

Jewish Federations of North America oppose Israel's judicial reform

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In a rare comment on internal Israeli politics, the umbrella organization for local Jewish federations is urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to drop one element of his government's controversial plan for judicial reform.

On February 21, the Jewish Federations of North America sent an open letter to Netanyahu and Yair Lapid, leader of the parliamentary opposition, opposing a proposed change that would allow a bare majority of Israeli lawmakers to override Supreme Court rulings. Israel's parliament, the Knesset, has 120 seats, and one piece of the plan would allow 61 members to negate court decisions that strike down laws. Lapid opposes the plan.

It is the first statement by a large North American Jewish umbrella group opposing the court reform. The proposed changes have sparked mass protests across Israel and warnings from a chorus of public figures that they will damage Israel's democratic character.

Some elements of the proposal, though not the override clause, just passed a major legislative milestone in the Knesset. A bill approved in an initial vote on Feb. 20 would hand the Israeli government full control over judicial appointments and bar the Supreme Court from ruling on Israeli Basic Laws, the country's closest parallel to a constitution. Following the vote, the value of the Israeli shekel plunged.

The group's letter also encourages the parliamentary coalition and opposition to enter into negotiations over the content of the reform, as proposed by Israeli President Isaac Herzog.



Israelis protest against the proposed changes to the legal system in Haifa, on February 20, 2023. (Shir Torem/Flash90)

"We urge you to make clear that a majority of just sixty one votes of the Knesset is not sufficient to override a decision of the Supreme Court," the letter said. "The essence of democracy is both majority rule and protection of minority rights. We recognize that any system of checks and balances will be different than those in our own countries, but such a dramatic change to the Israeli system of governance will have far-reaching consequences in North America, both within the Jewish community and in the broader society."

In the past, the Jewish federations system and other American Jewish groups have taken action to oppose Israeli policies or proposals that could harm religious freedom or Jewish pluralism in Israel. The vast majority of North American Jews are not Orthodox, and federation leadership has worked in the past to counter measures that, in their view, could impinge on the recognition or rights of non-Orthodox Jews in the Jewish state.

Past actions on that front include convening nonprofits that work on religious freedom, lobbying the prime minister directly and — in the case of one federation leader — telling Israeli lawmakers who supported a bill to stay away from his city.

The federations' letter does not include promises or

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TBT Gallery presents three emerging Jewish artists

By Shelley Werner

presence in the world



In the depth of winter comes an art show at TBT Gallery that brings the warmth of collaboration and the inspiration of partnership in a group show entitled *"From Strength to Strength."* Three emerging artists present their diverse artistic orientations. Orianne Aviv features photography, Lauren Jacobson focuses on sculptural installations and Jules Schacter shows the integration of illustration with texture on tote bags.

All three artists are students, but their individual styles and raw talent is evident in the pieces on display.

Curator Jennifer Eiserman commented, "The photographic, sculptural and painted works explore themes of being present to experience (Aviv), what gives something its function (Jacobson) and how art functions in our daily lives (Schacter). They remind us that strength comes in many forms, from quiet with its challenges. We move from strength to strength as we navigate our lives."

Orianne Aviv is a Calgary based photographer. She is currently a fourth year English student at the University of Calgary with the intent of becoming a teacher. She started photography as a hobby

when she was sixteen and has slowly developed her skills over time. She is excited to share her work for the first time with the public.

"I think what inspires me the most in taking photos

Orianne Aviv, Jules Schacter and Lauren Jacobson are three emerging artists who are currently featured - until March 26 - in an exhibit at the TBT Gallery at Temple B'nai Tikvah in Calgary.

> is seeing what's around me, and capturing things that I'm seeing and sharing that with friends. An example is when walking along the beach in Tel Aviv I found it to be a good challenge for me to get a

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Reviewed by Rabbah Gila Caine

Every generation says this: we need a good story. We need a story that brings sense into our lives, purpose into our actions and meaning into our being here on earth.

When we talk about mysticism, or mystical traditions, we are talking about the greater story within which we play out our life. And to clarify, I'm saying "story" to show this is a critically important and foundational way in which we see the world, like air and gravity it is hidden in full view. Which is why the book title Embodied Kabbalah: Jewish mysticism for all people totally caught my attention. What a great name for the story our generation desperately needs, we who are stuck online and increasingly not only separated from the outdoors but growing overly fearful of human contact and physical presence.

In his book, Calgary born Rabbi Ponak, invites us to explore forty-two segments of Jewish mystical text, each dealing in its own way with the central and sacred place our body/flesh holds, as we do our spiritual work. By weaving traditional mystical Jewish texts together with his knowledge of other religious traditions as well as contemporary practices in grounded spirituality, Rabbi Ponak creates that rare book - one which is both metaphysical and practical.

Before I briefly comment on the words "Kabbalah," "Embodied" and "for all people", I'll say something about the book's structure:

Embodied Kabbalah is a compilation of texts selected from books written over the past millennia, though it focuses mainly on the last 500 years through the start of the 20th century. Most, but not all, of these works were written in Europe. Rabbi Ponak touches on the gendered aspect of this collection and adds his hope that by reading these texts, a more diverse set of readers will be inspired to renew, refresh, and reimagine what Jewish mysticism looks like. Amen. And I would venture to say that the fact that we are presented with a Kabbalistic compilation of grounded texts, speaks to the profound influence Feminist theology has had on our spiritual life today. But this is for another time.

Each page is designed in the manner that we now consider to be a traditional Talmud page - the main text in the center, surrounded by commentary, spiritual practice, meditations and historical contexts. You could read the book cover to cover, but at its core it is not linear. Each textual offering stands holding its own as we progress in our exploration of embodied and

grounded Jewish spirituality.

Kabbalah is a huge field of inquiry and practice, and this isn't the place to go into detailed exploration of its many pathways and meanings. But one important thing Rabbi Ponak reminds us of is that "Being a householder tradition, Judaism and its mystical components emphasizes a balance between the earthly and the spiritual". Our mystical tradition is overwhelmingly non-monastic, and very much engaged in spiritual change through daily life and ethical behavior. This rootedness in the world is critical if we are to invite multitudes to develop their spiritual selves, within their own lives.

This is exactly where "Embodiment" enters as a key tool if we are to redevelop a spiritual language that can be meaningful for most people.

An embodied practice cultivates an intimate (and loving?) relationship with the body, rather than trying to escape it. For instance, connecting to Shabbat's spiritual power by enjoying a good Shabbat meal, is an embodied experience, and this kind of work is critical for our heady, online, disembodied time in history. And while Halacha and much of Jewish practice has been inherently of-the-world, Jewish mysticism hasn't always taken that path. Which is why this book, with its intentional focus on embodied spiritual work, is critical for our times in the way it reminds us that mystical practices don't have to be about running away from the world. They can function as a sacred bridge connecting our physical and spiritual life.

The foreword to this book was written by Rabbi Arthur Green, one of the great contemporary teachers of Jewish thought and mysticism. He speaks of his own work as "translator" of texts and leads us into Embodied Kabbalah by describing it as a work of "translation" in the deepest sense, translation as "a cultural task, making words spoken...or written in one cultural context accessible and meaningful to readers who live in another."

This touches on the last part of the title, "for all people", and on Rabbi Ponak's vision that "In the same way that cultures in many parts of the world have benefited from mindfulness and yoga, people can benefit from the universal insights found in Judaism. Our planet, our people, and our societies need help from as many sources as they can access". Our story of deeply grounded, down to earth, life-loving spirituality is a gift to the world and one we should share.

This is also a particularly good work of "translation" for Jews who are curious about touching on something "beyond", but who might not necessarily want to buy



"Embodied Kabbalah: Jewish mysticism for all people" is a foundational new book by Calgary born Rabbi Matt Ponak.

into a God centered universe. Here is a book that uses Jewish language to tell us an important story: By listening to our physical sensations, we can connect with a divine which isn't separate from us, but sometimes hidden even from ourselves.

A shout out to Pinchas Segal for a deceptively simple, yet intriguing cover image. In a few lines, he has captured the essence of the book, and the essence of the wider project which it represents.

Yishar Koach to Rabbi Ponak on this book, an important and timely addition to any Jewish library, and one which I look forward to joyfully exploring further in my teaching.

You can order your copy at: matthewponak.com/embodied-kabbalah.

Rabbah Gila Caine is the spiritual leader at Temple Beth Ora, Edmonton's Reform Jewish congregation.





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The Joy of Purim

By Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski

Purim is a Jewish holiday celebrated with gifts to friends and the needy, of masquerades and noisemakers. It is filled with a unique joy, but it also has a deeper and more profound side to it.

The Zohar states: "It is called Purim because of Yom Kippurim... (Zohar 57b:4)". This explanation of the Zohar comes from isolating the prefix of the word Kippurim - the Hebrew letter Kaf - which translates to "like Purim". The Jewish holiday of repentance and abstinence is contrasted with the Jewish holiday of fun. How are we to understand this?

There is a Talmudic discussion that can help lend clarity on the subject:

Rava, the Rabbi, said, "In the days of Achashveirosh, the Jews re-accepted the Torah" (Tractate Shabbat, Talmud Bavli 88a).

Earlier in the Talmudic text, it speaks out that the Jewish nation had accepted the Torah originally at Mount Sinai. This statement of Rava informs us that they accepted it again in the time of Esther and Mordechai. The question is what distinction was there between these two acceptances of the Torah?

When Moshe first brought down the two stone tablets from Har Sinai, he was met with the sin of the golden calf and broke them. Several weeks later, on Yom Kippur, the Jewish people finally received the second set. The backdrop to this acceptance was sin, which made Yom Kippur a day of judgment and repentance.

The backdrop to Haman's plot against the Jews was also of an idolatrous nature. A Talmudic discussion

informs us of the following: The students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him: "Why were the Jews of Esther's time deserving of annihilation?" Rabbi Shimon said to them: "Why do you think?" They first suggested: "It is because they joined in Achashveirosh's meal."

Rabbi Shimon responded: "If so, only the Jews of Shushan should have been threatened. and those in the rest of the world should not have been included." They said to him: "So, why do you think?" He said to them: "It is because they bowed before the idol made by Nevuchadnetzar, the Babylonian king who had destroyed the first Jewish

Babylonian king who had destroyed the first Jewish Temple in Jerusalem." The students asked: "Then why did Hashem forgive them?" He replied: "They did not really worship the idol but pretended to do so only for

really worship the idol but pretended to do so only for appearances." (Tractate Megillah, Talmud Bavli 12a) In this instance, the idolatrous action was of a lesser

degree, lacking the hearts of the Jew.

The merriment of Purim is recognizing an evolution from Yom Kippur to Purim. When the Jews sinned by the golden calf, this was a sin rooted in the heart. It had significant ramifications, and we repent yearly to mark the day. By Purim, the heart and soul of the Jewish people stayed untarnished and showed a

PJ Library Hummus Party in YEG



Edmonton PJ Library hosted a hummus party at the home of PJ parent, Jen Kovacs. Moms had an opportunity to bond over great conversation, meet new PJ parents, enjoy tasty foods, and sample a variety of hummus flavours!

significant improvement in the Jewish nation.

