

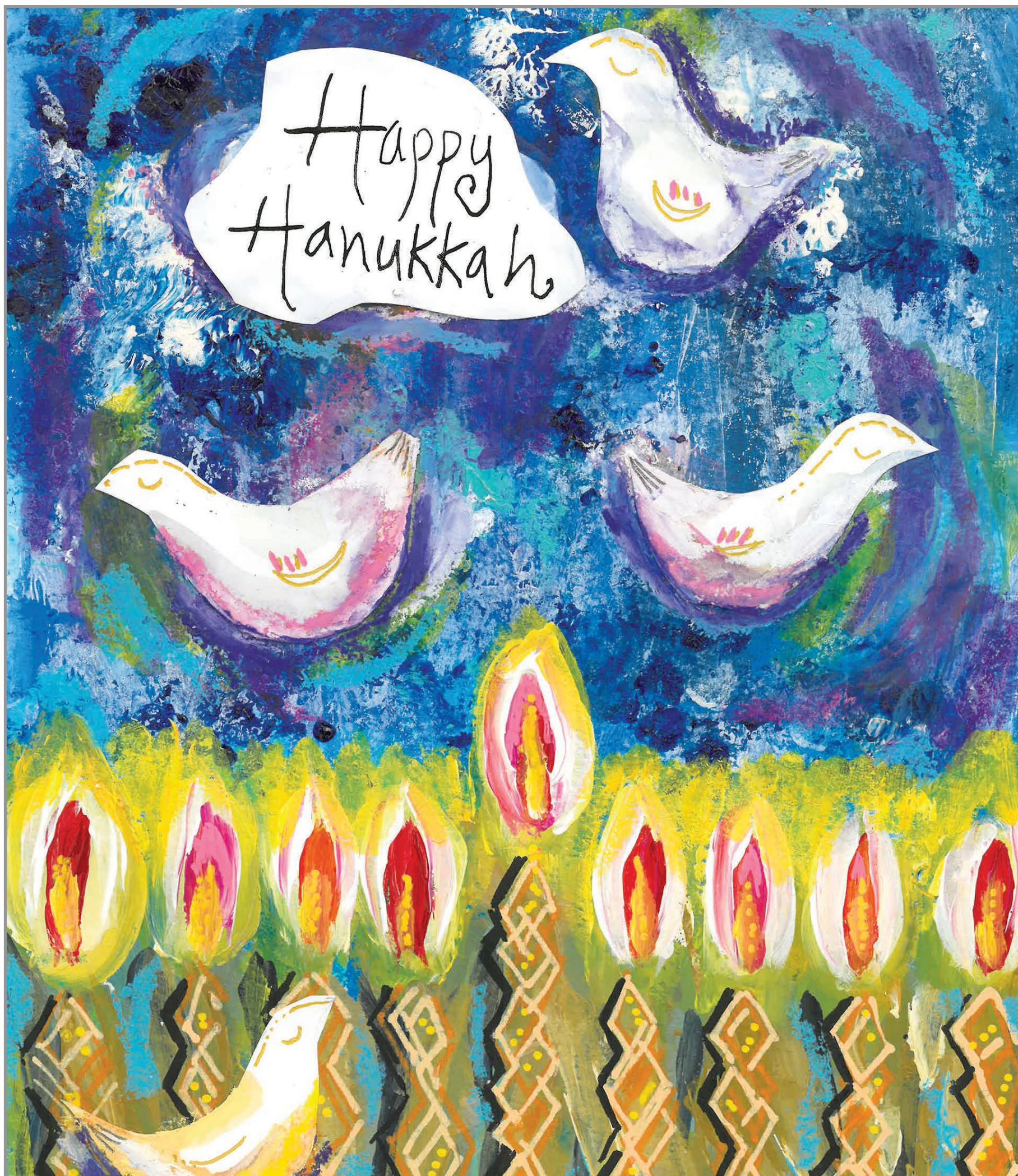
# ALBERTA Jewish NEWS

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Cover art: Happy Hanukkah © by Shelley Werner. Reprinted with permission.



# Al Osten donates a ‘game changer’ to Camp BB-Riback

By Maxine Fischbein, LJI Reporter

Calgary philanthropist Al Osten has few regrets in life, but one of them is that he never had the opportunity to attend Jewish summer camp.

“We were too poor to afford it,” recalled Osten (né Ostrovsky), who at 95 years young beams with pride at the \$1 million gift he pledged to Camp BB-Riback just weeks ago.

Osten’s donation is believed to be the largest single gift ever received by the camp, said outgoing Camp Director Stacy Shaikin, adding that the camp plans to deposit the lion’s share of the gift in an endowment fund so as to protect the principal, ensuring a steady stream of support in perpetuity.

Part of the gift may be devoted to a capital project which has not yet been announced.

“When I talk to people today, they always remember their camp days. That was one of the best parts of their lives, and they still have the friends they made there,” Osten told *AJNews*.

While his family did not have two nickels to rub together, there was always a *pishke* (charity box) in the Ostrovsky home, and the door was always open to family and friends.

Osten, who continues to live the lessons he learned at his parent’s knees, has ramped up his already significant charitable giving to civic and Jewish causes by tens of millions over the past few years alone. News of recent gifts supporting arts initiatives in both Calgary and Edmonton has been the stuff of newspaper headlines and radio interviews.

But it is hard to imagine that Osten can smile more broadly than he does at the thought of helping Jewish kids to enjoy the summer of their lives on the shores of Pine Lake.

“Al’s gift is a game changer,” says Jessica Miller Switzer, a former camper who has chaired the Camp BB Riback board of directors for the past three years.

“It ensures a strong and sustainable future for camp BB Riback and provides us with the opportunity to dream bigger than ever before,” Miller Switzer wrote

to the camp board as she shared the happy news.

“This moment is massive for our camp family,” Miller Switzer stated. “It is not only a gift, it is a vote of confidence in our future. We must build on this momentum, celebrate it wisely and leverage it to inspire further support from our community.”

According to Shaikin and Miller Switzer, the camp is actively pursuing matching dollars from corporate donors, individuals, and families and has already netted \$40 thousand (USD) from the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

Miller Switzer’s dream is for the camp to use the interest from the endowment to help defray the cost of sending kids to camp. She notes that the cost of sending three children to the camp tops \$15 thousand, which is financially challenging for most families, especially if they are also sending their kids to Jewish day schools and supporting other community institutions.

Lowering the cost of camp tuitions across the board – and providing additional financial support to families who need additional assistance – would go a long way to giving kids a formative Jewish experience, says Miller Switzer.

“Camp should be accessible for everyone, and I think it can be,” Switzer told *AJNews*, adding that the ability to open the camp gates wider is a gift to the future of Jewish life in Alberta.

Studies by sociologists have shown that when kids attend Jewish day schools and overnight Jewish camps, it increases the likelihood that they will engage in Jewish life as adults.

Osten told *AJNews* that he was poised to make a gift elsewhere when several members of the community made the case for his support of Camp BB Riback.

It caused him to fondly recall the late Donna Riback, who chaired the JNF Gala honouring Osten in 2017.



Philanthropist Al Osten has made a transformational donation to Camp BB-Riback.

Her father, Ted Riback, was a founder and generous supporter of the camp which eventually came to bear his name.

Calgary lawyer and philanthropist Gordy Hoffman was instrumental in facilitating Osten’s gift to the camp. Hoffman also reached out to Calgary architect Harvey Bernbaum – a former camper – who will be sharing his expertise and professional knowledge with camp leaders regarding potential future development at the camp.

Hoffman’s son JJ – a former Camp BB camper and counselor and its first-ever mountain bike specialist – has been an avid volunteer at the camp for years. The owner of Cutline Developments Inc., a landscaping and construction company, JJ recently advised the camp on potential repairs and upgrades to its sports courts – which he and a colleague in the concrete business had offered to complete on a sub-profit basis.

When the project was delayed due to the need for fundraising, JJ talked to his own friends, some of whom stepped up with donations. He also spoke with his father, who, in turn, spoke with Osten.

“It’s all about relationships,” says Stacy Shaikin,

*Continued on page 11*



# Happy Hanukkah!

Best wishes for a Happy Hanukkah



# Hanukkah: One flame at a time

By Rabbi Russell Jayne

As we prepare to enter Hanukkah, I find myself returning to a detail in the familiar story of the Maccabees that we often rush past. We speak of the miracle of the oil that burned far longer than it should have, of a rededicated Temple glowing once again with sacred light. But before any of that happened, before the miracle unfolded, something much more quiet took place. Something without which there could have been no miracle at all.



Rabbi Russell Jayne

A single flame was lit. In a sanctuary still scarred by war, surrounded by debris and uncertainty, with no assurance that there would be enough oil for the days ahead, our ancestors chose to act anyway. They didn't wait for conditions to be perfect. They didn't wait to feel ready. They didn't wait for the world to give them a sign. They simply lit one small flame, trusting that this first step mattered. That is what Hanukkah is, at its heart, a festival of small courage. A celebration not of grand victories, but of modest acts of faith that become the foundation for something far greater. Most of us aren't fighting ancient armies or purifying desecrated Temples. But we know what it means to walk through uncertainty. We know what it feels like when the world seems dimmer than we wish it did, when our reserves feel low, when the days seem shorter in more ways than one. And yet, like our ancestors, we keep lighting that next candle. Every time we choose kindness when it would be easier to retreat, every time we extend a hand despite feeling weary, every time we create connection in a world that too often drifts toward isolation we are performing our own Hanukkah miracles. They may not feel dramatic, but they shine just as brightly. In every Jewish community across our province, these quiet acts take place every single day: A volunteer who steps forward even when no one sees, simply because it is the right thing to do.

Our cover artist: Shelley Werner

The whimsical painting on the cover of this month's edition – Happy Hanukkah – is by Shelley Werner, a designer and illustrator who recently moved from Winnipeg to Calgary. An award-winning speaker, she is one of the founding members of Art and Scroll Studio. [youtube.com/@artandscrollstudio](https://www.youtube.com/@artandscrollstudio). In her own art, her interests include the Alberta landscape, which has brought her a new form of meditation on majesty, as well as Judaica and botanical themes. She uses bold colours, acrylics, watercolour and markers to create multi-media projects. Shelley is passionate about integrating Tikkun Olam in all things. She recently created "Midrash Makers", a mixed media workshop featured at Temple B'nai Tikvah. Her "Illustrious" work is available by contacting [wernerdesignprojects@gmail.com](mailto:wernerdesignprojects@gmail.com).

A member who calls someone who has been absent, asking sincerely, "Are you okay? We've missed you." A family who chooses hope over fear by showing up, participating, and bringing life into Jewish spaces. A person who offers kindness even when their own heart feels heavy. These are our "one-day-of-oil moments." They are small, but they matter more than we know. They remind us that while the world often celebrates spectacle, Judaism has always honoured the sacred power of the *Kol D'mamah Dakah* (the still, small voice). This year, Hanukkah arrives at a time when many people are carrying quiet burdens, visible and invisible. Some are worried about global crises. Some feel the weight of rising antisemitism. Some are navigating illnesses, family stresses, or private griefs. Others are simply tired, tired in the way that only modern life, with its relentless speed and expectation, can make us. Hanukkah doesn't ask us to solve these challenges all at once. It asks only that we take a small step toward light. Our tradition teaches that when the Maccabees searched the Temple, they found just one cruse of pure oil, barely enough for a single day. But what is equally important is that they didn't dismiss that tiny reserve as insufficient. They didn't say, "It's not enough, so why bother?" Instead, they honoured what they had. That, too, is a profound spiritual message. The world does not need us to be perfect. It needs us to be willing. One flame at a time. One act of compassion at a time. One conversation, one prayer, one gesture of generosity.

The story of Hanukkah reminds us that hope doesn't begin with certainty. It begins with the courage to try. Courage rarely feels like bravery in the moment. Most often, it feels small, like the decision to strike a match, not knowing what might come next. But Jewish history is built on these moments. On people who stepped forward when they weren't sure, who brought light into imperfect circumstances, who trusted that doing something, however small, mattered deeply. This is how we rebuild our communities. This is how we strengthen the bonds between us. This is how we honour the generations before us and sustain the generations to come. As our menorahs glow across Alberta, in private homes, in synagogues, in schools, in care facilities, in public celebrations, I hope we will remember that each light is a testament to someone's courage, past or present, ancient or modern, grand or humble. May we have the courage to bring our light into the world, one candle at a time. *Chag Urim Sameach!* May your Festival of Lights be filled with warmth, resilience, community, and gentle miracles. Rabbi Russell Jayne is Senior Rabbi and Cantor at Beth Tzedec Congregation.

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# Stunning “Jewish on Paper” is on exhibit at TBT Gallery

By Shelley Werner

The show “Jewish on Paper” will be on display in the TBT Gallery, as follow up to its featured show on Art and Scroll Studio in September 2025. The original exhibition was born in the Jerusalem Biennale in 2023. The original curator, Hillel Smith was a guest on the show in the fall. This stunning graphic show is now available to be seen in person in Calgary, beginning on Dec. 12, 2025. There are more than 25 artists from over 15 countries represented in the show.

TBT Gallery is fortunate to have access to this work. Hillel Smith was hoping that after the Jerusalem exhibition the show would live on. He was delighted to provide the images originally used, and they were printed locally. Each image has the name of the designer.

TBT curator Jennifer Eiserman said, “Jewish on Paper reminds us that the everyday images we hang in our homes carry the deepest stories of who we are. In bringing global Jewish creativity to Calgary, this exhibition connects our community to a rich, ongoing tradition of visual expression. It invites us to see our heritage not as distant history, but as something vibrant, playful, and profoundly alive in our lives today.”

Hillel explained that the exhibition seeks to elevate posters featuring Jewish texts, holidays, and rituals. These posters include works intended as home décor, as synagogue art, and for display in other formal and

informal contexts. They are works for adults and for children. They can be serious, joyful or ironic. Many use typography in their rendering of ancient passages.

Posters are the most accessible form of commercially available art. Inexpensive and easy to install, there is collective memory in our culture of the use of posters: in bedrooms, in the history of popular culture.

Many of the works are based on spiritual passages or Torah portions. The show is a “who’s who” of Judaic artists. Included are a variety of series by acclaimed Judaic artists like Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik, Yitzchok Mouly and Eleyor Snir.

Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik cuts up comic books and reassembles them into clean lines and patterns, sinuous shapes and sharp edges, large fields of color and smaller intimate spaces. He lives in Santa Clarita California. Yitzchok Mouly is a conceptual artist whose work explores the intersection of spirituality and material world we live in. He lives in Hillside, New Jersey. EleyOri art prints and products are designed to bring inspiration, blessings, beauty, and joy into homes and lives. The art unites traditional Judaic motifs, quotes, verses and blessings, with contemporary themes, balancing it all together. Created and illustrated by Eleyor (Ori) Snir in Neslon BC, EleyOri creates inspirational modern folk art that speaks to the heart.

It is often the everyday products we use to decorate our lives - the drawings we hang on our walls, the cards we send to friends, the jokes we share and the posts we like - that speak most deeply about what is important to us.

The common thread is the desire to bring Jewish content to the fore in ways that feel rooted both in Jewish life and modern society. The exhibition exemplifies the message that while the aesthetics we use may change, the act of weaving Judaism into our lives is ever present.

Many contemporary designers choose to look back to the minimalism and techniques of previous eras to inform their work. Others look around to the esthetics of their surroundings, infusing traditional iconography with surprising outside influences. The common thread is the desire to bring Jewish content to the fore in ways that feel rooted both in Jewish life and modern society. The exhibition exemplifies the message that



Eleyor Snir

the esthetics we use may change, the act of weaving Judaism into our lives is a constant.


Curator Jennifer Eiserman is a professor at the University of Calgary in the Department of Art. She teaches courses in Art Education, Studio Practice, Art Theory and Museum and Heritage Studies. She is fascinated by how people learn through engagement with art. This has directed her in teaching and research about community-based art and collaborative practice. The importance of making together, learning together, and understanding together have been the driving force of her research and teaching practice. She was the coordinator for Betzalel Arts, a community-based Jewish artists’ group, for 3 years. She is actively engaged in community-based arts groups in Calgary, including as founder and co-curator of the TBT Gallery committed to promoting Jewish artists.

“Jewish on Paper” can be seen at TBT Gallery, Temple B’nai Tikvah, 900 47 Ave SW, Calgary. Monday to Thursday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm / Friday 9:00 am to 2:00 pm or by appointment. Contact the office (403) 252-1654.

Shelley Werner is the host of Art and Scroll Studio zoom series that celebrates the makers and creators of Judaica art.



Curator Jennifer Eiserman



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Happy Chanukah!


With best wishes,  
Rabbi Mark Glickman and the Board of Trustees



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# Looking at our inner Mizbeach

By Rabbi Nisan Andrews



**Rabbi Nisan Andrews** While the Al HaNissim prayer emphasizes the miraculous military victory, the Rabbis of the Talmud (Shabbat 21b) focus on the lighting of the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash

Searching for the story of Chanukah in the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) would not be a productive use of time; it simply isn't there. Instead, the narrative can be found in later sources, with different texts highlighting various aspects of the festival.

While the Al HaNissim prayer emphasizes the miraculous military victory, the Rabbis of the Talmud (Shabbat 21b) focus on the lighting of the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash

(Temple) and the fact that these lamps burned for a full eight days.

This raises an intriguing question. When the Rabbis decided which Torah portions would be read during Chanukah, one might have expected them to select sections related to the Menorah. Instead, they chose passages from Parashat Naso that describe the offerings made by the princes during the inauguration of the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) highlights a lesser-known aspect of Chanukah. The Talmud notes in Yoma 16a that the oil was not the only thing that became defiled by the Greeks; the Mizbeach (Altar) became unusable for spiritual purposes after being used for idolatrous worship by the Greeks.

As a result, when the Hasmoneans re-entered the Beit HaMikdash, they sought not only pure oil but also began the challenging process of constructing a new Mizbeach. The inauguration of this altar involved new Korbanot (sacrifices), which parallels the Biblical inauguration of the original Mizbeach in the Mishkan.

We often associate Chanukah with loud and proud displays of our Jewish identity. Many of the halachot (laws) regarding the lighting of Chanukah candles

revolve around the principle of "pirsumei nisa" (publicizing the miracle). For example, the Chanukah menorah should not be placed lower than 3 tefachim (handbreadths) from the ground and no higher than 20 amot (cubits) off the ground, as people do not naturally look up to such heights.

However, Chanukah should also be a time for introspection. True pride in our Jewish identity is only possible when we reflect on what Judaism truly means to us.

What does our inner mizbeach look like? What are we willing to sacrifice ourselves for? Are we driven solely by contemporary Western values, or do we prioritize building a deeper relationship with God through Torah and mitzvot?

As our Chanukah lights shine brightly toward the world, we are also encouraged to shine a metaphorical light inward, toward our internal altar. This is an opportunity to rediscover the spiritual greatness within us and ensure that we are living our most authentically Jewish lives.

*Rabbi Nisan Andrews is Rabbi at House of Jacob Mikveh Yisrael.*

# Hanukkah: The Dedication to a New Beginning



**Rabbi Guy Tal**

By Rabbi Guy Tal

Hanukkah is the last of the festivals ordained by the Sages before the long exile, until we were privileged in our generation to witness the renewal of our nation's revival in its land and the establishment of additional holy days: Yom Ha'atzmaut

(Independence Day) and Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day).

Though it is the last, its very name bears the profound meaning of a fresh start: Hanukkah (חנוכה) stems from the root of "Chinuch" (חינוך), meaning "education" or "inauguration."

The first occurrence of the root associated with the word Chinuch in the Bible is during Abraham's war against the four kings: "He armed his retainers (חניכיו)" (Genesis 14:14). Rashi explains this: "This is Eliezer, whom he trained (חננו) in the commandments, and it is the term for the beginning of a person or an instrument's entry into the craft he is destined to master." Rashi provides further examples: "Chanoch la-na'ar" (educate the child) and "Chanukat HaMizbeach" (The dedication of the Altar.)

In essence, when we commence utilizing a specific thing for the purpose for which it was intended – its very essence and purpose in existence – we are "Chonchim" or "dedicating" it. Thus, for instance, when

we celebrate "Chanukat HaBayit" (the dedication of the home), we begin using the house for its intended purpose: to live in it. When we engage in the Chinuch (education) of our children, we strive to guide the one being educated to walk the path for which he is destined. Contrary to a common misconception, we are not constructing something entirely new within the child; rather, we are assisting him in discovering his purpose and inner strengths – "to enter the craft he is destined to master," in Rashi's words.

Technically, the word Hanukkah reflects the Chanukat HaMikdash, the rededication of the Temple after the Greeks defiled it. On a deeper level, however, the Hanukkah festival may be understood as our "Chinuch" (our education) – the initiation of our enduring challenge to ignite the light in a place of darkness. In the year's deepest gloom, there is a necessity to begin fulfilling our destiny of illumination. Approximately 200 years before the commencement of

*Continued on page 12*

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# The Meanings of Hanukkah

By Rabbi Leonard Cohen

Best wishes to the community for a happy and meaningful Hanukkah celebration. The following is adapted from Rabbi Nosson Scherman of Torah.org.



