

April 2024
Adar II / Nissan 5784

Jlife

SGPV JEWISH LIFE



CAN JEWS SING
'DAYENU' WHILE
THERE ARE
HOSTAGES?
The Passover seder
gets a post-Oct. 7
rethink.

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FOR PASSOVER
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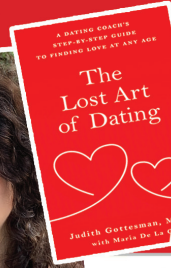
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A TIMELESS TREASURE

How Fiddler on the Roof made its way to the JFed Players' Stage.

I'm not quite sure when I first remember watching *Fiddler on the Roof* or listening to the music of this iconic show. I remember singing it in choir, and it always being part of the ethos in my family. And yet, growing up, even to this day, I've had a love-hate relationship with this show... Or maybe hate is too strong of a word. During a Sing-along screening on Christmas Eve 10 years ago, I remember taking the following note as I sat at the Claremont Laemmle theater with other Jews:

"The problem facing the Jewish community is epitomized in the fact that an event to bring the Jewish community out on Christmas eve is a film almost 50 years old. Partly because it is a bell weather and that there is no other well established 'thing' to bring people together. Kind of like how Hatikvah is used as an anthem for Jews.

I didn't have any issues with the movie. Still, I don't believe I fully understood or was able to comprehend how deeply rooted *Fiddler* has become within the American Jewish vernacular.

Yet, I am in awe of how much people feel connected to the show and its lessons, morals, and universal connections. For a show deeply rooted in Jewish history and connected to the "old country," this timeless treasure is performed every day worldwide. There have been books, documentaries, and even a Yiddish version of the show that I



still feel a deep connection to.

In fact, one of my all-time favorite quotes comes from *Fiddler*. It is when a couple of townspeople are discussing something. After one of them makes a point, Tevye says, "You know he's right." And then the other person gives a counterpoint, and Tevye once again says, "You know he's right." An observer then points out to Tevye that if one of them is correct, how can the other person be right? And Tevye says, "You know... you're right." I love this because this scene is a reminder that, very often, two truths can be correct simultaneously. So not only is *Fiddler* part of our history and tradition, but it is also a reminder that we can learn lessons about life while watching a national... an international treasure.

When our Jewish Federation launched our Cultural Arts program back in 2011, one of the things I said when we decided that we

were going to create what would ultimately become our JFed Players, was that I never wanted us to do *Fiddler on the Roof*. You see, I didn't want our program to be seen as just doing "Jewish" shows. So I said we could never do *Fiddler on the Roof* (or *Yentl*). However, when the JFed Players Steering Committee told me they wanted to produce and put on *Fiddler* as part of our special 30th Anniversary programming, it seemed only fitting, as our Cultural Arts program celebrates its Bar Mitzvah year. I am so proud of what this program has created and accomplished since it began.

I hope you'll join us as we return to Anatevka at one of the upcoming performances. ☆



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

“
This year, during your Seder, I encourage you to engage in G-d-talk—but please don't feel that you have to go easy on G-d.”

JEWISH RITUAL & TRADITION

G-d-Talk and the Passover Seder

BY TEDDY WEINBERGER

A few years ago I wrote a column about my friend Valeria's "Catholic Tsuris." [I have used pseudonyms for all names here.]

Despite Valeria's providing her son Michael with parochial school education, Michael went ahead and found himself a Jewish girlfriend, Lisa. The couple got married this past summer, in a ceremony that had neither Catholic nor Jewish religious elements. Over these past years, Valeria has spent a lot of time with Michael and Lisa. To her surprise, Lisa told Valeria that growing up through all her (Reform) Jewish educational frameworks (Sunday school, summer camps, etc.), there was absolutely no talk about G-d. Talk about ritual and practice, yes; G-d, no. Valeria was dumbfounded since for her G-d-talk is a key part of Catholicism. The truth is that since Lisa attended and still attends Passover Seders, she was exposed to much discourse about G-d—at least in print. The *Haggadah* is replete with G-d talk. Indeed, Moses is completely absent from the *Haggadah's* narrative in order to concentrate our attention solely upon G-d's role in the Exodus. For Lisa this powerful theological message got lost amidst the ritual meal with its four cups of wine, matzo, maror, and haroset.

With so much going on at the Seder, it is perhaps understandable how G-d could get overlooked, and yet what about the entire course of Lisa's Jewish education? Apparently the strategy that guided Lisa's teachers was as follows: with a limited amount of time for Jewish education, it's best to emphasize what is unique in Judaism (i.e., Jewish ritual and tradition). If this strategy was designed to increase



intra-Jewish marriage, my hunch is that Lisa was not the only one for whom it was misplaced. At any rate, it's hard to square such a strategy with the *Hagaddah's* bold G-d-talk; for example take the *Hagaddah's* dialoguing with Exodus 12.12: **"And I will pass through the land of Egypt"; I and not an angel. 'And I will smite every firstborn in the land of Egypt'; I and not a seraph. 'And I will carry out judgements against all the G-ds of Egypt'; I and not a messenger. 'I am the Lord'; it is I and no other."**

This year, during your Seder, I encourage you to engage in G-d-talk. Questions are especially encouraged on this night (indeed one explanation for certain portions of the Seder, such as the hand-washing before eating the Karpas vegetable, is that they are designed to stimulate questions)—so please don't feel that you have to go easy on G-d. For example: Why was it part of G-d's plan for the people

of Israel to be enslaved; after all, remember that G-d told Abraham: "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years" (Genesis 15. 13). And after the Holocaust, can we really speak about how G-d saves his people "in every generation."

There is no getting around the fact that American Jews are a tiny minority amidst a huge nation with a majority Christian culture. Talking about G-d may therefore not do anything to lower the assimilation numbers, but it certainly does better justice to Judaism in general and to the Seder night in particular. ✨

TEDDY WEINBERGER IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLIFE MAGAZINE. HE MADE ALIYAH WITH HIS FAMILY IN 1997 FROM MIAMI, WHERE HE WAS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES. TEDDY AND HIS WIFE, SARAH JANE ROSS, HAVE FIVE CHILDREN.

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SURVIRORS

by Jeff Stolzer

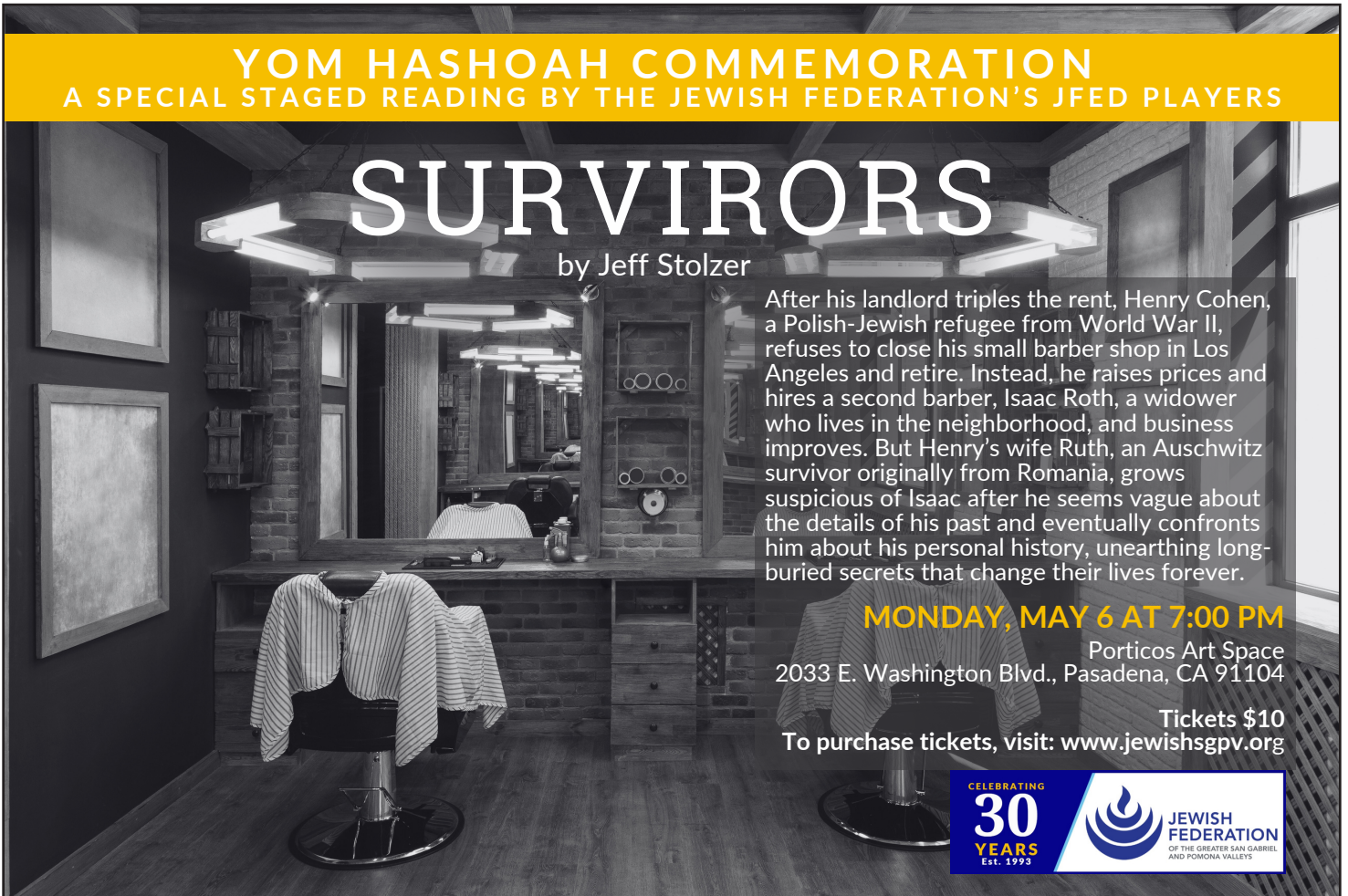
After his landlord triples the rent, Henry Cohen, a Polish-Jewish refugee from World War II, refuses to close his small barber shop in Los Angeles and retire. Instead, he raises prices and hires a second barber, Isaac Roth, a widower who lives in the neighborhood, and business improves. But Henry's wife Ruth, an Auschwitz survivor originally from Romania, grows suspicious of Isaac after he seems vague about the details of his past and eventually confronts him about his personal history, unearthing long-buried secrets that change their lives forever.

