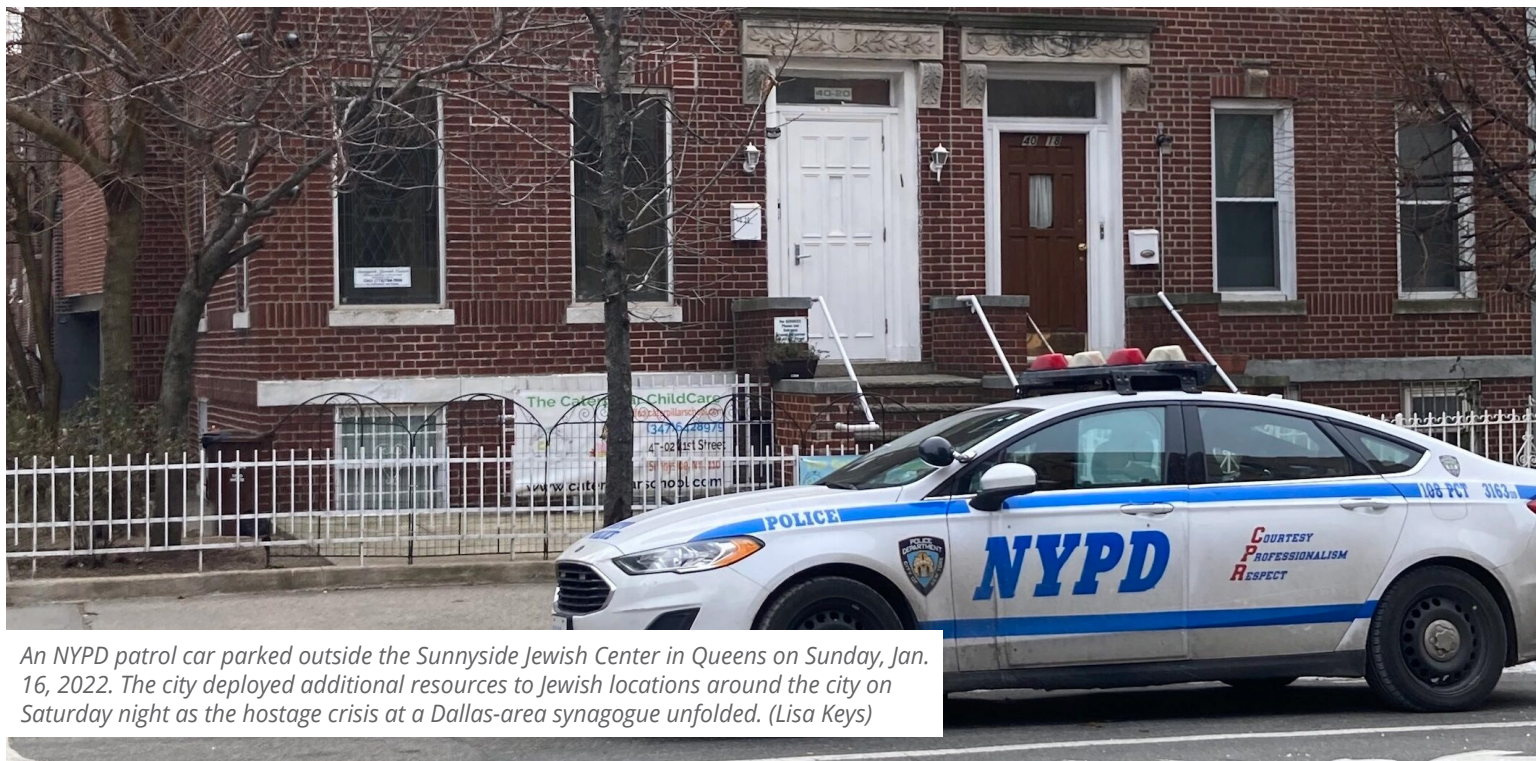


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An NYPD patrol car parked outside the Sunnyside Jewish Center in Queens on Sunday, Jan. 16, 2022. The city deployed additional resources to Jewish locations around the city on Saturday night as the hostage crisis at a Dallas-area synagogue unfolded. (Lisa Keys)

Must read

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● NEWS

Texas Synagogue Hostage-Taker Claimed to Have Planted Bombs in New York City

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

The British man who held Jews hostage at a Texas synagogue claimed to have planted bombs in New York City, according to the head of a Jewish communal security service in New York.

Some 1,000 people tuned into a briefing on Tuesday evening, presented by UJA-Federation of New York and the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, on Saturday's hostage-taking at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas.

During the Zoom event, Mitch Silber, executive director of the groups' Community Security Initiative, offered new details on the New York angle, including an account of the phone calls between the suspect, Malik Faisal Akram, and Rabbi

Angela Buchdahl of Manhattan's Central Synagogue.

Buchdahl had no prior contact with Akram, who according to Silber had learned her name thanks to her prominent social media presence. Akram demanded that one of the hostages, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, call Buchdahl on her cell phone, and that Akram told Buchdahl that he planned to kill the four hostages unless Aafia Siddiqui, a terrorism suspect serving time at a Texas prison, was released.

"Among Akram's claims," said Silber, "were that there were explosives planted in New York and Brooklyn, potentially in and around synagogues, and that he had associates in New York."

Law enforcement determined this week that there is no basis to these claims.

According to Silber, who said he spoke to Buchdahl directly as she waited in her apartment for members of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force to arrive, the NYPD also dispatched patrol cars to Central Synagogue and Buchdahl's apartment building.