Rabbi Leonard Cohen

Why is the upcoming holiday called Hanukkah? The word itself has a variety of meanings, each of which adds to our understanding of the holiday. The word Hanukkah signifies all of the following:

**Peace** – the word Hanukkah, according to sages Abduraham, Tur, Ran and others, derives from two words: “Chanu”, which means [they] rested, and “Kaf-Heh” which means 25. In other words, the Jewish fighters, i.e. the Maccabees, rested from their

battles on the 25th day of Kislev. This suggests that the Jewish ethic is not to commemorate the battle victory as much as the peace that resulted from it.

**Divine Grace** – Noam Elimelech connects Hanukkah with the Hebrew word “Chen” which means grace. Hanukkah is the time when the Jewish warriors, as well as the nation as a whole, encountered Divine grace.

**Rededication** – The word Hanukkah is used in the Book of Maccabees to refer to the dedication (“chanukah”), or in fact rededication, of the desecrated altar in the Beit Hamikdash. From this perspective, the holiday celebrates our turning away from the unholy and dedicating ourselves once again to that which is sacred.

**Commemoration** – The consecration of the 2nd Temple occurred on the 24th of Kislev (see Chaggai 2:18). As well, according to Midrash, the dedication of the Mishkan – the holy tabernacle built by the Israelites in the desert – occurred on or around this date. The latter event is commemorated in the Torah readings each day of Hanukkah, which recount the sacrificial offerings presented by the leaders of each tribe at the dedication of the Mishkan.

**Revelation** – According to Kabbalah, Chanukah is a preparation, or “chinuch”, for our eventual redemption. The light of the Hanukkah candles forms

part of the Ohr Haganuz – G-d’s perfect light which was shattered and then hidden since Creation. Our mystical challenge as Jews is to unify the holy sparks in our world in order to recreate this great light.

**Increasing Holiness** – Ateret Zekenim and Pri Megadim depict the word Hanukkah as an abbreviation of the phrase “chet nerot v’halacha k’veit Hillel” – “Eight lights, and the Halacha follows the School of Hillel.” This refers to the Talmudic debate between Shammai and Hillel. Shammai said we should light eight candles on the first night of Hanukkah, then decrease the number of candles by one each subsequent night. Hillel, on the other hand, said that we should light one candle the first night then add one additional candle for each night – and this is in fact our practice to this day. Hillel’s reasoning? Ma’alin b’kodesh v’ein moridin – We increase holiness, we don’t reduce it.

May we use the opportunity of this holiday of Hanukkah to achieve all the meanings of Hanukkah – and to continue discovering ways to always reach higher and higher in fulfilling G-d’s purpose for us.

*Rabbi Leonard Cohen is the Spiritual leader at congregation Kehilat Shalom in Calgary.*

# Andrew Zimmern’s Perfect Potato Latkes

By Andrew Zimmern

(JTA) - These potato latkes are so good that posting the recipe alone is a mitzvah of the highest order. The Festival of Lights refers to a lamp in the temple that was supposed to have only enough oil to last the Maccabees one night, but instead lasted for eight. The holiday celebrates the miracle of the oil, so fried foods are often featured at Hanukkah feasts. Problem is, most potato pancakes, or latkes, are awful. Luckily for you, these are amazing.

**Ingredients**

1 pound Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks  
sea salt  
2 pounds baking potatoes  
1 large onion, finely diced  
2 large eggs, lightly beaten  
1 cup matzah meal  
1/2 tsp freshly ground white pepper  
vegetable oil, for frying

applesauce, crème fraîche, smoked salmon, salmon roe, and dill sprigs, to serve

**Directions**

In a medium saucepan, cover the Yukon Gold potatoes with cool water, season generously with salt, and bring to a boil. Cook the potatoes until tender, about 15 minutes. Drain well and immediately pass the potatoes through a ricer into a large bowl.

Working quickly, peel and grate the baking potatoes on the large holes of a box grater into a medium bowl. Press with a clean kitchen towel to remove excess moisture. Add half of the grated potatoes to the riced potatoes.

Transfer the remaining grated potatoes to the bowl of a food processor. Add the onion and pulse until the potatoes and onions are very finely chopped. Transfer to a fine-mesh sieve and press with the back of a spoon to extract as much liquid as possible. Add the potato-onion mixture to the large bowl. Stir in the eggs, matzah meal, white pepper, and 2 tsp of salt.

In a large, heavy skillet, heat 1/4 inch of oil until shimmering. Working in 3 batches, spoon 1/4 cup of the potato mixture into the oil for each latke; press slightly to flatten. Fry over moderate heat, turning



once, until the latkes are golden and crisp on both sides, about 7 minutes. Drain the latkes on a paper towel-lined baking sheet and sprinkle lightly with salt. Serve with applesauce, crème fraîche, smoked salmon, salmon roe, and dill.

Note: The fried latkes can be kept at room temperature for up to 4 hours. Reheat them on a baking sheet in a 375 degrees F oven for about 5 minutes, or until warmed through and crisp.

# SHUV MAJUMDAR

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## CHAG CHANUKAH SAMEACH!



# CJA welcomes new CEO Jordan Balaban

By Maxine Fischbein

The recent appointment of Jordan Balaban as CEO at The Calgary Jewish Academy (CJA) is good news for Calgary's largest and most deeply rooted Jewish day school.

Balaban, who co-founded Greengate Power together with his family and previously served as the renewable energy company's president, comes to his newly established position with a Bachelor of Commerce degree from Queen's University, two decades of business experience, and a proven track record as a lay leader in the Jewish community. He was among Avenue Magazine's Top 40 under 40 in 2021, an A-list of young movers and shakers on the Calgary scene.

In his new role at CJA, Balaban is responsible for looking after the business end of running the school, working in close partnership with CJA Principal Shelly Gelfand, Community and Advancement Director Dana Silver, and the CJA Board of Directors – co-chaired by Michelle Jacobson and Eytan Donsky.

Like Gelfand – a veteran teacher and school administrator who was appointed CJA principal at the end of the last school year – Balaban is a former student at CJA (known as the Calgary Hebrew School in Gelfand's day). They share a passion for making the school the best it can be, and Balaban looks forward to the day when he will bring his toddler son to CJA to begin his own educational journey.

In other words, Balaban has skin in the game.

This bodes well for current and potential students, their parents, and an invigorated staff. Front and centre is a skilled learning leadership team, which is a blend of long serving and new educators. Veteran members include Avi Sherman, currently serving as head of Judaic studies and interim vice principal, and Alex Kouperman, the Athletics/Student Voice Learning Leader. New additions to the team include Early Years Coordinator Colleen Bartlett and GAIN Coordinator Tammara Behl.

Balaban and his colleagues know that they have their work cut out for them; it is no secret that the CJA has had its share of challenges over recent years.

Things came to a head last year as teachers sought to join a labour union. The effort was eventually abandoned, but not before additional faultlines threatened the stability of one of Jewish Calgary's most important communal institutions.

"There were a lot of unhappy people with very valid concerns that were brought up not just over the last year, but over many years," recalls Michelle Jacobson.

"We are rebuilding the experience for our students... and making sure that the teachers feel supported and encouraged to do the things they want to do to make CJA the best place it can be for our children," Jacobson added.

"We are a private school that must run like a thriving business," says Jordan Balaban. "When our enrollment improves, and our revenue improves, we have the ability to fund programs and experiences for the students that promote academic excellence, pride in their Jewish identity, and a thriving culture."

"In just my first four weeks, I see so much untapped potential and I am looking forward to building on the foundation, community, and warmth that already exists in the school," Balaban adds.

Increasing school enrollment is critical to the success of CJA going forward, says Balaban.

"We need parents and students to buy in, and I'm already seeing it happen in real time. It's very encouraging and exciting!"

After Greengate Power sold most of its assets a couple of years back, Balaban moved on to other things, including bonding with his newborn son and enjoying a three-month sabbatical in New Zealand with his wife Zoe – also a CJA alum – and their son.

Balaban then started thinking about new career steps.

"I was looking at the venture capital start-up ecosystem," said Balaban who did some advisory and mentorship work.

"There was some fulfillment in that but it didn't feel like what I really wanted to do."

After years of volunteering on not-for-profit committees and boards – including a dozen years on the board of Calgary Jewish Federation – Balaban joined the CJA board this past September.

"It became very clear to me after that first meeting that a lot of really important business activities were being managed by the board of directors, which should function as a governance board," recalled Balaban.

"It dawned on me that the role I have now taken on would be perfect for me."

"Jordan has done so many great things in his career, and he is so well-connected within the community," recalled Jacobson, adding, "He came to us with an offer we couldn't refuse."

While Balaban's CEO post is a paid position, the return on investment will be significant, given that his choice to serve the school is, primarily, a labour of love, Jacobson says.

The CJA board launched a search last summer for a Head of School whose job it would be to manage the business end of running the school, allowing the principal to focus on teachers, students and families, says board co-chair Eytan Donsky.

They interviewed several candidates but did not find the right person for the position.

"We were very confident in Shelly's ability to come into the school as a strong leader as principal," recalled Donsky, adding that the board opted to suspend the Head of School search while Gelfand settled into her role and the lay leadership refined their thinking about the Head of School role.

And then along came Balaban.

"He could be doing many, many other things," says Donsky, "but he's doing this because he believes in the future of the school. And we believe in him."

"When it comes to strategic planning, recruitment and retention, you need day to day management to make sure you're doing a good job," Balaban told *AJNews*.

"It is very typical for private schools to have somebody in this role," he said, adding that the top private schools in Calgary are the arena in which CJA is competing.

"Judaic Studies are offerings that only CJA and Akiva Academy provide, so it goes without saying that you're going to get that here, but there is a standard of academic excellence that people expect when they



New CEO Jordan Balaban with MP Shuvaloy Majumdar and several members of the Calgary Jewish Academy leadership team.

send their kids to Jewish day schools," says Balaban.

"That's totally fair," Balaban says, while adding that the belief among some parents that CJA is slipping when it comes to the Alberta curriculum is more perception than reality.

The Fraser Institute annual rankings of Alberta schools, based on Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) scores, reveal that while Calgary Jewish Academy results trail those of self-selecting private schools, CJA sits in the top five percent of Alberta schools.

"We are a community school. We try and take anybody who wants a Jewish education," explains Balaban.

As a result, the school serves more kids with identified needs than is typical at the private schools most often compared with CJA, says Balaban. "The dual curriculum [roughly 60 percent Alberta curriculum and 40 percent Judaic Studies] challenges our students."

It seems that community building and the dual curriculum have not hampered – and may well have helped – generations of Jewish day school students.

"If you look at the success of our alumni, it is astounding. I don't know if we are doing a good enough job communicating that," Balaban says.

"I'm still best friends with all of the people I went to school with at CJA. Every one of them is unbelievably successful," among them physicians, entrepreneurs, lawyers, philanthropists, and the list goes on.

"I think our achievements have much to do with the relationships that we cemented here in this building. The community we built here really helped us to thrive," Balaban said, emphasizing the power of Jewish values learned and lived at CJA.

Parents may bring their kids to CJA because it is a Jewish school, but school leaders agree that students

Continued on page 28

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# The Dark Between Flames

By Lesley Machon

As a child, I was terrified of the dark. Each night, light from my bedside spilled across the floor of the moonlit hallway, and my closet doors glowed orange as they kept imagined monsters shut away.

Turning out the lights and plunging the world into darkness was a threatening task. I regularly opted out.

Now, as a Jewish community chaplain, I find myself thinking differently about the dark. When I try to trace this shifted relationship in my memory, I land on an evening mangrove tour in Costa Rica several years ago. As dusk settled, our boat meandered along the waterways, the nocturnal wildlife emerging with eyes reflecting our flashlight beams. Above us, the stars brightened and crystallized like sugar across the sky. Below, the strokes of my paddle stirred up the bioluminescent plankton, swirling and rippling, scattering blue-green sparkles in the inky water.

This darkness wasn't obfuscating or empty, nor was it threatening. Instead, it was glowing, abundant. It made the stars easier to see. It made the world more glittery and electric.

What I saw and felt in those mangroves reminds me of what Rabbi Fern Feldman teaches about sacred darkness, or what she describes as "depths, womb, soil where seeds sprout, soothing shade, night in which we grow and make long-term memory. Darkness is source, essence, innermost being, transcendence, nothingness, emptiness, mystery." When we dismiss darkness, Feldman argues, we devalue everything associated with it, from dark skin to women to the earth itself. We might risk forgetting how many of the Torah's revelations take place in the sanctuaried darkness of caves.

Feldman's framing invites us to reconsider everything we've been taught about safety and reflection. So often, we're told to "bring things to light." But some things need time in the dark to grow properly. Seeds need to ready themselves in the soil before they grow, relationships require conflict before they can deepen, and creative work must brew before it's poured. Cut a butterfly from a cocoon too early, and it may never develop the wing strength to fly.

In her essay "Museum of Color," Stephanie Krzywonos describes how the cave paintings at Font-de-Gaume depict reindeer in bone-black charcoal markings that were likely drawn with pigment made from reindeer bones. To create this pigment, you have

to "remove all of an animal's fat, muscle, and tendons from the bones, then roast them in high heat while starving them of oxygen." This conceptualization of darkness as the source of our earliest marks, our first attempts to capture the world and make meaning from the stuff of it, has stayed with me. To capture darkness has its roots in an act of destruction and devotion, of carefully, lovingly, even ritualistically extracting to honour and preserve.

Biologists and ecologists will know this inherent tension of the dark well. Artificial light pollution has disrupted nature's rituals because many plants measure not daylight but night-length, using darkness to determine when to flower, fruit, or enter dormancy. Strawberry plants need darkness to produce fruit, but streetlights near farms have caused harvests to dwindle. Confused plants leaf out instead. Dung beetles, too, navigate by starlight, moving in straight lines to avoid predators. Without access to the night sky, they scatter into chaos, losing their way.

Just as dung beetles lose access to their Milky Way map, we can lose sight of our hurt and our healing. In an attempt to stave off heavy feelings, we end up dimming our own light, turning away from the world and failing to see so many glimmers of joy that can only glow in the dark. Just like the stars above Costa Rica's mangroves, the chanukiah's flames are more vivid in a dark room.

This Hanukkah, as we incrementally kindle flame after flame across the season's longest nights, I want to linger on the miracle that precedes the light, the one we habitually forget in our rush toward the safety of what's easier to see. Before that small pot of olive oil was lit, another miracle had already occurred precisely because the oil was still there. It had remained intact and sealed, hidden in darkness across years of desecration. Rabbi David Seidenberg reminds us that "Darkness is not opposition to light—it is what allows light to appear, to shine."

As a chaplain, I spend time in Calgary's hospitals and hospices, sitting with people facing diagnoses, grief, and end-of-life transitions. In my work, I sit with people in their darkest hours.

This sitting-with, a refusal to rush toward light without drinking in the fullness of the dark, is so necessary, and it changes us irrevocably. To be present in a crisis isn't to arrive with solutions or platitudes about silver linings but to trust that something needs to be reckoned with, and that process would be interrupted, slowed, even damaged, by a too-swift, premature illumination.

Afterwards, what matters most isn't whether we can restore what was but whether we can remain present with what is. In the dark, we find the smatterings of wisdom, love, hope, and reassurance we may need to



latch onto for the rest of our lives.

As an adult, it's not always easy for me to avoid bouts of sadness during this wintry season. I am extraordinarily grateful to have rabbis, friends, family, fellow chaplains, and a family doctor (forever and always thankful, Dr. O), who are willing to sit with me in the dark, who don't immediately reach for a switch when I'm struggling, who trust that the nights of my days deserve their time to be tended. This is what community care looks like; it's the holding that allows someone to fall apart safely.

The eight nights of Hanukkah unfold across this season, and there is darkness between each new flame. We turn to rhythm, ritual, and a gentle accumulation of light against the turning year. Meanwhile, the pot of oil survived because someone had the foresight to seal it carefully, trusting the protective cloak of darkness.

This Hanukkah, perhaps we can let the flames outline the darkness rather than cut through it. In doing so, we might remember that the oil itself was the first miracle, that we all have reserves we wouldn't know existed were it not for the dark.

*Lesley Machon is the JFSC Community Chaplain. If you would like a phone call or a visit, email her at [lesleym@jfsc.org](mailto:lesleym@jfsc.org)*

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# Hope is the real miracle of Chanukah

**By Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapid**



## Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapides

The recent release of *Wicked: for Good*, the second part of the film adaptation of the popular Broadway musical, has reverberated in the Jewish world in unexpected ways.

There are some folks who believe that *Wicked*, particularly when referencing the original book written by Gregory Maguire, is a parable of the Holocaust. An anti-

fascist novel of how antisemitism can arise from the wickedness of propaganda, particularly if good people stand by and let it happen.

In journalist Olivia Haynie's article in the Dec. 2024 *Forward*, she states: "Wicked is a parable about how propaganda can be leveraged by authority figures, whether against Elphaba or the Jews, and the different forms it can take...In *Wicked*, Maguire wanted to examine how language is used to prompt violence against minorities and dissenting voices in a society."

The argument is related to the plot of *Wicked* in which the Wizard of Oz has decided that the (talking and fully functional) animals that live among humanoid residents in the Land of Oz are the cause of all evil in their society. The Wizard, using relentless propaganda and manipulation, convinces everyone to turn against the animals: removing them from their jobs, taking away their voices, and shackling them away from society. There is even a literal scape-goat, the main characters' friend and mentor, who gets fired from his professorial job and taken away by the powers that be.

There is another perspective, however, that Wicked can be looked at as anti-Zionist because of how a character, like the Wicked Witch of the West (Elphaba in the movie) has her ‘wickedness’ excused and explained-away by her back-story. Allison Josephs, creator of the popular *Jew in the City* blog, wrote an article titled: “Wicked Could Not Have Come at a Worse Time for America.”

She asserts that anyone who watched the original *The Wizard of Oz* film from 1939 can't help but be traumatized by how scary and evil the Wicked Witch of the West is. And no amount of back-story or explanation for how that character came to be could or should excuse the behavior.

She writes: “When society has been primed to feel sympathy for villains with difficult pasts, young Americans will begin posting videos on TikTok expressing support for real-life monsters like Osama bin Laden, as many did this past November. Atrocities like the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel – a massacre beyond our worst nightmares – will be put into “context.” When I saw the Namor storyline in *Wakanda Forever* back in 2022, I immediately feared that this framing would further justify violence against Israel, “the colonizer.”

Now, you may be asking, what does this have to do with Chanukah? Where does hope fit in? Well, perhaps, like how Chanukah can be so misunderstood, we need to go back to the true source material to get the real story.

In the original and beloved *The Wizard of Oz* film, the song ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, is the central focus of the movie. It is the vehicle that drives the theme of hope throughout the story. The song frames the movie and reflects the wistful longing and desire for a world that is peaceful and sweeter than the one in which Dorothy currently resides.

The curious thing about the song, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, is that, like many Christmas songs, it was written by Jews.

In considering the connection between hope and this song, Matt Haig in his non-fiction work, *The Comfort Book* writes: "I think that it's no coincidence that 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow', one of the most bittersweet yet hopeful songs in the world, a song that has topped polls as the greatest song of the twentieth century, was written by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg for *The Wizard of Oz* in one of the bleakest years in

human history: 1939.

“Harold wrote the music, while Yip penned the words. Harold and Yip themselves were no strangers to suffering. Yip had seen the horrors of the First World War and was left bankrupt following the crash of 1929. As for Harold, who would become known for his hopeful octave-leaping, he was born with a twin brother who sadly died in infancy. Aged sixteen, Harold fled his Jewish Orthodox parents and went to pursue a modern musical path. And let's not forget these were two Jewish musicians writing arguably the most hopeful song ever written, all while Adolf Hitler was triggering war and antisemitism was on the rise.”

In the Chanukah story, there is a moment when the rag-tag army of Jews have finally beaten the Greco-Syrian war machine. It is then that the Jews participate in a particularly poignant hopeful act: They light the menorah.

They light the menorah knowing that there is not enough oil to keep burning, knowing that it will go out before kosher oil can be delivered, knowing that the practice is to not light unless you know it will burn eternally, they lit it anyway. That small, sweet act of faith now brings light to the darkness for millions of their descendants thousands of years later. That's an amazing act of hope.

So, is the *Wicked* movie ‘Good for the Jews’, or no? Maybe that’s the wrong question. Maybe the question is, how can we keep the glow of those tiny candles in our hearts regardless of what the world around us thinks? The answer is that we must continue in our traditions and continue to reflect the beauty and holiness of the world God has given us. In our small way, every time we light a Chanukah candle, we are bringing light to the night; connecting our souls to *Am Israel* and honouring all those who came before us. We may ask, how can we nurture and nourish our hope when things can seem so dark? And the answer to that is: One candle at a time.

