

# Jlife

SGPV JEWISH LIFE

December 2022  
Kislev/ Tevet 5783



**THE JEWISH  
STATE OF AFFAIRS**  
An interview with  
former Israeli  
Prime Minister  
Ehud Olmert

**KOOLULAM**  
Social Musical  
Initiaive from  
Israel Comes  
to Los Angeles

**“HANUKKAH  
ON RYE”**  
Hallmark’s New  
Hanukkah Movie

**THE HANUKKAH ISSUE**

GOT KIDS?  
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**kiddish**



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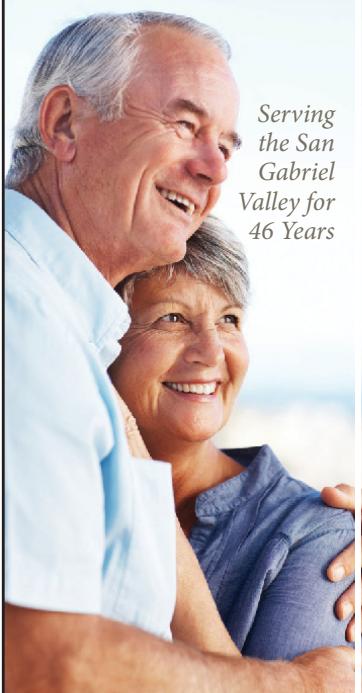
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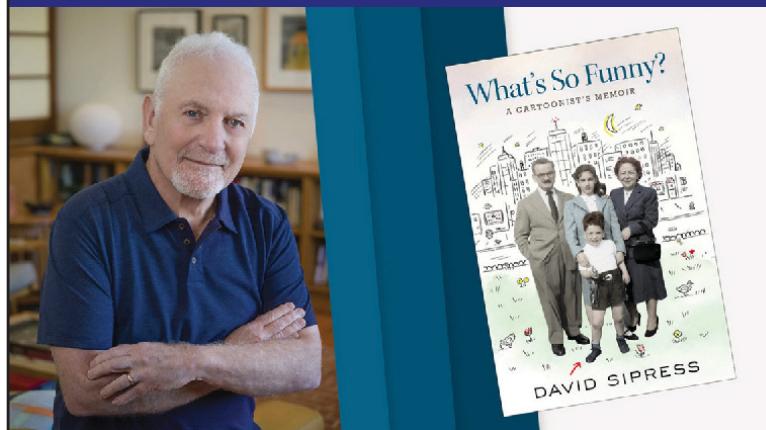
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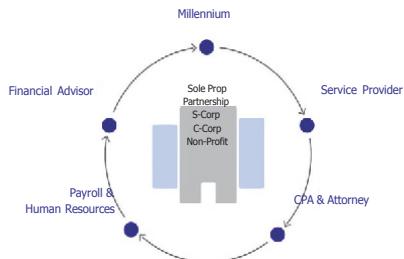


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# COUNTERING HATE WITH JEWISH PRIDE

## My list of Almost 100 Things I Love Most about Being Jewish

I know that the prevalence and incidents of antisemitism, we are witnessing has caught many of us off-guard and with a feeling of helplessness as we are being hit with it from all sides.

With comments made by politicians and celebrities, along with what feels like a new set of despicable flyers thrown on driveways each week throughout our community, it is hard not to feel uneasy about showing our Jewish pride.

Instead of focusing this month's column on these incidents, I have decided to take a different approach and celebrate what I love about being Jewish. This is something that I saw Michael Twitty—an African American Jew who is a culinary historian, educator and writer, who recently published "Koshersoul" and "The Cooking Gene"—had posted on Twitter earlier this year.

He decided to highlight the 50 things he loves most about being Jewish. And last month, on Kveller, a wonderful website that covers Jewish culture, Jaime Herndon, wrote an article she titled "100+ Things To Love About Being Jewish." (We have included Herndon's article on page 10).

Each wanted to celebrate Judaism in light of the hatred toward the Jewish community.

