

Jlife

SGPV JEWISH LIFE

December 2025
Kislev — Tevet 5786

JEREMY PIVEN
From Ari Gold to
Authentic Gold—
The Actor, the Comic,
and the Mensch
Behind the Mic

KOSHERSOUL BY
MICHAEL W. TWITTY
IS A LOVE LETTER TO
OUR JEWISH AND
BLACK COMMUNITY

THE HANUKKAH ISSUE

GOT KIDS?
Look Inside for
kiddish



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CONTENTS

JLIFE | Kislev — Tevet 5786 | December 2025

VIEWPOINTS

- 7 FROM WHERE I SIT**
It is never too late to re-dedicate

- 8 ISRAELI GUY**
Hanukkah 5786

FEATURES

- 10 WHY IS HANUKKAH EIGHT NIGHTS?**
The reasons this holiday lasts so long.

- 12 BY THE THOUSANDS, IDF LONE SOLDIERS FIND SUPPORT AND SERVICES AT UNIQUE TEL AVIV ERRANDS DAY**

- 14 WHY HANUKKAH BECAME SUCH A BIG DEAL**
Though it is ostensibly about the purification of the Temple, Hanukkah really marks the political achievement of the Hasmoneans.

- 16 AT TEL AVIV SCHOOL OF LAST RESORT, MISSILE DAMAGE FROM WAR BRING CHALLENGES—AND OPPORTUNITIES**

- 18 JEREMY PIVEN**
From Ari Gold to Authentic Gold—The Actor, the Comic, and the Mensch Behind the Mic

- 23 HOW MANY CANDLES ARE NEEDED FOR HANUKKAH?**
Keeping your menorah lit all eight days.

- 24 COVER STORY: KOSHERSOUL BY MICHAEL W. TWITTY IS A LOVE LETTER TO OUR JEWISH AND BLACK COMMUNITY**

Kiddish (insert publication for Jewish youth) begins on page 27

LIFESTYLE

- 28 COOKING JEWISH**
Recipes with Judy Bart Kancigor

- 31 HOW TO CELEBRATE HANUKKAH ON A BUDGET**
Enjoy the Festival of Lights without breaking the bank.

- 32 CALENDAR**
Community Calendar

- 34 NEWS & JEWS**
SGPV Jewish Scene

- 35 LAST WORD**

ON THE COVER:
THE HANUKKAH ISSUE

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO RE-DEDICATE



One of the many positions I have held in the Jewish community was as a Sunday School and Hebrew School teacher. I started shortly after graduating from college and continued until 2020. I enjoyed having the opportunity to enlighten the young minds of my students and to share what I had learned over the years with them. Inevitably, each year, as part of my curriculum, I covered the Jewish holidays. And every year, I tried to think of new and different ways to impress upon my students the many aspects and relevant facts about each holiday.

Of course, around this time of the year, my attention always turned to Hanukkah and the many lessons this holiday teaches us. Was I going to focus my attention on discussing the significance of the "miracle" this year or try to get my students to understand that the holiday is more than just an excuse to get presents around the same time as their non-Jewish friends? However, no matter what, my goal was always to have my students understand that one of the main concepts of

Hanukkah was the importance of re-dedication.

While some may argue that Hanukkah's popularity among Jews has served as a Jewish 'answer' to Christmas, understanding its deeper significance encourages us to celebrate all our holidays with purpose, not just the most popular ones.

Maimonides, the great twelfth-century philosopher and expert in Jewish law, enumerated eight levels of *tzedakah*, each higher level more honorable than the others. However, Maimonides points out that while one may be more honorable than the others, performing any form of *tzedakah*. We can draw a parallel from this point and use it in discussing Hanukkah.

Does it matter that Hanukkah is not considered the "holiest" of the holidays? Should we not celebrate Hanukkah with all of the joy and enthusiasm that has developed over the years, just because it is not the "holiest?" The answer to each question is unequivocally... NO.

We should take from the holiday what our tradition teaches us, rather than spend all our time focusing on

why it isn't as special or important as Passover, Yom Kippur, or any other holiday you feel is the holiest.

So, let's focus on the idea of re-dedication and how it can inspire us to renew our commitments and find hope in our own lives today.

The word re-dedication suggests reconnecting with what matters most. Consider how you can actively re-dedicate yourself to your family, community, or personal goals today, making the holiday's lessons a living practice.

The story of Hanukkah shows us that it's never too late to return to what matters. Knowing the Maccabees celebrated Sukkot after defilement teaches us that dedication can be renewed at any time, offering reassurance and hope.

So this year, consider re-dedicating yourself to something you have "missed"; something that was once very important to you and can be again. ☆



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

“Taken together, “**Might**” and “**Light**” offer a resilient vision of Jewish identity for the modern world.”

HANUKKAH 5786

AI Enhanced

BY TEDDY WEINBERGER

Over the years, I’ve written 10 columns that specifically focus upon how Hanukkah is celebrated in Israel versus how it is celebrated in America. This year, I couldn’t resist using Notebook (“an AI-powered research assistant from Google”) to synthesize the 10 columns together. Besides accessing a discursive essay based on my Hanukkah columns, in the “Studio” section using the link below, you can choose from some really cool AI features, including: a podcast featuring a male and a female host discussing the 10 columns, a video overview, a “mind map” (an interactive diagram), flashcards (one question per card), and a multiple-choice quiz. Here is the link: <https://notebooklm.google.com/notebook/2b7c5ad4-2196-427d-89bb-959726b1632c>, and below is my Hanukkah 5786 column, condensed and edited from the AI version—heck, you still need the human touch!

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, is a holiday built upon a fundamental duality. It commemorates not one, but two distinct and, in many ways, competing miracles. The first is a story of sovereign might: the stunning military victory of the *Hasmoneans* over the powerful Seleucid Empire in 167 BCE. The second is a tale of spiritual light: the miraculous endurance of a single, pure flask of olive oil, which burned for eight days when it should have lasted for only one. The tension between these two narratives—the story of the sword and the story of the oil—is not merely a historical footnote. It is a dynamic force that profoundly shapes contemporary Jewish identity, celebration, and political consciousness. This tension manifests in markedly different ways, reflecting the distinct realities of Jews living as a majority culture in Israel versus those navigating the minority

experience of the diaspora.

In the sovereign Jewish state of Israel, the cultural and political landscape necessitates a profound narrative inversion, elevating the Maccabean story of military might from a historical account to a foundational national ethos. The story of national liberation was a core inspiration for the early Zionist movement and continues to be a cornerstone of modern Israeli identity.

Modern Israeli society often makes a conscious effort to emphasize this military narrative. A country-wide program sponsored by the Ministry of Education, for example, was titled “Together we light the *Hanukiyah* of heroism.” This initiative encourages Israelis to recall the military victory, an act seen by many as necessary because it affirms that “we are not newcomers in this land, that our history is here.” In a nation where security is a constant concern, the military dimension of the holiday cannot be ignored. This focus on the military miracle and its public celebration is a direct reflection of Israel’s political reality and national consciousness, where sovereignty and self-defense are central pillars of identity.

The dual miracles of Hanukkah, emphasized so differently in Israel and the *diaspora*, are not contradictory but complementary, each meeting the distinct communal and political needs of its environment. In the *diaspora*, the gentle flame of the oil miracle provides a model for sustaining a minority identity with inner strength and domestic integrity. In Israel, the triumphant sword of the Maccabees provides a foundational story of national sovereignty and the right to



self-defense.

Yet these two narratives are not mutually exclusive but dynamically intertwined. Even in Israel, with its focus on heroism, there are initiatives that prioritize the light of connection over might. The “*Ner Mehaber*” (“The Candle That Connects”) project, for instance, arose from a desire within religious Zionism to “reconnect with the secular Israeli public,” uniting disparate families to foster stronger communities. And in the *diaspora*, the simple act of lighting the *hanukiyah* is often experienced as a “Maccabean act,” a quiet but powerful assertion of public identity.

Ultimately, the enduring power of Hanukkah lies in its ability to hold both narratives in this productive tension. “Might” and “Light” are both indispensable facets of the Jewish story. Together, they offer a resilient vision of Jewish identity for the modern world—one that understands the need for both military might and an incandescent flame to illuminate the soul. Happy Hanukkah! ☆

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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WHY IS HANUKKAH EIGHT NIGHTS?

The reasons this holiday lasts so long.

BY RABBI PAUL STEINBERG, MY JEWISH LEARNING

When the Greeks entered the Temple they defiled all the oils and when the Hasmoneans prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. It contained only enough oil to light for one day, yet a miracle happened and they used it to light for eight days. -B. Talmud Shabbat 21b
It's Miraculous

This aspect of the Hanukkah story, learned from the Talmud, is commonly taught to Jewish children in Hebrew and Sunday schools across America; and it is surely the most remembered part of the holiday narrative, told and retold throughout the world. Perhaps this miracle-centered version occurs so often because Jews are more familiar with the Talmud than with the Apocrypha where the historical books of the Maccabees are found.

Or perhaps the frequency is inspired by the emphasis on the oil and the *hanukkiah* (Hanukkah menorah); they offer something tangible with which to express our deep connection to and appreciation for the valor of our ancestors. Most likely though, the recounting of the miracle is so dominant and popular because it focuses on the role of G-d in this story, as opposed to the Maccabees' military accomplishments—a focus echoing a phrase from the biblical Book of Zechariah that is always chanted during Hanukkah: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit..."

Whatever the reason, the talmudic legend remains the account of Hanukkah that most Jews know. Within it, however, are layers of items to ponder and criticize, and questions to answer. For example, even people who seem to accept the legend and not question the miraculous nature will ask why we must celebrate for eight days; after all, if there was enough oil for one day, then the duration of the miracle was only seven days not eight! The common response from the tradition is that the oil burned extraordinarily slowly, diminishing only a bit for each of the eight days, and therein lies the miracle.

Beyond any symbolic explanations for the number eight lie some more practical, concrete, or commemorative explanations. One Rabbinic tradition says that the *Hasmoneans* (Maccabees) may have needed eight days to become purified, after being in contact with the dead on the battlefield. Purification consisted of being sprinkled with clean water that had been mixed with the ashes of an unblemished, sacrificial red heifer.

The sprinkling would have occurred on days number three and seven, and only the next day could the *Hasmoneans*, now ritually cleansed, produce a new batch of purified oil. Another explanation, the one heard more often claims simply that it took eight days to obtain olives and crush them into oil.

A lesser-heard explanation for the commemorative number of eight and the lighting of candles on Hanukkah is found in *Pesikta Rabbati*, a collection of *midrashim* compiled in the ninth to 13th centuries. It says that when the *Hasmoneans* entered the Temple, they discovered eight iron rods. Into these, they carved grooves, filled the grooves with oil, and then kindled wicks in the oil. According to this tradition, the eight days of Hanukkah honor that specific moment when the *Hasmoneans* officially took control of the Temple.

It's Historical

The questions surrounding the eight-day miracle of the oil are fascinating, and Rabbinic literature discusses them at length. When we look at the purely historical sources, however, such questions are not part of the discussion. Flavius Josephus, the most significant historian living in the ancient Near East, makes no mention of a miracle in his account of the *Hasmoneans* and the rededication of the Temple.

Nor is there any mention in the Apocrypha, which provides a basic narrative about Hanukkah. The First Book of the Maccabees (c. 100 BCE), believed to have been written in Israel, simply refers to Hanukkah as a holiday of thanksgiving and joy to be annually observed. The Second Book of the Maccabees ("second," but slightly earlier, c. 124 BCE), written in Egypt, gives a plausible historical reason why Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days, yet clearly lacks any reference to a miracle:

The sanctuary was purified on the 25th of Kislev, the same day of the same month as that on which foreigners had profaned it. The joyful celebration lasted for eight days, like the Feast of Tabernacles [Sukkot] and then they recalled how, only a short time before they had kept that feast while living like wild animals in the mountains and caves. So carrying garlanded wands and flowering branches, as well as palm fronds (i.e. the ritual symbols of Sukkot) they chanted hymns to the One who so triumphantly achieved the purification of his own temple.