From my family to yours, wishing you a *Lichtig* and *Freilech Chanukah*. Chag Chanukah Sameach!

*Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapidès has an independent Rabbinic practice at [RockyMountainRabbi.com](http://RockyMountainRabbi.com) and is the Assistant Rabbi at the Beth Tzedec Congregation.*

# Remembering Jewish Communities that were uprooted from their homes

On November 30, Jewish communities across Canada and around the world gathered to mark Yom HaPitit, the Day of the Jewish Refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. The day commemorates the nearly one million Jews forced from their ancestral homes in the 20th century.

Honouring the memory of these displaced communities is especially important now, given that this history is often glaringly excluded from discussions about the Middle East. Just days ago, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) announced a controversial Nakba exhibit that advances an activist political agenda and excludes the lived experiences of Jews displaced from their homes. In so doing, it betrays CMHR's own professional responsibilities and mandate as a national, publicly funded museum.

“Had CMHR chosen to engage in meaningful consultation, it would have learned that the 1948 war was the result of Palestinian rejection of a Jewish state and the years that followed brought displacement, loss, and suffering to the region’s Arabs and Jews alike,” said, Noah Shack, CEO, Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA). “Museums should be anchored in history, not politics – this is especially important at a time when radical activists and violent extremists have exploited the conflict to spread hate and target Canadians.”

CIJA recently launched a letter campaign that mobilized thousands of Canadians via ActionHub.ca to call on CMHR CEO Isha Khan to uphold the Museum's mandate, be transparent about its decision-making, and establish a credible consultation process before any further development proceeds on the exhibit.

CIJA is also launching a new initiative to gather and amplify testimonies from Jewish Canadians whose families were displaced from the Middle East and North Africa.

“The political exhibit erases stories like mine,” said Dr. Caroline Bassoon-Zaltzman, who was forced to leave Iraq as a teenager. “Jews were violently uprooted – forcibly displaced from Middle Eastern and North African lands. We cannot allow this same hateful ideology that caused so much pain for my family to take root in Canada.”

“Jewish populations in these regions were ethnically cleansed – an exodus of nearly one million people violently uprooted from the lands where they had lived for 2,500 years,” said Sylvain Abitbol, Co-President, Justice for Jews from Arab Countries. “The Museum’s controversial exhibit omits this lived experience entirely. This erasure must not stand.”





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# CJA Students take part in historic Holocaust Education experience

By Krista Wilson

Students at the Calgary Jewish Academy had the rare opportunity to engage in a deeply meaningful learning experience thanks to the support and dedication of Calgary Jewish Federation, whose commitment to Holocaust education continues to bring impactful programs to our students and school community.

World-renowned advocate Jonny Daniels visited the school to offer our Grade 6–9 students an unforgettable window into his work. Sharing stories of the last living Righteous Among the Nations, Daniels told of remarkable acts of courage taken by those who risked everything to help Jewish people escape, hide, and survive during the Holocaust – challenging students to consider what they might do when ‘doing the right thing’ comes with tremendous personal risk.

During his visit, CJA welcomed Holocaust survivors and their descendants for a deeply meaningful moment as part of the Survivor Torah Project. Daniels shared a rescued Torah scroll that had been hidden in a Polish village since 1939, now travelling the world to be completed by survivors. One by one, they carefully inscribed a letter in the unfinished Torah, honouring the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust and ensuring their stories live on.

CJA students were not simply learning about history, they were witnessing it. The moment was described as profoundly moving and filled with an indescribable energy, as students watched resilience and remembrance come together before them. For many, it was an experience that will stay with them for years to come.

CJA extends a heartfelt thank-you to Calgary Jewish Federation for making experiences like this



possible and for their unwavering commitment to educating and inspiring our youth.

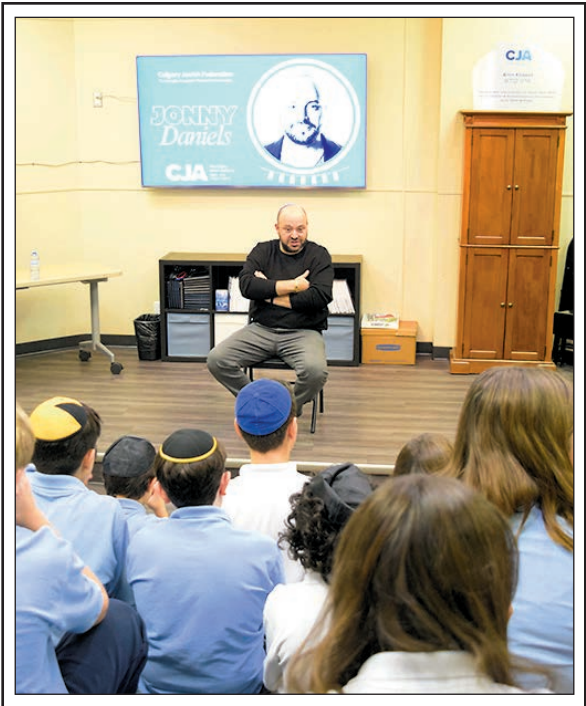


World renowned advocate Jonny Daniels provided CJA students with a powerful experience of resilience and remembrance.



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# Al Osten *Cont. from page 2*

who is thrilled that the camp received Osten's transformational gift on his watch, following his eighth and final season as camp director.

"I couldn't have asked for a better way to go out," Shaikin said. "Maybe some of the dreams that I had when I came into the job have now come to fruition."

To be sure, Shaikin worked hard at realizing those dreams, having retired the camp's debt while fundraising for and completing vital capital projects. Now, Osten's gift will give the camp much-needed forward momentum.

"We are asking the community to share in this with Al," said Shaikin, who describes Camp BB-Riback as the "hub of the Alberta Jewish community," the only local organization he can think of that serves both Calgary and Edmonton.

"The camp is important to Jewish youth, especially nowadays," says JJ Hoffman, who grew up with Shaikin and shares his passion for BB Riback.

"With antisemitism and all the chaos in the world, it is more important than ever to give to the camp and the schools, where we can foster Jewish identity," added Hoffman. "Kids need to grow up loving their Judaism, loving their community, loving the places that basically shape their future."

With the news of Osten's gift, the entire camp community is smiling, but none as broadly as their benefactor.

"The last few years have been the happiest in my life," Osten told *AJNews*. "I'm so proud of the things we've been doing."

The "we" refers to the late Buddy Victor, Osten's showbiz, business, and life partner, who passed away in 2023 but whose name lives on in all the couple's charitable works, bringing Osten much comfort and many happy memories.

Osten and Victor met when they were singers in the Rover Boys, a 1950s quartet whose hit song *Graduation Day* is still fondly remembered. They even helped to discover legendary singer Paul Anka who later acknowledged their early support in his autobiography.

After living for a time in New York City, Osten and Victor settled in Edmonton, where Osten – born in Saskatoon – had been raised. They achieved business success following their ground-floor entry into the weight-loss industry with their purchase of the Alberta and Saskatchewan Weight Watchers franchise.

That meeting changed the course of Victor and Osten's life.

For one thing they lost a lot of weight. As their waistlines shrunk, their business grew, necessitating Osten's move to Calgary while Victor continued to helm the Edmonton office.

Thanks to a relationship they had with a Weight Watchers friend, Mildred Oppenheimer, Osten and Victor began investing in Broadway shows, some of which became major hits, including *Hairspray* (2002), *Little Shop of Horrors* (2003), *Sweeney Todd* (2005), and *Young Frankenstein* (2009).

Prudent investment through the years allowed Osten and Victor – who did not have children of their own – to build and then generously share their legacy, taking care of kin and the causes nearest their big hearts.

Osten told *AJNews* that the couple's charitable efforts in both Edmonton and Calgary have been built around four pillars: Hospice and healthcare (or, as Osten puts it, "living and dying with dignity"); children

and youth; the arts; and religious organizations, with emphasis on Jewish and Catholic charities, consistent with Osten and Victor's respective faiths.

Through their Osten-Victor fund at the Calgary Foundation and Victor-Osten Fund at the Edmonton Community Foundation, they have supported countless worthwhile organizations and institutions, like the Roozen Family Hospice Centre in Edmonton and Ronald McDonald Houses in both Edmonton and Calgary, to name but a few.

Within the Jewish community, beneficiaries have included Temple B'nai Tikvah – where Al is a much-cherished congregant, Calgary Jewish Federation/ UJA, Jewish Family Service Calgary, CHW, the Beth Tzedec Congregation Jewish Film Festival, Chabad Lubavitch, and JNF.

Funds donated by Osten and other supporters at the 2017 JNF Negev Gala gave a boost to the Israel Tennis Centre, with funds earmarked for programs facilitating the integration of Ethiopian immigrants, youth with disabilities, and other at-risk groups while modeling the peaceful co-existence of Arabs and Jews through a unifying love for sports.

Osten's \$500 thousand gift to CIJA (the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs) – announced this past July – supports that organization's first-ever office in Calgary, helping to boost local advocacy for Israel and the Jewish community.

In recent years, Osten has also pledged an after-lifetime gift to a broad range of Jewish communal organizations via the Life & Legacy program, an initiative of the Massachusetts-based Harold Grinspoon Foundation that is coordinated locally by the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary and the Calgary Jewish Federation.

It is impossible to list all the civic organizations in both Calgary and Edmonton that have benefited from Al Osten and Buddy Victor's philanthropy. Their donation some years back to the Art Gallery of Alberta's New Vision building capital campaign was described by the AGA as "pivotal," and they later donated many works of art to the AGA. In Calgary, the Osten and Victor Alberta Tennis Centre is making a difference in the lives of young tennis players.

A former member of the board of directors at Theatre Calgary, Osten is proud that the legacy fund they endowed there has, among other things, subsidized ticket prices, making theatre accessible to more Calgarians.

Recent major gifts – dizzying in their scope –



Camp BB-Riback summer of 2024. Photo supplied.

reflect Al and Buddy's shared love for the performing arts. They include a \$5 million gift to the Glenbow Museum – which will feature a 150-seat Osten-Victor theatre – and a \$12 million gift to the Werklund Centre which will house the state-of-the-art Osten-Victor Playhouse at the Werklund Centre, previously known as Arts Commons.

Another eponymous performance space Osten is excited to have gifted to Calgarians is the Osten-Victor Inspiration Studio, a state-of-the-art, accessible theatre/dance workshop venue that will be part of the Multidisciplinary Disability Community Arts Hub (MDCAH) Project of The National accessArts Centre in Calgary.

Other philanthropic projects are currently in the works, says Osten whose friends sometimes warn him he is giving it all away.

"That's the plan," he replies, counterintuitively adding, "The more you give, the more you get."

"It shoots me to the moon," says Osten.

Jessica Miller Switzer has a more modest travel proposal for Osten.

"We want to bring Al out to BB-Riback this spring," said Miller Switzer.

How heartwarming is that? Al Osten will finally go to camp!

## Chag Hanukkah Sameach!



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# Creating inclusive classrooms at Halpern Akiva Academy

Imagine you are an 8-year old, entering Grade 3, but you do not speak the language of your teachers or peers. You are not sure how you will ask for help, make friends, or understand your teachers. You know they are all trying to help you and welcome you, but at first, everything is just a blur of words and activities that don't make sense.

This is the reality for many new students at Halpern Akiva Academy. Akiva has been helping to integrate EAL (English as an Additional Language) students for much of its 40-plus year history.

This year, the school is very fortunate to have an expert on-staff to facilitate this transition – Ms. Fiona Whitlie, Director of Learning Intervention.

A former teacher and Curriculum Specialist with the Calgary Board of Education, she brings 36 years of experience in a variety of roles to Halpern Akiva Academy.

Her experience includes teaching all subject areas, early reading intervention at the younger grades, and peer leadership on a variety of grade teams. As a Curriculum Specialist, Ms. Whitlie worked with educators across the system in curriculum design and resource implementation.

Her focus at Halpern Akiva Academy is on supporting children in their learning journeys and assisting classroom teachers with assessment and development of learning opportunities to provide the

best possible environment for student success.

Ms. Whitlie is helping support the EAL students, guiding new teachers with student behaviour plans, and responding to diverse learning needs.

The proof is in the laughter and cooperative play seen on the playground, and the excited raising of hands to answer teachers' questions in class.

Halpern Akiva Academy registration is still open for the 2025-26 school year for students from Daycare (12+ months) to Grade 9. Please call 403-258-1312 or email [office@akiva.ca](mailto:office@akiva.ca) to learn more!

## Hanukkah *Cont. from page 5*

the long exile, which has endured for some 2,000 years, we dedicate our capacity to confront the darkness.

The Midrash in Bereishit Rabbah interprets the verse at the start of the Book of Genesis, "and darkness


was upon the face of the deep," by stating: "Darkness – this is the Kingdom of Greece, which darkened the eyes of Israel with its decrees, for they said to them, 'Write that you have no share in the G-d of Israel.'"

The struggle against the external influence that seeks to make us forget our essence, our connection to our great past and our luminous future – the redemption of Israel and the building of the Temple on the Temple Mount, the denial of the

Divine, and the severing of our bond with the Torah and tradition – this is the perennial struggle of the exile that began with the deeds of the Syrian-Greeks and continues today with various permutations of those same forces antagonistic to the spirit of Israel.

When we light the Hanukkah candles this year, we will begin, yet again, "to enter the craft we are destined to master."

*Rabbi Guy Tal is the Rabbi at Beth Israel Synagogue in Edmonton.*



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# Chai Life YYC opens with “Joseph” on November 29

By Holly Shifrah, LJI Reporter

Chai Life YYC’s production of *Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, running from November 29 to December 7 at Temple B’nai Tikvah, will be kicking off the newly founded theatre company’s revival of Jewish Theatre in Calgary. Chai Life YYC has entrusted award-winning local director, Sean Anderson, the Artistic Director/Executive Producer and co-founder of Morpheus Theatre, to lead their inaugural production.

When asked if he felt a sense of pressure regarding the need for this first show to succeed in order for Chai Life YYC to continue, he expressed that the opposite has been true saying, “I think there’s a lot of support, both in people wanting to see this company succeed... and also in financial support.”

Anderson also expressed that though recently there’s been a dearth of auditioning actors in the Calgary community theatre scene, especially for musicals, *Joseph* not only managed to fill all the roles they needed, their cast is a mix of Jewish and non-Jewish actors. In fact, Anderson himself is not Jewish. He said that while directing *Joseph* he “took the opportunity to learn” and “really enjoyed the experience.”

Chai Life YYC describes, as part of their dream, bringing together “an inclusive community that dedicates itself to nurturing and presenting different Jewish voices...to a larger community – to enrich and strengthen the human spirit.” In the face of rising antisemitism and the air, as Chai Life YYC describes it, “rife with intolerance, misunderstanding,

unkindness, marginalization, persecution, and unrighteousness,” the reality of a diverse cast and crew coming together to support this newborn Jewish theatre company is not just encouraging, it’s a dream come true.

The show has presented some unique challenges for its director, such as the relatively small stage size, its unique layout, and the fact that a permanent set was not possible in the shared space, which led to simplified props and costume changes as well as keeping much of the 30 person cast on stage most of the time. Anderson also intentionally avoided copying previous, more famous, productions of the show. He explained that he tries to “take a fresh look at it and just direct what comes from the script itself.”

Even those who have never had the opportunity to see a live production of *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat* may be familiar with the 1999 film version starring Donny Osmond. A new film adaptation is in development with filmmaker John M Chu (the man responsible for the wildly successful 2-part film adaptation of the Broadway show *Wicked*, in addition to directing the 2021 musical film *In the Heights*). But when asked if he thought that the success of movie musicals like *Wicked* has increased interest in participation in community theatre, Anderson indicated that he thinks what’s increasing interest, particularly for younger audiences and actors, are fresh shows. He believes that “having some really good scripts coming into the theatre...not just relying on musicals that are 60, 80, 100 plus years old...[and] getting a more modern take on musical theatre” is drawing new people to participate.



Though *Joseph* may be approaching that 60 year mark, it will be exciting to see what creativity this local director brings to the show as well as seeing what fresh new shows Chai Life YYC may present in the future, provided Calgary continues to show them the outpouring of support they’ve thus far enjoyed. In addition to a successful fundraising campaign prior to auditions for *Joseph*, Anderson and the ticket sales website both indicate the very real possibility of a sold-out run. Tickets are no longer available online for three of the scheduled seven performances, with only one ticket listed as still available for opening night (at time of writing). Don’t despair though, a limited number of tickets will be available at the door for each performance, even if it says sold-out on-line. With such a level of pre-show support and ticket sales, the future of Chai Life YYC looks bright.



"Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat" at TBT: (Left) Paul Finkleman (bottom centre) as Jacob, with some of his sons. (Right) Lorna Gilfedder, Dustin Port as Pharaoh, Hayley Powis and Tracy Smith. Photos by Dorin McIntosh.

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# Inspiring Philanthropy: A year of growth and impact

**By Joseph Tappenden**

The Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary (JCFC) has released its 2025 Annual Report, celebrating another year of growth and meaningful impact in the Calgary Jewish community and beyond. For more than 35 years, JCFC has been the long-term philanthropic partner of the community, helping individuals, families, and organizations make lasting contributions to the causes they care about most.

This past fiscal year, JCFC reached a new milestone: \$40.5 million in assets under management, up from \$33.7 million the previous year. The Foundation now oversees 265 charitable funds, reflecting the growing trust of community members who see JCFC as a secure and effective way to fulfill their philanthropic goals.

JCFC Chair Stuart Myron attributes this growth to the generosity of fundholders and the Foundation's careful stewardship. "An increasing number of individuals, families, and community organizations have faith in our Foundation's ability to support their philanthropic passions and objectives," he said. "Because of their collective efforts, our future is strong."

Grants and distributions totaled more than \$2 million this past year, supporting over 200 local and national charitable initiatives. This reflects our fundholders' commitment to investing their charitable dollars into meaningful community causes, including education, social services, health and wellness, Israel, and religious institutions.

JCFC's investment portfolio also performed exceptionally well last fiscal year. Despite ongoing global uncertainty, disciplined management and diversification produced strong returns. Richard Nagan, outgoing Chair of the Investment Committee, explained: "Our managers have continued to bring prudence and strong guidance to our investments. Even in an unpredictable market, we focus on the long term — ensuring stable growth that allows the Foundation to provide dependable support to



the community.”

Another area of continued success is the Life & Legacy program, an initiative of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation that helps individuals and families make after-lifetime gifts to the Jewish organizations they value most. Since joining six years ago, nearly 270 Calgary donors have made formal commitments, representing an estimated \$19.2 million in future endowments which will support Jewish schools, synagogues, and agencies. In November 2024, JCFC and its partners launched a new Life & Legacy Council, bringing together community professionals and lay leaders to encourage others to consider legacy giving. The goal: to welcome an additional 100 donors over the next five years.

“These commitments represent not just generosity, but vision,” said Myron. “They reflect a shared belief that financial sustainability is essential for the strength of Jewish life in Calgary — not only today,

but for generations to come.”

JCFC continues to inspire the next generation of community builders through educational initiatives. This past summer, 28 teens from Camp BB Riback participated in the Teen Philanthropy Program, adding to the more than 200 young people who have participated since it began. Underwritten by B'nai Brith Lodge #816, the program teaches Jewish teens the value of charitable giving and how thoughtful philanthropy can make a real difference.

As the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary celebrates over 35 years of inspiring philanthropy, its mission remains clear: to nurture generosity, steward resources wisely, and ensure the Calgary Jewish community continues to thrive for generations to come.

To learn more about JCFC, how you can build your legacy, or establish a fund, visit [jcfc.ca](http://jcfc.ca), call (403) 640-2273, or contact Joseph Tappenden at [joseph.tappenden@jcfc.ca](mailto:joseph.tappenden@jcfc.ca).

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# Canadian Jewish Literary Awards announced

The nine winners of the 2025 Canadian Jewish Literary Awards have been announced. The accomplishments of these writers stand as a beacon of hope and resilience in these challenging times when the community often feels under siege. The awards were presented on October 26, 2025, at a gala ceremony at the Miles Nadal JCC in Toronto.

As it embarks on its second decade, the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards recognizes and rewards the finest Canadian writing on Jewish themes and subjects. Winners have been selected in the categories of fiction, biography, memoir, poetry, Yiddish, Jewish culture, history, scholarship, and books for children and youth.

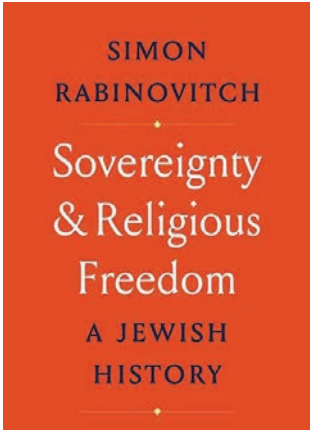
“Despite the challenges, the Canadian Literary Awards had more submissions this year than ever before,” Canadian Jewish Literary Awards founder and Jury Chair Edward Trapunski said. “The quality of the submissions was exemplary, and the Jury had to make tough decisions to honour these exceptional books.”