Inspired by these two, I have put together my own list that I am calling "My Almost 100 Things I Love Most About Being Jewish." I had a little fun and even posted a Facebook poll and asked my friends to share their ideas. Some have made it onto this list, which is organized in no particular order:

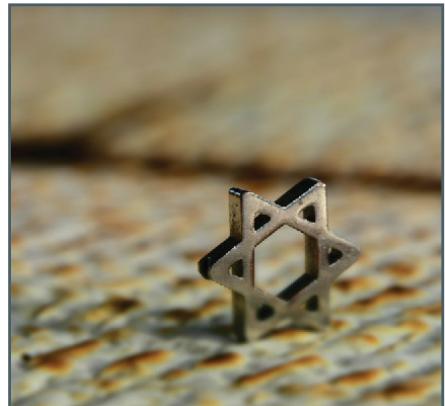
Playing Jewish geography; Rick Recht; Shabbat Oneg (a more festive dessert party); Radio Hanukkah on Sirius XM radio; "Wherever you go, there's always someone Jewish"; Havdallah; Camp song sessions; Mel Brooks; Jewish comedy; "Fiddler on the Roof"; Torah; Pirkei Avot; Steven Windmueller's insight; Israel; Passover seders with family and friends;

feeling an instant connection when finding out someone else is Jewish; chocolate Babka; matzo ball soup; matzo brei; kugel; latkes (with sour cream and sugar); Jelly doughnuts.

Also spinning a dreidel upside down on Hanukkah; *Vehavta* (to me it embodies all we are supposed to do as Jews); *nigguns* (wordless melodies); Doug Cotler's "Listen"; Bim Bam; PJ Library; PJ Library; PJ Library (I think this program is revolutionizing the Jewish community); Jewish Federations; youth groups; Shabbaton/shabbat retreats; camp style of *Birkat Hamazon* (blessings after the meal); our history; Jewish debates; Debbie Friedman; the Maccabeats; Six13; "I have a little dreidel"; Wearing a kippah and being stopped by people with questions (including at the airport).

The *Shehecheyanu* (the prayer that provides us the opportunity to appreciate and mark special moments); Hearing Yiddish words in everyday conversations; going to the movies and eating Chinese food on Dec. 25; *Tikkun Olam*; Apricot or cherry Hamantaschen; Purim; "May their name forever be a blessing" (words offered to the family of those who have passed away); *Kol Nidre* (both the service and the prayer); the concept of Repentance/teshuvah; a perfectly toasted everything bagel with lox shmear; those gummy Passover fruit candy slices; Jewish summer camp; Sunday School; Noah Ben Shea's "Jacob the Baker" (if you have never read it, please do); Birthright Israel; Debbie Friedman's "Mi Sheberach melody" (the special healing blessing); seeing a counter or table full of menorahs on the 6th, 7th and 8th night of Hanukkah.

"The Frisco Kid" (great movie with Gene Wilder as a rabbi and Harrison Ford as a bank robber who befriends him); the increased focus on greater inclusion within the Jewish community; creating opportunities for people to see and feel the beauty of Judaism; *Ga-Ga*; *Tzedakah*; *Mitzvot*; listening to a good sermon; my rabbi.



High Holy Day services; making Judaism relevant in my work; Jewish cooking; memories of past holiday celebrations with family and friends; my family; the smell of freshly baked challah; hearing Hebrew; the Jewish ideal that we are all *B'ztelel Elohim* (created in the image of G-d).

Biting into a good brisket; going outside to see if there are three stars in the sky (this signifies that a holiday is over); prayer; Hillel (both the Rabbi and the college organization); knowing that the Great American Songbook was primarily written by Jews; Broadway; Danny Kaye; love that science and Torah are not mutually exclusive; Jews feel a moral obligation to stand with those who are suffering; chopped liver on rye; bar/bat mitzvahs; seeing a Star of David and feeling an instant connection; community; *Rugrats* Hanukkah and Passover; Purim carnivals and costume parades; the Priestly Benediction; feeling a connection to something that is larger than me; Jewish friends; rugelach; Sam Glaser's music; Joel Ben Izzy's storytelling; stories from Chelm.