Silber also described how Buchdahl contacted the head of security at her synagogue, who subsequently reached out to Silber's organization. After consulting with the NYPD Intelligence Bureau and other law enforcement agencies, Silber contacted two other Jewish community security services and shared a security alert with synagogues, schools, JCCs and museums in the New York area.

The hostage-taker flew into John F. Kennedy Airport just before New Year's and reportedly stayed at a hotel on Queens Boulevard before heading to Texas. All four hostages were unhurt and Akram died late Saturday after a standoff that lasted more than 10 hours in the Dallas suburb.

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● NEWS

Colleyville Rabbi Who Escaped Synagogue Hostage Situation: 'It's Safe to Go to Shul'

By Andrew Lapin

Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, the man at the center of the Colleyville, Texas, synagogue hostage crisis last weekend, says that he is looking for another job, but wants the world's focus to remain on his congregation's trauma and healing process rather than his career.

"My congregation, Congregation Beth Israel, and Colleyville have just undergone a traumatic experience. I've just undergone a traumatic experience," he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "And that's where the focus needs to be."

Cytron-Walker was responding to an article published earlier Wednesday in the Forward reporting that the rabbi had resigned from his congregation last fall, possibly amid discord about whether he should remain.

The synagogue is advertising for a new rabbi on the Reform movement's jobs board, its search committee met twice this month and Cytron-Walker made an oblique joke about the situation from the stage of a healing service held Monday night.

"I am looking for another opportunity after dedicating over 15 years of my life to a congregation," Cytron-Walker told JTA, adding that he is leaving with many positive feelings about the only pulpit he has held since graduating from rabbinical school. "I love the congregation. I love the people. I love the community."

Cytron-Walker said he also wants Jews to know that despite what happened to him, he would stress to Jews everywhere that "it's safe to go to shul" — and that synagogues should continue to make themselves sanctuaries for all.

Cytron-Walker's 12-hour ordeal with an antisemitic gunman on Saturday, which ended with him throwing a chair at the hostage-taker to allow himself and two congregants to escape safely, drew international attention to his congregation, as well as to himself. The rabbi said that it's been "incredibly overwhelming to see the level of support that we have received from our local community, our national community and the global community. I can't tell you how much it means to me and the congregation."

At the same time, he added, Beth Israel is still struggling to figure out how to heal.

"We're really trying to figure out what we need to do," he said. "We've got repairs to make to the congregation and we're making arrangements so that we can have services this weekend." He's also encouraging his congregants to seek out therapy if they need it.

The newfound scrutiny on the congregation has come with some discord, including a man identifying himself as a former congregant who criticized the rabbi on social media for, he claimed, forbidding congregants to carry guns inside the building and for calling Israel "an apartheid state." Both claims, Cytron-Walker said, were untrue.

Though Beth Israel requests that visitors to its synagogue not carry firearms openly, he said, concealed carry — hiding a firearm on one's person in a public setting with the proper license — is permitted.

"And I would have hoped that one of the people in the synagogue that morning, one of the members from the synagogue, had had a gun on them to have ended things a little bit earlier," he said. (Texas is an open-carry state, but "we don't feel that open carry should be a part of a synagogue service," the rabbi said.)

And, Cytron-Walker said, he does not believe Israel is an apartheid state. "When I teach about Israel, I teach about how Israel is complicated. I'm a huge supporter of Israel," he said, noting that the synagogue's education program works with the Ofek Learning Hub to have Israeli teachers leading online learning for youth programs, and that "we sing 'Hatikvah' [the Israeli national anthem] at the end of every religious school."

The hostage crisis has caused many Jews the world over to once again have heightened concerns for synagogue security, as congregation leadership weighs how to bal-

ance personal safety with the Jewish commandment to "welcome the stranger."

"It's such a random occurrence, and the percentages are so low" of an antisemitic incident occurring at services, he said.

"I have literally led thousands and thousands of services at Congregation Beth Israel, and this was the first time we had such a traumatic incident," Cytron-Walker said.

At the same time, the rabbi acknowledged, "We have to be hospitable and we have to be secure. And we have to find ways to strike that balance."

Smaller congregations such as Beth Israel, he noted, don't have the means to hire security officers for every service, particularly when, as in Saturday's Shabbat morning service, they attract so few people. Only four people were in the building Saturday morning when the attack began.

Cytron-Walker instead encouraged synagogue leaders and congregants alike to undergo security training akin to drills he had run with the Anti-Defamation League and Secure Community Network in recent months — exercises that he has credited with saving his life.

Doing that training, Cytron-Walker said, helped him assess the risks of Saturday's situation even as he was able to attend to what he initially thought was an innocuous visitor.

"While I was providing hospitality, I was also analyzing the situation," he said, while acknowledging that he had been thrown off initially because the assailant's behavior at first didn't match the training. "This guy didn't exhibit the nervousness, the looking in all different directions. He looked me in the eye. ... I didn't see any of the things that indicated falseness in that initial encounter."

What congregations cannot do, the rabbi emphasized, is cease welcoming the stranger.

"I've welcomed people into the congregation that don't look like your stereotypical visitor to a Jewish synagogue, over and over and over again," he said. "And people are looking to pray. People are looking for community. And they're asking the question, 'Do I belong?' And we need to stress to them, and the whole community has to be able to stress to them, that yes — you belong."

One of the most visible ways the congregation has worked to heal itself was with a special service Monday evening, at which Cytron-Walker stood on the bimah next to synagogue leaders and preached directly to his congregation, as well as the broader community — a show of unity, healing and love, regardless of any internal strife.