—2 Macc. 10:5-7

This version explains that Hanukkah was a belated celebration of the fall festival of Sukkot, because the Jews had not been able to celebrate that holiday during wartime. In the next verse of the same chapter, the text says that the celebration should be repeated every year to commemorate what happened in the *Hasmonean* era. Having eight days of Hanukkah is as a parallel to the eight days of Sukkot (including Shemini Atzeret). This connection may also inform two related matters.

One is a passage in the First Book of the Maccabees that refers to Sukkot as the holiday of independence, thus mirroring itself back onto Hanukkah. The other is the selection of the *lulav* (one of the four species used during Sukkot) as the symbol that was imprinted on *Hasmonean* coins of the period. ☆

RABBI PAUL STEINBERG IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

BY THE THOUSANDS, IDF LONE SOLDIERS FIND SUPPORT AND SERVICES AT UNIQUE TEL AVIV ERRANDS DAY

BY SHANNA FULD, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY, JTA

When A. moved from Florida to Israel after high school and began his mandatory service in the Israel Defense Forces, he knew it would be challenging to serve in a combat unit far from his family.

"Combat service has been very difficult," said A., whose name is being withheld to protect his identity, like those of other soldiers cited in this story. "I've had to face challenges I never could have imagined. But you go through it, and you come out able to handle things—even better than I could have before in my civilian life."

Several months on, however, A., 19, still has trouble handling his civilian To Do list—like getting an Israeli driver's license. He just has no time for it.

So when he heard that the Friends of the IDF-Nefesh B'Nefesh Lone Soldiers Program, in partnership with the Mofet Unit of the IDF Manpower Directorate and the Association for Israel's Soldiers, was organizing an Errands Day event in Tel Aviv for Lone Soldiers—where representatives of banks, government offices, employment organizations, and numerous other service providers would be on hand to ease and expedite errands for soldiers without immediate family in Israel—A. was thrilled.

At the all-day, mid-November event at the Tel Aviv Expo center, which drew over 4,000 Lone Soldiers from 70 different countries, A. went to get his driver's license and was astonished to find more than 70 volunteer driving instructors and 60 certified examiners speeding soldiers through one of Israel's most notoriously bureaucratic processes. It took A. just minutes to obtain his license, printed by a biometric machine on site.

"It was on the spot!" he marveled. "It was a big thing I needed to do. It's all stuff that is really helping me out."

The mass-scale Yom Siddurim (Errands Day) was the largest ever, and the first to be held since Oct. 7, 2023. Over the last two years of war, holding such an event was impossible because the IDF couldn't spare



Over 4,000 Israeli Lone Soldiers hailing from 70 countries attended a unique Errands Day event in Tel Aviv organized in part by Nefesh B'Nefesh, the immigration-assistance organization co-founded by Tony Gelbart, left center, and Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, right center. The soldiers' faces are blurred to protect their identities. (Yonit Schiller)

thousands of soldiers all on the same day during the height of the war, according to Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, co-founder and executive director of Nefesh B'Nefesh. The mission of his organization, which began with a holistic approach to facilitating aliyah (immigration to Israel) from North America, has broadened to encompass supporting Israeli national service, development of the country with a focus on its periphery and Zionist education.

For a day, the Tel Aviv Expo center was turned into a one-stop shop for nearly every bureaucratic, logistical and personal need a Lone Soldier could face.

Soldiers renewed their passports, sorted out payments from Israel's National Insurance Institute and got free haircuts from on-site barbers. They lined up at booths to meet with representatives of government ministries, embassies, banks, the Electric Company, the Population Authority, and numerous NGOs. They got a hot lunch and even availed themselves of tailors on site to hem their military-issue pants and skirts.

Though all wearing Israeli army uniforms, the soldiers hailed from all over the globe—including native Israelis considered Lone Soldiers because they don't have immediate family they can rely upon in Israel.

"We know these soldiers come from all over the world to serve," said Roni, a representative of the IDF unit that cares

for Lone Soldiers. "Our job is to make sure they know their rights: vacation days, housing assistance, financial benefits, refunds for flights to see their families. We run a 24/7 hotline. Everything we do is so they know they're not alone."

Y., a 25-year-old infantryman from Canada who moved to Israel in August 2023, said the hardest part about being a Lone Soldier is the distance from his family.

"My teammates took me in like brothers," said Y. "They see their parents every few weeks; I don't. I am missing my family and want to see them."

Y. utilized his time at the Yom Siddurim getting his North American undergraduate degree officially recognized so he can enroll in a master's program in Israel after he finishes the army. He also was able to get answers about rent payments and the process for enrolling in ulpan (Hebrew language classes).

A 21-year-old Lone Soldier originally from Russia, D., used the day to take care of paying his municipal taxes, sorting out his electricity bill and getting new national ID cards.

"I need everything," D. said, "and here we can do all of it. The atmosphere is happy. We have presents, food, drinks. And today I'm not in the army," he added with a laugh. "It's a good day."

M., a 24-year-old American woman, moved to Israel after graduating from Georgia Tech with a degree in biochemistry. Through the army's academic track, which deploys degree-holders in technical and relevant positions as officers, M. became a hazardous materials officer for Israel's Home Front Command.

"Oct. 7 happened in the first semester of my senior year. I realized I wanted my life to be meaningful," M. said of her decision to immigrate to Israel. "I wanted to serve the Jewish people."

With an army job focused on keeping factories and citizens safe, she said the Errands Day event was a reminder of how Israel is also taking care of her.

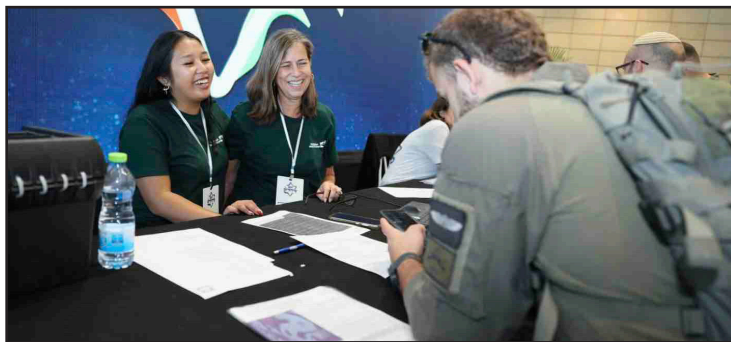
"It's touching," she said. "It shows there is actually infrastructure to help olim [new immigrants] and the citizens."

That's exactly the point, said Nadav Padan, CEO of Friends of the IDF and a major general in the IDF reserves.

"Yom Siddurim is one of the many ways FIDF shows our deep appreciation and support for the young men and women who volunteer to serve in the IDF," Padan said. "We aim to ensure they know they are never alone, and that they have a family of supporters across the United States standing with them. Through comprehensive support that includes financial assistance, housing, flights home, community events and mental health support, FIDF is committed to easing their experience so they can focus fully on their vital mission of protecting the State of Israel."

In addition to service providers of all kinds, Knesset members from across the political spectrum stopped by, including Minister of Aliyah and Integration Ofir Sofer, Likud's Yuli Edelstein and Gadi Eisenkot, a former IDF chief of staff and Knesset member.

"This is our nation," said Nefesh B'Nefesh's co-founder and chairman, Tony Gelbart. "That celebration of unity, with this as the anchor, is uplifting."



The Errands Day event in Tel Aviv, known as a Yom Siddurim, was organized by the Friends of the IDF-Nefesh B'Nefesh Lone Soldiers Program in partnership with the Mofet Unit of the IDF Manpower Directorate and the Association for Israel's Soldiers. (Bar Bino)

Fass said that one of the government ministers on hand was so taken with the event that he wants to re-create it for Israelis displaced by the Oct. 7 war, who despite their return home face all sorts of bureaucratic hurdles ranging from getting compensation for lost income to accessing mental health services.

"I said take it! Copy and paste it. It's modular," Fass said.

"The young men and women who make aliyah, and are required to serve in the IDF, embody an extraordinary commitment to the State of Israel, driven by a strong Zionist spirit and a deep desire to contribute to our nation," Fass and Gelbart said in a joint statement. "This year's Yom Siddurim is a powerful reminder of our responsibility to support these new olim, provide for their needs and demonstrate our gratitude for their ongoing service to the Jewish nation."★

SHANNA FULD IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

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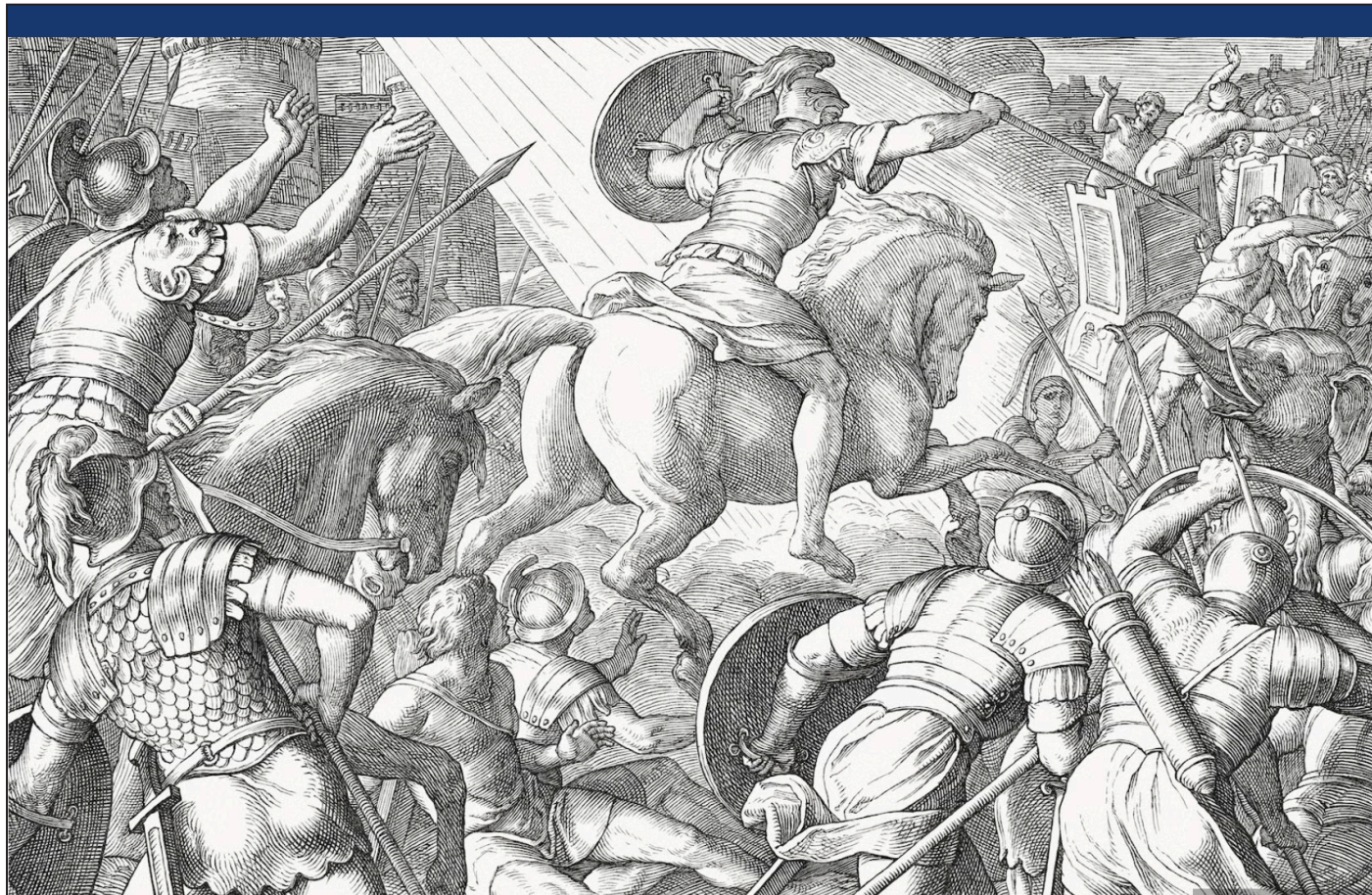
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WHY HANUKKAH BECAME SUCH A BIG DEAL

Though it is ostensibly about the purification of the Temple, Hanukkah really marks the political achievement of the *Hasmoneans*.

