

Jlife

SGPV JEWISH LIFE

February 2026
Shevat — Adar 5786

EITHER WE LAUGH
OR IT WOULD
MAKE US CRY

JEWISH DISABILITY
AWARENESS AND
INCLUSION MONTH

THE LADIES OF LAUGHTER COMEDY FEST RETURNS

GOT KIDS?
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kiddish



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Jlife

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LADIES OF LAUGHTER Comedy Fest

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2026 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Thursday, March 5, 7 pm
Look! Cinemas | Monrovia
Golden Love Isn't Blind

Saturday, March 7, 7 pm
Look! Cinemas | Monrovia
NIGHT OF HONOR
The Gilda Radner Award

Sunday, March 8 10:30 am
Amusing Jews Live Podcast

Sunday March 8, 7 pm
Laugh Factory | Covina
STAND-UP NIGHT
Cathy Ladman
Judy Carter | Abby Schachner
Becca Tham

Wednesday, March 11, 7:30 pm
Laemmle Theater | Claremont
Film Night
Short Film by local filmmaker
7:50 pm Funny Girl

Thursday, March 12, 7 pm
Sierra Madre Playhouse
IMPROV AND SKETCH NIGHT
Pure and Weary
Soup Sisters
Messing with A Friend
(Susan Messing and Rose Abdo)

Saturday, March 14, 7:30 pm
Sierra Madre Playhouse
STAND-UP NIGHT
Jena Friedman
Gina Gold | Eunji Kim | Jessica Winther

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ON THE COVER:
PURE & WEARY

THE POWER OF RABBI HILLEL'S TEACHING STILL HAS POWER TODAY

Over the last several weeks, I have had the privilege and honor of speaking about and representing both Judaism and the Jewish community at several of our local schools. Inevitably, in each of these events and opportunities, I'm asked to try to capture the essence of what Judaism is all about. And each time I share the story about Rabbi Hillel being asked to summarize the Torah while standing on 1 foot. If you're not familiar, he says, "Do unto others as you would have done unto you. The rest is commentary, go and study it."

I was thinking about this story as I sat and listened as over 125 volunteers read the names of those who were murdered during the Holocaust during our eighth annual Every Person Has A Name Commemoration and Vigil. Our annual event happened to take place on the same day that Alex Pretti was standing up for someone else and was ultimately shot by ICE agents in the streets of Minneapolis.

I provide that context because if people, all people, would follow Rabbi Hillel's basic teaching, "Do unto others as you would have done unto you", what we are witnessing and experiencing would not be taking place.

Think about that for a moment... If each one of us, every single person, followed the mantra of "Do unto others as you would have done unto you, it is hard to imagine that the hate and violence we are seeing play out before us would continue to exist.

Every year, shortly before the ball drops in Times Square on New Year's Eve, John Lennon's Imagine is played throughout Times Square. The song captures the imagination of what the world could be like if we treated every-



one as we believe we should be treated.

*Imagine there's no Heaven
It's easy if you try
No Hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Livin' for today
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Livin' life in peace
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one
Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharin' all the world
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one*

On a separate note, I would be completely remiss if I did not

acknowledge and celebrate the return of the last remaining hostage kidnapped by Hamas on October 7. To think that for the first time in 4,208 days, there are no Israelis being held hostage in Gaza. Take a moment to soak that in. It is why, I believe, we saw, with great celebration, videos and pictures of people removing their yellow ribbons and our IDF dog tags on social media. The sense of relief and wholeness for the country must have been palpable in ways no one could have possibly imagined. In many ways, the word *Shalom* was actualized. As you may be aware, the root word (*Shalem*) means whole.... In essence, when we use the word *Shalom* as a reference to peace, the true meaning is wholeness. Israel is finally whole again... finally experiencing *Shalom* for the first time in a very long time. ☆



JASON MOSS IS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
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OF THE GREATER
SAN GABRIEL AND
POMONA VALLEYS.



WHAT IS CHOCOLATE PHOSPHATE AND WHY IS IT SO JEWISH?

As nostalgic as its New York cousin, the egg cream.

BY RACHEL RINGLER, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)



Photo Credit Biz Jones

Growing up in Skokie, a suburb of Chicago, Sue (Shyman) Fishbain drank her fair share of chocolate phosphates. Her family would go out for dinner at a local Jewish deli where they would order water or pop, the Midwest term for sweetened carbonated beverages, but Sue only had eyes for the phosphate.

"It's just like chocolate pop because it's fizzy," she said. Her husband, Michael, who is from Chicago, remembers seeing phosphates on the menu of the corner pharmacies when he was in high school several decades ago.

While chocolate phosphates were a beloved part of Sue's childhood (Michael wasn't a fan), many born and raised New Yorkers who were polled for this article had never heard of them.

Joan Nathan, author of the landmark cookbook "Jewish Cooking in America" (1994) says there is a clear geographic divide on who drinks what: "New York Jews,"

she wrote, "drank egg creams. Chicago Jews drank chocolate phosphates."

Like its New York cousin the egg cream, the chocolate phosphate is made by combining seltzer and chocolate syrup. But then their paths diverge. The egg cream has milk in it while the phosphate does not. True to its name, the original phosphate was made with phosphoric acid, giving the drink a bit of a tart, but pleasant, taste.

But phosphates today mostly lack the very ingredient that gave it its name. Most places serving chocolate phosphates prepare them using just seltzer and syrup without its namesake phosphoric acid, a product which is available online and in specialty stores, but hardly a household ingredient.

At the turn of the 20th century, though, phosphate sodas with phosphoric acid were all the rage at drugstore soda fountains. They came in a variety of flavors, with lemon, cherry and chocolate being especially popular. And while the flavors were good,



current events played a role in their popularity, too.

"Soda fountains became popular in the 1880s at drugstores because they were a meld between healthy drinks and pharmacists," says food historian Dann Woellert. "As you moved into Prohibition from 1919 into the 1930s, the soda fountain became the bar for adults. The chocolate phosphate and fruit-flavored phosphates became the mocktail of the Depression era."

Food historian Andrew Coe, writing in "The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink," wrote that the phosphates' high point "lasted until the 1930s when ice-cream based concoctions began to dominate the soda fountain."

If mostly forgotten in much of the country, phosphoric acid is still found wherever Coca-Cola is sold or served. It is one of Coca-Cola's six ingredients, giving the world's most popular carbonated soft drink its mildly tangy aftertaste.

Chocolate phosphates may primarily be found today in the Midwest, but they are found in other places, too. In Philadelphia, Franklin Fountain is a recreation of a 1915 ice cream parlor with "Fizzes and Phosphates" on its menu. In 2006, Josh Lebewohl, one of the owners of Second Avenue Deli, a kosher delicatessen in Manhattan, began serving complimentary chocolate phosphates at the end of every meal.

"We called it chocolate shots," said Lebewohl. "We made it with seltzer and Bosco, because Bosco chocolate syrup is *pareve*. It was a welcome '*l'chaim*.' It is fun, it is nice, and it is sweet."

While the drink was beloved by customers, Lebewohl recently stopped serving it.

He swapped out the end of meal chocolate shots for blue-and-white cookies, a riff on New York's beloved black-and-white cookie as a way of showing support for Israel in the post-October 7th world.

Those who still have chocolate phosphates-sans-phosphates on the menu find other ways to make the

drink stand out. Bradley Rubin, the proprietor of Eleven City Diner in Chicago, where you can expect to wait an hour just to get in the door, sells more than 100 chocolate phosphates, what he calls "chocolate phos," a week.

For Rubin, serving the chocolate phos is a nostalgic labor of love.

"I learned to make a chocolate phos from my father and grandfather in my house," he says, where his family had an antique soda fountain. "Everyone loves them. We serve it with a sidecar with soda, what we call a 2-cent plain."

Having the sidecar, he said, "allows you to take the long spoon it comes with and mix the chocolate on the bottom of the glass with the soda from the side car. You get a little more chocolate soda. You aren't popping open a can. The drink becomes yours."

"We are a chocolate phos town," continued Rubin. "This is what we do in Chicago."