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CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

A Jewish institution asks: What does Judaism have to say about AI?

BY ZEV STUB, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS



Dean Bell, Oren Etzioni, Ellen Goodman, David Zvi Kalman, and Orly Lobel, left to right, spoke at Spertus Institute's Critical Conversations event, March 17, 2024. (Spertus)

Will the advent of artificial intelligence usher in a new age of prosperity and efficiency, or will it hasten the downfall of civilization as we know it?

While tech leaders and government regulators race to establish new practical and legal frameworks to determine how computer automation and algorithmic decision-making will impact our lives, Spertus Institute, the Chicago-based institution of Jewish learning and leadership, is asking a different question.

What does Judaism have to say about AI?

That question was the focus of Spertus Institute's annual Critical Conversations program that took

place on March 17—a free online event that brought together some top Jewish thinkers for a discussion about the future of technology, learning, ethics and human progress. In line with Jewish tradition, plenty of disagreement ensued. A highlight of the event included, “Critical Conversations: Artificial Intelligence, Jewish Ethics, and the Future of Humanity.”

For Spertus Institute, founded 100 years ago to focus on Jewish education dedicated to real-world action, it's natural to hold a uniquely Jewish discussion about cutting-edge technologies like ChatGPT, said Dean Bell, president & CEO of Spertus.

“AI raises some really interesting questions about how we think and engage with Jewish law in a traditional, broader world,” Bell said. “How will

technology affect how we think, how we learn? What does it mean for humanity and its possibilities? There are so many rich and interesting topics for us to explore.”

The panelists for the conversation will be AI researcher and entrepreneur Oren Etzioni, technology law expert Ellen Goodman, scholar and entrepreneur David Zvi Kalman, and tech policy law professor Orly Lobel.

“It is critical to bring a Jewish lens to how we frame these discussions,” Bell said, “how to think about big issues like regulation, autonomy, and even humanity’s role in creation. So even if it’s not purely a Jewish conversation, there are Jewish elements that will be helpful in this discussion.”

Lobel, who has advised global policymakers including former president Barack Obama, says that AI can be used for good or ill.

“When we talk about Jewish ethics and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), we have people using technology to tackle problems ranging from hate speech and poverty to climate change and environmental issues,” Lobel said. “There are a lot of opportunities to use data and machine learning to tackle those problems. But the very same tools can also be used to exacerbate those problems. That’s the tension here.”

The issue now isn’t whether or not to use AI—the genie is already out of the bottle, she noted—but how to ensure we use it for good. In her latest book, “The Equality Machine: Harnessing Digital Technology for a Brighter, More Inclusive Future,” Lobel argues that we can direct the course of technological development in a way that aligns with our values.

She uses a Jewish analogy as a frame of reference.

“One thing we see in the analytical process used in the Talmud is that it can be hard to translate abstract concepts into clear actions and specific policies,” Lobel said. “You have to start by understanding the greater purpose of the technology and embracing the potential.”

The application of AI will look different in every field, whether transportation, healthcare, education or even the fight against antisemitism.

Widespread AI adoption will lead to massive shifts in the labor market, forcing workers to adapt and reskill to keep pace, Lobel predicts. She said the US should learn some lessons from the social welfare policies of Israel, where she got her first degree in law at Tel Aviv University, to help citizens navigate the upcoming turmoil.

“This is a moment where the United States will have to look more at job retraining, income redistribution and social welfare policies that will help people stay financially afloat during these upheavals,” Lobel said. “We need to acknowledge that change is going to come quickly, and that it is going to cause new challenges like people losing their jobs. We shouldn’t slow down progress, but we need to prepare for disruption.”

Kalman, the entrepreneur and scholar who serves as a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute, says the idea that machines can possess intelligence similar to that of humans introduces a variety of new

“**Widespread AI adoption will lead to massive shifts in the labor market, forcing workers to adapt and reskill to keep pace, Lobel predicts.**”

philosophical dilemmas challenging classical religious thought.

“One is theological: If human beings have created something that is capable of doing things that are distinctly human, then should we think about ourselves as almost godlike?” Kalman asked. “Another issue relates to pedagogy: How does AI affect religious practices and the digitization of Jewish knowledge transmission? These are conversations that Jews are having.”

Discussions about AI policy and regulation are the “least Jewish” of the philosophical dilemmas posed by AI, Kalman said, but there, too, Judaism may have something to say.

“There are Jewish conversations around every social issue—from charity to immigration to abortion—so neglecting these critical topics would be a failure that I believe would lead Judaism towards ethical obsolescence.”

The other two panelists at the March 17 Critical Conversations program will raise other issues. Goodman, a Rutgers University professor whose legal expertise includes AI and digital platform policy, is a senior advisor for algorithmic justice at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration of the US Department of Commerce. She also co-founded and co-directs the Rutgers Institute for Information Policy & Law.

Etzioni, founder of several companies, is also the leader of True Media, a nonprofit dedicated to fighting deep fakes in politics and a professor at the University of Washington. In 2014, he was the founding CEO of the Allen Institute for AI.

Spertus Institute offers graduate, certificate, and public programs in Jewish studies and leadership to hundreds of students in Chicago and worldwide. Its Critical Conversations program was founded in 2017 and has focused on hot-button issues including antisemitism, climate change, race and immigration.

This article is sponsored by and produced in collaboration with Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, a Chicago-based institution of higher Jewish learning dedicated to real-world action. This story was produced by JTA’s native content team. ☆

A NEW WORD TO TRICK ISRAEL

The potentially heavy weight of just three letters.

BY MOSHE PHILLIPS



Nineteen Democratic U.S. senators have called on President Biden to “recognize a nonmilitarized Palestinian state.” Until now, congressional supporters of Palestinian statehood have always used the term “demilitarized.” Why the sudden change?

There’s just no way it was an accident. Letters signed by U.S. senators are reviewed and revised by a large team of writers and public relations advisers. In this case, the staffs of nineteen different senators reviewed and approved this letter dated March 20. A change like this, from “demilitarized” to “nonmilitarized,” didn’t just slip through without anybody noticing. Especially when “nonmilitarized” is such a peculiar term. Throughout modern history “demilitarized” has always been the conventional term. Somebody made a conscious decision to change the word. Here’s a theory as to why. It

involves two reasons.

The first reason for the change is rhetorical. A major problem for advocates of “demilitarization” is that it has a long history of not working. The most famous example is the German territory of the Rhineland, which was supposed to be demilitarized after World War One—that is, until Hitler decided to remilitarize it. And the world stood idly by.

American advocates of Palestinian statehood don’t want their opponents to be able to cite that historical precedent. They hate historical precedents—because they prove the fallacy of the “demilitarization” idea. They think that by changing the word, they can preempt criticism of the idea.

The second reason for the change is more practical. If you say “nonmilitarized,” you’re pretending that right now, the Palestinian Authority regime does not have military capability, so to create a state, you would just

convert the existing entity into a fully sovereign state without having to impose any real changes on it. But if you use the term “demilitarized,” that means acknowledging that the Palestinian Authority already has a de-facto army—and therefore you would have to disarm it. Which nobody in the international community is willing to do.

The PA’s de-facto army began its existence disguised as a “strong police force,” according to Article VII of the first Oslo agreement. While nobody was paying attention, the PA expanded the original 12,000 man “police force” into a 60,000-man “security force.”

Then came Oslo II, in 1995, which required the PA security forces to “apprehend, investigate and prosecute perpetrators and all other persons directly or indirectly involved in acts of terrorism, violence and incitement.” (Annex I, Article II, 3-c).

The PA never fulfilled that obligation. In fact, just the opposite. A new study by a major Israeli think tank, Regavim, found that the PA security forces themselves list 2,000 of their members as “martyrs”—meaning they died while committing terrorism. In addition, fully 12% of all Palestinian Arab terrorists currently jailed in Israel are members of the PA security forces—that’s approximately 500 out of the 4,500-5,000 jailed terrorists. Yet our own CIA continues to provide training for the PA’s de-facto army.

The World Atlas lists which countries have the largest per-capita security forces. The largest ones are those with the tiniest populations, thus making the size of their security forces disproportionately large, like the Vatican, the Pitcairn Islands, and Monaco. Sixth on the list—despite having a population of several million—is the Palestinian Authority. The PA has a whopping 1,250 “police officers” per 100,000 people.

A 2018 report by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, titled “Evolution of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces,” revealed that “by late 1998, the PA security services...had in almost every regard violated the letter of the agreements reached with Israel,” turning the PA-governed areas into “one of the most heavily policed territories in the world.”