Cytron-Walker said the service “was really valuable for me, to be able to stand and see so many — not just my congregation, but also so many other people in the community that I care about, that I love.”

Asked whether the events of the past week have changed the dynamics of the congregation at all, the rabbi said, “That sense of unity, it usually lasts for a little while. But let’s be realistic, right?”

He added, “We need to be able to know that ‘kol arevim zeh bazeh,’ that each of us are responsible for one another. And if we can live that value, beyond any other disagreements that we may be experiencing, then, I mean, that’s the space that we need to live in. That’s the value that we need to live.”

● NEWS

This New York-Based Survivor Will Address Germany’s Parliament on International Holocaust Remembrance Day

By Stewart Ain

Inge Auerbacher survived the Holocaust as a child and has devoted much of her life to speaking about her experiences and the need for tolerance in the world.

She has commanded prominent stages: Three years ago, she marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day with an address to the United Nations.

This month, she will return to Germany for the international commemoration on Jan. 27 as the keynote speaker at the German Bundestag.

“They are both amazing places to speak at,” she told the New York Jewish Week in an interview from her home in Jamaica, Queens. “It is truly a great honor. My remarks at the U.N. were heard throughout the world. My friend in Sicily watched it live. ... They are both enormous events and I am honored to have been asked to speak.”

Auerbacher, 87, said she’ll be seated when she delivers her 20-minute address to the Bundestag, Germany’s federal parliament. She acknowledges that she’s taking a chance to travel there because of COVID-19, “but this is a once in a lifetime opportunity,” she said. “You take your chances in life and this is very important to me. ... A lady from the Shoah Foundation will be driving me from place to place, so I won’t have to go on public transportation.”

Asked about her remarks, Auerbacher said: “I’m not going to scream, ‘You murderers,’ which some are. Instead, I will deliver my message in German and say that hatred against a people is terrible and that we are born as brothers and sisters and should live together.”

“I will speak from my heart, point to the audience and say there should be no more antisemitism in Germany,” she added. “I don’t want antisemitism and hatred against anybody. I come as a peacemaker.”

Germany in recent years has seen a rise in antisemitic hate crimes, including the Halle shooting in 2019, in which a gunman blocked from entering a synagogue on Yom Kippur instead shot and killed two passers-by and wounded two others. A study that year found that more than a quarter of Germans hold antisemitic views. The number of antisemitic incidents rose steadily through 2020.

Since 1996, Holocaust survivors and world leaders — including Elie Wiesel and Israeli President Shimon Peres — have been invited to address the Bundestag on Jan. 27, the anniversary of the day when the Auschwitz extermination camp was liberated by Soviet troops in 1945.

Auerbacher said she plans to speak about how well Jews were integrated into German society prior to World War II, having lived there for more than 1,700 years. She noted a street was named after one of her relatives, Moses

Baruch Auerbacher (known as Berthold Auerbach), a 19th-century German Jewish poet and writer.

"My father was a disabled war veteran, having been wounded in World War I," she said. "Because of his wounds, he was unable to lift his right arm and he received the Iron Cross. ... We were very integrated into society. My grandmother was one of 14 children and she had four brothers, two of whom gave their lives to the Fatherland in World War I."

Still, Auerbacher said she doesn't want to speak just about herself when she addresses the Bundestag. Rather, hopes to use her personal story to illustrate what happened to Jews in Germany.

Auerbacher was born in an 18-room house that had two maids in Kippenheim, a village with about 60 Jewish families in southwest Germany. Her father was a textile merchant. Her mother's parents lived about 125 miles away in Jebenhausen, which during the mid-1800s was 40 percent Jewish.

During the Kristallnacht pogrom on Nov. 10, 1938, her father was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. He was released a few weeks later and her parents quickly sold their home and moved in with her mother's parents.

"My mother had a brother in the United States," she said. "He tried [and failed] to get us out."

Nazi restrictions made life difficult for the family and Auerbacher was told she could no longer attend the local public school. At the age of 6, she had to attend a Jewish school in Stuttgart. She and other Jews were forced to wear the Star of David and she recalls being taunted by some children.

Her grandmother was deported to Latvia in 1941 (her grandfather had already died), her house was confiscated and Auerbacher and her parents were forced to move into a house with other Jews. After six months they were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto-concentration camp.

"They [the Nazis] took away my brooch before the deportation, saying, 'You won't need this where you are going,'" Auerbacher recalled. "I was 7 years old, the youngest in the transport of around 1,100 Jews."

They were allowed to stay in the disabled war veterans'

section until the camp was liberated by Soviet troops in May, 1945.

The three were then sent to a displaced person's camp. Later, they were allowed to return to her grandparent's house and her father resumed his business. On June 17, 1946, with the help of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, they boarded the SS Marine Perch with 864 others. It was the second immigrant ship to transport refugees to the United States.

"We went to my aunt and uncle in Rockville Centre, Long Island, and my mother then got a job as a cook and maid and my father worked as a butler," Auerbacher said.

She herself had contracted tuberculosis in Theresienstadt and spent four years in bed until the development of streptomycin, an antibiotic that treated tuberculosis and other bacterial infections.

Auerbacher started high school at the age of 15 and graduated college in 1958. She pursued a career as a chemist, working in medical research and clinical work for 38 years. Over the past 30 years she has written six books, four about her experiences during the Holocaust, including "I'm A Star: Child of the Holocaust."