But the question remains: Is chocolate phosphate a Jewish drink in the way that Manischewitz wine certainly is? It's true that it is made with seltzer, a beverage seen as Jewish given Jews' predilection for the bubbly water and their involvement in the seltzer trade. And it's also *pareve*, a drink that can be served with meat or dairy, in diners or delis, with cheese blintzes or pastrami sandwiches.

Susan Fishbain never thought of it as a Jewish drink. Nor did Linda Neiman, a Chicago-born lover of chocolate phosphates who drank them in diners and ice cream shops when growing up. In her parents' era, before World War II, it was very popular among everyone in Chicago, not just Jews.

Barry Joseph, author of "Seltzertopia," and the co-founder of the Brooklyn Seltzer Museum distinguishes between a Jewish drink and a drink enjoyed by Jews:

"When you ask somebody what's your favorite Jewish drink, I think some people are answering—what's your favorite drink as a Jew?" he said. "Which doesn't mean the drink is inherently Jewish, but it's something they drank as a Jew." ☆

RACHEL RINGLER IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

THE BITTER JEWISH HISTORY OF EGGPLANT

In 17th century Italy, “eggplant eyes” was a pejorative term for Jews.

BY RONNIE FEIN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

Eggplant isn't easy to love. It can be bitter and may be among the kinds of food that appeal more to grown-ups than children (at least anecdotally!).

Historically, the disdain for eggplant runs much deeper than bitter flesh. For a long time, this vegetable was both feared and reviled. Feared because it is a member of the nightshade family, which includes some poisonous plants like tomatoes and potatoes, that at one time were also thought to be deadly. Some Europeans thought eggplant caused epilepsy or insanity, terming it the “mad apple.” Reviled, in part, because of antisemitism. Trace the eggplant's history and you'll see why:

Although its origins are probably in India, eggplant became a culinary staple in the Middle East thanks to the Caliph of Baghdad. In 825 A.D. he was about to be married and he ordered a special sauteed eggplant dish for the wedding dinner. He named the dish “buraniyya” in honor of his bride, Buran. It was so delicious that the recipe became famous and has endured to this day. (Apparently, the secret to this beloved dish was Buran's cooking tip: salt to rid the eggplant flesh of bitterness.)

Soon after, Arab traders from the Middle East brought the eggplant to Spain, where it became a favorite ingredient among the Sephardic Jews, who had been a thriving and respected people in the Iberian peninsula for centuries.

Until they weren't.

When the Jews were exiled during the Spanish Inquisition, they fled far and wide, including to the Ottoman Empire and central Europe, bringing their love of eggplant with them.

The vegetable was readily accepted among Sicilians, who had long been a diverse cultural community and whose cuisine was heavily influenced by Middle Eastern foods. So, too, among the Ottomans; Romania, where my family comes from, was part of the Ottoman Empire, hence my grandmother's weekly bowl of potlagela, a Romanian eggplant salad that was a staple of my childhood, centuries later.

But in central and northern Italy and other parts of western Europe, the eggplant – and the Jews – did not fare so well. In most of Italy the strange, unfamiliar vegetable was associated with the clannish non-Christians, who were despised, and so was “their” vegetable. In Italy, “eggplant eyes” was a pejorative term for Jews.

The disdain was set in stone in 1638, when Italian food aficionado, Antonio Frugoli, wrote “Pratica e



Scalcaria,” a book about haute cuisine, in which he said that vegetables such as eggplants were fit only for peasants and Jews and therefore not worthy for the table.

According to an article by Orge Castellano in Tablet Magazine, the low regard for eggplant “persisted into the 17th century.” But actually, the association of lowly eggplant and lowly Jew hung around for another couple of centuries, until the mid-1800s, when people gradually began to realize how terrific it could be. By 1891, Pellegrino Artusi (who some consider the father of modern Italian cuisine) wrote “La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiar Bene” in which he bemoaned the fact that eggplants took so long to become respected throughout Europe. He noted that it had long been regarded as the “vile food of the Jews” and that in this, as in other matters, “the Jews have shown a better flair for good things than the Christians.”

As the sage Hillel once said, “the rest is commentary.” Eggplant is now a mainstay, among the most popular vegetables (fun fact: It is actually a berry!) in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. It became a culinary star in the United States back in the 1980s when Mediterranean cuisine became au courant.

There are so many well-known eggplant recipes these days: Eggplant Parmesan, *caponata*, *ratatouille*, *baba ganoush*, *moussaka* and so on. ☆

RONNIE FEIN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND J LIFE MAGAZINE.

JEWISH DISABILITY AWARENESS AND INCLUSION MONTH

BY CAREY MCINTOSH



Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) is a coordinated effort among Jewish institutions to honor and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities and their loved ones in the full spectrum of Jewish life. Founded in 2009 by the Jewish Special Education International Consortium and celebrated every February, JDAIM is quickly becoming a well-recognized presence within the Jewish calendar for many organizations.

When thinking about disability, it can be tempting to look at it as a thing that happens to other people. However, disability is more prevalent than most people assume, and it touches all of our lives, whether directly or indirectly. Think of yourself or someone you know who dealt with lingering Covid symptoms such as fatigue and body aches that interfered with their ability to maintain their usual pace of life for the space of a few months. Or perhaps someone you know has had to restrict their activity because of chronic pain, or they struggle to follow a conversation even with hearing aids. Although estimates of disability rates in the general US population fall within a range of 10%-28%, that number rises to nearly 45% for people 65 and older. These figures do not generally capture people

who are temporarily impaired through, say, a broken ankle or bad cataracts. The fact is that disability is not a fringe phenomenon, but an integral part of the human experience that will directly affect more than half of us at some point in our lives.

Many people associate disability with certain impairments, such as an inability to walk unassisted or losing one's sense of vision or hearing. However, many disabilities are invisible and thus easily underestimated, minimized or disbelieved. These can range from physical issues such as fatigue, brain fog and chronic pain to intellectual disability and some forms of neurodiversity. Mental health issues are an often unrecognized but significant source of disability. Not all impairments are created equal; what matters is the degree to which they interfere with people's ability to live an active, independent life in our society. That last part is important because the same impairment, such as weakness that necessitates the use of a wheelchair, can cause more or less of a functional disability depending on the built infrastructure and people's expectations. Not being able to walk unaided, for example, results in a much bigger disability in a building with only stairs than one with an elevator.



Many people wonder about the etiquette of what to do when someone with a disability looks like they might need some help. Most people with disabilities are not offended by the offer of help. Reaching in to do so without being asked or not taking “no, thank you” for an answer can cause discomfort because of the implication that the person is unable to complete the task independently, even if it is a struggle. Trying a simple, “Would you like some help?” and then respecting the answer is a great way to acknowledge someone’s extra difficulty while also respecting their autonomy.

The challenge for us as individuals, organizations and institutions is to be aware and inclusive all year round, not just in February. A wonderful example of this is the Jewish Federation’s Camp Gan Shalom, which seeks to ensure full participation of all children through its hiring practices, training for camp counselors, and planning of events and activities in order to meet the needs of children with emotional, intellectual and physical



Keshet-National Organization to provide Jewish Disability awareness and inclusion for children. Keshet - An Organization for Individuals with Special Needs and Disabilities



JDAIM- the official JDAIM logo which was created to symbolize how disability inclusion is woven into all aspects of Jewish life. Jewish Disability Awareness & Inclusion Month - Disability Belongs™

disabilities. To register your child for Camp Gan Shalom please visit www.jewishsgpv.org.

This year, Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center is holding two special events to mark JDAIM. The first is a showing on February 1 of the short film *Thirteen* by Allison Norlian, which depicts a mother’s struggle to secure a bat mitzvah for her physically and intellectually disabled daughter, to promote reflection and exchange among religious-school kids, their families and other interested congregants. The second event will be a disability Shabbat service, which will take place on Saturday, February 28 at 9:30 am. The service will include special prayers, reflection and a sermon that promises to find a connection between the High Priest’s temple garments and disability. Tables will be set aside at the kiddush lunch for those who would like to discuss further, and people with experience of disability in Jewish spaces will be available to answer questions and engage in conversation.