Especially significant is the Irving Abella Award in History given annually in honour of Irving Abella z"l, of blessed memory. Celebrating the best Canadian writing on Jewish history, the Irving Abella Award is supported by the friends of this giant of scholarship who left an indelible imprint on Canadian Jewish studies.

### The Irving Abella Award in History

*Sovereignty and Religious Freedom: A Jewish History* (Yale University Press) by Simon Rabinovitch recounts the story of the varying rights Jews have enjoyed in different countries. Deeply researched and brilliantly conceived, it is both a survey and a legal history of Jewish sovereignty and religious freedom. It explores ideas about citizenship and belonging,

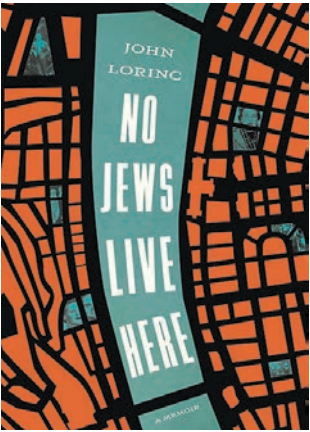
including who is a Jew, what constitutes a Jewish family, and how to define Jewish space. It compares the conflicts between the individual and collective rights of Jews over the last two centuries. With Rabinovitch as a guide, we explore religious freedom and group rights for Jews in America, Europe, and Israel, the one state



where they are a majority. The book’s analysis of Jewish rights and sovereignty is directly applicable to Quebec’s history, particularly the Jewish community’s response to Quebec’s own sovereignty movements and the ongoing discussions within Quebec about the rights of religious minorities. *Sovereignty and Religious Freedom* is original, comprehensive, nuanced, and surprisingly accessible.

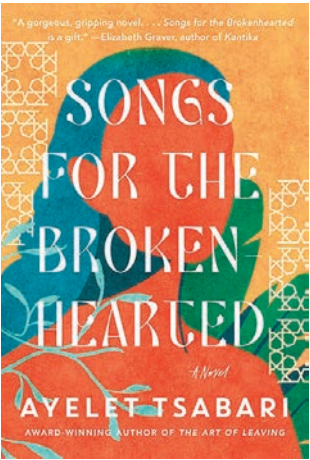
### Biography

*Menachem Mendel Schneerson: Becoming the Messiah* (Yale University Press: Jewish Series) by Ezra Glinter is a highly readable, non-partisan biography that allows the reader to understand the gifts, the accomplishments and perhaps the limitations of a man admired by Jews and non-Jews alike. It places Schneerson within the intellectual context of Hasidism and the historical context of Eastern European Jewry. It follows him through his educational journey, surprisingly, in secular institutions in Berlin and Paris that continued alongside his religious studies. It delves into the politics of leadership and succession within the Lubavitch Hasidic movement and Schneerson’s role in establishing Chabad/Lubavitch in America. Its distinctive ideology is at the centre of a worldwide Jewish outreach program with the Rebbe as its sage and sometimes messianic figure. The photograph on the cover has become a meme signifying both the Hasidic movement that Schneerson led as Rebbe and the messianic beliefs and aspirations of his followers, including arguably of himself.



### Memoir

*No Jews Live Here* (Coach House Press) by John Lorinc explores his family story and how life is shaped by historical forces over which we have no control. From pre-war Budapest to post-war Toronto, John Lorinc unspools four generations of his family’s journey through the Holocaust, the 1956 Revolution, and finally an exodus from a country that can’t rid itself of its antisemitic demons. His parents and maternal grandmother, Ilona, Holocaust survivors, arrived in Canada in 1956, the second wave of Hungarian refugees, mostly Jewish. The irony is that Lorinc’s parents kept his Jewish identity a secret from him to protect him from the atrocities they might have faced even in seemingly benevolent Canada. As a child, the author and his sister were baptized at a United Church, a classic “just in case” move for his still traumatized survivor parents. In uncovering his Jewish and Hungarian identity, he tells a profoundly human saga that weaves his fascinating family history with the history of Hungary and its uneasy relationship with its Jewish community.



### Fiction

*Songs for the Broken-Hearted* (HarperCollins) by Ayelet Tsabari is a rich and moving novel in which a young woman rediscovers and reclaims her homeland, heritage, and family. The year is 1995, and Zohara, a Yemenite Israeli, interrupts her studies in the U.S. to return home for her mother’s funeral. It’s an unsettling journey, as she uncovers secrets about her mother’s past, immerses herself in the haunting traditional songs of the Yemenite women, and expands her political awareness. Shifting between 1950 and 1995, the novel

also features a compelling love story that crosses generations. Drawing on her own cultural background, Tsabari confronts the discriminatory treatment of her community in the early days of the state, including the controversial Yemenite Children Affair. *Songs for the Broken-Hearted* offers a window into a segment of Israeli society that has often been ignored in literature.

### Poetry

*To All the Mirrored Doors of Beginning, a Journey Ending* (Wipf and Stock) by Ruth Rivka, is a collection of poems driven by passion and urgency. Under her full name, Ruth Rifka Abrams, she is a well-known visual artist and expressionist painter. With advanced age has come the need for words, as well. In the poem titled “In My 96th Year,” she begins: “I am obsessed/ to search out the truth of all things, to see the picture clear/ before I go as go I must.” With startling honesty and directness, Ruth wrestles with questions of mortality, morality and belief, responding to painful current events and the rise of antisemitism. Exploring Jewish experience and concepts, she looks inward and, at the same time, bravely outward to engage with the world around her. In the Jewish tradition, her poems are an interrogation, a lament and, at the same time, a testament to the creative spirit.

### Children and Youth

The winner in the Children and Youth category is *The Light Keeper*, written by Sheila Baslaw and Karen Levine, and illustrated by Alice Priestley (Second Story Press)

*The Light Keeper* is a story of light—both physical and metaphorical. Shmuel is eager to help support his poor family, but no one in his shtetl will hire a 10-year-old boy. One day, two men arrive and install electric lamps, bringing the miracle of light to the village square. When a lamp breaks during a storm, Shmuel, who had carefully watched the men as they worked, is the only one who can fix it. To do it, he must overcome his fear of heights. This story is based on tales Sheila Baslaw’s father told her about life in Porilla, a shtetl near Kyiv. Told from a child’s perspective, their themes overcoming fears, family responsibility, and the importance of community—are universal. With co-

Continued on page 32

ALBERTA’S NEW DEMOCRAT CAUCUS

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Samir Kayande  
MLA FOR CALGARY-ELBOW

HAPPY Hanukkah



# Project Regeneration sets big things in motion in Northern Israel

**By Regan Lipes, LJI Reporter**

On October 7, 2023, the international Jewish community looked on in horror and fear as peaceful communities in Eretz Israel were descended upon by terrorists orchestrating modern day pogroms of mass slaughter and the bloodshed of innocents. On October 8, with the numbers of dead still rising, and a still unknown number of hostages, the international Jewish community sprang into action. While pro-Hamas rallies and demonstrations began to brew, Jews around the world came together, emotionally, spiritually, and monetarily to support Israel and the future of the Jewish State.

Albertans may recall a visit from Sarah Mali, the Director General of the Jewish Federations of Canada in September 2024. In Edmonton, she attended an event to kick off the United Jewish Appeal campaign. She explained passionately that the people she visited in Northern Israel were being supported in meaningful and life-changing ways by the generosity of Canadian Jewish communities. Even then Mali was clear with audience members, that the process of collective healing would take years of effort and dedication. The destruction of October 7 aftermath will ricochet for many years to come but the inspiring efforts to rebuild and rejuvenate Canada's partner communities in Northern Israel are already underway and thriving.

Recently, Stacey Leavitt-Wright, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, traveled to Israel with Calgary Jewish Federation CEO Rob Nagus and their counterparts from other Jewish Federations and Coast-to-Coast representatives. As Jewish Albertans are well aware, Leavitt-Wright and Nagus have both worked tirelessly with their teams to keep the communities safe and informed as hate crimes and rising antisemitism have sparked uncertainty and anxiety.

Leavitt-Wright was happy to be able to share good news with the *Alberta Jewish News* in an interview following her return, bringing with her a message of hope and healing from Eretz Israel. “Our communities in Canada were abundantly generous with donations to support Israel following October 7,” she explained. “These funds were vital and we were able to help support some essential services at a critical time, but we always knew that there would be a long process of healing.”

While in Israel, the Canadian delegates met with community leaders, local decision-makers in municipal government, and educators.

“Together, we’ve allocated emergency funding over the past two years throughout Israel, and today, we stand united in our commitment to the North, a testament to the collective of Canadian Jewry where we are contributing equally toward a shared vision.” Leavitt-Wright expanded on the importance of a new and uplifting undertaking. She said, “Project Regeneration unites the Federations of Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Coast-to-Coast Emergency Forum, who are each committing an equal share toward a joint goal for the North. The Coast-to-Coast group includes Jewish Winnipeg; Ottawa; Calgary; Edmonton, and Atlantic Jewish Council. We are joined in this endeavour today with Victoria and Vancouver Island; Windsor; Hamilton; London, Ontario and small communities in Ontario and Saskatchewan. I am so proud of our work together and the impact we create when we galvanize the Canadian collective, an opportunity that has ensured that the smaller federations and communities could also join in something larger than what any of us could have accomplished on our own. This is the true spirit of what it means to be a Jewish Federation and part of the Canadian collective.”

The power of collective giving cannot be underestimated. “In February 2024 we came to Etzbal Hagalil for a Coast-to-Coast solidarity mission, to listen and to see firsthand how our remarkable partners on the ground were dealing with an unprecedented situation. Ensuring that communities were supported and kept intact, despite being spread across the country, took herculean efforts by very dedicated professionals and lay leaders.”

According to a June 2025 article in the *Canadian Jewish News*, over \$140 million dollars in emergency

funds were raised to support Israel. In Northern Israel, with so many families displaced long term this support was crucial. As Leavitt-Wright reiterated though, there is now the need to rejuvenate and rebuild, and this may be an even longer process than anticipated.

“It isn’t just about repairing infrastructure, but revitalizing community, and bringing families back to their homes,” she said. Displaced families have been living in other, sometimes more established, communities for the past two years, and some are reluctant to return to the North. “When we asked residents what mattered most to them, beyond security, they spoke of education and academia – two sides of the same coin, and the foundation for a thriving future. Project Regeneration is about more than replacing what was lost – it is about building back better. And building on the knowledge and expertise from these decades of collaboration and the team of professionals we have



here on the ground,” Leavitt-Wright commented candidly.

Education is positioned at the heart of core Jewish values, and it is understandable that parents want to give their children only the best. The remaining funds raised in Canada to send to Israel are now being allocated to reinvigorating the North, with Kiryat Shmona at the centre and education at the core. "All the communities we spoke with agreed that a vibrant Kiryat Shmona would benefit the entire region,"

*Continued on page 29*



Wishing The Jewish Community Of Calgary A

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From the Promised Land to the Prairies

# An Israeli family’s search for safety and reunion

By Jana Zalmanowitz, LJI Reporter

It’s been over two years since the horrors of October 7, 2023 shattered the lives of many Israelis. Since that time, some have made the choice to leave Israel, while rebuilding and finding an identity here in Alberta. This series examines the reasons they left and what being in Alberta has meant to their Jewish identity.

When Valeria Murov and her husband Stas, heard about the Canadian program granting 3-year work visas to Israelis during the war, they saw an opportunity. They loved their life in Israel but were finding it increasingly difficult to navigate with young children. “It’s so scary what’s happened there. I wanted my children to be calm, not to wake up in the night from alarms, always searching for a safe place.”

Valeria did her research. She had never been to Canada but learned that Calgary had the most sunny days per year, boasted views of the mountains and that Alberta had lower taxes than other Canadian provinces. They settled on Calgary and she decided to take the leap and leave behind what she knew: their house, family, friends and an established career. What she did not anticipate leaving behind was her husband.

While Stas, a business owner, stayed in Israel longer to work, Valeria came to Calgary in September 2024 with her children, ages 3 and 6 to set up their life. She knew nobody, but within 10 days of arriving had registered her kids in daycare, found an apartment and opened a bank account. There were endless bureaucracies to figure out. “You know you come to Costco and they say ‘No, you can’t come to Costco

because you need a membership,’” Valeria says, describing one of the unexpected rules of Canadian life. “It’s a store. Can’t you just shop there?”

She quickly figured out Calgary is not easily walkable and she would need a car to get around more easily, so she got her Canadian driver’s license, bought a car and learned to drive in snow. She’s wasted no time in embracing this new life.

When it came time for Stas to join his family in December of 2024, he was denied entry to Canada at the border. “He’s on a blacklist or something. They told us he needs an Authorization to Return,” Valeria explains. Stas lived with his parents in Montreal for part of his childhood, leaving for Israel when he was still a minor. “He arrived in LA and immigration said he can’t get on the plane. So we all flew to Florida. It was my son’s birthday.” While the family managed to make a different kind of memory on vacation in Disneyworld, it didn’t solve the long-term problem.

Valeria and her family have been working with an immigration consultant but are still unsure why her husband cannot enter Canada and how he can gain entry to join his family. “It was last December and that’s the last time we saw him. It’s very hard.”

Valeria is building a life in Alberta for her children. When asked for photos, she pulls up images of her and her children on hikes in the mountains and dressed up for Stampede. Quintessential Calgarian experiences. Her son started at public school this year and both kids are making friends in their neighbourhood. She has watched their knowledge of English go from nonexistent to fluent.

Valeria met other new Israeli Calgarians through a WhatsApp group but hasn’t ventured too much into



A family photo, the last time they were together, one year ago.

the rest of the Jewish community. She attributes this partly to language. “I was at the JCC on Pesach but didn’t meet a ton of people. Maybe because my English is not so good. I don’t feel so free to speak with the Jewish people there who aren’t Israeli.”

When asked about whether she acknowledges she is Jewish or Israeli to those who she meets in the broader community, there isn’t a simple answer. Valeria was born in Belarus and moved to Israel when she was one. She speaks Russian with her children and says when people hear them talking, they often assume they have come from Ukraine. Her children aren’t old enough to truly understand antisemitism and Valeria is okay with that right now.

“I left Israel because I was afraid and I don’t want my children to be afraid. I want to understand how it works here and when I feel safety, it will work. I do want my children to know they are Jewish. That’s how I grew up. But I can’t explain to them there are bad people who may want to hurt you. I just can’t have this conversation with them again right now.”

Building a new life for her children is hard. Especially without her husband in the country. She misses her family and friends. She misses her work. Valeria was trained in communications and human resources. She managed a team in the Electrical Engineering department at a university. “I felt like the queen at work. Someone always needed something from me.” She understands it will take time to learn the language and gain not just employment, but work that uses her skills to their potential.

It’s not just the personal things she misses. Valeria talks about Israel with obvious love, in a way that makes you want to go there. You can feel the heavy trade-offs newcomers to our province make. They are not just coming somewhere new, but leaving somewhere they love behind. “I miss the sea. I miss the beach. I miss the *balagan* of Israel. We say it’s like a scene. There’s always something happening and something doing. Here there’s no balagan but it’s good for my children.”

Valeria is doing what so many parents have done before her, and that’s trade her comfort for her children’s future opportunities. Her biggest wish is that she does not have to do it alone and her husband can share in the joys and challenges of raising Jewish children in Canada. While they continue to problem solve and seek guidance, Valeria hopes the Jewish community can become a new home for her here in Alberta, offering support. “I hope someone reads this and says, ‘I can help her!’”



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# This Indian donut is the perfect Hanukkah treat

By Joanna Nissim

(The Noshers via JTA) - Hanukkah has always been my favorite Jewish holiday. I love all of it: Friends and family gathering together, watching children open their presents, cheery songs to sing when lighting the candles, the celebration of triumph over evil and the opportunity to eat fried food and happily justify it. Of course, no Jewish holiday is complete without each family's edible traditions.

Our family are Bagdadi Jews from Bombay and Calcutta, and have wonderful culinary traditions from Iraq and India for every Jewish holiday. For example, cheese sambusak are *always* served to break the Yom Kippur fast, and leek fritters are always served at our Rosh Hashanah seder. On Hanukkah, we enjoy all sorts of delicious fried food, from latkes and donuts to zalabia; however, I am *always* on the lookout for something new to add to our repertoire.

My Aunt Ruby who grew up in Calcutta, India recalls being taken as a child by her parents to KC Dass, a sweet shop close to where they lived, after Passover to have gulab jamun: a small, milky donut which has been deep-fried and soaked in cardamom and saffron syrup. She said they would dream about the little creamy treats all Passover, and would count down the minutes until they could eat them.

This got me thinking that they would make an amazing addition to our Hanukkah table: They're fried, to symbolize the oil lasting eight days; they contain dairy, to celebrate the heroism of Judith, slayer of the general Holofernes; and they're soaked in syrup — well there doesn't need to be a reason to eat anything soaked in syrup!

Gulab jamun is one of India's most famous deserts, though it was introduced by the Persians around 500 BC. The word "gulab" is derived from the Persian words "gol" (flower) and "ab" (water), which refer to the sweet's rose water-scented syrup. Interestingly, gulab jamun is commonly served at Diwali, the Indian festival of lights, which, much like our own festival of lights, Hanukkah, celebrates bringing light into the world and good triumphing over evil.

**Gulab Jamun**  
Prep time: 15 minutes + 2 hours soaking time  
Cook time: 30 minutes  
Yield: 15 balls

**Ingredients**  
**For the syrup:**  
4 green cardamom pods, bashed in a pestle and mortar, 500 g caster sugar, 2 tsp rosewater, ¼ tsp saffron strands  
**For the gulab jamun:**  
1 tsp ground cardamom, 1 tsp caster sugar, 100 g milk powder, 40 g plain flour, ½ tsp baking powder, 50 g softened unsalted butter, cut into cubes, 1 Tbsp natural yogurt, squeeze of lemon juice, 3 Tbsp whole milk, sunflower oil (or any other neutral oil), for frying  
**To serve:**  
2 tsp crushed pistachios, slivered almonds and/or silver leaf

**Instructions**  
Make the syrup by gently heating the sugar and cardamom in 500 ml water in a saucepan. Once it comes to a boil, lower the temperature and simmer for 10 mins. Remove from heat, add the rosewater and a pinch of saffron, and leave to infuse. Set aside.  
To make the gulab jamun, sieve ground cardamom, sugar, milk powder, flour and baking powder into a mixing bowl.  
Rub in the 50 g butter using your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.



Add the yogurt, lemon juice and 3 Tbsp milk. Mix to form a soft dough, taking care not to overwork the mixture.

Oil your hands with a little sunflower oil and shape small portions of the dough into walnut-sized balls, about 3 cm in diameter and 20 g each. Make sure the dumplings are smooth and have no cracks or folds.

Reheat the syrup until it comes to the boil, then turn off the heat and cover with a lid.

Heat the oil in a deep saucepan. Once the top is shimmering, the oil is hot enough for frying. Test the oil with a piece of bread to ensure that it sizzles. Fry the balls in batches over medium heat for 5-7 mins. (As soon as you drop one in, move it around immediately with a spoon to ensure it doesn't catch on the bottom of the pan.)

Once the balls are even and dark golden brown, remove them from the oil and let them drain on paper towel.

Once cooled, add to the balls warm syrup and leave to soak at room temperature for at least 2-3 hours, if not overnight.

Eat warm or at room temperature, and garnish with slivered almonds, crushed pistachios and/or silver leaf for a special decoration.

*This story originally appeared on The Noshers.*

# HAPPY CHANUKAH!



As the lights of the menorah shine bright, the **Calgary Police Service** wishes you peace, joy, and meaningful moments spent with your loved ones.