One can erroneously read the biblical narrative as a series of failures by the Jewish people. The story of Megillat Esther serves as a reminder that we are capable of great things, and that we should never lose hope in our ability to improve. So, let us be inspired by the bravery and determination of Esther and Mordechai, and let us celebrate every step we take towards becoming the best versions of ourselves.

May you all have a joyous Purim,

Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski is the Head of Judaic Studies at Halpern Akiva Academy.

The masks we wear on Purim — and on Facebook

By Cindy Sher

CHICAGO (JUF News via JTA) — Like so many other Jewish little girls on Purim, both my big sister and I would dress up for our annual Purim carnival as Queen Esther. The morning of the carnival, my mom would array us in regal dresses, bright red lipstick and a homemade crown or sparkly tiara bought for this

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very occasion — and only this occasion — so as to raise grounded daughters the rest of the year.

And in households down the street, the Jewish boys I knew would dress as the male hero of Purim: Mordechai.

Our costumes were a fun way to reinforce the attributes of these Jewish heroes who were brave and stood up for what's right.

But then, after a couple hours at the carnival, we'd reach our Purim fill. The combs at the ends of the tiara would start to scratch the backs of our ears, the lipstick would smear on girls too young to pull off crimson red, our bellies would ache from cotton candy and hamantaschen overload. At that point we'd go home, take off our royal dresses and return to our comfy play clothes — still brave girls, minus the fancy costumes. And being ourselves, it turned out, was pretty nice, too.

Thirty years later, my generation of Queen Esthers and Mordechais are all grown up, but we're still working on taking off our masks.



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In some ways, the media today — particularly social media — has made it all the easier to don a mask. On Facebook, for instance, we package ourselves exactly the way we want the public to see us — as the shiniest, happiest-looking versions of ourselves. As we scroll through our News Feeds showing our friends' adorable babies and dogs (or better yet, the baby posed with the family dog), brides and grooms so perfect they might as well perch themselves on top of a wedding cake and pictures of us sipping pina coladas on the beach, things look fantastic.

Yet, that's just the thing — those pictures are fantasy. As someone once told me, "I wish I was having as much fun in real life as I am on Facebook." Because, get real. No one's that happy all the time.

But it's not all fake. Despite the virtual masks we sometimes wear, society can be an easier place to be

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What about Weinberg? Calgary musician puts composer on the radar

By Maxine Fischbein

Hard on the heels of their January joint program -*Under the Radar: 30 Notable Canadian Jewish Musicians* with author David Eisenstadt - Temple B'nai Tikvah and Beth Tzedec Congregation are welcoming Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra Concertmaster and First Chair Violist Diana Cohen as she puts Polish-born Jewish composer Mieczyslaw (Moishe) Weinberg on the radar on March 28 at Beth Tzedec.

This extraordinary musical event will feature excerpts from Weinberg's acclaimed Violin Concerto, performed by Cohen, accompanied by her husband, world-renowned pianist Roman Rabinovich. The moderator for the event is Mark Limacher, himself an accomplished pianist and long-serving CKUA host. Limacher, Cohen and Rabinovich will also discuss Weinberg's music and his life and times.

Why Weinberg?

"He is one of the great composers of the 20th century," Diana Cohen told *AJNews*, adding that Dmitri Shostakovich was Weinberg's "close friend and colleague and believed wholeheartedly in him."

"Weinberg's voice was every bit as important as

Shostakovich's," Cohen said.

Weinberg faced huge challenges during his lifetime. As a Polish refugee, he felt the sting of xenophobia; as a Jew, he suffered antisemitism. As an artist, he was harshly suppressed during the Stalinist era.

"He was always trying to escape something," said Cohen.

While Weinberg's works were performed by some leading musicians in the Soviet Union, they were a well-kept secret throughout most of Europe and North America.

Weinberg was born in Warsaw in 1919. His father was a composer and conductor, his mother an actress in the Yiddish theatre. When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union at the beginning of World War II, Weinberg fled into Russia. Remaining behind, his parents and younger sister were forced into the Warsaw Ghetto and perished at the Trawniki concentration camp.

Weinberg studied music in Minsk, but when Germany attacked Russia in 1941, he was forced to move again, this time to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. There, Weinberg married his first wife and wrote his first symphony, sending it to Shostakovich, who successfully intervened with Soviet authorities, garnering an invitation for Weinberg to travel to Moscow, where he



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Diana Cohen and Roman Rabinovich

settled in 1943.

Suppressed and persecuted, Weinberg saw friends and members of his and his wife's family imprisoned and murdered. Incarcerated in 1953 on trumped-up charges of "plotting to establish a Jewish republic in Crimea," Weinberg escaped the death penalty when an amnesty was declared following Josef Stalin's death later that year.

"The story of [Weinberg's] neglect is a history of the 20th century at its worst, encompassing both the Nazi and Soviet tyrannies," writes classical music critic Robert L. Reilly on a website devoted to the music and history of Mieczyslaw Weinberg (music-weinberg.net/).

A prolific composer, "Weinberg wrote 22 symphonies, 17 string quartets, seven operas, six concertos, three ballets, 30 sonatas, and more than 200 songs as well as 60 film scores and incidental music for theatre and circus," according to the ORT *Music and the Holocaust* website.

Weinberg's Jewish roots are reflected in his music, echoes of which are found in some of Shostakovich's compositions.

Sadly, Weinberg suffered ill health, including Crohn's disease. Shortly before his passing in 1996, he converted to Russian Orthodoxy. A controversy ensued as to whether he was coerced to do so or freely chose his path to Christianity.

Either way, Weinberg's remarkable music was influenced by his lived experience as a Jew; suffering

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CJA Junior High Journeys into Grief and Loss

By Lesley Machon

Calgary Jewish Academy junior high students explored a curriculum-twist this year with the infusion of literature about grief, death, and healing. Although these are not topics we commonly lean into, teens decided to push past fears and hesitations and dive deep into questioning the impact that our view of death, might have on our lives.

Though most of you know me as the Humanities teacher, I have also pursued additional training in Thanatology and grief and bereavement counselling to offer end-of-life support to fellow Albertans. This work has deepened my appreciation for life and transformed the way I show up in the classroom.

Acknowledging that many families in our community have endured tragedies in recent years, my aim was to incorporate the topic of death in the classroom in a sensitive yet significant way. Students tapped into their innate desire for relevance and meaning-making, and created projects that were tender and stirring.

We began with a unit called "From Lab Coat to Sweatpants: Bridging the Gap Between Science and Empathy" where students read and researched medical stories and explored illness from both a scientific and emotional perspective. Then we explored different ways to talk about and orient towards

death: through poetry, novel studies, and film studies. We invited in guest speakers – a mom and

her child who was given 24 hours to live (but who lived to receive a rare transplant and was labelled medical а miracle), and a bioethics expert. The students enjoyed $_{\mathrm{this}}$ aspect immensely, and asked insightful questions, such as what the mother felt when she was given the news of her daughter's prognosis, and how she coped with the devastating news. Soon, we will hear from an Indigenous death doula and various religious leaders.



and engaged in a mitzvah project that included the creation of bracelets, hats, and art for children in the Alberta Children's Hospital. (Photo supplied).

To cap it off, our mitzvah project included the creation of bracelets, hats, and art for children in the Alberta Children's Hospital. Seeing students' creations bring joy to families at the hospital, and walking

through $_{\mathrm{the}}$ school hallways amidst posters they created as part of their medical research project, was incredibly moving.

As a result of the impact I witnessed this exploration have on students, I published an article for a teaching magazine outlining our process with the hopes of inspiring other educators to incorporate this topic in their classroom and make death a less taboo topic.

Death is a subject that can be uncomfortable for many, but like many topics we find confronting, grief, loss, and death are important for young people to explore. Doing so helps them appreciate life, engage with others in an empathetic and compassionate way, and postulate about living and dying with dignity and integrity.

A special thank you to Dr. Julie Booke and Sydney Morgan for the crochet help, and the Bondar family for donating the materials for our mitzvah project.



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Judaic inspired drama comes to TT

By Natalie Soroka, Talmud Torah Society

Talmud Torah School (TT) is well known for its cohesive community and familial nature. In any given year we average around 140 students, and an additional 60 children in the Talmud Torah Early Learning Centre. For the 2022-23 school year we wanted our students to experience the creation and performance of a drama production. Talmud Torah School Council (TTSC), through the efforts of Chair Christina Reboh and TTSC parent volunteers, Talmud Torah Society's Education Committee, as well as principal Darin Johnson, were able to bring Trickster Theatre to Talmud Torah School. Trickster Theatre is a non-profit organization that creates fun, engaging, effective learning through physical theatre.

Throughout the week of February 13, teachers had the unique opportunity to be inspired by Trickster Theatre artists and learn new techniques to their cross-curricular, Judaic inspired drama/art projects. Our students took the lead with just one prop and three 1.5 hour sessions. Along with techniques taught by Trickster Theatre leaders, students learned about script writing, artistic collaboration, costume design, stage presence and lighting, lessons which will be valuable for years to come.

Our community had a special opportunity to come together at TT the evening of February 16th and the afternoon of February 17th to see the students demonstrate our values on stage. KG – act with loving kindness, show your love through kind actions – gemilut hasadim; Gr. 1 – community – help your community grow by showing kindness and helping all people who share things in common with you – kehillah; Gr. 2 – be content, be happy with what you have – sameach b'chelko.

Gr. 3 – kind speech – use your words to help and be kind – if you don't have something nice to say, don't say it at all – lashan ha'ra; Gr. 4 – honour humanity – every person has great value and deserves to be treated with respect – kavod ha'briot; Gr. 5 – repair the world – take care of the world, show how much you love it, by helping to clean it and working toward fixing any problems you might find – tikkun olam; Gr. 6 – shadow show bringing together all the Jewish values performed. The gymnasium was filled with family and friends, along with special guests including MLA Lorne

Dach, Edmonton Public School Trustee Dawn Hancock, and Jewish Federation CEO Stacey Leavitt Wright. The students worked very hard to prepare skits that were not only entertaining, but oftentimes humorous and heartwarming. It culminated in an outstanding, spinetingling performance by the Grade 6 students done solely with shadows and music. Not a word was spoken, but the



Throughout the week of Feb. 13 TT teachers worked with Trickster Theatre to bring a physical theatre experience to the students.

messages were loud and clear. Parent volunteers worked throughout the week, schlepping stage equipment, creating props for the Grade 6 performance, organizing costumes, and helping during the performances. As always, our amazing volunteers came through with flying colours! This drama residency could not have been achieved without a generous grant from the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation (EJCCF). In providing the grant, the EJCCF recognized the importance of drama in school, specifically drama with a Judaic theme. "The Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation provides grants every year to the Talmud Torah Society that support student enrichment. They are an integral part of our ability to enhance the student experience at TT, and we are so very thankful," Christina stated. As well, many parents and community members supported this residency by placing greetings or business ads in the playbill. Thank you to all of our volunteers and sponsors for your efforts in bringing this special drama experience to Talmud Torah students and staff.