If you or someone you know is looking for disability-related resources within the Jewish community, the following are good places to start:

- Diverse Abilities/Special Needs | Builders of Jewish Education
- Mental Health - Jewish Family Service LA
- Los Angeles Jewish Abilities Center (LAJAC) - Jewish Federation Los Angeles
- About Us - JLA Trust
- Keshet - An Organization for Individuals with Special Needs and Disabilities

And finally, if you notice behavior or a physical or institutional barrier for someone with a particular disability to fully participate, feel free to bring it up to the leaders/organizers. Often, even those with the best intentions find it difficult to think of everything and are usually grateful for any ideas that will help everyone feel that they belong. ☆

CAREY MCINTOSH IS THE CO-CHAIR OF THE JEWISH EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE AT PASADENA JEWISH TEMPLE & CENTER AND IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLIFE MAGAZINE.

EITHER WE LAUGH OR IT WOULD MAKE US CRY

BY PRIMO CATALANO



Cathy Ladman

// I burst out laughing before hysterically crying” — Julia Louis-Dreyfus

Laughter has always been one of the ways we survive. All one needs to do is look at the long Jewish tradition of comedy to understand how critical humor is for the survival of the soul. That spirit is at the heart of the Ladies of Laughter Comedy Fest, returning this March to

celebrate Jewish women comedians after a year-long hiatus.

Last year, the festival was paused when the Jewish Federation of the Greater San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys redirected critical resources to support recovery efforts following the Eaton and Palisades fires. It was the right decision, but not an easy one. Arts bring joy, connection, and healing, but in



moments of crisis, communities come together to meet urgent needs first. Even so, the absence of the festival was deeply felt. In its inaugural year, it reminded us just how important shared laughter can be, especially during difficult times.

Now, thanks to the overwhelming enthusiasm and support generated during its first year, and an ever-growing list of reasons to cry, the festival is back to help us laugh instead, and it is bigger than ever. This year's Ladies of Laughter Comedy Fest will span nearly two weeks, running March 5 to 14, with performances and events across the region, from the Laugh Factory in Covina to the Sierra Madre Playhouse and beyond. What began as a bold idea has grown into a vibrant, multi-venue celebration of comedy, culture, and community.

From the start, Ladies of Laughter was envisioned as more than a series of shows. It was meant to become an annual tradition, a way to celebrate Women's Month in March while shining a spotlight on the voices, perspectives, and creative contributions of Jewish women in comedy. That mission feels even more meaningful this year. Our communities are still healing, and life continues to

give us plenty of reasons to laugh and cry. Comedy does not ignore that reality. It helps us face it together.

The festival lineup reflects that range, bringing together film, stand-up, podcasts, improv, and live performance in venues throughout the area. The festival opens Thursday, March 5, in Monrovia at Look! Cinemas with a screening of *Golden Love Isn't Blind*, setting the tone with a raunchy gameshow that blends humor and heart.

On Saturday, March 7, back at Look! Cinemas in Monrovia, with a Night of Honor and the presentation of The Gilda Radner Award, celebrating the talent, impact, and enduring legacy of women in comedy. Radner's spirit, joyful, vulnerable, and deeply human, is a fitting symbol for a festival rooted in humor and heart.

Sunday, March 8 offers a full day of laughter in two distinct styles. The morning begins with a live recording featuring the Amusing Jews Podcast Group, giving audiences a chance to experience smart and funny conversation in an intimate format. That evening, the Laugh Factory in Covina hosts the first Stand-Up Night with Becca Tham, Abby Schachner,



Rose Abdoo!

Judy Carter, and headliner Cathy Ladman, a comedy veteran whose wit and warmth have made her a beloved voice in stand-up. You may recognize these names from the first year of the festival. We loved them so much, we had to invite them to come back.

Midweek, the festival continues to expand its creative reach. On Wednesday, March 11, Film Night at the Laemmle Theater in Glendale showcases a short comedic film by local filmmaker Anita Merzel-

Todd, followed by the iconic musical comedy *Funny Girl*, a nod to the long legacy of Jewish women shaping comedy on screen and stage.

The laughs keep coming on Thursday, March 12, when the Sierra Madre Playhouse hosts an Improv and Sketch Night featuring *Pure and Weary*, *Soup Sisters*, and *Messing with a Friend* starring Susan Messing and Rose Abdoo. This evening celebrates spontaneous and collaborative comedy, the kind that reminds us laughter is often a team effort.

The festival concludes Saturday, March 14, another Stand-Up Night to close out the festival, at the Sierra Madre Playhouse. It features a stellar lineup of comedians including Jessica Winther, Eunji Kim, Gina Gold, and headliner Jena Friedman, known for her sharp and fearless comedic voice.

Ultimately, *Ladies of Laughter* is about more than punchlines. It is about creating space for laughter, camaraderie, connection, creativity, and inclusivity. It is about gathering in

shared experience, finding lightness even when life feels heavy, and honoring the storytellers who help us do both. In a year when so much has been rebuilt, this festival is part of that rebuilding too, a reminder that culture, joy, and community matter.

For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit www.jewishsgpv.org. Join us for an unforgettable celebration of women, laughter, and legacy at the Ladies of Laughter Comedy Fest. ✨

PRIMO CATALANO IS AN LOL COMEDY COMMITTEE MEMBER AND A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLife MAGAZINE.

THE INTOXICATING JEWISH HISTORY OF MOROCCO'S FAVORITE SPIRIT

From a black market dealings to religious pilgrimages, mahia is so much more than a drink.

BY ARYEH GINGER, MY JEWISH LEARNING

It would be hard to tell the story of Moroccan Jewry without looking at mahia, the quintessential spirit that defined Jewish life in Morocco. Mahia has a fascinating history that begins with how it's distilled. Using figs and dates infused with aniseed, this slightly sweet aromatic beverage is an ultimate symbol of

Moroccan Jewish heritage. Traditionally distilled as an eau de vie by the Jewish community in the Mellah (the Jewish quarter of Morocco), and hidden in their basements, for Moroccan Jews homebrewing was the only way to enjoy alcohol, due to booze being haram for Muslims. The drink is typically sipped neat, during or after dinner, though some Moroccan mothers recommend it be enjoyed alongside breakfast to give strength for the rest of the day.

For many Moroccan Jews, mahia is not just a drink but a part of religious and cultural rituals, such as "Hillula" pilgrimages honoring great rabbis and Jewish saints. Mahia is thought to be able to absorb the saint's powers just by being in his presence. When the pilgrimage is over, the drink is brought back home for consumption for those who could not make the trip, which makes mahia less a vehicle for intoxication and more a path to connecting with one's spirituality, explains anthropologist Oren Kosnansky.

Kosnansky cites one account of a Moroccan Hillula celebration that explains how chaotic it was: "It is difficult to render an account of the kind of frenzy that one sees at the time of the major pilgrimages, with their bacchic disorder and heavy drinking... Do these gestures attest to a woeful inability to appeal to G-d except with carnal exaltation?"

Despite its Jewish origins, mahia has found a way to transcend religious boundaries. While identities of mahia distillers were hidden to protect them from the law, the tradition of mahia managed to break through the walls of the Mellah, and found a way to the Moroccan black market, for those fiending for a taste.

In the past century, as Morocco's Jewish population deserted the Sahara for Israel, fewer and fewer possessed the secret recipes for distilling the drink.



This brought bootleg mahia to the rural areas and streets of Morocco, nicknamed "Moroccan Moonshine" for both its strength and danger, with reports that mahia claimed the lives of eight Moroccans and severely poisoned 81 more in the past century.

Outside Morocco, however, mahia has found success with Western audiences with London-based Sahara Distillery and Nahmias Distillery in New York crafting their own smoother variations built for the western palate. mahia has become a favorite for mixologists, with its subtle but special flavors. Take it from mixologist and mahia enthusiast Warren Bobrow, who praises the drink for its unique flavor that is "chock-full of roasted figs and exotic anise, bathed in pools of warm sunshine."