A MESSAGE FROM ROB NAGUS

As I approach my one-year anniversary with Calgary Jewish Federation and look forward to a Chanukah filled with light, pride, and Jewish joy, I find myself feeling deeply grateful. First and foremost, I am grateful for all of you. Katie and I have been welcomed with extraordinary kindness. We have met so many passionate, generous, and dedicated members of this community, and we are continually inspired by the strength and potential of Jewish Calgary. We certainly face challenges—some shared with Jewish communities around the world, and others unique to our city. And yet, I remain convinced that the future of Jewish Calgary is bright. Ours is a community with remarkable opportunities, a strong foundation, and the will to move forward. This does not diminish the serious and systemic issues we must confront. Rising costs make Jewish

life and Jewish education increasingly difficult to access. Antisemitism in Canada continues to escalate and normalize. Security concerns here at home are very real. But we are not passive in the face of these challenges. Thanks to a dedicated professional team and a committed Board of Directors, we are focused on our core mission: meeting the needs of an evolving—and growing—Jewish community. Our annual UJA Campaign has been very successful so far, driven by your generosity and care. If you have not yet made your gift this year, please consider doing so. Your support directly strengthens Jewish life in Calgary and ensures a vibrant Jewish future for generations to come. I am also pleased to share that we have officially launched our community-wide Strategic Planning process. Working closely with our dynamic Strategic

Planning Committee, we have engaged Finley & Associates—a highly respected local firm with deep experience in the not-for-profit sector. Together, we will undertake a thoughtful, forward-looking process focused on renewal, clarity of purpose, and measurable impact. We look forward to keeping you informed as this work unfolds. As the days grow shorter, it becomes even more important that we continue to cast our light—boldly, proudly, and joyfully. Wishing you and your family a very happy Chanukah. Warmly, Rob Nagus, CEO, Calgary Jewish Federation

Building an inclusive community is a priority. Contact us and we will make every effort to meet your needs.

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Calgary donors are part of this remarkable achievement. Through their legacy gifts, they're helping to build lasting endowments that will keep Jewish Calgary's future strong, resilient, and full of promise.

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UJA 2025

All events on this page are made possible by your gifts to Calgary Jewish Federation's annual UJA Campaign.



# GIVE TODAY. STRENGTHEN TOMORROW. TOGETHER WE CAN



Diana Kalef, Director of Development

The 2025 UJA Campaign is well underway, and our community is counting on all of us.

As security needs grow, more families turn to IBP (Integrated Bursary Program), and our voice in advocacy becomes ever more essential, your support provides comfort, dignity, and strength. Every gift—every act of generosity—touches real people and sustains the institutions that hold our community together. Please give today and help us stand together in this critical moment. **Give Today. Strengthen Tomorrow. Together We Can.**

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We were honoured to welcome **Jonny Daniels** back to Calgary at the end of November, giving our community—and especially our treasured Holocaust survivors—a meaningful opportunity to take part in his Torah Project. For Jonny, this initiative is a personal mission: to visit every living survivor he can, ensuring their voices, their names, and their legacy are woven directly into the eternal words of Torah.

Here in Calgary, that mission came to life in the most moving way. Survivors added their inscriptions surrounded by family, friends, and community members who cherish them. The visits to both The Calgary Jewish Academy and the Bertha Gold Jewish Seniors Residence created unforgettable intergenerational moments—children, seniors, parents, and educators standing together in honour, memory, and resilience. It was a living bridge between past and future... a testament to Jewish strength and continuity.

These encounters reminded us once again that our survivors are pillars of courage, and that it is our responsibility to ensure their lessons endure.



Our 24-hour **Mitzvah Match-athon** on November 26 was incredible! The community showed up with heart, generosity, and a full commitment to Jewish Calgary. From early morning to late evening, there were beautiful acts of giving, inspiring stories of impact, and a shared sense of purpose that really brought our community together.

Every donation, every phone call, and every conversation reflected the values we hold dear—kindness, responsibility, and the power of community. Together, we are not just raising funds; we are strengthening the fabric of Jewish life in Calgary and beyond, supporting programs that nurture youth, seniors, families, and those in need. The energy and the spirit of giving we witnessed remind us of what we can achieve when we come together. *Todah rabah* to everyone who participated!



## NOW IS THE TIME TO MAKE YOUR UJA GIFT

Support Jewish Calgary today—your gift to the 2025 UJA Campaign helps everyone from babies to seniors thrive in our community. Give now and be part of something meaningful that changes lives. **Give Today. Strengthen Tomorrow. Together We Can.**



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# B’nai Brith Canada calls on Parliament to adopt Bill C-9 with key amendments

By B’nai Brith Canada

OTTAWA – Citing a national rise in hate-motivated incidents, B’nai Brith Canada is urging a Parliamentary committee to recommend the Government adopt Bill C-9 with amendments.

“Bill C-9 is a critical step to update Canada’s Criminal Code to address modern forms of hate,” said Richard Robertson, B’nai Brith Canada’s Director of Research and Advocacy. “It includes new offences for hate-motivated actions and obstructing access to cultural places.”

Bill C-9, the *Combating Hate Act*, would amend Canada’s criminal law to respond effectively to the documented surge in antisemitism, extremist activity and increases in reported hate-crimes. Aspects of the legislation are based on legislative amendments to combat hate in other jurisdictions, including Germany and Australia.

On November 27, B’nai Brith Canada delivered a 10-page submission supporting the bill to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (JUST), which is debating the legislation. We called on its members to endorse it, with certain amendments.

Robertson said B’nai Brith Canada’s recommendations are designed to ensure that the legislation functions as intended by refining its scope, aligning it with Supreme Court precedent, and balancing efficiency with safeguards against misuse.

“Our amendments would maintain Attorney General consent for private hate propaganda prosecutions to block vexatious complaints,” he said.

“They would also sharpen the ban on hate symbols to include the giving of the *Sieg Heil* salute, remove the term “Nazi Swastika” from the legislation,

create an offence related to the public display of terrorist symbols, codify the Supreme Court’s definition of ‘hatred,’ and remove the exemptions that allow purveyors of hate speech to dodge accountability.”

Hate-motivated offences have risen sharply across Canada in recent years, according to police reports from provinces and major cities nationwide. In its Annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in Canada for the year 2024, B’nai Brith Canada documented a 124% increase from 2022 to 2024, with over 6,200 incidents recorded. These trends coincide with the normalization of extremist symbols, the exploitation of statutory exemptions and the expansion of digital environments that facilitate the circulation of hate-based content. B’nai Brith Canada argues that legislative updates are required to correct these gaps.

B’nai Brith made the following recommendations:

The Committee should support Section 3 and Subsection 4(2), while maintaining the requirement for Attorney General consent for private prosecutions under the Hate Propaganda provisions;

The Committee should reject the proposed Subsection 319(2.2) as drafted, limit it to hate symbols, remove the term “Nazi Swastika,” use the term *Hakenkreuz* (Hooked Cross), include the *Sieg Heil*

salute, and create a new subsection under Section 83.18 prohibiting the public display of symbols used by listed terrorist entities;

The Committee should require that any codified definition of “Hatred” conforms with the Supreme Court of Canada’s articulation in the *Whatcott* decision;

The Committee should repeal or amend the exemptions in Subsections 319(3)(b) and 319(3.1)(b).

“As a society, we cannot allow the rise in hate-motivated activity to continue unchecked,” Robertson said. “Bill C-9, properly amended, will serve as an effective tool in defending the safety and dignity of all Canadians.”

## Tour of Calgary Public Library



Community members enjoyed an informative and engaging tour of the Calgary Public Library. (JCC Facebook photo).

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# New study finds that AI can weaken antisemitism, too

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) - Every day, it can seem, brings a fresh headline about how AI chatbots are spreading hateful ideas. But researchers tasked with understanding antisemitism and how it can be stopped say they have found evidence that AI chatbots can actually fight hate.

Researchers affiliated with the Anti-Defamation League’s Center for Antisemitism Research trained a large-language model, or LLM, on countering antisemitic conspiracy theories, then invited people who subscribed to at least one of those theories to interact with it.

The result, according to a new study: The users soon believed in the antisemitic theories less, while at the same time feeling more favorable about Jews as a group. And the effects were still strong a month later, even without further engagement with the LLM.

The researchers are hailing the finding as a breakthrough in the quest for identifying actionable strategies in the fight against Jew-hatred.

“What’s remarkable about these findings is that factual debunking works even for conspiracy theories with deep historical roots and strong connections to identity and prejudice,” David Rand, a Cornell University professor who was the study’s senior author, said in a statement.

“Our artificial intelligence debunker bot typically doesn’t rely on emotional appeals, empathy-building exercises, or anti-bias tactics to correct false beliefs,” Rand continued, referring to practices frequently employed by advocates seeking to fight antisemitism, including at the ADL. “It mostly provides accurate information and evidence-based counterarguments, demonstrating that facts still matter in changing minds.”

Matt Williams, who has headed the Center for Antisemitism Research since its founding three years ago, says the study builds on a growing body of research that views contemporary antisemitism as primarily a misinformation problem, rather than a civil rights problem.

“We need to think about antisemitism less like feelings about Jews, and more like feelings about Bigfoot,” he said in an interview. “And what I mean by that is, it’s not ‘Jews’ that are the problem. It is ‘the Jew’ as a function of conspiracy theory that is the problem. And the relationship between ‘Jews’ and ‘the Jew’ in that context is far more tenuous than we might want to think.”

Calling conspiracy theories “malfunctions in the ways that we make truth out of the world,” Williams said the study showed something remarkable. “People

can correct those malfunctions,” he said. “They really can, which is super exciting and really impactful.”

The study emerges from the ADL’s relatively new effort to come-up with evidence-based ways to reduce antisemitism, working with dozens of researchers across a slew of institutions to design and carry out experiments aimed at turning a robust advocacy space into less of a guessing game.

The new experiment, conducted earlier this year, involved more than 1,200 people who said on a previous ADL survey that they believed at least one of six prominent antisemitic conspiracy theories, such as that Jews control the media or the “Great Replacement” theory about Jewish involvement in immigration.

The people then were randomly assigned three different scenarios: A third chatted with an LLM programmed by the researchers to debunk such theories, built within Microsoft’s Claude AI model; another third chatted with Claude about an unrelated topic; and the final third were simply told that their belief represented a “dangerous” conspiracy theory. Then they were all tested again about their beliefs.

Members of the group that chatted with what the researchers are calling DebunkBot were far more likely than members of the other groups to have their beliefs weakened, the researchers found.

DebunkBot was hardly a panacea for antisemitism: The study found that those who believed in more antisemitic conspiracy theories experienced less change. And Williams notes that the study found only that belief in antisemitic conspiracies was reduced, not rooted out entirely.

But he said any strategy that can cut against what researchers believe has been a widespread explosion of belief in conspiracy theories is a good thing.

The proportion of Americans subscribing to conspiracy theories over the last decade has reached as much as 45%, more than twice the rate that had held steady for 70 to 80 years, Williams said.

“To me, the increase in that level of saturation is far more concerning than any particular conspiracy theory

## PJ Library is a blast!



Calgary Jewish Federation hosts amazing PJ Library programs throughout the year for young families. For information visit [jewishcalgary.org](http://jewishcalgary.org). (Facebook photos).

moving through different generations,” he said. “I don’t think that we’re going to ever create a world in which we go under 15% — but going from 45 back to 30 or 25 seems more doable.”

The new study comes as AI models vault into widespread use among Americans, raising concerns about their implications for Jews. When Elon Musk launched a model of his own earlier this year called Grok, it immediately drew criticism for amplifying antisemitism — kicking off a pattern that has played out repeatedly. Soon, the company apologized and said it would train its model to avoid the same behavior in the future. Criticism of Grok is still widespread, but it no longer praises Hitler — though even this week it reportedly told one user that the Nazi gas chambers were not designed for mass killing, prompting an investigation by French authorities.

Chatbot training is seen as essential for delivering high-quality AI results. DebunkBot can be found online on its own website now, but Williams said efforts were underway within the ADL to convince the companies operating major AI platforms to incorporate its expertise.

“There’s far more receptivity than not, by any stretch of the imagination,” he said, while noting that the work was early and he could not share many details.

Whatever happens with that effort, Williams said, the new research demonstrates that combatting what’s sometimes called the world’s oldest hatred is possible.

“AI and LLMs — those are tools, right? And we can use tools for good and for evil,” Williams said. “But the fact that we can subject conspiracy theories to rational conversation and arguments and actually lead to favorable outcomes is itself, I think, relatively innovative, surprising and extraordinarily useful.”



**HAPPY HANUKKAH**



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# The Persian tradition of Yalda pairs perfectly with Hanukkah

By Rachel Sumekh

(Hey Alma via JTA) - By the time we reach the winter, I need all the light I can get.

It's almost as if my Iranian Jewish ancestors knew the moments we'd find ourselves in and came prepared with a double dose. Alongside the miracle of light from Hanukkah, I grew up celebrating Shab-e Yalda, the ancient Persian winter solstice tradition.

The mystics believed that on the year's longest and darkest night – usually Dec. 21 – evil spirits reached their peak. To counter this energy, Persians would gather around a fire in the comfort of community and stay up into the night. They'd share the last of their red summer fruits and read the poetry of Hafez, whose words illuminated the darkness until the first light chased the spirits away.

As a host and self-proclaimed balabusta, I've always seen these two winter holidays as natural companions, like sour cream and applesauce. Their shared timing, mutual focus on light and inspired foods make them an easy pairing. In much the way that Nowruz, the Persian new year, coincides with Passover, I can no longer imagine celebrating Hanukkah without poetry or Yalda without my fried donuts.

Fortunately, my friend and food writer Tannaz Sassooni saw the synchronicity too. Together, we created Erev Yalda, a project that fuses our Iranian and Jewish traditions into one meaningful celebration. With Reboot Studios, the funding and production arm of the Jewish arts and culture nonprofit Reboot, we produced a short film of a beautiful Erev Yalda celebration featuring actor and producer Michaela Watkins, Black and Persian comedian Tehran and Iranian-Israeli comedian and activist Noam Shuster-Eliassi. We also created a downloadable guide to celebrating Erev Yalda.

In the film, Watkins asks why a series of bad – but not catastrophic – things happened to her. She closes her eyes and shuffles through the pages of Hafez,

landing on a poem titled “Of Course Things Like That Can Happen.” We all laughed as it answered her question and perfectly captured the magic and mysticism of the tradition. We sat around the fire, each guest posing a question and landing on a poem that as they read, felt like Hafez was speaking directly to their heart. My doubts about whether our friends would “get it” melted away.

The food added its own poetry to the evening: sufganiyot bursting with tart sour cherry filling, as vibrant as the crimson dawn symbolizing Yalda, and a golden-crusted latke tahdig which shone as brightly as a fully lit menorah.

My Iranian Jewish identity has always been a defining part of my life. I went to Persian class on Saturdays and Hebrew on Sundays. When I married my cute Ashkenazi husband Max this summer, we signed our ketubah on a hand printed Iranian tablecloth adorned with Hebrew text that my grandmother packed with her from Esfahan. My attachment to this culture, both Iranian and Jewish, is a thread woven deeply into who I am.

This is Erev Yalda: a reclamation of two traditions, thousands of years old. Something tells me we weren't the first to recognize their similarities. This year, Yalda will fall on the sixth night of Hanukkah, an even more aligned opportunity to celebrate.


Through Erev Yalda, I've learned that alongside the light we inherit, we have the power to adapt our traditions, in ways that bring meaning, ease and joy, especially in times when we face many unknowns.



My grandmother often reminded us with a Persian proverb: Dar nomidi basi omid ast, pāyān-e šab-e siyah sefid ast — “There is much hope in hopelessness; for at the end of the dark night, there is light.”

This winter, gather your community around the menorah, read a few good poems and remember that we come from many traditions that teach us to be and bring in the light.

*A version of this article was first published on Hey Alma.*



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# This year’s Hanukkah kids’ books light up the imagination

By Penny Schwartz

(JTA) — From Who-ville to Schmoozeville, and from island getaways to cozy homes, this year’s crop of Hanukkah books for kids of all ages take families on journeys to imaginative settings, some familiar from the pantheon of children’s literature and Jewish ideas. Families from across the diverse Jewish spectrum will enjoy the new titles that celebrate the popular eight-day holiday, also known as the Festival of Lights.

Three titles garnered the recommendation of the Association of Jewish Libraries — “Construction Site, Hanukkah Lights,” “Banana Menorah” and “Lost and Found Hanukkah.”

Hanukkah begins at sundown on Sunday, Dec. 14.

## “Construction Site Hanukkah Lights”

Sherri Duskey Rinker and Shawna J.C. Tenney  
Chronicle Books; ages 2-4

The youngest children — particularly those who are vehicle-obsessed — will enjoy lifting the flaps of this rhyming story, in which a dump truck, a crane and a cement mixer transform a construction site into a Hanukkah wonderland with a dazzling giant menorah and a huge pile of shiny gold Hanukkah gelt.

## “Happy HanukKat”

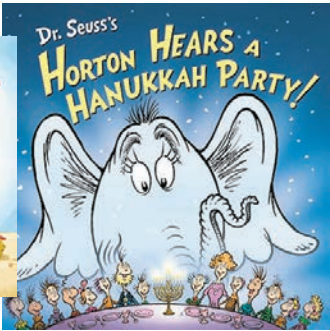
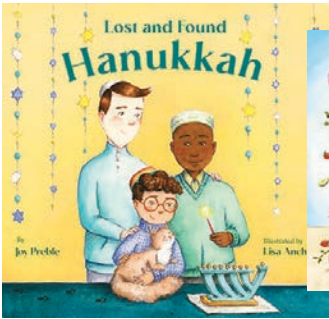
Jessica Hickman; illustrated by Elissambura  
Kar-Ben Publishing; ages 1-4

Jessica Hickman’s sweet, rhyming board book about a lively Jewish family of kittens will tickle the youngest kids, who will have fun celebrating each night of the holiday with the Hanukkah party-loving cat family. Elissambura’s playful illustrations feature kitties in Hanukkah party hats and sweaters.

## “Golem Loves Latkes: A Tasty Hanukkah Tale”

Doreen Klein Robinson;  
illustrated by Anna Krajewska  
Intergalactic Afikomen; ages 3-10

In Doreen Klein Robinson’s fun-filled story, an endearing little girl loves to visit her bubbie for Hanukkah in the happy village of Schmoozeville, where everyone likes to schmooze — chat, in Yiddish. But this year, the usually friendly townsfolk are bickering about the best topping for fried potato latkes — applesauce or sour cream. The young girl makes a clay dreidel that spins to life as a golem, the centuries-old Jewish mystical clay figure who protects Jews. When the latke-loving golem gobbles up all of Schmoozeville’s crispy latkes, the clever girl takes the



golem’s message to the warring camps: Enjoy your latkes however you like and celebrate the true meaning of the holiday. Anna Krajewska’s lively, colorful illustrations add to the mayhem and score points for featuring a youthful, active bubbie.

## “Dr. Seuss’s Horton Hears a Hanukkah Party!”

Leslie Kimmelman; illustrated by Tom Brannon,  
based on “Horton Hears a Who!” by Dr. Seuss  
Random House; ages 3-7

Horton the Elephant looms large in Leslie Kimmelman’s rhyming riff on the classic “Horton Hears a Who!” by Dr. Seuss. The original features an elephant who champions the small against the mighty — a perfect character for the Hanukkah story. In this version, only Horton hears the faint sound of celebration that goes on night after night, so his jungle friends tease him. On the eighth night Horton sees the sparkling menorah belonging to a rabbi, who invites Horton and his pals to his family’s celebration. Tom Brannon’s illustrations translate the essence of Seuss’s floppy-eared Horton to a Jewish setting.

## “Banana Menorah”

Lee Wind; illustrated by Karl West  
Apples & Honey Press; ages 3-5

In Lee Wind’s light-hearted story, Skylar, a spirited young girl, and her two fathers are vacationing on an island far from home on the first night of Hanukkah. But both dads forgot to pack a menorah. The clever girl improvises with what’s on hand — the first night, it’s a banana menorah, the next, a granola bar. When they get home in time for the fourth candle and light their three menorahs, Skylar misses the new ones. For the rest of the holiday, her family celebrates with friends and all kinds of menorahs. Karl West’s animated illustrations add to the fun for a playful, creative holiday. Instructions for a banana menorah at the end — though there are also mass market versions available to buy.

## “Lost and Found Hanukkah”

Joy Preble; illustrated by Lisa Anchin  
Chronicle Books; ages 5-8

LGBT families and homemade menorahs are part of Joy Preble’s heartwarming story about Nate, who loves celebrating Hanukkah and lighting his family’s three menorahs, including one he made. When he and his two fathers move to a new apartment, Nate’s menorah gets lost. At Amy’s Judaica shop, Nate befriends the latke-loving, furry store kitty named Kugel, who runs out of the shop. When Nate’s dads fry up a batch of

latkes for the holiday, the clever boy hatches a plan to find Kugel. By story’s end, everyone is reunited in time to celebrate Hanukkah and Nate carves a perfect new menorah. Lisa Anchin’s large cartoon-style illustrations reflect the story’s warmth and love.