BY RABBI DR. ZEV FARBER, MY JEWISH LEARNING



Hanukkah has long been the festival commemorating the *Hasmonean* victory over Antiochus IV and the Seleucid Greeks, but it is not obvious why or how Hanukkah came to occupy this position, given the length of the war and its twists and turns.

Judah Maccabee's victory over Antiochus IV and rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem came three years after his father Mattathias announced the war.

The victory was not nearly so clean-cut as we are often led to believe. Soon after this celebration, the Seleucids were again in charge of Jerusalem, with their general Nicanor as governor. As the story is told in 2 Maccabees, Nicanor sought to capture Judah Maccabee, believing he was going to lead another revolt:

He (Nicanor) stretched out his right hand toward the sanctuary and swore this oath: "If you do not

hand Judah over to me as a prisoner, I will level this shrine of G-d to the ground and tear down the altar and build here a splendid temple to Dionysus." (2 Maccabees 14:33)

Nicanor didn't succeed in capturing Judah Maccabee. Instead, Judah defeated Nicanor in battle, dismembered him and brought the pieces to the Temple:

Judah hung Nicanor's head from the citadel, a clear and conspicuous sign to everyone of the help of the Lord. And they all decreed by public vote never to let this day go unobserved but to celebrate the 13th day of the twelfth month—which is called Adar in the Aramaic language—the day before Mordecai's day (Purim).

(2 Maccabees 15:35–36)

This is the climax of 2 Maccabees, which is much more interested in this incident—later celebrated as

Nicanor Day—than it is in the rededication of the Temple on Hanukkah.

But this too was not the end of the war against the Seleucid Greeks, which continued for two more decades. Judah was killed the year after this victory, and his brother Jonathan Apphus took the lead in the revolt. He was also killed, after which their brother Simon Thassi took over. It was Simon who finally established the independent *Hasmonean* kingdom in 140 B.C.E., 27 years after the rebellion began, and 24 years after the events that Hanukkah celebrates.

Hanukkah, therefore, is only one of multiple holidays the *Hasmoneans* instituted to celebrate milestones in a decades-long war. As described above, Nicanor Day (13th of Adar) celebrates Judah's defeat of Nicanor. Another is Hakra Day (23rd of Nisan), celebrating when Simon removed the Seleucid garrison from Jerusalem in 141 B.C.E. Both, of course, took place after the original Hanukkah.

For this and other reasons, several scholars (me included) have argued that Hanukkah as a festival was likely instituted long after Judah's death, and its significance, ironically, stands not on the military defeat of Antiochus IV but on the establishment of the *Hasmonean* priesthood. The key is to keep our eyes on the high priesthood—the top job at the Temple.

Before the Antiochian persecution began, the Temple was run by the Oniads, a traditional family of high priests. But their cousin Jason bribed the Seleucid king to give him the job, ousting Onias. Soon after, Menelaus, a man from a different priestly family, paid even more and replaced Jason. Meanwhile, Onias, the legitimate high priest, escaped to Egypt, where he built his own Temple. (But that is another story.)

As historian Daniel Schwartz has noted, when the *Hasmonean* revolt began, it was almost certainly taken as a given by their supporters that if they were to defeat the Seleucids, the Oniad family—the legitimate high priests—would regain their position. It had not yet occurred to anyone that



The Dead Sea Scrolls

the *Hasmoneans* would occupy this role (despite the fanciful claim in rabbinic liturgy that Mattathias or his father Johanan served as high priest).

It was Judah's brother Jonathan who was the first *Hasmonean* to take the position of high priest (153 B.C.E.), when he was appointed by Alexander Balas, a contender for the Seleucid throne. We can see how controversial this was when we read the Dead Sea Scrolls, which speak disparagingly about "the wicked priest," a likely reference to Jonathan.

Following Jonathan's death, other *Hasmoneans* occupied the position of high priest, which became the equivalent to head of state. It was only then that Hanukkah—which commemorates an event early in the rebellion—became a major festival. It is likely the holiday was amped up as propaganda for the family. Though it is ostensibly about the purification of the Temple, Hanukkah really marks the political achievement of the *Hasmoneans*, whose eventual success established their right to be high priests and, *ipso facto*, kings of Judea.

Hanukkah is, therefore, in essence a religio-political holiday. The symbolic lighting of candles mimics a ritual act in the Temple but, at the same time, the festival's significance lies in how it marks the beginning of Judean political independence under the *Hasmoneans*. This achievement should not be minimized. The *Hasmonean* period was the only time in the Second Temple period where Judeans had self-rule. Indeed, it is the only such period in Jewish history between the destruction of the First Temple and the establishment of the modern state of Israel. ☆

RABBI DR. ZEV FARBER IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

AT TEL AVIV SCHOOL OF LAST RESORT, MISSILE DAMAGE FROM WAR BRING CHALLENGES—AND OPPORTUNITIES

BY ELANA SZTOKMAN, JTA



The Max Fein school is meant to be an oasis of sorts for Israeli students who have fallen through the cracks. After missiles struck the school during Israel's war with Iran, students found a way to carry on. (Courtesy of Max Fein)

Students at the Max Fein Vocational High School in Tel Aviv are used to overcoming challenges.

The school long has been known as a place where students who have fallen through the cracks in Israel's state educational system—whether due to trauma, family problems, mental health struggles or socioeconomic hardship—get an opportunity to rewrite their life trajectories. Children come from diverse backgrounds, including immigrants, refugees, and students who dropped out or were expelled from their previous schools.

But when the school was damaged by Iranian missile strikes during the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, it brought a new kind of hardship.

"In the heart of Tel Aviv, where missiles have fallen and protests flood the streets, our students are fighting personal battles just as fierce," Ofir Levy, the school principal, who spent 10 months in military combat reserve duty since Oct. 7, 2023, said at the time. "They

have been amazing about it. Because this school is more than a classroom. It's a home, a sanctuary and a second

Israel's longest-ever war may be at its end, but two years of conflict have left their mark on Max Fein.

Like others in Israel, students had to deal with personal losses, including relatives killed in the war, and frequent air raid sirens. The school came under particularly heavy fire during the Iran-Israel war because it's located right next to Israel's military headquarters in Tel Aviv. And the prolonged absence of Levy, an IDF company commander, left the school without its leader during one of the most turbulent periods in its history.

Now the school is using these challenges as an opportunity for renewal, renovating rocket-damaged areas into new creative spaces, including building a podcast and music recording studio as well as a long-awaited gym.

In this sense, the Max Fein school is a mirror of Israeli society: It took a hit, but thanks to the strength of its community it's bouncing back and rebuilding.

In November, the school inaugurated the MaxFun Center, a new space for conferences, arts and sports meant to foster creativity, culture and resilience. The center currently is hosting an exhibition of artworks by graduates that reflect the school's role as a home and creative sanctuary for students from diverse and often challenging backgrounds.

During the war, students said that having their principal in uniform—facing the same dangers as their brothers, cousins, and neighbors—brought both anxiety and pride. When Levy returned between military deployments, he reminded students that resilience was not just a lesson in their textbooks but something lived together in classrooms, bomb shelters and the front lines.

Even during missile attacks, classes moved into bomb shelters and lessons continued, turning war-related disruptions into moments of strength. When the school was struck by Iranian missiles, the building was empty because all schools in Israel were closed at the time due to the war.

"When the missiles hit, it was terrifying to think what could have happened if students had been inside," Levy said. "We walked through the rubble of a classroom that, in normal times, would have been full of teenagers. The fact that the building was empty saved lives, but it also reminded us just how fragile normalcy is. For our community, it was a wake-up call that education here is always under fire, literally, and yet that makes our mission all the more urgent."

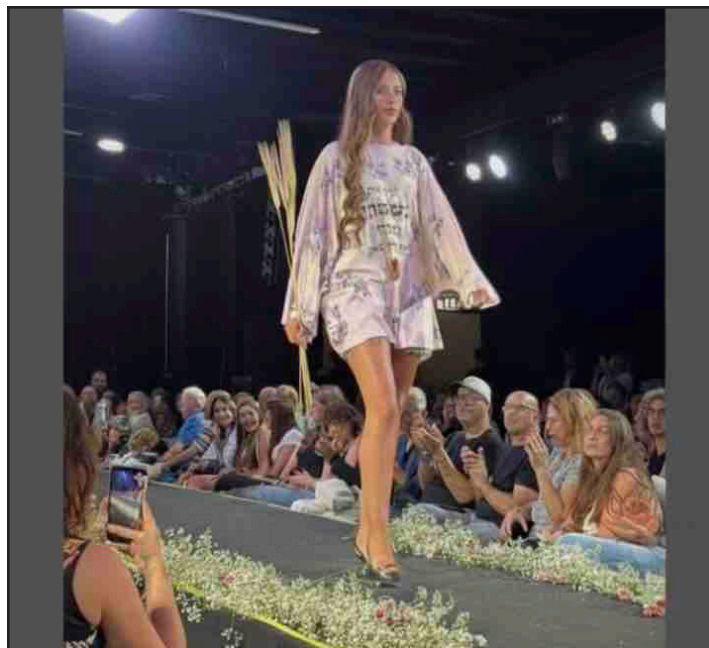
Max Fein aims to be an oasis of sorts for its 160 students, including both high school and a two-year post-high school track with courses in vocational subjects like electrical engineering, mechanics, sound production and fashion design. At Max Fein, students spend two days a week working and three in class.

The school is part of Amal, a national network of 50 schools focused on populations at the periphery of Israeli society: the disadvantaged, immigrants, Arabs, haredim and others. Traditionally positioned as a network of vocational schools, Amal has focused in recent years on helping heal Israel's societal rifts and strengthening democratic values among its more than 3,000 teachers and 26,000 students. In addition to receiving state funding, Amal relies on support from the private sector and Jewish communities around the world.

"These are not easy times in Israel," said Amal's director general, Karen Tal, an award-winning educator. "Schools like Max Fein show us what's possible: that we can be inclusive, that we can be strong, that we can build a better society, student by student. We are creating a new blueprint for Israel: one rooted in compassion, shared responsibility, and a belief that every child, no matter where they come from, deserves the tools to shape the future."

Today, Amal is Israel's most diverse high school network—geographically, demographically, and in the kinds of schools it runs. As Amal approaches its 100th anniversary year in 2028, it's aiming also to be a top-tier network for civics and science-technology education.

At Max Fein, vocational programs in electrical engineering, carpentry, and culinary arts are tied



Students at the Max Fein school study vocational subjects like electrical engineering, sound production and fashion design, spending three days a week in class and two working. (Courtesy of Amal)

directly to workplace apprenticeships.

The school's annual fashion show is both a creative and emotional outlet. When student Tamar Idan designed a garment in tribute to Liri Albag, a young Israeli taken hostage on Oct. 7 and later released, Idan wrote. "Liri radiates inner strength and courage. I chose the pansy flower to represent her: small but striking, able to bloom in hard conditions. It symbolizes both sensitivity and resilience, just like her."

Last December, 11th graders launched a campaign protesting the world's silence in the face of the sexual violence committed against Israeli women on Oct. 7, designing Barbie-themed posters and outfits.