“A proliferation of weapons was occurring, both in quantity and quality, well beyond that stipulated in Oslo II,” according to the Washington Institute. “By one estimate, there were at least 40,000 more weapons than allowed in the agreement, including RPGs, mortars, mines, grenade launchers, and sniper rifles; also being developed was a small-scale indigenous manufacturing capacity for hand grenades and other ammunition.” That was fifteen years ago.



A major problem for advocates of “demilitarization” is that it has a long history of not working. The most famous example is the German territory of the Rhineland, which was supposed to be demilitarized after World War One—that is, until Hitler decided to remilitarize it. And the world stood idly by.

One can only imagine what the PA has in its arsenal now.

Now you see the problem with using the term “demilitarization”—it would mean taking away most of the PA security forces’ weapons and military equipment.

In all likelihood, the change from “demilitarized” to “nonmilitarized” was initiated by some ex-State Department official or some “as a Jew...” critic of Israel. Or maybe one person who fits both descriptions. He probably thought he was being clever. Maybe nobody would notice; the term would start to gain circulation, and before long nobody would remember its significance.

But words matter. And when it comes to Middle East diplomacy, words really matter. Just think about the countless debates over why UN Security Council Resolution 242 said Israel should withdraw from “territories,” not “the territories.”

The same is true for “demilitarized” and “nonmilitarized.” That seemingly small change is actually a big deal. A very big deal. ☆

MOSHE PHILLIPS IS A COMMENTATOR ON JEWISH AFFAIRS WHOSE WRITINGS APPEAR REGULARLY IN THE AMERICAN AND ISRAELI PRESS.

A SILENT PRAYER

As Ukraine war enters Year 3, Odessa Jewish Children's Home struggles with new challenges

BY JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA) & MISHPACHA CHABAD ODESSA



Mishpacha Children's Home in Odessa cares for 120 Ukrainian Jewish children whose parents either are dead or cannot care for them. (Courtesy of Mishpacha Chabad Odessa)

When Rabbi Avraham Wolff leaves the Mishpacha Children's Home in Odessa, Ukraine, most evenings, he whispers a silent prayer.

He prays that the 120 children for whom his organization cares will be able to sleep through the night, uninterrupted by air raid sirens and a race to the bomb shelter. He prays that the food, education and warmth his staff provides will help them overcome the challenges of their circumstances so they can obtain the same opportunities as regular children.

He prays that he'll be able to come up with the resources he needs to keep the Children's Home running despite the war and the devastation it has wreaked on Odessa.

"Hardly a day goes by without some kind of trauma," says Wolff, who in addition to running Mishpacha Odessa is a Chabad emissary and chief rabbi of southern Ukraine. "The kids meet with psychologists all the time. We're coping with very trying circumstances."

As the war in Ukraine enters its third year, the hardship has not eased for the estimated 30,000 Jews remaining in Odessa, despite the fading of the Russia-Ukraine war from international headlines. There are

still attacks on the city nearly every day, tens of thousands remain displaced, and many of those who remain are struggling with the loss of their livelihoods, homes and loved ones in the war.

In the midst of this, Wolff runs an orphanage for a Jewish population that was at high risk even before the war. About 70% children at his facility come from homes all over Ukraine where their parents (or, in most cases, single parent) could not care for them due to trouble with drugs, alcohol, crime, prostitution or mental-health problems. About 30% of the children have no parents at all. A few arrived at the Mishpacha Children's Home as newborns, straight from the hospital delivery room and with nothing other than their birth certificate. Since the war began, seven new children have joined the orphanage, including two boys ages 4 and 5 whose mother disappeared during a bombing attack on Odessa six months into the war. They were brought to Mishpacha by neighbors.

Wolff's job is to provide the children under his guardianship with a safe and nurturing Jewish environment from the moment they arrive until they go off on their own—often, only once they get married. They get food, clothes, schooling, healthcare, psychological counseling and love. The children, of course, pay nothing, but the

annual cost of running the separate boys' and girls' homes is \$2.5 million. Wolff's organization also runs a host of other Jewish institutions in Odessa, including two kindergartens, an elementary school, a high school, a Jewish university, a senior-care facility for Holocaust survivors and a home for war refugees.

In the early days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with Russian warships anchored off Odessa's Black Sea coast, missile attacks wreaking havoc in the city, and Russian President Vladimir Putin making specific mention of his ambitions for Odessa, Wolff made the difficult decision to evacuate all the children under his care to Berlin.

"The war had come to our home," Wolff recalled. "Jews came to the synagogue in the morning with the paleness of fear of death covering their faces. If this anxiety hit everyone, how much more so did it strike the orphans, who are like our children. This fear surrounded them and paralyzed them. All the security that we instilled in them—which we worked so hard for, with dedicated teams 24/7—was about to collapse."

In a complicated logistical operation, Mishpacha arranged for the children's evacuation in the midst of the fighting and despite the fact that many of them lacked passports. The children went on a 52-hour overland journey accompanied by Wolff's son Mendi and Mendi's wife, Mushki, as well as Mishpacha staffers and Igor Shatkhin, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Southern Ukraine.

As soon as they arrived in Berlin, Shatkhin began organizing the evacuation of other Jewish children and women in Odessa who wanted to flee. The men had to stay behind due to Ukraine's wartime conscription law barring most men ages 18-60 from leaving the country.

"We sent a message to the entire community: Women and children who want to go with us to Berlin to register immediately by phone and report the next day at 6 AM," Shatkhin recalled. "The hysteria was so great that in less than an hour 180 women and children signed up."

Wolff's wife, Haya, accompanied these evacuees on their journey, but Wolff himself stayed behind. He had to care for those who remained in the city, including at a Mishpacha senior-care facility.

After a year, Wolff brought the orphans in exile back to the Children's Home in Odessa, where they could finally feel



Rabbi Avraham Wolff, founder of the Mishpacha Children's Home, aims to nurture the children under his care so they can rise above their difficult circumstances and have a chance at normal, happy lives. (Courtesy of Mishpacha Chabad Odessa)



The children at the Mishpacha Children's Home range in age from 1 month old to 20 years old. Some arrive straight from the hospital delivery room, born to mothers who cannot care for them. (Courtesy of Mishpacha Chabad Odessa)

at home again.

But they returned to a transformed city. The Jewish population had shrunk by almost half. The well-to-do local businessmen who in their philanthropic largesse had funded over 80% of Mishpacha's budget had become needy themselves. Parents who had managed until the war to hold onto their kids had become desperate and distraught. One child was brought to the orphanage after her mother was hospitalized at a mental-health facility following an attempted suicide. These days, Wolff's top priorities are dealing with the kids' wartime traumas and increased mental-health needs while finding alternative sources of funding for the Children's Home.

"Our donors have lost their businesses and are now asking us for food," Wolff said. "Before the war we were supported almost entirely by the local community, but today there's hardly a single dollar we're able to collect in Odessa. We are 100% reliant on donors from overseas."

Shatkhin says his Jewish federation is able to help some, but the lion's share of support still must come from overseas. Mishpacha Children's Home receives funding from organizations including the Jewish Relief Network Ukraine (JRNU), Kate and Marty Rifkin of the KMR Foundation, and the Patrick and Lina Drahi Foundation, but Shatkhin is seeking more help from American Jews.

"Our goal is to do everything we can to make these kids smile, despite their trauma," Shatkhin said. "We want to continue to raise them and prepare them for independent, full and successful lives. But we need the Jewish world's help."

Since Oct. 7, Wolff has been caught up in a second war—the conflict in his native Israel, where Wolff still has plenty of family and which has drawn global attention away from the Russia-Ukraine war.

"The security and needs in Israel are very important to the Jewish world—and they are very important to me," Wolff said. "But we can't forget that there are thousands of Jewish children here in Ukraine, too, and they also need our love and support."

To make a donation now to support Mishpacha Children's Home, visit <https://www.mishpachaorphanage.org/shelteringhearts>.

This article is sponsored by and produced in collaboration with Mishpacha Chabad Odessa, which cares for Jewish elderly, children, and the community in Odessa, Ukraine. This story was produced by JTA's native content team. ✪

AI & JEWISH CREATIVITY

Jews have always been prolific writers. Has AI wound up with too much of their work?

BY ASAF ELIA-SHALEV, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)

Growing up Jewish in New York City, Heila Precel absorbed the lesson that education can set you on a path toward personal success and protect against the forces that have marginalized Jews throughout history.

"I was told by my family and by my culture versions of 'They can't take away your education.' Investing in education has been a tremendously successful strategy for American Jews," Precel said.

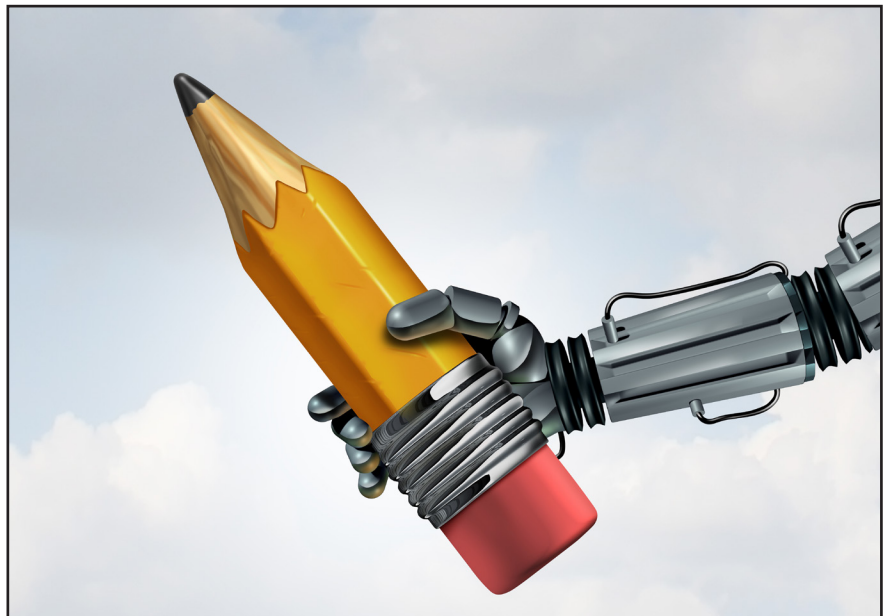
Precel heeded her childhood lesson and made her way to Boston University, where today she is working on a doctorate in computing and data sciences. But a research paper she just published, in partnership with other scholars, suggests that the formula for success that countless American Jews like herself have banked on could be in peril.

