



ALBERTA

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Why this night is different

By Rabbi Steven Schwarzman



Rabbi Steven Schwarzman

Pesach, Matzah, and Maror - in the Haggadah, Rabban Gamliel teaches that whoever doesn't say these three things on Passover hasn't fulfilled their obligation. If you use a bare-bones Haggadah, you might think that this is a magical incantation of sorts: utter these three words, and somehow you're good for Pesach.

And it might seem especially odd that we say the word "Pesach" on Pesach, as if we didn't know the name of the holiday!

Like much of the Haggadah, this is actually a quote from the Mishnah's tractate Pesachim. Unlike in the Haggadah, where this passage follows Dayenu, so one might reasonably see it as a summing up or boiling down of all the thank-yous in Dayenu into three essential points, in the Mishnah, it follows the four questions and the obligation to teach our children about the Exodus.

In both settings, Rabban Gamliel's teaching gives us insights into what Passover and the seder are really all about.

In the Haggadah, where it follows Dayenu and its list of it-would-have-been-enoughs (when it actually wouldn't have been, just that we're grateful for each step along the way), Rabban Gamliel brings us back to the present. Yes, we are and should be grateful for G-d bringing us out of Egypt and back into our homeland, the Land of Israel. But first we have to remember where we began. Rabbi Barukh HaLevi Epstein, in his 20th-century commentary *Barukh She'amar*, asks what makes this mitzvah different from all the others

Purim costumes and treats at Beth Shalom



The Beth Shalom Purim party had it all - costumes, hamantaschen and other treats, and of course a fun megilla reading.

(yes, he clearly had a sense of humour!) in that Rabban Gamliel singled them out. His answer is that all mitzvot require that we think about why we do them, but for these three, the inner experience of thinking is not enough. We have to say the words out loud, perhaps as part of our obligation to see ourselves as if we, personally, left Egypt. We have to experience the Exodus ourselves: how our homes were spared - Pesach, and the haste with which we had to leave - Matzah, and the bitterness of servitude - Maror.

In the Mishnah, where Rabban Gamliel's insistence that we say these three words follows the four questions, the context may be both simpler and deeper: simpler, in that these three items - the Pesach sacrifice, the matzah, and the maror - were the main dishes on the seder table, as Dr. Joshua Kulp of the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem explains, and deeper, in that they help us, and force us, to concentrate on those four probing questions. Why, truly, is this night different? Why do we do all these unusual things at this meal?

In his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides writes that we are to surprise the children (and all guests) at the seder by breaking the habits and expectations of a normal meal. Once we've done that (as one technique, Maimonides suggests clearing the table before anyone gets a chance to eat!), we have the attention of all present. By doing things differently than usual, that's

when we can get down to the real business of the seder, which is to tell and relive the story as if we were there ourselves.

You see, the seder isn't a ritual to do by rote, reading the Haggadah word by word - including Rabban Gamliel's three words - like machines. The point of the seder is to use the rituals, including the words of the Haggadah, as a springboard to a deep discussion. How can we see ourselves as leaving Egypt? What do servitude and freedom mean in our lives? What does redemption mean to us?

When we work toward answering these questions, we'll know why this night is different. On Passover, we don't have the option of just going about the business of our lives, because that's not what it means to be free from serving Pharaoh so that we can serve G-d instead. We're obligated to do a deep dive into what our lives mean, as human beings and as Jews. We have to name the things that create meaning in our lives, because that will help us get started on the path toward growing them.

As we gather for our seders, may we all be blessed with the deep comfort that comes from tradition, from familiar recipes and songs, and familiar people. And may we also be blessed with the deep experience of what Passover means, using the tools that the Haggadah has built-in to help us consider the real questions of life in new ways each year, with new people joining us at our tables and new understandings of our lives. *Chag kasher vesameach!*

Rabbi Steven Schwarzman is the spiritual leader at Beth Shalom Synagogue, Edmonton's egalitarian conservative congregation.

Happy Passover

Chag Sameach from the Federation staff and board

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Wishing everyone a
Happy, Healthy Passover!

Edmonton Oilers celebrate Jewish Heritage Night with the Community



Members of the Jewish Community came out to support and cheer for the Edmonton Oilers as they celebrated Jewish Heritage Night.

Holocaust symposium to be held in person this year

By Tammy Vineberg

Holocaust education has always been a core focus of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton and, historically, the annual Dianne and Irving Kipnes Holocaust Education Symposium has been a key program to reach high school students from across the city. The pandemic necessitated a shift from an in-person experience to a virtual symposium for the last three years. The Federation is finally ready to offer it in-person again. This year the symposium will be held in the Muttart Theatre at the Stanley A. Milner branch of the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) on May 9 and 10.

The half day program is offered to Grade 11 and 12 social studies classes and is expected to have 500 students registered. The Federation is partnering with EPL as part of its ongoing partnership that focuses on

Holocaust and human rights education.

Another partner is Azrieli Foundation, an important institution in Holocaust education across Canada, who will be bringing a Holocaust survivor to speak to the students. The foundation will also provide a copy of this survivor's memoir to all attendees that students will use to prepare for the interactive part of the survivor testimony.

Prior to COVID-19, the symposium was offered to high school students over two days. The program has taken place for over 25 years to supplement the Alberta Education curriculum, which does not formally include the Holocaust. The Federation is pleased to continue this important function of ensuring that Holocaust education is accessible to students in the public school system in Edmonton and surrounding areas.

Like Dr. Eva Olsson and Rene Goldman, two

survivors who have participated in this program in the past, this year's survivor speaker will also share a personal story, helping students to understand the impact of the Holocaust through testimony. Elie Weisel famously said, "Whoever listens to a witness, becomes a witness."

"With the aging of our precious Holocaust survivors and Holocaust distortion and denial becoming more prevalent, it is more important than ever for students to hear this testimony," says Jenn Magalnick, the Federation's associate director of Holocaust education and community engagement.

To learn more about Holocaust education and resources for junior high and high schools, contact holocaustedu@edjfed.org.

Tammy Vineberg is Associate Director, Marketing and Communications, Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

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Alberta Legislature endorses IHRA definition

On March 13, the Alberta Legislature voted unanimously to affirm the endorsement and adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism through a Private Members' Bill sponsored by Richard Gotfried, MLA Calgary-Fishcreek, with assistance from Tany Yao, MLA Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. All present in the legislature, from all parties, voted in favour of the motion.

"This is an important achievement for our Calgary and Edmonton communities as the IHRA definition provides policymakers, law enforcement, and community leaders a tool to identify, understand, and combat contemporary forms of antisemitism and Jew hate in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere," stated Jewish Federation of Edmonton CEO Stacey Leavitt-Wright, and Community Relations co-chairs Adam Zepp and Steven Shafir.

The Jewish Federation of Edmonton and Calgary Jewish Federation along with their advocacy partner CIJA, and B'nai Brith Canada have been working for many years to have this definition recognized and endorsed by government leaders.

"Today's nonpartisan affirmation acknowledges the need for increased action against the growing threat of antisemitism within our province, noting that antisemitism cannot be properly addressed unless formally defined," added CJF CEO Adam Silver.

Both the CJF and JFE remain committed to working in partnership with key stakeholders towards proper and effective implementation.

"We thank all of the elected officials who led or supported this effort, and for their dedication to combating antisemitism and Jew hate in Alberta. We appreciate the community leaders who came to witness this bipartisan endorsement," stated Leavitt-Wright.

Richard Gotfried, MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek, introduced the motion, which condemned antisemitism, endorsed the IHRA definition and called

for its implementation across the province. The motion specifically supported the Government's action last September, when the province adopted the IHRA definition.

The Federal Government and the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan also use the definition.

"This reminds us that it is the responsibility of us all to combat a concerning surge into antisemitism and indeed other forms of racism," Gotfried told the Legislative Assembly. "Hence, we must begin by clearly defining it. Because antisemitism knows no borders, it is important that Canadian institutions at all levels embrace the same definition to facilitate collective efforts to combat it.

"Significantly, over the past year Canadian governments and institutions continue to embrace the most authoritative, comprehensive, and representative definition of antisemitism that exists today," Gotfried continued, referring to the IHRA definition.

"To ensure the heinous crimes against humanity, perpetrated now almost 80 years ago by the hateful actions of cold-blooded murderers and, sadly, by the inaction of silence of so many who remained silently complicit, will never be forgotten now and by future generations for eternity because of the adherence to this definition."

Michael Mostyn, Chief Executive Officer of B'nai Brith Canada, tipped his cap to Gotfried and his ALA colleagues.

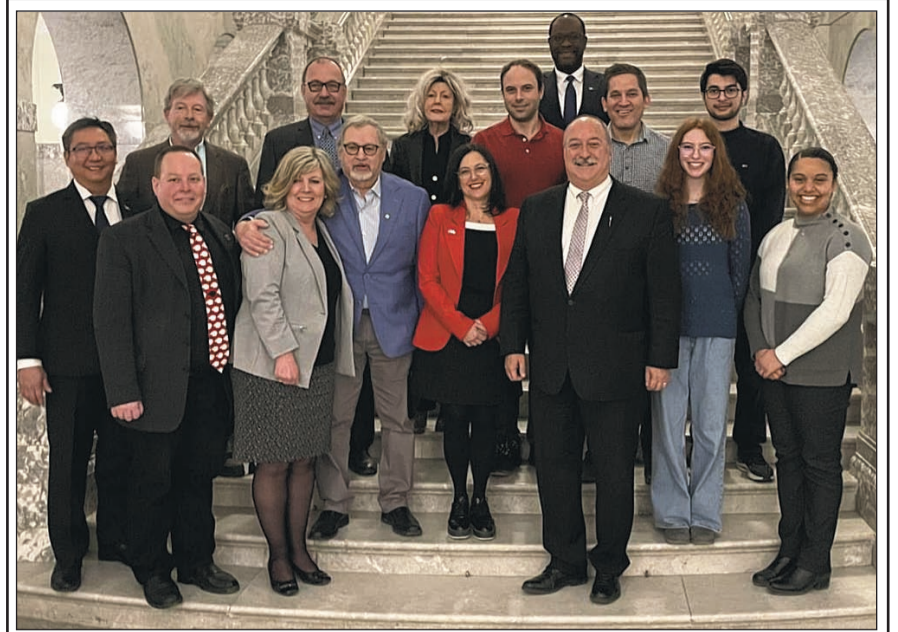
"We are grateful to the ALA for its continued support

of the Jewish people," Mostyn said. "The Legislative Assembly is the democratic voice of Albertans. Its endorsement and calls to implement the IHRA definition are welcomed and greatly appreciated. Alberta has fortified its adoption of the working IHRA definition. We thank the province for its commitment to combating antisemitism and clearing the path for robust Jewish life in Alberta."

Mostyn and Abe Silverman, Alberta Public Affairs Manager, along with Marvin Rotrand, National Director of B'nai Brith's League for Human Rights, were singled out by Gotfried for advocacy efforts that led to the ALA's adoption of the IHRA definition.

Silverman, a Holocaust survivor, was deeply touched by Alberta's relentless dedication to confronting antisemitism.

"I will be 81 soon," Silverman said, "and let me say I wept while listening to Richard Gotfried and the other MLAs make such a passionate case for the Jewish people. During the Holocaust, so few stood up for Jews in our time of need. I know I speak on behalf of my fellow Jewish Albertans when I salute you."



Members of the Jewish community welcomed the Alberta Legislature unanimously affirming the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

Happy Passover!

Best wishes to the Edmonton Jewish Community for a Passover filled with love, happiness, good health, peace and security.

Hon. Kaycee Madu, KC, ECA
 MLA for Edmonton - South West
 Deputy Premier and
 Minister of Skilled Trades and Professions

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TT and JNF partner up to raise funds for Tu Bi 'Shevat

By Matthew Levine

Since the beginning of its existence, Talmud Torah has upheld the traditional Jewish value of tikun olam by contributing to tree planting in Israel during Tu B'shvat. They partner with JNF each year and focus on a specific area in Israel that needs its forest rebuilt. Sometimes it is just new planting, while other times forests that have burned down need to be replaced. That was the case this year, and Talmud Torah responded by raising money to plant approximately 340 trees in the Segev forest.

Jay Cairns, Executive Director for JNF in Edmonton, works with Talmud Torah annually to complete this Tu B'shvat project. In an interview with Jay, he talked about the meaning behind planting trees in today's world, and the opportunities this partnership with Talmud Torah provides for the students. Jay insists that there are historical, traditional, and modern aspects of Tu B'shvat. The historical aspect involves tree planting in Israel that goes back to Israel's establishment. The traditional aspect refers to the meaning of the holiday Tu B'shvat and its importance in Judaism. Modernly, there is more and more of an appreciation for the environment and an increasing amount of climate change initiatives. Jay remarked, "People are more and more conscious and

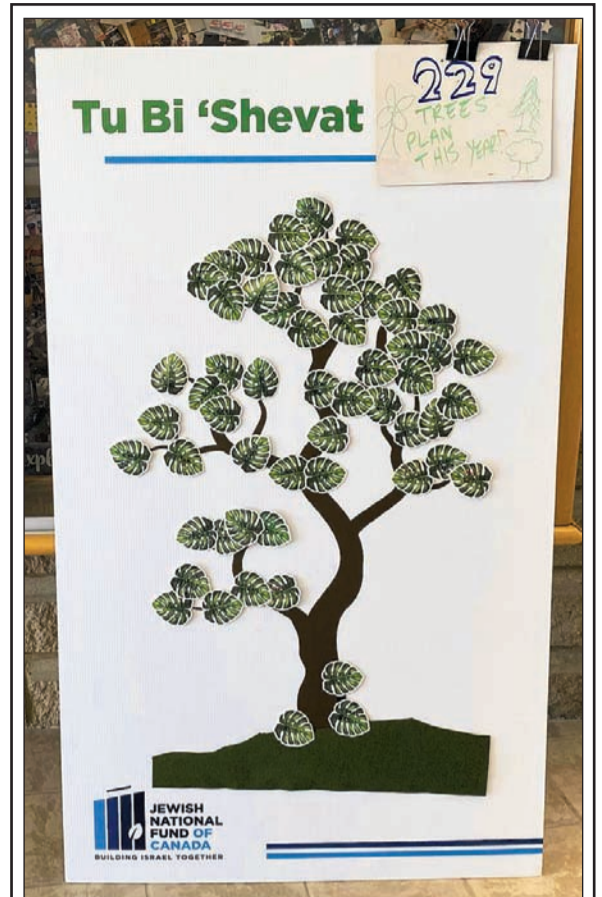
aware of their carbon footprint."

Jay thinks of Tu B'shvat "in terms of tikun olam, which is repairing the world, and the strategies we use to repair the world? We're repairing the world in part by being kind to the environment through campaigns like this," he said. This environmentally conscious aspect is what the children at Talmud Torah can relate to and appreciate, and what allows the campaign to be so successful year after year.

Students at Talmud Torah contribute to the campaign in different ways. Each year there are 3 to 4 tree leaders selected from grade 6 to build videos, put together a pitch, build a slogan, and run the campaign. They must be organized, technologically knowledgeable, and have leadership skills. The tree leaders obtain marketing skills, learning how to sell an idea they believe in. Jay is passionate about this project because it ties into our heritage and into Israel's right to exist. He works to spread this passion to the students leading the fundraising.

The other students at Talmud Torah contribute to the cause in whatever way they want. There are some kids who take a fundraising angle and others who take more of a marketing role. There is opportunity for these kids to get as involved as possible. Solly Singer, a student in grade 5 who will be a tree leader

Continued on page 17



JNF and Talmud Torah kept a running tally of their successful Tu B'shvat campaign.

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Stan and Rosemary Kitay were born in South Africa to traditional Jewish families that shared a passion for Israel and involvement in their Jewish community. Their journey began on a tour of Israel where they met, fell in love, and five years later were married and began a beautiful life together in Johannesburg.

In 1991, the Kitays immigrated to Edmonton with their three children and immersed themselves in the Jewish community. Over the years, the couple has been active in supporting various organizations, both locally and abroad. Their unwavering support for Israel has been a driving force in their volunteerism and board positions in Jewish organizations.

The Kitays are delighted to support the Eshkol Educational Center, a community building initiative aimed at enhancing the mental health and safety of residents in the Eshkol region of Israel. Their commitment to this project is a testament to their love and devotion to the people and the land of Israel.

Please join in celebrating Israel's 75th anniversary!

Pesach: Holiday of education



Rabbi Guy Tal

By Rabbi Guy Tal

Whenever any holiday arrives, I feel overwhelmed with many ideas and messages about the values and the concepts that this Holiday can teach us. Those ideas and "divrei torah" are the fruits of centuries of contemplating, pondering and drawing ideas made by the most intelligent people of our nation. Every year they study again about the holyday, investigating the ancient holy sources and always come with some new ideas from the infinite wisdom of the Torah.

However, sometimes I feel a bit lost in that sea of ideas, values, and explanations, asking myself, so, what is the main idea? What is the center of the holiday around which all the other lessons are located? It is not easy to find that main idea or value, and there might even be disagreements about it, like in many other cases in the rich Jewish world of thought.

In the case of Pesach, or, at least, its (two) first nights – the "seder" – many may agree that the main purpose is *education* – the special mitzva of telling the story of "yetziat mitsraim" – Exodus – to our children. We learn that mitzva from the verse that recite: "vehigadta lebincha" – you shall tell it to your son (Ex. 13, 8). It is a special mitzva, distinct from that of teaching Torah generally and is focused on that night that should be used to transmit our millenarian legacy to the next generation.

