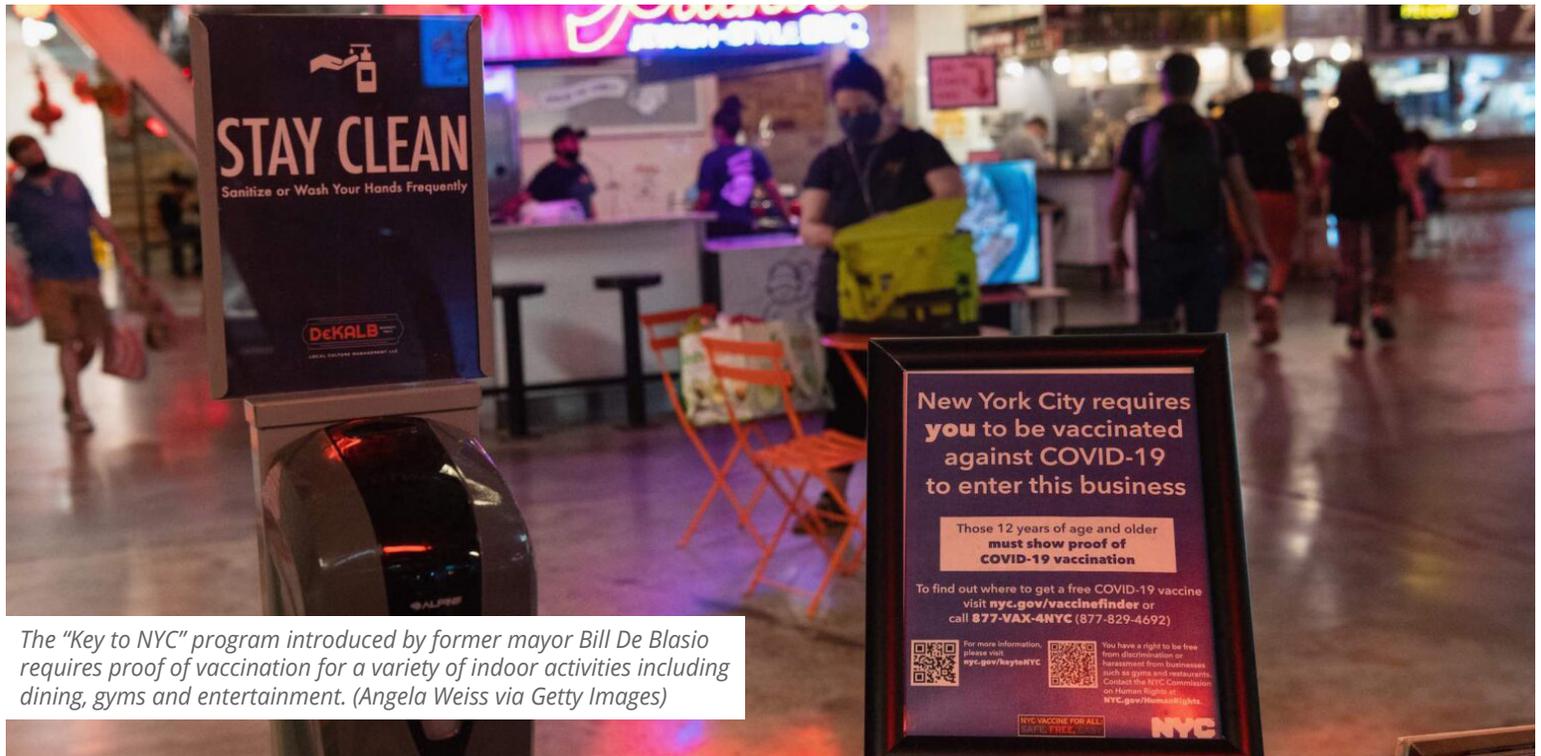


# The New York Jewish Week/end

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The "Key to NYC" program introduced by former mayor Bill De Blasio requires proof of vaccination for a variety of indoor activities including dining, gyms and entertainment. (Angela Weiss via Getty Images)

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## ● NEWS

# 5 Orthodox New Yorkers Sue City Over COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements

By Julia Gergely

Five Orthodox Jewish New Yorkers have joined a suit challenging the city's vaccine requirements for indoor spaces.

Two of the plaintiffs are rabbis at yeshivas. The suit, filed Feb. 7 in New York, challenges the "Key to NYC" program and a recent Covid vaccination mandate for religious and private school employees. The mandate was opposed by many haredi Orthodox yeshivas and groups representing them, including Agudath Israel of America.

Three of the Jewish plaintiffs are parents suing on behalf of a total of 12 of their children, all minors, whose COVID vaccination they oppose on what they claim are religious grounds.

The unnamed plaintiffs allege an “unprecedented abuse of power” in regard to COVID vaccine requirements for indoor spaces in the city. The plaintiffs, who also include a Catholic resident of New York, object to the vaccine on religious and constitutional grounds.

The Catholic and Orthodox Jewish plaintiffs say the vaccines are derived from research into fetal cell lines from abortions in the 1970s and '80s, a technology they oppose on religious grounds. Another religious ground cited by the Orthodox Jewish plaintiffs is that “[s]ubmitting to a government dictate that conditions freedom on vaccination is a form of slavery and subjugation” that “violates numerous commandments in the Torah that require one to remember and internalize the great Exodus from slavery in ancient Egypt.”

Groups representing the major Jewish denominations, including the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America, have all released statements endorsing vaccines, and many rabbis in the haredi Orthodox community have participated in campaigns to increase vaccination rates in their communities. Still, Orthodox health professionals and communal leaders note that a vocal minority of their community won't heed their guidance.

The suit was filed by the Thomas More Society, a conservative Catholic nonprofit that earlier in the pandemic represented Orthodox Jews in New York in a lawsuit opposing caps on the number of attendees able to attend houses of worship. In that case, a judge blocked the state from imposing stricter rules on houses of worship than on other businesses.

In November 2020, in a case brought by Agudath Israel, the Supreme Court ruled that occupancy restrictions and mandates unfairly discriminated against religious institutions.