The threat comes from the rise of artificial intelligence systems powering the kind of chatbots that communicate like humans—ChatGPT, for example. Those systems are trained on books, articles and other texts that have been fed into the machine largely without the permission of their authors.

That means anyone who produces intellectual property can wind up seeing their work used without license. Those creators face potential copyright infringement and, in the longer term, possible job displacement as A.I. tools may come to replace many white-collar workers.

Precel discovered through research that Jews are overrepresented among authors whose intellectual property is being used for A.I. training purposes. Compared to their numbers in the overall U.S. population, Jewish authors are overrepresented by a factor of two to six-and-a-half based on an analysis of available data. Among those authors are comedian Sarah Silverman and novelist Michael Chabon, both of whom have sued OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, for alleged copyright infringement.

Developers of A.I. systems are likely glad to Hoover up all the content they get without regard for the identity of its authors, and no one is alleging that antisemitism is at play in the overrepresentation of Jewish authors. In fact, Precel acknowledges that the premise of her research can sound like a bit of a humblebrag: Jews make up a tiny portion of the



AI models incorporate large quantities of written words, of which Jewish authors have contributed many.

population but have produced so much knowledge that, to a worrying degree, the future of A.I. research relies on them.

But she said a narrow interpretation like that would miss the point of her paper.

For one thing, the paper emphasizes that further research would likely confirm that other groups, such as Hindu Americans and Asian Americans, are also likely overrepresented. Precel also says exposing biases that harm Jews often reveals broader issues. That idea is reflected in an analogy in the title of the paper, "A Canary in the AI Coal Mine: American Jews May Be Disproportionately Harmed by Intellectual Property Dispossession in Large Language Model Training."

"We are not saying that all of the lawyers are Jews, and therefore replacing lawyers is going to be bad for the Jews," Precel said. "There are many lawyers who are not Jewish, and what we are seeing is going to be bad for everyone. It just might be especially bad for Jews, because Jews have historically put a lot of our eggs into this basket of educational attainment. In other words, we are shining a light on this overall problem with the canary-in-the-coal-mine analogy—while making sure to remember that canary itself does not fare too well in this story."

Precel grew up in a Conservative Jewish household and attended Jewish day school as a child. As an adult she has become more observant and attends synagogue weekly. The label she gives herself is traditional egalitarian. That is

all to say that Precel has had many chances to discuss her research with other Jews whose texts may be found in databases used for A.I. training without permission.

In fact, her new paper is published in such a database. She says she's encountered people with concerns, but many others don't understand where the training data comes from or how it's used.

"I get a lot of surprised reactions and some anxieties but also optimism," Precel said.

Her paper belongs to a larger genre of research into the impacts and implications of technological advancements in the areas of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

But Precel's co-author, Nicholas Vincent, said the issue is often examined "through the lens of underrepresentation" rather than overrepresentation.

"The most famous example is models that performed really poorly on people with dark skin," said Vincent, a computer science professor at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada, referring to the problem of image analysis software mislabeling Black people as gorillas. In the realm of text-based systems, he said, "if you're not from the predominant cultural background, you're more likely to sort of receive poor outcomes with models used for hiring or credit scoring."

A new paper released this month tested how A.I. relates to people speaking an African-American dialect of English as opposed to using what's known as Standard American English. The study found that the A.I. makes racist assumptions based on the difference. One chatbot, for example, was more likely to recommend the death penalty for defendants when they spoke African-American English.


One of the limitations of all these studies is that many artificial intelligence systems operate as black boxes. With ChatGPT, for example, it's not possible to know what content developers used to train the system, because its owner, OpenAI, considers that information proprietary.

For the Jewish authorship paper, what researchers tried to do, then, is study not the systems but the data that is fed into them. They looked at what data the open-source systems use and at digital repositories of knowledge that are likely being used by the proprietary systems. These repositories contain massive amounts of scientific literature, published books, legal opinions and other kinds of texts.

But since authorship information typically doesn't indicate that someone is Jewish, the researchers searched for a way to identify and classify authors en masse. For that task they turned to the field of Jewish demographic studies.

Many different techniques exist to identify and count Jews; each has its own strengths and weaknesses. Using surveys to study Jews, for example, can help answer granular questions but is very costly because Jews are a small minority scattered across a wide geography.

"You end up spending a huge amount of money



Hi, I'm Heila!
(pronounced /hi'la:)/

I'm a PhD student at [Boston University's Faculty of Computing and Data Science](#) advised by [Dr. Allison McDonald](#).

Formerly, I was a Product Manager at [Microsoft](#) and studied Computer Science at [Brown University](#).

I am an [observant Jew](#), which may affect my working hours and online availability.

My research interests include [computing ethics](#), [algorithmic accountability & generative AI](#), [data dignity](#), and [usable security](#).

Heila Precel's website outlines her research interests in artificial intelligence and her Jewish identity. (Screenshot)

reaching out to people who are not Jewish," Precel said. "There have been a lot of methods developed in the Jewish demographic literature to try to solve this problem."

The team settled on a method that infers Jewish identity based on a set of distinctive Jewish last names. Many Jews have indistinguishable last names, but demographers have repeatedly found throughout recent decades in American Jewish history that distinctive Jewish names can be used as a statistical proxy for the overall Jewish population. The method is not helpful for research about Jewish diversity, but it can be used in certain scenarios, such as estimating the number of Jews in a long list of authors of A.I. training texts.

Much of the paper is spent on what might be done to address the concerns raised by the findings. The researchers imagine a future in which A.I. isn't allowed to replace human work but to augment it, while avoiding large-scale economic disruption.

One possibility for achieving that scenario is using the findings to help inform policymakers and A.I. developers concerned with the ethical dimension of the technology. But the researchers also suggest another route.

"If people organize collectively around their intellectual property, there can be a more level playing field to negotiate with operators of A.I. technologies," Vincent said. "Individually, your data is of really low value, but when we get enough people together, we have a lot of leverage."

The Jewish community might already be organized enough to make collective advocacy possible. While there isn't a union of Jewish writers, for example, informal coalitions of creative professionals have responded to anti-Israel sentiment in the literary world and in Hollywood.

In a hypothetical scenario, a group representing Jewish writers could come together and agree to adopt measures on their websites blocking bots from collecting content.

"So going forward, that group is particularly hard to get data for, and then all of a sudden there's a big gap in the data," Vincent said. ✨



Marty Herskovitz speaks at the Schechter seminary's Feb. 4 conference in Israel. (Nadav Itai)

CAN JEWS SING 'DAYENU' WHILE THERE ARE HOSTAGES?

The Passover seder gets a post-Oct. 7 rethink.

BY JACOB GURVIS, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)

As the American-Israeli poet Marty Herskovitz thought about the upcoming Passover holiday, the prospect of singing "Dayenu" at the first seder since his country was attacked didn't sit right with him.

The classic Passover song, whose title means "It would have been enough," expresses gratitude about how much God has done for the Jewish people. But Herskovitz, the son of a Holocaust survivor who has lived in Israel since 1986, thought the words would ring hollow at a time when so many Jews are at risk.

"We have to take the text and find a way to make it relevant and not just say the words that seem so impossible to say," Herskovitz told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "Dayenu, it's enough. It's clearly not enough. As long as people are trapped in Gaza, that's not enough. As long as our soldiers are still risking their lives, it's not enough. We can't say 'Dayenu.' It can't be, you know, 'Praise G-d for this situation.' So we have to find new texts."

It's a mission that has long animated Herskovitz, who used the financial reward from a legal settlement after

his then teenaged son was injured in a terrorist attack in 2001 to create a fund to support education initiatives in Israel. The fund has backed his own Creating Memory initiative at Bar-Ilan University, which focuses on Holocaust remembrance through art, and also Israel's Conservative Schechter Rabbinical Seminary.

This year, at Herskovitz's urging, Schechter convened dozens of rabbis and Jewish community leaders from across Israel last month to reimagine the haggadah, the core text of the Passover seder. The result of their work will be a supplement for Israeli families to use during their seders at the beginning the first major holiday since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7—an assault that itself pierced the observance of a Jewish holiday, Simchat Torah. (The Oct. 7 attack reportedly had originally been planned for the first night of Passover last year.)

Many seder tables will have empty seats representing Oct. 7 victims, hostages and soldiers who are unable to return home for the holiday. But the seminary sought to provide rabbis and their communities with other ways to adapt the ancient tradition to the current moment.

"The Passover holiday is really one in which families



celebrate on their own," said Rabbi Arie Hasit, Schechter's associate dean. "It will be the job of rabbis and community leaders to frame Purim [the festive holiday later this month], because the ritual aspects of it are largely going to happen in the synagogue, or in the Jewish community. But Passover is going to happen in the home. So our job right now, which is so significant, is to help people navigate how to prepare."

Among the supplement's passages is an addition to the seminal "Four Questions" recited during the seder, which ask, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" The added text aims to reflect the feelings of seder attendees this year.