Jews have managed to find unique ways to distill alcohol for centuries, the Tunisians for instance have boukha, a similar spirit based on figs, Levantine Jews have arak. But mahia tastes and feels different, like an entire community and culture distilled into one beverage. Mahia is a testament to Morocco's multicultural history and artisanal expertise. Its revival not only preserves this heritage but also introduces global audiences to a unique facet of Moroccan culture—a true "water of life" that bridges past and present. ☆

ARYEH GINGER IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.





Dede Banaid and Nitzan Mintz (Credit:NewYorkTimes)

BEARING WITNESS

Art, Identity, and Moral Urgency in a Shattered World

BY TANYA FEIN

For artists Dede Banaid and Nitzan Mintz, creation has never been confined to studio walls or gallery spaces. Their work was born in public—on streets, in shared spaces, and in moments of raw exposure—long before it entered the contemporary art world. Shaped by personal trauma, sensitivity, and a profound need to communicate, their artistic paths eventually converged, forming a partnership rooted in vulnerability, empathy, and fierce honesty.

In the aftermath of October 7, their work took on an unmistakable urgency. What began as an instinctive creative response—the now globally recognized KIDNAPPED posters—became a humanitarian call that rippled across cities worldwide, revealing both solidarity and a disturbing resurgence of antisemitism. In this conversation, Dede and Nitzan reflect on the origins of their artistic voices, the intersections of art and activism, the role of Jewish and Israeli identity in their work, and the responsibility—or refusal—artists face during moments of collective trauma. Their answers offer a rare,

unfiltered look at what it means to create while standing inside history as it unfolds.

How did each of you first discover your artistic voice, and what were the formative moments—personal, cultural, or spiritual—that led you to pursue art as a life's work?

Each of us began our creative path separately, but there was something larger than both of us that eventually drew our practices together—first as artists, and later as partners. In our own ways, we each felt that the street and the public sphere were the most honest places to begin making art. As teenagers with no guidance or artistic mentors, we found a deep sense of freedom in the creative openness that the street offered. For Dede, that freedom came in the aftermath of military-related trauma; for Nitzan, it came as an escape from difficulties at home during childhood. The public space—raw, immediate, and unscreened by curators or gatekeepers—became the fastest, most direct way to communicate our emotions, thoughts, and perspectives. After several years of working independently, each of us eventually moved into formal art studies at different



Mural in Southern California (Credit: Lynn Counio)

academies, merging our work in public space with a growing presence in the contemporary art field. *Many of your pieces highlight vulnerability, healing, and human connection. What draws you to these themes?*

We are both highly sensitive people who absorb our surroundings in ways that leave a deep imprint. We also share a strong desire to communicate with as many people as possible—something that, for us, can only be fully achieved through creation. Our need to reach others, to speak to them, to touch them, manifests in constant work across media and locations. Each of us brings different traumas to the table: post-military trauma and the struggle to process on one side, and childhood trauma rooted in an environment that didn't nurture emotional needs on the other. The impulse to run toward the outside world—or to run away from home—has shaped both of us. So even without sharing identical life experiences, we often find ourselves returning to similar themes in our work.

Your work took on new urgency after October 7, especially with the KIDNAPPED posters that appeared around the world. What compelled you to create them?

When your home is shattered and your country feels like it is collapsing, nothing else in your life holds meaning. We were far from Israel at the time, without local roots beneath us, but our entire lives—our families, our culture, our identity—are Israeli. When such a tragedy strikes your people, the only possible response is to stand up and serve in whatever way you can. Our way, in that moment, was to act creatively and quickly—conceiving the posters almost immediately after the attack. The posters became a global symbol of awareness and solidarity.

What was it like watching them spread worldwide—

sometimes being torn down, sometimes fiercely protected?

We never anticipated what unfolded in the days, weeks, and months after the idea was born. Shortly after conceiving it, we connected with an Israeli graphic designer, Tal Huber, and together designed the posters. We then built an international volunteer “war room,” working around the clock across PR, design, organization, and information-gathering. At first, the posters were torn down sporadically—something we recognized as a familiar, almost expected form of antisemitism. But it quickly grew into something far larger and far more disturbing, revealing an antisemitic wave we had heard about from our grandparents but had never witnessed ourselves. Today, we at least value the fact that the posters exposed the true faces of many people around the world. Now, we know exactly where we stand in their hearts.

In the documentary film TORN, your work becomes a catalyst for something much larger than yourselves. How does the film frame your involvement, and what does it document about New York—and the wider world—during this period?

In truth, the film doesn't document our real-time experience, so the genuine hardships we faced from the beginning of the initiative until today don't actually appear in it. The documentary includes an interview with us as well as conversations with key figures who reflect the social rupture New York experienced during the war and in response to the posters. Our role in the film is almost like the inventors of a nuclear device—the catalyst—while the film itself focuses on what the project did to New York and how it reshaped the city's atmosphere. Most of the painful moments we endured aren't included: the threats sent our way, the apartments we had to move out of after being targeted, and the emotional toll of those months. What the film does offer is an important historical document for



Dede and Nitzan at Orange County (Credit: Lynn Counio)

future generations, capturing one of the largest waves of antisemitism the U.S. and the Western world have seen since the 1930s—and revealing the true value of Jewish lives in societies that once felt safe.

How do you personally define the boundary between artistic expression, activism, and politics?

We don't define ourselves as political artists. We are guided by instinct—by personal feelings of justice and urgency that drive our work with fire and conviction. We firmly believe in artistic freedom and the right to create without restriction. Sometimes our art is interpreted as socially engaged, but we're intentional about not folding it into politics. Even the poster campaign, despite how it's been portrayed, was not political—it was humanitarian. Some insist otherwise or claim we "chose a side," but the purpose was simple: to humanize victims of a brutal attack, not to make a political statement.

We are a Jewish Life magazine, so I'm curious: in what ways does your Jewish heritage or Israeli identity appear in your work?

Our art doesn't rely on Jewish symbols. We are Israelis—and deeply confident in our roots. Often, Jewish art in the diaspora feels compelled to express identity through symbols like Stars of David, menorahs, flags, or biblical quotations. We feel that simply being who we are is more than enough. We grew from the soil, breathed the air,

studied history and Tanakh, and speak a language thousands of years old. Nitzan's Hebrew poetry, the specific imagery in our visual work depicting local wildlife, architecture, sceneries etc, and the lived experience behind them are, for us, the most genuinely Jewish and Israeli expressions we can offer. We see ourselves as part of the evolution of "the people of the book" into a visual future.

What role do you believe artists should play in moments of national grief, tension, or transformation?

In our view, artists shouldn't feel obligated to represent anything that doesn't come directly from their heart. We see it clearly in the global art world: countless artists on social media feel pressured to shout political slogans—often without understanding the historical reality behind them. Artists, for some reason, feel compelled to become megaphones for movements they may know very little about. We deeply admire the artists who isolate themselves and paint flowers simply because that is what their soul needs—more than the loud chorus of those who feel an imposed duty to broadcast opinions. Art is not inherently bound to politics, time, or place. It can be whatever its creator needs it to be. The more relevant question is why so many creators feel obligated to speak on issues with which they have no personal connection to.

What new themes or projects are you exploring in your current work?



We feel we've reached a very interesting moment in our creative lives—a state of fracture and growth at the same time. On one hand, we are living in a new country, creating in a new art studio, surrounded by new visual culture and an exciting artistic landscape. On the other hand, our homeland is wounded and trying to heal. We feel as though we're in a greenhouse—a place of accelerated growth. Part of us is called back home,

urged to create works that document the tragedy and explore our personal longing to understand what happened. At the same time, we have complete freedom to write and paint whatever comes to mind in a new place where no one knows us. This is our moment to experiment with new materials, step outside familiar patterns, and take risks. We already have new works in progress that diverge visually and emotionally from anything we've created before.

Throughout this conversation, Dede and Nitzan resist easy definitions—of art, of activism, of identity. Instead, they return again and again to instinct, integrity, and the courage to act from a deeply personal place. Their work does not seek permission, nor does it rely on overt symbols to assert who they are. It emerges from lived experience, from language, land, memory, and moral urgency.