The Thomas More Society has filed a number of lawsuits across the country opposing vaccine requirements, including representing health care workers in New York State who have been denied an exemption from the vaccine on religious grounds.

If successful, the suit would allow yeshiva employees to remain or return to work without a vaccine, as well as gather indoors and gain access to the same spaces as vaccinated New Yorkers without discrimination.

Named in the suit are New York City Mayor Eric Adams and Dr. Dave Choski, the commissioner of the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

The suit asserts that the Key to NYC program is creating a two-tiered society within the city, where unvaccinated residents are unable to participate in daily life or institutions, and that the program violates rights to due process, equal protection, privacy, freedom of assembly and free exercise of religion.

“Never in the history of this country, nor in the history of pandemics generally, has any government declared an entire class of citizens *personae non gratae* based on refusal to be vaccinated,” wrote Thomas More Society Special Counsel Christopher Ferrara in a press release. “What we see here is the sad corruption of public health policy by power politics.”

The complaint also alleges that Key to NYC offers exemptions to secular activities and discriminates against religious activities, and discriminates against those who hold that COVID-19 vaccinations violate their religion.

Marc Stern, the chief legal officer for the American Jewish Committee, does not see sufficient evidence for the religious freedom claim, and said several of the lawsuit's other claims, including that the Key to NYC program infringes on a person's right to privacy, are baseless.

“I can't say the suit is completely frivolous, and there are certainly disturbing aspects to the accommodation guidelines, where some of the lines aren't neat and clean,” Stern said. However, “the court has ruled many times that in cases of an epidemic, the government has great latitude for what they can do to balance public health guidelines with what will benefit the economy. I'm reasonably certain this case will not see a sympathetic response, and those lines will prevail.”

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**● NEWS**

# As Antisemitism Rises in New York, Local Politicians Share Tools to Fight It

By Julia Gergely

New York City saw nearly three times as many antisemitic hate crimes in January 2022 compared to the same period a year ago, prompting concern from local lawmakers.

City Council member Julie Menin, who represents the Upper East Side, hosted a virtual “Antisemitism Town Hall” Wednesday night that featured remarks by Sen. Charles Schumer and fellow Council member Eric Dinowitz.

The event, co-hosted by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, drew some 200 attendees and brought together politicians and representatives from Jewish organizations and the NYPD to discuss how to quell antisemitism.

The NYPD hate crimes unit reported 22 hate crimes against Jewish people last month, compared to eight in the same time period last year.

Just this past weekend, there were three alleged antisemitic attacks in Williamsburg. They included an assault on a man wearing Hasidic garb and a graffiti attack on yeshiva school buses.

Residents in Menin’s district were also unsettled when, in early January, a woman found a swastika stamped on a \$100 bill dispensed by a Chase Bank ATM on 86th Street. The next day, the Second Avenue comedy club Comic Strip Live compared vaccine mandates to the Holocaust in an Instagram post.

Menin — who last night noted her personal connection to the issue as the daughter and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors — condemned all of the recent events.

Senate Majority Leader Schumer— who recently spoke at a confirmation hearing supporting scholar Deborah Lipstadt as the U.S. State Department’s antisemitism

monitor — provided opening remarks at the town hall and also spoke of relatives he lost in the Holocaust. Schumer called for doubling funding for the federal Non-Profit Security Grant program from \$180 million to \$360 million. He noted that about a quarter of that funding goes to New York to harden security at religious institutions and other nonprofits.

“It’s our collective responsibility to call out antisemitism whenever it rears its ugly head,” he said. “We know what happens when antisemitism is not fought and fought and fought.”

Dinowitz, whose district covers the northwest Bronx, emphasized that antisemitic incidents are not always violent attacks — often, they appear as implicit biases or remarks in daily life. He chairs the council’s Jewish Caucus.

Panelists spoke of the different tools available to New Yorkers to combat antisemitism, including reporting crimes to the police, filing civil lawsuits, attending bias and intervention trainings, establishing strong security measures in Jewish spaces, and more.

Inspector Jessica Corey, the commanding officer for the NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force, and Inspector Melissa Eger of the 19th precinct on the Upper East Side spoke about how and when to contact law enforcement when witnessing a hate crime. They emphasized that while social media can be effective, witnesses should call 911 to report a crime, using physical identifiers and as many specifics of the incident as possible.

Rick Sawyer, the special counsel on hate crimes for the state Attorney General, explained the type of civil lawsuits that his office can pursue against implicit bias and discrimination. Jonah Boyarin, the Jewish liaison for the NYC Commission on Human Rights, noted the different workshops his office can provide, such as bystander intervention training.

Other panelists included Mitch Silber, executive director of the Community Security Initiative, and Alexander Rosemberg, the deputy regional director of the NY/NJ branch of the Anti-Defamation League.

“By reporting, you drive data, which drives policy,” said Rosemberg. “This is how you can affect change.”

Michael Cohen, the eastern director of the Simon Wi-

esenthal Center, spoke of his organization's role in educating children about antisemitism and tolerance. He lauded the center's newest educational initiative, the Mobile Museum of Tolerance, which will visit schools across the state. Last month the state Assembly announced \$1.5 million in capital funding for the mobile museum.

## ● NEWS

# How This Jewish Politician in Brooklyn Wins Friends Among Progressives and the Haredi Orthodox

By Jacob Henry

In the same week that he rallied against a natural gas company's expansion plans, Lincoln Restler repeatedly condemned a series of antisemitic incidents in Brooklyn.

Such positions may be par for the course for a member of the New York City Council, but they also reflect Restler's unusual ability, as a newly elected member of the council, to build coalitions within both progressive groups and the large Orthodox community in his Brooklyn district.

Restler won the November election with a sweeping 63% of the ranked-choice vote in District 33, which encompasses the haredi Jewish stronghold of Williamsburg along with Greenpoint, Dumbo, Brooklyn Heights and parts of downtown Brooklyn.

Since then, Restler, 37, has been busy. Last week, he helped restore water to over 500 families at Gowanus Houses, a public housing complex, and rallied against upgrades at National Grid's Greenpoint Energy Center that he and other politicians said would expand fossil fuel infrastructure and contribute to climate change.