"On all other nights, we think that we have answers. Tonight, we all just stay silent," says the passage, which is in Hebrew. "On all other nights, we remember, sing and cry. ... On this night, we only cry."

The initiative is one of several underway to adapt the Passover holiday for a different crisis in the Jewish story.

Rabbi Menachem Creditor, the scholar-in-residence at UJA-Federation of New York, is working on a haggadah supplement with the Academy of Jewish Religion, a pluralistic rabbinic school in Yonkers, New York.

"To talk about liberation when our family is not yet whole again is very hard, and our own tears will mix with the maror," Creditor told JTA, using the Hebrew word for the seder plate's bitter herbs. "We won't need the haggadah's usual explanation of what bitterness feels like."

Creditor said AJR's CEO and academic dean Ora Horn Prouser approached him with the idea of creating a

Passover supplement about the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. They put out a call for submissions—prayers, essays, artwork and other reflections—and received dozens of responses that will be edited into a resource AJR will self-publish and sell on Amazon. Parts of the final product will also be available for free on the seminary's website.

"This is a supplement that very directly addresses our current time and provides a community of thinking that we can bring into our seders," Horn Prouser told JTA.

In addition to "Dayenu," Creditor and Horn Prouser pointed to one pathrticular piece of the Passover text with new resonance this year: "Vehi Sheamda," the prayer that warns that in every generation, a new enemy will attempt to defeat the Jewish people. This year's crisis conjures new ideas about both the enemy and how to vanquish it, Creditor said.

"The language in the seder, in the haggadah, is that G-d will save us," Creditor said. "But Zionism represents a very different religious posture, which is: We will save us."

"Unfortunately, the first part of the paragraph remains true and was amplified horribly on Oct. 7," Creditor continued. "The second half of it must be true through the connection that we have, as a Jewish people throughout the world, strengthening our homeland."

The Passover initiatives in both Israel and the United States add to a long tradition of haggadah iterations and supplements that layer present-day issues onto the ancient text, from those centered around Soviet Jewry to more recent examples like additions about the Ukraine war and the pandemic. Last year, some families left an



empty seat at their seder table in honor of Evan Gershkovich, the Jewish Wall Street Journal reporter who remains jailed in Russia.

"The *Haggadah* is something that developed and, and as modern Jews who are dealing with issues of the same themes that have come up again and again in our history, we need to figure out how to make those themes accessible, relevant, real and useful," said Rabbi Sara Cohen, a Schechter alumna who helped plan the seminary's conference in Israel.

Cohen, who lives on Kibbutz Ketura near the southern port city of Eilat, where the population swelled with war evacuees, said the text offers an important opportunity for the kind of emotional reckoning that is desperately needed in a battered Israel and Jewish world.

"We don't necessarily think of holidays as a time for processing trauma, but because Passover is the first major holiday since [Oct. 7] and because it's a holiday that the story of which talks about national trauma and redemption, one of the questions is, 'What is redemption in our day, and are we feeling redeemed, are we feeling free?'" Cohen said. "When you're brought face to face with the holiday that brings up these issues, hopefully we won't just pass them by but we'll think about how it's relevant in our lives today."

She added, "We have to pay attention to the desire to process the trauma and the framework that our tradition gives us for processing it."

Cohen wrote the additions to the Four Questions that are included in the Schechter supplement. Other supplement passages invoke more explicit war imagery and the sense of bereavement felt by many across Israel. Herskovitz's entry is an interpretation of the core Passover text suggesting that each Jew see themselves

as though they personally left Egypt.

Hasit acknowledged that beginning the project in early February was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provided Schechter with plenty of time to collect responses and work with Herskovitz to put together a Passover resource ahead of the holiday, which this year begins April 22.

On the other hand, the war is evolving daily, and nobody knows what the status of the conflict, or the hostages, will be by late April. But Hasit said no matter what happens, the trauma of Oct. 7 will need to be addressed at the seder table.

"We know that [Passover's] coming, and we know that it's going to be different," he said. "We know that it's going to include processing everything that has happened since Oct. 7. And no matter what happens tomorrow, and the day after that, none of that is going to change."

Horn Prouser shared a similar sentiment. "Even if our prayers are all answered, our community is feeling trauma," she said. "The issues to discuss, we still need time to process them."

Herskovitz said he views the Passover effort as a cognate of his Holocaust remembrance work, in which he emphasizes the importance of creating fresh, personal materials that people can connect with.

"I think the same exact thing is what has to be done in Pesach this year," he said, using the Hebrew word for Passover. "You cannot use the same text and the same ideas that you used for years and years because this year is so radically different. And to go back to the old text, the old ideas, is basically making it irrelevant." ✨

JACOB GURVIS IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

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APRIL 2024

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Passover (Pesach) 101

What you need to know about the festival of freedom.

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING

Passover, or Pesach in Hebrew, is one of the three major pilgrimage festivals of ancient Israel and commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. Its name comes from the miracle in which G-d “passed over” the houses of the Israelites during the tenth plague. Centered on the family or communal celebration of the seder (ritual meal), Passover is one of the most beloved of all Jewish holidays.

Passover History

The origins of Passover lie in pre-Israelite spring celebrations of the first grain harvest and the births of the first lambs of the season. In the Jewish context, it celebrates G-d’s great redemptive act at the time of the Exodus, leading the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt to freedom. Together with Shavuot (the Festival of Weeks) and Sukkot (The Festival of Booths), Passover is one of the three ancient Israelite pilgrimage festivals, during which adult males journeyed to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and bask in the divine presence. Since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the focus of Passover shifted to the ritual meal, called the seder, which normally takes place at home.

Passover At Home

In anticipation of Passover, it is traditional to engage in a thorough spring cleaning. During the holiday, the food reflects the major theme of Passover and is intended to help Jews relive G-d’s great redemptive act, albeit in a vicarious manner. Because the Israelites had no time to let their bread rise as they hurriedly left Egypt, Jewish law forbids eating (or even possessing) any food that contains leavened grains. Therefore, a major part of the preparations for Passover consists of removing all traces of leavened foods from the home and replacing them with unleavened foods (though many Jews prefer to “sell” some leavened products to a non-Jew for the duration of the holiday). This necessitates both a massive cleanup and the replacement of one’s ordinary dishes with special Passover ones. It also requires a shopping expedition to stock the kitchen with special kosher-for-Passover foods.

The central ritual of Passover is the seder, a



carefully choreographed ritual meal that typically takes place in the home. A number of symbolic foods are laid out on the table, of which the most important is the matzah, the unleavened “bread of affliction.” The seder follows a script laid out in the *Haggadah*, a book that tells the story of the redemption from Egypt. Although the *Haggadah* is a traditional text, many people add to it and revise it in accord with their theology and understanding of G-d’s redemptive actions in the world.

Passover In the Community

Although the focus of Passover observance is on the home, on the first and last days traditional Judaism prohibits working. There are special synagogue services, including special biblical readings, among them Shir ha-Shirim, “The Song of Songs,” and Hallel, psalms of praise and thanksgiving. The last day of Passover is one of the four times a year that the Yizkor service of remembrance is recited.

Passover Theology and Themes

The overarching theme of Passover is redemption. After all, this is the holiday that celebrates G-d’s intervention in history to lead the Israelites from slavery to freedom. It is a time to celebrate G-d as the great liberator of humanity. The divine redemption of the Israelites thus becomes the blueprint for the Jewish understanding of G-d and divine morality and ethics. ☆

Remembering Our Oppression With Sweetness

The haroset paste eaten at the Passover Seder recalls the mortar the Israelite slaves used to build in Egypt.

BY RABBI JILL HAMMER & MY JEWISH LEARNING



In the mysterious culinary language of Passover, each food on the Seder plate embodies a particular meaning.

Traditionally, haroset symbolizes hard labor and oppression. The Talmud Pesachim 116a says the word itself is related to *cheres*, meaning “clay.” According to Maimonides, haroset symbolizes the mortar that the slaves used to make bricks. He also offers a recipe: “We take dates, dried figs,

or raisins and the like, and crush them and add vinegar to them, and mix them with spices, as clay is mixed with straw.” (Hilchot Chameitz uMatzah 7:11).

Yet the ritual meaning of haroset is ambiguous because it is never explained during the Seder. According to the Talmud, one must mention and explain certain foods at the Seder: the paschal offering (symbolized by a bone), the matzah (unleav-

ened bread), and the *maror* (bitter herb). Haroset is not one of them.

Whether or not the haroset is a Passover obligation—the Talmud records a disagreement on this question—it seems clear that discussing it is not a mandatory part of the ritual. That is, its meaning is not fixed by the Seder, but rather open to interpretation.

This raises the question: Why create such a delicious food to embody such a harsh oppression?

Two legends from the Midrash speak to the role of fruit in the Exodus story and seem to suggest that haroset is not only a symbol of sorrow, but of sweetness.

In Exodus Rabbah 1:12, when the Egyptians seek to kill the male babies of the Hebrews, the Hebrew women save their infants by going out to give birth in the orchards under the apple trees. The babies were then left in the orchards to be cared for by angels. The Midrash says: “G-d sent an angel from above to cleanse and beautify them, like a midwife who makes the child look beautiful ... G-d then provided for them two nipples, one of oil and one of honey.”

G-d essentially creates a massive day care center in the orchards of Egypt, with angelic caretakers to watch over the infants. The earth itself becomes nipples to nourish the babies. When the Egyptians find out about this, they try to run plows over the orchards to kill the children, but the children are swallowed up by the earth and saved. Then they grow bigger and proceed in “herds” to their homes, as if they are spring lambs.