"I have spoken frequently in schools and other venues in the United States and throughout the world about my experiences during the Holocaust and about the importance of tolerance," she said. "I also co-wrote a song for the first World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in 1981, 'We Shall Never Forget.'"

In recognition of her body of work and witness-bearing, she has been honored by Germany and received two honorary doctorates. After her address to the Bundestag, Auerbacher said she plans to visit her hometown and her grandparents' hometown before visiting the town of Goepfingen, which plans to make her an honorary citizen for the years she has spoken there to students and community groups.

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● NEWS

Lincoln Square Cantor Is Making Modern Yiddish Music That Swings

By Julia Gergely

Right before COVID hit in the spring of 2020, Yisroel Leshes was looking to branch out of the world of cantorial music. For most of his professional singing career, he has been working as the assistant cantor at Lincoln Square Synagogue, a Modern Orthodox synagogue on the Upper West Side.

The 35-year-old is a lover of jazz music and jazz bars, so he asked his jazz musician friends — who happen to not be Jewish — what material he should start with.

Their answer surprised him. “Why not take a look at Yiddish theater?” they suggested.

“I always kind of wrote it off. It was something my grandmother listened to — not me,” Leshes, who lives in Brooklyn, told *The New York Jewish Week*. “But once I started to dig into it, I found that I had misjudged it.”

According to the Milken Archive of Jewish Music, the heyday of Yiddish theater lasted from about 1882 to the middle of the 20th century, back when New York’s Second Avenue was dotted with so many theaters it was known as “Yiddish Broadway.” This unique, Yiddish-language mix of vaudeville and musicals was both a nostalgic preservation of the Old World, as well a reflection on the hopes, anxieties and experiences of new Americans. As the 20th century progressed, Yiddish theater began to die out as Jews assimilated into broader American culture, though it has been seeing a small but popular resurgence in recent years.

“We have over 50,000 albums of material [from Yiddish theater] that almost nobody performs,” Leshes said. And if they are performing it, he added, it is in a nostalgic, traditional way.

So in order to bring Yiddish musical theater into the world of jazz, Leshes had to reinvent the genre. For the past few years, he has been rewriting the old songs from Yiddish theater as modern jazz tunes. “I’m just discovering it all now, and it’s incredible,” he said. “There’s so much amazing material.”

Leshes grew up around Yiddish and speaks it himself, but it is only recently that he has been able to appreciate its modern applications in music and performance.

Last Friday, Leshes released his first music video for his song, “Younger World” (“Yinger Velt” in Yiddish), which he filmed last summer while on vacation in Venice over the course of only a single morning. The original song is actually a reworked, swinging version of the song “Di Zukunft (The Future),” which was written by Yiddish poet Morris Winchevsky in the early 1900s. Leshes worked with jazz arranger Adam Podd to recompose the melody. The result has some of the vibe of “Bei Mir Bistu Shein,” the Andrews Sisters’ 20th-century Yiddish crossover hit, which itself was covered by such jazz greats as Ella Fitzgerald and Benny Goodman.

In the video, Leshes sings his way around the colorful canals — crooning while sitting in a gondola — and walking along the narrow streets. He’s joined by a trumpet player, while his daughter, Shira, dances and laughs with him as they sing about the old world changing into a new era.

“Venice is the most colorful city in the world,” said the Venetian director of the video, Dean Lakić, “It is a superb setting for a song about a brighter future.”

The reception to the song and video, Leshes said, has been great. “People stop me on the street in Brooklyn. I’m so glad to know it’s not just me, that a lot of people are really liking this kind of music.”

Leshes’ appreciation for jazz and Yiddish theater isn’t limited to his own performances. One of his favorite things about jazz, he said, is the experience of being able to see and hear the music in an intimate venue with only a few dozen other people. But because he keeps kosher, Leshes was aware that he was harming jazz clubs’ bottom lines by not purchasing food when he took up a table.

So, Leshes did the next logical thing: In the early months of 2020, he opened *The Mansion NYC*, a pop-up jazz

club in the YJP (Young Jewish Professionals) Mansion, a three-story venue on East 16th St. near Union Square.

The venue was able to host three shows before the pandemic shutdown in 2020; there was kosher food, a bar and about 100 people in attendance at each performance, he said. He showcased Jewish and Israeli Klezmer music, featuring performers Yanke Lemmer, Frank London and Daniel Zamir.

"It was just absolutely magic," he said. "People loved it. There's just a very Jewish, heimish atmosphere. Nobody felt awkward or out of place."

Leshes had planned to reopen this month, before the recent Omicron spike delayed its comeback. He's waiting until cases are lower before he'll look into booking acts again.

In the video for "Younger World," Leshes belts the last lines of the song while sitting on a gondola as it glides along a canal: "Alzo mutik in di reynen, In di reynen, tsu befrayen, Tzu befrayen un banayen Unser alte velt."

The video's subtitles translates this to: "Let's all have the courage in the ranks to free and rejuvenate our Old World." It seems he is already doing so.

● REMEMBERING

Ed Schoenfeld, Jewish Restaurateur Who Helped Promote Chinese Food to New York Palates in the 1970s and '80s, Is Dead at 72

By Shira Hanau

Ed Schoenfeld, a Jewish restaurateur who helped promote an array of Chinese food options in New York City over decades, died Friday at 72.

Schoenfeld's love of cooking first began with Jewish dishes like kreplach and blintzes, which he learned in his grandmother's kitchen. And yet, he became an unlikely champion of Chinese cuisine.