On Monday, he and other members of the council's Jewish Caucus issued a statement condemning what they called a "rise in anti-Jewish attacks in our city." On Feb. 4, a man wearing Hasidic garb was sucker-punched as he was walking in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. Over the weekend, vandals spray-painted antisemitic graffiti on school buses belonging to a local yeshiva. Both incidents happened in or around Williamsburg.

Progressive values and Jewish identification come naturally to Restler. He was previously elected as district leader and worked as a community activist. As a young child he participated in acts of service at the Reform Brooklyn Heights Synagogue with his parents.

"That commitment in the Jewish faith to look out for those in need has informed my values and my commitment to public service," Restler told The New York Jewish Week. "It is one of the threads that stretches across the Jewish community, left, right and center."

During his campaign, Restler received the endorsement of Assemblymember Simcha Eichenstein, who represents Borough Park, and several Satmar Hasidic leaders in the Brooklyn Orthodox Jewish Community.

Rabbi Moishe Indig, a leader in the Satmar community, said that Restler is already a fixture in Brooklyn, with years of public service on his record.

"He's not like other politicians," Indig said. "He's always on the streets. If it's snow, or a blackout or a flood, whatever it is, he is there to help."

Indig said that it wasn't Restler's Judaism that gained him the Satmar endorsement, but his track record throughout all of Brooklyn.

"We have all kinds of different communities and people in Brooklyn," Indig said. "He knows how to balance all of that."

In the same campaign, Restler was endorsed by The Jewish Vote, the political wing of Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, a progressive Jewish organization in New York City.

JFREJ Political Director Rachel McCullough said Restler's ability to listen and engage with the community was an important factor in receiving support from both progressives and the Orthodox community.

"We noticed right away that he had clearly built the right set of relationships with the right set of leaders across the Jewish community," McCullough said. "He made it clear that he was running to represent the whole district."

McCullough added that Restler's election to City Council demonstrates that progressive politics are alive and well in the city. Many progressives were disappointed when the centrist Eric Adams, the Brooklyn Borough president and former New York city cop, was elected mayor in November. (The Jewish Vote endorsed Maya Wiley, a progressive candidate.)

"There's a really important role for Jewish left politics to be played in New York, the home of the largest Jewish community outside of Israel," she said. "Lincoln really embodies that, and I think he's going to make the entire community proud."

Restler said that one of the most important parts of the job is being a bridge-builder between different groups of people and helping them to find common ground.

"I hope to be a councilmember who has enough credibility in different camps that, even when there's disagreement, we can give one another the benefit of the doubt and work together toward a compromise," he said.

While Orthodox and progressive groups have different opinions on many issues — such as policing and Israel — both sides are in agreement about stopping antisemitic and other hate crimes.

"This is in the front of my mind," Restler said. "I am focused on bringing together all groups in the Jewish community to engage with people of other backgrounds and build tolerance to root out this violence."

Restler added Orthodox Jews, in their recognizable dress, are disproportionately the targets of antisemitic attacks.

"When I'm walking down the street, I don't feel at risk of antisemitic violence because people don't even know that I'm Jewish," he said. "If you're wearing a kippah and traditional garb, it sends a very different message."

Where progressives and the city's Orthodox Jews may disagree is on tactics in fighting antisemitism. In January, when the Jewish mainstream was calling for increased law enforcement and beefed-up security, JFREJ led a can-

vassing effort in Williamsburg in response to a series of antisemitic attacks, hoping to defuse tension between diverse local groups.

"We recognized that policing alone is not an effective approach to preventing hate violence," McCullough said. "We think that Lincoln is committed to investing in community-based, restorative approaches to hate violence."

Restler took part in the canvassing and, speaking to a New York Jewish Week reporter at the time, said he sought to balance calls for increased police presence to respond to and prevent attacks with community-based responses like JFREJ's.

Affordable housing was another issue at the forefront of Restler's campaign. He said that Jews and gentiles alike are being forced out of the district due to steep increases on rent.

"We need to strike a much better bargain with developers to ensure that when new constructions are going up in our communities, we're getting the affordable housing we need," Restler said.

He also noted the lack of high-quality affordable childcare and wants to expand vouchers, not just in the Jewish community, but in the whole district.

"It's another month's rent for many working families to afford childcare in our city," he said. "Expanding affordable childcare options in Williamsburg and districtwide is a pressing priority."

Indig said it was important that Restler recognized housing and childcare because many families in his community are in need.

"We have large families," Indig said. "They need to be able to feed their kids. We just need a lot of help with their day-to-day needs."

McCullough attributed Restler's success to a cultural competency that can only come from being a Jewish kid from Brooklyn. According to Restler's bio, he "grew up in a tight-knit community on Pierrepont Street in Brooklyn Heights in the '80s and '90s," and today lives in Greenpoint. After college at Brown University, he worked for as a financial program officer in New York City's Department of Consumer Affairs.

“He knows how to schmooze,” McCullough said. “He knows how to show up for people, which at the end of the day is what City Council members need to do.”

Restler shared an anecdote about his grandparents, whom he said were founding members of Judaism’s Reconstructionist movement. His family still uses their haggadah during Passover, which dates back to the 1930s.

“In that Haggadah, the experience of Jews escaping Israel is explicitly compared to the challenges of African Americans in the United States,” Restler said.

“That commitment to social justice informs the history of my family over generations, and is the part of my Jewish faith that I’m most proud of,” he added.

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## ● NEWS

# 99-Year-Old Holocaust Survivor Killed in Traffic on Way to Brooklyn Synagogue

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

A 99-year-old Holocaust survivor riding an electric wheelchair was struck by a motorist and killed on his way to synagogue in Brooklyn.

Jack Mikulincer was headed to the Manhattan Beach Jewish Center when a BMW SUV plowed into him late Saturday afternoon, the New York Daily News reported.

Mikulincer’s daughter Aviva told the Daily News that the Orthodox synagogue had been a refuge for him.

“He loved going to synagogue, and when the coronavirus came upon us, there was no synagogue,” she said. “I think it made him lonely and sad.”