The infants in this Midrash, threatened by the cruelty of human beings, find their sustenance directly from the divine. They grow in the orchards as if they are fruit on the Tree of Life. This beautiful Midrash could be connected to the sweet haroset. We eat haroset not only as a reminder of slavery, but as a reminder of redemption and the blossoming spring.

There is yet another story that could connect haroset to redemption. In Exodus Rabbah 21:10, as the people are passing through the Sea of Reeds, the parents of young children have a problem: their children are hungry. It’s easy to imagine how, passing through a split sea at midnight, children would get upset and need a snack. The Midrash says: “The daughters of Israel passed through the sea holding their children with their hands, and when the children cried, they would stretch out their hands and pluck an apple or pomegranate from the sea.”



In this legend, the Sea of Reeds becomes a kind of Eden, producing fruit for those who need it. Again, the miracle of redemption is associated with fruit trees.

When trees blossom and fruit every year, they show us that new growth is possible. Passover offers us much the same message. What if we told the story of the fruit within the sea as part of our Passover Seder and asked one another how the sweetness of the haroset reminds us of the wondrous gifts of liberation and the blessings of springtime? What if the haroset could be not only a symbol of sorrow, but an embodiment of joy? That would seem to match more with joyful experience of eating sweet haroset.

Hiding in the background of all this discussion of orchards is the kabbalistic meaning of orchard. One of the names for Shechinah—the Divine Presence, G-d’s numinous spirit and G-d’s bride—is the Holy Apple Orchard. When we eat haroset on Passover, whatever kind of fruit we put in it, perhaps we are making a direct connection with the divine as it dwells on earth. Indeed, in many other cultures, from Greece to Scandinavia to China, the fruit orchard is an otherworldly place, where humans can touch the immortal.

We don’t need, of course, to discard the idea of haroset as mortar. Yet we can complexify and sweeten that meaning by telling some new old stories as part of our Passover story. And we can allow the taste of the haroset to inspire us to increase the sweetness of liberation in our world. ✨

RABBI JILL HAMMER, PHD, IS THE DIRECTOR OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION AT THE ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RELIGION AND THE CO-FOUNDER OF THE KOHENET HEBREW PRIESTESS INSTITUTE. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF A NUMBER OF BOOKS, INCLUDING “THE JEWISH BOOK OF DAYS: A COMPANION FOR ALL SEASONS,” “THE HEBREW PRIESTESS: ANCIENT AND NEW VISIONS OF JEWISH WOMEN’S SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP” (WITH TAYA SHERE), AND “THE BOOK OF EARTH AND OTHER MYSTERIES.”

Where To Find Songs for Your Passover Seder

Online resources for Passover recordings, lyrics, sheet music and more.

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING

Singing is traditionally a major part of the Passover seder, and it certainly makes for a more festive and participatory celebration. But what if your repertoire of Passover songs is lacking or you can't remember the lyrics or melodies even for classics like "Dayenu" or "Chad Gadya"? Or what if you have an urge to accompany the singing on guitar (or some other instrument) this year?

Whatever the situation, we can help. Below (and in no particular order) are the best online resources we could find. Are we missing something great? Leave a comment below and we'll consider your suggestions.

Zemirot Database

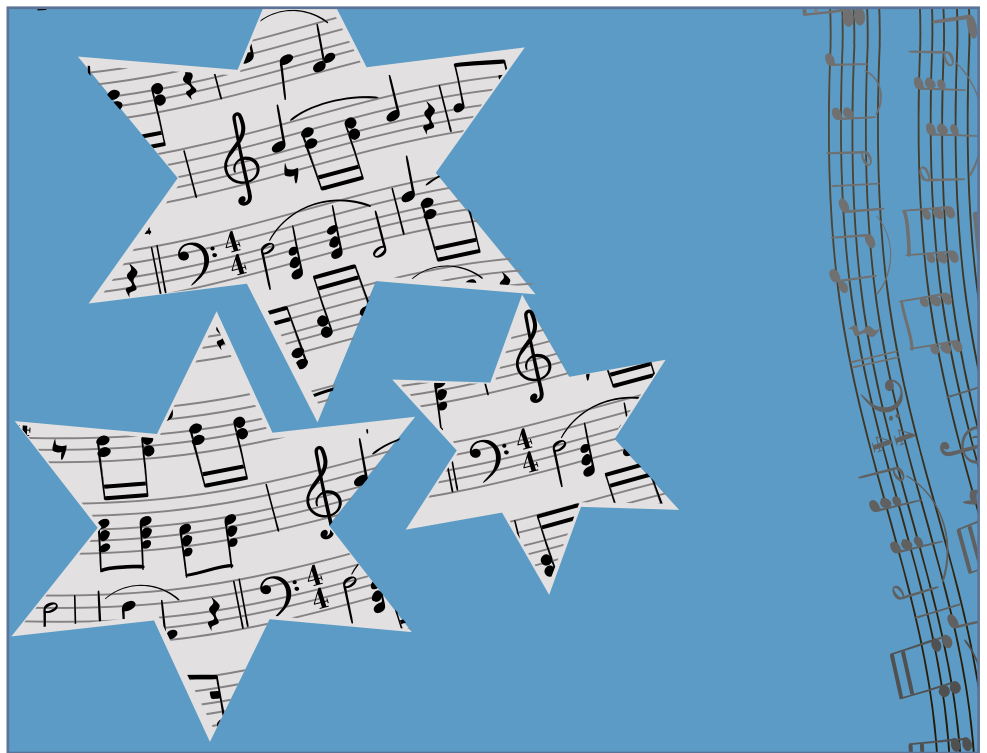
Zemirot Database ("zemirot" is the word for songs sung around a holiday table) is also a great place to find songs for Shabbat and other holidays. The site provides free printable lyrics, in Hebrew, English and transliteration, for more than 20 Passover songs. Most songs also have recordings embedded for streaming.

Haggadot.com

Haggadot.com is set up to help you to create your own Haggadah. But even if you don't want to make a whole Haggadah, you can use the site, which is free but requires registration, to search for Passover music and other content. Search the site's clip library for songs and other content. You can search by media type (ie. Text, audio or video) and also by section of the seder.

Chabad

This site features more than 15 Passover songs with streamable audio (plus links directing you to places where you can purchase the songs), and printable song sheets/lyrics in Hebrew, English and transliteration. One unique offering is "Mah Nishtanah" (The Four Questions) in Yiddish.



YouTube

If you know what song you're looking for and just want to listen to the melody, this is a great resource to search. You can also do a search for "Passover Songs" and browse the results. Videos vary dramatically in quality, of course—but a number of them include lyrics and transliteration, sometimes presented karaoke style. In addition to traditional songs, here you'll find a wide range of modern parody songs, including myriad versions of "Let It Go" (generally changed to "Let Us Go"). We've embedded an example below:

JewishMusicStream.com

You can access all kinds of Jewish music that is streaming online and even put in requests for different ones you'd like to hear.

Another option if you want the notes, as well as the lyrics, is to purchase a book on Amazon.com or at your local Judaica store or bookstore ☆

What It Means to Keep Kosher for Passover

Hametz, kitniyot and the holiday's dietary restrictions

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING

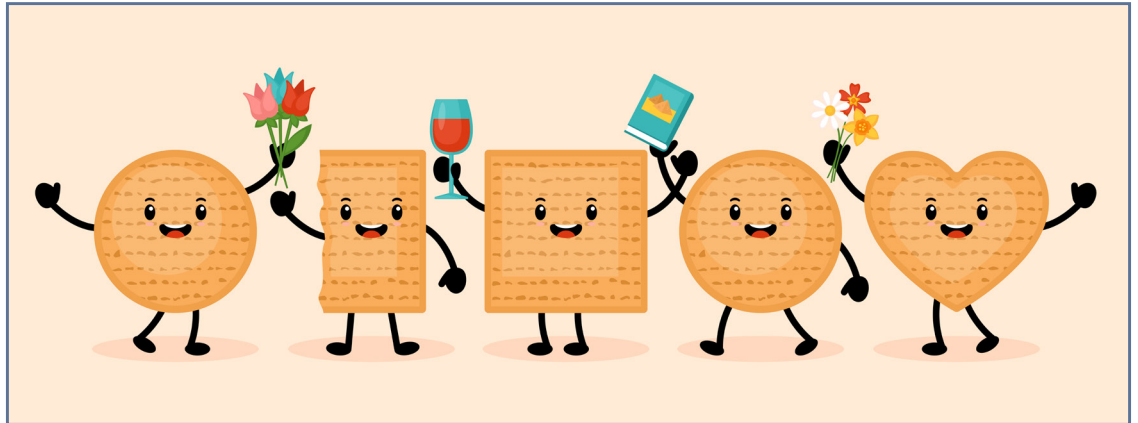
Keeping kosher for Passover means abstaining from hametz, the fermented products of five principal grains: wheat, rye, spelt, barley and oats. Though matzah, the unleavened bread eaten on Passover, is made from grain, it is produced under highly controlled conditions to ensure that it does not ferment.

Ashkenazi Jews who keep kosher for Passover have also traditionally avoided eating *kitniyot*, a category of foods that includes corn, rice, beans and lentils, though the Conservative movement's rabbinic authorities overturned the *kitniyot* prohibition in 2015. Sephardi Jews do not abstain from *kitniyot*. A minority of Jews add an additional stringency by avoiding "gebrochts"—unleavened matzah products that become wet, such as matzah balls or matzah meal.