## “The Book of Candles: Eight Poems for Hanukkah”

Laurel Snyder; illustrated by Leanne Hatch  
Clarion Books; ages 4-8

Children will enjoy following a young girl, her siblings, their parents and — again — a kitten as they light Hanukkah candles every night. Each night’s poem flows lyrically to the next. The award-winning Laurel Snyder adds a note for each candle that illuminates the themes of the holiday and turns the story into a teachable moment. Leanne Hatch’s cartoon-style illustrations capture the cozy, wintry setting and glow of the flickering flames

## “A Dragon Called Spark: A Hanukkah Story”

Lily Murray; illustrated by Kirsti Beautyman  
Kalaniot Books; ages 4-7

In Lily Murray’s imaginative tale, a young girl named Eva feels lonely when she and her family move somewhere new and she is far from friends at the start of Hanukkah. For comfort, Eva turns to Spark, her imaginary friend, a diminutive flying dragon. But Eva is worried that Spark is lonely and hopes for a Hanukkah miracle — a friend for herself and for Spark. When she meets Charlie, her neighbor, they become friends and she tells him about Spark, whom he can’t see. The power of friendship shines in this poignant story. Kirsti Beautyman’s illustrations capture the magic of the tale, which gets high marks for featuring a multiracial friendship.

## “Eight Fairy Nights”

Imagined and illustrated by Bub  
BookBaby; ages 4-8

Bub’s unique Hanukkah story introduces young kids to a fairytale version of the Hanukkah story and the Maccabees — who are lauded for their courage. Readers then meet eight fairies with eight virtues, one for each night. The book captures Bub’s enthusiasm for celebrating Hanukkah, and his weakness for riddles. Without referencing God’s hand in the Hanukkah miracle, “Eight Fairy Nights,” may be especially appealing to secular and humanist Jews.



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Happy Hanukkah! Wishing light and peace during this Chanukah season.



# Raising awareness and *chesed* about kidney donation

By Regan Lipes

In Vayikra it is said: “You shall keep My statutes and My laws, which a person shall do and shall live by them. [...] You shall not stand idly by while your neighbor’s blood is shed.”

The value of human life is a fundamental belief in Jewish teaching. *Pikuah nefesh*, the preservation of life, is so critical within Jewish Law that it allows for the breaking of Shabbos. Some observant medical professionals might even be called upon to perform lifesaving measures during Shabbos with full support of religious authorities. In order to save another’s life, those observing *shomer negiah* are able to touch the opposite sex, and despite some beliefs to the contrary, within *halacha*, organ donation is permitted. The saving of lives is so critical within Judaism that many Hasidic communities operate their own emergency response service, *Hatzalah* (rescue).

In 2018 *Alberta Jewish News* was delighted to share a local success story, that of Rabbi Mendy Blachman of Chabad Lubavitch of Edmonton and Herschel Moster. Since live-donor, Rabbi Blachman and Moster first began sharing their shared story, Edmonton’s local Jewish community has had a bit more familiarity with the real faces attached to *halachic* organ donation. The two men have an unbreakable bond for life.

This past September, just before the Jewish world welcomed a sweet new year, Edmontonians again paused to consider the tremendous impact of *pikuah nefesh*. “I honestly had only thought about this in more abstract terms before,” confided local lawyer and forester Craig Rose. “Now I think about it constantly and it’s real and personal.”

Rose, originally from Toronto, has lived and worked in Alberta for over four decades. He built a stunning career here and raised a family. For the last seven years, he has also been battling kidney disease. In January of 2025 he stopped working and now goes three times a week for kidney dialysis. “I was going twice a week for four-hour sessions, but it left me so exhausted and weak I couldn’t do anything, so now I’m going three times for shorter treatments.”

For anyone not familiar with how kidney dialysis works, it might be surprising to know how invasive and intense the procedure is. The patient is hooked up to a machine that extracts and filters their blood before returning it back to their body. This cycle is completed several times during the course of a treatment, and despite the fact that it leaves the body’s blood free of waste and extra fluids that contaminate the kidneys, it also debilitates the patient. This has left Rose, a man who is not only good at his job, but passionate about his work, unable to do what he loves.

“How many mothers out there can say that their son is a forester,” he mused jovially when asked about the

position. He explained that growing up in Toronto exposed him to very different kinds of forests, but “coming out here was the best thing that could have happened to me.” In 1995, Rose was admitted to the Bar, and has since synthesized his love of forestry and law.

Jodi Zabłudowski, President of the Edmonton section of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada commented; “Craig has always been the one to lift others up – offering his time, his wisdom, and his heart. And now, as he faces the challenge of needing a kidney transplant, he continues to inspire us with courage, resilience, and unwavering positivity.”

Despite being a longtime congregant and community leader at Beth Shalom Synagogue, representation from all the Edmonton shuls were present on September 14 at the Fantasyland Hotel to learn more about Craig Rose and kidney donation.

“When our son was preparing to be bar mitzvahed, I was livid when they told me we had to be present for three out of every four Shabbat services. Then, by the time he had his bar mitzvah, I was livid if we ever had to miss a Shabbat service,” he chuckled.

Rose is very much an integral part of shul-life at Beth Shalom, and the greater Jewish community of Edmonton as well. The awareness event in his honour was graciously sponsored by NCJWC Edmonton, and attended by special guests from Renewal Canada. “National Council of Jewish Women has always stood for compassion, justice, and the power of individual action to make a difference,” commented Zabłudowski. “One of the most meaningful ways we can live these values is through organ and tissue donation – the ultimate act of *chesed*, loving-kindness.”

Renewal Canada is a life-giving Jewish organization that works to help connect patients with potential live-donors. “What inspires me most is that Renewal Canada does this with such compassion. Their services are free. Their motivation is kindness. Their work is literally saving lives. A living kidney donation can mean years of health, freedom from dialysis, and a future that once seemed out of reach,” said Zabłudowski.

Penny Kravetsky from Renewal Canada joined the event and traveled from Toronto accompanied by a past donor. This gave those in attendance a chance to ask questions about what it was like to undergo the process of kidney donation from first being tested, undergoing the screening process, being matched,



Craig, Corbin and Eve Rose.

donating, and then recovering.

“Judaism teaches *pikuah nefesh* – that saving a life is the highest of all commandments. By choosing to be an organ donor, we have the chance to give others hope, healing, and a future. NCJW supports this sacred responsibility through education, awareness, and advocacy, encouraging our community to have open conversations about donation and to take the simple step of registering as donors. Each of us carries the ability to change lives,” Zabłudowski concluded meaningfully.

According to the Renewal Canada website: “Receiving a diagnosis of irreversible kidney failure can be devastating. That’s where Renewal comes in. We help patients and their families navigate the complex process of kidney transplant, from finding a donor to arranging the transplant and beyond. At the same time, we support donors to make sure their incredible self-sacrifice is as easy as can be and comes at no financial cost to them. Our services are always free of charge to anyone in need.”

The support and care offered to Jewish patients and their families by Renewal Canada is a blessing, and they work cooperatively with local donor registries and hospitals. While Renewal Canada works to find a donor match for Rose, so does Alberta Health, G-d willing, making it more likely to find a compatible match – and soon!

A live-donor transplant is preferable to an organ harvested from a cadaver. According to Renewal Canada: “On average a deceased donor kidney lasts 10 years, whereas a living kidney lasts an average of 15-20 years. As these are just averages, each situation is different. A variety of factors such as overall health and lifestyle of the recipient contribute to the lifespan of the kidney. In some cases, transplanted living donor kidneys have been known to last for many decades. With regard to a deceased donor kidney, there is a

Continued on page 27



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# What Chanukah can teach Canada about celebrating ourselves

By Rabbah Gila Caine

The days are growing shorter. In Edmonton and Calgary, and in cities from coast to coast to coast, temperatures are dropping. And soon, something quite beautiful is about to unfold.



Rabbah Gila Caine

Jewish families across Canada will light the Chanukiah and place it in their windows. This is a moving annual ritual: a defiant assertion of light against the gathering darkness, echoing in its own way the ancient Menorah that once burned in our Temple in Jerusalem, centuries ago.

This light is meant to be seen. It is meant to be public. Yet Chanukah raises a question that feels particularly urgent for Canada right now. What exactly is this light meant to illuminate? And perhaps more importantly, for whom is it shining?

The answer reveals something profound about Judaism – and about what our country very much needs to hear.

Among the “Abrahamic” faiths, Judaism stands apart in at least one crucial respect: it does not view itself as a missionary religion. We do not seek conversion. We do not attempt to remake others in our image. This is not cultural insularity, nor is it indifference to the wider world. Rather, it reflects something foundational to how Judaism understands its place within human society.

While some faiths, for their own theological reasons, have pursued spreading their message through expansion and conversion, Judaism has embraced a different attitude entirely: the defence of particularism – the right of peoples and cultures to remain distinctly themselves.

That is a real light we offer: An assertion that a people, a culture, a way of life has the inherent right to persist as itself, without apology and without expectation that others will join.

The psychologist Bill Plotkin explores this idea through the concept of *individual ecological niches*. Just as different species occupy irreplaceable positions within nature's ecosystem, societies inhabit distinct niches, and so do individuals within a society. I would add that our soul – our *neshamah* – possesses a singular place in the cosmic order. A life well-lived means discovering and occupying that specific niche with integrity and skill. Nations have such niches. And among the nations, so do Jews.

This frames Chanukah as a moment of public declaration: an affirmation that Jewish life – with its particular rituals, texts and ways of being in the world – represents something vital and irreplaceable. Not superior to others. Not the only legitimate path. But distinctly ours, and worthy of illumination.

For Canada, this carries particular resonance. In an era of increasing cultural anxiety, we face a fundamental choice about what kind of nation we wish to become. Chanukah offers a lesson worth heeding: we can celebrate and deepen our own cultural identity without diminishing others. The mistake we often make is treating cultural flourishing as a zero-sum game. It need not be. When I light my candles, I do not extinguish yours.

Canadians can stop apologising and stop worrying. Taking care of Canada, taking pride in Canada, investing our talents and resources in our own home does not mean we negate other places. It only means we are taking ourselves seriously.

This is the gift that Canadian Jews can offer the broader nation, and in dark times such light matters more than we might think.

This Chanukah, as flickering candle- lights appear in windows across Edmonton and beyond, they will carry that message. And in a country that increasingly needs to remember what binds us together, that is a light worth seeing.

Chag Sameach.

Rabbah Gila Caine is the spiritual leader at Temple Beth Ora in Edmonton.

## Raising awareness

Cont. from page 26

significant chance that the kidney won't work initially, thereby complicating the post-operative care and increasing the chance of complications. Conversely, a living donor kidney works right away in about 95% of cases.”

Nobody is a more passionate supporter of Renewal Canada than Eve Rose, Craig's determined and loving wife. “What this organization does is incredible, and there really are no words,” she explained with the note of a quiver in her voice. “The generosity and humanity that some people are willing to give is, well, it takes your breath away. To think that someone could be so selfless, so giving, it's inspiring and humbling.”

The Edmonton community joins together in praying for a match for Craig Rose, but a potential donor could be anywhere in the country. “People are tested but this doesn't mean that the search is only in that community,” Craig explained. “And so being tested at the event in September, and many people did volunteer to be tested, means that those people could, in theory be paired with someone hundreds of miles away.”

Being tested to be a donor carries no obligation, but the potential to give life to another person cannot be underestimated; it is a monumental gift, and one that Eve Rose expressed she has no words to adequately describe. Rabbi Ari Drelich, who attended the event to blow the shofar in anticipation of Rosh Hashanah, commented that: “It's inspiring that there are people out there who are ready to give such a gift to a person they may not even know.”

Rabbi Drelich's sentiments are well taken; when a total stranger can literally give a piece of themselves to give another person a chance at life without the burden of debilitating dialysis visits multiple times a week, this is truly something exceptional. Knowing that such generous individuals exist, should give everyone hope regardless of their own health status. Altruism that can never be repaid is an immeasurable mitzvah, and it is not only the donations themselves, but those who are willing to be tested to consider this act of heroism that trumpet the spirit of tikkun olam.

Renewal Canada was in Edmonton in September for a Kidney Donor and Awareness Swab Drive to focus on Craig and they were also in Richmond BC to raise awareness for Kenny Sanders, and also in Toronto to raise awareness for Colin Silver. Even now, in Winnipeg, Renewal Canada is working to find a live-


donor kidney for Mark Kagan, at a Kidney Donor and Awareness Swab Drive on December 9. There were countless more events that took place earlier in the year, and there will no doubt be more in 2026.

With the help of Renewal Canada, members of Jewish communities across Canada, including Alberta's Craig Rose, or Mark Kagan of Winnipeg, Kenny Sanders of Vancouver and Colin Silver in Toronto, could have their lives given back to them through the *chesed* of another person with the desire to make a significant contribution to *tikkun olam*.

Even if someone is uncomfortable with the idea of themselves being a live-donor, they can still do their part to spread the word and promote awareness within their community. Anyone wanting more information about Renewal Canada should visit their website to read testimonies from donors and recipients: <https://www.renewalcanada.org/>.


Regan is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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## CJA welcomes *Cont. from page 7*

are more likely to stay if they feel that the school also delivers when it comes to secular studies.

“We need to be the best school we can be, not just the best Jewish school,” Jacobson said.

When *AJNews* sat down with Balaban last month, he was beginning his fourth week as CEO.

“It’s a lot of just drinking from the fire hose,” Balaban quipped as he described his learning curve.

“I’ve been talking with parents about their concerns, talking to funding partners about how those relationships work, talking to government, board members, trying to understand the numbers behind the school, the opportunities for revenue generation and improvement of the bottom line.”

“We can really provide a more enriching experience for students, parents, teachers and our community at large,” Balaban says.

While he has ideas for new initiatives, he is keeping his powder dry for now, with the exception of one ambition, to increase the school’s current enrollment of 208.

“We’re stabilizing and enhancing and then we can innovate,” Balaban said. “You want to make sure the foundation is rock solid before you start building,” he added.

Teamwork is critical, says Balaban, who is pumped about the potential of the school administrative team, beginning at the top with Principal Shelly Gelfand.

“Shelly has been incredible in resetting the school culture with both the students and the teachers,” noted Balaban. “Numerous people have told me that this place feels like a new school in some ways. It’s pretty remarkable considering it’s only been about two months.”

For her part, Gelfand says she is grateful to be teaming up with Balaban.

“He comes with a wealth of business knowledge, and he is connected to the Jewish community,” said Gelfand. “He went to CJA and obviously understands the context of the school and why it is such an important component of our Jewish community.”

In addition to working with Gelfand and Silver, Balaban is delighted to be interfacing with teachers and students.

Following in the footsteps of his late father Jack Balaban, OBM, Jordan has coached basketball at CJA as have his brothers Dan and Michael. This year, in addition to his CEO duties, Jordan is once again coaching the junior and senior boys’ teams.

“There’s something special about competing together with your Jewish brothers and sisters against all the other schools in the city. There are bonds that are formed that, in my personal experience, were cemented in the gym, Balaban said.

“Shelly and her teaching staff have the opportunity to connect with the kids in the classroom. For me, the gym is my classroom, my opportunity to connect with the kids in my own way,” adds Balaban, who continues to serve on the board of Maccabi Canada, having competed in basketball on Team Canada in both the North American Maccabi Games and Maccabiah in Israel.

“This school is the beating heart of the community,” says Balaban, adding, “In this post-October 7 world, there is no better way to build Jewish identity than having strong and thriving Jewish day schools and

summer camps.”

A fan of *Start-Up Nation* author Dan Senor’s popular podcast, Balaban gives voice to Senor’s oft-repeated mantra that the most important investment a Jewish community can make is in its day schools.

While he is firmly focused on the future of his alma mater, Balaban also plans to work with Dana Silver in looking back to the many members of the Jewish community who benefited from their education at CJA and its predecessor schools.

“Tapping into this amazing pool of successful alumni who can give back to our school community is part of the enhancement we want to do,” Balaban said.

Also vital to the community are past and current parents.

“I love the school. It is the hub and the heart of the community,” says veteran CJA parent Dahlia Libin, adding that she has never questioned her choice to send her daughters Mila, currently in Grade Eight, and Sophie – who graduated two years ago – to CJA.

“Having our kids in a Jewish environment has been a priority for our family,” said Libin. “When you are raising a Jewish family in Calgary you can’t do it alone. You need a community. That’s what CJA has provided for my girls.”

“They aren’t just learning Hebrew and the holidays. Their teachers have helped to instill confidence in them and a pride in being Jewish and Zionist that will help them to be resilient in a world that is increasingly challenging for Jewish people,” Libin added.

She is equally pleased with the academic success her daughters have had when it comes to the Alberta curriculum.

“My kids have been able to learn in a supportive environment where the class sizes are not huge and their teachers know them well,” Libin said.

“The small class sizes end up being a very good thing because you get really close with your classmates over the year and those are friendships you will have for a long time,” says Mila who adds that the junior high students tend to be close with one another across all three grades.

“The teachers do a good job of explaining things and there is a good assignment to projects to test ratio,” says Mila, whose favourite subject is math.

“I like Judaics a lot too. The teachers are from Israel, and they are funny and nice,” says Mila, adding that, in general, CJA teachers really care about their students and go out of their way to provide them with enrichment opportunities like, for example, advanced math.

Mila participates avidly in extracurricular activities. As vice president of the CJA Student Council, she enjoys planning fun activities for the kids including



CEO Jordan Balaban will continue coaching the CJA basketball team. Pictured with co-coach Dan Balaban and a winning team.

recently held activity days for younger grades, an upcoming school sleepover and various non-uniform days. And Mila loves competing on the school volleyball, basketball, badminton, track, and field hockey teams.

Mila has also benefited from school trips that are offered to students in grades 5-9. Last year’s Grade Seven trip to Ottawa was a highlight. This year, Mila and her classmates look forward to going to Washington, DC, where they will visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Grade Nine typically culminates in a trip to Israel, though they were suspended in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 attacks by Hamas terrorists in Israel.

“I hope my class will be able to go next year,” said Mila, who, overall, gives her experience at CJA two thumbs up.

The best is yet to come for The Calgary Jewish Academy, says Dahlia Libin.

“I’ve met some of the new teachers, and I have even more optimism for where the school is going,” she adds.

Principal Shelly Gelfand is proud of the way this year’s CJA staff – which includes many new teachers – is coalescing.

“Staff that have been here for quite a few years are dedicated and passionate about the school, about our students, and about our families. So are the new staff. A brand-new team has come together and I see everyone meshing, calibrating, and bringing joy into the hallways and into the learning,” Gelfand said.

Jordan Balaban – who knows a thing or two about team play – will be helping to support all that and more as he settles into his old-new calling: taking care of business.

*Plans are currently in the works for a CJA Winter Open House, details TBA. In the meantime, parents can contact the school at [communications@cja.ab.ca](mailto:communications@cja.ab.ca) or go to [cja.ab.ca](http://cja.ab.ca) for more information or to book a personalized tour.*

*Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.*




Happy Hanukkah!

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# Carrying grief through a season of light

By Sarah Karesa, M.Ed., R.Psych

For many, the holiday season is a time filled with joy, connection, and celebration; a period where we are all encouraged to engage in practices that reflect a sense of warmth, tradition, and togetherness. But for those who are grieving, this same season can feel very different. The light that warms our hearts and our homes during Hanukkah can become a painful reminder of those things that we have lost (e.g., our loved ones, our traditions, and even our past selves who enjoyed these special days). We feel the pressure to pretend that everything is okay when, in reality, we are struggling with the heaviness and unavoidability of our grief. To those who are grieving, everything is not okay.

Even though we cannot change the holiday season itself – the expectations, the gatherings, and the painful reminders – we can *gently* shift how we start to approach it. Coping begins by giving ourselves permission to show up honestly, without forcing enjoyment or hiding what hurts. It may mean setting new boundaries, simplifying traditions, or creating space for quiet moments of reflection. It might look like honouring your loved one in a small, intentional way, or seeking support from people who understand. By orienting ourselves with compassion rather than pressure, we can move through Hanukkah, or any other holiday, in a way that feels more grounded, more honest, and ultimately more supportive to our grieving hearts.

How do we start to orient ourselves differently and gently shift how we approach this time of year? First, consider your expectations for the holiday season – what is the image you have in your head when you think about Hanukkah? For some, it might be a lively gathering filled with delicious food, cherished rituals, and the warm bustle of hosting a large crowd. For others, it might look like a quieter evening with a

simple meal shared between friends and family. Whatever your image may be, it is shaped by memories, hopes, and the ways you have celebrated in the past. Know that this does not need to be the case every year; part of grieving is loosening the grip of old expectations and allowing yourself to approach the season in a way that feels more manageable and comfortable. Ask yourself: What is truly necessary and important for me to include this year? What might be nice to have, but is not essential? What do you simply not have capacity for right now but might return to in future years? By taking stock of what we can and cannot do, we create space to be intentional, genuine, and honest in our holiday practices, making room to navigate our grief with greater compassion.

Second, know that carrying grief during Hanukkah is not about avoiding or minimizing what you are feeling. Rather, it's about deepening your relationship with grief and allowing it to be present in ways that make it meaningful and manageable. What this means could look different for everyone. For some, this might mean planning for moments of quiet reflection to acknowledge how this time of year shapes your grief. For others, it might involve bringing the loved one into the celebrations themselves – saving a place for them at the table, sharing stories that keep their memory alive, or embracing their favourite activities, foods, or traditions. Don't be afraid to make new memories or traditions that honour the grief you, and others, may be experiencing. By giving yourself intentional opportunities to stay connected to both your loved one and your grief, you create space for comfort, authenticity, and even tenderness amid the holiday season.