The field of education is complicated, profound, and challenging for everyone. We can never know if we are doing or saying the right things to our children or if we take the right approach with them. The Halachot and customs of the Passover Seder can give us some general guidance about this complex issue. I would like to mention three ideas that I believe can be useful to everyone in that area.

Experimental education

The seder teaches us that education is not only verbal, rational, or informative, but a real live experience. In Pesach we not only tell the story but try to live those glorious moments of the Exodus again

with our real actions. We eat the same food as our ancestors, taste the bitterness of the maror, sit in a certain way, in order to feel free etc. The key sentence is the following: In each and every generation a person is obligated to see himself (other version: show himself) as if he went out of Egypt.

You should see yourself – imagine it, feel it live it as it is happening to you and you are now taking your family, putting some matza in your bag, and going out happily from this horrible place – Egypt. If you only read that many years ago some people did it – you have not completed your obligation. These feelings of happiness, freedom and gratitude should pass to our children through that special experience. The message and the values we want to plant in our children's lives do not pass only through their minds but through their whole being.

I remember a nice custom that my grandmother Savta Masuda z"l did when I was child. In the middle of the seder the kids went out from the dining room, dressed up like the ancient Jews and then came back. All the participants of the seder made the following conversation with us:

Who are you? We are Bnei Israel?

Where do you come from? We come from Egypt, from the house of slavery.

Where are you going to? We are going to Eretz Israel.

It was such a nice episode and another vivid way to live the experience of the seder and its educational message.

Questions.

We begin the story of Exodus in the seder with questions – Ma Nishtana Halayla Haze. Those questions should be asked by the kids.

There are instructions written in the Haggadah for some actions we should do during the seder and sometimes people don't really know why we do those things and just do it because it is written, but its real original purpose is to awaken the curiosity of children and make them ask the question: why do we do all these strange things and why is that night so different from other nights? For example, sometimes we uncover the matzot and then we recover it. It is also the reason that we remove the plate – the "Keara" - from the table before the meal and then bring it back. Part of the actions in the seder itself are done for the same reason. We do "netilat yadayim without a beracha and eat the karpas (apio) with salty water or vinegar because we want the children to notice that something is different tonight.

The motivation to ask, the curiosity and awareness of what is happening around me is the base of learning. The question is, of course, the first step towards the answer. We must encourage our children to open their eyes and ask. We should also make them feel safe when doing it, creating a supporting and healthy environment to doubts and exploring. The questions show that the actual situation is not enough for me and I am looking to elevate myself to the next level of knowledge and understanding. That is why the biggest achievement of the seder



Purim fun: Beth Israel and Chabad

should be hearing my child asking curiously why this night is so different from any other night, since hearing that means that he is ready to listen and to be open to the answers we might give him.

Diversity

We read in the Haggadah: The Torah speaks of four children: one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask.

These words are based on the fact that the mitzva of telling the sons the story of the Exodus is written four times in the Torah. We can learn from that that different kinds of children require different kinds of answers. The Mishna says: According to the son's level his father teaches him.

We cannot answer the "chacham" as we do with the "rasha." The Haggadah mentions only four sons, but the real number is the number of children you have sitting around the table, because each one of them is a unique world and needs his own treatment.

Another important message is that we can never give up on the "rasha." He may ask in a provocative way. Maybe he will set himself apart from the community or the family (*he disassociated himself from the congregation*) Sometimes we may answer him in a harsh way. But an answer always must be given. To ignore him, reject him or just being indifferent to him would be the biggest mistake!

Rav Savatu emphasizes that it is important to give the right attitude and treatment to the wise son as well. Many times, we have a nice clever boy thanks G-d. Everything is simply fine with him. He learns well, he does not have any social or emotional difficulties, and he does not bother us too much with his problems. It looks like we do not need to "spend energy" on him. It is another big mistake. The "chacham" needs our attention and the specific treatment he requires not less than the "rasha" or any other child.

There are many other lessons that we can learn from this extraordinary evening with all its customs and halachot (laws). Most of these lessons are connected to the purpose of educating the next generation. These customs and halachot can provide helpful advice how to face that challenge not only in the evening of the seder but during the whole year.

Mo'adim Lesimcha and Chag Sameach!

Rabbi Guy Tal is the spiritual leader of Beth Israel Congregation, Edmonton's Modern Orthodox Jewish congregation.

PASSOVER 5783 ת"סג

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Local athletes heading to Maccabi

By Tammy Vineberg

Will Hatch was one of eight teens from Edmonton and Calgary who had a chance to experience JCC Maccabi in San Diego, California in August 2022. The experience opened his eyes to the Jewish world outside of Alberta.

“I feel like we have a smaller Jewish community than other cities. Outside of Talmud Torah, I didn’t have many Jewish friends until I started going to BBYO. But when I went to Maccabi, I didn’t realize how many Jewish teens there were, especially Jewish teens who play sports,” he says.

He wanted to go to Maccabi after hearing about it from friends at Camp BB Riback. During his trip, he played hockey, stayed with a billet family, and made new friends, some who he still stays in touch with.

The JCC Maccabi Games, which celebrated their 40th anniversary in 2022, provide an opportunity for teens to play 13 different sports with delegations around the world. It is a Jewish event for Jewish teenagers that fosters long-lasting memories and identification with organized Jewish community groups and with Israel. JCC Maccabi Games helps build a strong Jewish identity among all its participants.

Maccabi pairs well with the Jewish Federation of Edmonton’s strategic plan to develop young leaders and provide accessible Jewish experiences. This year there are 11 teens going to Fort Lauderdale, Florida from August 4 – 11. They will be billeted with local host families and participate in table tennis, swimming, volleyball, baseball, and tennis.

There is also a separate trip for the Israel JCC

Maccabi Games from July 5 to 25. Eight athletes are competing in soccer, swimming, flag football, and hockey. This delegation will also include a few Israeli teens from the Federation’s Partnership2Gether region. The sporting tournament will include meeting famous and influential Israeli sports figures, and will culminate with a tour of Israel focusing on sports and important cultural and historical sights. The participants will be housed in dorms. Chloe Soibelman and Marit Abrams are the delegation heads for Team Alberta.

For Will, he believes JCC Maccabi is an opportunity that teens shouldn’t pass up. “I think it’s life changing. Most people only go once, and they try to make it the best experience for you.”

Tammy Vineberg is Associate Director of Marketing and Communications, Jewish Federation of Edmonton.



Brooks Arcand-Paul
Edmonton – Decore



Sarah Hoffman
Edmonton – Glenora



Nathan Ip
Edmonton – South West



Jodi Calahoo-Stonehouse
Edmonton – Rutherford

*Chag Pesach
sameach!*



Rakhi Pancholi
Edmonton – Whitemud



Rachel Notley
Alberta NDP Leader



Rhiannon Hoyle
Edmonton – South

*Happy
Passover!*



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Festival Hatzafon brings Israeli Dance to Edmonton

By Jenna Soroka

The Aviv Israeli Folk Dance Association's (AIFDA) annual Festival Hatzafon was held in Campus Saint-Jean's auditorium this year. The event welcomed the community to an evening of Israeli dance, music, and connection with family and friends. Aviv, Shemesh, and Rikud - AIFDA's dance groups - showcased a total of 10 numbers. Additionally, Edmonton's talented four-person cover band, *Israelita*, shared several musical performances that featured singing from Keren Scheinman, Osnat Wine, Ben Ragosin on guitar and Asaf Sagi on drums/percussion. MCs Jayden and Kingsley Leung kept the evening flowing smoothly as they entertained the audience between performances with comedic expertise. The community also stepped up to support Festival Hatzafon 2023 with sponsorships from Barry Slawsky, Cushman & Wakefield Edmonton, the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, and the National Council of Jewish Women Edmonton (NCJWC).

Reel Mensch Studios professionally filmed the show, and a few of the dance numbers will be available for the community to view on AIFDA's website. Keep an eye out on social media.

AIFDA is a non-profit organization that is powered by the hard work and dedication of Artistic Director Sari Uretsky Leung, the executive board, parents, and of course, the dancers. AIFDA was born in 2006 out of Sari's desire to build "a cultural experience for youth and adults where people could get together and enjoy Israeli dance." Seventeen years later, the organization continues to enrich Edmonton's Jewish community through Israeli dance instruction, local and abroad performances, and opportunities to build meaningful friendships.

The theme for this year's Festival was Seasons of Israel, and the performances took the audience through Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. If you are a long-time fan of AIFDA's Aviv group, then you would have recognized classic performances such as Adama V'Shamayim (choreographed by Sari Uretsky Leung) and Kehila (choreographed by Memo Treisman). The show also featured new choreographies from both Shemesh and Aviv dancers, which did not disappoint.

Rachel Kondor, a seasoned Aviv dancer, reminisced on her past years with the group and its evolution over time. AIFDA has taken on the creative challenge to honour the history of Israeli dance while still engaging



The Aviv Israeli Folk Dance Association's annual Festival Hatzafon was held last month - much to the delight of everyone in attendance.

each generation by mixing traditional with contemporary. Davina Eisenstat, another AIFDA dancer and co-teacher of Aviv with Abby Wright, described the show as a blend of newer dance styles infused with elements of Jewish heritage to keep the traditions and culture alive.

One of the new numbers Aviv learned was called Israel Sheli, the final dance number of the show. Davina shared how this is one of her favourite dances. "It's so upbeat, and it makes me feel connected to my roots when I'm dancing it."

Shemesh's new dance number was choreographed by Aviv's very own Hannah Pertman. This energetic performance had the audience grooving in their seats.

Hannah Pertman has been a long-standing AIFDA dancer. She began attending Israeli dance classes with Rikud Academy in kindergarten until grade 6. She then went on to perform with AIFDA's performance groups Shemesh, Mayim, and, currently, Aviv. "I have loved my whole experience. I look forward to teaching every week. I look forward to dancing every week, and I love that it has given me the ability to be a teacher, because I want to go on and become a dance teacher."

Classes are typically held once per week, allowing students to experience the culture of Israeli dance while exploring other passions and commitments if they desire. Sari has curated her dance programs to ensure kids, teens, and adults can experience this fun community regardless of dance experience.

Other Aviv dancers who have grown up with AIFDA

include Ella Pertman, Ellie Vogel, and Ronny Stocklin-Sagi who taught this year's Rikud Academy students. "I love Israeli dance because, when I start dancing, I just flow with the music and rhythm. The excitement of the show and nerve-racking dress changes were fun and worth it!" Ronny expressed after the show. It is this type of passion and energy from the instructors that the younger generation of AIFDA dancers get to witness and grow up with as they connect with their culture and community through Israeli dance.

Over the years, AIFDA dancers have performed in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Miami, Disney World, and Universal Studios. This year Shemesh and Aviv will return to Winnipeg to dance in the 25th anniversary show of Beyachad: Robyn Braha School of Dance. In Sari's closing remarks at the show, she also hinted at a return to perform in Miami and Disney next year.

This year's Festival Hatzafon was extra special, coming off of several years without performing in a theatre. The venue was buzzing with excitement, laughter, and an abundance of schmoozing as family and friends gathered in support of AIFDA's wonderful dancers.

If you or your child is interested in becoming a part of AIFDA's incredible dance experience, head to www.aifda.ca to learn more.

Jenna Soroka is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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On Dynasties, Marriages and Leadership in Hasidism

By Regan Treewater-Lipes, LJI Reporter

Despite some Lufthansa scheduling catastrophes, the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies was able to pivot gracefully for this year's annual Tova Yedlin Lecture which took place in the Student Lounge of the Old Arts Building at the University of Alberta on March 16.

"I am so sorry that I cannot be there in-person with you today," explained Professor Marcin Wodzinski, this year's guest speaker from the University of Wroclaw, who spoke to a sizeable crowd of lecture attendees via Zoom. Professor Alexander Carpenter of the Wirth Institute warmly welcomed Professor Wodzinski, who has spoken at the University of Alberta on past occasions as well. In addition to a great number of Edmonton Jewish community members, academics from various departments also joined for a 'Viewing Party' and the lecture was accessible to an even larger audience over Zoom.

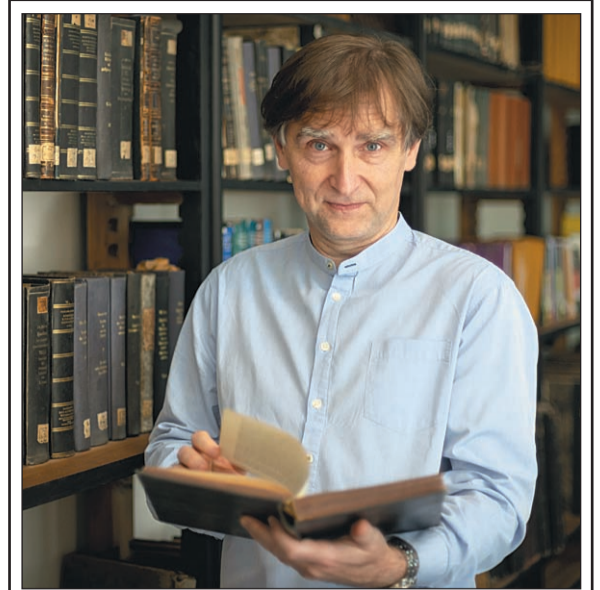
Professor Wodzinski's lecture "How to Marry Charisma: Dynasties, Marriages, and Leadership in Hasidism," drew a diverse crowd to learn about a highly intriguing, and little understood topic. When asked in an interview prior to his talk about what drew the decorated historian to this research, Professor Wodzinski replied: "I think my interest in Hasidism might appear less surprising when you consider where I live and work. Hasidism is possibly the most important religious phenomenon, and I mean of any religion, that has ever emerged in Poland. It is also a religious, but also cultural phenomenon that informed much of contemporary Jewish civilization, even for those who don't know much about it. And if you live in Poland, a sensitive eye easily catches traces of a Hasidic past, graves, pilgrimage sites, courts, you name it. Then once you get to the Hasidic literature, you discover much of this is happening on the streets of towns and villages you know, in the same neighbourhoods you pass every day, in the same place and space, yet in a different spiritual dimension. This is just fascinating, no?"

His ability to see the significance of historical echoes

still resonating in everyday places around him has resulted in some extremely fascinating documenting of the trends and traditions observed in the marriages of Hasidic dynasties throughout Central and Eastern Europe leading up to the first half of the twentieth century. In partnership with two colleagues from Israel, Professor Wodzinski has taken on the monumental task of cataloging these marriage alliances into an online database. This information, although daunting in scope, would be a potential breakthrough for many Jewish genealogy projects.

As the Director of the Taube Department of Jewish Studies, Professor Wodzinski has observed firsthand the significance of strong Jewish studies institutions in his country. "What is unique is the scale of success we managed to achieve," he stated. "I'm very proud of both our research and teaching activities. I claim we might be the fastest growing humanities department in the universe. When most university programmes in the humanities shrink, we managed to grow from 1 position in 2003 to 10 academic and 3 administrative positions now. We have one of the strongest Yiddish studies in Europe, leading scholars in the field of post-Holocaust Jewish history, excellent team of researchers working on Hasidism and Jewish religious life more generally, amazing scholars working on Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, and other Jewish literatures. We have also an excellent research library, including one of the best book collections on Jewish spirituality bequeathed to us by the late professor Ada Rapoport-Albert. I'm also very proud of our BA and two MA programmes in Jewish studies, one in Polish and one in English. The English programme is quite unique globally, I think. This is a three-semester MA programme based on three tracks of specialization in East European Jewish history and culture, with three intensive languages taught: Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish."

This scope is certainly indicative of a Polish society hungry to understand their thousand-year history alongside Jewish life. Since the first Jews stopped in a forest outside Lublin and heard through the trees "po lin" or "here rest" Jews have been a part of Poland's historical trajectory. Whether or not the story of how the Jewish first arrived in Poland is apocryphal or not,



Professor Marcin Wodzinski via zoom.

this influence and lasting contribution to Polish culture is illustrated by the amazing research like Professor Wodzinski is receiving.

Despite trends in the right direction within academy and grassroots local activism throughout the country, Professor Wodzinski is still cautious with his optimism. "The Jewish community in Poland is very small, possibly too small to develop without careful support from the more mighty players outside," he noted. "At the same time this is deeply divided and painfully torn by all sorts of conflicts. This is not the best situation for the Jewish culture to flourish I'm afraid. At the same time, there is huge interest in Jewish history and culture in Poland which led, among others, to the creation of several major cultural institutions that present Jewish history and culture to the wider public. Some of them are European-scale success. The best example is the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, a landmark international success and really an

Continued on page 20

HAPPY *Passover* חג פסח כשר ושמח

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FROM YOUR CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Art Spiegelman discusses his life's work at EPL, CPL event

By Jeremy Appel

Cartoonist Art Spiegelman, who depicted his father's Holocaust survival in the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel *Maus*, spoke on Feb. 21 at an online forum hosted by Edmonton Public Library, in partnership with Calgary Public Library and Edify Edmonton, as part of its Forward Thinking Speaker Series.

The event, which had almost 600 viewers, was a dialogue between Spiegelman and local author Sandra Wong, where they discussed Spiegelman's life and career, and a rural Tennessee school board's decision last year to ban *Maus* from its curriculum.

Spiegelman recalled grappling with this question of what art is while on nitrous oxide during a dentist appointment, and he came up with an answer.

"Art is anything that gives form to your thoughts and feelings," he said. "That's a lot better than what I learned in college, which was just that art is anything you can get away with, which means if they'll buy it, it's art."

Throughout the talk, images of Spiegelman's works that were being discussed were put on screen for the audience to see.

"Maybe all art is provocative," said Spiegelman. "You just have to spend a longer time finding what the provocation is in certain paintings."