Mikulincer was born in Uzhhorod in what is now western Ukraine in 1923. During World War II he escaped a forced labor battalion and served in resistance groups before being liberated by the Soviets, according to testi-

mony he gave to the USC Shoah Foundation. He fought in Israel’s War of Independence before moving to Brooklyn, where he was a longtime owner and operator of a bakery in Brighton Beach, according to Chesed Shel Emes, an ambulance service, and a gabbai, or sexton, at his synagogue.

“This is a tragedy. Imagine enduring what Jack Mikulincer did in his life only for it to end like this,” tweeted New York City Mayor Eric Adams. “We owe it to his memory to make our streets safe for all New Yorkers.”

Adams has vowed to reduce traffic fatalities after a record-breaking year for traffic deaths in 2021. Last week the state Senate Transportation Committee passed a traffic safety law named after Samuel Cohen Eckstein, a 12-year-old Jewish boy killed in 2013 by a driver on Prospect Park West in Brooklyn. “Sammy’s Law” allows New York City to lower speed limits to 20 mph citywide and as low as 5 mph on streets with traffic calming measures.

The 52-year-old driver who struck Mikulincer remained at the scene and has not been charged, the NYPD said.

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## ● NEWS

# Emma Saltzberg Didn’t Expect to Win on ‘Jeopardy!’ — But Criticism of Her Israel Activism Came as No Surprise

By Philissa Cramer

Emma Saltzberg knew she might invite criticism by competing on “Jeopardy!”

From her years of experience in progressive Jewish groups, including IfNotNow, a group founded in 2014 to galvanize American Jews to oppose Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories, she knew that her appearance on one of the most popular TV shows in the United States

would likely generate negative comments from those who believe criticizing the occupation is antisemitic.

So when those comments started to appear on social media, especially after IfNotNow touted her third win, and then her fourth and final contest, Saltzberg wasn't surprised.

"That was priced in to my decision to do something public," she told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "I was totally expecting it."

What she hadn't counted on, she said, was her fellow contestants standing up for her. On Monday, Lawrence Long, the nursing student and self-described "stay-at-home uncle" from North Carolina who defeated Saltzberg on Monday's episode reached out to let her know that he was distressed by the attacks and would be donating to IfNotNow in her honor.

Long, whose second appearance also ended in a win Tuesday, told JTA that he happens to agree with Saltzberg on the issue of the occupation, but that wasn't what animated him.

"I noticed the particularly hateful comments directed at Emma online," he said in an email, adding, "I would have had her back regardless of whether our personal beliefs aligned. ... I wish her nothing but the best and I gotta figure out the cool multiple of \$18 to donate."

Saltzberg said Long's outreach "made my heart swell" — and that it was just one of many examples of kindness from within the famously tight-knit community of "Jeopardy!" contestants.

"It was just more than I could have possibly dreamed up," she said about her game-show experience.

Saltzberg said she plans to use her \$56,199 in winnings to save for an apartment in Brooklyn, where she lives with her fiancé, and to buy art. She talked to JTA about the correct answers that she credits to her years in Hebrew school, how her Jewish family turned her onto trivia and what she thinks Jewish communities can learn from the "Jeopardy!" community.

*This conversation has been lightly edited for length and clarity.*

**JTA: How did you end up on "Jeopardy!" and what was the experience like for you?**

**Saltzberg:** It was so fun. I feel like I really am not used to experiences that are, like, just good and fun. Especially not now.

It was just so much fun getting to go to the Sony lot and work with the staff on "Jeopardy!" who are just incredible. They're so skilled and warm and just made me feel so comfortable. And then winning, and then winning again and again — it was just more than I could have possibly dreamed up.

In November 2020, my fiancé and I were watching the old "Jeopardy!" episodes on Netflix, and I just kept getting things right and quickly and he said, you know, you should take the test. He didn't stop bugging me for several days until I took the test. I got the invitation to a group audition on Zoom in June. And then in August they called me and they asked me to come at the end of September.

I couldn't go because it was my friend's wedding, so I ended up going right after Thanksgiving. I realized later that if I had gone that day it was Amy Schneider's first set of tapings. [Schneider recently ended a 40-game winning streak, the second longest in "Jeopardy!" history.] I would have been one of the first people to go up against Amy.

It would have been an honor and a joy to have her to stomp me into the ground. But it was also fun to go after her, when everyone was just so excited.

***Was there a moment while you were playing where you realized, hey, this is going my way?***

In the first episode I didn't know that I won until the very last possible second because I won on making a big bet on Final Jeopardy and having the person who was ahead of me not know the answer. It was completely shocking. I had thought, I'm really proud. I played hard and I'm leaving with my head held high.

And then it was like, Oh, you are not leaving. You're coming back for the next day — which is really right away, because they tape five episodes in a day. They whisk you away to go change into your next outfit and have your makeup touched up and guzzle down some water and then you're right back out doing it again.

***You were a quick draw on a question whose correct response was the Yiddish word "bupkes," meaning "noth-***

*ing.” Can you share a little about your Jewish background, and were there moments where you felt that being Jewish gave you an advantage?*

There was a whole Bible category on one of the nights so that was definitely like, thank you, Hebrew school.

I’ve been in Brooklyn since the year I graduated from college, so eight years. But I grew up right outside Philadelphia, on the [suburban] Main Line. My family has deep roots in Philadelphia and they are not that thrilled that I repped Brooklyn on the show! I grew up going to Beth Am Israel in Penn Valley and then I went to Amherst College, where I was actually the vice president of Amherst College Hillel.

*You mentioned you’re not used to experiences that are just fun. It sounded like part of that is about pandemic life. But I was also wondering if your work as a Jewish activist, and the response to it during your “Jeopardy!” run, was also on your mind.*

You know, my work on the Jewish left really rose out of the same roots that my “Jeopardy!” gameplay grows out of: I just love to learn about the world and the more that I learn, the more I feel an obligation to do what I can to make the world a better place. Living out my Jewish ethics means working to build power so that everyone, no matter who they are and no matter where they live, has what they need to thrive and live a good life.