As important as it is to honour your grief over the holidays, it is equally as important to allow yourself breaks – the third way we can gently shift our approach to the holiday season. Breaks are moments that help you preserve the emotional energy you need to cope with demands of the season. They offer space for you to breathe and process – a chance to pause, let your grief out, and gather yourself. These breaks can be short or long, planned or unplanned, and involve any sort of activity (self-care or even sitting quietly on your bed). They can also involve other people – often a supportive other who can cover for you, create space when you need it, and help ensure you take the time



Sarah Karesa is Counselling Program Manager at JFSE Edmonton Healing Centre.

necessary to care for yourself in grief. Breaks are an essential part of coping with grief over the holidays; by honouring your needs and giving yourself these moments of rest, you create the capacity to engage more fully in meaningful experiences, connect with loved ones, and navigate the season with greater resilience and compassion.

As Hanukkah moves closer, and the reality of your losses become more present amidst the painful reminders that may surround you – remember to take care of yourself. Give yourself permission to be honest with yourself about what you need and allow yourself the space and latitude to provide it. Adjust your expectations, acknowledge your grief, and make room for moments of pause, reflection, and gentle connection. By approaching the season with intentionality, flexibility, and kindness toward yourself, you will create a way to navigate the holidays that honours both your loss and your resilience and, in doing so, you will allow the light of the season to shine in and offer warmth amidst the heartache.

Sarah Karesa is Counselling Program Manager, Edmonton Healing Centre at Jewish Family Services Edmonton.

## Project Regeneration

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emphasized Leavitt-Wright.

After Sarah Mali's visit to Alberta in 2024, the *Alberta Jewish News* reported that there were already efforts underway to transition a local college, Tel-Hai, to university status. This vision became tangible for the Canadian delegates as they laid a foundational cornerstone for a new senate building. Leavitt-Wright expressed: "This is why the establishment of Kiryat Shmona and Galilee University is so crucial. From my vantage point, this is not just a building – it's a beacon. With 10,000 students, hundreds of faculty and researchers, and thousands of volunteer hours dedicated to the region, Tel-Hai is transforming into an educational engine for the Galilee Panhandle."

As the old saying goes, if you build it, they will come, recognizing the existing Tel-Hai institution as a university promises to draw people to Kiryat Shmona: students, educators, researchers, and the families they will bring with them. "This journey hasn't been easy," she said. "It's taken vision, perseverance, and a deep belief in the power of regeneration."

This project is not, however, solely focussed on what a university in the region will bring, but also what it will accompany. Efforts will go into revitalizing community centres, local schools, and rehabilitation. Leavitt-Wright pointed out that after so many years of being displaced from their homes and schools, many children will have a lot of catching up to do.

"There are huge strains on a family when they are housed long term in a single hotel room," she emphasized. "A few days is manageable, but we're talking about years."

As children return to school in their home communities Project Regeneration will connect them with free tutoring to support them as they undertake the monumental task of catching up with the national curriculum. There is security in numbers, and with a strong focus on education, numbers are sure to grow.

Stacey Leavitt-Wright, Rob Nagus and their CEO counterparts continue to work steadfastly with the support of Sarah Mali, in cooperation with sister communities in Northern Israel to bring the inspired vision of Project Regeneration to fruition. The generosity of Canada's Jewish communities during a time of significant need, will help to rebuild the North, perhaps even stronger than it was before.

# Happy Chanukah

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Orizon Energy has quickly become one of Alberta’s leading solar providers since opening its doors in 2021. In just 4 years, the company has completed over 2000 residential solar installations, adding over 19 MegaWatts of clean energy to Canadian Homes.

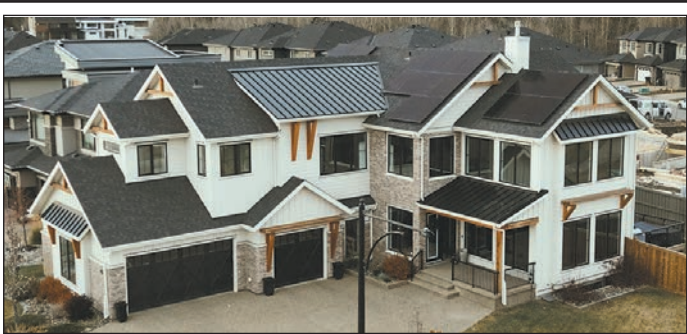
As the Hanukkah season approaches, a celebration of light, renewal, and possibility, Orizon continues its work helping Canadians harness light in a way that lowers bills, increases energy independence, and contributes to a cleaner future. For Orizon’s founders (Oren and Nic), the symbolism is meaningful. Raised with a deep sense of Jewish heritage, they grew up with values centred on responsibility, pride, and the belief that every generation should strive to build something better for the next. That mindset has shaped much of Orizon’s purpose.

Orizon was founded on a simple mission: to make high-quality, affordable renewable energy accessible to homeowners across Canada. From the first consultation to long after installation, Orizon manages

the entire process. This streamlined approach ensures homeowners receive a tailored solar solution designed for their roof and their long-term energy goals. Oren and Nic have committed to integrity and doing business like a mensch. Both pride themselves on doing ethical work, which they credit to their upbringing.

As interest in greener, cost-saving home upgrades continues to grow, Orizon is expanding too. The company has recently relocated to a 20,000 sq ft facility located in Edmonton at 6605 82 Ave, where you are welcome to visit and see the equipment, as well as Canada's first SolarEdge demo wall. This new office allows for faster service, localized support, and deeper involvement in the community that helped shape its beginnings. Community involvement has always been central to the company’s identity, from supporting children’s sports and local health initiatives to exploring opportunities to help make sustainable energy more accessible for organizations like the future Edmonton Jewish Community Centre.

Orizon’s values guide every project and every customer interaction. These principles, rooted in



An Orizon solar project.

accountability, service, and the desire to create a better future, have helped the company earn a strong reputation in a rapidly developing industry.

With strong growth, a dedicated team, and a commitment to doing what’s right, Orizon Energy is lighting the way toward a more sustainable future. And for its founders, there is a special meaning in helping others realize the power of light during a season that celebrates it. If you or someone you know is considering solar, you can visit [orizonenergy.ca](http://orizonenergy.ca) to request a free quote today!

## Jewish Book Festival kicks off with cookbook guru Micah Siva



The annual Paperny Family JCC Jewish Book Festival kicked-off with a wonderful afternoon spent with author Micah Siva, who led a workshop crafting customized mezze boards that were almost too beautiful to eat. Micah, who has strong roots with the Jewish community in Alberta, is the author of a delicious vegetarian cookbook titled "Nosh with Micah." (Photos from Facebook)



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# World Zionist Congress: In the room where it happened

By Howie Sniderman

It costs 8 shekels to ride the Jerusalem Light Rail Train. I took the LRT daily to Binyanei Ha’Uma (the Jerusalem International Conference Center) to attend the 39th World Zionist Congress on October 28-29. The 39th iteration of Theodor Herzl’s original convening of the leaders of the Jewish world in Basel, Switzerland in 1897.

I mention the Jerusalem LRT for two reasons. First, they are digging up much of downtown West Jerusalem as they construct new lines so I felt like I was right at home back in Edmonton, seeing traffic tied up in knots trying to find ways around the construction related congestion.

But, more germane, I mention the Jerusalem LRT because, in preparation for the whirlwind of Israeli politics that predictably descended on the Congress, a few days prior I had an early crash course in ‘differing opinions’ when, over a delicious Shabbat dinner at the home of close friends from Beth Shalom’s sister synagogue in Jerusalem, Kehillat Ya’ar Ramot, I (not so) innocently asked the dozen or so at the table for their advice on the best way to access and pay for travel on the Jerusalem LRT.

As you will imagine, there were a dozen or so different opinions gleefully shouted my way and at one another over the next 30 minutes until everyone was satisfied that they’d had their say. In the end, one of my friends abruptly got up from the table, walked out the door and 3 minutes later walked back in and handed me a Rav Kav (transit) card. You tap it as you enter the train – one of the various ways in which you can pay for an LRT ride.

So, what did I learn from this? No surprise here – it’s not what you know, it’s what you do that will carry the day. You may have the loudest, shrillest and/or most insistent voice in the room. But rest assured, there will be others who are in the background ‘doing’ while you are talking and, in the end, they will carry the day. Or not. Which is the wonderful thing (maybe?) about Israeli politics.

Let me give you an example. One of the well-publicized resolutions voted on at the WZO Congress urged the Israeli Knesset to enact legislation that makes it mandatory for all age-eligible Israeli’s to complete national service or service in the IDF. In other words, no more exemptions for Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox). Indeed, in the weeks leading up to the Congress the Knesset itself has been rife with speculation on what the long-promised legislation on the issue would actually say. The latest iteration, which may well be superseded by something else by the time you read this, would exempt 50% of age-eligible Haredi who are not enrolled in a Yeshiva. (Hmmm - I wonder how quickly the Haredi Yeshiva enrollment ledgers will inflate if that ends up being the legislated ‘compromise?’).

More to the point, with the issue squarely on the table at the WZO Congress and in the Knesset, the Haredi called for a ‘Million Man’ protest (no women allowed, of course) to take place at the Central Jerusalem Train station - directly in front of the

conference centre and exactly where my LRT station stop was located. They set the protest for the final morning of the Congress, when the resolution on the exemptions was scheduled for vote, making it impossible to access the conference centre.

In response, the WZO Congress met until nearly midnight the night before to complete the vote on all resolutions (but one), passing the ‘equal national service for all’ resolution by a margin of almost 4 to 1.

Votes for: 427  
Votes against: 09  
Abstentions: 12

Resolution passed.

This was one of the resolutions proposed by Mercaz Olami – the political arm of the Conservative/Masorti movement. The approval of the resolution – which is now the official ‘policy’ that will be promoted and followed by the World Zionist Organization – is indicative of and representative of the overall ‘mood’ of the Jews of the World and indicative of the ultimate outcome of most of the other 30 or so policy resolutions that were reviewed, debated and voted upon by the 755 delegates to the Congress from over 43 countries, including delegates from Uganda, one of 6 nations making their debut at a WZO Congress.

The final resolution to be voted upon at each Congress relates to the ratification of a Coalition Agreement. Specifically, an agreement on how the leadership of the WZO and its constituent arms, known collectively as the National Institutions, will be governed for the coming 5 years until the next Congress.

The National Institutions of the World Zionist Congress include:

**The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI)** – JAFI works in 65 countries. Amongst other things, JAFI promotes Aliyah, sends Shlichim to engage with local Jewish communities who bring Israel to the world, and provides funding for the security of threatened Jewish communities.

**Keren Kayemeth L’Yisrael/Jewish National Fund (KKL/JNF)** – Since its establishment in 1901 KKL/JNF has helped build Israel though forestry projects, combating desertification, community development, and water management amongst other things. KKL/JNF owns and controls over 12% of the land of Israel.

**Keren Hayesod/United Israel Appeal:** Established in 1920 with a mission to raise funds and provide social services for the State of Israel, this national institution has partnerships in 45 countries and helps, amongst other things, with the absorption of immigrants to Israel, provides funding for programming and services that strengthen weak populations and disadvantaged youth in Israel and for programs which connect Diaspora Jews to Israel by cultivating and facilitating the dissemination of information and informed discussions about Zionism and modern Israel.



Opening Ceremonies of the 39th World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem held on October 28, 2025.

**World Zionist Organization:** The various departments of the WZO include those that combat anti-Semitism, promote Holocaust Commemoration, provide spiritual services in the Diaspora, organize & liaison with Israelis in the Diaspora, and strengthen Jewish Identity and connection to Israel in the spirit of Israel’s Declaration of Independence.

Controlling an overall budget in excess of \$5 Billion USD annually, it’s patently clear why efforts to populate the key leadership positions are a struggle at each WZO Congress and the 39th iteration was no different. In the end, the Coalition Agreement ratified by the Congress – albeit more than 2 weeks later by a remote vote by Congress delegates – proved to be a final success for the centre/ centre left faction, repelling efforts (for example) to provide what would amount to a pure nepotism position in the National Institutions to Benjamin Netanyahu’s son, Yair, and specifically prohibiting any role in the governance of the WZO and National Institutions by the likes of Itamar Ben Gvir and his racist Otzma Yehudit thugs.

The ability to achieve these successes – and they are indeed tangible and real successes for sanity and a path forward to more sanity – is in major part thanks to the participation of hundreds of thousands of Jews worldwide in the election and selection of their national delegates. My personal thanks to our Jewish community in Alberta, who (singularly amongst Canadian provinces) voted primarily to select delegates to the Congress who promoted the principles of our Conservative/Masorti movement, and whose votes propelled me to be able to attend the Congress to voice (until I pretty much had none left) those principles. To literally be ‘in the room where it happened’.

In the end, while the ‘parliament of the Jewish people’ has now spoken, through the resolutions passed at the 39th World Zionist Congress, it is clear that our Jewish world (in Israel and in the Diaspora) has much work to do to match the plea of Israel’s President Isaac Herzog at the Opening Ceremonies, where he welcomed us all as ‘Am Eched’ – one people – but implored us to be more than that; to be a ‘united people’.

And so, back to work. On the LRT (in Edmonton and in Jerusalem) and on the path to unity of our ‘Am Eched.’

Am Yisrael Chai.



Howie Sniderman with Rabbi Gershom Sizomu from Uganda.

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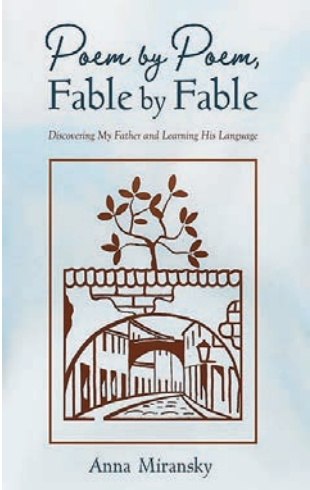
# Literary Awards

Cont. from page 16

author Karen Levine, who wrote *Hana’s Suitcase*, Baslaw, who is 92, is passing the stories on to the next generation. The atmospheric illustrations rendered in sepia and earth tones by Toronto artist Alice Priestley enrich a tale that touches the heart as it illuminates a chapter of our collective past. past. 4

## Jewish Culture

*Mashel Teitelbaum: Terror and Beauty* (Goose Lane Editions with workbook) by Andrew Kear (Editor) is a beautiful book featuring more than 200 reproductions of artwork from the full scope of Mashel Teitelbaum’s career. Teitelbaum (1921-1985) said about his work: “What I’m saying I’m painting, in effect ... is the terror and beauty of life.” Andrew Kear has compiled essays and reflections on the life and work of one of Canada’s most talented artistic outsiders. The terror and the beauty are both clearly shaped by Teitelbaum’s Jewish background. One essay, “The Mills of the Gods: The Impact of Judaism and War on Mashel Teitelbaum’s Art,” highlights a painting depicting a bearded and burdened Jewish figure in a biblical landscape with a temple and palm trees (the meaning of Teitelbaum) at the end of



the path, layering Jewish scenes over a Canadian landscape.

## Yiddish

*Poem by Poem, Fable by Fable: Discovering My Father and Learning His Language* (Wipf and Stock) by Anna Miransky does more than celebrate the life of her father, Peretz Miransky, one of Canada’s foremost Yiddish writers. At the age of seventy-two, she begins to read her father’s poetry and fables in her first and forgotten language. She not only discovers her father, but she also gains insights into the experiences of being a Holocaust survivor, being a member of Yung Vilne, the celebrated Yiddish literary group, and the thriving Yiddish cultural community in Montreal. In an astute literary analysis, she probes why he had to write in fables to protect himself from harm and why, as a Yiddish writer, he chose the literary themes he did. *Poem by Poem, Fable by Fable* brings forward an understanding of the creative imagination and introduces the reader to remarkable poems and fables both in Yiddish and in English translation.

## Scholarship

*A Time to Sow: Refusenik Life in Leningrad 1979-1989* (University of Toronto Press) by Michael Beizer and Ann Komaromi, provides an account of the *refusenik* movement in Leningrad in the period between the end of *détente* with the West and the beginning of the policy of *perestroika*. This time marked the end of any realistic possibility for Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union to the point where such emigration once again became possible. The book dispels any notion that the Soviet Jewish community was passively waiting for external guidance or deliverance. It shows how they themselves worked to establish a Russian Jewish identity during that period. A story emerges of how these *refuseniks* created their own Russian Jewish identity where previously there was none. A movement that originally sought emigration because of economic realities came to understand, as one *refusenik* put it, “a free person needs to belong to some sort of group with shared traditions, with shared values and a shared world view.” The book’s great achievement is to focus our attention not only on what the *refuseniks* resisted, but also on the identity they constructed.



# Netanyahu says he is formally seeking a pardon

By Philissa Cramer

(JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is formally seeking a preemptive pardon of the criminal charges he has long faced, saying in a

video address ending his prosecution was needed to bring unity to a divided nation. “I am certain, as are many others in the nation, that an immediate end to the trial would greatly help lower the flames and promote broad reconciliation — something our country desperately needs,” Netanyahu said in the speech on Sunday as his attorneys filed a petition with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who is responsible for granting pardons. Netanyahu’s speech comes weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump wrote to Herzog advocating a pardon, which Herzog said he could not consider because Israeli law requires the accused or his family

to make the request. Netanyahu has three legal cases open against him, on charges of fraud, bribery and breach of trust. They relate to allegations that he accepted lavish gifts in exchange for political favors and that he used his position to secure positive media coverage. The trial in the cases began in 2020 and has proceeded in fits and starts, with hearings routinely canceled as Netanyahu attends to Israel’s affairs, including the multi-front war and a protest movement that Netanyahu and his allies allege has been stoked through foreign interference.

Continued on page 33



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# Archival work underway for future YEG Holocaust Education Centre

By Tammy Vineberg

Zion Barany spends his days poring over historical documents and items, trying to link the stories of Edmonton Holocaust survivors in preparation for a permanent exhibit at the future Holocaust Education Centre which will be housed at the new Edmonton Jewish Community Centre, expected to open later next year.

Zion started his role as curator in June, thanks to a grant from the Edmonton Community Foundation. He's been diving into files, videos, and photos held by the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta (JAHSENA) with fresh eyes, as he has never lived in Canada and is not Jewish.

He grew up in Iran, where he attended an Armenian school and mainly socialized with the country's minority populations—Jewish, Kurds, and others. Zion says that's where his passion for history and philosophy stems from.

"Growing up as a minority in a majority country, you kind of wonder why we are here. You begin thinking about why certain groups are in countries where they are not the majority," he says.

When his family fled Iran, they settled in Germany, where Zion had to learn a new language before studying history and philosophy at Ruhr-Universität Bochum. He decided to focus on modern history, including Jewish history and the Middle East, for his master's degree. Following graduation, he worked as an intern at museums and developed an exhibit for the Westfalen Jewish Museum in Dorsten, Germany. He also worked at the Holocaust Museum LA in California, where he analyzed handwritten German documents from 1933 to 1945. His role was to research their origins and translate and transcribe the materials.

After returning from Germany following his stay in Los Angeles, he contemplated where he wanted to live and work. He discovered Edmonton after coming across a position as an archivist for JAHSENA. The timing for that role didn't work out, but his résumé was forwarded to the Jewish Federation of Edmonton as work needed to be completed for the future Holocaust Education Centre.

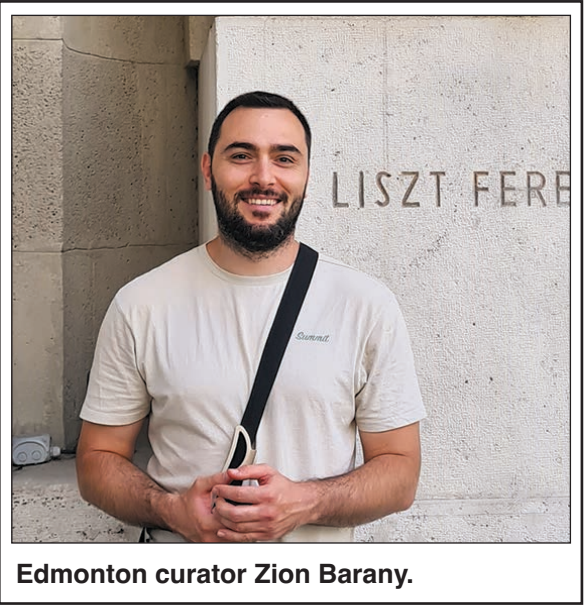
"I guess it was meant to be. Everything fell into place at the right time. I'm happy about it," says Zion.

As he had never been to Edmonton before, he had to get his bearings while learning an overall understanding of how the Edmonton Jewish community is related to the Holocaust. For example, how many survivors immigrated to the city and Alberta. He has been pulling files on each survivor one by one. As a Jewish Federation of Edmonton employee, he is collaborating with JAHSENA to access these files.