One of Spiegelman's earliest influences was *Mad Magazine*, which he described as "unlike anything else available" at the time.

"It was my gateway to America. My parents couldn't give me that and we didn't even have a television set when I was little," Spiegelman recalled.

"Mad was telling you that the whole adult world is lying to you. 'And we here at Mad, we're adults,' so it was a magazine asking you to think for yourself even as a kid."



New Yorker covers

In a particularly provocative and prescient *New Yorker* cover from September 1993, Spiegelman depicted students returning to school, but all of them were armed with guns — six years before the Columbine massacre brought the issue of gun violence in schools to the forefront of U.S. cultural discourse.

"I was just worried because my daughter was about six years old, so she was in school when I did this," he explained.

"And even before Columbine, there have been shootings in schools in the United States since about 1848. Nothing as dramatic as what seems to go on every week now, but in the year leading up to [the cover image], there was a shooting in a middle school.

"It was definitely on my mind. As sort of a back to school moment, I just figured the guns would be an appropriate image."

Spiegelman acknowledged that he seeks to push the boundary of what's acceptable.

"A lot of it just comes from knowing approximately where the lines are going two inches over," he said, "but sometimes I get more like two feet over it and this usually involves getting rejected."

These lines are often set by *New Yorker* arts editor Francoise Mouly, who is Spiegelman's wife.

His first cover art for the magazine, which Wong described as "beautiful," was drawn after the 1991 Crown Heights riots, showing an image of a Black woman and Hasidic man kissing.

Maus

When Spiegelman set about writing *Maus*, there wasn't as much written about the Shoah as there is today, nor was it a major part of popular culture.

"I could read everything in my college library in about three weeks that was in English and was serious about that subject," he said.

That began to change when the French documentary *Shoah* came out in 1985. "It unleashed a popular culture version of the Holocaust in a much bigger way and soon after that, maybe because my generation came of age, there were a lot of books," Spiegelman said. "Now one couldn't read them in a lifetime."

Spiegelman watched the seminal miniseries with his father and step-mother, who was also a Holocaust survivor.

"He just walked out saying he already knows all this stuff," Spiegelman said.

The artist embarked on telling his father's story. Spiegelman decided to use anthropomorphic animals — Jews as mice and their persecutors, both German and Polish, as cats — in part to recognize his narrative's limitations.

"No matter what I did, I could never get it right.



Cartoonist Art Spiegelman via zoom.

Even if I lived through it, I wouldn't be able to get it right," he said. "It was all attempts to get closer and closer, but still acknowledge in various ways in the course of the book that this was as close as I could get to finding that story."

Wong asked Spiegelman what he saw as his responsibility to those who died in the Shoah and its survivors.

Spiegelman recognized that surviving the Holocaust was largely a matter of luck. "If the war lasted longer, everyone would have been killed, so to do that, and have him presented with his flaws, was to me a much more important way of doing something about what he lived through," he said.

"It was about how this person survived from a combination of luck and very strong will, always looking for what he could do next to keep it going."

Book banning

Of the decision to ban *Maus*, the McMinn County School Board's decision referenced the book's "unnecessary use of profanity and nudity and its depiction of violence and suicide," the latter referring to his mother's death.

"Obviously, none of them read it," Spiegelman said.

In the book, Spiegelman's character refers to his mother as a "bitch" after he finds out she died by suicide. "I'm screaming about her death and abandoning me, and I'm left as the prisoner on the whole planet without her," he explained. The only nudity in *Maus* is a picture of his mother dead in a bathtub.

In another part, Spiegelman exclaims "goddammit" when he found out his father burned his diaries.

"There were very few bad words in *Maus*. I wasn't trying to avoid them or use them. They were just where they had to be," he said.

These were simply pretexts to ban the book, Spiegelman suspects. When news came out about the school board's vote, Spiegelman told the *New York Times* that McMinn trustees just wanted to "teach a nicer Holocaust."

Continued on page 15

Chag Pesach Sameach

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Healing Hearts- Inspiring Trust- Honouring Legacy

Matzah pajamas are the latest trend in American Jewish branding

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA) — Rabbi Yael Buechler conceived of her latest product two years ago, after planning ways to make the Passover seder fun for her two young sons. But it wasn't until she started promoting the matzah pajamas she designed that she decided to make adult sizes, too.

After she reached out in December 2021 to The Maccabeats - the Orthodox a capella group that releases splashy new videos for most holidays - to offer kids' pajamas for their Passover project, they demurred.

"They wrote back jokingly, 'Haha - but like, do they come in grownup sizes?'" Buechler recalled.

But these days, both lines sell like, well, unleavened hotcakes. Jewish influencers have modeled the pajamas on social media, often as entire families, and the children's set vaulted near the top of Passover sales rankings at Modern Tribe, an online marketplace for Jewish products.

That the breakout Passover product is technically sleepwear reflects a new frontier in the ongoing commercialization of Jewish holidays. It also reflects the turn toward comfort clothes that Americans in general have made since the COVID-19 pandemic began just before Passover three years ago.

"You used to get dressed up to go to seder, but now everyone is a lot more casual," said Amy Kritzer Becker, one of Modern Tribe's owners.

Indeed, the promotion of fancy clothing for Passover is a prime example of American consumerism layered atop traditional Jewish practice. Many traditionally observant families buy new clothes, especially for children, for the holiday, to fulfill the mitzvah of "simcha," or joy.

That became a marketing opportunity for clothing manufacturers as Jews moved to the U.S. in large numbers and emerged as a consumer segment.

"Because of the alignment of the Passover holiday

with Easter, it was an opportunity for Jews to also purchase nice attire," said art historian Kerri Steinberg, author of "Jewish Mad Men: Advertising and the Design of the American Jewish Experience."

Steinberg says the commercialization of Judaism has been a defining characteristic of American Judaism — and, in some ways, a safeguard for Jewish identity in a country that long boasted of being a melting pot.

"One thing that's been very discrete and sort of distinctive I would say about Judaism in America is how it's been branded and marketed, and packaged," she said. "[That acculturation] stopped short of full assimilation because in order to maintain a vibrant Jewish market, their identities had to be sort of retained in a discrete way."

"In America, capitalism has been the key structure," Steinberg added. "So it does make sense that there were opportunities for more consumption of Jewish goods and products around the holidays."

Some of those goods and products were integral to observing the holiday. American Jewish newspapers from the turn of the century and onward featured ads from companies like Streit's, Horowitz, and Manischewitz battling over claims to the best matzah and whitefish.

And of course there is also the Maxwell House Haggadah, created as a marketing ploy for the coffee company in 1932 and still produced today. Its creator, Joseph Jacobs, was an advertising maven who saw huge potential in a base of Jewish customers; he is credited with inventing the concept of targeted marketing.

But other products promoted for Passover had little or nothing to do with what happens during it. Stetson advertised its hats to Jewish customers in Jewish newspapers, while Colgate hawked perfume and other companies noted sales on shoes. Even Macy's had a Passover department advertised in a March 1912 edition of the now-defunct Hebrew Standard.



By the second half of the 20th century, other forces were working in favor of Passover products. The rise of identity politics in the 1970s meant that many Jews were seeking items that would let them display their Jewishness, Steinberg said. Then, starting in the 1990s, the rise of kitsch, a nostalgic aesthetic, opened the door to nostalgic items such as Manischewitz purses, Streit's aprons and gefilte fish T-shirts.

Just as dreidel and menorah patterns are ubiquitous on items mass-produced for Hanukkah, the telltale striping of factory-produced matzah has long adorned items marketed for Passover.

"People have always loved matzah products," said Becker, whose store offers a slew of print-on-demand matzah-emblazoned products, as well as baby shoes in the print.

"Obviously matzah is the preeminent symbol of the holiday," Steinberg said. "Claiming matzah is just a proud assertion of Jewish distinction."

For Buechler, who launched her line of Jewish fashion products a decade ago with nail decals of the 10 plagues, the motif was inspired by her son's confusion.

Continued on page 25

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An action packed 5th annual JNF Alberta Cup tournament was held at the West Edmonton Mall on Feb. 25 and 26. A special congratulations to the Tu Bi'Shevat Tigers for winning for a second year in a row! This year's Alberta Cup raised funds in support of Kav Lachayim's new community housing for adults with disabilities in Israel. If you'd like to make a contribution to this important project contact edmonton@jnf.ca. Photos by Chris Cardinal

Israel is our responsibility

By Rabbah Gila Caine



Rabbah Gila Caine

From when, i.e., from which date, does one begin to mention the might of the

rains by inserting the phrase: "He makes the wind blow and the rain to fall"?...The mishnah states a general principle: One requests rain only

immediately preceding the rainy season... Until when does one request rain? Rabbi Yehuda says: We request rain until Passover has passed. Rabbi Meir says: Until the month of Nisan has ended... (Mishnah, Ta'anit 1)

The rainy season in Israel is winter, but here in Canada? I guess summer. How about Australia? It doesn't really matter when the rainy season is in YOUR corner of the world, because liturgically speaking, we are always aiming at the rainy season in the land of Israel as a way of maintaining a centre. This isn't only about that strip of earth being our indigenous homeland, but also, and I would say mainly, because by asking all Jews around the world to pray for rain at the time when Israel needs it most, we hold a shared sense of solidarity and create time and again

a sacred focal point.

It isn't the land which is sacred. All Earth is sacred. Rather, it is our joint intention, the aligning of our body towards Israel in prayer and our thoughts towards the parched land, that creates and recreates our sacred body-Israel.

On the first day of Pesach Jews around the world will stop praying for rain, and begin mentioning dew (dew, the summer moisture and ancient symbol of revival). As Jews living in Alberta we are still responsible for the lushness and fruitfulness of Israel, and liturgically we aren't only allowed to join our voices in the call for rain and dew, but are actually obligated to do so. Even if we don't currently live on the land or vote for its government. The rationale for the whole Zionist project (be it cultural, political or religious) lies on the premise that Jews around the world have a say in the viability of the land and that their words (our words) can tip the balance between a livable home or destroyed wasteland.

Over the past few months, I've watched in awe as the semi-hidden rifts and cracks in Israeli society have come into plain view. What might have been swept under the carpet of "shevet achim gam yachad"; is now presented plainly for all of us to see and choose from: A democratic state, or a halachic state. And to be clear, halachah in its most reactionary and fundamentalist iteration, one which would proclaim many of this city's Jews non-Jewish (or suspect at best).

What kind of Jewish homeland are you hoping and praying for? If you want one in which all are ruled by an antiquated version of Torah, where adult women are considered legal "minors" and where majority rules but there are no protections for minorities

(sexual, religious, ethnic etc'), then we are headed in the right direction. If, on the other hand, you would like to support an Israel which is part of the Western world - you need to speak up now. We need to speak up now. By speaking up you are joining and supporting tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of Israelis from across the religious and political spectrum, who are out demonstrating every week, all over the country. If you care about an Israel where your ideals and your Judaism are recognised and respected, you need to make your voice heard.

This is hard, because we all know how questioning Israeli government policy has the tendency to get hijacked by third parties with an anti-Zionist agenda. So we have to be clear in our words and intentions, and work through organisations we trust are doing this work to support Israel and not cripple it. But we can't allow this fear to hold us back from proclaiming we too hold a stake in the "personality" our country is developing, since Israel is homeland to all Jews. If this "personality" is moving far away from what I believe is the essence of Jewish peoplehood, then it is my religious obligation as a Jew, to call on my land to do tshuvah.

For untold generations we've aligned ourselves in the cycle of rain rituals and dew liturgy, focusing on a land far away, but at the core of our being. This year as Pesach approaches, we are obligated to listen closely to what our land needs and make sure we articulate a demand for freedom and a just covenant from those in power.

Pesach kasher v'sameach.

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

Our very best wishes to the Jewish community for a happy, healthy Passover

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New poll says most Canadian Jews oppose Israeli judicial reforms

Most Canadian Jews oppose policies favoured by the current Israeli government, according to a new poll commissioned by the New Israel Fund of Canada and JSpaceCanada.

In the poll, fielded by EKOS Research Associates, fully three-quarters of Canadian Jews say they are emotionally attached to Israel. However, 56% claim that Israel's government is moving in the wrong direction, compared to just 13% who say it is moving in the right direction.

Opposition is especially strong to laws proposed by members of the governing coalition that would allow gender segregation in some public places, ban Pride parades, and legalize conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ people on religious grounds, with between 83% and 88% of Canadian Jews expressing opposition to such moves.

Some 73% of Canadian Jews oppose judicial reform that would make it easier for the Israeli government to reverse Supreme Court decisions, thus adding their voices to that of well-known Canadian jurist and former Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler, among others.

Two-thirds of Canada's Jews oppose the idea of disallowing Palestinians from serving in the Israeli parliament, compared to just 15% who support the idea. About twice as many Canadian Jews oppose building new Jewish settlements in the West Bank and incorporating parts of the West Bank into the State of Israel as favour such initiatives. The so-called "grandparent clause" in Israel's Law of Return allows anyone with one Jewish grandparent to claim citizenship, but religiously Orthodox members want the clause removed. Some 58% of Canadian Jews oppose such a move, while 17% favour it – hardly surprising since fewer than one-fifth of Canadian Jews are Orthodox.

Israel's Minister of National Security was once convicted of incitement to racism and supporting a terrorist organization. Israel's Minister of Finance recently described himself on radio as a "proud homophobe." JSpaceCanada and the New Israel Fund of Canada have proposed that the Canadian

government refuse to meet or build relationships with these ministers. Nearly 6 in 10 Canadian Jews agree with that proposal, while just 2 in 10 disagree.

Commenting on the results, Joe Roberts, Board Chair of JSpaceCanada, said, "These results couldn't be clearer, Jewish Canadians are overwhelmingly concerned with the direction and policy decisions proposed by Israel's radical governing coalition. These are not the shared values that the Canada-Israel relationship was built upon. Jewish Canadians, like the hundreds of thousands of Israelis taking to the streets to protest the undermining of democracy and assault on the human rights of Palestinians, expect bold and decisive leadership on this issue from the government that represents us in Ottawa."

Ben Murane, Executive Director of the New Israel Fund of Canada said, "Canadian Jews are worried that a country that removes basic democratic checks and balances and eviscerates the independence of the judiciary can no longer be referred to seriously as a full democracy. They overwhelmingly oppose the Israeli government's legislation stripping power from the country's judiciary, one of the few remaining institutions willing to protect the rights of Palestinians, LGBTQ people, women, and other vulnerable populations."

The poll was funded by JSpaceCanada and the New Israel Fund of Canada, organizations that promote democracy and equality in Israel, as well as a two-state solution to end the Israel-Palestine conflict. It was designed and analyzed by Professor Robert Brym of the Department of Sociology and Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto. Brym commented, "To corroborate these findings we need more polls with larger samples asking similar questions. However, this poll provides a fair baseline representation of Jewish community perspectives on issues of vital importance to the approximately 404,000 Canadians who identify as Jewish by religion or ethnicity."

The poll, fielded between February 16 and 28 2023 by EKOS Research Associates, is based on a nationally

Celebrating Purim



BI and Chabad celebrated Purim together. It was awesome!

representative sample of 288 Canadian adults who identify as Jewish by religion or ethnicity. Nineteen of 20 polls like this one would likely yield results with less than a 5.8% margin of error.

Happy Passover
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United Conservative caucus

Talmud Torah's Purim Carnival is back!

By Natalie Soroka, TT Society

The Purim Carnival at TT is an experience no other Edmonton school can replicate. After two long years of modified Purim events due to Covid, the celebration was back and better than ever!

Grade 6 students look forward in anticipation to the Purim Carnival each year, as they are given a leadership role in running the event. They brainstorm ideas for activities the whole school will enjoy, working together to execute their vision. Posters are prepared and hung on the school walls with enticing pictures and descriptions of the activities the students can look forward to.

The most anticipated activity our Grade 6 students look forward to working on is the Haunted House! You can hear and see the excitement during the lead up to Purim as students go in and out of the gym stage, up and down the school library stairs, working on bringing their ideas to life. If you speak to any TT alumni you can be sure the Purim Carnival is one of the significant memories.

The lunchroom was extra noisy the day of the carnival, with kids chatting to their classmates about what activities they were going to first and how they couldn't wait to join in the fun. On your mark, get set, and they're off! I chose to follow one group of kids as they moved from station to station, and this group went straight to the haunted house. As they waited in line for their turn to enter their energy was palpable. As the first group exited, you could hear comments, such as "that wasn't scary at all," to "something jumped out and touched me!"

"Where to, next?" one asked, and off they went to answer trivia questions in the kitchen. The colourful trivia wheel displayed numbers, and each number corresponded to different movie-themed questions, depending on whether a student was in Division 1 (K-Grade 3) or Division 2 (Grades 4-6). Round and round the wheel went as the first student stepped up to take a spin. Each student answered a question, and most



Talmud Torah's Purim Carnival was back in full force this year with costumes, games, face painting, activities for the kids and wonderful leadership opportunities for the older students. Everyone had a great time.

received a prize for the correct answer.

It was then off to the gymnasium for Purim Carnival Sports. The posters stated that you could participate in football, soccer, and hockey, and that's just what this group did. They particularly enjoyed Armchair QB with the football. I even gave it a try. After getting hot and sweaty from sports, it was off to get a snack in Room 19 to fuel themselves for the next activities. The group picked up bags of chips and drank from their water bottles to quench their thirst.