"We wanted to give a voice to women who could no longer speak for themselves," one student explained. "Fashion was our way of shouting back and saying that silence is unforgivable."

Shir Bachar, who leads the school's fashion design track, said, "We live and teach in the thick of it. Our students absorb everything – politics, war, anxiety, confusion. And yet, somehow, they show up. That presence and togetherness are what gets us through."

The school is deeply embedded in the local community. Local high-tech companies donate time and materials to the school, and local law firms offer pro bono classes.

One of the Amal network's guiding principles is closing educational gaps between disadvantaged students and Israel's privileged.

"These are students who have been rejected by the system," Levy said. "At Max Fein, they're not only welcomed. They're celebrated."

This story was sponsored by and produced in collaboration with Amal Educational Network, an Israeli public high school network specializing in science and technology that prepares students of all social groups for the changing needs of democratic Israeli society. This article was produced by JTA's native content team.★

ELANA SZTOKMAN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.



JEREMY PIVEN

From Ari Gold to Authentic Gold— The Actor, the Comic, and the Mensch Behind the Mic

BY TANYA FEIN

Jeremy Piven is a man in motion. Known for his sharp wit, kinetic energy, and ability to fully inhabit every role he touches, he has spent over four decades performing in front of audiences who can't take their eyes off him. Whether he's sparring with Vince and the boys as Ari Gold on *Entourage*, delivering biting one-liners in *Old School*, or playing the voice of reason and practicality, often providing comic relief through his skepticism and witty one-liners in one of my favorite romantic comedies, *Serendipity*—Piven is a force to be reckoned with and manages to steal the show every time.

Now stepping onto the stand-up comedy stage with nothing but a microphone and his instincts, Piven brings the same ferocious dedication to his craft that has made him one of the most compelling performers of his generation.

But behind the bravado, there's another side to Piven—one rooted in family, theater, and a deep sense of heritage. His parents, Byrne and Joyce Piven, were legendary theater educators who co-founded the Piven Theatre Workshop in Evanston, Illinois, a creative hub that helped shape actors like siblings Joan and John Cusack, and Aidan Quinn. For Jeremy, performance isn't just a profession—it's a birthright, a language of love and storytelling passed down from his parents and grounded in Jewish cultural tradition.

Now, as he tours the country performing stand-up, Piven finds himself reconnecting with the essence of what first drew him to performance—that immediate, electric exchange between artist and audience. "There's nothing to hide behind in stand-up," he says. "It's just you, the mic, and the truth."

I recently sat down with Piven to talk about his new creative chapter, his powerful new film *The Performance*, his reflections on Jewish identity and humor, and yes—whether Ari Gold might one day pick up the phone and yell, "LLOYD!" once again.



Finding the Rhythm of Laughter

You're currently on tour doing stand-up. What can your audience expect from an evening with Jeremy Piven?

"Total enlightenment, clarity... if you're vertically challenged, you'll get taller," he jokes, his signature grin audible through his words. "I'm shot out of a cannon, I do a bit of pottery... oh wait, this is stand-up!"

Then, more seriously, he adds, "It's my job to surprise you, make you laugh, and give you pure escapism. I want people to put their phones away for an hour, be present, and just enjoy. I think that's what everyone needs right now."

Piven's stand-up act blends storytelling, observational humor, and self-deprecation. He riffs on Hollywood absurdities, fame, relationships, and the insanity of modern life—but always with a grounding in authenticity. "It's raw," he says. "I'm not playing a character. It's me up there. And that's terrifying—but also freeing. I've done every kind of performance, but stand-up? It's the purest connection I've ever felt."



Oregon Ducks First Pitch

Who were some of your comedic influences growing up—people you admired?

"I remember going to the movie theater and seeing Eddie Murphy," Piven recalls. "Imagine paying money just to watch someone's live stand-up—that's how magnetic he was. He was genuinely funny, universal, and fearless."

He pauses, reflective. "Of course, George Carlin was brilliant—so thoughtful and precise about his topics. His point of view was honest, refreshing, and unapologetic. And then there was Robin Williams. I saw him when I was a kid doing improv. He was this whirlwind—an absolute animal onstage. One of the few prolific actors who made the leap to stand-up and kept both worlds alive. He was definitely a hero of mine."

That idea—of blending acting and stand-up—feels central to Piven's current work. He brings an actor's sensitivity and timing to the stage, while the spontaneity of stand-up feeds his acting. "The two crafts feed each other," he says. "The rhythm, the connection, the listening—they're all the same muscles."

The Jewish Connection: Storytelling as Survival
We're a Jewish magazine. What is it about Jewish comedians—and Jewish culture—that makes us so funny?

"That's a great question," Piven says, leaning in. "I think it's part of our DNA. We love to tell stories. We love to make each other laugh. And we're not afraid to unpack the hard stuff. It's how we process things—through humor and conversation."

He recalls growing up immersed in Jewish community and ritual. "I remember the long services, the readings, the debates—and even as a kid, I saw how humor was woven into all of it. It wasn't just about jokes; it was about rhythm and storytelling. It was how we stayed connected."

Piven sees Jewish humor as not just entertainment, but as cultural resilience. "We're survivors," he says. "We've come through so much, and humor keeps us alive. It's how we lift each other up. It's a way of saying—we're still here. I think humor is a part of stoking our spirits and keeping us joyous and alive and it's a very needed element in our culture today."

A Family Legacy of Art and Purpose

Few actors can speak about their roots with such tenderness. The Piven family is theater royalty in Chicago, but for Jeremy, it was never about fame—it was about purpose. His late mother, Joyce Piven, was not just a teacher but a mentor to generations of actors. Her influence continues to shape him every day.

I was so sorry to hear about the passing of your mom, Joyce—who was such a pillar in the Chicago theater community. What's one piece of advice she gave you that you still carry with you?

"I can't really distill it down to one," he says softly. "She had so many. One of her big ones was: 'Endings are very important.' She also used to say, 'Whenever you get up on stage, remember—you are enough.'"



Don't doubt yourself. Don't get in your own way."

He pauses, then adds, "Those lessons were everything. She was always teaching, not in a heavy-handed way, but gently, almost spiritually. She taught me how to be present—on stage and in life."

Her words echo in *The Performance*, his latest film—a project that became both a tribute to her and a meditation on courage, identity, and art.

The Performance: Art, History, and Moral Courage

The Performance is based on a short story by legendary playwright Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*, *All My Sons*). Set in the late 1930s, it follows four struggling American dancers who accept an invitation to perform in a luxurious Berlin club—only to find themselves entangled in the darkness of Nazi Germany. Piven plays Harold May, the troupe's leader—a man navigating ambition, survival, and conscience as the world collapses around him. *Talk to me about you and your sister Shira's passion project, The Performance. What made you so determined to bring it to life?*

"My mother gave me the short story," he explains. "It was from *The New Yorker*. I read it and thought—this has to be a film. It was haunting and beautiful. But it took over 15 years to get it made. That's how much it meant to us. The film, directed by his sister Shira Piven, became a labor of love. "Working with Shira was completely natural," he says. "We grew up in the theater together. We speak the same creative language."

"I knew I had to do this film and I knew if I pulled this off that this would be something that we could all use as an example." The story's themes, he notes, are as urgent now as ever. "It's very hard to be understood these days—living in times where we get all our information from our phones—where this story can reach everyone because at its core it's about the question of how much of yourself will you compromise to become successful. It reveals, organically, the absurdity of antisemitism in a way that a podcast or an article or tweet can't. This film reaches deeper. It makes you feel something. And I think we need that more than ever."

Life After Ari Gold

For many fans, Jeremy Piven will forever be Ari Gold—the volcanic Hollywood agent with a heart buried under layers of bravado. His performance on HBO's *Entourage* earned him three Emmy Awards and a Golden Globe, and the character became a cultural touchstone for an entire generation.

Our readers will want me to ask—is there any chance of an Entourage reboot in the near future?

He laughs. "The reality is, no one knows more than I do what people are hungry for—because I'm out there on the road, talking to them every night. And people miss *Entourage*. Older fans who watched it when it aired, and a whole new generation that binged it during the pandemic—they all come up to me."

He smiles, reflective. "Those characters navigating today's world? That would be comedy gold. Where are they now? How would Ari Gold survive cancel culture? How would he handle Hollywood today? I think it could work."

He adds with a grin, "It's not up to me, obviously—otherwise I'd shave, put on a suit, and start screaming at Lloyd immediately. But I will say this: I'm a better actor now than I was then—unbeknownst to me performing my bits and impressions and improv, I never thought that would tie into acting, but because I have no rust on me—I jump on the set now completely raw and ready—so the Ari Gold 2.0 might even be better."

On Reinvention and Resilience

At 59, Piven shows no signs of slowing down. His career has spanned theater, television, and film, and now, the unpredictable world of stand-up. Each chapter, he says, has taught him something new about vulnerability and courage.

"Stand-up has humbled me," he says. "You can't fake it. You either connect or you don't. You're forced to listen, to adjust, to be honest. It's terrifying—and that's exactly why I love it."

He's equally candid about the challenges of longevity in entertainment. "You have to keep evolving," he says. "The moment you think you've arrived, you're done. You have to stay curious, stay hungry. My mom used to say, 'Keep the beginner's mind.' That's been my mantra."



Reflections on Faith, Family, and the Future

As the conversation turns personal, Piven reflects on the ways his Jewish upbringing continues to shape his worldview. "I think Judaism taught me empathy—it's about connection and responsibility. The idea that you're part of something larger, that you're accountable for how you treat people."

That compassion extends to his art. "Whether it's comedy or drama, I'm always looking for truth," he says. "That's what audiences respond to—not perfection, but honesty."

He's also passionate about encouraging younger performers to find their own voices. "My advice? Don't chase fame. Chase the work. Chase the joy. The rest will follow."

Conclusion: The Art of Being Enough

Jeremy Piven's journey—from the son of theater educators in Chicago to a Hollywood powerhouse, from the chaos of *Entourage* to the intimacy of a comedy club stage—is, at its core, about authenticity. Whether he's embodying a character, crafting a joke, or producing a film that challenges antisemitism, Piven is guided by the same principle his mother once told him: You are enough.

In an industry often driven by ego and image, that message feels radical—and profoundly Jewish. It's about honoring the past while embracing change, about finding purpose in laughter and meaning in vulnerability.

As Piven continues his stand-up tour and promotes *The Performance*, he stands as a testament to the power of resilience, reinvention, and storytelling. Beneath the celebrity persona is a performer deeply connected to his roots—and to the timeless belief that humor, truth, and courage can change hearts.