Writing in GrubStreet, Adam Platt said Schonfeld was less noteworthy as a chef or restaurateur than as a lover of the cuisine in all its nuances. "He was an enthusiast and a scholar, and he regarded himself, from the beginning of his career in the late 1960s, as an ambassador for proper Chinese cuisine," Platt wrote.

Edward Schoenfeld was born in Jersey City in 1949 and grew up in Brooklyn's Clinton Hill. He fell in love with Chinese food by his teens and became a regular at Shun Lee Dynasty, one of the earliest fine-dining Chinese restaurants in New York City. He learned about the cuisine by eating it and deepened his knowledge by befriending Chinese chefs in the city whose cooking he admired.

In 1973, he got his first restaurant job as assistant to restaurateur David Keh when he opened Uncle Tai's, one of the first Hunan restaurants in New York. That job only lasted two years, until what Schoenfeld described as a "John Wayne barroom scene" in a New York Magazine profile from 1984. "During dinner, somebody took a flying tackle at me and knocked me out. I was lying on the floor covered in duck sauce and rice," he said.

Despite the early struggle, Schoenfeld went on to a career developing and running restaurants over some four decades. Among his well-regarded Chinese restaurants were Auntie Yuan and Pig Heaven, both on the Upper East Side, as well as Red Farm, a farm-to-table restaurant in Greenwich Village, which opened in 2010.

Asked once why Jews loved Chinese food so much, Schoenfeld responded simply: "It's very obvious, Chinese food is better."

In 2012, he told the Forward that Chinese food constituted "safe treyf" to Jews, using the Yiddish word for not kosher. According to the Forward, Schoenfeld was once asked by a Chinese restaurateur to show him around a series of Jewish neighborhoods so the businessman would know where to open more Chinese restaurants.

"My personal joke is that I learned to speak Yiddish in the Chinese restaurant from my customers," Schoenfeld told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in 2013.

● EDITOR'S DESK

From Vigils to Vitriol, the Texas Hostage Crisis Showed Social Media at Its Best and Worst

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

It was the best of Twitter. It was the worst of Twitter.

During the long agonizing hours of last Saturday evening, during which a rabbi and three congregants were held against their will at a Dallas-area synagogue, social media performed perhaps as its creators and optimists always thought it would. It was a community of caring, with users posting prayers, sharing their distress and comforting one another. They sent messages of hope to the Jews trapped in the building and words of gratitude to the responders gathered outside.

Actual vigils — or should I say, actual virtual vigils — were quickly organized, allowing people to tune in and turn to one another to pray and commiserate. Twitter became a tool for creating community at a speed that could scarcely be imagined in an analog world. Jewish officialdom — defense groups, synagogue organizations, Israeli diplomats — assured the world that they were “monitoring” the situation, a benign word meaning “we are anxious and scared and feeling as helpless as the rest of you.”

As Shabbat ended and more and more Jews who had been enjoying a quiet Shabbat joined the vigil, the conversation grew and the topics expanded. For many the crisis at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville was playing out as a slow-motion repeat of the 2018 Pittsburgh massacre, when people tuned in after another Shabbat and learned of the deaths of 11 Jews at the Tree of Life synagogue. Many lamented that U.S. synagogues need to be constantly on alert for attacks like these. New York comedian Alex Edelman tweeted, “People genuinely don't seem to understand that this could happen at

any synagogue in America.”

The locations of other recent deadly attacks on Jews were repeated like an incantation: Pittsburgh, Poway, Jersey City, Monsey....

And inevitably, this being Twitter, the conversations began to shift, taken over by the angry rhetoric of a polarized era. I'm not talking here about the white supremacists who celebrated the crisis, or the Muslim activists who appeared to support the hostage-taking because the hostage-taker demanded the release of an accused Muslim terrorist. I'm talking about the Jewish conversation.

Jewish users began to demand that Muslim groups denounce and distance themselves from the crime. And when they did — when the Muslim-American organization CAIR said the hostage-taking was “an unacceptable act of evil” — many held them and their spokespeople responsible for years of incitement against Israel and the Zionist synagogues that support it. Others turned their ire on the media, claiming without evidence that the standoff would have gotten more attention if the victims were Black and the perpetrator were white. (CNN, the only cable channel running nonstop coverage, broke off to air a previously scheduled documentary on “The Movies: The 2000s.”)

Even as the lives of four people hung in the balance, Jews and Muslims sniped. When some users fretted about an Islamophobic backlash, they were attacked for “centering” Muslims during a Jewish tragedy.

The comments got ugly and uglier. Some Jews attacked the synagogue's rabbi, Charlie Cytron-Walker, for his liberal politics. Or asked why he invited a stranger into the synagogue in the first place.

(At the same, people eagerly shared the news that Cytron-Walker was known locally for his outreach to the Muslim community and overall *menschiness*.)

CNN quickly turned back to the hostage crisis when a loud bang was heard from the direction of the synagogue, and reported some 30 minutes later that all the hostages were safe and the suspect dead.

With the immediate crisis resolved, the online conversation shifted yet again, this time to a comment by the head of the FBI Dallas Field Office, Matthew Desarno, who said

that the hostage-taker was “singularly focused on one issue and it was not specifically related to the Jewish community.” Jewish Twitter erupted, asking how an attack on a synagogue on a Shabbat morning could be anything other than “specifically related to the Jewish community.”

That conversation, at least, was rooted in the facts and an important communal debate. The British national who carried out the attack was said to be demanding the release of Aaifa Siddiqui, a Muslim woman suspected of plotting attacks in New York who is now serving an 86-year sentence in the Fort Worth area. How was it possible, commentators like Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin of Religion News Service asked, to separate Islamist terrorism from the antisemitism and anti-Zionism of its ideologues?