To learn more about the TT Trickster Theatre residency, to share student enrichment opportunities, or to get more involved in all the fun and learning at Talmud Torah, please

connect with the TTSC at talmudtorahschoolcouncil @partner.epsb.ca.



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A grant from the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation provided funds for the drama residency at TT.

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Applications, including a resume, should be emailed to: president@edmontonbethshalom.org Only applicants selected for interview will be contacted.

Ben Freeman: Be loud, be proud, be Jewish

By Matthew Levine

Jewish Federation of Edmonton hosted Ben M. Freeman, a prominent thought leader in Jewish identity, at the Creative Hive in Edmonton on February 9 for a community conversation about developing Jewish pride as an antidote to antisemitism.

After an introduction from Adam Zepp, Freeman participated in a Q and A style interview. He was born in Scotland and lived in a similar community to Edmonton with about 5000 Jewish people. There, his parents worked hard to build his Jewish identity and he attended the only Jewish school in Scotland. At the same time, he was really struggling with his homosexuality. He eventually realized he had done nothing wrong and learned to be proud of his sexual orientation. "Jews also deserve to feel proud," says Freeman. "We must reject the shame imposed on us." This idea is what lead to his first book.

Freeman's first book – Jewish Pride: Rebuilding a People - is centred around the idea that, as Jews, we absorb shame from the non-Jewish world. Furthermore, we must address issues like shame and internalized anti-Judaism in order to build pride. Ben claims that anti-Jewish sentiment is the biggest threat facing Jewish people. He insists that one of the main reasons that young Jewish people are shedding their Zionism is because they do not realize they can be Zionists and still disagree with the Israeli government. Ben continuously emphasizes that we must be authentically who we are, and celebrate that.

Assimilation as the number one enemy. Ben argues that being proudly Jewish was seen as encroaching on universal boundaries in the 19th century. He also brings up the point that we are the only minority group that does not always play themselves in movies, and he insists that we should. He says that intersectionality is key, and that we as Jews are made to feel as if we must choose between being Jewish and our other identities. However, he says that we must embrace our dual identities, and hold on to our Judaism through a Jewish anchor.

What is a Jewish anchor? Ben describes it as an object or action that allows for our individual connection to Judaism. He claims that we work harder to be Jewish in the diaspora than those in Israel because people in Israel are constantly reminded of their Judaism. They get the Jewish holidays off work for example. This is why we must know who we are and live it, using an

anchor as a reminder. Ben uses a Kippah as his anchor. This is interesting as he is strictly secular, meaning Gd does not play a role in his beliefs, but he says wearing it grounds him in his Judaism. His partner is also not Jewish so the Kippah works as a reminder for him. He contrasted being marked as Jews with the "Jude" star in the Holocaust, with being proud to be Jewish now, marking himself with a Kippah.

Anti-zionism as a post-holocaust form of Jew hatred. Ben argues that people telling us who we are is completely unacceptable and that we must not let it happen. We have to reject these ideas and find comfort in ourselves. He furthers this point by saying that we must not debate who we are. Ben tells us that if you find yourself inside a space where someone is making you justify your Judaism, you can leave that space or block whoever you need to. You can be a proud zionist and have an interest in social justice,

and you can disengage from negative discourse without changing who you are. Ben leaves us with three main points: Reject

Ben leaves us with three main points: Reject Jew-hatred, define our own identity, and we



Jewish Federation of Edmonton presented an engaging conversation with Ben M Freeman at The Creative Hive on February 9. Before the event, Ben and Lisa Stadelbauer, the Canadian ambassador to Israel, met with Hillel Edmonton students.

must go on a journey to find our personal Jewish identity. He asks if you have ever spoken the words "I'm Jewish but." Freeman tells us that as long as we feel physically safe and the issue is comfort, we need to accept who we are and not be afraid to show our Judaism. He wishes to change the phrase "We survived, let's eat" into "We survived, we thrived, let's eat" because our commitment to Judaism is what allowed us to thrive and not simply survive.

This event was informative, well-attended, and incredibly thought-provoking. Ben Freeman's parallels between being gay and Jewish were quite interesting and provided an alternative perspective on Judaism.

Matthew Levine is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

The masks *cont. from page 4*

real and open than it used to be — if we choose to.

As the world grows smaller, we're revealing ourselves and relating to one another in ways that often make us feel less alone. In this age of sharing (and oversharing), some of us are shedding light on the parts of us that aren't so shiny and happy all the time. In the world's biggest group therapy session, we're electronically sharing our emotional, mental and physical struggles with one another. We're bonding over our shared human experiences of love, loss, failure, success, spiritual growth and purpose. We're more likely to admit that life isn't just sunshine and rainbows — and that makes us feel less alone in whatever we're going through.

A couple of years ago, I wrote a blog post about my mom's struggle with — and, thank G-d, her triumph over — bipolar disorder. My post garnered more "likes" and positive responses than any piece I'd written in 15 years. For months, people would approach me with their personal mental health struggles. Before that post, I had rarely spoken or written in a public forum about the previously stigmatized illness.

But then I figured times have changed and her illness is no longer shrouded in darkness it's something so many people are touched by. Plus I realized that being open could go a long way in helping people face whatever hardships they're dealing with.

It's wonderful to teach our kids to embody the bravery of heroes like Esther and Mordechai, and it's exciting to dress up as someone else every now and then. But when the tiara starts to itch and we grow tired of our disguises, let's remember that the best and bravest face to wear at the end of the day is our own.

Cindy Sher is the executive editor of JUF News.



PJ Library Tot Shabbat





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Serving lunch at the Bissell Centre

By Netta Phillet

The Inner City Pastoral Ministry (ICPM) is an ecumenical Christian organization serving the people of Edmonton's inner city. It began in 1978 and is now jointly sponsored by three denominations, and includes lunch served to anyone who wishes to come in for a meal, they do not have to attend the service. It takes place in the Bissell Centre so we refer to it that way for simplicity. Different churches take turns through the year, supplying the food and servers.

In the mid 1990's we found out that the Sunday before Christmas was the most difficult to fill with volunteers, and the Jewish community stepped up. For the first few years we prepared everything at Beth Shalom, and then developed a different method, with individuals making sandwiches and baking at home. COVID put an end to that.

Participants often asked if we couldn't do this more than once a year and were told to go ahead. A few years ago a member of Beth Israel began the Thanksgiving Sunday Bissell lunch, based mostly out of BI, but for both lunches there have always been volunteers from the entire Jewish community. Thanks to the generosity of our community we handed out 200 bag lunches on December 25th. There were also Christmas dinners being served downtown; our food could be taken away and had items that could last several days.

Huge thanks to Cheryl & Wayne Shur for assembling and distributing the bags and donating the water. Tony Russell assisted. Thanks as well to Linda Hartum for delivering and donating fruit. Each lunch had a bottle of water (critical for those who spend a lot of time outdoors), a juice box,

protein bar, chips, Babybel, a banana, an orange, and a tuna or chicken snack pack. These are relatively expensive and a real treat; the total cost was \$7 each.

were provided this year.

In the words of one volunteer, "Although we have donated to the Bissell Centre and Hope Mission for years this was actually my first experience of interacting with those who so desperately need these services.... the smiles and words of thanks were far more than enough and once back in my vehicle, I couldn't hold back the tears."

A group of community members from Beth Shalom has been

providing lunches at the Bissell Centre in Edmonton as part of the

Inner City Pastoral Ministry since the 1990's. Over 200 bag lunches

Next year, who knows? Perhaps we'll be back to making sandwiches in Beth Shalom.

The Shortest History of Israel and Palestine

Reviewed by Deborah Shatz

The Shortest History of Israel and Palestine: From Zionism to Intifadas and the Struggle for Peace by Michael Scott-Baumann is the latest title in The Shortest History Series published this month by The Experiment Publishing Company. While it is true that the book is easy to read and understand, and it does cover both viewpoints in the conflict, I wouldn't quite call it balanced.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most bitter struggles in history, with profound global consequences. In The Shortest History, author Michael Scott-Baumann describes its origins and charts its history to present day. At its core, he identifies the conflict as a struggle between Jewish immigrants and their descendants and the Arabs among whom they settled. Not to belabour the point but the first flaw of the book is that although the author recognizes the biblical attachment of the Israelis to the land, he does not identify them as indigenous to the area. This is a sticking point for Jewish people.

Besides that, he does move on to say that the heart of the conflict is that "both sides claim the right to live in and control, some or all of Palestine."

The book outlines the pre-1914 origins of the conflict and describes the unique circumstances that led to the creation of the State of Israel. It identifies key turning points and shows how history, leadership and decisionmaking on both sides has shaped the present.

Each chapter starts with some key political questions to be answered and ends by giving perspectives and testimonies from both sides. Scott-Baumann examines the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Six Day War of 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, two Intifadas and up to former US President Donald Trump's 'Deal of the Century' in 2020. At the end, he looks at the nature of Israeli control of the Palestinian territories and the Palestinian resistance.

The book purports to be "an accessible, balanced chronicle of how the Israel-Palestine conflict originated and developed over the past century." I did not find the narrative to be balanced or comprehensive. First it minimized the Jewish ancestral connection to the land and then it presented a skewed version of wars and skirmishes, consistently emphasizing Israel's actions and downplaying the preceding actions of the Palestinians. Words matter – and while the book mentions that Israel was reacting to acts of aggression, each time that seems to be glossed over. The provocation is repeatedly diminished.

However, although the historical account is neither balanced nor comprehensive in describing the Israeli side of the conflict, the book's conclusion is sound. "Palestinians and Israelis will always be neighbours and an agreement based on equality and justice could enable both sides to live in peace and security. At

present, however, that seems a distant prospect."

Regardless of its inadequacies, I found the Shortest History to be a valuable read in that it humanizes the Palestinian struggle side by side with the Israeli need for security. In isolation that might be unbalanced but if you are already well versed in the history of Israel, it is definitely thought provoking.

The path to the present has been turbulent and for a long time Israel's claim that there was no reliable partner for peace seemed to be valid. However, in today's climate and likely since the rise of Israel's current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, it is equally true that Israel is also not a reliable partner for peace.

The book's message is that we have to keep talking - on a human level - and on that I would hope we all agree.

March is our Passover Edition! Our print date is March 22, 2023 Deadline is March 17, 2023





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Marcin Wodziński

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Marcin Wodziński, born and raised in Silesia, works at the University of Wrocław, Poland, where he runs the Taube Department of Jewish Studies and holds position of professor of Jewish history and literature. His research focuses on the history and culture of East European Jews in modern times, especially the Haskalah and Hasidism. Of his publications, he is most proud of Historical Atlas of Hasidism (Princeton, 2018) and Hasidism: Key Questions (Oxford, 2018).