While waiting for the kids to finish their chips, I took a look around to observe the costumes students were wearing, and it was amazing. Such a variety was on display throughout the hallways and classrooms, from Disney characters, to super heroes, to John and Ringo from Sgt. Pepper's Lonely-Hearts Club Band. Of course, TT school staff were decked out too. Each year, school staff come up with a group theme, and this year's theme was FRUIT. There were 3 pineapples, 2 strawberries, 2 bunches of grapes, as well as a watermelon, blueberry, banana, lime and avocado. In addition, many of the TTELC educators dressed up to the delight of their students.

Of course, our hallways were lined with Purim artwork galore. Papier mache masks created by Gr. 3 students hung outside their classroom, while adorable multi-media carnival-style creations of students wearing silly costumes were displayed outside the Grade 1 class. Gr. 2 created fun artwork

through playing a game titled "Roll a Picasso Art Game for Purim." They had fun creating funny faces and also learned about Pablo Picasso and Cubism.

Fueled and ready, the group set off to the lunchroom for some arts and crafts, including face painting, colouring Purim masks, and hair styling. Fifteen or twenty minutes later they were painted, styled and ready for the Games Station in Room 9. Students had the chance to win prizes by throwing a ball and trying to hit paper cups from different distances, as well as attempting to get a small ball into large cups on a table. Then we were off on a treasure hunt.

The Grade 6 students took turns running their assigned stations. It was a fun and challenging role for our student leaders. They brainstormed ahead of time, and made last minute preparations to be ready for the rush of students. Their energy and enthusiasm were contagious and they beamed with pride as they ran their stations with confidence.

The younger students in the Early Learning Centre lined the hallways watching the costume parade as it snaked through the hallways and into the school office. Some parents of our younger K-6 students, as well as those in the ELC, joined in on the fun and could be seen taking pictures of their children joyfully participating in the Purim festivities.

By the time 3 pm rolled around, my group had finished participating in all of the stations and was ready to pack it in. I hope you enjoyed a glimpse into the life of a TT Purim Carnival student and that you almost felt like you were there!



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Where are we today? Let's take stock.

By Judy Zelikovitz



Judy Zelikovitz

Passover is one of the most widely observed of Jewish traditions. Looking back at our long history, we gather around the Seder table every year to celebrate our ancestors' freedom from slavery in Egypt. At that same Seder table, we look forward, retelling the story for our children of our exodus from Egypt to

Israel, which, since Roman times, has been a communal, unfulfilled aspiration.

The Passover story is one of survival and courage. Led by Moses, the Jewish people wandered the desert for 40 years, choosing to face the unknown over further persecution and oppression by the Egyptians.

At the heart of the story, over these 2,000 years, are our tenacity as a people and our willingness to stand up to those who would do us harm.

Passover is also a time to take stock of where we are today.

Sadly, in 2023, even in Canada, Jew-hatred is still very much a reality. Only now it manifests not only in the streets but also in the virtual world – where social media has created a breeding zone for hate that has gone almost unchecked. And, as we have seen here and

across the globe, what happens online can be an indicator of what is to come in the real world.

As online technology continues to develop and expand and the lines of our public and private worlds blur, hate is finding new means of expression.

In Canada, we have a Charter protecting, among many treasured freedoms, our freedom of expression. But Canada's Charter of Rights is also our Charter of Responsibilities, and all freedoms come with limits. Dictating responsible use of our freedoms, those limits must apply to online communications.

Social media platforms both spread hateful ideas quickly to large groups of followers and mobilize those followers. The results are indiscriminate yet organized campaigns targeting, among others, Blacks, Muslims, LGBTQ2+, women, or Jews, who are trolled online, and, offline, threatened with violence.

In 2018 a man entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh during Shabbat Saturday morning services, murdering 11 innocent Jewish worshipers and injuring six more – the deadliest attack on Jews in US history. His own online history indicated strong ties to online antisemites.

This surge in online antisemitism has taken a celebrity turn with ignorant and hateful comments from Kanye West. His tweets do not just light up the internet. They engender real-world incidents of violence and hate, including spurring a group to fly a banner proclaiming "Kanye is right" over a busy Los Angeles highway and an attack on a Jewish New Yorker who was assaulted in Central Park by an individual yelling "Kanye 2024." West has also defended basketball player Kyrie Irving's promotion of a film linking Jews to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Weeks later, police officers arrested two young men who had threatened New York synagogues. Just hours before his arrest, one had tweeted "Jews owned the ships."

Canada is not immune. In May 2021, during the

Gaza war, online hate spilled onto the streets of Montreal when two young men were arrested after driving through a Jewish neighbourhood yelling slurs and threatening Jews – after posting their actions on TikTok.

Yet another Canadian example is the disturbing case of Laith Marouf, who has become infamous across the country for virulent, hate-filled tweets. They were disturbing enough that the government not only disavowed any future interaction with him but also sought to claw back previously distributed grants and change the responsible department's funding process.

These are just a few of the many reasons CIJA has been advocating for legislation to address online hate. The time has come to tell online platforms that, if they cannot moderate online hate by shutting down those who post it, the government must step in. CIJA has demanded accountability. Freedom of expression is a cherished Jewish and Canadian value. But messages aimed at harming identifiable groups is not legal in the real world and it must be legislated against in the virtual realm.

We are hopeful that the government will indeed tackle harms from online hate with legislation, forcing platforms to take accountability for the content they leave up. We have advocated for a third-party regulator and that platforms become responsible for capturing, removing, and preserving – for prosecution – content that violates Canada's hate laws.

Oppression comes in many forms. As we recall the story of Passover at the Seder table once again, let's take a moment to remember our ancestors' journeys and our personal responsibility to ensure that their will to fight oppression will sustain us today as it has for countless generations.

Judy Zelikovitz is Vice President, University and Local Partner Services at The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA).

Spiegelman *Cont. from page 10*

Still, Spiegelman admits he was somewhat shocked when he initially discovered that young children were being assigned *Maus* in schools, given its heavy subject matter.

"I just looked dismayed, like it was a form of child abuse," he recalled. "It took me a while to get used to the fact that I later met many kids who had read it and many adults who had read it, and often the kids were more alert with their questions than the adults."

"I was just being ageist in reverse."

In response to a question from an audience member, Spiegelman placed the *Maus* ban in the context of an "insane culture war" in the U.S., a key battleground of which is "trying to limit what children can read."

This push for more parental control over their children's education is part of a larger attack on public

education itself.

"That's, I think, the very strategic and specific agenda. The yahoos on the school board just thought that this was a book they could remove without anybody even getting upset," Spiegelman observed, noting that the meeting's minutes were posted on Jan. 27, which is Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"I think they were actually just dumbasses. It wasn't a belligerent thing."

The controversy has been good for business. Sales of *Maus* increased 753 per cent in January alone, *Forbes* reported.

"They were very shrewd marketers in McMinn County," Spiegelman said.

Jeremy Appel is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.



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The JNF Alberta Cup, hosted by JNF Edmonton at West Edmonton Mall was a success. This year's Mensch Valuable Player in memory of Nathan Reboh z"l was Brendon Pipke and the Most Valuable Player in memory of Stevie Schwartzberg z"l was Tyler Large. "Kol HaKavod to you both," said JNF Edmonton Executive Director Jay Cairns. "Our Community Free Skate was also a success - thank you to BBYO and PJ library and toda raba to our amazing sponsors, participants and friends who came out and enjoyed the weekend." Photos by Chris Cardinal

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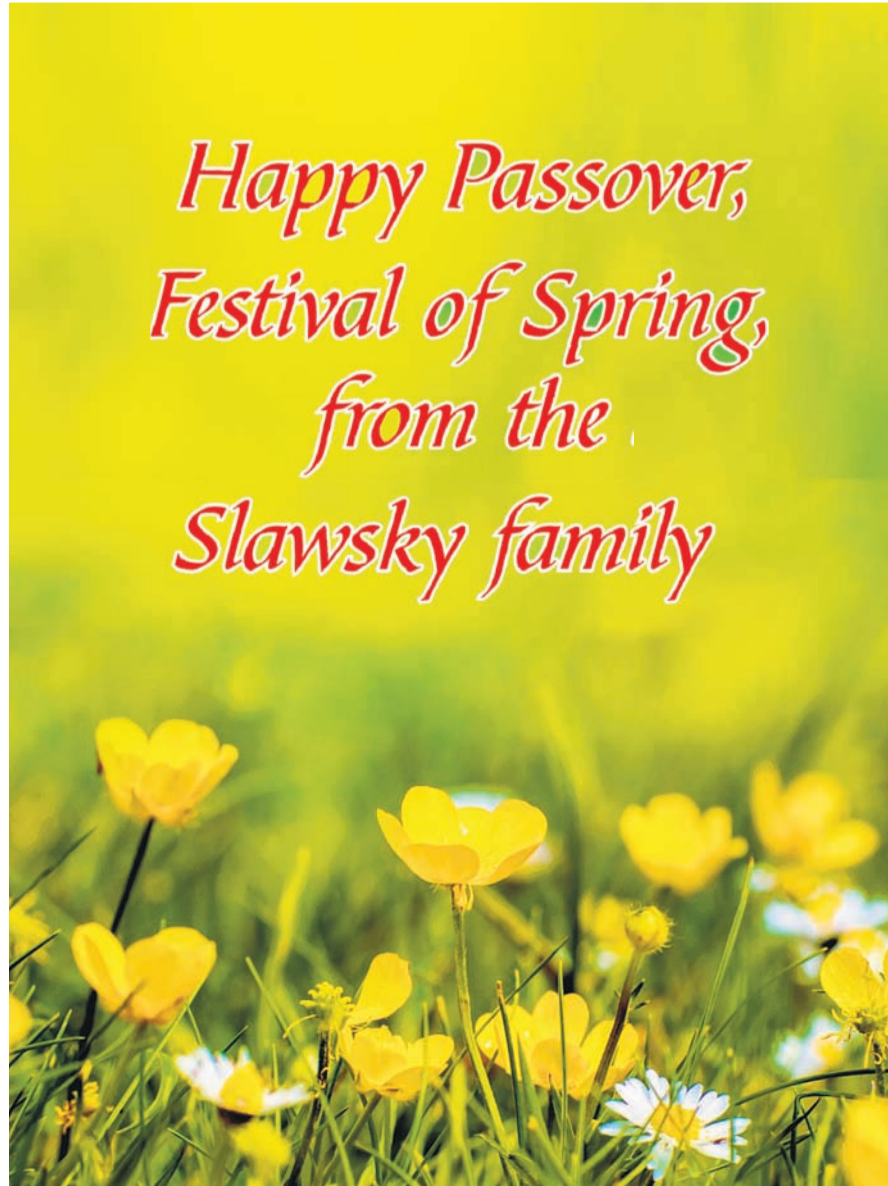
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Sephardic Matzah Spinach Pie

By Susan Barocas

(Nosher via JTA) - Matzah pies called minas are a classic Sephardic Passover dish, traditionally served for brunch or lunch with the slow-cooked, hard-boiled eggs called huevos haminados. The truth is that a mina makes a great side or main dish for any meal, even when it's not Passover. With a top and bottom "crust" made from sheets of matzah, the filling can be made of meat — like seasoned lamb, beef, chicken — or vegetables, most commonly spinach and cheese, though sometimes with leeks or mashed potato added. Another option is to shred, salt and squeeze about 2 pounds of zucchini to use in place of the spinach in the recipe below. The flavors in this vegetarian mina mimic spinach and feta borekas or spanikopita, but I've added a twist. Given the fondness for artichokes in Sephardic food (and for me personally), I've added some to the filling for extra texture and flavor.

Ingredients

20 oz frozen chopped spinach, thawed, 5 or 6 sheets plain matzah, 2 Tbsp olive oil, 1 medium onion, finely chopped, Salt to taste, 1 14 oz can artichoke hearts, drained and diced, 1/2 cup fresh dill with thinner stems, finely chopped, 1 cup (about 4 ounces) crumbled feta, 2/3 cup grated Parmesan or Romano cheese, divided, 1 1/2 cup milk (can be low-fat), 1/2 tsp ground black pepper, 1/8 tsp nutmeg (optional), 3 large eggs, divided

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
Put the spinach into a fine mesh strainer and set in the sink or over a bowl to drain.

Fill a large baking pan with tepid water. Break two sheets in half as equally as possible. Add the matzah to the pan of water for 2 minutes, making sure they are submerged. (You can gently lay a couple heavy pieces of silverware across the top of the matzah to hold down.) The matzah should be pliable, but still hold its shape. Take each sheet out by lifting it holding onto two corners. Let some of the water drip off for a moment, then lay the softened matzah in a single layer on a thick dish towel or two. You can do the matzah in batches depending on the size of your pan with water.

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and a couple pinches of salt, stir and sauté about 5 minutes until the onion starts to soften. Mix in the chopped artichoke and cook another 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, as the artichokes and onions begin to take on a little color.

As the mixture cooks, use a large spoon or your hands to squeeze as much liquid as possible out of the spinach. Set the squeezed spinach into a large mixing bowl, breaking up the clumps. When the onion and artichokes are ready, add to the bowl with the spinach and stir to blend the vegetables. Add the dill, feta, 1/3 cup grated cheese, milk, pepper and nutmeg, if using. Mix until well blended, then taste for saltiness. Depending on the saltiness of the feta, add salt as needed. Beat two eggs and stir into the mixture until well blended.

Put 1 tablespoon olive oil in an 8 x 11.5-inch (2 quart) glass baking dish. Swirl the oil to cover the bottom and a bit of the sides, then put the dish in the preheated oven for 4 to 5 minutes. Heating the baking



dish will help create a good bottom crust and keep it from sticking. As soon as the dish comes out hot, cover the bottom completely with about 1 1/2 sheets of matzah, slightly overlapping. The matzah should sizzle as it hits the oil. Spoon half the spinach mixture onto the matzah and gently spread evenly. Cover with another layer of 1 1/2 sheets of matzah, then the remaining spinach mixture making sure it's even. Add the top layer of matzah, covering the filling edge to edge. Use the extra half piece of wet matzah to fill in any of the layers as needed.

Beat the remaining egg and tablespoon of oil together. Pour the mixture all over the top of the matzah. Some will drip down the sides and that's fine. Use a pastry brush to spread any pools of egg so the coating on the matzah is even. Bake for 40 minutes, then sprinkle the remaining 1/3 cup grated cheese evenly over the top. Continue baking another 10 to 12 minutes until the top is golden brown. Let stand 10 minutes before cutting. Serve warm.

Tu Bi'Shevat *Cont. from page 5*

next year, went above and beyond this year. He was the top tree seller, playing a large role in bringing the school's total trees sold from 229 to 340.

Yifat, JNF's national education department head came out to Talmud Torah to run programming for the students. She ran different stations and programs for different age groups and talked about Israel and JNF.

Something different Jay did this year was to bring a five foot tree poster, and the students had little leaves that were put on the poster as they sold and planted trees. "By the end (of that campaign), when I saw it last week while I was in there, it went from being a naked tree to full and lush." This provided an arts and crafts aspect for the kids and allowed them to see how hard they worked in a concrete and visual way.

Jay ended the interview by sharing his thanks, "I always want to just thank everyone who contributed, the tree leaders, the teachers, the everybody else who helped, because it takes a community to make this sort of thing happen." He also wanted to share a special thanks to Ari Sniderman, a teacher at Talmud Torah, and Jay's contact regard regarding his project. After reaching out to Ari about the success of this project he expressed how proud he is of what the students and this partnership accomplish every year. He also shared his thanks to JNF for providing his students with amazing leadership opportunities, and for this campaign that makes such a big difference in the world and spreads tikun olam.

Jay mentioned that this year Talmud Torah broke all previous records, planting more trees than they ever have in the past. So much so that they hit the minimum number of trees planted to get a plaque in

their honour put up in Israel. This speaks to the success of this longstanding partnership and what they have accomplished.

Matthew Levine is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



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PJ Library Get Together grant helps connect families

By Tammy Vineberg

Thanks to a PJ Library grant, Amanda Rose had a wonderful experience hosting a small Chanukah get together to introduce her non-Jewish friends to the holiday. The Get Together grant, provided by a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, supports families in organizing a Jewish-related event with up to \$100. Families can apply for the grant up to three times a year.

"The grant really enhanced the overall experience. I purchased sufganiyot (Israeli donuts) from Bliss Baked Goods, made homemade latkes, played dreidel, and did a beautiful menorah lighting. It was a learning experience for my friends and fun for us to host. It was a lovely evening," says Amanda.

This was her second time receiving a grant. Her first experience was organizing a Passover seder. With both positive experiences, she encouraged her brother to apply. Amanda says it's a straightforward process for the Get Together grant.

"You fill out what it is you want to do and once approved, you organize the event, take a few pictures, and send them back. Then the funds are sent by mail or electronically. It's as simple as that!" she explains.

Being able to host traditional Jewish events is very meaningful to Amanda, whose family were the only

Jews in the small town of New Brunswick where she is from. She moved to Edmonton about 10 years ago and met her husband, who is not Jewish. By chance, she met Jewish friends who introduced her to the local organizations and resources. The first friend she connected with was Davina Eisenstat.

"I was able to continue many of the traditions out here by joining their families for some of the holidays. It's been wonderful being in a community where there are a lot more Jewish people," says Amanda.

When she had her son in 2022, women from the Shalom Baby group reached out by leaving gifts at her doorstep and offering an abundance of support. They also introduced her to PJ Library, where she has since been receiving Jewish-related books monthly for her son and has attended several events to connect with other moms.

Amanda says the connections she has made and the community support she has received make it a lot easier to become involved in Jewish Edmonton. The United Jewish Appeal campaign funds the free books to over 200 children, including Amanda's son.

"It made me feel a lot more connected to the Jewish community, and just being more aware of the resources and support out there, and how close to home they really are. It's truly a great community," she adds.