At a moment when the global art world often feels compelled toward noise and slogans, their perspective is a reminder that art's greatest power may lie in its honesty rather than its volume. Whether documenting pain, holding space for grief, or quietly experimenting with new forms in unfamiliar surroundings, they continue to ask the same essential question: what does it mean to remain human—and to bear witness—through creation? In a fractured world, their answer is clear: to create is to refuse erasure, and to insist that every life, every story, matters.

To learn more please visit www.dedebandaaid.com. ☆

TANYA FEIN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLFIFE MAGAZINE.



SGPV'S JEWISH YOUTH & PARENTS

kiddish

Mazel Tov!
The celebration issue

FEBRUARY 2026

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An Introduction to Purim

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING



Happy Purim!

There are four commandments to be fulfilled on Purim. These are in addition to the custom of disguising ourselves in costumes in commemoration of how G-d concealed himself when orchestrating the miracle of Purim (G-d's name does not appear in Megillat Esther). The four commandments are:

Reading the Megillah (Kriyat Megillah)

On Purim, Jews gather to read the story of the holiday as it is recorded in the Book of Esther. It is customary to make noise whenever the name of Haman is read in order to "blot out" his name.

Giving Charity (Matanot L'evyonim)

On Purim, Jews are required to give gifts to the poor in order to commemorate the charity G-d gave the Jews by overturning Haman's evil decree. The requirement is to give at least one gift to two different needy people, at least two gifts in total.

The Festive Meal (Seuda)

In the afternoon of Purim we are instructed to partake in a festive meal. According to the Vilna Gaon this feast is commemorative of the feast Esther had with the King and Haman where she asked the King to save the Jews.

Sending Gifts to One Another (Mishloach Manot)

We are commanded to give one another food gifts on Purim. The commandment is to send one gift of two portions of ready-made food to another. This commandment is commemorative of the brotherly love that awoke amongst the Jews after the story of Purim occurred. The most common food to be given in these gifts is *Hamentaschen*, triangular pastry pockets with various fillings.

Special Prayers

On Purim, there are also special prayers recited. *Al Hanissim* is added to the Amidah prayer and *Birkat HaMazon*. The Megillah is read twice, once at night and again in the morning.

History of Bat Mitzvah

The bat mitzvah ceremony is of relatively recent vintage, with the first American observance in 1922.

BY RABBI ARTHUR O. WASKOW, MY JEWISH LEARNING

In many segments of the Jewish community, girls at 12 or 13 years of age undertake exactly the same ceremony as boys. For American Jews, this process famously began in 1922 when Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism, arranged for his daughter Judith to celebrate becoming a bat mitzvah at a public synagogue ceremony.

But in fact her ceremony did not involve a full aliyah to the Torah [going up to the Torah and reciting blessings over its reading], and was thus a much-diminished version of what boys did. It bore considerable resemblance to a way of celebrating this passage in the synagogue that some girls in Italy and France had begun even earlier, and Rabbi Kaplan may have used for his daughter's rite what he had heard or seen of an Italian ceremony.

Elsewhere, too, in Jewish life, girls entering adulthood had begun to take part in a public ceremony. Late in the 19th century, Joseph Hayyim Eliyahu ben Moshe of Baghdad, Ben Ish Hai, wrote (as translated by Howard Tzvi Adelman):

And also the daughter on the day that she enters the obligation of the commandments, even though they don't usually make for her a seudah [celebratory meal], nevertheless that day will be one of happiness. She should wear Sabbath clothing and if she is able to do so she should wear new clothing and bless the Shehecheyanu prayer [for the One 'Who gives us life, lifts us up, and carries us to this moment'] and be ready for her entry to the yoke of the commandments. There are those who are accustomed to make her birthday every year into a holiday. It is a good sign, and this we do in our house.

Another bat mitzvah ceremony, in the synagogue, was celebrated in Lvov in 1902 by Rabbi Dr. Yehezkel Caro, "rabbi for the enlightened Jews."

What gave long-term importance to Judith Kaplan's moment was that American culture



supported transforming this hesitant beginning into wholehearted change. By the end of the 20th century, in almost all non-Orthodox congregations girls were celebrating their coming of age as b'not mitzvah through much the same ceremonies their brothers experienced.

Indeed, by the end of the 20th century, many Orthodox synagogues were doing the same kind of limited ceremony short of a full aliyah that Rabbi Kaplan had originally arranged for his daughter. And even among haredi ("ultra-Orthodox") communities, some girls' schools were holding a special breakfast for the class of 12-year-olds, to which mothers were invited.

In some American haredi communities, each girl signs up for a Sunday near her birthday on which to have a lunch and deliver a d'var Torah [talk on her Torah portion]. Some have proposed a party where the Bat Mitzvah might separate challah [set aside a portion of the dough in remembrance of for the first time, or do another mitzvah particular to women. Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic communities celebrate a girl's becoming bat mitzvah with the girl choosing a teaching of the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe to learn and discuss at a gathering of her friends and family.

☆

RABBI ARTHUR O. WASKOW IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.

Is the Bar Mitzvah Over?

BY REBECCA SIRBU, MY JEWISH LEARNING

The simple answer, of course, is no. Bar/Bat Mitzvah is one of the most popular Jewish rituals in the United States today. There is something deeply human about wanting to mark the end of childhood, which a bar/bat mitzvah effectively does. Marking at twelve, for a girl, and thirteen for a boy that they now have new responsibilities as they enter adolescence is a profoundly moving experience for both the emerging teenager and his or her family.

And yet the bar/bat mitzvah ritual is experiencing a period of disruption. Rabbis are recognizing a growing need to tailor the bar/bat mitzvah experience to a particular child or family. The one size fits all “bar mitzvah factories” of old no longer apply. Three recent examples heralding this change have come to my attention.

Rabbi Michael Knopf of Temple Beth El in Richmond, VA is overhauling the bar/bat mitzvah experience for the teens in his congregation. He advocates an approach for an individualized experience for the teen and their families so that they can study together, identify what is most important to them, and develop a Jewish ritual to mark the occasion which may or may not take place in on Shabbat. It is an individualized approach focusing on the needs of a particular student and tailoring their Jewish learning to meet their needs.

Rabbi Andrew Jacobs of Ramat Shalom synagogue in Plantation, FL is taking things one step further by integrating technology into the experience. He has developed a strong online curriculum of learning whereby a student can learn remotely with a tutor and study at times that fit their schedule. His program is called Chai Tech “With an internet connection and a computer, tablet or smartphone, bar/bat mitzvah students can prepare for their big day wherever they are, whenever they can. No more schlepping to the synagogue or the tutor. Once you go Chai Tech, bar/bat mitzvah preparation works easily into your busy schedule.

Everything is online - including a teacher who monitors your child's progress and keeps you informed using an advanced, online learning management system.”

These are only a couple examples of how preparing for and experiencing the ritual of bar/



bat mitzvah is being challenged and changed across the country.

Though changing ancient rituals is always scary, I think this is a good thing. There is actually no Jewish law surrounding the bar mitzvah ceremony. A child simply becomes bar/bat mitzvah on her twelfth birthday for a girl, or thirteenth birthday for a boy. This entry in to Jewish adulthood was often marked, for a boy, by having him honored by being called up to the Torah, receiving an aliyah. Chanting the Torah, haftorah or leading services are all modern day inventions added to mark this moment of transformation. They are not required.

I do not know where this time of experimentation will end. I too agree that Jewish literacy is important. Children and families should have to learn and prepare to mark a bar/bat mitzvah. But Jewish wisdom is expansive and deep. There are many options on what we can do here. I am hopeful that rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators across this country who work with teens and families to prepare to mark their bar/bat mitzvah will be able to identify what their current spiritual needs are and craft the appropriate course of study and celebratory ritual to honor them.

Hazak, hazak v'nitchazek - may we go from strength to strength as we explore the boundless potential of Judaism to add meaning to our lives. ☆

REBECCA SIRBU IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.