It’s conceivable that Desarno wasn’t deeply versed in what is and isn’t a “Jewish” issue — perhaps mistakenly viewing antisemitism as an attack on Judaism as a religion and not an attack on a people inextricably tied up, intentionally or not, in geopolitics. (It’s also conceivable that he was just tired.) If he wasn’t before, he probably is now: In thanking the FBI and law enforcement, the Anti-Defamation League said pointedly in a statement: “There is no doubt, given what we know so far, that the hostage-taker chose his target carefully. We urge law enforcement and prosecutors to investigate the role antisemitism may have played in motivating the suspect.”

The debate won’t end there. Some Jews will insist that targeting Jews in the name of an Islamist terrorist confirms their worst fears about “the new antisemitism.” Others will point out the central place Israel holds in American synagogue life and conclude that vulnerability to haters is the price Jews pay for their commitments.

Twitter isn’t real life, but it is a close simulacrum of how Jews talk to and about one another. On Saturday, as it does so often, the conversation devolved into anger and invective even before the crisis was resolved, and before the facts were in. Twitter is a machine for amplifying fast takes, misinformation and invective. It is also a tool for community-organizing, mutual support and enlightening opinions. During the Colleyville hostage crisis, it was both.

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

● OPINION

Colleyville Is an Opportunity for American Jews to Rethink Our Approach to Curbing Antisemitism

By Judah Bernstein

Saturday’s assault on a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, has renewed the familiar yet always harrowing question: How should Jews combat antisemitism?

Contemporary Jewish leaders, organizations and pundits have offered various answers to this question in the past, but they rarely target the specific socioeconomic, technological, legal or other systems that give antisemitism life today. Beyond synagogue security measures, American Jews have yet to rally around a coherent policy agenda that may help diminish antisemitic violence.

One obstacle is the way so many Jews and their spokespeople view antisemitism: as ineradicable and inevitable and otherwise unique among prejudices. However, as someone trained in the academic study of modern Jewish history, I see that while Jewish history is rife with Jew-hatred, such hatred takes many forms and has many causes, often specific to various times and places. By separating and distinguishing these causes, perhaps we can recover old solutions as well as open the door to new strategies to combat antisemitism.

The current approach to antisemitism can be seen, for instance, in the July 2021 “No Fear” rally in Washington, D.C., held in the wake of attacks on American Jews during the most recent Gaza flareup.

That “Rally in Solidarity with the Jewish People” was intended to be a unified Jewish communal response to antisemitism. It offered the ideal forum for politicians, celebrities, and other dignitaries to roll out their vision

for how to stop Jew-hatred in its tracks. What the speakers at the rally provided, however, were mostly attitudinal or public relations solutions, urging the crowd to embrace vocal protest, bipartisanship, Jewish education and pride.

Or consider one of the most successful books to grapple with the question, Bari Weiss's 2016 manifesto "How To Fight Antisemitism." Weiss's answers to the titular query included calling out antisemitism even when it's hard, displaying one's Jewish pride without fear, expecting solidarity from neighbors and allies, disavowing identity politics, remaining committed to "liberalism," supporting Israel and striving to "nurture" one's Jewish identity.

Many feel that these are important first steps, but Weiss's suite of answers is puzzling given her view that antisemitism is ubiquitous in American politics and culture. By her own argument, antisemitism is part of the west's "cultural DNA" and therefore teeming on the political right and left in the United States. It is similar to how Nikole Hannah Jones, the journalist behind The New York Times' "1619 Project," asserts that "anti-Black racism runs in the very DNA of this country."

Regardless of one's opinions of anti-racism activists in the United States, their efforts have birthed ambitious policy proposals that seek to revamp criminal justice, policing, housing, schooling and more. Why haven't activists against antisemitism done the same? If antisemitism is indeed a systemic bigotry on par with other varieties of prejudice, doesn't it demand more thoroughgoing responses than pride and protest?

I don't pretend to possess any panaceas for an inordinately complex problem, but I can imagine what bolder and more proactive rejoinders to violent antisemitism might look like.

If extremist rhetoric is more of a threat today, maybe Jews should propose limits on group libel that are as of now shielded by First Amendment protections. There is historical precedent for this, as explored in a 2019 article by Jewish historian James Loeffler. In the 1940s and '50s, American Jews engaged in pioneering legal and legislative advocacy to criminalize group libel. Their efforts resulted in a major 1952 Supreme Court victory in the case of *Beauharnais v. Illinois*, which held that a white supremacist's campaign against Blacks amounted to li-

bel and was therefore beyond constitutional protection. That this history is largely forgotten and required Loeffler's uncovering is instructive.

If social media is a repository of antisemitic bile, Jews should be at the front of those pushing for tech companies to moderate their content more vigorously. The Anti-Defamation League has taken this on, but it appears to be alone in the Jewish space.

If violent antisemitism flows downstream from socio-economic despair, or if it in some way overlaps with the scourge of mental illness, as this latest attack once again suggests it does, maybe Jews should get behind reinvigorated social welfare programs.

If the danger comes from easy access to guns, which may have played a role in Colleyville as well, perhaps gun control ought to be a higher communal Jewish priority. True, gun reform has attracted the tireless work of a number of laudable Jewish organizations, but there's still much more that could be done to place it at the top of the communal agenda.