"There are a lot of documents in one file. You don't know what you will find. You are looking at interviews, trying to find the whole story because you only get bits and pieces in archival material. You must cross-reference the material with the overall history of Canada and how it is related to the Holocaust. It's like a puzzle," explains Zion.

His role is different from archivists because archivists are responsible for handling and preserving historical materials. What Zion does is examine the archives and trace the history of each paper, one by one. "I try to understand where that piece of paper came from, who wrote the letter, to whom it was written, and why. I ask questions about why this piece of paper existed and how it relates to overall history. You try to contextualize archival material in the broad history."

His gloved hands have touched many interesting pieces that are stored, including barbed wire from



Edmonton curator Zion Barany.

Auschwitz. The next step is to interview the family who donated this piece of history.

With so many Holocaust museums around the world, Zion still believes it's important that Edmonton has its own centre. "It's even more important because we have so many survivors here, and I think it's doing a disservice to them if we don't highlight their stories. These people came and found a home here. It's part of this country's history. Holocaust education is not only about the past. It's not only about what happened and how these people survived. It's a way of dealing with the future. It's equipping citizens and visitors who come to the centre to make them able to see growing hate and to see what threats in a democracy can lead to," he says.

If you or a family member has items from the Holocaust and would like to donate them to this Edmonton-based project, please contact Zion at [zbarany@edjfed.org](mailto:zbarany@edjfed.org).

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

## Netanyahu cont. from p 32

In his speech, Netanyahu did not acknowledge guilt and said, as he long has contended, that the charges against him were political in nature. He alleged that crimes had been committed in the case against him. He also cited Trump's advocacy on his behalf.

"President Trump called for an immediate end to the trial so that, together with him, I could advance even more vigorously the vital interests shared by Israel and the United States, within a time window that may

never return," Netanyahu said.

Herzog's office said it would consider the pardon request in accordance with Israeli law. Netanyahu's critics lambasted the request, saying it amounted to another assault on country's legal norms by the prime minister, whose right-wing government has led an effort to overhaul the judiciary.

"I call on President Herzog: You cannot grant Netanyahu a pardon without an admission of guilt, an expression of remorse, and an immediate withdrawal from political life," tweeted opposition leader Yair

Lapid while making a video address of his own.

Netanyahu's request comes as the country nears elections that must take place within the next year. Netanyahu was reelected most recently in 2022, after the charges against him were in place.

A previous prime minister who faced legal charges, Ehud Olmert, resigned before being charged and requested a pardon only after being convicted and jailed.



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from  
Nily and Avram Alima 

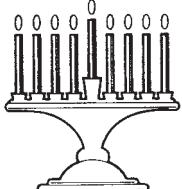
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from Linda and  
John Barron and family


Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community from  
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חג חנוכה שמח  
from  
Renée & Milton Bogoch

Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from Annabelle Bondar


 Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from the Bondar family


Wishing everyone a Chanukah filled  
with love, light, peace and hope  
from  
Jean Barron,  
Sandy and Paula 

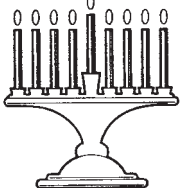
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from Faye and Warren Book


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Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from  
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Chafetz  
and family 


Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from  
Phyllis D'Aguiar 


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and Zach 

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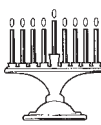
Wishing everyone  
a Chanukah filled with love,  
light, peace and hope.  
from  
Sam, Cindy, Rebekah  
& Josh Feldman 

Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from  
Louise Feldman 


 Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from Michele Doctoroff,  
Ted Switzer, Sydney Switzer


Chag Chanukah Sameach.  
We stand with Israel  
from Steve, Tracey,  
Oscar & Alanis 

Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from Sandy Fayerman

Chag Chanukah Sameach  
from  
Maxine & Milt Fischbein 


Happy Chanukah to everyone  
from Laura Moser  
and Mike Fischer

Have a happy Chanukah  
filled with good food, family,  
and light  
from  
Alvin Libin  
& Bobby Libin  
and family 

Have a happy Chanukah  
filled with good food, family,  
and light  
from  
Jenny Belzberg 





Have a happy Chanukah filled  
with good food, family, and light

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**Louise Glin  
and family**


Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from  
**Senator Daryl Fridhandler  
and Ellen Fridhandler, Arnie,  
Rachael, Eli and Sadie Ann  
(Jersey City, NJ) and  
Rachel Fridhandler ( NYC, NY)**

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light,  
peace and hope.

 from  
**Therese Groner  
and Family**


 Chag Chanukah Sameach.  
We stand with Israel.  
Halley and Bruce Girvitz

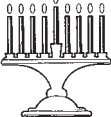
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from Dr. Caron  
& Rabbi Mark Glickman




Chag Sameach  
Wishing our friends and family  
Peace, Hope, Love  
from Mickey & Ricki Gelfand


Happy Chanukah  
from  
**Darryl, Alli, Joseph  
and Leo Gurevitch**




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all the best this Chanukah  
from Jackie Halpern,  
Glenn Solomon and Family

 Chag Chanukah Sameach.  
We stand with Israel.  
from Cheryl, Jason,  
Jacob & Gabrielle Gurevitch


Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from Vivian and Ben Herman




Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from  
**Susan and David Inhaber**




Wishing everyone a Chanukah filled  
with love, light, peace and hope.


 from  
**Eva & Gordy  
Hoffman  
and family**

 Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from Joan Juskiw  
and family

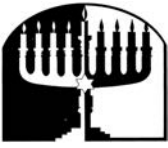
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to the entire community  
from Rabbi Cantor Russell G. Jayne  
and Mr. Russ Janiger

Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community

 from  
**Barb and Ron Krell  
& Family**

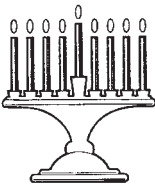
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from Rhonda Barad,  
Steve Kaganov and family.


Let the light shine this Chanukah  
and everyday. Am Yisrael Chai.

from  
 Jackie & Hayim  
Hamborger

Let the light shine  
this Chanukah and everyday.  
Am Yisrael Chai.


from  
**Marni Besser  
and Steve Lipton**




 Wishing everyone a  
Chanukah filled with love,  
light, peace and hope.


from Ruth Dvorkin,  
Susan Dvorkin,  
Dara, Spencer, Ivy & Josh

Let the light shine this Chanukah  
and every day. Am Yisrael Chai,

 from Mel and  
Gail Ksienski  
& Family


Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from Shirley Ksienski  
& Arnold Anderson



 Chag Chanukah Sameach.  
Am Yisrael Chai,  
from  
**Sandra & Harold Lipton  
and family**

Happy Chanukah  
from Janis & Brian Kowall  
and Family

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light,  
peace and hope.


 from  
**Marina Paperny  
& Shep Secter  
and family**

 Have a happy Chanukah  
filled with good food,  
family, and light

**MHM Professional  
Corporation &  
The Mandel  
Family**




Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community




from  
Jack Meyer

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light,  
peace and hope.



from  
Roz Mendelson  
& David Hodgins


Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community



from  
Phil and  
Harriet Libin

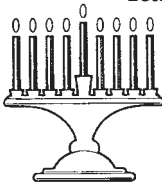
Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from Cheryl, Rob, Danielle  
& Jarrett Milner

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light,  
peace and hope.




from  
Walter Moscovitz

Have a happy Chanukah  
filled with good food,  
family, and light



from  
Al Osten

Let the light shine this  
Chanukah and everyday.  
Am Yisrael Chai.



from  
Hilda & Lenny Smith  
and family

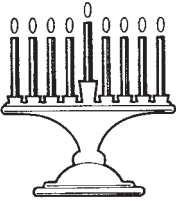
Happy Chanukah to the  
entire community from  
Michele Moss, Allan Donsky  
and Family

Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from Therese Nagler


חג חנוכה שמח

from Joshua, Jessica, Zoey,  
and Max Switzer

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light,  
peace and hope.




from  
Dr. Stuart and  
Irene z”l Ross




Wishing family & friends  
a happy, healthy Chanukah

from Richard, Kimberly, Liam & Seth Nagan


Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from David and Cynthia Prasow  
and Family




Happy Chanukah from  
Medina Shatz, Randy Best,  
Penny & Bluberry



Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah




from  
Dorothy Hanson,  
Sheldon Shagal  
and family



Happy Chanukah  
to the entire community  
from Michael & Dorothy Plottel

חנה סמל ורחל  
and Hanna Singer and Adam Levy

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light, peace and hope.



from Lorne,  
Raechelle,  
Shoshanna &  
Leo Paperny

From our family to yours:  
wishes for a Happy Chanukah,  
from Sandy Shuler & Doug Foulkes  
& families


Happy Chanukah to the entire community  
from Pnina and Mark Rubensohn and  
family. Michelle and Bronwyn Leifer



Have a  
happy Chanukah  
filled with good food,  
family, and light

from  
Esther and  
Sam Plucer

Wishing family and friends  
a peaceful and illuminating  
Chanukah



from  
Jerry and Fay z”l  
Schwartz




# ENJOY THE BLESSINGS OF CHANUKAH

חג חנוכה שמח  
from Judy Shapiro  
and Richard Bronstein and family


Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah

 from Faigel z”l  
& Len Shapiro  
and family


Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah


 from  
Esther and  
Gary Silberg

Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah


 from  
Gail, Dean, Bryan,  
Ellie, & Matthew Staniloff

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light, peace and hope.

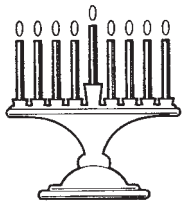
 from  
Darlene Switzer-Foster,  
Bill Foster  
& Family

 Happy Chanukah  
from  
Brian and Gail Sidorisky

Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah  
from  
Cheryl & Morley Shore




Have a happy Chanukah filled  
with good food, family, and light

 from  
Mary & Ken Taub  
and Family

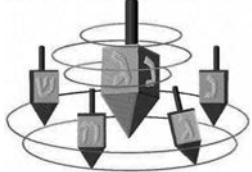
Wishing everyone a  
Chanukah filled with love,  
light, peace and hope.

 from  
Linda & Gary  
Wolf and family

Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah


 from  
Stan and Carey  
Smith and family

Wishing family and friends  
all the best this Chanukah

 From Arlene,  
David, Michael,  
Erin & Julian  
Holmes

Wishing everyone a  
Chanukah filled with love,  
light, peace and hope.

from  
Wynne &  
Harvey Thal




Chag Chanukah Sameach.  
We stand with Israel.  
from Diana Kalef, Elliott,  
Jonah & Micah Steinberg

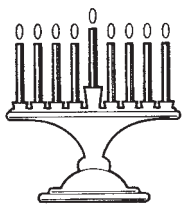


Happy Hanukkah  
from  
Art and Scroll Studio,  
Caron Glickman & Shelley Werner

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light,  
peace and hope.


 from  
the Zivot Family,  
Rose, Debbie,  
Mark & Karen

Wishing everyone a Chanukah filled  
with love, light, peace and hope.

 from Dalia, Allan,  
Tammy and  
Mark Wolinsky

Wishing everyone a Chanukah  
filled with love, light,  
peace and hope.

from  
Ron Plucer  
and family



Wishing the entire  
community a  
Happy Chanukah

from the  
Balaban Family



 *Happy Chanukah*

From all of us at Alberta Jewish News:  
Deb Shatz, Dan Moser, Sandra Edwards,  
Sandy Fayerman and Maxine Fischbein.



from the

Sources

by Eliezer Segal

A problematic priest

In his concluding message to Israel, as told in the penultimate chapter of the Torah, Moses addressed each of the tribes with a blessing concerning its future. Speaking to his own tribe of Levi, he prayed: “Lord, bless his might and accept the work of his hands; smite through the loins of them that rise against him and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.”

Rashi offered two different readings of this verse. The first of them focused on its violent tone, as an assurance that the priestly tribe of Levi would be granted the physical or military strength necessary to defend themselves against their foes. Moses’s blessing promised that the opponents will be eradicated totally without any chance to rise up again.

Who are those foes? Rashi says: “Those who challenge the authority of the priesthood.” It is not entirely clear if he was referring to a specific episode in biblical or post-biblical history.

Which brings us to Rashi’s second explanation.

“He foresaw that Hashmonai and his sons would one day wage war against the Greeks, so he prayed on their behalf because they were few in number— a mere twelve Hasmonean sons [it is unclear where this number came from] and Eleazar, arrayed against several myriads. It was for this reason that he said, ‘Lord, bless his might.’”

In other words, Rashi was stating that Moses’s blessing to the tribe of Levi might have been a prediction of the Hanukkah story in which the Jewish triumph was spearheaded by a family of Levite priests [kohens], known as the Hasmoneans.

Rashi was alluding here to a passage in a midrash according to which one of the twelve tribes of Israel was preordained to bring about the downfall of each of the four great empires that will subjugate Israel through history: Babylonia, Media (Persia), Greece, and Rome (Edom). In that framework Jacob’s third son, Levi, will be the one to overthrow the third empire, Greece.

“These [the Greeks] are numerous in their population while these [the Jews] are but few in number. And yet the many fell into the hands of the

few. To what may this be credited? To Moses’s blessing, when he said: ‘smite through the loins of them that rise against him.’ Into whose hand does Greece fall? Into the hand of the sons of Hashmonai who stem from Levi.”

An ancient Aramaic interpretive translation of the Torah —a “Targum” mistakenly ascribed to the ancient sage Jonathan ben Uzziel and usually dated to the seventh century C.E.— inserted a mystifying clause with reference to Moses’s words about “them that rise against him.” Here the Targum remarked: “let those who hate Yohanan the High Priest be unable to stand on their legs.” This reading is not attested in any other work of ancient Jewish exegesis or midrash. Which high priest did it have in mind, and what does it tell us about the Targum’s origin and purpose?

The patriarch of the family is designated “Mattathias son of Yohanan,” and the Targum might well be alluding to that Yohanan, though he is nowhere mentioned as an active protagonist in the Hanukkah story.

However, several prominent scholars argued that the reference is to Yohanan (John) Hyrcanus, grandson of Mattathias and nephew of Judah Macabee, who served as political and cultic leader of Judea during the second century B.C.E. Hyrcanus was a controversial figure who pursued warlike policies toward Judea’s neighbours. He underwent a radical about-face on internal religious questions, switching his support from the Pharisaic sages to the priestly Sadducee party. Evidently, an addendum of this kind could only have come into existence at a time when he enjoyed the favour of the Jewish religious leadership, before his defection to the Sadducees. It has even been suggested that the Targum text might have functioned as a kind of liturgical blessing for the government when it was recited during Hyrcanus’s reign as part of the synagogue Torah reading, to plead for the sovereign’s protection from his numerous internal and foreign opponents.

Indeed, recent scholarship has argued that classical Hebrew liturgical poetry and Targums were produced

in distinctive priestly circles that did not always share the perspectives of the rabbis.

This explanation would situate this Targum passage centuries earlier than the bulk of rabbinic texts that were not composed until the second century C.E. and later —and much, much earlier than the date normally proposed for the “Jonathan Targum.”

Other scholars have been less extreme in their claims, reluctant to go beyond the acknowledgment that this particular passage preserves a unique remnant from an older tradition (one that somehow eluded censorship by the Pharisees or rabbis), though the entire Targum is not necessarily so ancient. It is therefore quite understandable that some scholars simply dismissed the problematic reading “Yohanan” as a scribal error for what should have been “Aaron,” Moses’s brother and the founder of the Hebrew priesthood.

On the other hand, the Targum does make reference to other militant priests in its explication of Moses’s blessing to Levi. Consistent with a rabbinic tradition that the prophet Elijah was of priestly stock, identified with the zealot Pinhas, the Targum has Moses praying prophetically that the Almighty will accept “the offering of the hand of Elijah the priest, which he will offer on Mount Carmel” against the priests of Baal, and that he should “smash the loins of Ahab his enemy, and the neck of the false prophets who rise up against him.”

There are those who would argue that it is inappropriate for priests, whose main concerns should be confined to the spiritual realm, to take up arms in battle. This, however, is one of the lasting lessons of the Hanukkah story: that sometimes—all too often—it becomes necessary to contend with powerful enemies in order to create the conditions for pursuing the life of the spirit.

‘From the Sources’ by Eliezer Segal is sponsored by the Zeisler Families of Calgary, Edmonton, New York and Los Angeles

Annual JCC Hanukkah Market had something for everyone!



The annual Hanukkah holiday market at the JCC brought together a great assortment of vendors and shoppers. (Facebook photos).



# A Hanukkah gift budget doesn't ruin the magic

By Gail Hoffer-Loibl

This essay was first published on *Kveller*.

The holiday season has arrived in full force, and already promotions for toys, games and other products are enticing our children to ask for more and more. My family has already seen countless commercials for Black Friday deals, and we even got a full holiday catalog from Amazon in our mailbox before the end of October.

In our home, that Amazon catalog is a useful tool to help my children, ages 10 and 7, get a sense of what they might want for Hanukkah. We tend to limit gifts for our kids throughout the year in favor of making the holiday a special one for them.

My more judicious elder child carefully analyzes each page and marks off a handful of items, while my younger one might as well draw a giant circle on the cover to indicate he wants every product listed within the thick booklet.

Regardless of how many things each of my children desire, I want them to understand our family has a budget, and that, like anything else we choose to invest in, we need to be mindful about our spending and think about what is best for all of us. Like many families, we have a number of required expenses that need to come before spending in other areas, including Hanukkah gifts.

Early on, my husband and I tried to instill in our children mindfulness around material possessions. This has meant enduring many tantrums over our refusal to buy them some random toy we knew they would just toss out the next day. During Hanukkah time, we take our kids' interests into account and give them gifts within our budget. This means we don't get them everything they want. For the most part, our kids don't complain about the amount of gifts they get, as we also try to instill in them a sense of gratitude.

Of course, our kids weren't born knowing about things like budgets and spending, and as they grow up, helping them understand these concepts is very important in our family. At around age 5 or 6, I believe kids can understand gifts don't just materialize out of nowhere. They cost money and that money comes from their parents or anyone else who purchases something for them. People work hard to earn the money used to buy them gifts, and this is something to be appreciated and not taken for granted.

The elementary years are also when children start learning about currency, and monetary literacy

becomes an important part of their math education. At home, many kids this age receive an allowance and can begin thinking about how to use their own money. My kids will ask me to buy them something, to which I will often reply by telling them to use their own money. It is amazing how disinterested in something they become when their own cash is on the line.

Though we do our best to help our kids understand the value of spending wisely and being grateful for the gifts they receive, we are up against enormous societal pressure to get our children as many gifts as possible. Many of us have kids whose classmates and friends celebrate Christmas and are showered with gifts, putting even more pressure on Jewish parents to help our kids "fit in." Being left out of the Christmas "magic" is eased a bit when you can share how many toys you got for Hanukkah.

There is no denying the massive influence of Christmas culture on Jewish kids and their families. However, I learned long ago to avoid competing with Christmas and instead make the focus of Hanukkah family togetherness, Jewish pride and passing on the traditions of lighting the menorah, eating latkes and playing dreidel.

But we still do gifts. My honesty about our family gift budget is never intended to make my kids worry or feel bad about our family finances. In discussing our Hanukkah plans, I focus on the wonderful things we get to do for the holiday and making the time truly special. My husband and I don't get into specifics about how much money we have budgeted for gifts, and we guide our kids toward focusing on the few items they really want instead of just asking for everything.



An assortment of fun and practical gifts were on display at the Hanukkah Holiday Market held at the JCC last month.

This year, for example, in lieu of more physical gifts, we are hoping to give our kids a special day out. We discussed this idea with them and explained this would mean getting fewer or less elaborate gifts for the remainder of the holiday. They also agreed that they are becoming less interested in playing with toys and would prefer doing fun things as a family. In the future, I could see us forgoing physical gifts all together, or just giving our kids a small amount of cash each night.

While some may feel honesty about who buys the gifts may take away from the joy of the holiday, I do not envy my Christmas celebrating friends whose kids believe Santa is responsible for their presents. Instead of stressing over how to give our kids everything they want, and having to explain why a mythical being couldn't get them their dream gift, I can just be upfront with my kids about what we can and can't afford. I also talk to them about the importance of giving back to others, and part of our family budget goes toward monetary and physical donations to local and national causes we support.

By encouraging mindfulness in their gift choices, and consideration of others who may not be as fortunate, I hope my kids learn that Hanukkah is more than a holiday for getting presents. It is a time for being with family, honoring tradition and celebrating Jewish pride.



# HAPPY HANUKKAH

May your candles burn bright this season



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MLA, Calgary-Hays



MYLES MCDUGALL  
MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek



ERIC BOUCHARD  
MLA, Calgary-Lougheed



CHANTELLE DE JONGE  
MLA, Chestermere-Strathmore



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# This Hanukkah has brought inspiration and hope

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