There are trolls in IfNotNow’s Twitter mentions, a small and vocal group of people who say really negative things. That was priced in to my decision to do something public. I was totally expecting it.

I will also say that I got a real perspective into how messed up the kind of hate that comes our way actually is. The contestant who beat me on last night’s show messaged my fiance to say that he was just appalled at the things that he was seeing. And that actually he was going to be making a donation to IfNotNow in my honor.

It made my heart swell to see that kind of solidarity. I think it can be really difficult as Jews to really comprehend that there are people who are in solidarity with us. It’s something that comes up all the time that people feel really alone. And this was a moment when someone showed me in a really concrete and gracious way that we’re not.

*The community of “Jeopardy!” contestants is famously collegial. How do you think the Jewish community can learn from the “Jeopardy!” community?*

What makes the “Jeopardy!” world so great is this sense of curiosity and wanting to learn and being there for each other. And so much of the conversation that I’m seeing in the Jewish world right now is so deeply anti-intellectual in a way that I find really heartbreaking.

I see Jewish organizations — big and small, secular and religious — rejecting the painstakingly crafted research of a whole swath of human rights organizations just out of hand, without even bothering to make arguments about what it’s saying on the merits. They just reject it out of hand, and in a way that really sows confusion, for non-Jews and Jews alike, about what antisemitism is. So they’re calling things like this Amnesty International report antisemitic, or saying that it will increase antisemitism just to look squarely at what the Israeli government is doing to Palestinians.

This whole conversation is basically posing a false choice: that people can support Jews against antisemitism, or they can support Palestinian liberation from Israeli oppression. The idea that you have to pick one is so dangerous to me and so sad, because we actually can stand for Palestinian freedom and stand for our freedom and safety as Jews.

That sense of, we have to put ourselves in competition is the total opposite of the spirit that I’ve encountered in my brief time in the “Jeopardy!” world, which is that people are incredibly supportive. People want to learn and people are just decent to each other.

*It’s funny that this is your takeaway because “Jeopardy!” actually is a competition with a single correct answer.*

It’s a competition — but it’s also a place where people respect the rules of the game, and if you get the answer wrong, you don’t tell the hosts that they’re making it more dangerous for Jews to live in the world. In some ways, that sort of clear competition creates a clearer way to support one another.

*Is there anything else you’d want Jewish “Jeopardy!” viewers to know about you?*

I was so honored and felt so loved by the various Jewish

left institutions that cheered me on. I want to mention one other organization that shouted me out, which is the Western States Center, where I'm a Defending Democracy Fellow right now. One of my freelance jobs is working with them to support organizing against white nationalism. I take the threat of a politics that is animated by antisemitism and is rapidly ascending to power in the Republican Party very seriously.

But I have a lot of other things about me, even Jewishly. I'm a really big amateur genealogist and I gave a presentation to my family about our ancestors going back several generations in Latvia and Poland. I love to do Shabbat potluck dinners with my friends when it's COVID-appropriate. I keep meaning to join Kolot Chayeynu [a progressive synagogue in Brooklyn] but I haven't yet. I will!

My family's motto when I was a child, which I'm pretty sure my dad got from my bubbe, was "Books are our friends." I grew up in a family that really encouraged me to read and my dad's trained as a scientist, so I could ask him any questions about how things worked, and he would give me a scientific explanation. I'm lucky to have gone to excellent public schools and a college that took me seriously. And, yeah, I'm just curious about lots of things.

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## ● EDITOR'S DESK

# 'Maus' Is Not 'Auschwitz for Beginners' — and That's Why It Needs to Be Taught

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

Art Spiegelman once complained that "Maus," his classic memoir about his father's experiences in the Holocaust, was assumed to be intended for young adults because it took the form of a comic book.

"I have since come to terms with the fact that comics are

an incredible democratic medium," he told an interviewer.

"Adults" seemed to agree: "Maus" won a Pulitzer Prize citation and an American Book Award and remains 36 years after its first appearance in hardcover one of the most searing accounts ever written of the Shoah and its impact on the children of survivors.

I remembered Spiegelman's concern after a Tennessee school board voted last month to remove "Maus" from middle-school classrooms, citing its use of profanity, nudity and depictions of "killing kids." The reaction to the ban from outside McMinn County was swift and angry. Booksellers offered to give copies away. A professor offered local students a free online course about the book. Sales soared. The fantasy writer and graphic novelist Neil Gaiman tweeted, "There's only one kind of people who would vote to ban Maus, whatever they are calling themselves these days."

But the debate over "Maus" has in many ways done a disservice to Spiegelman and his epic project. Because to read some of the comments from defenders of the book, you'd think "Maus" is a challenging but ultimately tween-friendly introduction to the horrors of the Nazi years — a sort of Shoah textbook with mouse illustrations.

However, "Maus" is not, as Spiegelman once pointed out, "Auschwitz for Beginners." It is not — or not just — a book about "man's inhumanity to man," the phrase that actor Whoopi Goldberg got in trouble for using to explain the Holocaust. It is infinitely wilder and woolier and more unsettling than that. It is about the complex relationship between a father who has experienced the worst a person can experience, and a son raised in relative middle-class comfort. It is about mental illness and how a mother's suicide haunts the child who survives her. It is about guilt in many forms, and how it can be transmitted through generations.

I hadn't looked at a copy of the book in years before the current controversy, yet I could still recount by memory its opening almost frame by frame. A 10- or 11-year-old Artie is playing with friends in his neighborhood in Queens, when they abandon him on the way to the playground. Artie comes home to find his father Vladek in their driveway and explains through tears that his friends had skated away without him.

"Friends? Your friends...," says Vladek. "If you lock them

together in a room with no food for a week... THEN you could see what it is, friends!"

With this little slice of childhood trauma, we are suddenly deep into the world of "Maus," where, as the first chapter proclaims, Vladek Spiegelman "bleeds history." Art Spiegelman does not deliver saintly characters oppressed by cartoon villains. His father, like his son, is deeply human and anguished, buffeted by his time in the camps and his wife's suicide and consumed by his own ingrained if understandable prejudices.