To learn more about Shalom Baby and PJ Library,



Amanda Rose enjoys the PJ Library programs with her baby.

reach out to Jenn Magalnick at magalj@edjfed.org.

Tammy Vineberg is Associate Director, Marketing and Communications, Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

PJ Library enhances their family Haggadah

The Edmonton Jewish Community is very active with PJ Library connecting young families, making new friendships, celebrating holidays and building community.

Always seeking innovative new ways to engage Jewish families, especially at one of the most important holidays of the year, PJ Library brings the age old Passover story and their family-friendly Haggadah to life through a partnership with Novel Effect, the only app which combines children's books with powerful speech recognition. Families need only to download the Novel Effect app, and as they read along, seder guests will be treated to a synchronized soundscape to "In Every Generation: A PJ Library Family Haggadah," including authentic music, sound effects, and even pronunciation of Hebrew words that help kids stay engaged and excited

throughout the meal.

One of the leading sources for family-friendly Haggadahs across North America and beyond, PJ Library has shipped nearly 800,000 Haggadahs to more than 100,000 subscriber families over the past five years. And this year, they'll once again offer anyone celebrating Passover their beautifully-illustrated "In Every Generation: A PJ Library Family Haggadah." While subscribers have already received printed copies, it's also available to download for free in five languages, including English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and French. With the new Novel Effect partnership which utilizes technology to enhance traditional Jewish stories, PJ Library looks to keep ancient traditions alive and relevant for a new generation.

Also available this Passover holiday for the first time are large print, braille, and audio versions of the Haggadah prepared by the Jewish Braille Institute, to ensure accessibility for anyone who is visually impaired, blind or reading disabled. Aside from the traditional prayers and readings, this downloadable guide to the Passover seder offers up specially curated interactive videos and explanations that help make the holiday a fun, engaging and family-friendly experience.

PJ Library has also refreshed their Passover hub, packed full with everything from music, stories, crafts and recipes to games, history, and printables. Families can find a 15 Minute seder - a step-by-step video playlist where kids can learn (or refresh) some serious seder skills; the PJ Library Passover River Ride booklet which is the story of Passover in ten scenes; Printable Passover Recipe Cards; Passover-Themed Mad Libs; and much more. Families everywhere can visit pjlibrary.org to learn more.

A program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation that engages communities (including the Jewish Federation of Edmonton) to participate with funds and memberships, PJ Library sends engaging storybooks and activities that provide fun and easy ways for families to connect with Jewish life. PJ Library's high-quality books have become everyday favorites of kids from birth through age 12, whether the stories serve as first introductions to Jewish values and culture or inspire families to create new Jewish traditions at home. More than 680,000 books are delivered to families worldwide each month. For information about PJ Library in Edmonton contact magalj@edjfed.org.

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Lenka Lichtenberg wins JUNO for Holocaust-themed poetry album

By Irena Karshenbaum

After sitting through a very long awards ceremony, held in Edmonton on March 11, 2023, Czech-born, Canadian music artist, Lenka Lichtenberg, was shocked to hear that her work, "Thieves of Dreams: Songs of Theresienstadt's Secret Poetess," beat out the other four nominees to win a JUNO Award in the Global Music Album of the Year category.

The announcement was not what Lichtenberg was expecting as, she believes, a Holocaust-themed album has never won a JUNO and it is the first time that a Czech-language album had been nominated and won. She says that after a lifetime of recording, since the age of 10, and submitting, "Over and over again to the JUNOs and entering MASARYK five years ago, which I thought was my best album ever, I wasn't expecting to win. I thought I should be a happy person thanks to my beautiful life and I should stop dreaming of a JUNO. Of course, I submitted "Thieves of Dreams" and thought this has no chance, and when I was nominated, I was shocked."

The collection of 15 songs (plus one instrumental) - based on poems written between 1940 and 1945 by her grandmother, Anna Hana Friesová, just before and while she was incarcerated, together with her daughter, Jana Renée Friesová, at Terezin, or Theresienstadt - did not fall on deaf ears by the JUNO jury who recognized the work's universal beauty and poignant story.

Lichtenberg found her grandmother's poems in her mother's desk, in her Prague apartment, after her mother had passed away in 2016. She explains that the poems were most likely written on scraps of paper, which Anna Hana managed to keep hidden for two and a half years while at Terezin. After the mother and daughter were liberated, on May 8, 1945, and returned to their lives, Anna Hana copied her poems into booklets and never spoke about her experiences during the Holocaust, or her poetry, again. Anna Hana's daughter was different. Jana Renée wrote about her time in Terezin in her 1996 book, *Fortress of My Youth*.

The discovery of her grandmother's poems compelled Lichtenberg on a journey to, "Bring her voice back to life in the way I best knew how, through music."

Born in Prague, Lichtenberg studied at the Prague Music Conservatory before arriving in Canada in 1981 where she went on to obtain a Masters degree in Ethnomusicology from York University. She taught music and built a career as a musician, composer and producer with seven solo music albums to her credit spanning a broad spectrum from Czech, Moravian and Slovak folk songs, new age remixes, and songs sang in Yiddish, Arabic, Iraqi, English and French.

Her style has been described as "folk-art jazz," which also applies to "Thieves of Dreams" performed entirely in Czech.

This depth of experience allowed Lichtenberg to delve deeply into her grandmother's poetry, which, in spite of all the tragedy she was living through, was surprisingly full of hope and love. In *Miracles*, Anna Hana writes, "There never have been more magical moments/and evenings, and intimacy more brilliant/and nights in dreams more beautiful/and a heart has never dreamt so exquisitely/as in our togetherness."

Lichtenberg hopes that her grandmother was writing about her grandfather, Richard Fries, and in many poems she believes she was, although she is not entirely sure, as by the time the family was deported to Terezin, her grandparent's marriage was falling apart. She recounts that after her grandfather returned from being imprisoned by the Gestapo, he was, "a broken man." Surviving such horrors and set in contrast to his wife's "very energetic and very funny" nature, "Apparently, they argued so loudly you could hear them through the whole house."

Of course, Anna Hana was not a woman who had fallen out of love with her husband. In *It was a cold dusk, my love*, she writes about the heartbreak of parting from her beloved husband, "With our last tear the final darkness fell/and G-d couldn't see our faces;/the end fell into our eyes like a stone onto a mirror;/only the wind wanted to know what was going on." Fries was deported to Auschwitz where he was murdered in the gas chambers on October 10, 1944.

"There is some sadness, loss of faith, but they are not bitter," Lichtenberg describes the poetry. In fact, Anna Hana shows a remarkable capacity for forgiveness. In *I wanted to curse you, bitter land*, she writes about being betrayed as Jews by Czechoslovakia, "Damned be all places,/where I'd been happy!/Suddenly my heart softened,/as if broken; instead of cursing/I whispered a prayer: after all,/all the trees there were in full bloom."

It may have been her eternal hope that allowed Anna Hana to find companionship and love again by remarrying Bedrich Stein, another Holocaust survivor, after the War.

This desire for renewal also applied to Lichtenberg's own life as a Jew. The process of assimilation, to try to save themselves, had started with her great-grandmother, Františka Siegrova, whose second marriage was to a non-Jewish man, Jan Siegr, a judge. Both perished in the Holocaust. She at Auschwitz and he was shot for storing food to send to Terezin. Her grandfather, Richard Fries, who was from a mountainous part of Czechoslovakia, had experienced pogroms himself causing him to indicate "no religion" on his marriage document, even though both him and



Juno award winner Lenka Lichtenberg

his wife were fully Jewish. "They felt that would somehow keep them safe. Of course, that wasn't the case with the Nazis," Lichtenberg explains. When their only child, Jana Renée, was born in 1927 the parents wrote "none" under religion on her birth certificate. Jana Renée only learned she was Jewish at the age of 12, after the Nazis had occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, and her parents had to explain to her why she couldn't go to school.

Lichtenberg, like her mother, did not know she was Jewish, when, at the age of 10, as a well-known child singer in Czechoslovakia, she was invited to perform at the Prague Jewish Community Centre and her mother had to finally tell her about her roots.

As an adult, Lichtenberg wanted to defy the path of assimilation her family had been on for almost a century, "I decided I would make up for all that had been lost and live as Jewish as possible." She started to study Jewish music and through that met her future husband, Rubin Cohen. The couple have three children.

Lichtenberg performs regularly as a cantorial soloist and co-leads Shabbat services at Congregation Darchei Noam in Toronto. She is working on releasing volume two containing 12 new songs, from a total of 65 poems that her grandmother wrote, sang in English this time. Aiming for a release date of October of 2023, the collection does not yet have a name. A book containing all poems, both in English and Czech, is also in the works with editor, Alena Jirásek.

Irena Karshenbaum writes in Calgary. irenakarshenbaum.com

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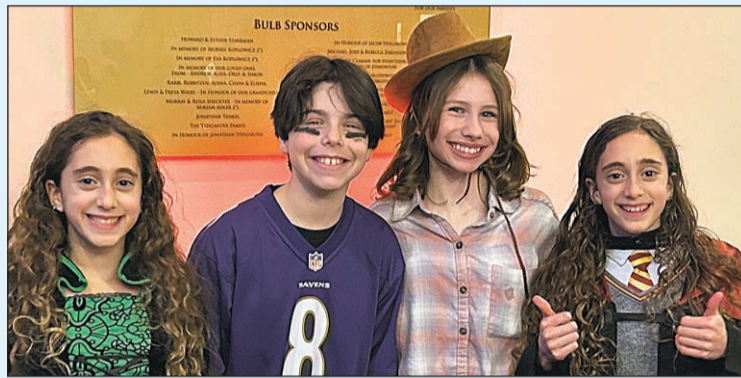
Happy Passover to the Jewish Community

Heather Sweet
MLA Edmonton Manning

Official Opposition Critic for Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Economic Development

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Beth Israel and Chabad of Edmonton celebrated Purim together!



Dynasties *Cont. from page 9*

amazing institution. But there are several more, including Jewish Festival in Kraków, a number of smaller museum, cultural events, etc. This disproportion between small and socially weak Jewish community on the one side and thriving presence of Jewish culture in public sphere, usually produced by non-Jews for non-Jews about the Jews, is certainly unhealthy. But there is no easy remedy to this situation.”

Professor Wodzinski is quite right that many prominent and dedicated organizations working to preserve the memory of Jewish Poland are not run by Jews at all: the Brama Grodzka NN Theatre, The Auschwitz Jewish Center, or the work of Bogdan Bialek who has devoted himself to preserving the history of Jewish Kielce and educating the local population of the city’s infamous post-war pogrom. This is a by-product of the dwindling numbers of Jews in the country, but also symptomatic of a national movement to engage

with history in an authentic and transparent manner.

Prominent scholars like Professor Wodzinski who are major players on the international stage of Jewish scholarship are safeguarding the knowledge that remains after the dynastic Hasidic communities have dispersed into the diaspora.

“Historical topics of Polish-Jewish past are often targeted by the regime in their whitewashing attempts to reshape the public consciousness of the Polish society,” explained Wodzinski. “This is directly affecting Jewish studies: government officials and state-owned media have, on a number of occasions, continued to express their dissatisfaction with academic research on sensitive issues such as Polish involvement in Holocaust-related crimes or Polish antisemitism. At times this has taken the form of incitement against institutions or individual scholars. The real question is how long this unfavorable political climate will continue to exist, and if it does, how it will reflect on longer-range trends in scholarly interests, choice of studies, distribution of human and financial resources,

and public debates.

“In the short run, pronounced polarization of Polish society and major public debates prompt quite a number of individuals to choose studies that are meant to provide them with the tools for pursuing identity quests, of combating antisemitism, and propagating a more diversified and liberal version of Polishness. In this sense, Jewish studies in Poland, as in several other East European countries, is the paradoxical beneficiary of right-wing populism and the rising wave of xenophobia. In the longer run, however, we cannot be certain this will remain the case.”

The crowd was transfixed despite the last-minute technical difficulties. The firing off of questions did not stop, and it was clear how engaged everyone at the ‘Viewing Party’ was. Professor Carpenter fielded questions from the Zoom attendees, and on-site audience members approached the microphone so Professor Wodzinski could see and hear then clearly. If the audience participation was any indication, it is clear that the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies should definitely look into re-engaging Professor Wodzinski.

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Pianist Mona Golabek brings Children of Willesden Lane to Calgary

By Maxine Fischbein

When long-time Holocaust education volunteer Paula Lexier saw a production of *The Children of Willesden Lane* some five years ago, a dream was born.

"I thought it was amazing. I was impressed with the storytelling and the artistry of the production, and I really had this passion for bringing it to Calgary," Lexier said.

Fast forward to last year when the KSW Holocaust Education Fund at the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary ran with Lexier's idea, forming a group of partners to bring Grammy-nominated concert pianist Mona Golabek to Calgary to perform her highly-acclaimed one-woman show during Shoah Week.

Local philanthropists Al Osten and Buddy Victor have generously underwritten Golabek's Calgary performances, including two abridged daytime performances for junior and senior high school students and 500 copies of Golabek's book, which will be distributed to youth between the ages of four and 18.

The Western Canadian premiere of Golabek's multimedia show will take place in the Bella Theatre at the Taylor Centre for Performing Arts on Wednesday, April 19, followed by a second performance the following evening.

Based on the eponymous book by Golabek, *The Children of Willesden Lane* tells the story of the Kindertransport, a humanitarian mission that saved the lives of 10,000 Jewish children by transporting them from Nazi-occupied Europe to England in the months leading up to World War II. In particular, the story focuses on the experiences of a budding young Viennese piano prodigy, Lisa Jura, Golabek's mother.

There was excitement in Mona Golabek's voice when she spoke to *AJNews* from her home in Los Angeles last week. With a packed performance schedule, the renowned pianist is a moving target at the best of times, spending 50 to 60 percent of her time on the road. On top of that, she was dealing with extensive damage to her home following the recent California floods.

Seemingly unflappable, Golabek did not let the disaster distract from her greatest passion - sharing her mother's incredibly moving story.

Golabek and her late sister Renee learned both piano and their family history from their mother. Like her, the Sisters Golabek became talented pianists, performing together as a duo and producing several recordings including the best-selling album, *Carnival of the Animals*, featuring the voices of Hollywood stars including Audrey Hepburn and Charlton Heston.

Golabek was enjoying a highly successful career as a concert pianist, garnering a Grammy Nomination (Best Chamber Music or Other Small Ensemble Performance for *Arensky: Piano Trio #2 in D Minor / Tchaikovsky: Piano Trio in A Minor*).

Yet, despite all her success, she had a nagging feeling. "I came off one of my tours and thought to myself, 'something is really missing in my life,'" Golabek said.

"When I was a little kid, my mom taught me the

piano and told me the story of her life. It entered my heart, but then the years passed. One day I was engaged to play the very piece that she had dreamed of making her debut in, the *Grieg Piano Concerto*," Golabek added. "A dream was born.... I wanted to share her story with others."

At first, Golabek wrote a book about her mother's experiences. "Someone fell in love with it and sent it to a major publishing house. The rest was history for me," she said. Some philanthropists then embraced the book, feeling it would be "a powerful message for young people."

They assisted Golabek in forming the *Hold on to your Music Foundation* which, in turn, shared the story with schools. It wasn't long before Golabek's efforts came to the attention of filmmaker Steven Spielberg's USC Shoah Foundation, which partnered with Hold on to your Music Foundation in The Willesden Project, bringing further educational resources to this unique form of Holocaust education.

The best was yet to come. Golabek was introduced to Hershey Felder. The pianist, actor and playwright - famous for his portrayals of composers - knew a good thing when he saw it.

"I'm going to take a chance on you. I'm going to produce you," he told Golabek, whose debut performance of *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* took place at LA's Geffen Playhouse Theatre about a dozen years ago. "He changed the course of my life," said Golabek of Felder. "He's toured me all over the world."

Sadly, Lisa Jura Golabek, who passed away in 1997, did not live to see how her daughter immortalized her story. "I hope wherever she is, in heaven, she's observing the millions of kids who have now read the book in multiple languages," said Golabek. "It's just been fabulous to see the reaction all over the world."

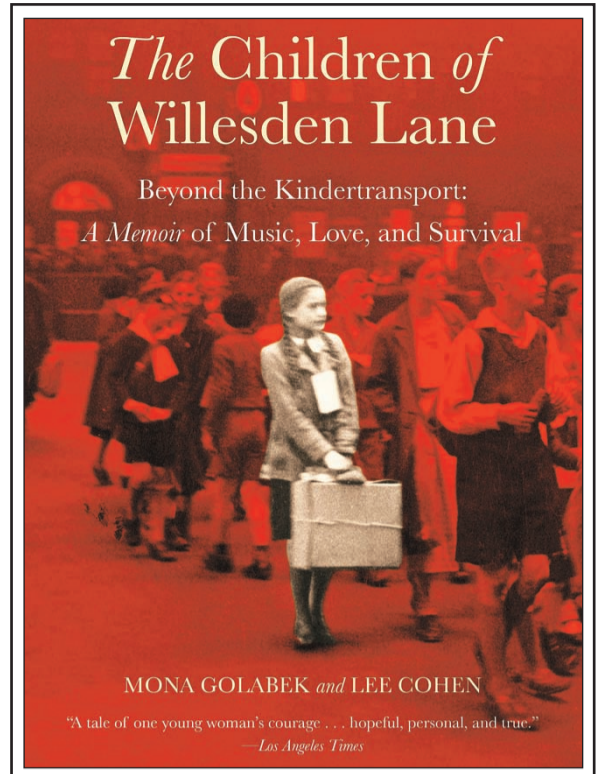
So impressed was Paula Lexier with Golabek's show, that she enthusiastically stepped up to help organize her Calgary performances, serving as liaison between the KSW Holocaust Education fund, the Taylor Centre for Performing Arts, Calgary Jewish Federation, and event sponsors Al Osten and Buddy Victor.