Part of Jewish Studies Week 2023

Reception to follow!

Leah Horlick becomes U of C's first Jewish Writer-in-Residence

By Irena Karshenbaum

In what may be a first in its 30-year history, the University of Calgary Distinguished Writers Program has appointed a Jewish Writer-in-Residence, Leah Horlick.

Serving the writing community over the 2022-2023 academic year, the prestigious appointment carries many serious responsibilities including not only public appearances and readings (that are critiqued after each event), but also a heavy workload of consultations with beginning writers. The consultation process is quite demanding requiring the Writer-in-Residence to provide feedback, in writing, on each submission as well as a face-to-face meeting with each writer. (Being one of the writers Horlick met with, I can attest to the insight and empathy she showed in reviewing my writing, and would recommend the process to anyone looking to gain a greater understanding of their work.) The Calgary Distinguished Writers Program is considered generous as it does not contain a teaching component freeing the writer to use half of their time to work on their next writing project, which in Horlick's case will be her first novel.

At just 34, Horlick's career has had a heady rise. Graduating from the University of Saskatchewan with a Bachelor of Arts in Languages and Linguistics and UBC with an MFA in Creative Writing, Horlick published three books of poetry in quick succession. *Riot Lung* (Thistledown Press) was released in 2012, followed by *For Your Own Good* (Caitlin Press) in 2015 and the *Moldovan Hotel* (Brick Books) in 2021. Her second work, *For Your Own Good*, which delves into the difficult territory of surviving a long-term abusive lesbian relationship, was named a 2016 Stonewall Honor Title by the American Library Association and was awarded the Dayne Ogilvie Prize for LGBT Emerging Writers.

Moldovan Hotel was written after Horlick travelled to Romania in search of her Jewish roots. Her future novel, she explains, will also mine Jewish themes and will be based on the Dybbuk story, through "a queer lens," and an ending that may not be so tragic.

Horlick fulfills her duties remotely while living in Saskatoon and visiting Calgary, occasionally, for public engagements, which is what she did the week of February 5. At an "In Conversation with Leah Horlick" event held over the lunch hour on February 8 at the University of Calgary, Horlick spoke about the importance of writers persevering and doing the same thing over and over again to achieve different results. This is how she received her appointment - she applied three times - and finally with a sprinkling of lucky fairy dust, Horlick was invited to fill the role.

Horlick credits her success to the support she receives from her family.

Born in Saskatoon to Allan Horlick and Anna Power-Horlick, her parents supported her talents from an early age. The family's interfaith Jewish roots also played a significant part in her success. Horlick tells how both of her parents had one Jewish parent. Her father's father was Jewish, Dr. Louis Horlick who married, Ruth, a "vaguely" religious Protestant woman from southern Ontario (the family suspects the last name was changed from Gorelick when her greatgrandfather came to Montreal from Minsk), and her mother's mother was born to Jewish parents who fled Romania just before the Holocaust and settled in London, England. It was here that her maternal grandmother, Sylvia, met and married Douglas Power, a soldier - which Sylvia would describe as "a Catholic guy with a Jewish heart" - coming from a family of miners in Nova Scotia. With both sets of grandparents being in interfaith marriages, at a time when this was more difficult, Horlick explains, all the grandparents, "Got along like a house on fire because they could identify with that. No one came to our wedding and it was just us and whoever we could find to officiate it."

She continues, "Given that each set of my grandparents had a lot of experience with ostracization based around their intimate relationships, it meant that I have a very gay-friendly family, which has been really nice for me because each set of my grandparents were like, 'Well, we can't presume to know exactly what this is like, but we sure know what it's like to be shunned and treated differently about this because neither of us planned to fall in love with the people we did.' So that I think has been a huge support."

Horlick says she received, "lots of empathy" and that her family was "hugely supportive of writing, coming from a cultural background with the values of education and study. My grandparents were like: Absolutely, be an artist as long as you can feed yourself and make a living." Horlick has supported herself by working in the not-for-profit sector, in an art gallery, as an audio describer for film and TV and she makes indexes at the backs of books. Horlick says she actually prefers working full-time not only for the steady paycheck, but also because she is social.

She was drawn to writing poetry because, she explains, she has a hard time talking about her feelings, "Poetry is a much safer vessel for that than interpersonal communication. My attraction is to all of the different kinds of experimentation that you have room for in poetry that you don't have in fiction. I

really enjoy being able to inhabit a moment in time rather than having to fully experience a setting and a plot and that is what I am finding really challenging with writing the novel right now. So many things have to happen. I can't just pick one powerful scene like I can with a poem."

Referring to *Moldovan Hotel*, Horlick explains that she is not a Holocaust scholar, but that, "I can write poetry that transmits as much of the emotional experience as I can gather from traveling, from family stories, with permission, and create something accessible that relies on



scholarly research, but that doesn't try to recreate it. I am not well positioned to write a book about the Romanian Holocaust, but what I can do: Here is what it's like being me in this family and a lot of other people have had similar experiences and it's really challenging to talk about so here are maybe some ways of body-based and language-based ways to access these stories."

Horlick lists Leonard Cohen as one favourite poet and says that Canada has many great living poets who are her peers and colleagues, and with the community being small so many more things are possible, "It's rare for poets to have agents, we're not making the big book deals or sales. We have more freedom. Relationally, we have more time to get to know each other."

We look forward to getting to know Leah Horlick better over the coming years through her soon-to-be written books.

The demand for a consultation with Horlick has been so great that she is fully booked until the end of her term in June of 2023. To submit a sample of your writing to the next Writer-in-Residence (do it early in the academic year!), visit arts.ucalgary.ca.

Irena Karshenbaum writes in Calgary. irenakarshenbaum.com





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community calendar

Want to know what's going on in Jewish Calgary? Check out the Community Calendar at jewishcalgary.org

Have an event? Click on "Suggest an Event" to add it to the calendar

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recall being part of a board of directors for a Jewish day school in Toronto, and participating in a specific workshop with an aim at examining Israel education curriculum and delivery for students. Things we discussed included some strategies for deeper education and engagement, and conversations about ways the school could embed Israel into its neshama, its soul. More than a decade later, I still recall the overall theme applied to the learning -Ahavat Israel, literally translated as love for Israel, but intended to mean hugging and wrestling with Israel.

What a novel concept, I thought. To me, the idea of hugging and wrestling, of truly caring, encapsulates how many of us feel as we do our best to support Israel during challenging and ever changing times. When I engage with community members in conversations about Israel, most of them proudly identify a strong connection with our ancestral homeland. Many of those very same people share questions or meaningful community, and focus on, as articulated in CIJA's CEO, Calgary Jewish Federation

concerns – about overall policy, about specific military activities, about gross disparities in resources between central Israel and its periphery communities, and so on. Still, their passion and care remains evident. Just as we accept family members and friends for their strengths and their deficiencies, so too do we accept Israel, warts and all.

That's not to say we should ignore attributes or actions we find challenging or troublesome, but just as with family and friends, we must recognize Israel's uniqueness, growing pains, and the various things the country and its existence mean to different people. Our community is diverse and its members hold a breadth of views. Often, we have discussed Israel's complexities, and have agreed to disagree if not fully B'Shalom, aligned. However, the recent polarization of views in our community (and beyond) feels different to me these days. I am hopeful we can remain strong as a Adam Silver

recent virtual town hall, "Unity, Not Uniformity".

We do not all need to hold the same views, but I would like to appeal to Jewish Calgary that we must have constructive, respectful dialogue. I continue to see thoughts expressed which seem to drive us apart on the topic of Israel, instead of bringing us together to share in important and thoughtful conversations. It is my hope that we will individually and collectively find ways to appreciate Israel's strengths, to struggle with how we (or the country) might address some of the imperfections we see, and to dream about and create all that Eretz Israel can be for us now, and for generations to come.

Stin She





CJF's Holocaust and Human Rights: Remembrance and Education **Co-Chairs, Dahlia Libin and Marnie Bondar, reached hundreds of teachers** at Calgary City Teacher's Convention (CCTC) on February 16 and 17.

On the first day, Dahlia spoke to a full house of nearly 100 teachers on bringing Holocaust education into the classroom and the many programs and resources that the department has to offer. She also shared powerful testimony from Holocaust survivor, Bronia Cyngiser. On both days Marnie, Dahlia, and Amy Glassman Boiko engaged with hundreds of teachers at their booth in the Telus Convention Centre Hall. We thank CCTC for having us for a second year in a row (this time in-person), and for giving us the opportunity to engage with educators who are leading the way in Holocaust education in their classrooms.

For more information on Holocaust education programs and services visit: jewishcalgary.org or email Dahlia and Marnie at holocaustedu@jewishcalgary.org.



Focus on Real Estate

Protect your greatest investment

By Christina Crowe

You may or may not have heard in the news recently that there have been incidents of fraud in Ontario where homes were sold without the homeowner's knowledge. Shocking, and rare as it is, all homeowners should be aware that this kind of activity can happen. Thankfully, there are things you can do to protect yourself.

How can a home be sold without a

homeowner's knowledge?

In the case in Ontario, fake identifications and other documents were used to pose as both homeowners and potential tenants.

In one case, a property management company chose tenants for their landlord client, who were later discovered to have used fake identity documents, along with bogus references. The fraudsters, originally posing as the tenants, then attempted to impersonate the homeowner and sell their home.

Work With a Licensed Real Estate Agent

Through their education and training, real estate licensees are advised to build strong client relationships and be on the lookout for any red flags. They are further obligated to verify their client's identification as part of providing competent service. When you work with a licensed real estate agent to buy or sell your home, obtain a mortgage, or manage your property, it decreases the probability that situations may arise where fraud could occur.

Red Flags

incorrect or inconsistent spelling of names across multiple documents

employment references listed for companies that could not be found online or had no website

phone numbers for personal references which, when attempted to be verified, are the wrong number or for out-of-service numbers

potential clients who are unwilling to meet in-person

Check Your Land Title

It's not something most homeowners do on a regular basis but checking in on your land title is a good fraud prevention tool. You likely wouldn't invest a large sum of money without checking in on how it's performing, so similarly, checking in on your land title is a good housekeeping measure for those who own property. Checking your land title can be done through any registry office or directly through Alberta land titles.

Do You Have Title Insurance?

Even with the best client identification procedures in place, experienced fraudsters with sophisticated tactics exist. The purchasing of title insurance can offer added protection.

Title insurance is relatively inexpensive and protects the policyholder against most losses associated with title fraud and other title-related issues, including challenges against ownership. Title insurance can be purchased through many insurance companies and typically covers legal expenses and other costs related to restoring title. Even homeowners who did not obtain title insurance at the time of their property purchase can purchase a policy at any time.

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The Real Estate Council of Alberta, RECA, as we are often called, is here to help consumers. We're experts when it comes to the province's Rules and Regulations

when trading in real estate, dealing in mortgages, and managing property and condominiums. One of our roles is to ensure the licensees that work in these industries have the proper training, background, and licence to operate. But we're here for consumers too in fact, our mandate is to protect consumers. Please reach out with any questions you may have regarding the Real Estate Act and its Rules.