Many Jews avoid most processed food that is not explicitly labeled kosher for Passover. This is true even for products like cheese or juice that do not contain any *hametz*, but may have been processed in a plant alongside products containing *hametz*. Some products that are kosher year-round are modified slightly to be kosher for Passover—most famously Coca-Cola, which substitutes cane sugar for corn syrup in some regions over the holiday and is marked by a distinctive yellow cap.

A guide to kosher for Passover foods is published each year by the Orthodox Union, which also maintains a searchable database of Passover foods on its website. The OU also has information on food products that can be used without explicit Passover certification.

There are a range of additional practices common to Jews who keep kosher for Passover. Chief among them is ridding the home of any *hametz* products. This is typically done in the days leading up to Passover when homes are cleaned of all *hametz*. For



hametz products that are too valuable or difficult to discard, it is also possible to sell the *hametz* to a non-Jew. Generally, a rabbi performs this service on behalf of his congregants and then repurchases the *hametz* for them when the holiday concludes. In these cases, the seller rarely delivers the food to the purchaser, but instead packs it away.

Making a kitchen kosher for Passover is an elaborate process. Countertop surfaces and sinks are either *kasher ed* (made kosher) with boiling water or covered for the duration of the holiday, depending on the material. Metal pots and utensils can usually be *kasher ed* with boiling water, and various appliances have their own requirements. The OU has a guide to kitchen preparation.

Given the difficulties involved, many Jews maintain separate Passover cookware, dishes and utensils that are used only during the holiday.

Many Jews who do not follow all these restrictions nonetheless make some dietary changes in honor of the holiday. Some people avoid eating *hametz* but do not thoroughly purge their kitchens of it, while others cut out bread and pasta, yet continue to eat some traditionally forbidden items.

In recent years, some affluent Jews have opted to avoid the rigors of cleaning their kitchen for Passover by going on special kosher-for-Passover cruises or to kosher-for-Passover resorts. The trend, while costly, not only makes the holiday easier to observe, but often provides a welcome opportunity for an extended family to get together without the burden of having to host and cook for large numbers of guests. ☆

COOKING JEWISH

Lifestyle

TRADITIONS WITH A TWIST

Celebrating Passover

BY JUDY BART KANCIGOR



Boca Negra with
Tomatillo Sauce
Flourless Chocolate Cake

With Passover around the corner, the Jewish cooking frenzy has officially begun.

Passover, which begins this year at sundown on Monday, April 22, is the most celebrated Jewish holiday of the year. Even people who never step inside a synagogue will knock themselves out for this one.

Julie Ghodsi, owner with her husband, Shahrokh, of Golden Dreidle at www.goldendreidle.com, reports that despite all the gift-giving at Hanukkah, more Jewish cookbooks are sold before Passover. "This is the time of year when people are looking for traditional childhood favorite recipes," she said, "but they want something new too, particularly fun and creative desserts. People don't necessarily come in specifically for Passover cookbooks, but they'll see my display and then say, 'I want to see others.' At this time of year people are also looking for hostess gifts. Sometimes they'll buy two copies of the same cookbook." And this season all cookbooks are marked down to 25 percent off.

While Judaica shops across the country have been closing, Golden Dreidle, is in its 33rd year.

You'll find everything for the holiday from Seder plates to toys and games, even matzo-printed baby bibs, plus ketubas, tallit and mezzuzot. The magnificent Seder plates by Michael Aram especially caught my eye. "There are Kiddush cups to match," Julie pointed out. "He keeps adding Judaica in the most beautiful way." See goldendreidle.com for more ideas.

Just in time for Passover, two new cookbooks have got my attention. More and more each year it seems we are cooking with our guest's dietary restric-

tions in mind. "Nosh" by Micah Siva (The Collective Book Studio, \$35) serves up over 80 plant-forward recipes celebrating modern Jewish cuisine. That vegan at your Passover table will love this vegetable inspired take on gefilte fish, but best of all, so will the carnivores among you. As Adeena Sussman, author of the wildly popular cookbook "Sababa" and more recently "Shabbat," writes in the forward: "Of the many nice qualities about cooking with Micah is there isn't even a whiff of preaching us or pretension. She makes gentle suggestions for how to live a more plant-based life, but there's no arm-twisting or guilt (Jewish or otherwise). If this is your first ride on the plant-based train, it will be the steam engine to get you going. If you've already hopped on, this book will get you into the first-class car."

"The Jewish Holiday Table" by Naama Shefi and the Jewish Food Society with Devra Ferst (Artisan, \$36) (jewishfoodsociety.org) features holiday classics, "the backbone of Jewish cooking," as Shefi puts it, through the stories and treasured recipes of families around the globe. The society is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and celebrating Jewish culinary heritage from around the world and holds a digital archive with over a thousand family stories with their recipes. "We bring them to life through events like pop-up dinners, cooking classes, and our podcast, Schmaltzy," writes Shefi.

The book is divided by holiday, and the unusual flourless chocolate cake from the Passover chapter featured here comes from Chef Fany Gerson, who hosted her first real Seder at 20 while living in New York, far away from her family in Mexico City. Having recently graduated from culinary school, she was homesick and

wanted to re-create her grandmother Ana's dishes handed down by her great grandmother Lena, who had emigrated from Ukraine to Mexico in 1926. "Babi's menu was pretty traditional Ashkenazi, but she gave it a few Mexican updates," she writes. "She served her matzoh ball soup with lime and made a 'red' gefilte fish served warm in a tomato sauce that was spicy from lots of white pepper." New additions to her Passover menu include brisket tamales, her husband's brainchild, combining both their heritages; roast chicken with apricots created by Fany, but inspired by her family's apricot chicken; and Mexican Chocolate Covered Caramelized Matzo, which uses both bittersweet and Mexican chocolate.

The cake featured here is a variation on the Mexican dessert boca negra—"black mouth"—so named because it is so fudgy that it turns your mouth black. It gets its kick from the addition of chipotle chiles, and the tangy tomatillo sauce gets its sweetness from piloncillo, which you can find in Orange County's many Mexican markets. ✨

“This is the time of year when people are looking for traditional childhood favorite recipes.”

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.



Vegan "Gefilte" Cakes

Vegan "Gefilte" Cakes

Yield: 10 cakes

This vegan recipe uses a mixture of vegetables, seaweed and spices to mimic the flavor and textures of Siva's great grandmother Freda's gefilte fish.

Note: Whole flax seeds are acceptable for Passover, but ground seeds need certification. You can grind your own in a coffee grinder.

- 2 medium carrots, scrubbed, 1 roughly chopped
- 1/4 head cauliflower, cut into florets
- 1 medium parsnip, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 medium russet potato, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1/4 white onion, roughly chopped
- 1/4 cup raw cashews,
- 1 sheet sushi nori, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup matzo meal
- 3 tablespoons flax meal
- 4 1/4 to 6 1/4 cups water, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon potato starch
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Flaky sea salt, for serving
- Horseradish, for serving

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper.
2. In food processor, pulse chopped carrot, cauliflower, parsnip, potato, and onion until they are the size of peas. Add cashews and pulse until well combined.
3. Transfer vegetables to medium bowl. Add nori, matzo meal, flax meal, 1/4 cup of the water, pepper, salt, lemon zest, potato starch, and baking powder and mix until combined. Let sit 10 minutes.
4. Using a 1/4-cup measure, form mixture into 10 patties.
5. Heat olive oil in nonstick pan over medium-high heat. Cook patties until golden, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Transfer patties to prepared sheet pan and bake 15 minutes. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt.
6. Meanwhile, cut remaining carrot into 1/4-inch slices. Combine carrots and enough water to cover by 1 inch in medium saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Lower heat to a simmer, and gently cook carrots until tender. Drain and set aside. Top patties with sliced carrots and serve with horseradish.

Source: "Nosh" by Micah Siva

Boca Negra with Tomatillo Sauce Flourless Chocolate Cake

While Fany uses a regular cake pan, it may be easier to remove the cake from the pan if you use a springform. Because the cake is baked in a water bath, you'll need to wrap the springform tightly with foil.

Makes one 8-inch (20 cm) round cake

- For the cake
- 12 tablespoons (11/2 sticks) unsalted butter or nondairy butter, cut into small pieces, plus 1 teaspoon for the pan
 - 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar
 - 6 medium dried chipotle chiles
 - 10 ounces high-quality semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
 - 6 tablespoons fresh orange juice
 - 4 large eggs
 - 11/2 tablespoons cornstarch or almond flour
 - Pinch of kosher salt

- For the tomatillo sauce
- 1 pound tomatillos, husks removed, rinsed and coarsely chopped
 - 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
 - 8 ounces piloncillo
 - 1/4 cup sugar
 - 1/3 cup water
 - 1 small cinnamon stick

1. Cake: Preheat oven to 325°F. Cut a round of parchment paper to fit inside of 8-inch round cake pan (you don't need parchment if using a springform pan). Grease bottom and sides of cake pan or 8-inch springform with 1 teaspoon butter, line bottom with parchment, if using, and grease parchment with a bit more butter. Dust interior of pan with 1 tablespoon sugar, shaking and turning pan to distribute it all around, and tap pan to remove excess. If using a springform pan, wrap bottom and sides securely in foil, making sure to tightly seal any seams so water can't seep into pan. (Recipe continues at jlifespv.com.)



3 SPECIAL SHABBATS TO GET YOU IN THE MOOD FOR PASSOVER

Shabbat Parah, Shabbat HaHodesh and Shabbat HaGadol.

BY MICHELE ALPERIN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

The Shabbat ot (plural of Shabbat) surrounding holidays often are permeated with the holiday themes, creating the mood for an upcoming festival, reflecting or enhancing festival themes, or easing the transition from a holiday back into the weekly flow of Shabbat.