Empowering Bat Mitzvah Girls

BY DANIELLA JAFF KLEIN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

A few years ago my family was living in Israel and attending a synagogue near our home. One Shabbat, our four year old daughter came running up to me in tears. Apparently she was not allowed on the *bima*, podium, with her big brother and his friends. Why? Because she was a girl, of course. I was amazed that she should be exposed to such blatant discrimination at four! I immediately vented to our rabbi friend with whom I regularly studied. How could we allow our daughter to feel so excluded? What would we do about her Bat Mitzvah? How was I to explain to her that she couldn't read from the Torah in front of men? Her Bat Mitzvah would be just a few months after her brother's Bar Mitzvah and the juxtaposition would be so blatant!

When I was slightly less hysterical, our rabbi gently asked me to remind him how old our daughter was. "Um, four." "Right," he responded, "you have a few years to figure it out before panicking!" He also offered me some other crucial advice: "Don't try to emulate the Bar Mitzvah ceremony just for the sake of it. There are lots of things wrong with Bar Mitzvahs. If you want to make the Bat Mitzvah ceremony meaningful. Go back to first principles. Think of ways to make a coming-of-age milestone meaningful." So that is what I did.

My own Bat Mitzvah didn't serve to inspire me, in spite of my reading the entire Torah portion (it being in a Reform synagogue). My overriding memory of it was beaming at my friends from the *bima* with my sparkling braces. And being forewarned by my sister not to giggle when blessed by the rabbi. I did. It was not exactly the meaningful ceremony I was hoping for our daughter.

Around that time, a cousin of mine was about to have her Bat Mitzvah. Relative to her secular upbringing, I was practically Lubavitch in my level of frumness. The plan was to have a party and her mother asked me how we could add a bit of Jewishness. So I prepared some questions and found a couple of quotations. Included were



questions to ask her grandparents about their Jewish life, about Jewish foods and jokes and stories. I printed them out and literally cut and pasted them into a scrapbook. Very badly. We sat together a few times before her celebration and discussed some of the questions and read through Megillat Ruth as it was around the time of Shavuot. And when her party came round, she gave a beautiful *d'var torah*.

Fortunately, soon after, I met Juliet Simmons who would save me from having to cut and paste for the rest of my life.

Juliet also felt passionately about creating something beautiful and meaningful for Jewish girls. She'd had a "typical" London Bat Mitzvah - speaking on the *bima* on a Sunday afternoon with about six other girls, but it wasn't until she was much older that she'd discovered bits about being Jewish that she'd really loved - and met inspiring Jewish women. We both felt that it was time to speak to the Jewish women

who had inspired us as adults and share that inspiration (and that love of all things Jewish) with younger women and girls - why should they have to wait?! Juliet and I both found ourselves enthused with the idea of creating something that was magical and accessible and that would enhance this special time of coming-of-age for girls. And so began a process that took two years of research, meetings, discussions, brain storming and lots of tea and toast, and that eventually led to the creation of *My Own Bat Mitzvah Book*.

The book seeks to serve as a dialogue between the girls and their tradition. There are fourteen chapters written by different women, each exploring different facets of Judaism, from the concept of time in Judaism, to thinking about Shabbat, to contemporary Jewish culture. Each chapter affords the girls an opportunity to complete activities frequently involving interaction with family members. It is meant as a journey towards a milestone event as well as a keepsake for future generations.

We tapped into twenty extraordinary women, with very different backgrounds from across the globe, across denominations, and across cultures. We couldn't have wished for a more diverse group-rebbetzins, educators, rock stars, peace activists, mothers, cooks, artists, comedians. By involving so many women, we hoped to break down stereotypes about what it means to be a "good Jewish woman," and show that there are many paths to live a passionate and engaged Jewish life.

The book is interactive, in order to make the girls feel as though they are the next link in a beautiful and ancient chain of tradition. We want them to feel that they are a part of the Jewish conversation and are empowered to impact on what the religion is today. We very deliberately did not want to be prescriptive but at the same time we have kept it as halakhically on track as possible. As one of our contributors said: "It is deeply rooted in Jewish text and tradition but it also has a very introspective almost soul searching approach, inviting young girls to think about themselves in relation to themselves, their community, their G-d, and the world at large as they come of age."



For me, the most meaningful chapter is the one called Making Laws your own. Even with a legal background, I know how intimidating Jewish law and text-based study can be and so we really wanted to break it down so that the girls can have a sense of the legal process and how laws change. In the book, we replicated a Talmud page and included explanations about the different commentaries around the page. We even highlighted the point that we are all part of the Jewish story by creating an open space for the girls to write their own commentary and add their own voices. After all, Judaism is a religion based in innovation!

Adolescent years are not easy, especially for girls wading through all of the conflicting messages from the media and our society. But Judaism has recognised that this is a time to be introspective, to think about ourselves, our role in relation to the rest of the world, to examine our identities and to draw on the role models around us. We hope the book helps to empower girls to figure out their own paths, not just through Judaism, but through becoming a woman.

I'm hoping that when it is my daughter's time to become a Bat Mitzvah, she won't have to be worried about whether she's allowed to stand on the bima, and that she feels empowered to make choices about how to celebrate her own Jewishness and her identity as a woman.

And perhaps it will be my son complaining that it is unfair, that a keepsake Bar Mitzvah book doesn't exist for him. ☆

DANIELLA JAFF KLEIN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.



COOKING JEWISH

Lifestyle

POLISH DELIGHTS

**A nostalgic taste of
Polish baking.**

BY JUDY BART KANCIGOR

PHOTO COURTESY OF MALAYSIA MINITA

Pletzl (onion flatbread)

I am the product of a mixed marriage. My mother was a Litvak (a Jew from the historical region of “greater Lithuania”—modern-day Lithuania, Belarus, parts of Latvia, Poland, and Ukraine), and my father was a Galitzianer (a Jew from Galicia—contemporary western Ukraine and southeastern Poland). Historically, there has been a stereotypical cultural divide between the two: Litvaks seen as more intellectual, favoring more savory food and Galitzianers as more emotional, favoring sweet foods. Needless to say, in this centuries-old feud, Galitzianers have not been looked upon kindly by the Litvaks.

My father was born in the town of Sambor, Poland—well, it was Poland then. Today the town is just inside the western border of Ukraine. My grandmother, Ruchel Strausser, had a bakery there, and as I wandered through Laurel Kratochvila’s new cookbook, “Dobre Dobre: Baking from Poland and Beyond,” I wondered which of these delectables my grandmother might have sold there or baked at home for the family.

Grandma Ruchel died when I was 16, so my memory of her baking is limited. I found myself on a nostalgia trip, however, salivating over the *rugalach*, *kichelach* (light-as-air bow tie cookies), *hamantaschen*, *knishes*, *babka*, apple cake, *pletzl* (onion flatbread), and, of course, *challah* that I do remember. But this is an eclectic set of recipes and not definitive in terms of Polish baking, Kratochvila asserts. The recipes are curated based on her “own travels, friends, family, research, and unapologetic affection for Polish baking.” I’m eager to try her Lodz Bread with Coffee and Raisins, Chanterelle and Smoky Cheese Danishes, Karpotka (Layered Choux and Cream Cake), Goose and Pumpkin Turnovers (finely diced turkey or ground beef may be substituted for the goose) and *Chatka* (Braid-ed Egg Bread with Streusel, which, she writes: “might be the most

common baked good in Poland.)” There’s even a recipe for matzo!

The book’s title comes from a Polish saying “*Dobre Dobre, nie za słodkie*”: good, good, not too sweet. (It must be a Litvak saying.) And, oh, the writing. Any cookbook that begins with: “I fell in love with Polish baking because I didn’t like the pickles in the Czech Republic” has got my attention. Spoiler alert: She snagged the pickles she craved in Poland and with them her husband! From there she “trained as a baker in Paris, opened her own bakery, wrote a cookbook, and never stopped returning to Poland. As a professional baker whose bakery focuses on Heritage Jewish baking,” she writes, “Polish bakeries and cake shops...have become my way of connecting to that culinary heritage in the wild.”

Through the centuries Poland has undergone many border changes, sometimes disappearing altogether. No matter how many generations of a Jewish family lived there, they never thought of themselves as Poles. As Kratochvila’s grandmother told her, “We were never Polish,” and as Kratochvila explains, “The terrible antisemitism in the country’s history made for a tricky relationship.”