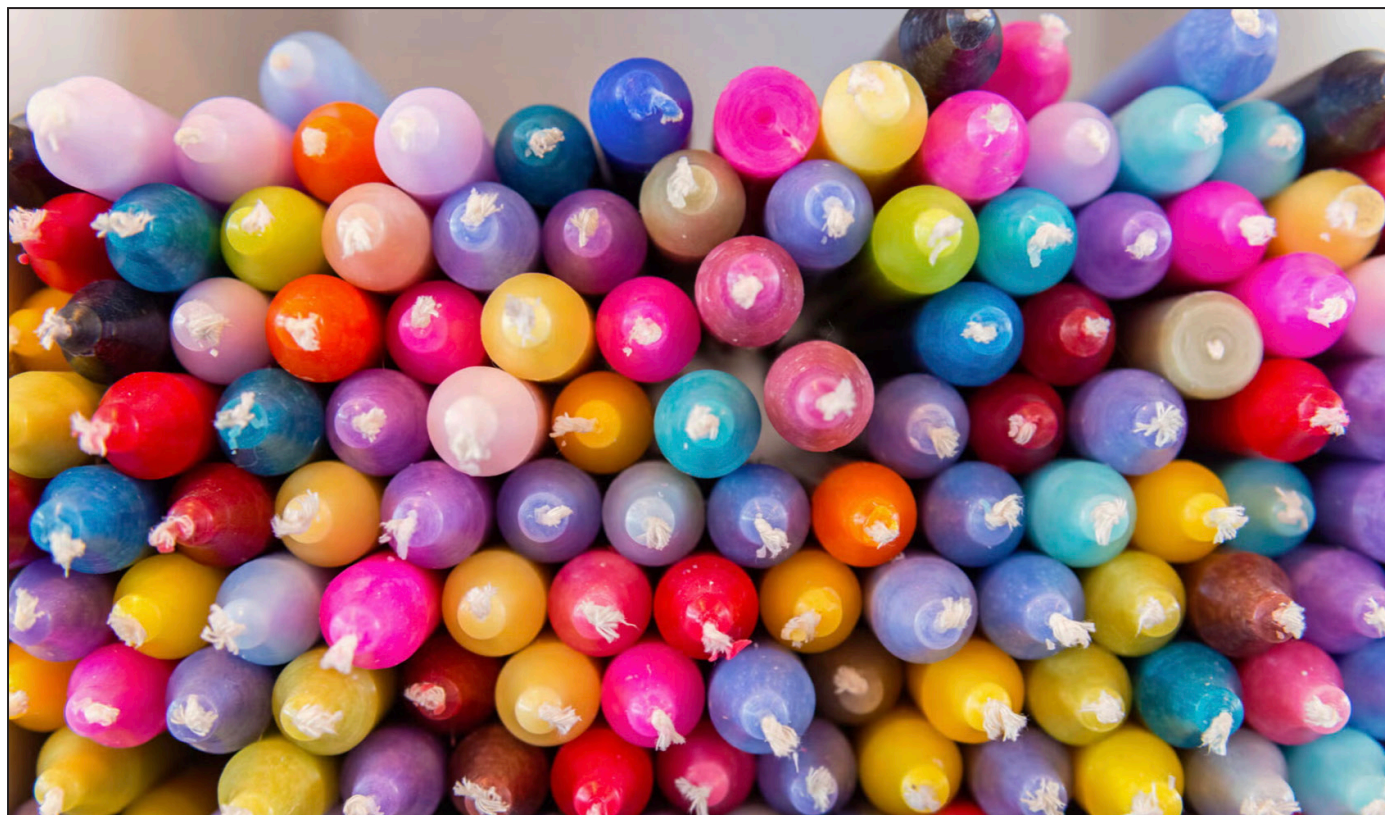
Because for Jeremy Piven, it's never just about the performance. It's about connection—the kind that leaves both artist and audience a little more alive than before. ✨

TANYA FEIN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLife MAGAZINE.

HOW MANY CANDLES ARE NEEDED FOR HANUKKAH?

Keeping your menorah lit all eight days.

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING



You need 44 candles for every menorah you plan to light over Hanukkah. On the first night, two candles are needed, one as the *shamash* and one to represent the first night. On the second night, you will need three candles, then four, and so on until the eighth night on which you will need nine candles. Added together, this is a total of 44 candles:

$$2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 = 44$$

A traditional box of Hanukkah candles should have 44 individual candles, though sometimes they are packaged in sets of 45 in case one breaks.

Your calculation may be different if you use the Sephardi system of menorah lighting. While Ashkenazi Jews use the *shamash* to light the other candles, Sephardi Jews use a separate source of fire to light all candles, including the *shamash*. This separate source need not be a candle. It could, for instance, be a lighter. But some Sephardi Jews use another candle to light. In this case, you would need more than 44 candles.

Is there any significance to the number 44? As it turns out, there is a Hasidic teaching from Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev about why we light this many

candles on Hanukkah:

On Hanukkah we light 36 candles, and the Service of Below arouses Above to light 36 lights, and 36 of Above with 36 of Below is 72, corresponding to the 72 Names of the Blessed One, and counting the *shamash* we get 44, and with corresponding 44 from Above we get 88. And the hint behind 88: "the trap broke and we were saved" (Ps. 124:7). Through the trap that was broken, the kingdom of Antiochus, we cause Below and Above to light 88 lights...

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev explains that if we exclude the *shamash*, over the course of Hanukkah we light 36 candles here on earth. Above, in the heavens, 36 more candles are lit, bringing the total to 72, which is equivalent to the number of names for the divine. Further, he says, if we include the *shamash* that is lit eight times, the number of candles is 44. When we envision that 44 parallel candles are lit in the heavens, this brings the total to 88 which, in *gematria* (the Jewish system of assigning numerical values to letters) is equivalent to the value of the Hebrew word *pach*, meaning trap. This alludes to the miracle of Hanukkah, since the Maccabees broke the trap laid by King Antiochus. ✡

COVER STORY

MICHAEL W. TWITTY

THE FAITH AND FOOD JOURNEY OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN JEW

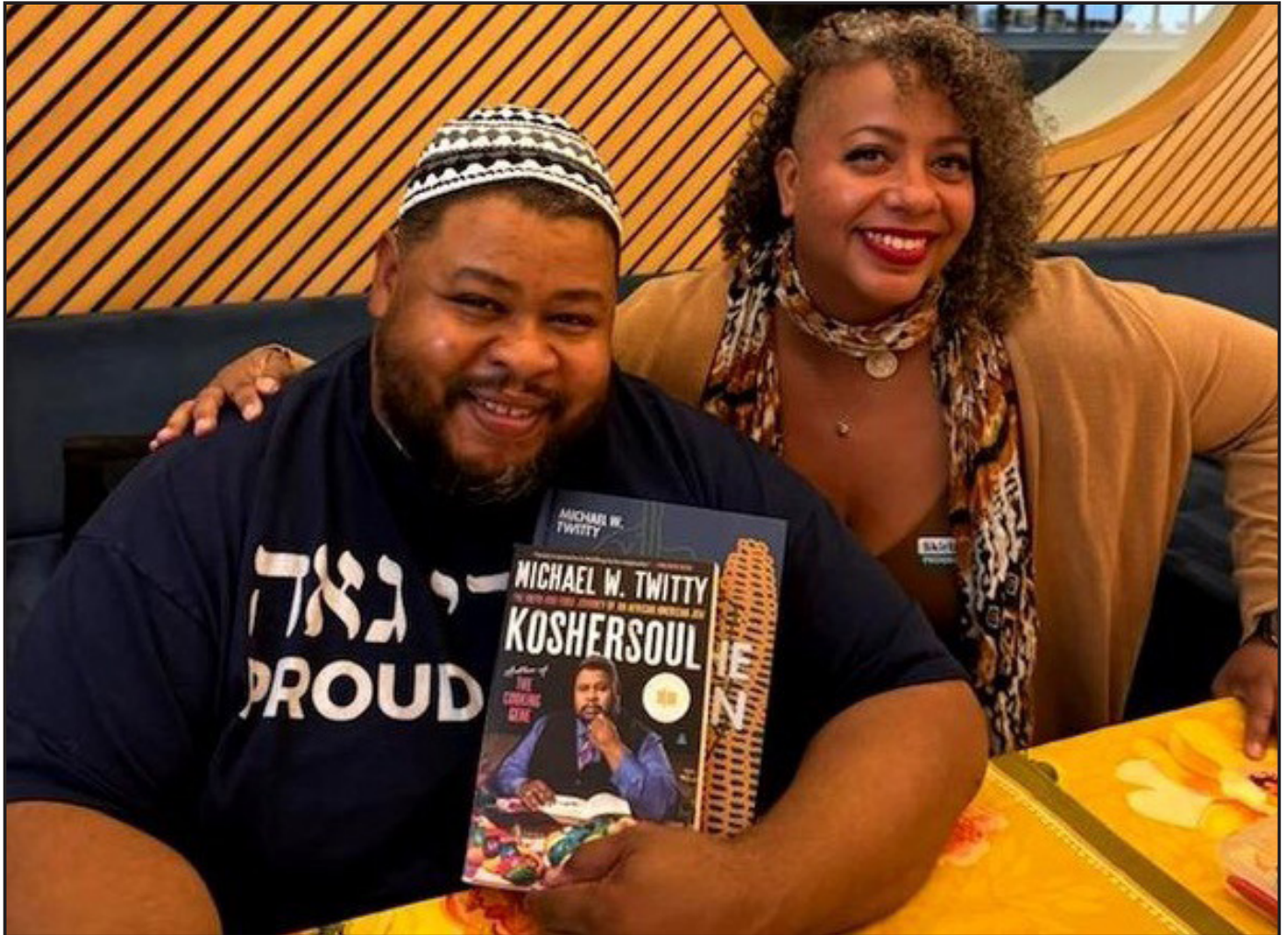
KOSHERSOUL

Author of
**THE
COOKING
GENE**



KOSHERSOUL BY MICHAEL W. TWITTY IS A LOVE LETTER TO OUR JEWISH AND BLACK COMMUNITY

BY DIANE BURR



Michael Twitty and Veronica Andersen

// This is a book about a part of Black food that's also Jewish food; this is a book about Jewish food that's also Black because it is a book about Black people who are Jewish and Jewish people who are Black", explains celebrated culinary historian, Michael W. Twitty in the preface of *Koshersoul: The Faith and Food Journey of an African American Jew*.

Twitty is an observant Jew who traces his lineage to African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Senegal. He wants us to know that Jews live and have lived on every continent for centuries and that embracing this history and today's Jewish multiracial and multicultural diversity enriches all of us.

Part biography, part memoir, Michael Twitty's intensely intimate recollections welcome us into his life, telling his story about being Black, Jewish, of

Southern Heritage and gay. He does this with elegance and humor while taking us on his journey to find the story of how food shaped his family and "how the food, produced and consumed along the way defined us, soul by soul, down to me."

Renowned as an educator as well as a chef and culinary historian, Twitty was the first African American to receive the James Beard award both for Book of the Year as well as for writing *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the South*. *Koshersoul* is the second of a trilogy where he explores food and identity. Both of the books are grounded in his lived experiences of all the ways he moves through his world with a passionate love of food and his respect for the power of its traditions.

Although how creative and luscious the recipes

in this book are, it is not a cookbook. Not even close. Rather it is primarily a collection of chapters with the heading of “mayseh” (lore or story) that appear in many forms throughout the book including conversations, letters, poetry, prayers, recollections, and heartfelt remembrances of Twitty’s many years as a religious school teacher. Twitty teaches us through a variety of references, including the words and/or writings of Martin Luther King, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, Rabbi Shais Rishon, Tema Smith, Lenny Bruce, author Joan Nathan, and numerous other thinkers, chefs, family and friends. All of this is weaved in with historical context for various foodways, including those of Western Sephardic Jews, and the influence of West and Central African and Afro-Caribbean culinary traditions.

Especially touching is the chapter “The Letter I always wanted to write” beginning with “Dear Former Students Who are LGBTQ”. Twitty reminds his former students that “loving yourself means you are *betzelem Elokim* - made in G-d’s image - as much as any other person, and that your struggles and strengths matter to our Creator”. This is expressed throughout the book: accepting and embracing one’s own identity. The fundamental need to belong, to learn about our history and traditions and redefining our concept of family especially within the Jewish community are at the heart of the book.

“*Koshersoul* exemplifies what it means to stand at the crossroads of identity,” says Veronica Andersen, Board Member and Chair of the Jewish Tapestry Book Group at Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center. “Twitty treads a razor thin line to tell a uniquely American story from both a historical and culinary lens, all while weaving in his own story and the stories of others. I only wish *Koshersoul* had been released thirty years earlier. As a teenager, I was so uncomfortable in my own skin. I think it would have taught me to embrace everything that made me different a lot sooner. This book would have changed my life!”