We're here to help.

Christina Crowe is Senior Communications Officer at the Real Estate Council of Alberta.



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Judicial reform

Cont. from page 1

threats of further action. But a separate statement by the Jewish federations' CEO Eric Fingerhut and chair-



woman Julie Platt suggested that they feared the court reform could hurt Israeli religious pluralism activists.

Passing the override clause would mean "complete power would be in the hands of each temporary majority created after each election," said Fingerhut and Platt's memo. "This concentration of power is a cause

of great concern on many issues that North American Jews and our allies across the broader society have always cared about."

The memo and the letter did not say which particular issues of concern would be affected by the change, but the court has been instrumental in protecting the rights of miincluding norities, non-Orthodox religious

streams and the LGBTQ community.

The letter joins a growing list of public exhortations against the legislation from a wide array of groups and people. This weekend, new letters were distributed by the Conservative/Masorti movement of Judaism, 200 U.S. Jewish scientists and Arab Israeli leaders. Some of those opposing the court reform are staunch defenders of Israel in other circumstances, including Bret Stephens, the conservative New York Times columnist; Alan Dershowitz, the celebrity lawyer; and Abe Foxman, the emeritus CEO of the Anti-Defamation League.

Last month the head of the largest federation, UJA-Federation of New York, also expressed his alarm over the proposed reforms.

On Feb. 20, Netanyahu again rejected a call to freeze the legislative process, a measure Herzog recommended, saying he would speak with the opposition but without "preconditions."



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Focus on Real Estate

Tanya Eklund: Keeping ahead of the evolving real estate industry

By Tanya Eklund

Born and raised in rural Alberta. Tanya Eklund attended the University of Alberta prior to beginning her real estate career in August of 2000. She is married to Chad Hughes of 16 years, and together they have two beautiful daughters, Ophelia 9 and Ruby 6. In her spare time, Tanya enjoys travel, fitness, being a mother and taking her career to new heights. In this article, she shares with readers about how real estate has changed over the years and how keeping ahead of the trends is integral to a successful business.

When I began my career in August of 2000, real estate looked much different than it does today. Very few realtors had a website, social media was not yet introduced, and the use of video was not yet thought of. To put it bluntly, marketing was pretty bland. To feature a listing an agent would take out an ad in the Calgary Herald for \$29.99 and that would get you around 15 words. However, if you wanted to increase your budget and spend a whopping \$69.99, your ad word count increased to 30 words. Typically, the ads would be in black and white, very unromantic and uninviting. Realtors relied on old school tactics, such as door knocking, open houses, calling expired listings, soliciting FSBO'S (for sale by owners) and Monday morning realtor tours to tour the new listings in the area. Oh, and let's not forget about the listing book. Every month, the Calgary Real Estate Board would come out with the new listings in Calgary. There were no websites and the MLS was just being introduced. Not that any of this dates me!

Fast forward 22 years later, with so many platforms available, it is challenging to know whether you are coming or going. Now introducing Marketing 101. You now need a marketing degree to be a successful realtor or you need to hire someone with a marketing degree to be a successful realtor. We now use platforms such as target marketing and SEO (search engine optimization) on Facebook,

Instagram and LinkedIn. We are using reels, videos, virtual tours, realtor tours and hosting a lunch prepared by a French chef. And lord help me, someone asked me if I use Snapchat and the quick answer is absolutely not... that is where I draw the line.

For every seller's home, we now have to ensure that it looks like it grew legs and walked out of Architectural Magazine.

Decluttering, perfectly quaffed

pillows, the quintessential lamp and the perfect throw rug with a hint of

bergamot and this is just the starting point of how one must present a home for sale. A picture-perfect listing, paired with custom feature sheets with gold embossments, full page magazine ads, and just listed cards delivered to the whole community within a week of being listed are just a few marketing strategies that realtors implement today.

It was about 5 years ago when I was laying in bed at about five to one in the morning that I was posting my own listings and trying to learn how to boost them to reach my ideal target market. It was at that very



Although this sounds daunting, let's not throw out the old school tactics. A good realtor can still door knock and can implement print ads in a magazine, although they will no longer be at the very low price of \$69.99. We can still do a realtor open house and have comradery with our colleagues. I believe that it is a culmination of old school meets new school. Evolution is a necessity to growth!

She's been one of Calgary's top selling Real Estate Agents for years. She has valuable experience working within Calgary's Inner City Real Estate market, and she understands every client is as unique as their home.

Tanya takes the time to listen; to understand your wants and needs. She doesn't expect your trust, Tanya earns it by consistently remaining honest, accessible and tenacious. That's what sets Tanya apart.

The Tanya Eklund Group was founded on Tanya's principles. The professionals within her group don't work for Tanya – they work for you, the client. They provide unparalleled expertise, skill and service to Calgary's inner city.





Both Calgary Jewish Federation and Jewish Federation of Edmonton

were proud to host Canada's Ambassador to Israel, Lisa Stadelbauer.

During her visit, Ambassador Stadelbauer met with our community's

local leadership as well as both Edmonton and Calgary Hillel executive

leadership to learn more about issues affecting our community, share

highlights from her post in Israel, and discuss ways that Israel and

Canada are cooperating. Alongside CJF CEO, Adam Silver, she also

met with local changemakers and politicians, including Mayor Jyoti

Chamber of Commerce, to discuss opportunities for innovation and

Gondek and Deborah Yedlin, President and CEO of The Calgary

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-Focus on Real Estate

Jewish movies to watch at the Oscars

By Andrew Lapin

(JTA) - The 95th Oscars will air live on ABC on Sunday, March 12, 2023 and the host will be Jimmy Kimmel.

"The Fabelmans," Spielberg's Steven autobiographical drama about his Jewish upbringing, had an expected strong haul of Oscar nominations, which were announced last month.

A remake of a movie once targeted by the Nazis, a blockbuster embroiled in a lawsuit with an Israeli family and a documentary by the program director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival also got recognized in a list jam-packed with Jewish characters, stories and artists.

Spielberg's movie overcame an anemic box office showing to score nominations in the major categories of best picture, director and screenplay, for Spielberg and celebrated Jewish playwright and screenwriter Tony Kushner. The directing nomination brings Spielberg's total nominations in the category to nine, tying him with Martin Scorsese for the second-most directing nominations in Oscar history.

The film also scored acting nods for Judd Hirsch, who is Jewish, and Michelle Williams, who recently said she is planning to raise her two children with Judaism.

"The Fabelmans" was the best picture nominee with the strongest Jewish themes, but it wasn't the only one. The psychological drama "Tár," starring Cate Blanchett as a problematic conductor, picked up six nominations, including for picture, actress and director; the film weaves Jewish mysticism into its storytelling.

"All Quiet On The Western Front," Netflix's new German-language adaptation of the classic 1929 novel about the horrors experienced by German soldiers during World War I, was also nominated for nine Oscars, including best picture, international feature and adapted screenplay. The film's source material was once banned and burned by the ascending Nazi Party, which believed its anti-war stance made the German military look weak and constituted a threat to their plans for world domination.

When the book's initial 1930 film adaptation, directed by Jewish filmmaker Lewis Milestone, was released in Germany, Nazis led by Joseph Goebbels set off stink bombs, released mice into the theaters and called the movie a "Judenfilm" (or "Jewish film"). Germany and Austria banned the film from being shown in their countries, and the public censorship campaign led the novel's author, Erich Maria Remarque, to renounce his German citizenship (Nazis were erroneously labeling him as a Jew).

In response, Jewish studio head Carl Laemmle Sr., agreed to heavily edit the movie and remove material deemed objectionable to the Nazis in order to improve its commercial prospects in Germany. One possible silver lining for the remake's producers: The 1930 film went on to win best picture that year.

Back to this year's Oscars: "Top Gun: Maverick," the action blockbuster sequel, picked up four nominations, including for best picture. The film's distributor, Paramount, is currently embroiled in a copyright lawsuit with the family of Israeli journalist Ehud Yonay, whose magazine article about a Navy fighter pilot school was the basis for the original "Top Gun" in 1986. In November, a judge dismissed Paramount's attempts to throw out the suit and ruled the Yonay family could proceed with their claims.

Writer, director and actress Sarah Polley also scored a nomination for best adapted screenplay for her drama "Women Talking," about a group of abused women in an isolated Mennonite community, which was also nominated for best picture. Polley has a Jewish biological father, whose secret parentage she explored in her 2013 documentary "Stories We Tell."

Jewish film producer Gail Berman also scored her first Oscar nomination for producing best picture nominee "Elvis," while Jewish producing partners Darren Aronofsky and Ari Handel scored their own best picture nomination for "The Whale." The movie, which Aronofsky directed, stars Brendan Fraser (also nominated) as a morbidly obese English professor.

In the performing categories, one actor was nominated for playing a real-life Jewish convert: Ana de Armas received a best actress nomination for her portrayal of Marilyn Monroe in Netflix's "Blonde." Monroe converted to Judaism in the 1950s and remained devoted to the religion even after divorcing her husband, Jewish playwright Arthur Miller.

Also, veteran actress Jamie Lee Curtis - whose father, Golden Age Hollywood actor Tony Curtis, was Jewish - picked up her first-ever Oscar nomination for her supporting role as a sinister tax officer in the multiverse sci-fi comedy "Everything Everywhere All At Once.'

Curtis is nominated in the category alongside her costar Stephanie Hsu, who is also known to fans of the very Jewish TV series "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" as Mei Lin, a Chinese restaurant owner who gets together



Director Steven Spielberg (Merie Weismiller Wallace/Universal Pictures and Amblin **Entertainment**)

with co-lead Joel Maisel. Early buzz on the upcoming fifth season of "Maisel" says that Hsu's character will convert to Judaism.

Another "Everything Everywhere" co-star, Jewish actress Jenny Slate, helped a different film score an Oscar nomination in the best animated feature category: the stop-motion mockumentary "Marcel The Shell With Shoes On." Slate co-wrote the feature with her ex-husband Dean Fleischer-Camp, who directs; Slate also voices the lead role of Marcel. However, she is not one of the nominated producers on the film.

"All the Beauty and the Bloodshed," a portrait of the outsider artist Nan Goldin and her years-long activism campaign against opioid manufacturers the Sackler family, was nominated in the best documentary feature category and is favored to win. The film documents how Goldin was born to Jewish parents but had an emotionally abusive family life and left home in her teens. The Sacklers are also Jewish.

The documentary short category saw the second nomination in a row for Jewish filmmaker Jay Rosenblatt, whose documentary "How Do You Measure a Year" chronicles many years of his daughter Ella's birthdays. Rosenblatt is the program director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival.

Veteran Polish filmmaker Jerzy Skolimowski was also nominated in the international feature category for his drama "EO," told from the perspective of a donkey. Skolimowski's father was a member of the Polish Resistance and his mother hid a Jewish family in their house during World War II.