While there has been much sharing of recipes between Poland and many other cultures through the years, and despite the fact that before World War II only ten percent of the Polish population was Jewish, “I’d posit that there is no greater influence on Poland’s bakery culture in the present day than the Jewish bakers of its past,” she notes. “While an exact number isn’t known, some speculate that until the second world war, up to half of Poland’s bakers were Jews. There was almost no city or town without at least one Jewish bakery, and it wasn’t unusual if half or even all the bakeries...were Jewish. Even if Jewish bakeries basically don’t exist in today’s Poland, their influence certainly does.

The overlap of what is Jewish

and what is Polish is so complete that there’s no point in trying to disentangle them. *Rugalach*, onion breads, apple cakes—everyone makes them, so what belongs to whom? Of course there was no answer to this question. Food is cultural and cultural borders are porous.”

Polish baking has had a global influence “from the New York bagel to pletzalej in Argentina to the French Baba Au Rhum,” she explains. “Populations exiled from Poland transmitted the baking culture to their new homeland, where it’s been reinvented time and again. Polish and Polish-Jewish traditions exist in bakeries from Chicago to Brooklyn, Tel Aviv to Melbourne, Bangkok to San Luis Potosi in Mexico. Among these bakeries there is massive variation. Some are holders of tradition, nearly frozen in time, like a language spoken by only a few on a desert island. Others, especially the North American Jewish bakeries, are the natural continuation of a baking tradition that has adapted in *diaspora*, absorbing new influences, tastes, and ingredients.” ☆

“**The book’s title comes from a Polish saying “Dobre Dobre, nie za słodkie”: good, good, not too sweet.**

JLIFE FOOD EDITOR JUDY BART KANCIGOR IS THE AUTHOR OF “COOKING JEWISH” (WORKMAN) AND “THE PERFECT PASSOVER COOKBOOK” (AN E-BOOK SHORT FROM WORKMAN), A COLUMNIST AND FEATURE WRITER FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS AND CAN BE FOUND ON THE WEB AT WWW.COOKINGJEWISH.COM.



Jewish Apple Pie (Szarlotka) Balls

Jewish Apple Pie (Szarlotka)

See further note in pletzle recipe (right) if you don't have a convection setting.

Although called a pie, "this is more cake than pie, made in a pie plate or springform pan spread with thick batter that leaks between the apples."

2 pounds 3 ounces tart and firm apples, such as Granny Smith, Braeburn, or Cortland (8 to 10 medium apples), peeled, cored, and sliced into 1 1/2- to 2-inch chunks
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 1/4 cups sugar
4 large eggs, at room temperature
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
2 cups all-purpose flour
3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. Line base of 9-inch springform pan with parchment paper, then butter sides and coat with sugar. Preheat oven to 400°F with convection setting turned on.
2. Gently pile apples into pan, all the way to the top. No need to pack tightly.
3. In bowl of stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment, cream butter and 2 cups of the sugar on medium speed until fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, then increase speed to medium-high. Beat about 5 minutes, until batter turns pale yellow. Reduce speed to low and add vanilla and salt. Add flour, mixing until batter is smooth. It will be thick but pourable. Pour batter over apples, covering top entirely. Using a spatula, smooth batter to edges of pan. If it doesn't seem like enough batter, don't worry. It will sink down among apples as it bakes.
4. In small bowl, mix together remaining sugar and cinnamon, then sprinkle evenly over pie. Bake 15 minutes, then lower heat to 350°F and continue baking another 45 to 55 minutes. Top will be a rich tan color and a knife inserted into the middle will come out clean but wet from the apples. If the top starts to get too dark, cover loosely with aluminum foil for remainder of the bake. Remove from oven and allow to cool completely before sliding a knife around edge of cake and undoing the springform

Pletzl (onion flatbread)

Yield: 3 pletzls

Note: Kratochvila prefers a convection setting "for a faster more even bake. If you don't have a convection setting, you may need to increase the baking time by about 25 percent and rotate your items as you bake." Begin checking at 5 minutes.

This dough starts the day before you're ready to bake. If you can't find the 00 pizza flour, it's available online.

Dough

1 1/3 cups plus 2 teaspoons water
1 tablespoon honey
Tiniest pinch (1 g) instant yeast
3 1/3 cups Italian type 00 pizza flour
1/2 cup whole-rye flour
1 3/4 teaspoons kosher salt
1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil

Cornmeal, for dusting

Filling

2 medium onions, finely chopped (about 2 cups)
6 spring onions, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
1/2 cup olive oil

Toppings

2 tablespoon sesame seeds (optional)
1 tablespoon Nigella seeds (optional)
1 tablespoon poppy seeds (optional)
Flaky sea salt

1. Dough: In bowl of stand mixer, combine water, honey and yeast. Whisk until smooth. Add pizza flour, rye flour and salt and, with dough hook attachment, mix on low speed until all ingredients are incorporated. Increase speed to medium; continue mixing 8 minutes, or until dough is smooth and starts to pull away from sides of bowl. Turn speed to low; drizzle in olive oil in thin stream until entirely incorporated. (Dough will come apart and then return to a smooth mass within a couple minutes.) Recipe continues at jlifegp.com.

sides. Serve at room temperature with vanilla ice cream or store covered in fridge up to 5 days, serving cold or reheating in oven.

Source: "Dobre Dobre" by Laurel Kratochvila. ☆



A FOOD NETWORK STAR OPENS A JEWISH DELI AT AMERICA'S BUSIEST AIRPORT

With Duff Goldman's new deli, Atlanta welcomes airport food that's anything but.

BY EVELYN FRICK, MY JEWISH LEARNING

As a rule, I don't eat at the airport. It's not that I don't want to. I've just given up on finding an airport restaurant that seems appetizing. Terminal food always appears clumsily made with ingredients that look anything but fresh, resulting in concoctions that are too heavy and too greasy. Presented with those depressing options, I prefer to stick with just a cold ginger ale from the bookstore, thanks.

But the next time I find myself at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, I think I might finally, thankfully, break my rule. That's because chef Duff Goldman opened his first restaurant there, a Jewish deli called Duff's Deli + Market, last month.

Yes, you read that correctly. The 51-year-old Jewish pastry chef and owner of Baltimore's Charm City Cakes, perhaps best known for his Food Network reality show "Ace of Cakes," has opened a deli. But from Goldman's perspective, this foray into savory is a completely natural one. "Before I was a pastry chef, before TV, before any of that, I was a kid who grew up eating at Jewish delis. Those places shaped my understanding of food as comfort, as culture, and as community," Goldman recently told me via email. "Opening a deli felt like coming full circle and paying tribute to the food I grew up loving."

And what a tribute it is. In Goldman's estimation, what makes a great Jewish deli is its soul, and Duff's Deli + Market certainly has a lot of that. The vibe of the space is whimsical—the restaurant's decor is mostly peachy salmon (think lox). The menu is decorated with smiling cartoon food. The multi-tier, colorful cakes Duff is known for are on display throughout the restaurant. The menu includes classic deli fare, such as a hot pastrami sandwich (Goldman's favorite item on the menu), the lox platter, matzah ball soup, a bagel and schmear and black and white cookies. But there are some twists, too; like the sliced brisket on rye with tiger sauce, the craft dessert-themed cocktails at the bar and the cake jars from Charm City Cakes. For travelers with a connection



Photo Courtesy: Duff Goldman

to catch and no time for the full sit-down experience, the gourmet market component offers plenty of pre-prepared salads, sandwiches, drinks and more—a welcome reprieve from the sameness of terminal take-away.

While the idea of opening a Jewish deli in an airport might seem a bit unconventional, Goldman sees it as an opportunity. In his view, Hartsfield-Jackson airport, one of the busiest in the world, is the perfect location for his deli to offer "a moment of comfort" in the midst of the chaos of traveling. Additionally, it allows him to introduce really good, authentic Jewish deli food to people who may not otherwise have had the opportunity to try it. So far, the reception has been as hot as the pastrami. "Hearing travelers say it reminds them of the deli they grew up with is the best compliment I could ask for," he gushed. "That's exactly what I hoped to create."