"What makes this story so different is that she shares the history of the Kindertransport in a way that I've never seen before," said Lexier. "Her weaving of classical piano pieces with her mother's tragedy and triumph resonates with the audience in a completely different way. That is what makes the experience so unique."

"The fact that the Taylor Centre for Performing Arts is offering this as part of their regular concert season reinforces the quality of the production," Lexier added.

Organizers are predicting brisk demand from Calgary music lovers and encourage members of the Jewish community to grab tickets while the best seats are still available.

In addition to the public performances on April 19 and 20, Golabek looks forward, as always, to interacting with local youth. Calgary Jewish Federation Holocaust and Human Rights Remembrance and Education co-chairs Marnie Bondar and Dahlia Libin promoted the youth performances with Calgary and area social studies and band



teachers who snapped up every available seat. "I am thrilled that 1,200 junior high and high school students will get to experience the abridged version of the production and have an opportunity to participate in a Q and A after the performances," Lexier said.

At the heart of *The Children of Willesden Lane* are the last words Lisa Jura ever heard from her mother as the 14-year-old boarded the Kindertransport train.

"My grandmother told my mother to hold on to her music, that it would be her best friend and that she would be with her every step of the way through her music," Golabek said.

"Even though the story is set 80 years ago it has more relevance today than ever before," said Golabek, because it touches upon the rescue of refugees as well as the fight against antisemitism and racism.

To date, an astonishing 2,000,000 young people have read Golabek's book, which has been translated into 12 languages, including Arabic.

Golabek told *AJNews* that she will soon take *The Children of Willesden Lane* to the United Arab Emirates. Her performances there will be her first in an Arab country. In January 2024 she will team up with the Israel Philharmonic in a Willesden Read event sponsored by philanthropist Charles Bronfman.

Golabek's performances and conversations have also had a profound effect closer to home.

"I've seen this story captivate young African Americans all across America. They really relate it to the stories they've heard from their legacies. I see Hispanic and Asian refugees cheer this story," says Golabek. "We are all in this together."

To purchase tickets for the April 19 and 20 Calgary performances of *The Children of Willesden Lane*, go to taylorcentre.ca/all-events. For more information about *The Children of Willesden Lane*, go to holdontoyourmusic.org/

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.



I hope you have a wonderful Passover celebration

Hon. Randy Boissonault,
Member of Parliament / Député
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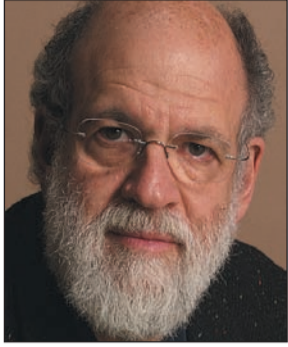
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Jeremy Kagan paints the Torah

By Shelley Werner



Jeremy Kagan

Renowned Filmmaker Jeremy Kagan will be the feature next month on the Season Finale of Art and Scroll Studio.

Professor Kagan is well versed in creating stories that move. As a filmmaker and professor, he excels in the art and craft of making narratives come alive. Whether the source material is a book or a script, he teases

out the essence of the emotional content and conveys it in a way that will move the viewer. He is an internationally recognized director/writer/producer of feature films and television and a well-known teacher. He has made many movies about Jewish subjects and worked with many Jewish actors, including "The Chosen."

One story that had never been before his lens is the Torah. He was drawn to the idea of creating a visual midrash, that is an artist work that would capture the essence of the Torah portion.

On April 19, 2023 at 7 pm MDT he will be the special guest on the season finale of Art and Scroll Studio zoom series on Judaica art.

"On my iPad, I've been drawing a visual response to this week's Torah portion and the Midrash about it. I do this every week and, over the last few years, I've made five sets of these drawings. The first set started on a whim. I had learned some odd stories about the first parsha Beresheit. One Midrash described the snake as a tall creature on two legs with a long neck and a lust for Eve. I had just learned an ancient Indian technique of painting on stretched silk and decided to illustrate this creation story."

Every week in synagogues around the world, a section of the Torah is read. The Torah is divided into 54 portions – called parshas. After each parsha, a selection from the prophets is also read, and these are called the Haftorah. Kagan's paintings and drawings are responses not only to the text of the Torah and Haftorah, but also to the rabbinic commentary in Talmud and Mishna and to apocrypha that have emerged over the centuries.

"I created the first set of paintings and pencil caricatures from the Haftorah over a six year period," explained Kagan. "I was at the time working as a

filmmaker. Over the last four years using the iPad I have done a second set of visual responses and I am presently working on the third set."

Rabbis write that there are multiple meanings for each word in Torah, starting with the literal, and moving toward the more subtle and esoteric. Hebrew, as a language itself, offers interweaving permutations as each letter has symbolic and even numerical values, all of which give rise to much interpretation of the text.

"In many of the paintings there are references to the Kabbalah and its imagery," noted Kagan. "Kabbalah is the spiritual path of Judaism. It provides meditative, mystical and practical guidance. It is a vast field of knowledge and experience. And in much of the imagery there are reflections of Kabbalistic concepts including a basic one that has a visual component called the "Etz Chaim" – the tree of life, and it divides into 10 energy-like centers called Sephirot that are part of this tree. Each of these has colors associated with it."

Making images from these inspired words is a challenge. At one time because of the second commandment, which forbids making idols, image making was frowned upon until the last two centuries when Jewish graphic artists began to express themselves. Kagan took on these projects as a personal assignment of doing a drawing for each week.

"It has been fun and a challenge and an opportunity to get closer to Torah," he explained. "I must admit these images are mostly surface and just touching the edges of the depth one could go into the teachings."

It is said that everyone should write a copy of the Torah during their life times. These are his versions. He hopes the images entertain, provoke and inspire the viewer to further examinations and insights and encourage people to explore more these remarkable writings.

"Each illustration draws me closer to my history, our history, my family, our ancestors and to reminding me of the ethics, imagination, and abiding courage of our sages and our people," said Kagan. "I have had the gift of being a Jew in America."

He comments that he has had the fortune of grandparents who risked immigration and the unknown, leaving Europe and probably escaping death in the Holocaust. His family tree reaches back to rabbis on all sides for hundreds of years. They were all orthodox and may not have approved of his drawings. "But I am in their debt for bringing me here where I have had the blessings, as is said in morning prayers, of kindness, mercy and grace to be a creative being. And I am grateful."

Professor Kagan teaches graduate courses at the School of Cinematic Arts at USC and has created the Change Making Media Lab which specializes in developing and creating Entertainment Education (EE) emphasizing the values of narrative dramas and



'Red Sea' by filmmaker/author Jeremy Kagan. He will be a guest on Art and Scroll Studio April 19 at 7 pm MDT. Visit artandscrollstudio@gmail.com for advance tickets

comedies to successfully motivate behavior change.

Some of his feature credits include the box-office hits "Heros" with Henry Winkler, the political thriller "The Big Fix" with Richard Dreyfuss, "The Chosen" from Chaim Potok's classic novel, and "The Journey of Natty Gann." Among his many television shows are Katherine: The Making of an American Revolutionary and HBO's "Conspiracy: The Trial of the Chicago 8." Among his other television films are "Descending Angel" about former Nazi criminals disguising themselves in the US and "Color of Justice" with Judd Hirsh about racism.

Jeremy Kagan will be the featured guest on April 19, 2023, 7 pm MDT on Art and Scroll Studio: A zoom series that celebrates the makers and creators of Judaic art.

To register for the virtual and free program please click here: <https://bit.ly/JeremyKaganTickets>

Shelley Werner is a designer and the host of Art and Scroll Studio. ([YouTube.com/@artandscrollstudio](https://www.youtube.com/@artandscrollstudio))





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A conversation about Palestinians in Israel

By David Sklar

Peter Driftmier was visibly nervous but composed, as he stepped up to the front of Temple B'nai Tikvah's library on the evening of Monday, February 27th. He was there to present a talk on his month working with Israeli and Palestinian NGOs in the occupied territories.

"What do you mean by occupied?" was the first question lobbed at Driftmier before he could even get two sentences out of his mouth.

He was there to address his experiences working with the Wi'am Centre in Bethlehem, All That's Left (an Israeli leftist-NGO) in Masafer Yatta, Rabbis for Human Rights, Tent of Nations, and the Centre for Jewish non-violence to name a few.

By simply saying the words, "Occupied territories," Driftmier knew he was opening a can of worms.

Anytime the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is discussed or even attempted to be brought up within the Jewish community, accusations of disloyalty, self-hatred or simple naivety can be tossed around. According to Driftmier, the CJF (Calgary Jewish Federation) didn't initially want to publicize his event for fear of blowback, but they eventually agreed to do so.

As Driftmier took sip after sip of water between slideshows of interviews and videos he filmed, he discussed some of the logistics behind IDF military training zones in the West Bank, as well as growing settler violence. But, as Driftmier will tell you himself, he is neither a conflict nor political expert and rather wanted to focus on the Israeli and Palestinian human rights workers, who have been putting their careers and lives on the line, defending their beliefs. And it was in these recounted personal moments, that the audience was able to connect with the lecture.

For Driftmier, his connection to Israel began on Birthright, where many young Jews first get their first taste of the Land of Milk and Honey, but according to him, "You only get one side of the story. If you are active in Jewish life you can't not talk about Israel. And as someone who is committed to human rights, you also can't ignore the occupation."

Within his first 24 hours of landing in the Middle East and heading towards Bethlehem, he already felt the stark difference between how Israelis and Palestinians live. "What was once a suburb of Jerusalem now has a wall and a checkpoint that you have to go through."

"And whose fault is that?" was an audience member's retort. "The Palestinian terrorists. They brought this on themselves. Israel is just defending itself."

Driftmier, while conceding that some Palestinians want to harm Israelis and Jews, noted our general perception of them is often caricatured and one-dimensional. "I was taught to be scared of Palestinians, to avoid them. But when you're able to connect with people on the ground, discuss their day-to-day lives, their fears, frustrations, hopes and joys, the reality is so much more nuanced."

"Do you know that Palestinians are the biggest recipients of UN funding? Where does that money go?" was an enquiry from another audience member.

Perhaps drifting further away from the personal stories of the lecture, Driftmier stated, "People shouldn't be mass evicted from their homes, have their towns bulldozed, lack access to water and electricity, constantly be afraid of midnight raids or watch settlers attack rabbis in the middle of the day."

"But if their homes are constantly being demolished, why don't they just go somewhere else?" was yet another question raised.

Driftmier wanted to stress the power imbalance that exists between those that have full rights and others that are denied basic human rights. "I close my presentation with a tractate from the Talmud that states, *Anyone who is able to protest against the wrongdoing of their house's people and does not - they are responsible for the wrongdoings of their house's people.* I don't think the Jewish community is ready to hear that."

"Well, I don't agree with that," was heard from the back.

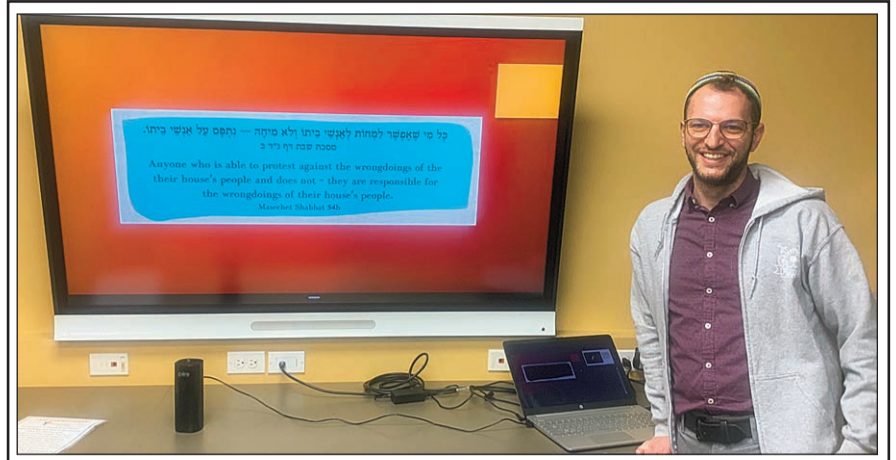
The tractate or my opinion? Peter responded.

"Both!"

Had Driftmier crossed a line?

Driftmier later told me that he felt some people weren't there to listen and engage. "It was more of a staging opportunity for people to air their points. But that's ok. People do that at all kinds of Q and A's."

What could someone from the Jewish community,



Peter Driftmier gave an engaging presentation about his work with Israeli and Palestinian NGO's.

who feels very attached to Israel, but is concerned with government policies, do, I wondered? How can they fight for justice without crossing the line and being accused of being anti-Zionist?

"This line is used by the right to prevent people from taking action. Look for the Jewish, Israeli and Palestinian organizations that are doing human rights work like Rabbis for Human Rights. Learn from them, and look at the different ways you can support it, whether it's financial, volunteering, or applying political pressure. Don't worry about the line. It's imaginary. It's used to prevent you from taking action and ensure that their agenda ends up winning."

It wasn't lost on Driftmier that the day before his talk, settlers rampaged through the West Bank town of Hawara in which the Israeli Central Command chief Maj. Gen. Yehuda Fuchs described as a "pogrom." Driftmier said that Israelis in the thousands took to the street to protest their government, but there was near silence from the Diaspora Jewish community.

Jennifer Eiserman, who introduced Driftmier at the start of the event, had many more questions than answers. "Why is it that calling yourself pro-Israel means that you can't support Palestinian rights or being pro-Palestinian means you are automatically anti-Israel? Why is it always so black and white? I thought Peter provided a glimpse of hope into what often seems like an intractable situation."

Perhaps this night's lecture stressed how fraught it still is within the Jewish community to even attempt to have nuanced conversation taking both sides into account, but that it is important to do, nonetheless.

David Sklar is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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Happy Passover from Steve, Karen, Adam, Anika, and Levi Zepp



Best wishes from the HeAtBaGs

Chag sameach to family and friends from Jen Kovacs and family



This month's update from Edmonton Talmud Torah School



The Purim Carnival at Talmud Torah School is definitely one of the highlights of the year. Everyone participated and everyone had a fabulous time. There were sports, games, a haunted house and plenty of activities. The day culminated with a wonderful costume parade!

CMDA Gala: A spectacular night of food and fun

By Shael Gelfand

"It's going to be the Gala of the year and not to be missed." That's the word from Sharon Fraiman, Western Region Director for CMDA, describing the 2023 Calgary Red Carpet Gala Celebration on Sunday, May 28 at the newly renovated Carriage House Inn in SW Calgary.

Fraiman's enthusiasm is understandable. Many months of work and planning are coming to fruition. The Carriage House Inn is famous for its excellence in Kosher catering and this year's Gala menu will be something extra special. "And the food is just the beginning," says Fraiman.

Calgary singer, vocalist and entertainer Shari Chaskin will emcee the Gala and there's a tremendous line-up of speakers, performers, and special attractions. The Keynote speaker will be Tomer Gonen,

the Israeli lawyer and MDA volunteer who trains MDA's naval unit sailors on patrol in the Galilee. He'll bring stories of his team's around the clock efforts saving lives on the high seas. Rabbi Leonard Cohen from Kehilat Shalom Calgary will also be a guest speaker with a message of hope and inspiration.

Gala guests will enjoy fabulous entertainment from versatile Calgary Violinist Steven Klevisky and for some fun rock and roll nostalgia, Elvis Presley Impersonator Adam Fitzpatrick will hit the stage.

This year's Gala also features the Masks International Show, an international entertainment company that transforms art through innovative production. It's a visual sensation of stunning images and performances. And for some entertainment thrills, Calgary's own Bravo Circus Studio and Entertainment, founded by aerialist and hula-hoop performer Maria Chekmareva, will feature some world-class circus stars.

"The 2023 Gala will honour two outstanding Calgarians and CMDA supporters. Philanthropists Lenny Shapiro and Fanny Wedro will be presented with special Kol Hakavod Awards for their many years of support in helping MDA save lives. "It will be the most important part of the evening," says Fraiman, "and our opportunity to acknowledge two exceptional people and community leaders."

Tickets for the sure to be sold-out event are now available at \$125. Sponsorship packages provide the opportunity to support CMDA with lifesaving tools including Mobile Intensive Care Units, Advanced Life and Basic Life support equipment, and Automated Defibrillators for paramedics and EMTs.

"This year's Gala is going to be our best ever," says Fraiman. "But in the end it's really about saving lives and supporting the people of Israel," says Fraiman.

For tickets and sponsorship opportunities, contact Sharon at sfraiman@cmdai.org or call 587-435-5808.

Happy Passover

Sharon Fraiman

Western Region Director
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Jared Shore: Discussing the situation in Israel

By Jared Shore

Jews throughout Canada, and certainly worldwide, are watching the current political situation in Israel and the resulting polarization it is causing, with tremendous concern and consternation.

The now regular mass protests on the streets of Tel Aviv, and throughout the country are indicators of deep division in Israeli society, and concern over proposed judicial reforms and the complexion of the country's future. The demonstrations are also a sign of Israel's vibrant democracy, and we must not lose sight of that.

As with Canada and the United States, the voices and the will of the people are critical to the health of any true democracy. It is with our eyes keenly focused on Israel that we, as Jewish communities in the diaspora, can encourage Israelis, as neighbours, as friends, as family, as politicians, to find common ground, to find compromise, and to find something that represents a bright future for all Israelis; Sephardic and Ashkenazi, religious and secular, Arab and Jew.