Jewish composer Justin Hurwitz, who won an Oscar for his work on "La La Land," was nominated again for the score for "Babylon," a follow-up production with that film's director, Damien Chazelle.

And in the original song category, Jewish songwriter Diane Warren extended her nomination streak to 14 for the number "Applause," from the feminist documentary "Tell It Like a Woman." Warren has never won a competitive Oscar but did receive an honourary Academy Award last year.







Kathleen Jacob, LIT

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Focus on Real Estate

Bills, budgets and giving back: Financial literacy at HAA

By Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski

The conversation around financial literacy education in schools has grown in recent years. Society's understanding that students need the skills and knowledge to manage their personal financial situation competently is well-known. How to best implement such ideas on a curricular level is still highly debated and contested. Financial literacy is more than knowing about legal tender, financial constructs and having the ability to apply these concepts. It is also about helping students to make informed decisions, while considering the ethical aspects of those decisions.

With this in mind, Halpern Akiva Academy (HAA) partnered with Rabbi Nisan Andrews, the Rabbi of the HOJMI congregation, to do a week-long series on Finances and Tzedakah. Some areas that students covered are: Torah sources for giving charity, Who is responsible to give charity, Prioritization of who to give charity to, calculating personal gross revenue and tithing one's monies, among other concepts and ideas.

When Rabbi Andrews was approached about this collaboration, he shared, "It is a biblical obligation for a person to work and provide for themselves, as well as share from the wealth that Hashem gives them."

Grades 6-9 students at HAA will also be sharpening

money-managing their skills in a joint effort between general and Judaic studies teachers. Students will be participating in а financial literacy project as part of their math program, in which they'll be tasked with managing practice personal а budget.

"It's really important to know how to make a budget and manage your money," explained a student in Grade 8. "I don't want to have to learn this the hard way when I'm older by making mistakes. I want to be

independent and also still give back to charity."

Making a budget and, perhaps the hardest part, sticking to it, will be the focus of our older students. They'll be relied upon to make sound financial decisions when it comes to renting an apartment, paying monthly bills, and purchasing groceries, while also ensuring they can continue to give back to the



Students at Halpern Akiva Academy learning about financial literacy. (Photo supplied)

community.

A parent shared, "We are excited to hear Akiva will be implementing this program into the junior high students' curriculum. Instilling the importance of practical education that extends into their future lives makes school go beyond the walls of study, into real life."

The best basic hamantaschen

By Shannon Sarna

(JTA) – Hamantaschen weren't always my favorite cookie to enjoy. These triangle treats are enjoyed for the Jewish holiday of Purim, when the wicked king Haman (BOO!) was defeated through the brilliant intellect of a Jewish woman, Queen Esther. There's a bit more to the story, of course. But we were blessed with hamantaschen cookies as one of the many ways we are encouraged to celebrate the holiday. My other favorite part about Purim is that you are commanded to "drink until you cannot tell good from evil." Consider it done.

However, hamantaschen do not actually date back to Queen Esther; they are a far more recent addition to Jewish cuisine. Triangle-shaped, yeasted dough pastries filled with poppy seed (known as mohn) were common in Germany during the 18th century, and thats when Jews started adopting them and enjoying them for Purim, the triangle shape a nod to the hat supposedly worn by Haman.

My recipe below (which, yes, is one of the best you will ever try) is inspired by my dear friend Rachel Korycan and her mom Susan who took me under their wing to show me their recipe, which yields a far more delicate and delicious hamantaschen than many other old-school recipes. It is not made with a yeasted dough, but rather a sugar-cookie like dough which bakes up sweet and tender.

My favorite fillings include raspberry jam with mini chocolate chips, cookie butter, chocolate hazelnut spread and store-bought poppy seed filling (you can find it in the baking aisle near the cherry pie filling). But really, the sky is the limit, and the most important thing is to have fun. Hamantaschen can be tricky to make sometimes – they are notorious for leaking or losing their shape – so make sure to follow my genius hamantaschen trick to ensure you have picture perfect cookies every time. Chill the dough for at least one hour before rolling it out, and pinch the corners very well to ensure the cookies keep their shape. 1 tsp grated lemon zest (optional)

- $1\ 1/2\ {\rm cups}\ {\rm all-purpose}\ {\rm flour}\ {\rm plus}\ {\rm more}\ {\rm flour}\ {\rm for}\ {\rm rolling}$
- ¹/₄ tsp baking powder ¹/₄ tsp salt

Directions

Beat the butter and sugar together until smooth.

Add egg, milk, vanilla and lemon zest until mixed thoroughly.

Sift together the flour, baking powder and salt.

Add dry mixture to wet mixture until incorporated. Note: if the dough is too soft, increase flour amount by a few Tbsp at a time until firmer.

Form dough into a disk and cover with plastic wrap. Chill dough for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours.

Dust surface with flour to keep from sticking. Roll the dough to about ¹/₄ inch thick.

Using a round cookie cutter, cut out and place onto cookie sheet. To keep the dough from sticking to your cutter, dip in flour before each cut.



Fill each round with 1/2 tsp of your favorite filling, and using your favorite method, pinch corners together tightly.

Pop into the fridge for 10 minutes, or freezer for 5 minutes, to ensure hamantaschen hold their shape. Bake at 400° for about 7-9 minutes.



Ingredients

 $1\ stick\ (1/2\ cup)\ unsalted\ butter\ (or\ margarine), at\ room\ temperature$

 $^{3\!4}$ cup granulated sugar

$1 \, \mathrm{egg}$

1 Tbsp milk (or other non-dairy milk) 1 tsp vanilla extract

Edmontonians honoured with Platinum Jubilee Medals

By Regan Treewater-Lipes

A hearty mazel tov must be extended to some exceptional members of the Edmonton Jewish community. We may be small in numbers here in Edmonton, but we are enormous in our spirit of *tikkun* olam!

On January 26, set against the glittering backdrop of an exceptional downtown skyline view, under the sparkling lights of the Queen Elizabeth II Building reception hall, distinguished members of the Edmonton Jewish community were presented with the prestigious Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal in recognition of their ongoing commitment to enriching engagement and service.

Rabbi Ari Drelich, Stephanie Hendin, Gillian Horwitz, Clyde Hurtig, Ellery Lew, Steven Shafir, and Debby Shoctor were honoured in an auspicious ceremony, complete with due pomp and circumstance. Edmonton-McClung MLA Lorne Dach presided over the proceedings with characteristic joviality and enthusiasm.

The ceremony provided a "great opportunity to celebrate each other, celebrate community, and how we help each other, and the warmth we feel for each other. "Today's recipients lead rather than wait to be led," boomed Dach as his complimentary praises boomed through the elegant, windowed hall. "They tackle challenges head on. They see problems as opportunities instead of obstacles."

The ceremony was for recipients throughout the greater Edmonton area, but the Jewish presence was undeniable significant. When asked how he first



MLA Lorne Dach presented a Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal to Chabad of Edmonton Rabbi Ari Drelich.

reacted when he heard the exciting news that he would be honoured with this distinction Rabbi Drelich responded simply: "Surprised and humbled."

Rabbi Drelich's tireless work to ensure that kosher food be made available to all Jewish inmates incarcerated in the Province of Alberta has done much to promote equality and compassion for those working to redeem themselves in the eyes of society. Rabbi Drelich, the Executive Director of Chabad Lubavitch of Edmonton, has been working to contribute the to

sustainability, and religious vivacity of a modest, but active, local Jewish community with his wife, Rebbetzin Rifka Drelich, since November of 1991.

Lorne Dach bestowed Rabbi Drelich's medal as if paying tribute to a valued longtime friend. "Rabbi Drelich works tirelessly advocating for Jewish religious rights. [...] He is a protector of underprivileged rights. He is a constant in our community," Dach commended, noting that the two have collaborated prolifically on past initiatives. Rabbi Drelich was cheered on by his wife and son Mark.

Gillian Horwitz is a well known and dedicated leader within Jewish Edmonton. She has devoted decades to promoting Holocaust awareness through education, and was also a proud recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal. Horwitz had an impressive entourage of friends and family along for the occasion. When asked about her initial reaction when she first heard the impressive news, Horwitz humbly commented: "I have always felt a strong connection to my community be it the Jewish community or the general community and volunteering in the various organizations that I have, just seemed a natural thing to do. I grew up in a home and an environment where giving back was a way of life, so being 'rewarded' for what to me is simply a way of life, was unexpected and really quite overwhelming. And yes, I was even more surprised that my 'way of life was 'noticed' and needed to be acknowledged as it were." And noticed it was, with a moving introduction from Dach, who has had the privilege of working with Horwitz in the past. Horwitz is excited about some new endeavors on the horizon. She commented: "As for future projects, my involvement and commitment to



On January 26, MLA Lorne Dach presented Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medals to Jewish Federation of Edmonton President Steve Shafir, and Past Presidents Gillian Horwitz, Ellery Lew and Stephanie Hendin.

Holocaust Education is ongoing, particularly now with the rise of antisemitism. I am committed to ensuring that we continue open dialogues and communication when it comes to dealing with racism and antisemitism. Our upcoming Holocaust Symposium which is a 'Live' event this year, is an arena I am involved in." She continued with significance: "Irrational hatred and bigotry has no place in society and as demonstrated in the most heinous crime of the 20th century, the Holocaust is a prime example of where out of control antisemitism can lead to!"

The Jewish Federation of Edmonton's current President, Steven Shafir, was the youngest of the Jewish community's awardees and an impressive recipient. He was joined by family and friends, including both his parents. Dach noted that Shafir has worked to "combat hate-crimes so that all members of the community can feel safe." Former Jewish Federation of Edmonton CEO Debby Shoctor was unable to attend the ceremony in person.

Other members of our community were honoured to receive the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal in separate ceremonies earlier this year including Senator Paula Simons, Marshall Shoctor, Netta Phillet and Elexis Schloss. In all, 7000 Albertans will receive this medal in honour of Queen Elizabeth II's 70-year reign.

Yasher koach and heartfelt thanks to the honourees from all of us in the Edmonton Jewish community!

Regan Treewater-Lipes is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.





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-The Talmud

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Simchas and Celebrations

TBT Gallery Cont. from page 1

photo of the water spray, because I have to wait for it. I stood and I waited, and discovered that it was important to challenge myself in that way." Waiting for the right moment is a lesson in patience that is rewarded by unique photos.

When in Tel Aviv she noticed that most of the life guard stands are painted with murals. She saw one that had the words "Tel Aviv Non-Stop City" which is a powerful image that is featured in the show. "What draws me the most to taking a photo is a view that I like to see. I capture it mostly for myself, but I'm very excited at getting to share my photography with others in this show."

Lauren Jacobson describes herself as a "queer, Jewish artist living and making in Mohkinstis, colonially known as Calgary. They are in their final year of study at Alberta University of the Arts, pursuing a bachelor of fine arts in sculpture with a minor in printmaking."

