worked on the project to bring the memoir off the page, for 10 years along with de Waal.

Asked to imagine what it will be like to present in The Jewish Museum, with so many objects he has seen before now assembled in one place, de Waal says, "It's an extraordinary, beautiful, lyrical thing to see something again with fresh eyes. For me it's incredibly painful and poignant. There are things that I first saw 40 years ago in my uncle's apartment in Japan, or 50 years ago in my grandmother's house."

He says that he keeps talking to those who have passed. "Just because they have died doesn't mean that you're not still in conversation," he said.

Behind him in the studio are neatly arranged shelves of many books, and during a Zoom call he points out a few volumes of Rilke's poetry that belonged to his grandmother and that will not be in the show. He shifts his computer screen and points to a large installation on a wall nearby, with porcelain vessels arranged in a vitrine, based around a poem by Paul Celan.

De Waal speaks poetically and sparsely, like his prose and like his art.

"I always wanted to be a poet. Poetry is in everything I do. In my installations. I read poetry all the time." He recently created a poetry library for a cancer support center in England and will roll out the idea across the country.

Several years ago, de Waal gave most of the netsuke collection to the Jewish Museum Vienna on a long-term loan.

"That's exactly the right place for them," he says. Referring to the power of storytelling, he continues, "They can work really hard, talking about the diaspora, about what happened in Vienna." His family auctioned off 79 others, raising funds for refugee charities.

"We wanted to do this while my dad, who is 92, is alive. We decided to honor the fact that we are a refugee family. We raised a huge amount of money. That's also storytelling," he said. "You are not a passive bystander in this story, but an active participant. These stories aren't yet finished.

"People say, 'So you've moved on.' The answer is you can't move on. [The story] is still ongoing, unsettling, unresolved." He kept a few of the netsuke.

When I ask what a netsuke feels like in his hands, he says, "It's a proper playful experience. There's an expectation of what something feels like. You might know all about the dimensionality. You move it around and always discover something else. There's a gorgeous moment of delight, as you discover a rat's tail coiled up, or acrobats doing extraordinary things with their limbs. We are always surprised by objects, that's the joy."

For de Waal, writing and artmaking are entwined passions. Best known perhaps for his white porcelain vessels, he often fashions assemblages, shifting the light and space between his delicate, translucent creations. He has also created site-specific installations in museums and libraries around the world, including the Frick in New York City and – on exhibit now — at the Musée Nissim de Camondo in Paris.

He is also the author of "The White Road" about the history – and his fascination with — porcelain. His latest book is "Letters to Camondo," about another Jewish dynasty whose members lost their freedom, assets and lives to the Nazis.

For the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019, de Waal created

an exhibition in two parts: one in the Jewish Museum in the Venetian Ghetto and the second, a “library of exile” constructed inside a 16th-century building on the Grand Canal. It included almost 2,000 books by writers in exile, in 70 languages, from 52 countries. On walls covered with liquid porcelain, de Waal inscribed the names of lost libraries around the world, including those in Sarajevo, Mosul and Aleppo, the rabbinical libraries of Lublin and Warsaw and his great-grandfather’s library in Vienna.

After traveling to other museums, the “library of exile” is now in its permanent home in Mosul, Iraq, serving as the foundation of a new university library replacing what was destroyed.

“The Hare with Amber Eyes” is on view at The Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, from November 19, 2021 through May 15, 2022.

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 21 | 1:00 p.m.

Jewish Agriculturalism in the Garden State

The Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life at Rutgers is launching a new online exhibit that tells the little-known story of New Jersey’s Jewish farming legacy. In addition to historical photos and descriptions, the exhibit features interviews, on-location videos and music inspired by Jewish rural life in the Garden State. Advance registration is required for the official launch.

Register at <https://bildnercenter.rutgers.edu>

November 21 | 1:00 p.m. \$5+

Yiddish Meets Argentina

Flushing Town Hall’s new concert series, Common Ground: Mini-Global Mashups, will present “Yiddish Meets Argentina,” featuring Lorin Sklamberg, lead singer of the Grammy Award-winning, Jewish American roots band The Klezmatics, and Argentinian vocalist and songwriter Sofia Rei with accompanist JC Maillard. In-person: \$15/\$12 members; Virtual: \$7/\$5 members.

Get tickets at <https://bit.ly/3DB73a0>

November 21 | 3:00 p.m. Free

Antisemitism Today: A Conversation With Deborah Lipstadt and Ira Forman

Deborah Lipstadt, Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies at Emory University and Ira Forman, the former U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, will discuss the state of antisemitism today, how it has evolved since Forman’s tenure, and the most effective strategies for fighting back. Co-presented by the Museum of Jewish Heritage and New York Board of Rabbis.

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

November 22 | 3:00 p.m. Free

Answering the Call

Join the Workers Circle on Facebook Live for a short-form series, Answering the Call, a look at some of the most important issues and tumultuous decades of the 20th century as reported in the pages of the Workers Circle national in-house publication, The Call. Anthony Russell and Workers Circle Social Justice Organizer Jonathan Taubes will discuss voting rights, labor, racism and Jewish assimilation from the ’30s into the ’60s.

Join at <https://bit.ly/323usTx>

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