Over the past two weeks, I had the honour of serving as Calgary's representative on the CIJA Board of Directors mission to the United Arab Emirates and Israel. The two weeks were filled with face-to-face discussions with diplomats, politicians, think-tanks and ordinary citizens, to gather information about the state of affairs throughout the region, and to dig incredibly deeply into some of the enormous political challenges that the country is currently facing.

In speaking both with members of the ruling coalition (some intimately involved in the judicial reforms), as well as members of the opposition, many of the concerns that members of our community have raised directly with Federation and with CIJA were shared firmly and directly. At the same

time, we heard quite explicitly, even notably by members of opposition parties, that the most effective role the diaspora Jews can play in this, is that of a family member. A family member has difficult conversations yet doesn't have them publicly, and certainly not without extreme caution.

We must also remember that, despite our own significant cares and concerns about Israel, our personal views as individuals may differ from other members of the community, who care equally about Israel, and are as invested in the country's future as we are.

This is not the first time the country has been divided and, G-d willing, not the last. Likewise, representing a Jewish community here in Calgary with a diversity of opinions, means that our role as a representative of the Jewish community as a whole, needs to be one of caution when weighing in on the politics of Israel. Many will say that the proposed judicial reforms will qualitatively change what the country stands for. While that may be true, our role is to support a nation that reflects our Jewish values. We hope and urge the government and the coalition to work together to find common ground, to marginalize voices that stoke division and hate. Supporting Israel transcends supporting any particular government at any time, but rather

Oilers: Jewish Heritage Night



Members of the community came out to support the Edmonton Oilers on a special night celebrating Jewish Heritage.

supporting the country and the very best that it can be, irrespective of politics.

I look forward to sharing my experiences in learning about the Abraham Accords, the judicial reform, ongoing challenges with East Jerusalem and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Stay tuned to the Jewish Calgary community calendar for more information about an upcoming program about this past CIJA Board mission, as well as several virtual events with content experts from CIJA and The Jewish Agency for Israel.

Jared Shore is a current member of CIJA's Board of Directors and former President of Calgary Jewish Federation.

Matzah pjs *Cont. from page 11*

She had gotten her children new pajamas to liven up another at-home seder, their second during the pandemic. "It goes late anyway," she reasoned about the festive meal, which traditionally cannot begin until after sunset.

When she offered the two options — one yellow and the other blue — her then-2-year-old son declared he would have the "matzah pajamas."

She decided to turn his idea into reality, creating a design that could be printed on fabric, ordering samples and then producing them in a large quantity

in China. Then she set to work promoting the product, mailing free sets to influencers and reaching out to online Judaica stores, many of which were initially hesitant to purchase inventory they weren't sure would sell. (Buechler also gave a set of matzah pajamas away through Kveller, the Jewish parenting site that, like JTA, is part of 70 Faces Media.) Then the adults began to demand pajamas for themselves, which were manufactured quickly.

How does fast fashion square with the meaning of the holiday?

"Passover has always been about making things in haste," Buechler said. "And when you think about the

matzah itself, the entire reason we have matzah is because we left Mitzrayim, we left Egypt, in a hurry."

By last year, Buechler says she has sold around 1,800 sets of the matzah pajamas. Etsy lists them as a "bestseller" item, and ModernTribe, which also sells Buechler's Midrash Manicure products, has sold over 100 of the children's matzah pajamas since adding them to their inventory. They were the second-highest selling Passover item last year, behind coasters featuring the 10 Plagues.

"We've had a hard few years," Kritzer said. "I think people just want to have a little fun too."

Yom HaZikaron 2023

Please join us for the annual Yom HaZikaron ceremony, which will commemorate Israel's fallen soldiers and victims of terror through personal stories, music, and songs.

Monday, April 24

The gathering starts at 7:30 p.m.
The ceremony begins with the siren at 8 p.m.

Beth Shalom Synagogue
11916 Jasper Avenue

We hope you take part in this meaningful commemoration with us.

Best wishes to the Jewish community for a joyful Passover celebration. May your seders be filled with all the beautiful traditions of the holiday, from

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Menachem Kaiser on his quest to reclaim a family home

By Maxine Fischbein

When Canadian-born author Menachem Kaiser spoke at the Calgary Public Library on March 14, it was a rare literary treat.

His book *Plunder: A Memoir of Family Property and Nazi Treasure* was a New York Times Critics Top Non-fiction Book in 2021 and earned the Canadian Jewish Literary Award (biography) in 2021 and the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature in 2022.

Kaiser's genre of choice is ordinarily fiction, and he did not initially intend to write about his attempt to reclaim an apartment building in Sosnowiec, Poland owned by his grandfather's family prior to World War II. Good thing he did.

Kaiser's adventures in Poland (which have outlived the publication of *Plunder*) did not yield much information about his grandfather; but the "conversation" he engaged in with his Zaidy, Maier Menachem - for whom he is named - led to a page-turner that is suspenseful, introspective, quirky, and jaw-dropping. It is a tale of lost property, found relatives, star-crossed lovers and a bizarre cast of real-life characters, including an aging Polish lawyer dubbed "The Killer" and treasure hunters more focused on Nazi plunder purportedly hidden in the tunnels of Silesia than the tragic fates of Jewish slave labourers worked to death while building the massive subterranean structures.

Kaiser spoke at the third program of an annual Holocaust education series organized by the Holocaust and Human Rights department of Calgary Jewish Federation in partnership with the Calgary Public Library and the Edmonton Public Library. The event attracted an audience of 300, with nearly half attending in person and the balance via Zoom.

The series is generously supported by the Isadore and Florence Burstyn Memorial Fund, KSW Holocaust Education Fund, Viewpoint Foundation and donors to the Holocaust and Human Rights Fund at the Calgary Public Library Foundation.

Marnie Bondar and Dahlia Libin - co-chairs of the Holocaust and Human Rights Remembrance and Education department at the Calgary Jewish Federation - engaged Kaiser in a wide-ranging discussion about his reclamation efforts and his memoir.

"The origin story is kind of actually an anti-origin story," Kaiser said. "I was adamantly opposed to writing a book about anything to do with Eastern Europe or particularly with Poland. My grandparents are both Polish Holocaust survivors.... I didn't identify as Polish. And I didn't really have much of a curiosity, to be totally honest, about their story."

While living in Lithuania on a Fulbright Fellowship, Kaiser met a Brooklynite who was the road manager for a German band, The Scorpions, and the son of the Chief Rabbi of Galicia. The family invited Kaiser to Poland for Rosh Hashanah.

Kaiser's father prodded him to take an interest in previous efforts by his own father to reclaim the building that had belonged to his family in Sosnowiec, Poland prior to the Holocaust. Kaiser's grandfather had passed away in 1977, some eight years before he was born. Referring to his father as "a wonderful man and a sub-par storyteller," Kaiser said he "didn't really have a sense of who [my grandfather] really was."

"There was a kinship but I didn't really have a handle on it," Kaiser said. "There were some documents about applications for medical assistance from the German government after the war and a few hints about which camps he was in, but for all intents and purposes we didn't know anything."

In 2015, when Kaiser's father faxed him information

about the building in Sosnowiec, Kaiser began to relate to his grandfather's prior attempts to recover the property. "You know, failure is an interesting thing to project onto someone because you can...relate to frustration, probably easier than triumph."

It became a "perch for my imagination" and "a way for me and my grandfather to start a conversation," Kaiser said.

He engaged legal counsel on the advice of a local Chasid who recommended The Killer. "Sounds like the kind of lawyer you want," deadpanned Kaiser who launched into hilarious descriptions of the woman he figured was "...somewhere between 80 and 120 years old."

When Kaiser walked through the doors, one of two daughters who worked in their mother's practice was absorbed in a video about wrestling pandas. The entire office was festooned with images of cats. "I'm in... let's go," was Kaiser's reaction.

He imagined his application to the courts would be swift and successful. He was wrong. A year after initiating the process, Kaiser had to go to court to prove that his great-grandfather and great-grandmother - both murdered during the Holocaust - were dead. He possessed no proof, so the court came back with "we're not sure."

When Kaiser had first visited the building where he believed his grandfather had grown up, it was more a matter of "etiquette" than a "memory mission," he said. He recalled a "semi-forced emotional moment" when he thought, "Wow, this is where my grandfather grew up."

"It's really interesting when you are in those spaces," said Kaiser, who wondered whether the experience was "a real moment" versus an expectation that he was "supposed to have a moment."

Friends called him out on what they viewed as an act of "appropriation." Initially taken aback by that point of view, Kaiser came to appreciate that he was "missing a narrative... The fact is that people lived in that building and I wasn't taking them into account."

Kaiser took it upon himself to go back to the building and meet the people living there. "To me it would be an act of intense moral cowardice to not," he added.

"Those initial meetings were so intense and wild and rich," said Kaiser, who formed relationships with tenants and learned the unique history of the building when, under communist rule, it became a residence for people connected with the local theatre.

Ironically, after all that, Kaiser learned he had been in the wrong building. It had been built after the war, necessitating address changes along the block. It turned out that another building had belonged to the Kajzers; it was an investment property in which Kaiser's grandfather had never lived.

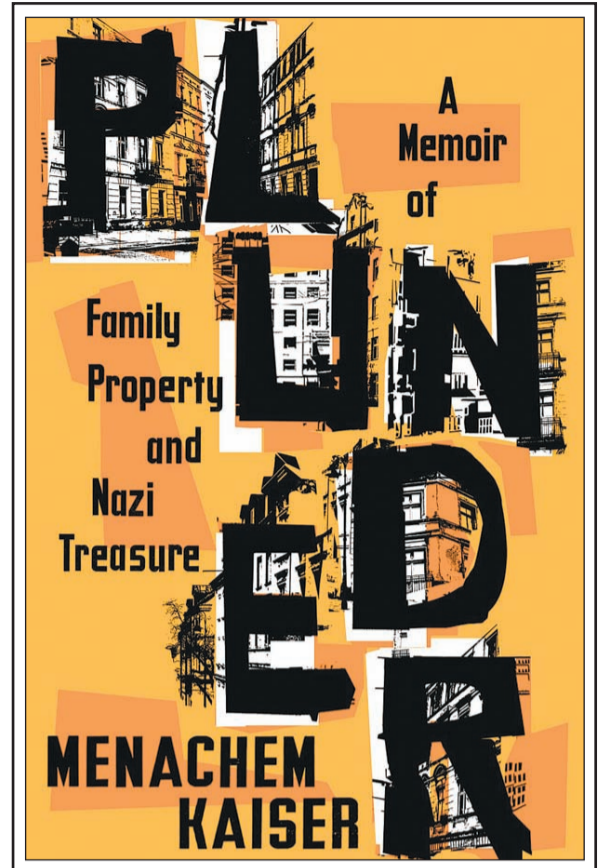
"All my interactions with Poles were wonderful," Kaiser said. "By and large I was met with overwhelming curiosity, support, interest of people who went over and beyond to help me.... I had a really good time in Poland."

Kaiser said there was a political shift in 2015 when a nationalist and revisionist government came to power, "initiating an assault on the judiciary." It was a "really scary moment" for friends who had grown up in a free Poland, Kaiser said.

Then testifying about his grandfather's property, Kaiser said he could not assume that the judge hearing his case was acting independently.

Meanwhile, a bizarre news story was unfolding that eventually intersected with his. In 2015, two treasure hunters captured worldwide attention. Media including the *New York Times* and *CNN* reported claims that they had discovered an alleged "Golden Train" containing gold looted by the Nazis and subsequently buried in Silesia.

"For whatever reason, most of the world believed it,"



Kaiser said.

At the time, he was working on a novel set in Poland and thought it would make "a great set piece." He wrote to Joanna Lamparska, a local historian and journalist well connected with the treasure hunting community. She introduced Kaiser to some of the hunters and to Project Riese, seven underground tunnels of epic scale.

"Curiously, there is virtually no documentation as to what the Nazis intended to do with these tunnels," Kaiser said, adding that this stoked a culture of mystery and conspiracy.

A friend and fellow writer who was along for the ride asked one of the treasure hunters how the deaths of the thousands of Jews that dug those tunnels fit into his narrative. The treasure hunter, Andrzej, began to answer in Polish, which Kaiser does not speak. During the exchange, Kaiser became aware that his own surname was repeated a number of times.

"He didn't know my last name, so he wasn't speaking about me.... I stopped him and asked what he was saying," Kaiser said. Andrzej was speaking about Abraham Kajzer, whom he called "One of the greatest people to come out of the war, Jew or Pole."

"That is not a sentiment you hear often from a rural Pole," Kaiser noted.

One of the slave labourers forced to build the tunnels, Kajzer daringly documented his experiences and observations on scraps of paper he stole from cement bags. He hid the notes under the latrines of nearby labour camps, later writing a book that has become a bible for the treasure hunters, Kaiser said.

"After the war, he was saved by a German woman who hid him. He borrowed a bicycle from her and rode from camp to camp and collected these scraps of cement packaging, and he later turned it into a book," said Kaiser.

Using Google Translate, Kaiser cross-referenced biographical information in the book with research done by The Killer and discovered that Abraham Kajzer was his grandfather's first cousin. "All of a sudden the family went from extinct to non-extinct," Kaiser said.

"I became a major celebrity among the treasure hunter community," Kaiser quipped, adding that they quickly mythologized the relationship, identifying him - despite his own objections - as Abraham Kajzer's grandson.

In *Plunder*, Kaiser's narrative alternates between his quest to reclaim the apartment building and his "descent, pun fully intended, into the tunnels."

The Nazis were very secretive about the tunnels, noted Kaiser, who spoke of the resulting conspiracy theories, including Nazi research in anti-gravity technology and time travel; commun-ing with ancient occult civilizations; and efforts to establish bases on the moon and Antarctica. Kaiser's personal

Continued on page 31

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Fantasy novels win prestigious Jewish books for kids prize

By Penny Schwartz

JTA — An illustrated book about an inspiring Holocaust survivor and two works of fantasy featuring dybbuks and Jewish demons have won this year's top prizes in Jewish children's literature.

The Sydney Taylor Book Awards are awarded annually to outstanding works of Jewish literature for children, as part of the American Library Association's youth media awards and in conjunction with the Association of Jewish Libraries.

This year, the top winner in the picture book category was "The Tower of Life: How Yaffa Eliach Rebuilt Her Town in Stories and Photographs" by Chana Stiefel, illustrated by Susan Gal. "Aviva vs. the Dybbuk" by Mari Lowe won in the middle-grade level. And "When the Angels Left the Old Country," the debut novel by Sacha Lamb, garnered the young adult award.

Named in memory of Sydney Taylor, the author of the "All-of-a-Kind-Family" series that is being made into a TV show, the prestigious award "recognizes books that exemplify high literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience," according to the award committee announcement.

As chair of the Sydney Taylor award committee for the past two years, Martha Simpson sees a growing diversity in Jewish children's books. This year, they considered an array of new titles that portray global Jewish life, others that feature neurodiverse characters and LGBTQ kids and more set in Orthodox communities, she wrote in an email.

"There are many different ways to live a Jewish life," Simpson said. "It's wonderful that these stories are finally being written and published so that readers can see themselves and also learn about other experiences."

The top picture book tells the story of Yaffa Eliach, who survived the Holocaust in hiding with her family after being expelled from their hometown of Eishyshok, a Polish shtetl (now in Lithuania) where

she had helped in her grandmother's bustling photography studio taking portraits of the Jewish villagers.

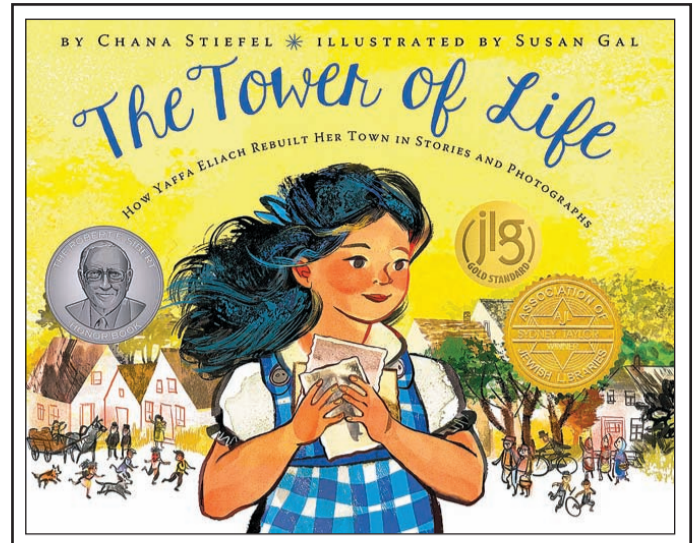
After immigrating to the US and becoming a historian, Eliach set about a globetrotting journey to thousands of photographs and remembrances from Eishyshok's Jewish families. Her ambitious project is now a centerpiece of the core exhibit at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. She died in 2016.

Gal, a previous Sydney Taylor winner and past recipient of the National Jewish Book Award, brings Eliach's story to life through her richly colored illustrations interspersed with photographs of Eliach.

Lowe's "Aviva vs. the Dybbuk" is a suspenseful coming-of-age novel about an introspective 11-year-old girl that opens a window into daily life in a tight-knit Orthodox Jewish community in New York. After the traumatic accidental death of her father, Aviva and her increasingly reclusive mother move into a small apartment above the old mikveh, the ritual bathing house where Aviva's mother becomes the caretaker. A supernatural, troublemaking dybbuk, whom only Aviva can see, becomes Aviva's confidant. The tale of resilience deals with grief, memory, the ups and downs of teen friendship, acts of antisemitic violence and the healing power of love and community.