Throughout the book, Twitty speaks candidly about micro and macro aggressions he experienced, as well as being in spaces of belonging where he felt seen, heard,



Shonda Isom Walkowitz and Judy Leib, founders of Challah and Soul

and valued. This is mixed in with historical context for various traditional foods and how racism and privilege are often the ingredients in the making of a dish whose recipe began long ago.

“Food and storytelling are what connects us to our history and in a broad sense to understanding about the diaspora” says Shonda Isom Walkowitz, co-founder with Judi Leib of “Challah and Soul” (see insert). Twitty, she explains, takes us on a journey of discovering Jewish and African American migration and diaspora “in a way that lets us understand not only our struggles, but our strength, pride, joy, resilience and connections. We have so much to give each other and offer as a tribe. We need to have this in our Jewish community. He reminds us that we need to know that each of us belong.”

Koshersoul is a book that honors each of us whatever our identity. You don’t need to be Black or Jewish to be glad you are reading it. Twitty ends the book leaving us with the hope of future conversations that “embrace differences, celebrate similarities and connections and create new traditions that honor us all.”

In the spirit of celebrating Jewish storytelling, Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center’s Jewish Tapestry Book Group will gather for a book review and light “*Koshersoul*” snacks on Sunday January 11, at 10:30 am at the Frostig School, 971 North Altadena Drive, Pasadena 91107. All are welcome with a RSVP to noni@alumni.ucla.edu. Come as you are! ☆

CHALLAH AND SOUL

Challah and Soul was founded by Shonda Isom Walkowitz and Judi Leib, with a mission to connect Black and Jewish communities by breaking bread and sharing stories, educating, uniting and restoring allyship between Black and Jewish communities. For more information, challahandsoul.org

JEW OF COLOR INITIATIVE

The Jews of Color Initiative works to build a truly multiracial, anti-racist Jewish community in which Jews of Color can experience joy and reach their full potential and belonging as leaders and community members. For more information, thejoci.org. ☆

SGPV'S JEWISH YOUTH & PARENTS

kiddish



*Happy
Hanukkah!*

DECEMBER 2025

3 WHY IS HANUKKAH CALLED THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS?

The origins of this common name for the December holiday go back to the first century.

4 CELEBRATING THE SEASON

Bring some beauty to your holidays.

6 THE SURPRISING ORIGIN OF THE DREIDEL

The well-known Hanukkah symbol has Christmastime roots.

7 HOW TO PLAY DREIDEL



kiddish

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Why Is Hanukkah Called the Festival of Lights?

The origins of this common name for the December holiday go back to the first century.

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING

Hanukkah today is often referred to as the Festival of Lights, or *chag ha-ooreem* in Hebrew. The origins of this term are quite old, going back to the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius.

Josephus lived in Jerusalem in the first century of the Common Era. In his work *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus describes the origins of the holiday we now know as Hanukkah.

And so Judah and his fellow citizens celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the Temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasure, but everyone feasted upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and they honored G-d, and delighted themselves with psalms of praise and the playing of harps. Indeed, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs and, after so long a time, having unexpectedly regained their right to worship, that they made it a law for their posterity that they should keep a festival celebrating the restoration of their Temple worship for eight days. And from that time to this we celebrate this, which we call the Festival of Lights, because, I imagine, beyond our hopes this right was brought to light, and so this name was placed on the festival.

Josephus' account differs markedly from the common one known today, which focuses on the miracle of a tiny jar of oil lasting for eight days. It is that miracle that is normally invoked as explanation for the eight days of the festival and the eight candles of the Hanukkah menorah. But Josephus makes no mention of the miracle of the oil and speculates that the name comes from the fact that the right to worship and sacrifice again in the ancient temple was "brought to light."

Today, of course, the most prominent and best-known symbol of the holiday is the menorah—the eight-armed candelabra (nine if you count the



shamash). And it is the menorah lights that we typically think of when we call Hanukkah the Festival of Lights. Which is no surprise, given that Hanukkah typically falls around the darkest part of the year.

But the earliest source we have of this term suggested something very different. It is not the physical lights of the holiday that we are commemorating, but the restoration of the ancient temple practices that, thanks to the courage of the Maccabees, was again "brought to light." ☆

Celebrating the Season

Bring some beauty to your holidays.

BY DIANA SHABTAI, "MISSDEE" PSY.D., ATR-BC



Holiday season provides the perfect and special opportunity for families to bond with each other, focus on connecting and celebrating the season in a meaningful way with mindful special moments. With the festive and joyous winter holidays and season upon us, it's time for a little extra family connection and celebration. We can do this through fun holiday arts and crafts and special creative activities.

This time of year can tend to be a busy time, so it is especially important to pause for some self-care and time with loved ones. Art-making provides an opportunity to gather together with family and friends, and connect through creativity. It's also an opportunity to celebrate what we are thankful for, the seasons, the holidays, and old and new family traditions, and to create sweet and thoughtful gifts that you can make together as a family and for each other. Not only does it bring out the creative side of every family member, but you also get to usher

in the holiday spirit with a personal touch and decorations for your home. Winter holidays are always a wonderful time to spend with family to pause, reflect, and focus mindfully on gratitude, togetherness, and joy. Whether you are starting new traditions or simply looking to entertain the kids, activities can make these holiday seasons especially wonderful.

With so much free time during Winter break, holiday themed crafts for kids are a great way to keep kids entertained, as well as teach them important lessons. Kids love having the opportunity to get creative and working with them to create something strengthens bonds and encourages communication. Here are some ideas and inspiration for things you can create alongside your kids, family friends, and relatives. I hope this gives you inspiration to spend more lovely (and creative) quality time with your loved ones. Remember to slow down and give each other the chance to have fun and get creative with some collaborative art projects. (Note: see

images of these activity examples)

1. A lovely keepsake that kids and families enjoy making and utilizing over the holidays are festive hand painted Hanukkah cookie/treat plates and winter/holiday mugs. You would simply use enamel paints (which come with baking instructions) on a plain ceramic dish, menorah, candlestick holders, or a mug/wine glass to paint your festive holiday design on. This can be cherished, holding special memories, and used over the years. They also make fantastic unique gifts!

2. Create a Nature Collage or Nature Mandala: Nature is so healing and inspiring. Try going on a fun, explorative, and peaceful family nature walk together after or before your holiday meal and treats, to gather colorful leaves and nature elements to use for your creative crafty activities. These activities can include painting something you saw in nature (ex: trees/flowers), gluing some elements you found on a canvas/paper, laying out your circular mandala (meditative pattern design) using nature elements such as leaves/branches/flowers/feathers, etc, or making a decorative nature collage (with nature elements and stickers/decorations to add from home). You may even include painting, drawing or writing on your crafty decoration, as well.

3. Clay Family Handprint, Hamsa Mosaics, Menorahs, dreidels, and keepsakes: Clay is always a fun medium for both kids and adults to try and both of these creative examples include paint and decorative embellishments, as well. Sculpting with clay and mosaic making are relaxing, meditative, soothing and fun sensory activities. For example, the kids can make a special gift of their handprints painted in clay (air dry clay works great) and while the clay is still wet, they can decorate around the handprints by sticking in gems/mosaic pieces to make a pattern and design. Pets can participate with their paw print as well because they are part of the family, too! Cookie cutters can be used to cut ornament shapes to paint, as well. Poke one or two holes at the top of the handmade ornaments, to tie a ribbon into, once it has dried, to hang/gift. Adults, as well as the family of all ages can also participate by sculpting a shape they would like to mosaic, such as a leaf, holiday symbol, or even a little pinch pot. And there are always plain ready-made ornaments at local craft stores you can hand-paint/decorate, as well.

4. Make a fun festive family mural together, collaborative painting on canvas, personalized wrapping paper, or a tablecloth at the kids table this year. You may use clear sheet paper roll



of any light color, or tape together clear sheets of paper, markers/crayons/paint, and stickers. This can be a fun interactive and collaborative tradition to start by having everyone put their special touch of creativity on any of these choices. Maybe focusing on gratitude, family, a festive winter wonderland scene, Hanukkah, or holiday symbols, and happy memories.

5. Create family vision board, or as I like to call it, crafty collaborative collage: This is one of my favorite, personal and special, activities to do with families towards and in the New Year. Come together over the holidays to create this "crafty collaborative collage" where you can craft (with the younger kids) decorating the canvas with special symbols, keepsakes/mementos (as shown in the image), or go deeper by sharing family goals and dreams, and create this powerful tool for manifesting, motivation, and goal setting with each other. This beneficial fun activity can help a family communicate (in a creative healthy way), stay inspired, and build a strong bond. It can include using almost any medium and embellishments you like and that are representative to you and yours (mementos, cut-outs-poems, affirmations, paint/markers/decorations, etc.). A vision for the New Year!

We wish you and yours the absolute best in great health and happiness in this upcoming winter and holiday season and hope you enjoy creating fun, festive, beneficial, self-care holiday art together! We are grateful to share these activities with you and hope to inspire some holiday creativity in your homes. Keep Creating! ✨

DIANA SHABTAI "MISSDEE, PSY.D., ATR-BC IS A BOARD CERTIFIED ART THERAPIST WHO OBTAINED A MASTERS DEGREE IN CLINICAL ART THERAPY, MA IN MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPY & A DOCTORATE DEGREE IN MFT. SHE IS PASSIONATE ADVOCATE FOR BRINGING AWARENESS TO THE THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF ART. EXPERIENCE STUDYING, WORKING, & EDUCATING IN THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY & THE THERAPEUTIC ARTS FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS. SHE IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLIFE MAGAZINE.

The Surprising Origin of the Dreidel

The well-known Hanukkah symbol has Christmastime roots.

BY RABBI DAVID GOLINKIN, MY JEWISH LEARNING

The dreidel or sevivon is perhaps the most famous custom associated with Hanukkah. Indeed, various rabbis have tried to find an integral connection between the dreidel and the Hanukkah story.

One 19th-century rabbi maintained that Jews played with the dreidel in order to fool the Greeks if they were caught studying Torah, which had been outlawed. Others figured out elaborate gematriot [numerological explanations based on the fact that every Hebrew letter has a numerical equivalent] and word plays for the letters *nun, gimmel, hey, shin*. For example, *nun, gimmel, hey, shin* in gematria equals 358, which is also the numerical equivalent of *mashiach* or Messiah!

Also, the letters *nun, gimmel, hey, shin* are supposed to represent the four kingdoms that tried to destroy us [in ancient times]: N = Nebuchadnetzar = Babylon; H = Haman = Persia = Madai; G = Gog = Greece; and S = Seir = Rome.

As a matter of fact, all of these elaborate explanations were invented after the fact.

The dreidel game originally had nothing to do with Hanukkah; it has been played by various people in various languages for many centuries.

In England and Ireland there is a game called *totum* or *teetotum* that is especially popular at Christmastime. In English, this game is first mentioned as "*totum*" ca. 1500-1520. The name comes from the Latin "*totum*," which means "all." By 1720, the game was called T- *totum* or *teetotum*, and by 1801 the four letters already represented four words in English: T = Take all; H = Half; P = Put down; and N = Nothing.

Our Eastern European game of dreidel (including the letters *nun, gimmel, hey, shin*) is directly based on the German equivalent of the



totum game: N = *Nichts* = nothing; G = *Ganz* = all; H = *Halb* = half; and S = *Stell ein* = put in. In German, the spinning top was called a "*torrel*" or "*trundl*," and in Yiddish it was called a "*dreidel*," a "*fargl*," a "*varfl*" [= something thrown], "*shtel ein*" [= put in], and "*gor, gorin*" [= all].

When Hebrew was revived as a spoken language, the dreidel was called, among other names, a *sevivon*, which is the one that caught on.