The dearth of widespread conversations about these or other far-reaching measures, let alone communal consensus, is all the more baffling when you consider the one notable exception: anti-BDS laws that have been enacted in over 30 states. Even as the constitutionality of these laws appears increasingly dubious, many American Jewish organizations continue to support them. But why unify around legally brash solutions that may depart from the American Jewish legacy of free-speech liberalism and that invite negative attention only when it comes to boycotts of Israel, and not around remedies that ensure our safety at home?

These are complicated questions. The ways most Jews understand antisemitism adds to that complexity. This includes the notion that antisemitism is the oldest and severest form of group hatred, that it is endemic to Christian civilization, that it ultimately stems from a consistent set of beliefs about Jews that rarely changes across time and place, and that it is inherently different from other forms of bigotry in its ontological salience.

If that is the consensus, it is natural to embrace responses that focus more on how Jews orient themselves relative to their enemies rather than actually taking on

the problems of Jew-hatred. If one sees antisemitism through the prism of ahistorical pessimism, maybe it cannot be taken on at all.

We need not see antisemitism in this way. We might instead conceive of Jew-hatred as not unlike other forms of prejudice even if Jew-hatred, like all prejudices, has certain unique characteristics. We might instead consider how Jews have devised all sorts of ways of dealing with animosity — against themselves and others — and while some have fallen short others have successfully met the particular social and political problems of their era and may hold great promise in our own.

Approaching the problem with a more critical eye will help us see our specific challenges in context and, even if daunting, as surmountable. And that might invite bolder responses than the ones currently in play.

Judah Bernstein holds a PhD in Hebrew-Judaic Studies and History from New York University and is currently a student at New York University School of Law.

● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT YITRO

The Humble Message of a Divine Sound and Light Show

For all its splendor, the revelation at Sinai has a simple message: Be a mensch.

By Fred Ehrman

It was the greatest sound and light display in the history of man. Nothing like it had been seen before, and nothing since. The people had been preparing for days in advance. Their clothes were laundered, they had immersed in a mikvah and were physically and spiritually pure.

The Talmud tells us that when Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, the serpent, the symbol of the primordial Evil Inclination filled her with spiritual impurity. When the Israelites stood at Sinai, that spiritual impurity was

removed (Shabbat 146A).

Mount Sinai was enveloped by heavy clouds, there was thunder and lightning and the blast of the shofar reverberated throughout. There was a huge crowd, numbering 600,000 men along with all the members of their households. And what they saw and heard made them tremble. The Ten Commandments were about to be proclaimed by the Almighty.

“I am Hashem, your God...There shall be no other gods in My presence.” At this point the people implored Moses to speak to them because they could not survive hearing the voice of God. And Moses proceeded to teach them the next eight commandments.

The Midrash tells us what follows. A myriad of angels descended and tied two crowns to each and every one of the Jewish people — one corresponding to “We will do” and one corresponding to “We will hear.” (Shabbat 88A). What each of the participants was able to witness at that moment was not seen in the greatest visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel (Mechilta).

We can hardly imagine what went through the minds of all who stood at the bottom of that mountain. A feeling of majesty, of being part of a sublime and exalted nature, almost ethereal. After all, no other human being had gone through the experience that each of them had. The two crowns on their heads only added to their feeling of superiority and chosenness.

At this point one would have thought that the Torah would dwell on the atmosphere surrounding Mount Sinai and its effect on the approximately three million people who were standing there. But surprisingly, it goes on to give us two new mitzvot, both associated with the altar in the Tabernacle. These particular commandments appear to be totally misplaced. Logically they should be found in Parshat Terumah, which we will read in just a few weeks, which instructs us on the building of the Tabernacle and all its contents. As Rashi similarly asked elsewhere, “Mah inyan mizbeach etzel Har Sinai” — what is the connection of the altar with Mount Sinai? Why here?

I suggest these two commandments appear right after this magnificent event in order to awaken us out of a sense of euphoria and elation and bring everyone back

down to earth in order to teach some fundamental truths regarding our existence. The first mitzvah states, “An altar of earth shall you make for Me...” (Shemot 20:21). Earth, not gold and silver inlaid with precious stones. The Midrash Tanchuma (Tzav 14) explains why it was to be made from earth, or “adamah.” The first man was called Adam because he came from the adamah. The Jewish people will bring their sacrifices to the altar made from adamah to atone for the sins committed by mortal bodies that were originally taken from the earth and would someday return to it. They were reminded of their mortality.

The second mitzvah was directed at the kohanim, the priests. They were instructed to ascend to the altar by means of a ramp and not by steps. Why? “[S]o that your nakedness will not be uncovered upon it” (Shemot 20:23). Nakedness? Not only was the ordinary kohen covered in a tunic, but he wore breeches “to cover the flesh of his nakedness” (Shemot 28:42). So what is the Torah really trying to teach us?

The Midrash Mechilta of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai gives us an answer. It is instructing the priestly class that when they are ascending to the altar, that they should be taking small steps, heel to toe, and not giant steps of hubris, signifying naked power and greatness. And if we show such consideration and humility to a stone ramp, how much more so are we to act accordingly to our fellow human being. As we are told in Micha 6:8, the Lord requires that we “walk humbly with your God.”

“We must always keep in mind the nature of our mortality and how it should affect our conduct.”

After all of this amazing display with its surrounding pomp and glory, we close with two vital lessons.

First, we must always keep in mind the nature of our mortality and how it should affect our conduct.

Second, we must acquire the most important of all human characteristics: the attribute of humility. One can follow all the commandments but still be a “naval birshut haTorah,” a degenerate while remaining within the Torah’s framework (Ramban Vayikra 19:2). “V’asita hayashar v’hatov b’einai Hashem” — one should constantly strive to do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:18).