At one point in the second volume, Vladek complains to Spiegelman and his wife about the "coloreds" who he says used to steal from their co-workers in the Garment District. It's an unflattering version of his survivor father that Spiegelman could easily have left out of the book, but there is nothing easy about "Maus."

This week a writer asked me to consider publishing his essay about "Maus," in which he objects to the portrayal of Vladek's miserliness, both Spiegelmans' "narcissism" and the books' examples of "Jewish self-loathing."

He's not wrong, exactly. But the triumph and tragedy of "Maus" is its veracity – a commitment to the facts of Auschwitz matched by its honesty about the complexities and ambiguities of its victims and survivors. In an interview for the book "MetaMaus," Spiegelman explains that his book "seems to have found itself useful to other people in my situation, meaning children of survivors. ... The mere idea of a child of survivors resenting and resisting his parents was breaking a taboo that I hadn't expected."

I for one don't see the harm in exposing children to books that may be beyond their years. And given the flood of content that comes the way of any child with a cell phone, laptop or television set, I find the idea of "protecting" kids from violent and sexual imagery in the name of education incredibly quaint.

But let's not pretend that "Maus" is ready-made for the teen market. "Maus" is "adult" not because of its depiction of corpses, its nudity and the acknowledgment that people have sex. It is adult in that it refuses to sugarcoat not just the horrors of the Holocaust, but the personalities of its victims.

It is not, in short, a book I'd give to a tween without hoping to discuss it, before and after — to help them under-

stand not only what they might not understand, but to confront the things that none of us understands.

In short, it is a book that should be taught, and taught well.

**Andrew Silow-Carroll** (@SilowCarroll) is editor in chief of *The New York Jewish Week* and senior editor of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. He previously served as JTA's editor in chief, and, in another century, one of its reporters covering New York. He has served as editor in chief and CEO of the *New Jersey Jewish News* and managing editor of the *Forward* newspaper. He writes a weekly column on the intersection of Jewish culture, politics and religion, and developed a curriculum on the history of Jewish humor used by the Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning.

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## ● OPINION

# Condemning That Flawed Amnesty International Report Doesn't Bring Israel Any Closer to Peace

By Matt Nosanchuk

Last week, Amnesty International released a 280-page report calling Israel an apartheid state and charging it with crimes against humanity, including atrocities against Palestinian citizens of Israel. Such claims have been made before, usually over vociferous objections from supporters of Israel.

Predictably, the report unleashed harsh criticism from the Israeli government and from voices throughout the American Jewish community. Much of the criticism, including the statement issued from my organization, the New York Jewish Agenda, focused on the report's language, terminology, omissions and conclusions, which called into question Israel's very legitimacy as a homeland for the Jewish people.

For example, as we noted in our statement, Amnesty International's report concludes that Israel has employed

a system of apartheid within its borders since the nation was established in 1948.

As an American Jewish organization uniting liberal Zionists who are passionate about Israel and hold a deep commitment to promoting their Jewish values here at home and in Israel, we share the anger of many in the Jewish community regarding the excesses of the report, especially during this time of growing concerns about the rise of antisemitism and authoritarianism in the United States and around the world. At the same time, we believe in the necessity of a more nuanced response beyond that anger.

We must look beyond this report's controversial legal conclusions and examine the difficult realities of Israel's 55-year occupation of the West Bank, its control of the Gaza border, and the unfulfilled promise of full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel. It's not just Amnesty International that has documented this in detail: Numerous Israeli NGOs and the U.S. State Department have warned about the many costs of occupation. These realities cannot be ignored – not by those who live in Israel, nor by those of us who support Israel here in America.

I have traveled to Israel numerous times over the past 46 years, including spending a year there during college. I have seen first-hand the harsh realities of the occupation and felt the dream of a peacefully shared society for Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel slipping away. I have also observed how the lack of Palestinian equality corrodes Jewish Israeli ideals of a democratic, just, and secure state. Like so many others, especially many younger American Jews, I find it increasingly difficult to see those ideals in the current state of Israel.

What matters most are the realities of life on the ground for Jews and Palestinians, not the labels – however controversial – that one puts on them. The categorical condemnation of the Amnesty International report by many in our community avoids grappling with the ongoing control and denial of rights that Palestinians in the occupied territories and (to a lesser degree) in Israel experience day in and day out. This unsupportable reality – with no moral, logical or politically feasible endgame – must change. It threatens to bring about the end, one way or another, of a democratic homeland for Jews.

In just the past few weeks, Palestinian families were

forcibly evicted from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. An 80-year-old Palestinian-American man, Omar Assad, died of a heart attack after being detained, handcuffed, blindfolded and abandoned in the cold by soldiers who apparently had no good reason to detain him. This ongoing Israeli coalition debate over the construction of a yeshiva in Evyatar, an illegal West Bank outpost, demonstrates the continued push by the settlement movement to take over more land in the West Bank and the apparent unwillingness of the government decision-makers to stop them.

For each one of these examples, supporters of Israel invoke others in which Israelis were targeted by Palestinians. They all become part of competing and irreconcilable narratives on both sides of the conflict. We can continue down the rabbit hole of one-sided recriminations—with no good end in sight—that has defined this decades-long conflict. Or we can focus our energies on supporting efforts to build a better future for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Imagine if those of us who care deeply about safeguarding a democratic homeland for Jews in Israel expended as much effort fighting for greater justice in Israel and an end to the occupation as we spend responding each time someone condemns Israel: We could help make a real difference in transforming the situation. We must stop allowing outside critics to define the conversation and limit our voices.

While a just, negotiated two-state solution to the conflict feels remote at this time, we don't need to limit our activism and voices to defending Israel in the face of harsh criticism. Many Jews and Arabs, Palestinians and Israelis – with support from many American Jewish organizations – work together every day to build trust and seek consensus around common issues.

In our increasingly polarized and siloed world, we too often hear only voices with which we agree and ignore or condemn the rest. It does not have to be this way. We know many in the New York and American Jewish communities share our feelings about the conflict. Like them, we remain committed to standing up for our values. This requires acknowledging that there are difficult realities on both sides. We can wait for the next report and the ensuing round of statements and recriminations, or we can raise our voices in support of building

bridges of understanding and a shared society. The choice is ours to make.