As for what's next, Goldman's top priority will still be ensuring that anyone who comes to Duff's Deli + Market knows they'll get carefully made, good food. He added, "I want it to bring a sense of warmth and nostalgia to unexpected places, and if we grow, I want to make sure we never lose that heart and authenticity."

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a trip to Atlanta to book.

☆

EVELYN FRICK IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIIFE MAGAZINE.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 10, 17 & 24

7:00 - 8:30 PM

**EVERY WEEK UNTIL
FEBRUARY 24, 2026**

Introduction to Judaism
Temple Beth Israel of
Pomona, TBI

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 10, 17 & 24

7:30 - 9:00 PM

**EVERY WEEK UNTIL
FEBRUARY 24, 2026**

Jewish Journeys:
Collective Memories
Through Place and Time
Pasadena Jewish
Temple and Center
(Temporary Location)
500 E Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena, CA 91101
Contact Theresa Brekan
theresa@pjtc.net
Cost:\$179.00, PJTC

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 12, 19 & 26

6:30 - 9:00 PM

**EVERY WEEK ON
THURSDAY UNTIL
MARCH 26, 2026**

Miller Intro to Judaism
Program
Pasadena Jewish
Temple and Center, PJTC

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6 & 20

10:00 - 11:30 AM

**30AMEVERY 2 WEEKS
UNTIL MAY 15, 2026**

Gan Katan:

Our Little Garden
Jewish Federation of the
Greater San Gabriel and
Pomona Valleys
114A W. Lime Avenue
Monrovia, CA
Cost:\$150.00, JFSGPV

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6

6:30 - 9:00 PM

Kinder Shabbat with Gitai
and Rabbi Ira and Main
Service
Temple Beth David of the
San Gabriel Valley, TBD

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 13, 20 & 27

7:00 - 8:00 PM

**EVERY WEEK UNTIL
MAY 29, 2026**

Erev Shabbat
Temple Ami Shalom
On Zoom, TAS

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 14, 21 & 28

10:00 AM - NOON

**EVERY WEEK UNTIL
MAY 30, 2026**

Shabbat services at
Temple Ami Shalom, TAS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8

3:00 - 6:00 PM

Superbowl Party at
Temple Beth David, TBD

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13

7:30 - 9:30 PM

Blessing The Month
of Purim at
Temple Beth David, TBD

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15

10:30 AM - NOON

PJ Library Makes Music In
the Park with Mr. Mark
Lewis McAdams Riverfront
Park 2944 Gleneden St
Los Angeles, CA 90039
Contact Natalie Karic
nkaric@jewishsgpv.org,
JFSGPV

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

7:00 - 9:00 PM

L'Dor Va'Dor
Shabbat Service at
Temple Beth David, TBD

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

5:00 - 9:00 PM

Family Fun Night 2026 at
Temple Beth David, TBD

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27

7:30 - 9:30 PM

Pre-Purim Mix
Shabbat Service at
Temple Beth David, TBD

SUNDAY, **FEBRUARY 25

NOON - 3:00 PM

Chabad Spa for the Soul
Chabad of the Inland
Empire, CIE

FRIDAY, ** 30

7:30 - 9:30 PM

Shabbat Shira with Rabbi Ira
Temple Beth David
of the San Gabriel Valley,
TBD

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bethshalomofwhittier.net](http://www.bethshalomofwhittier.net)

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jewishsouthpasadena.com](http://www.jewishsouthpasadena.com)

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www.jewisharcadia.com

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(CoP)**
www.chabadpasadena.com

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[www.chabadinlandempire.
com](http://www.chabadinlandempire.com)

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www.jewishsgpv.org

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pasadenajewishacademy.
com](http://www.pasadenajewishacademy.com)

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www.pjtc.net
Temple Ami Shalom
(TAS)
<https://templeamishalom.org/>

Temple Beth Israel of
Pomona (TBI)
www.tbipomona.org

Temple Beth David of
the San Gabriel Valley
(TBD)
www.templebethdavidsgv.org

Temple Beth Israel of
Highland Park and Eagle
Rock (TBILA)
www.tbila.org

Temple B'nai Emet (TBE)
<https://templebnaimet.org>

Temple Sinai of Glendale
(TSG)
<http://temple-sinai.net>

Temple Sholom of
Ontario (TSO)
www.templesholomofontario.org

Tree of Life Preschool
(formerly TBI Preschool)
(ToL)
<https://tbipomona.org> ☆



PJ Library Makes Music in the park with Mr. Mark!

Join us for a joyful morning of singing, dancing, and musical fun with the amazing Mr. Mark — perfect for little ones and their families!

Sunday, February 15, 10:30 AM
Lewis McAdams Riverfront Park
2944 Gleneden St, Los Angeles, CA 90039
To RSVP, visit www.jewishsgpv.org

NEWS & JEWS



Steven Spielberg speaks at a ceremony at the University of Southern California, March 25, 2024, in Los Angeles. (USC/Sean Dube)

Stephen Spielberg wins Grammy, becoming 9th Jew in elite EGOT ranks

Spielberg won for producing “Music by John Williams,” which won best music documentary.

By Philissa Kramer, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, JTA

The legendary director Steven Spielberg has become the ninth Jew to secure “EGOT” status after winning a Grammy for producing a documentary about the music of John Williams.

Spielberg was awarded the Grammy for producing “Music by John Williams,” which won best music documentary, before the televised ceremony on

Sunday. The win makes him the 22nd person to win the coveted quartet of Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony awards.

Spielberg has won three Oscars, including best picture for the 1993 Holocaust drama “Schindler’s List”; four Emmys for TV programming including two World War II dramatic miniseries; and a Tony for producing the Broadway show “A Strange Loop.”

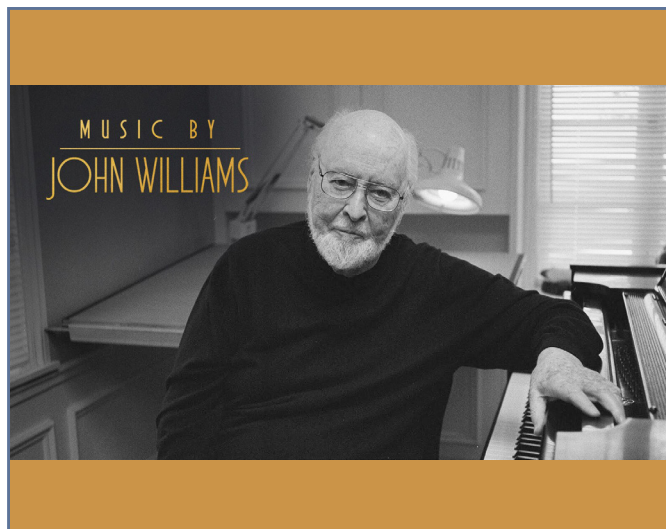
Spielberg adds to a large proportion of Jewish artists to win all four of the top entertainment awards. Nine of the 22 EGOTs have been Jewish, including the first person to ever reach the status, composer Richard Rodgers. Rodgers and Marvin Hamlisch, who was also Jewish, are the only people to have added a Pulitzer Prize to the EGOT crown. The most recent Jewish winner before Spielberg was the songwriter Benj Pasek, who secured the status in 2024 with an Emmy.

One of Spielberg’s more celebrated recent works was a drama based loosely on his own Jewish family. “The Fabelmans,” released in 2022, earned him three Oscar nods—for best picture, best director and best screenplay — but no wins.

In promoting that movie, Spielberg said antisemitic bullying when he was a child had informed his sense of being an “outsider,” which he translated into his filmmaking.

“Schindler’s List,” meanwhile, spurred the creation of the USC Shoah Foundation, a leading center for preserving Holocaust testimonies that has also recently embraced the task of preserving stories of contemporary antisemitism, too.

“It was, emotionally, the hardest movie I’ve ever made,” Spielberg said about his most decorated movie—for which John Williams earned an Oscar for the score. “It made me so proud to be a Jew.” ☆



*"Sharing food is the first act
through which slaves
become free human
beings...*

*those who are willing to
divide their food with a
stranger have already shown
themselves capable of
fellowship and faith"*

— Rabbi Sacks



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