Thus the dreidel game represents an irony of Jewish history. In order to celebrate the holiday of Hanukkah, which celebrates our victory over cultural assimilation, we play the dreidel game, which is an excellent example of cultural assimilation! Of course, there is a world of difference between imitating non-Jewish games and worshipping idols, but the irony remains nonetheless. ☆

RABBI DAVID GOLINKIN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.

How to Play Dreidel

BY NOAM ZION, MY JEWISH LEARNING



The Hebrew word for dreidel is *sevivon*, which, as in Yiddish, means “to turn around.” Dreidel s have four Hebrew letters on them, and they stand for the saying, *Nes gadol haya sham*, meaning A great miracle occurred there. In Israel, instead of the fourth letter *shin*, there is a *peh*, which means the saying is *Nes gadol haya po* — A great miracle occurred here.

Playing with the dreidel is a traditional Hanukkah game played in Jewish homes all over the world, and rules may vary. **Here’s how to play the basic dreidel game:**

1. Any number of people can take part.
2. Each player begins the game with an equal number of game pieces (about 10-15) such as pennies, nuts, chocolate chips, raisins, matchsticks, etc.
3. At the beginning of each round, every participant puts one game piece into the center “pot.” In addition, every time the pot is empty or has only one game piece left, every player should put one in the pot.

4. Every time it’s your turn, spin the dreidel once. Depending on the side it lands on, you give or get game pieces from the pot. For those who don’t read Hebrew, some dreidels also feature a transliteration of each letter.

a) Nun means “*nisht*” or “nothing.” The player does nothing.

b) Gimel means “*gantz*” or “everything.” The player gets everything in the pot.

c) Hey means “*halb*” or “half.” The player gets half of the pot. (If there is an odd number of pieces in the pot, the player takes half of the total plus one).

d) Shin (outside of Israel) means “*shtel*” or “put in.” *Peh* (in Israel) also means “put in.” The player adds a game piece to the pot.

5. If you find that you have no game pieces left, you are either “out” or may ask a fellow player for a “loan.”

6. When one person has won everything, that round of the game is over! ☆

NOAM ZION IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE.

COOKING JEWISH

Lifestyle

THE FRYING FRENZY

**Celebrate Hanukkah
with Pizzazz**

BY JUDY BART KANCIGOR

Turkish Doughnuts
with Rose Hip Syrup

Timing is everything in life. By 165 B.C.E. the Maccabees had been battling for three years both the Syrian-Greeks as well as Hellenized Jews, according to Phyllis Glazer and Miriyam Glazer in “The Essential Book of Jewish Festival Cooking” (HarperCollins). The Maccabees finally liberated the desecrated Temple, and as every Jewish school child knows—or as the Glazer sisters write, “as one tradition later claimed”—when they attempted to rededicate the Temple, a tiny cruse of oil meant to last a single day miraculously lasted for eight. But did you know that this first Hanukkah was actually a postponed celebration of the eight-day Sukkot holiday which they could not observe in a defiled Temple months before? And, as timing would have it, all this occurred in the month of Kislev, just at the end of the season when olives are pressed into oil? And that an ancient Jewish festival celebrating the end of the olive oil harvest had already been firmly established?

The Maccabees encouraged the celebration of this winter holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple, but “centuries later what actually happened in those days and why later generations should celebrate was no longer very clear,” the Glazers write. By less than 300 years later, the Maccabean dynasty had become corrupt, and that rededicated Temple was razed by the Romans, throwing the Jewish people into exile. The Talmud rabbis of Babylonia kept the story of the “Miracle of the Oil” alive, and we’ve been celebrating the holiday with a frying frenzy ever since.

“The Maccabees never saw a potato, much less a potato pancake,” writes rabbi and food historian Gil Marks in the “Encyclopedia of Jewish Food.” I’ll wager the Maccabees never saw a jelly doughnut either; yet *latkes* and *sufganiyot* have become the iconic Hanukkah dishes. Brought by the Spanish from South America to Europe, the

potato was considered poisonous and wasn’t considered edible for centuries until the French began cultivating it in response to the famine of the late 1700’s that followed the French Revolution.

“The *latke* as we know it took quite a culinary journey,” explains Liz Alpern in “The Gefilte Manifesto” (Flatiron Books, \$35), co-authored with Jeffrey Yoskowitz, “beginning centuries ago in Italy as a cheese fritter fried in olive oil, then moving northeast, where it morphed into a buckwheat and rye pancake, and then a turnip fritter fried in *schmaltz*. Finally, in the mid 19th century, the potato took over.”

Today we see all manner of iterations, including the root vegetable variation featured here, adding vibrant color and flavor to the dish. Preparing *latkes* for Hanukkah really connects Alpern to her Jewish roots. “While the rest of New York is feverishly buying gifts and planning big family meals, I’m quietly grating potatoes by the light of the menorah,” she writes. “All I need to do is fry up some *latkes*, and I am in the perfect holiday spirit.”

A tasty treat from Susan Feniger’s cookbook “Street: Irresistibly Crispy, Creamy, Crunchy, Spicy, Sticky, Sweet Recipes” (Clarkson Potter, \$27.50) will help you celebrate Hanukkah with pizzazz. Feniger, one-half of the *Too Hot Tamales* of Food Network fame (with Mary Sue Milliken, also her co-partner in the Border Grill restaurants) has gathered the street food she enjoyed from her years of globe-trotting travels—think fast food meets regional home cooking—into this adventurous cookbook.

Reminiscent of the *sufganiyot* Israelis enjoy for Hanukkah, her Turkish Doughnuts are quickly dipped in Rose Water Syrup and served with sour cream and Rose Hip Jam. “You can substitute any jam and purchased rosewater syrup,” she told me. “It’s the combination of the sour cream and sweetness that makes the dish.”

Feniger grew up in a reform

Jewish household in Toledo, Ohio. “We went to temple on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and I attended Saturday school, but I wasn’t brought up religious,” she said. “Our family was certainly very Jewish culturally, and Jewish culture is something I’m very drawn to. It’s about food and family and helping someone else.” The latter is evident in Feniger’s generous work with so many charities, including the Scleroderma Research Foundation. “Giving back was something they taught us. It wasn’t about a lot of money; it was about time and volunteer stuff. It’s a very Jewish thing.”

Threads of Jewish influence run through the cookbook: Romanian eggplant, flanken in her glazed short ribs, matzo candy and the za’atar spice mix she remembers from her high school days on an Israeli kibbutz. Ukrainian Spinach Dumplings were inspired by her grandmother’s *varenyky*. “I would spend Saturday night at my grandmother’s house and on Sunday watch her prepare them for the canasta ladies,” she recalled. ✨

“
... did you
know that this
first Hanukkah
was actually
a postponed
celebration of
the eight-day
Sukkot holiday
which they could
not observe in a
defiled Temple
months before?”

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.

Root Vegetable Latkes

Drain the shredded vegetables thoroughly. These are lighter and more fragile than the purely potato version, so take care when forming into *latkes* for frying.

Yield: 18 to 22 *latkes*

4 russet potatoes (about 2 pounds), peeled
1 medium parsnip, peeled
1 medium turnip, peeled
1 small onion
4 scallions, finely chopped
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1/3 cup breadcrumbs or matzo meal
Schmaltz or peanut, canola, or grapeseed oil, for frying
Apple-Pear sauce (recipe at jlifespvp.com), for serving (optional)
Sour cream

1. Shred potatoes, parsnip, turnip, and onion on large holes of box grater or in food processor using shredder plate. Transfer grated vegetables to large bowl; add cold water to cover. Let sit about 5 minutes.
2. Drape cheesecloth or clean, thin kitchen towel in empty bowl; add shredded vegetables. Wrap cheesecloth or towel around vegetables and squeeze tightly in bowl. Repeat until as much liquid as possible has been removed. White potato starch will collect at bottom of bowl. Carefully drain off water, reserving potato starch. Set aside.
3. Place drained vegetable shreds in large bowl. Add scallions, eggs, salt, pepper, flour, breadcrumbs, and reserved potato starch. Mix well, preferably using your hands.
4. In 9-inch nonstick or cast iron skillet, heat layer of schmaltz or oil, about 1/8 inch deep, over medium heat. Form *latke* batter into thin patties, using about 2 tablespoons for each. As you form patties, squeeze out and discard any excess liquid. Carefully slip patties, about 4 at a time, into pan and fry 2 to 3 minutes on each side, or until golden brown and crisp. Take care to flip them only once to avoid excess oil absorption. If pan begins to smoke, add more schmaltz or oil and heat again before frying another batch.
5. Remove *latkes*; place on baking sheet lined with paper towels to drain excess fat. *Latkes* are best and crispiest when served right away. If serving later, transfer to separate baking sheet and place in oven at 200°F to keep warm until serving. Serve hot, topped with Apple-Pear Sauce and/or sour cream.

Source: "The Gefilte Manifesto" by Jeffrey Yoskowitz and Liz Alpern

Root Vegetable Latkes



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAUREN VOLO

Turkish Doughnuts with Rose Hip Syrup

Yield: 6 servings

1 cup all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 cup whole milk
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter
4 large eggs
Canola oil, for frying
Rose Water Syrup (recipe follows)
1 cup sour cream
Rose Hip Jam, for serving (optional)

1. In small bowl, sift together flour, sugar, cardamom, cinnamon, and salt.
2. In large saucepan over medium-high heat, combine milk, butter, and 1/2 cup water. Bring to a boil; remove pan from heat, and add flour mixture all at once, stirring rapidly with wooden spoon until well combined and one solid mass. Put pan back on stove over medium heat and stir continuously 4-5 minutes until smooth. (For best texture do not shorten this step.)
3. Transfer dough to stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment. Mix on low speed 2 minutes to release some steam. With mixer on low, add eggs, one at a time, allowing each to be absorbed before adding next. Scrape with rubber spatula; mix dough a few more times. Dough will look glossy.
4. Fill deep, heavy-bottomed pot (5- to 6-inch sides work best) with oil reaching halfway up sides. Heat over medium heat 4-5 minutes until drop of dough floats immediately and deep-frying thermometer reaches 350°F. Reduce heat slightly.

(Recipe continues at jlifespvp.com) ☆

**MAKE
ME!
EASY TO
FOLLOW
RECIPE**

HOW TO CELEBRATE HANUKKAH ON A BUDGET

Enjoy the Festival of Lights without breaking the bank.

BY MY JEWISH LEARNING



Hanukkah is a joyous festival of light and miracles that falls in the darkest days of winter—at least, for those residing in the Northern Hemisphere. Hanukkah celebrations can be elaborate, but they need not break the bank.

There is only one *mitzvah* associated with Hanukkah, and that is lighting the Hanukkah candles. A box of basic Hanukkah candles can usually be acquired at a grocery store, Judaica shop, or online for a few dollars. It is lovely to have a beautiful menorah, and inexpensive disposable ones can also be acquired fairly cheaply, but in truth you can make your own or even light a row of the appropriate number of tea candles placed directly on a

The most common Hanukkah traditions outside of candle-lighting are eating *latkes* and jelly donuts and playing dreidel. *Latkes*, especially, can be made with relatively inexpensive ingredients: potatoes, oil, some

kind of binder and seasonings like salt, flour, matzah meal, and egg. But you need not make or eat *latkes*. Around the world and through time, Jews have eaten a variety of fried foods, and there is no requirement to eat any.

Likewise, a dreidel is a simple spinning top and can be acquired cheaply. You can play the game with any kind of simple marker—pennies, poker chips, jelly beans, or peanuts.

The biggest Hanukkah expense for most families usually comes in the form of gifts. Here, it is helpful to know that there is no requirement to give expensive gifts—or even give gifts at all—on Hanukkah.

Traditionally, gifts are only given on Purim and it is only in the last 150 years, and because of its proximity to Christmas, that Jews have given gifts on Hanukkah.