**Matt Nosanchuk** is a lawyer and the president and co-founder of the New York Jewish Agenda. A network of pluralistic and diverse Jewish leaders in New York City and State, NYJA advocates for key domestic priorities, supports a democratic Israel, and combats antisemitism. Matt served as the liaison to the American Jewish community in the White House during the Obama-Biden Administration.

## ● SABBATH WEEK PARSHAT TETZAVEH

# Emotional Intelligence Makes Every Space Holy

*A “wise heart” sustains human creativity and community.*

By Roberta Rosenthal Kwall

The Torah is a wonderful starting point for contemplating what motivates and sustains human creativity. Although the Creation narratives in Parshat Bereshit are probably the most celebrated stories about creativity in Western society, this week’s portion contains an often under-appreciated perspective about qualities that are necessary for human creativity to flourish. We learn in this portion that God instructs Moses to “speak to all the wise-hearted whom I have filled with a spirit of wisdom that they shall make Aaron’s garments to sanctify him that he may be a priest to me.”

What does “wise-hearted” mean in this context, and why is this quality so important for human creativity related to items connected to worship? Does God really care about the personalities of those who made the clothing for the first Israelite High Priest? Given that every word of the Torah contains tremendous significance, the answer here is clearly affirmative.

This is not the only place where the Torah uses the Hebrew phrase “choma lev” (wise-hearted/spirit of wis-

dom) to describe those selected to create items associated with divine worship. A couple weeks from now in Parshat Vayakhel, we see a nearly identical term used to describe those who have been endowed with the ability to perform the artistic work in connection with the sanctuary. Wisdom of the heart is distinct from intellectual wisdom. A “wise heart” is an emotionally intelligent heart. The Torah is telling us that only those with emotional intelligence are fit to fulfill the appointed task of creating an environment of holiness.

A key ingredient of emotional intelligence is the ability to transcend one’s own ego to better relate to the feelings of another. Scholars of creativity theory believe this type of self-transcendence is critical to the development of an artistic soul, because maximizing creative output requires an artist to get beyond herself and back to the source of her artistic gift. True creativity demands that the artist’s focus must always be directed to a space beyond herself.

Although the classical Jewish tradition views God as the external source of creativity, the more generalized idea is that creative expression comes from a source beyond the author’s control. The renowned writer Lewis Hyde observed that whereas the narcissist believes that her creative gifts come from herself, the true creative spirit is aware of an “abiding sense of gratitude” moving her to “labor in the service of her genius.” Similarly, Madeleine L’Engle, the novelist and devout Christian, noted the importance of “self-transcendence” when she observed that the artist must get outside of herself to complete her task.

Parshat Tetzaveh teaches us that by developing our emotional intelligence we can enhance our capacity for human creativity in general, as well as deepen our connection to God. But greater emotional intelligence also enables us to deepen our connection to other human beings. Emotional intelligence allows us to recognize when those close to us require extra support even if they do not ask for this directly.

***“Maximizing creative output requires an artist to get beyond herself and back to the source of her artistic gift.”***

Rabbi Elliot Dorff has touched on this in his writing about the importance of a type of “communal” tikkun olam that emphasizes being present for the people in

our lives in times of both need and joy. Another example of how emotional intelligence can improve human interactions is through a focus on developing a greater sense of emotional generosity.

As an academic, I see a huge need for the creation of spaces in which truly open discourse can take place, and in which mistakes will be forgiven because they are understood as essential to the learning process. Emotional generosity is essential to the creation of such an environment. By emphasizing the connection between emotional intelligence and the creation of holy objects, Parshat Tetzaveh is a reminder of the important role emotional intelligence plays in creating not only objects for worship but also functional families and communities.

*Roberta Rosenthal Kwall is the Raymond P. Niro Professor at DePaul University College of Law and the author of several books including "Remix Judaism: Preserving Tradition in a Diverse World" (updated edition, 2022).*

## ● MUSINGS

# What Are the Jews?

By David Wolpe

Although the Nazis branded Jews an inferior race, Jews are not exactly a race. After all, one can convert to Judaism and one cannot convert to be of a different race. Yet they have some characteristics in common. Hmm.

On the other hand, Jews aren't exactly a religion. One isn't born into a religion, and if tomorrow, I suddenly decided I didn't believe anything taught by Judaism at all, I would still be a Jew. Again, hmm.

On the third hand, there are Jews of every skin color and from all corners of the world, so no single sweeping statement seems to work. Except...

Jews are a religious family. You can join family. You don't leave your family by disliking it or disagreeing with it, but you can leave it by joining another family. That is historically how Judaism has worked. Theoretically one remains a Jew, but in practice a Jew who has chosen another religion is written out of the communal compact.

A religious family. That works. Not a category familiar in America, but nonetheless, that is what we are. Now, let's eat.

*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

# Jessica Seinfeld Shows Us How to Be Vegan (at Least Some of the Time)

By Rachel Ringle

Jessica Seinfeld's parents were true children of the '60s. They did yoga before it was cool and served their three daughters brown rice, tofu and wholesome cereal purchased in their local food co-p in Burlington, Vermont.

The young Jessica, embarrassed by their focus on healthy eating, "always wanted regular cereal that you could buy on the shelves of typical supermarkets." These days Seinfeld, 50 — the wife of comedian Jerry, of course, and a mother of three — is known for being a devotee of healthy food. Her first cookbook, 2007's "Deceptively Delicious: Simple Secrets to Get Your Kids Eating Good Food," which included strategies for sneaking pureed veggies into meals, was a bestseller.