As Rav said, the commandments were given to Israel solely to refine the human being (Vayikra Rabbah 13:3). Beneath the splendor is a humble message: be a mensch.

Fred Ehrman is a retired investment adviser and security analyst. He has held leadership positions in several Jewish organizations. He is completing his fourth cycle of Daf Yomi.

● MUSINGS

Eternity in Every Instant

By David Wolpe

Abraham Joshua Heschel used to tell the story of the boy in cheder who was reading the story of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. Year after year they read the story, yet each time this boy was frightened – what if Isaac is hurt? The other students made fun of him – after all, they said, you know how it ends; we read it before! But the teacher said no, this student is reading it properly, because the Torah should be happening anew every time.

To be part of the Jewish tradition is to view time differently. Events that happened in the past did not only happen in the past; they are always occurring. The revelation at Sinai both occurred and occurs. Creation, as the prayers tell us, is daily renewed. There is creation every single day, every moment.

A faithful Jew lives in an omnipresent now. Abraham can visit the Sukkah in 2022, every seder night we are freed from Egypt and each Shabbat God ceases from fashioning the world. Eternity collapses into each moment and you live both now and forever every day of your life.

*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 NOSHER

These Are the Most Popular Bagels in New York, According to Grubhub

By Julia Gergely

In honor of National Bagel Day this Saturday, GrubHub released data on the most popular bagels in New York City — and the results might surprise you.

The online delivery platform looked at what New Yorkers ordered via its service in 2021. Let's start with the most popular bagel variety in the five boroughs: The winner is — drum roll — everything.

That's a relief — everything is everything! But from there, things get a little suspect: Cinnamon, onion, blueberry and jalapeño take up spots two through five on the list of the most popular flavors. Seriously — what self-respecting New Yorker is ordering a cinnamon or jalapeño bagel? Reveal yourself! Whatever happened to the simple sesame? The classic poppyseed?

Of course, these stats are purely from GrubHub orders — they don't factor in other delivery services like Seamless or UberEats, as well as phone orders and the old-fashioned method of showing up somewhere in person.

Still, GrubHub's data offers an interesting peek into the bagel habits of neighbors. The most popular bagel shops in the city, for example, are nearly evenly split between Queens, Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Utopia Bagels out in Whitestone, Queens takes the prize as the most popular bagel store in the city, followed by the Upper East Side location of Tal Bagels, Astoria's Brooklyn Bagel & Coffee Company, and Forest Hills Bagels in Queens.

Rounding out the list: Ess-a-Bagel in Midtown East, Greenpoint's Bagel Point, Gramercy's David's Bagels, Tompkins Square Bagels in the East Village, Bagel Pub in Crown

Heights and, last but not least, Williamsburg's Bagelsmith.

GrubHub also tracked the most popular bagel sandwiches. Coming in at number one is the classic (if very not kosher) bacon, egg and cheese bagel sandwich. It's sans bacon counterpart takes the number three spot, with a lox with scallion spread combo sandwiched in between the two (finally, I feel seen!). Fourth on the list is a B.L.T. bagel sandwich, followed by ham and egg, which, isn't that a New Jersey thing?

Interestingly, GrubHub did not appear to release any information on the most popular cream cheese orders (no word on whether the cream cheese shortage had anything to do with that). Given the truly wacky variety of flavors on offer at many local bagel shops — Oreo, birthday cake... bacon cream cheese, anyone? — I think it's probably a good thing they kept that to themselves.

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Shevat 19, 5782 | Friday, January 21, 2021

- **Light candles at:** 4:42 p.m. (NYC)

Shevat 20, 5782 | Saturday, January 22, 2022

- **Torah reading:** Yitro, Exodus 18:1–20:23
- **Haftarah:** Isaiah 6:1–13
- **Shabbat ends:** 5:45 p.m. (NYC)

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 25 | 12:00 p.m. Free

Can Campus Still Be a Safe Place for Jews?

Join the New York Jewish Week and UJA-Federation of New York for a conversation with Scott Shay, Yossi Klein Halevi and Dr. Mijal Bitton as they discuss Shay's new book "Conspiracy U: A Case Study" and the challenges facing American Jews on campus from both the far right and far left.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3Kq3O9n>

January 25 | 7:00 p.m. \$18+

Who Knows One? Live at 92Y with Micah Hart

Who Knows One? with creator/host Micah Hart is a pandemic-era game show that combines Six Degrees of Separation and Jewish Geography.

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

January 27 | 10:00 a.m. Free

Echoes in Ink: A Liberation Day Reading of Short Stories from the Holocaust

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, join the Museum of Jewish Heritage for a reading of three short stories: "The Road of No Return" by Rachel Häring Korn, read by Jackie Hoffman; "The Shawl" by Cynthia Ozick, read by Mili Avital, and "A Wedding in Brownsville" by Isaac Bashevis Singer, read by Eleanor Reissa.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3Kuij7>

January 27 | 3:00 p.m. Free

Woman of Valor: Exploring the Most Famous Poem in the Book of Proverbs

What does it mean to be "a woman of valor," and how can the power of art help us interpret an ancient poem for our own times? Explore Eshet Chayil, a poem from the Book of Proverbs, with musician and Torah teacher Alicia Jo Rabins, and then pick up a pen, pencil, watercolor or instrument and add your own interpretation to the canon. No previous text study or artistic experience needed.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3FOA8yS>

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