A demon named Little Ash and an angel named Uriel are the compelling otherworldly characters at centre stage of "When the Angels Left the Old Country," Lamb's lyrically penned historical fantasy. As the page-turning drama unfolds, the pair of unlikely, centuries-old Talmud study partners, who take on human-like form, set out from their small Pale of Settlement shtetl and head to New York City on a quest to find the village baker's missing daughter.

In their journey, they confront the perils faced by Jewish immigrants — a deceitful rabbi, probing Ellis Island officials, exploitative sweatshop bosses and



the pushes and pulls of Jewish assimilation. Lamb, a 2018 Lambda Literary Fellow in young adult fiction, paints a richly textured tale of pathos and wit, filled with Jewish culture that explores gender identity and the bonds of friendship.

"Angels" took home two other ALA prizes, including the Stonewall book award for LGBTQ works for young readers.

In addition to the top winners, the Sydney Taylor committee named nine books as silver medalists and nine notable titles of Jewish content. Winners will be honored in June at the AJL's digital conference.

Other books with Jewish characters and themes also garnered several ALA awards including, "The Life and Crimes of Hoodie Rosen," by Isaac Blum, which won the William C. Morris young adult debut award; and "Just a Girl: A True Story of World War II" by Lia Levi, illustrated by Jeff Mason, which won the Batchelder prize, adapted for young readers, and translated from its original in Italian.

Jewish children's books recently recognized by the Jewish Book Council's National Jewish book awards were "The Very Best Sukkah: A Story from Uganda" by Shoshana Nambi, illustrated by Moran Yogev, and the middle-grade novel "The Prince of Steel Pier" by Stacy Nockowitz.

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The H.A. and I.R. Friedman Scholarship

Managed by Edmonton Talmud Torah

The H.A. and I.R. Friedman Scholarship Fund was created in 1984 to assist youth from Edmonton to go to Israel. If you are between the ages of 15 and 25 years, live in or within 25 kilometers of Edmonton, and are interested in travelling to Israel to learn the Hebrew language and participate in one of the programs created by The American Zionist Youth Foundation or The Youth and Hechalutz Department of Israel, you are eligible for this scholarship.

Applications can be made anytime throughout the year.


Examples of supported organizations are:

- March of the Living
- Masa Programs (ie. Internship, Gap Year, Teen Journey, Volunteer in Israel, Study in Israel, etc.)
- Young Judea
- USY (USCJ's Youth Movement)
- Friends of Israel Scouts
- BBYO
- B'nei Akiva
- Habonim Dror North America

Scholarships are granted on the merits of applicants and the program they would like to participate in, and financial need WILL NOT be a criterion of merit. The selection committee shall interview all applicants which it considers are possible recipients of a scholarship.


The Chair of the Scholarship is Barry Slawsky.
If you have questions or want an application contact Barry at 780-887-3432 or email: cristineslawsky@gmail.com

HAPPY PASSOVER


 Happy Passover to the entire community from Tamara Aronov and Family


חג פסח חנה
from Darlene & Gordon Bushewsky and family

ברכות לחג הפסח
from Zoya and Dally Belostotsky

 Happy Passover to the entire community from Gary, Mira, Noah, Nathan, and Leah Campbell


Happy Passover to the entire community from The Bass-Haines Family

 **Chag Sameach - Happy Passover**
from Judi Card

Happy Passover to the entire community from Benji, Rachel, Matan, and Aliza Edelman 

חג פסח שנה
Happy Passover from Francie Ratner & Mark Dolgoy

Wishing family & friends a Passover filled with joy and love from Arlein Hoffman Chetner & family


 Wishing family & friends all the best this Passover from Ben, Brittany, Bria, and Blake Feldman

חג פסח שנה
from Shulamit Gil & Keith Dannacker


ברכות לחג הפסח
Happy Passover from Mitchell, Kelly, Talia, and Charlotte Goldford


Wishing family & friends all the best this Passover from Anita Sky & Howard Davidow

חג פסח חנה
from Leeor, Ohad, Noa, Shai and Daniella Eliyahu


 Happy Passover from Joyce & Sam Galante


חג פסח שמח
from The Goldsand Family

 Wishing family & friends all the best this Passover from Larry Fliegel

 Happy Passover to the entire community from Samuel Koplowitz

Chag Sameach - Happy Passover from Marilyn, Murray and Seth Glick


 Chag Sameach - Happy Passover from Greg, Nomi and Maya


 Wishing family & friends a happy, healthy Passover from Mark & Sharon Katzeff and family


Wishing family & friends all the best this Passover from Cara, Farrell, Grace & Wyatt Greenspan


Wishing the entire community a Happy, Healthy Passover
Chag Sameach from Gabe & Senia Goldberg and family

Best wishes for a Pesach filled with good health, peace and happiness from Lena & Victor Linetsky and family

 Wishing family & friends a happy, healthy Passover from Kyle, Jess, and Oliver Hogan-Huberman

 Happy Passover from Joel Helm and the Helm Family

 Chag Sameach to everyone! from Valda Levin


Happy Passover from Mindy Jacobs & Eoin Kenny 


Happy Passover to the entire community from Michael, Olga, Aaron, and Joshua Muradov

Happy Passover to the entire community from Stan & Rosemary Kitay

Wishing family & friends all the best this Passover from the Lerner Families 

Happy Passover
from Gabriel, Megan, Daniella, Eliana, and Nes Mandel
פסח שמח לכולם

 Wishing family & friends a joyful Passover from Regan, Dmitriy, Benji, Jacob and Tamara Lipes



Happy Passover
from
Sherry & Alfred Muscat



Chag Sameach
Happy Passover
from Barbara Mandel


חג פסח שמח
from Robin & Dave Marcus




Happy Passover
from
Susan & Bruce Mintz

Chag Sameach - Happy Passover
from Gary & Shari McNeil
and family


Wishing everyone a Passover
filled with love and good health!
from
Michele & Josh Miller
and family

Chag Sameach - Happy Passover
from
Dylan, Leah,
Carter, Ayla and Arielle Muscat




Wishing everyone
a Chag Pesach Sameach
from Francie & Jon Nobleman
and family




Happy Passover
from
The Parker Family

Chag Pesach Sameach
from The Ovics Family:
Yossi & Vicky. Anat, Brian,
Noah, Eva & Maya.
Ori, Max and Zac.
פסח שמח לכולם




Wishing family & friends
all the best this Passover
from
Colin, Jen, Asher, and Nooni Muscat



Wishing family & friends
a happy, healthy Passover
from Renee & Errol Raff




Chag Sameach
Happy Passover
from The Phillets



Happy Passover
from
Carol & Ron Ritch


חג פסח שמח
from Mona & Dan Rosenberg
and family




Chag Sameach to everyone!
from
Colleen & Mike Paull

חג פסח שמח
from
Aubrey & Draytin Rogerville

Wishing family & friends
a Passover filled with
joy and love
from
Tulane Rollingher





Happy Passover to the entire community
from Sarah, Josh
and Jonah Raizman




Happy Passover to
the entire community
from
The Steiner Family

Wishing family & friends
a joyful Passover
from The Rebohs


Happy Passover
from Ron Sorokin, Lisa Redmond,
Jaime and Jack



Happy Passover
from
Boris & Teresa Sukalsky


Best wishes for a Pesach filled with
good health, peace and happiness
from
Howard & Esther Starkman
Daniel & Marina Starkman

חג פסח שמח
from Riva &
Howard Shein
and family

Wishing the community
a Happy Passover
from Gaylene Soifer, Jeff Rubin
and the entire family!

Wishing family & friends
a happy, healthy Passover
from
Beverly & Stephen Shafran



Wishing family & friends
a Passover filled with joy and love
from Rebecca
&
Shane Asbell
and family



Wishing everyone a healthy
and happy Passover from
Deb Shatz, Dan Moser,
Sandra Edwards
& the team at
Alberta Jewish News



חג פסח שמח

from Jane & Hersh Sobel
and family

חג פסח שמח

from Faren, Ari, Noam
and Maya Sniderman

Chag Sameach - Happy Passover
from
Debbie & Howie Sniderman
and family



חג פסח שמח

from The Soifer Family

Wishing family & friends
a happy, healthy Passover
from
Reisa & Murray Shekter



Happy Passover
from Uretsky Physiotherapy
Uretskyphysiotherapy.com

Wishing the community
a Happy Passover -
Chag Pesach Sameach!



from
Sam & Eva Weisz

Wishing family & friends
all the best this Passover
from



Sue & Alvin Winestock

Happy Passover
to the entire
community



from
Connie & Danny Zalmanowitz

חג פסח שמח

from Hal Zalmanowitz

Wishing the community
a very happy Passover
from Jodi, Michael
and Rebecca Zabudowski



חג פסח שמח

from
Natalie & Ken Soroka and family



Happy Passover
from Clyde and Karen



Chag Sameach - Happy Passover
from
Rick, Nikki, Jordon, Kayla,
Zach and Amanda Vogel



Chag Sameach
Happy Passover
from Jesse, Eva, Lola
and Ella Turuk

Wishing family & friends a
Passover filled with joy and love

from
Dalia, Allan,
Tammy and
Mark Wolinsky



חג פסח שמח

from
Forrest, Anna,
Adina and Naomi

Wishing family and friends
a joyful Passover from
Stacey, Erin, Jordyn,
Abby, and Lee Wright

Wishing family and friends
a joyful Passover



from the
Zwaigenbaum Family

Chag Kasher
v'Sameach

from Nicolas, Erin,
and Eli Sabbah, and
Britney and Tiffany



ПОРЯДОК СЕИДЕРА



קידוש
КАДДЕШ
Пронимает Киддуш над бокалом вина.
וַיְרַחֵץ
УРХАЦ

Омывают руки, но не произносят при этом
обычного при омовении рук благословения.



כרפס
КАРПАС

Обмакивают «карпас» в соленую воду,
произносят благословение над овощами и
кушают.



יחץ
ЯХАЦ

Среднюю мацу, из трех находящихся на
«кеаре», делат на две части; большую часть
прятут для «Афикоман».



מגיד
МАГГИД

Начинается чтение Агады. До того, как
младший в семье задает вопросы «Ма ништа-
на» наполняют второй бокал.



רחצה
РАХЦА

Омывают руки для еды, но на этот раз с
обычным благословением.



מוציא
МОЦИ,
מצה
МАЦА

Пронимает благословения «Хавоци» и «Ал
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מרור
МАРОР

Пронимает благословение «Ал ахилас мо-
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росет».



בורך
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שולחן עורר
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БЕРАХ

Наполняют третий бокал вина и произно-
сят застольную молитву.



צפון
ЦАФУН

Съедают «Афикоман», величиной с «ка-
зант».



הלל
ХАЛЛЕЛ

Наполняют четвертый бокал вина и
произносят специальную хвалебную молитву
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נרצה
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Сейдера можно быть уверенным, что он был
сплошен Всевышним

from the Sources

by Eliezer Segal

Where the wild things were

What exactly was the fourth of the ten plagues that were inflicted upon the Egyptians? It goes by the Hebrew name “arov,” but the Haggadah does not provide us with clues to its exact meaning.

The ancient Greek Septuagint translation, the writings of Philo of Alexandria, and the Greek version of the Torah by Aquila (composed under the supervision of prominent rabbis in the second century C.E.) all rendered the word as “*kunumuia*”: dog-fly, an insect pest that often plagued Egypt (and apparently still does).

Philo discoursed at length, seemingly from personal experience, on the malevolence of this insect, which epitomized the worst traits of both dogs and flies. Under normal conditions “it shoots in from a distance with a whizzing sound like an arrow, and when it has reached its mark it pierces very closely with great force... But these dog-flies were prompted by the Almighty to be even twice as treacherous and hostile against the Egyptians.”

Most non-Jewish translators, including the King James English version, translated arov as “flies” or another insect species. This option also had Jewish advocates, such as Rabbi Solomon David Luzatto (Shadal) of Trieste. Shadal reasoned that it must refer to tiny creatures because larger animals could have been kept out of people’s houses by strong doors and barriers. He understood that when the Torah speaks about the arov “devouring” the Egyptians, the expression should be read as hyperbole, as we speak of being eaten alive by insects.

However, most of us were brought up on the assumption that arov alludes to an incursion of diverse kinds of wild beasts. It’s an occasion for children to pull out the lions, tigers and bears that have been lying in their toy-boxes since reading about Noah’s ark; and it generates some vivid artwork in illustrated Haggadahs.

This is indeed in keeping with Rashi’s explanation of the original passage in Exodus: “All manner of evil beasts, snakes and scorpions mixed together [*be-irbuvia*,” from the same root as arov].” He cites a midrash that compares the strategy underlying the

Egyptian plagues to conventional siege tactics that seek to throw the enemy into a panic with horrifying noises. In the Midrash, Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish referred to the fourth plague as a “mixture of birds and animals.”

As we see, Rashi took his cue from the root meaning of the word: “mix.” He did not really enter into the question of which species of beasts made up the mixture. (It is in fact most interesting to compare the varied examples of animals that different commentators included in their lists of arov species.)

Other French exegetes of the period, such as Rabbis Joseph Kara and Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) narrowed the zoological range of arov candidates—to wolves and other beasts of the night. They adduced texts in Jeremiah and Zephaniah in which the prophets spoke of the retribution that will be inflicted on the wicked when “a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces.” In Hebrew the “wolf of the evenings” is *ze’ev ha-’aravot*, employing the Hebrew root “arov.” Rashbam explained that nocturnal predators are the most deadly and fearsome.

For some interpreters, the vital clue to identifying the arov was the verb employed by the Torah when G-d threatened to unleash them on Egypt: “I will send arov.” Maimonides’ son Rabbi Abraham assembled several scriptural passages where the verb “to send” is applied to wild beasts. For instance, in Moses’s admonitions in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, he threatens the disobedient Israelites that the Lord will “send beasts upon them.”

Formulating an idea that would be shared by several subsequent authors, Rabbi Abraham located the significance of this detail in the fact that, unlike other plagues, this one did not involve the creation of miraculous new beings with which to chastise Pharaoh, but rather modifications to the behaviour of existing species. Normally, nature maintains a balance in which wild creatures occupy a separate domain and restrain themselves from intrusions into human habitations. However, on this unique occasion G-d

chose to suspend those restraints and thereby “send” the creatures into the Egyptian population centres and private residences. It was in this sense that it was deemed a miracle when large numbers of animals broke out of their normal nocturnal enclaves and made their way by day into the Egyptian habitations.

Rabbi Bahya ben Asher pointed out that, unlike most of the other plagues, the word “arov” is accompanied by the definite article. This indicates that they were not new creations but the same beasts that had been there all along; however it was only now that were they unleashed to assail the Egyptians. Rabbi S. R. Hirsch claimed that the miracle consisted of removing the animals’ fear of humans.

(Rabbi Isaiah Berlin took a contrasting view, suggesting that beasts that had hitherto been tame and docile were now miraculously transformed into vicious predators.)

Several authors offered reasons why this plague was particularly appropriate. For instance, Rabbi Jacob Zvi Mecklenburg discerned poetic justice in the choice of animals to serve as weapons against the Egyptians, when viewed in the context of the veneration of zoological forms that was so central to their idolatrous religion, with its menagerie of sacred bulls, cats, crocodiles and the like.

Don Isaac Abravanel found a measure of divine justice in the way that the animals (with a little help from angels of destruction) confined the Egyptians captive to their homes and fields, in retribution for Pharaoh’s own treatment of the Israelites. The same type of Egyptian “hospitality” that he had imposed on his unwilling Hebrew guests, Pharaoh was now forced to extend to the savage arov as they stampeded “into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants’ houses, and into all the land of Egypt.”

And the uninvited guests probably behaved like a pack of rowdy party animals.

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Menachem Kaiser

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favour-ite is that it was all for nothing... just a giant money-laundering project by Nazi officials who knew the war was lost and needed a way to get their money out of Berlin.

Albert Speer, Nazi Germany’s chief architect, wrote an endnote about the tunnels in which he said that “more concrete was planned for these tunnels than for the entirety of occupied Germany,” Kaiser said. “More sober and responsible theories,” according to Kaiser, are “underground factories or a base of some sort.”

Kaiser said his sudden celebrity among treasure hunters motivated him to write *Plunder*. He recalled saying to himself, “Okay, this story has gotten so weird that I have to at least try.” On the most personal level, it was a gift, really, to my father,’ Kaiser said. “Here’s our family’s story. I don’t have answers, but at

least it can be told.”

Kaiser said his most emotional moments were “the errors and missteps,” those moments when, after taking something for granted, “the rug gets pulled from under you and you really have to redo your assumptions.”

He had assumed that the process of reclaiming his grandfather’s building would be easy, that his book would neatly conclude with the desired result. “Ten months later I’m, like, in a lot of trouble. There’s no way I’m getting this building back in time.”

“It really forced me to interrogate what I was doing and why,” noted Kaiser. “What is my relationship with my grandfather? I had to untangle this on the page in a way that would make sense to another human or even to myself.”

In the end, Kaiser said, “The prize becomes the story.”

To those who hope to engage in similar missions, he said, “I promise you will have an enriching and strange time....I promise you your story is more complicated than you think.”

Kaiser said he became “a reluctant spokesperson” for descendants of survivors following the publication of *Plunder*. While reticent to play that role, he emphasizes that “stories properly told and honestly told are important” and that descendants are part of those stories.

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

It's a girl!

Leeor, Ohad, Noa and Shai Elyahu welcomed Daniella to the family on December 14, 2022.

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