Since then, Seinfeld has devoted much of her time to

### CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

**Adar I 10, 5782 | Friday, February 11, 2022**

- **Light candles at:** 5:08 p.m. (NYC)

**Adar I 11, 5782 | Saturday, February 12, 2022**

- **Torah reading:** Tetzaveh, Exodus 27:20–30:10
- **Haftarah:** Ezekiel 43:10–27
- **Shabbat ends:** 6:09 p.m. (NYC)

thinking about getting families to eat healthfully. In addition to running Good+Foundation, a NYC-based non-profit that aims to dismantle multi-generational poverty, she's authored four additional cookbooks. Each one tackles a different food-related problem and provides solutions. With her latest, "Vegan, at Times: 120+ Recipes for Every Day or Every So Often," she shares meat-, egg- and dairy-free recipes she has developed for herself and her family.

And yet, Seinfeld insists you don't have to be vegan to enjoy her recipes. Eating vegan meals doesn't mean you have to swear off a good steak or a piece of fish forever — Seinfeld herself certainly hasn't.

"My entire life, I have been having bagels and lox every Sunday," Seinfeld said. "When I married Jerry, we continued that tradition and my kids rely on it."

These days, Seinfeld's dream bagel order is a toasted everything flugel (flat bagel) with scallion cream cheese, tomato, red onion — hold the lox. Her husband, Seinfeld said, enjoys his plain bagel topped with veggie cream cheese, Zabar's double-smoked lox, tomato and red onion with a big sour pickle on the side.

In other words, being vegan "at times" means you don't have to give anything up. As Seinfeld writes in the book's introduction: "It's time to eat, enjoy and live your life without fear of judgment."

Veganism, and even "part-time" veganism, like Seinfeld's, is on the rise. While 9.7 million Americans identified themselves as vegan in a 2019 survey by Ipsos Retail Performance — a number that held steady from 2012 — Gallup found in 2020 that nearly a quarter of Americans reported eating less meat that year than they had previously. (Just this past weekend the news broke that New York City Mayor Eric Adams — an avowed vegan who credits his plant-based diet with curing his diabetes — was spotted ordering fish at restaurants.)

According to a January, 2022 story from Insider, in 2020, the plant-based foods market was worth \$29.4 billion and could grow to \$162 billion in 2030. That's not because more people are becoming vegans; instead, "non-vegans are helping fuel the plant-based boom by trying to cut down on their meat, fish, and dairy intake."

Seinfeld serves traditional foods for Shabbat and Jewish

holidays: brisket, kugel and homemade, braided challahs coated with an egg wash for a beautiful finish. "I am not willing to give up on that flavor or that color," she said.

Aside from Sunday mornings and Jewish holidays, though, Seinfeld is mostly vegan. She writes that when she was in her 40s, she began to notice a connection between what she ate and how she felt. "I realized that what I ate could either drain me or invigorate me," she writes.

Once she considered how veganism is good for the planet and good for animals, Seinfeld was all in — well, mostly in.

But Seinfeld didn't immediately get on a soap box. Instead, she slowly experimented with recipes. The first vegan recipe that her family unanimously approved, which is in the new cookbook, was her egg- and butter-free banana bread. She baked it, left it on the countertop in the kitchen, and returned not long afterwards to find just a few remaining crumbs. The kids didn't know that they had just devoured one of mom's vegan creations.

"It's through desserts that I got my children on board," said Seinfeld, adding that they came to realize "vegan food does not have to taste like kale and spinach."

Other desserts in the book include a chocolate sheet cake, made with ripe banana and olive oil and iced with a combination of coconut oil and cocoa powder. There's also a carrot cake with unsweetened applesauce and sweetened coconut and frosted with a vegan cream cheese which she happily would make for her non-vegan friends.

The recipes are meant not only to be delicious, but easy-to-make (like her Easy Green Hummus) and affordable. "I keep perspective on how hard many people struggle in this country to afford — especially right now with inflation — groceries and dinner," she said. "The ingredients are all accessible because we [Seinfeld and her co-author, Sara Quessenberry] shopped at typical grocery stores. We did not go to fancy gourmet shops."

Seinfeld is a fan of the vegetable-forward cuisine coming out of Israel. "Tel Aviv is one of my favorite cities in the whole world," she said. "I love Israeli food and I love that America is responding to it." When at home on the Upper West Side in New York City — the family also has a home

in the Hamptons — Seinfeld said they love to dine at Israeli chef Eyal Shani's restaurants, Miznon and HaSalon.

Like all of Seinfeld's previous cookbooks, "Vegan, at Times," which was published last November, is a New York Times bestseller. And, Jerry's response, according to Seinfeld, has been enthusiastic, too: He is "blown away by the book's success and people's response to it," she said.

But let's get to the opinions of the people who really matter. Just how exactly do those "'60s cats" — how Seinfeld describes her parents — feel about their daughter's latest food foray?

"My mom is obsessed with the book," she said. "She sends me photos three or four times a week of dishes she is making. Her friends are cooking from the book, too."

## UPCOMING EVENTS

February 11 | 7:30 p.m. Free

### Louis Armstrong's Jewish Background

Learn more about the Karnoffsky family, immigrants who gave a young Louis Armstrong the support and guidance he needed to become an American jazz icon. Presented by Jim Ryan for the The City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism. The cultural program will be preceded by a Shabbat service.

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

February 13 | 11:00 a.m. \$20

### Day of Kabbalah

The Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan's (virtual) Day of Kabbalah will include keynote addresses, workshops and musical performances for students and seekers at all levels of experience. Cosponsored by The Carlebach Shul.

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

February 14 | 2:00 p.m. Free

### Love During the Holocaust

Join Dr. Edna Friedberg of the Jewish Theological Seminary to explore the varied manifestations of love — romantic, parental, platonic — during the Holocaust. The session will draw from primary sources including diaries, oral testimonies, artifacts, and historical photographs.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3srM2dw>

February 14 | 7:30 p.m. Free

### How to Have Difficult Conversations: Hadar's Winter Lecture Series

What do you say to someone who has lost a family member? How do you share painful or unsettling news? Are you permitted to lie if the truth might be worse? In a 3-part series, Dena Weiss of Hadar turns to biblical and rabbinic texts as a means to better understand what to do when "saying the right thing" can feel challenging to the point of impossible. Virtual and in-person at The Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

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

### Do you have an event coming up?

Submit your events online at [www.jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/contact/submit-an-event](http://www.jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/contact/submit-an-event)