Regarding the group show, she believes that it's important to think of leaning on other artists in the community as upholding each other, so all can be encouraged. "What I'm doing with my work in context of the title is taking an object that already has a defined use and shape, and changing its purpose or function which can be interpreted as giving it a new strength."

In her work she slightly alters the materials to recontextualize the objects and give them a new function. A loofa, for example, which has a purpose that could be assumed by other materials. "I think they are very beautiful, very bright colors, intricately woven, so I built steel frames in order to contrast with the softness. It becomes something strangely beautiful. The metal appears very oppressive and very cold and structured, while the loofa begins to look more organic in comparison."

The hammer head displayed in the show is cast from hard candy, which she makes from melted down sugar, and casts into the shape. She was thinking about the traditional uses of candy, which opens a discussion about not just objects and things but about the world at large.

"I think that's the point of art in general: to understand that it's open to interpretation. A lot of it is subjective. I'm very excited about the reactions that I get to see when people encounter my work."

Jules Schacter is a Calgary artist who is completing her last semester of a concurrent fine art and education degree at the University of Calgary. After graduating she hopes to become an art teacher, while also continuing to pursue her own art practice.

She expressed that "From Strength to Strength" captures how all three artists are bringing different things to the table. She paints using tote bags as her canvas. The art is being displayed in a gallery, but also through the use of the bags themselves. Her topics



include beauty and life and death. For example, much of her art includes a deer skull; taking photos of it and facing it directly allows her to get closer to death and cope with it.

Breaking free of the boundaries of a canvas allows her freedom to explore a new medium which reflects on sustainability, an area which is also important to her.

A meaningful reflection is the checkered bag which recalls her grandparent's floor when she was growing up.

She uses the female body in her work because it is visually interesting. "I'm an art history nerd so I love to include bits of art history such as the Venus de Milo, where I can. I'm drawn to exploring femininity and bodies. What was the idea body back then is completely different from the ideal body now."

From photography, to sculpture to small scale tote bags, "From Strength to Strength" demonstrates the

diversity to be found in these emerging artist's work. There is a richness in the show that demonstrates the depth of talent to be found in these young people. It is inspiring to see the contrasts and similarities in their fresh approach.

"From Strength to Strength" can be seen until Sunday March 26, 2023 at Temple B'nai Tikvah, 900 47 Ave SW, Calgary. Monday to Thursday 9 am to 4 pm/ Friday 9 am to 2 pm or by appointment with the artists: Orianne Aviv: orianne.aviv@ucalgary.ca, Lauren Jacobson: Jacobson.e.lauren@gmail.com Jules Schacter: Jules.schacter1@ucalgary.ca

Shelley Werner is the host of Art and Scroll Studio zoom series that celebrates the makers and creators of Judaica Art. Their upcoming episode is March 15, 2023 at 7 pm MST entitled "Flight and Freedom" featuring artists Ruth Weisberg, painter and Heather Stoltz, Fiber artist. Register for free tickets at https://bit.ly/WeisbergStoltzFreeTickets



"From my first walk through to the week after my son's bar mitzvah, the team at the Delta Calgary South was so impressive. I've been planning events for 20 years and this group was so accommodating, on top of every detail and wonderful to work with.

The food was amazing! It's always a gamble when you're feeding 180 people with different dietary restrictions and half are kids, but everyone is still talking about how amazing the food was. The venue is great for any size party and the service will have me coming back for my personal events and will be highly recommended to my clients.

The CJA grade 2 students celebrated their annual Hagigat Ha'Torah-Torah Celebration. Each student received a Tanakh to keep and use as a part of their Judaic studies. If you're looking for a venue that will make your planning easier and your event a huge success, call them. You won't be sorry and you'll have the best memories because you won't be worried about anything on the planning side.

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Simchas and Celebrations

Staying sober on Purim

By Rachel Román

(JTA) — When Jerry was 21, he was invited to a "white kiddush," a twist on the Shabbat eve service that substitutes vodka for the traditional wine or grape juice. It took place during Purim, the Jewish holiday when alcohol is not only permitted but often encouraged.

While there, he was poured 16 ounces of straight vodka in a glass. As he became inebriated, he grew belligerent — and rather than help, his fellow congregants egged him on.

"I definitely blacked out," said Jerry, who asked that his real name not be used. "My only memory is yelling obscenities at the top of my lungs during the service and getting a lot of encouragement for doing so. Everyone thought it was funny."

At the time, he didn't realize that he had an alcohol use disorder — but he spent the next 12 years battling the disease.

"If you're wondering if you're an alcoholic, then you are one," he said.

Most Jews consider Purim, which begins this year on the evening of March 6, to be a time of drinking and some believe heavy drinking. The holiday's story in the Book of Esther begins with a drinking party thrown by the king of the Persian Empire, Ahasuerus. From there, it's the tale of the Jewish Queen Esther and her cousin, Mordechai, who team up to defeat the treacherous Haman, the court adviser who has plans to wipe out all Jews. The upbeat holiday celebrates Esther and Mordechai's victory over their enemy.

In the Talmud (Megillah 7b), Jews are commanded to "l'vasumai," or to "become intoxicated" on the holiday, to the point that they cannot tell the difference between Haman and Mordechai.

There is a debate about how far "intoxicated" should go. What is festive to some can be a nightmare for others — especially those in the early stages of recovery who can be triggered by easy access to alcohol.

"All Jewish communities kind of create a normalizing view of drinking on the holidays, which can be very problematic. It's so embedded in our tradition that people are supposed to drink to excess



on Purim," said Rabbi Michael Perice, the rabbi at Temple Sinai in Cinnaminson, New Jersey, who has documented his own struggle with an opiate addiction. "For people who are alcoholics or have substance abuse issues, that excess can lead to a lot of problems."

"Our tradition provides so many opportunities that are alcohol fueled," added Marla Kaufman, the founder and executive director of the Jewish Addiction Awareness Network. "There's kiddush twice a week. In some communities on Shabbat there are kiddush clubs where some of the men disappear to have schnapps together [during services]. There's also a lot of events not attached to religious ritual that use alcohol to bring people in, and some of these are aimed at young adults, like [Hanukkah parties called] 'Latkes and Vodkas."

At the same time, said Kaufman, too many Jews are in denial about the toll of addiction in their own communities. When her then toopses son

own communities. When her then teenage son slipped into alcohol and drug abuse, she remembers dreading getting a phone call that her son had overdosed and having nightmares about his funeral. Before that, Kaufman's family regularly attended synagogue, volunteered on the synagogue board and fundraised for the Jewish day school. But after word got out that her son was suffering from the disorder, she said they were stigmatized. People pulled away and some wouldn't look her in the face.

"I was devastated," she said. "I love the Jewish community, but we are behind on this issue."

After sending her son to treatment — he is in longterm recovery — Kaufman read "Recovery, the 12 Steps and Jewish Spirituality: Reclaiming Hope, Courage & Wholeness," by Rabbi Paul Steinberg, a selfdescribed recovering alcoholic. She said the book changed her life and inspired her to form JAAN, which offers resources, events and programs, a blog and personal stories for those in or considering recovery. Steinberg said he wrote the book to mold the Alcoholics Anonymous' 12-step program to Judaism by aligning it to Jewish texts and values.

Steinberg first drank to excess when he was 11 years old at a Shabbat party run by the Hasidic Chabad-Lubavitch movement. He said no one noticed or cared. When he later tried to kick his issues with alcohol, Steinberg found that AA was rooted in the Christian faith. While there were recovery books for Jews, he couldn't find any based on firsthand experience.

(Chabad offers information and resources on Judaism and recovery, as well as a list of Chabad rabbis who focus on recovery, on its website, and runs a residential treatment center in Los Angeles.)

"The other piece that motivated writing a book was to reduce stigma," said Steinberg, now rabbi at Congregation Kol Shofar in Tiburon, California. "In AA, you're supposed to keep anonymity, but I made a conscious decision to put my name and 'rabbi' on the



book in an effort to be a model that is not giving in to the shame or stigma of it. This is something that humans deal with, and I've dealt with it. I want there to be a comfort in that."

Kaufman, Steinberg and Perice all dispute the folk saying "a shikker is a goy," a Yiddish phrase suggesting "real" Jews can't suffer from alcohol use disorder.

"The Jews that I serve are Americans, and they suffer from all of the same problems and blessings of Americans. They are no less alcoholic than anybody else," said Steinberg. "Alcoholics are not bad people; they're sick."

Even if they're in recovery, Jews might feel pressure to drink because they don't want to be the odd person out. Some justify that one glass of wine, beer or shot will help them save face at celebrations. But that sip of alcohol can cascade into two, then four.

Jews can avoid situations where there's drinking, or get used to being, as Jerry put it, a "little weird."

"It's just a price you pay, and you get used to it," he said. "It requires a bit of dedication to recovery and to your religion to say, 'I have to be a little bit weird because I have to save my own life.""

Support groups and resources

There are many websites devoted to helping people with alcohol and substance use issues remain sober. Check out JAAN's list of events, programs, resources as well as personal perspectives for coping during the holidays and every day in between.

If you're especially triggered by holidays where people will be drinking, like Purim, seek out a support group.

Find a mutual support network for Jews (or not) suffering from alcohol and substance dependency and their families, like JACS (Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons, And Significant Others).



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Simchas and Celebrations

Weinberg Cont. from page 6

and the ravages of war are frequent themes in his music.

The March 28 performance at Beth Tzedec Synagogue is a prelude to *Diana Cohen in Concert*, set to take place at the Jack Singer Concert Hall on March 31 and April 1, when Cohen and the CPO will perform Weinberg's Violin Concerto in G Minor (Opus 67). Conducted by Yue Bao, the concert will also feature Felix Mendelssohn's *The Hebrides* and Ludwig van Beethoven's Eighth Symphony.

According to Cohen, March 31 may well be the Canadian premiere of Weinberg's Violin Concerto; to date, her research has not yielded evidence of previous performances in this country. The concerto was, according to other sources, performed in the United States for the first time in 2015.

Cohen says that she and Rabinovich, who was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and raised in Israel, are thrilled to bring a preview of Weinberg's concerto to the Jewish community. Taking music beyond the doors of the concert hall and into the community is a passion for the couple. Cohen is founder and co-artistic director of ChamberFest Cleveland, an acclaimed music festival held annually in her home town. Together, she and Rabinovich - who travels the world as a much-sought-after solo pianist and is co-artistic director of ChamberFest Cleveland - have given Calgarians a similar gift of music as founders and co-artistic directors of ChamberFest West, established this past July.

When COVID-19 closed doors to concert halls during 2020 and 2021, Cohen and Rabinovich continued to entertain and educate Calgary music lovers by turning the front yard of their home into an openair venue where they provided a series of free weekly concerts.

Cohen's music has brought an added dimension to some High Holiday services at Temple B'nai Tikvah.

"Roman and I want to make this city as musical as we can," says Cohen. "Our lives can feel bigger and richer when we know more about music."