Hanukkah is about celebrating religious freedom. A joyful atmosphere and celebration can be engineered on any budget. ✨

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1 & 8

7:00 - 8:30 PM

The Kabbalah of Meaning
Chabad Arcadia
Arcadia Chamber of Commerce
388 W Huntington Dr
Arcadia, CA
Cost: \$129.00
CoA

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1 & 8

7:00 - 8:30 PM

The Kabbalah of Meaning
Chabad Arcadia
Arcadia Chamber of Commerce
388 W Huntington Dr
Arcadia, CA
Cost: \$129.00
CoA

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30

12:30 - 1:00 PM

**EVERY WEEK UNTIL
DECEMBER 30, 2025**

Weekly Tanya Class
Chabad of Arcadia, CoA

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30

7:00 - 8:30 PM

**EVERY WEEK UNTIL
FEBRUARY 24, 2026**

Introduction to Judaism
Temple Beth Israel of Pomona,
TBI

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

7:00 - 9:00 PM

27th Annual Jewish Book Festival
presents: Owen Lewis
On Zoom

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 11, 18 & 25

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, DECEMBER 5 & 19

10:00 - 11:30 AM

**EVERY 2 WEEKS UNTIL
DECEMBER 19, 2025**

Gan Katan -
PJ Library's Little Garden
JFSGPV

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5 & 19

6:30 - 9:30 PM

Kinder Shabbat and Main Service
Temple Beth David of the San
Gabriel Valley, TBD

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 12, 19 & 26

7:00 - 8:00 PM

**EVERY WEEK UNTIL MAY 29,
2026**

Erev Shabbat
Temple Ami Shalom
On Zoom
Temple Ami Shalom, TAS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 13, 20 & 27

10:00 AM - NOON

EVERY WEEK

Shabbat services at
Temple Ami Shalom, TAS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 13, 20 & 27

10:15 AM - 12:15 PM

EVERY WEEK

Shabbat Morning Services @ TBI
of Highland Park
TBILA

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

NOON - 2:00 PM

Jewish Ritual Art
Through the Ages
Beth Shalom of Whittier, BSW

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

9:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Bagel Breakfast - Senior Scam
Awareness with Renee Rose
Temple Beth David of the San
Gabriel Valley, TBD

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

7:30 - 9:00 PM

27th Annual Jewish Book Festival
presents: Leigh Bardugo
Pasadena Jewish Temple and
Center (Temporary Location)
500 E Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena, CA 91101

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12

7:30 - 9:30 PM

Shabbat Service
Temple Beth David
of the San Gabriel Valley, TBD

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

11:00 AM - NOON

Hanukkah Pajamakkahs Party
Vroman's Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena, CA

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

3:00 - 5:00 PM

17th Festival of Jewish Music
Temple Beth Israel of Pomona
Cost: \$12.00
JewishSGPV

Chanukah Festivals
Chabad of the Inland Empire

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16

6:30 - 9:00 PM

Rancho Cucamonga
Civic Center Courtyard

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

6:30 PM

Claremont City Hall

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

6:30 PM

Ontario Town Square
Followed by a
Menorah Car Parade, CIE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Blood Drive
Temple Beth Israel of Pomona,
TBI

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

Chabad of Arcadia
(CoA)

www.jewisharcadia.com

Chabad of Pasadena
(CoP)

www.chabadpasadena.com

Chabad of the
Inland Empire (CIE)

www.chabadinlandempire.com

Congregation Hugat
Haverim (CHH)

www.hugathaverim.com

Congregation Emanu El (CEE)

<https://emanuelsb.org/>

Jewish Federation of the
Greater San Gabriel and
Pomona Valleys (JFGSGPV)

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

Temple Beth Israel of
Highland Park and Eagle
Rock (TBILA)

www.tbila.org

Temple B'nai Emet (TBE)

<https://templebnaiemet.org>

Temple Sinai of Glendale
(TSG)

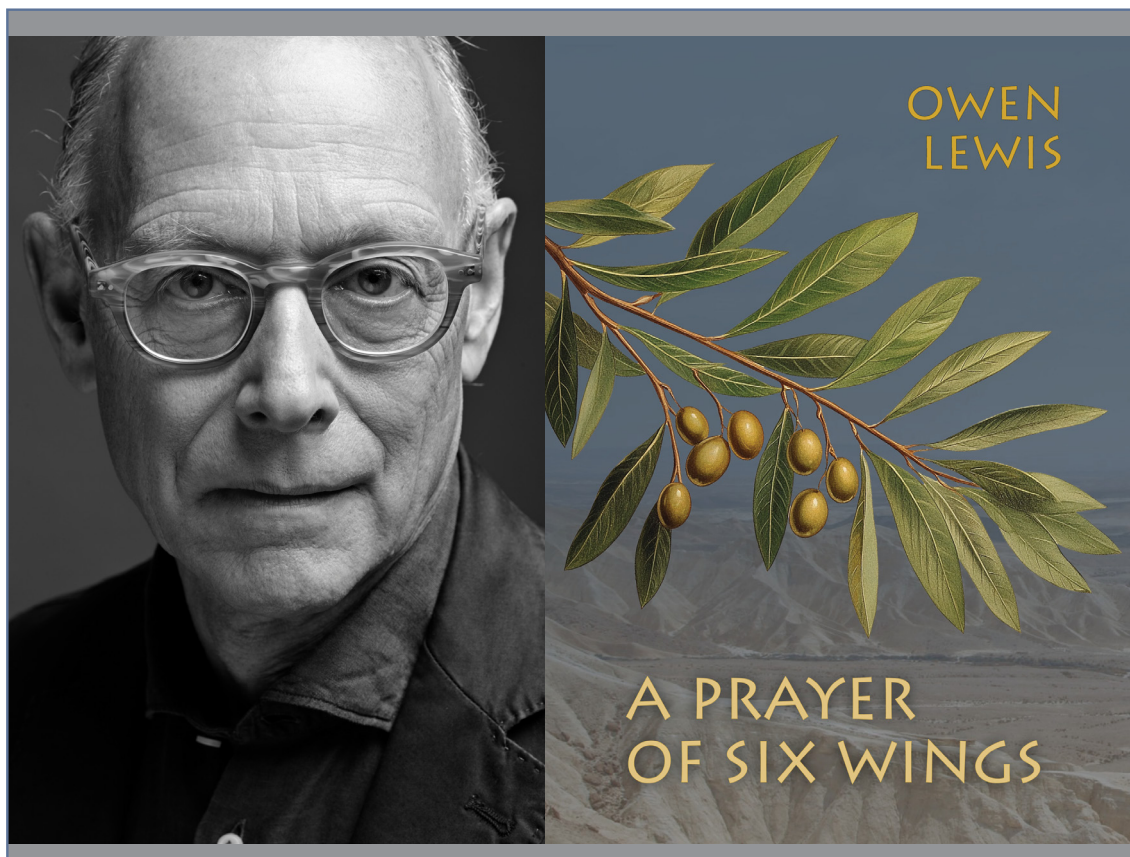
<http://temple-sinai.net>

Temple Sholom of
Ontario (TSO)

www.templesholomofontario.org

Tree of Life Preschool
(formerly TBI Preschool)
(ToL)

<https://tbipomona.org> ☆



27th Annual Jewish Book Festival presents:
Owen Lewis

A Prayer of Six Wings

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3 AT 7:00 P.M. ON ZOOM

October 7th attacks in Israel and during the following year. His poems intersperse newspaper headlines with his reactions and those of his family in Israel, as they grapple with the complex emotions so many of us share—horror at the suffering of both Israeli and Gazan victims, helplessness, dismay at the rise in antisemitism, and our desire for an elusive peace.

Owen Lewis is a psychiatry professor at Columbia University and the award-winning author of four poetry collections. He has received the E.E. Cummings Prize, the Guernsey International Poetry Prize, and the 2023 Rumi Prize for Poetry, among others. To register, visit: www.jewishsgpv.org/jbf

NEWS & JEWS

AEN Invests In UCLA's Jewish Faculty Resilience Group New Grant Reinvests Funds from 'Frankel Settlement' Back to the UCLA Campus to Combat Antisemitism and Support the Jewish Community

The Academic Engagement Network (AEN) today announced it has made a significant investment in the Jewish Faculty Resilience Group (JFRG) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). AEN's \$25,000 grant to JFRG will go toward increasing its staff capacity with new hires, creating educational programming for the 2025-2026 academic year, and engaging others committed to combating campus antisemitism in the UC system.

In August 2025, AEN was among eight nonprofit organizations that received a portion of a \$2.33 million contribution from the University of California, part of a settlement with UCLA over allegations of antisemitism on its campus that occurred in the spring of 2024. AEN is committed to reinvesting the funds it has received from the settlement back into projects and activities aimed at improving the campus climate and supporting the Jewish and Zionist community at UCLA. Further AEN grants to UCLA for these purposes will be made in the coming year.

JFRG is one of the more than 40 faculty groups AEN is supporting through its Faculty Against Antisemitism Movement (FAAM) initiative. AEN has provided JFRG with smaller grants in the past through its microgrants program, which have been used to support the group's educational programming on campus. JFRG is a non-partisan coalition of Jewish and allied faculty, researchers, and staff, founded and spearheaded by AEN faculty members, committed to combating antisemitism, defending academic freedom, and building Jewish resilience in higher education.

"At AEN, we continue to prioritize empowering faculty leaders who are working tirelessly to combat antisemitism and strengthen open, inclusive discourse on campuses across the country," said Miriam Elman, Executive Director of AEN. "Faculty groups like UCLA's Jewish Faculty Resilience Group exemplify how scholars can lead the way in building academic environments where Jewish and Zionist identities are respected and all voices are welcome. We're proud to reinvest these 'Frankel Settlement' funds back into such an important initiative at UCLA, and we look forward to seeing the lasting impact of the faculty's work across the UC system and beyond."

"The Jewish Faculty Resilience Group at UCLA is deeply grateful to the Academic Engagement Network for this generous \$25,000 grant," said Dr. Kira Stein, Founder and Chair of the Jewish Faculty Resilience Group at UCLA. "What makes this gift especially meaningful is that AEN



**Joe Bruin: official mascot of UCLA -
University of California, Los Angeles**

reached out to recognize our work at UCLA and our need for greater community support. That gesture of partnership is both touching and significant, reflecting AEN's integrity, empathy, and commitment to strengthening Jewish faculty and Jewish life on campus. We are honored to stand alongside AEN in shared purpose in the fight for academic integrity and balance in higher education."

In addition to UCLA's JFRG, AEN members across the country have launched numerous groups to publicly speak out against antisemitism and anti-Israel bias, to mentor students, advise university administrators, and host educational programming. Examples include: UIUC's Faculty for Academic Freedom and Against Antisemitism; Columbia's Jewish Faculty and Staff Supporting Israel; George Washington University Faculty and Staff Against Antisemitism and Hate; California State University at Northridge's Matadors Against Antisemitism; and Indiana University's Faculty and Staff for Israel.

AEN engages, educates, and empowers faculty on nearly 350 campuses nationwide who combat antisemitism, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel. Its Faculty Against Antisemitism Movement (FAAM), launched after October 7th, has galvanized AEN faculty members, as well as other academics who choose to get involved, to stand against antisemitism, the denigration of Jewish identity, and anti-Israel bias on their campuses and to collectively urge university leaders to take appropriate action. More than 25,000 professors across the country have become active in FAAM over the last year.

AEN faculty members at UPenn, UCLA, Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Dartmouth, UC Berkeley, the University of Cincinnati, and MIT have also organized faculty solidarity and educational missions to Israel. By networking faculty and sharing materials and best practices, AEN hopes to empower many more of these faculty groups and missions to sprout up across the country.

#

AEN is a national organization that mobilizes networks of university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel. More at <https://academicengagement.org/> and <https://www.facultyagainstantisemitism.org/>. ✨

LAST WORD

*From our family
to yours,
Happy Hanukkah!*



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