A special Shabbat usually includes a special Torah or *haftarah* [prophetic] reading that either replaces the standard weekly reading or is read in addition to it, as well as a *maftir*, or final *aliyah*, that reflects the holiday's theme and is read from a different Torah scroll.

Here's what happens on the three Shabbats preceding Passover:

Shabbat Parah

Shabbat Parah, the Sabbath of the Red Heifer, occurs on the last Shabbat of the month of Adar. The final Torah reading read on that Shabbat, Numbers 19:1-22, deals with the red heifer whose ashes were combined with water to ritually purify anyone who had been in contact with a dead person. Because only people who were pure could eat from the Passover sacrifice, in ancient times a public announcement reminded anyone who had become impure to purify themselves before making the Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The *haftarah*, Ezekiel 36:16-38, also deals with issues of being cleansed from contamination, but the impurity in this case symbolizes human sinfulness. But, like physical impurity, sins can be overcome. As G-d says in Ezekiel 36:25: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes [idolatrous practices]. And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you." This renewal of self and nation reflects Passover's theme of redemption.

Shabbat HaChodesh

Shabbat HaChodesh occurs either on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Nisan or on Rosh Chodesh itself. (Rosh Chodesh is a celebration of the new month.) The *maftir* reading is Exodus 12:1-20, which details eating the Passover sacrifice, with "your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand"; eating bitter herbs and unleavened bread; and putting blood on the doorposts; and it lists the Passover laws.



The first day of Nisan is also important as the occasion for G-d's first commandment, sanctifying the new moon, which begins the Torah reading: "This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you."

This commandment moved the determination of months from G-d's agenda into the hands of the Jewish people—giving them control over time and the theological/liturgical cycle. The *haftarah*, Ezekiel 45:16-46:18, describes the sacrifices that the Israelites are to bring on the first of Nisan, on Passover, and on other festivals in the future Temple.

Shabbat HaGadol

The Shabbat before Passover is called Shabbat HaGadol, the Great Sabbath. As the Israelites were preparing to leave Egypt, G-d commanded them to select a lamb that would serve as the Passover sacrifice. This mitzvah, or commandment, required the Israelites to actively participate in the redemption from Egypt. The name Shabbat HaGadol literally comes from a verse in the day's *haftarah*, Malachi 3:4-24. "Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the Lord," which alludes to a messianic future.

The past redemption at Passover is tied to the future messianic redemption, which, according to tradition, also will take place on Passover. Traditional practices on Shabbat HaGadol include reciting special hymns about the laws of Passover, reading the part of the *Haggadah* that begins with *Avadim Hayinu* ("We were slaves") and listening to the community's outstanding Torah scholar address the congregation on the laws of Passover. ✨

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Shabbat Mevarchim

Contact Rabbi Sholom Harlig
info@ChabadInlandEmpire.com, CIE

SUNDAY, APRIL 7

10:30 - 11:30 AM

Bagel Babies

Contact Rabbi Sholom Harlig
info@ChabadInlandEmpire.com, CIE

FRIDAY, APRIL 5 & 19

10:00 - 11:30 AM

Gan Katan – PJ Library's Little Garden Playgroup,

Contact Debby Singer

(626) 445-0810

dsinger@jewishsgpv.org

JFGSGPV

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

8:00 PM

SUNDAY, APRIL 7

3:30 PM (SOLD OUT)

THURSDAY, APRIL 11

7:30 PM

SATURDAY, APRIL 13

8:00 PM

SUNDAY, APRIL 14

3:30 PM (SOLD OUT)

THURSDAY, APRIL 18

7:30 PM

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

8:00 PM

SUNDAY, APRIL 21

3:30 PM

THURSDAY, APRIL 25

7:30 PM

SATURDAY, APRIL 27

8:00 PM

SUNDAY, APRIL 28

3:30 PM

Fiddler on the Roof

Cost

Priority \$40

General \$30

Group (10+) \$25

Contact Cantor Judy Sofer

jsofer@jewishsgpv.org,

JFGSGPV

PASSOVER 2024

BEGINS MONDAY, APRIL 22

AT SUNDOWN AND ENDS

ON TUESDAY, APRIL 30 AT

SUNDOWN

MONDAY, APRIL 22

7:30 PM

Community Passover Seder

Contact Rabbi Sholom Harlig

info@ChabadInlandEmpire.com,

CIE

Beth Shalom

of Whittier (BSW)

www.bethshalomofwhittier.net

B'nai Simcha

Community Preschool

www.bnaisimcha.org

Chabad Jewish Center of

South Pasadena

www.jewishsouthpasadena.com

com

Chabad of Arcadia

(CoA)

www.jewisharcadia.com

Chabad of Pasadena

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www.chabadpasadena.com

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Congregation Hugat

Haverim (CHH)

www.hugathaverim.com

Jewish Federation of the

Greater San Gabriel and

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www.jewishsgpv.org

Pasadena Jewish

Academy (PJA)

www.pasadenajewishacademy.com

Pasadena Jewish

Temple & Center (PJTC)

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

org

Temple Beth Israel of

Highland Park and Eagle

Rock (TBILA)

www.tbila.org

Temple B'nai Emet (TBE)

www.templebnaiemet.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> ✪



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Porticos Art Space | Pasadena
For tickets, visit:
www.jewishsgpv.org



In celebration of our 30th Anniversary, the Jewish Federation of the Greater San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys' JFed Players are proud to present the iconic musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, chronicling the trials and tribulations of Tevye, his family, and the villagers of Anatevka. A musical about life, resilience, family, and ... TRADITION!

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Sponsorship opportunities are available; for more information, contact:

Cantor Judy Sofer jsofer@jewishsgpv.org

NEWS & JEWS



From R-L - Denise Bar-Aharon, Sylvan Adams and Yoav Gross. Credit - Hila Aizinger

Make-A-Wish Israel Unveils New Ambassadors in the Wake of October 7 Attacks

Tel Aviv - April 1, 2024 – Israeli-Canadian businessman and philanthropist Sylvan Adams hosted the unveiling ceremony for Make-A-Wish Israel's newest ambassadors at his private residence in Tel Aviv last night. The new ambassadors will work to fulfil the wishes of children with critical illnesses in Israel, including those physically wounded with multi-system trauma by the attacks on October 7th.

Make-A-Wish Israel is an integral part of the international organization that serves children in 50 countries and was founded in the United States in 1980. Its mission is to fulfil the wishes of children aged 3-18 who are battling critical illnesses.

Denise and Avi Bar-Aharon established the Israeli branch of Make-A-Wish in 1996 in memory of Denise's brother, David Spero. Since its inception, the foundation has granted over 5,500 life-changing wishes for sick children in Israel.

During the ceremony, the foundation's founders, Denise and Avi Bar-Aharon, bestowed the title of Global Goodwill Ambassador to Sylvan Adams, known for his efforts to enhance Israel's global reputation, particularly following the October 7 attacks. In addition, Yoseph Haddad, Eden Hasson, Bar Refaeli, Niv Sultan, Kevin Ruben, Shahar Hauan and Odeya Azoulay were also selected amongst others as new ambassadors this year.

It was an emotional event that included "Wish Kids," Rotem Kalderon from Nir Oz, whose family was abducted to Gaza, and Itay Cohen from Or HaNer, who lost his eye from terrorist gunfire, standing alongside the ambassadors, as they were each recognized as new ambassadors for the foundation. The event was also attended by Make-A-Wish Israel's board of directors, led by its chairman Yoav Gross, Dvir Benedek the foundation's President and all the current Make-A-Wish Israel ambassadors, including Static, Noa Kirel, Lior Suchard, Neta Alchimister, Reef Neeman,



Avi and Denise Bar Aharon, Ron Baron, Itai Cohen, Sylvan Adams and Clinton Ephron, Credit - Shauli Landler

Tamir Grinberg, and more. Various esteemed supporters of the organization, such as Eyal Waldman, Leon Kofler, Dalia Itzik, Rakefet Russak-Aminoach, Dudi Weizmann and Barak Vard Rosen.

Several "Wish Kids" shared their heartfelt wish stories at the event: Eitan Fink, from Jerusalem who had been ill with cancer, said his wish had been to interview the President of the United States, and that he had fulfilled his dream thanks to Make-A-Wish Israel; Rotem Kalderon from Nir Oz, whose family was abducted to Gaza on October 7, and whose father is still held captive by Hamas, said he wished to receive goldsmith tools; and Itay Cohen from Or HaNer, who lost his eye from terrorist fire on October 7 while out cycling, said he wanted to receive a windsurfing board. During the ceremony, Sylvan Adams presented a gift of his own championship winning bike to Itay.

Sylvan Adams, newly appointed Make-A-Wish Israel Global Goodwill Ambassador, said, "I'm honoured by the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of these courageous children. While October 7th may have been marked by tragedy, today, as ambassadors for hope, we are able to rewrite the narrative, one wish at a time. Together, we'll transform dreams into reality, spreading joy and hope. *Am Yisrael Chai.*"

Denise Bar-Aharon, Make-A-Wish Israel's Co-founder and CEO, said, "I am proud and excited to welcome Sylvan Adams and the new ambassadors to the Make-A-Wish family, with the goal of reaching every eligible child in Israel and fulfilling their greatest wish. Wishes can truly be transformational for a child and their family, and I believe that the doctors give the medicine and Make-A-Wish gives the magic." ✨



(From R-L) Denise Bar-Aharon, Noa Kirel and Sylvan Adams Credit - Shauli Landler

LAST WORD

*Happy Passover
from our Jlife family
to yours.*





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