Those attending the performance at Beth Tzedec can look forward to a rich performance in a more intimate setting than the concert hall.

"It is a wonderful chance to hear incredible music... expressed by people who have lived with it for a long time, says Cohen. "Being close to the music is really exciting."

Following the program, a reception with light refreshments will provide attendees an opportunity to chat further with Cohen, Rabinovich and Limacher. Those who register for the program will receive a discount code that can be used to purchase tickets for the CPO performances on March 31 and April 1.

"The arts provide opportunities for communities to engage with their history, their triumphs and their failures, their greatest joys and their deepest sorrows," says Temple B'nai Tikvah Adult Education Chair Jennifer Eiserman, who teamed up with Beth Tzedec Congregation Education Director Ari Cohen to organize Why Weinberg!?. "We are grateful to Diana Cohen, Roman Rabinovich, Mark Limacher and the CPO for bringing the work of this Jewish composer to the Jewish and Calgary communities, Eiserman adds. Engaging with it will provide the Jewish community the opportunity to reflect more deeply on our history and shared experiences. The CPO performance will open new ways for the wider community to understand their Jewish neighbors."



On February 13, 2023, the CJA grade 2 class held their annual Hagigat Ha'Torah-Torah Celebration, in which students received their very own Tanakh to keep and use as a part of their Judaic studies. This was all made possible with the generous support of Mr. Jack Adler and his family. The Adler Torah Learning Fund in honor of Jack and Alice (OBM) Adler has supported this rite of passage for over a decade and hundreds of CJA families have felt the ripple effect of the Adler family's generosity.

will take place at Beth Tzedec Synagogue on March 28. Doors 6:30 pm. Program 7 pm. Admission is free; recommended donations of \$18 will be gratefully accepted. Registration prior to the event is required. Go to https://bethtzedec.ca/bethtzedec-events/what-about-weinberg/.

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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This month's update from Edmonton Talmud Torah School



Talmud Torah students and staff enjoyed a school wide Tu B'shevat Seder celebrating Israel's Arbor Day.

B'nei Mitzvot: What is available in Edmonton?

By Matthew Levine

Mira and Gary Campbell led a community information event discussing the various B'nei Mitzvah programs and options at different synagogues in Edmonton. This took place on February 12 at the Jewish Federation of Edmonton office and unfortunately had a small turnout due to the Super Bowl taking place at the same time. Four Rabbis were present at this event including Rabbah Gila Caine from TBO, Rabbi Steven Schwarzman representing Beth Shalom, Rabbi Guy Tal from Beth Israel, and Rabbi Dovid Pinson from Chabad.

The Rabbis started off by giving a short introduction describing what each of their synagogues offer for B'nei Mitzvot. Rabbah Gila of Temple Beth Ora emphasized that a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is just a pause in our Judaism to stop and celebrate. She went on to state that boys and girls can do the same thing at TBO, and that there is an option to lead Havdalah instead of Shacharit. For B'nei Mitzvah preparation at TBO, there are group, as well as individual processes. The group process involves the parent and child coming to learn together and becoming part of the community. The individual processes include a family history project, Dvar/Haftorah learning, and a tzedakah project. The requirements are a membership to TBO and regular shul attendance. They do not teach children Hebrew but can refer you to someone who does. They also accept patrilineal Jewish children into their programs. For more information visit templebethora.org.

Beth Shalom's Rabbi, Steven Shwarzman, emphasized that you don't need to go to shul to be Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Turning 12 as a girl or 13 as a boy is what makes you B'nei Mitzvah. The things you do in shul like Dvar/Haftorah just show the congregation that you have the ability to do these things. In his mind, the most important thing is that the child learns to do things they didn't do before and that the child stretches to learn as much as they can comfortably. Stretching without straining. He leads group sessions once a week to discuss the previous week's Torah reading. This helps students understand a Dvar Torah and connect to the stories of the Torah. He can recommend individual tutors within the community to help brush up on Hebrew, learn the Haftorah, and

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learn the services. Beth Shalom also does a Mitzvah/Tzadakah project. For more information visit edmontonbethshalom.org.

The main program that Beth Israel offers is a 10week co-ed program that includes a Shabbaton and other activities. There is also an option for separate boys' or girls' courses if that is what you want. To attend these courses you do not have to be a member of the Synagogue, and you can attend these programs without having your B'nei Mitzvah at Beth Israel. The first session is with kids and parents together, and the nine following meetings are with just the children. As this is an Orthodox Synagogue, girls are not able to read Torah at BI but they may speak and read informal Tfilot. For more information visit familyshul.org.

Chabad Rabbi Dovid Pinson offers traditional and unique B'nei Mitzvot. More than 60% of the children he works with choose to make it unique. Rabbi Dovid encourages parents not to have their child's B'nei Mitzvah on Shabbat. This allows for photos to be taken, and microphones to be accessed. A unique Bar Mitzvah does not have to be at shul and can be done anywhere. Chabad offers group lessons that go over the fundamentals of Judaism and include social activities. These are not Bar Mitzvah classes, but rather an opportunity to learn. Rabbi Dovid also offers one on one sessions if necessary. These sessions do not have a curriculum, and instead, attempt to help the child connect to G-d in their own way through their interests. In shul, the B'nei Mitzvot must be traditional, but you can do any other type of celebration anywhere else. For more information visit chabadedmonton.org.

After these introductions, a couple of families that were present at the event had some questions for the Rabbis. The first question was about doing a Havdallah service as the B'nei Mitzvah. All of the shuls were open to it, however, Beth Shalom does not encourage it as there is no evening Haftorah and less prayer. Temple Beth Ora brought up an outdoor service as another option. The second question was about group sessions. A family was wondering if they only take place once a year. At Beth Israel, they only happen once a year and have already begun, but at Beth Shalom and Chabad they have rolling admissions, and each lesson is standalone. Another family asked if all synagogues had a set price for their group sessions. Beth Shalom is the only synagogue with membership required, but all synagogues have the ability to change the price on a needs' basis.

Mira finalized the meeting by expressing how lucky we are to have so many options, all of them uniting us to Judaism. The Rabbi's reflected this opinion as well, constantly pointing out how interesting and amazing the other Rabbis' programs were and how happy they were to learn about what options are available to Jewish families in Edmonton.

Matthew Levine is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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Once upon a time, one of the foremost Jewish communities in the world was found in a land whose head of state was notorious for his exasperating inconsistency. He was forever surprising his subjects with volatile shifts in mood and in policy.

His frequent attitude-changes were paralleled by his erratic relationships with the women in his life. He was married more than once, and had no hesitations about publicly humiliating women; though he appeared genuinely devoted to his current First Lady.

As regards the Jewish citizens of his domain, his attitudes were no less baffling. On the one hand, he had no visible objection to counting Jews among his top political advisors, nor even to having them married into his family. And yet this very same leader could also be observed in the company of the most unsavoury anti-semitic rabble-rousers who had no difficulty in rallying him to oppress the ethnic minorities that were scattered through his land.

Such, then, was the exasperating personality of the Persian emperor Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, whose reign provides the historical setting for the events of the Purim story.

The Jewish heroes of the story, Esther and Mordecai, are generally painted as virtuous and loyal to their faith; whereas the main villain, Haman, is irredeemably wicked.

And yet Ahasuerus does not lend himself neatly to such stereotypical classification. Initially he seems to be a passive dupe in Haman's plot, but he later shifts sides completely when confronted by Esther. Indeed, the Talmud records a dispute between the two prominent third-century sages Rav and Samuel as to whether the king was a wise ruler or a fool. Their disagreement was prompted by the Megillah's statement that Ahasuerus first held a banquet for the people of his empire, and only afterwards convened a feast for the residents of Shushan, his capital. One side argued that it was strategically wiser for him to curry the goodwill of the provincials, since the loyalty of the locals was more readily assured. The opposing side believed that it was more prudent to surround himself with allies who could defend him in the event of an

uprising by the outsiders.

How are all these contradictory tendencies to be reconciled?

Rabban Gamaliel in the Talmud characterized the king as essentially a "hafakhfekhan": fickle and volatile. This assessment of his personality informed Esther's strategy when she invited Haman to the banquets at which she exposed his treachery before Ahasuerus. As Rashi understood it, the very fact of Haman's meeting a person on repeated occasions would feed the king's paranoia, and eventually provoke him to reverse his attitude toward Haman from one of trust to extreme hostility. (Can you imagine a modern political leader constantly turning against his top appointees?...)

The eleventh-century French exegete Rabbi Joseph Kara was convinced that Ahasuerus had an impulsive personality that—especially while under the influence of alcohol—would constantly leap about from one mood-swing to the next without any logical pattern. This psychological profile was evident in the king's reaction to Vashti's disobedience, when he summoned the queen to display her charms before the guests at the royal banquet. Rabbi Kara sides with the queen in her attempt to uphold the dignity of her royal station, and criticizes Ahasuerus for reacting hastily out of unrestrained rage when he should rather have allowed himself some time to sober up.

This episode convinced Mordecai that they were dealing with a rash monarch who could be counted on to be unpredictable. For this reason, according to Rabbi Kara, Mordecai urged Esther to take immediate measures while she was still in the king's favour. "Lest God forbid, today or tomorrow he might become angry at you and depose you. Therefore, while you are still in his good graces, approach him and entreat him on behalf of your people."

It was out of similar considerations, suggested Rabbi Jacob Reischer, that Esther had insisted on Haman's presence at the dinner at which she intended to expose him. This tactic would not allow the capricious Ahasuerus any time to undergo a subsequent change of heart. The weak-willed ruler would be open to

Will the real Ahasuerus please stand up

convenient manipulation, whether by Haman or by Esther.

When Esther did finally inform the king of the peril to which her people were being subjected, he reacted in astonishment, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" It sounds as if he was entirely unaware of the horrible threat that he had himself authorized.

Arguably the most common trend among the Jewish commentators was to paint the king as a malevolent villain. Although it was Haman who instigated the edict to murder the Jews of the empire, these interpreters felt that Ahasuerus was not just casually signing a document that had been placed on on his desk, but that he was in fact a willing collaborator in the scheme.

The king comes across as even more nefarious in the commentary of Rabbi Zechariah ben Saruk, an exegete who lived in Spain and north Africa in the fifteenth century. Rabbi Zechariah was an admirer of Aristotle, especially of the philosopher's Politics; however his depictions of the ancient Persian government might owe more to the events of the Spanish Inquisition and expulsion from Iberia (his commentary to Esther was completed in Algiers in 1493). According to Rabbi Zechariah's interpretation, when Haman approached the king he was only requesting permission to outlaw their religion and to confiscate their property; but it was Ahasuerus who expanded that original decree into a broad mandate "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews," with the expenses of the campaign being borne by the government.

From this we may conclude that Ahasuerus was an active participant in the persecution of Persian Jewry.

Or then again—he might have been just a weakwilled, vacillating figurehead who was led along by his advisor.

But on the other hand, maybe I'll see it all differently next year...

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