I hope that seeing my list got you thinking about your own list and gave you a feeling of Jewish pride. I would love to see what made your list. Please share it with me by emailing me at [jmoss@jewishsgpv.org](mailto:jmoss@jewishsgpv.org). ✡



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

“The heart of the celebration of Novi Gud lies in a big family meal on the night of December 31.”

# THE RUSSIAN JEWISH HOLIDAY

## Novi Gud Meal is Heart of Observance

BY TEDDY WEINBERGER

For Americans trying to understand why *Novi Gud* (“New Year”), is so special to hundreds of thousands of Russian Israelis, they must first realize that it should not be confused with the New Year’s holiday. Though both celebrate the end of one calendar year and the beginning of another, *Novi Gud* plays a truly exceptional part in Russian culture.

Tal (originally Vitaly) Paperim, who grew up in Kyiv and made aliyah with his family at the age of 9 in 1991, put it this way: “If you would take all of the Jewish holidays together and somehow substitute just one holiday for all of them, that is what you have with *Novi Gud*. It is not a holiday in Russia but the holiday.”

The heart of the celebration of *Novi Gud* lies in a big family meal on the night of December 31. Tal explains: “Historically speaking, in the Soviet Union families were spread all over. For many families, *Novi Gud* was the one time during the course of the entire year that they would all see each other.”

Does Tal celebrate *Novi Gud*? “Of course I do. I was born in the Soviet Union and it’s part of the culture.”

Tal, who became religious at the age of 15, admits that he celebrates *Novi Gud* now mostly out of respect for his parents and grandparents: “After all,” he says, “in Israel, there are many different Jewish holidays to celebrate; plus, every single week on Shabbat there is an opportunity for a family gathering and meal.”

The *Novi Gud* meal lasts for hours and hours. Caviar as well as various salads (cold and hot) are key features of the meal; a classic is called “herring in a fur coat” (a pickled-herring salad layered with grated vegetables, mayonnaise, and hard-boiled eggs). And then there is the



Traditional Georgian cuisine background. Khinkali, phali, chahokhbili, lobio, cheese and eggplant rolls.

traditional countdown to the New Year, the popping of champagne, and the opening of gifts.

My friend Alex, who is from Moldova and made aliyah in 1998 at the age of 19, is also fond of *Novi Gud*, saying that “it reminds you of your childhood and touches your heart,” but he points out that *Novi Gud* is tied to snow and winter and so “it’s hard to experience the holiday here.”

Perhaps because he does not have a family and children to introduce the holiday to, Alex says that he finds that his enthusiasm for *Novi Gud* is waning: “For 20 years I would decorate, I would invite friends, but how long can you make the tradition last?”

When I asked Jana (who grew up in St. Petersburg and made aliyah in 2001 at the age of 19) if she celebrates *Novi Gud* in Israel, she said: “Clearly—it’s the holiday of our childhood. There is no more important holiday than *Novi Gud*; in Russia it was even more

important than your birthday.” Jana always makes sure to have a nicely decorated tree for *Novi Gud*; under the tree, Jana places identically-wrapped gifts for her family.

Though *Novi Gud* trees at the end of December will inevitably remind Americans of a very different winter holiday, from a Jewish Zionist perspective, a Russian Israeli who celebrates *Novi Gud* is, as Tal points out (his wife is American) akin to an American Israeli who celebrates Thanksgiving.

If that is not enough to assuage your reservations about Jana’s *Novi Gud* tree, the following will: While the fertility rate for Russia is currently about 1.822 births per woman, Jana and her husband Oleg have four children. Happy *Novi Gud*! ♣

**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.

# L'CHAIM

## Meet the bartender behind New York's new Hanukkah-themed cocktail bar

BY JULIA GERGELY, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)

**D**uring the so-called "winter holiday season," Christmas cheer takes center stage, while Hanukkah gets relegated to hobbled-together end caps at grocery stores (if that).

This is something that's long irked Naomi Levy, a 36-year-old Jewish bartender who lives in Boston. There, as in New York, Christmas-themed pop-up bars appear all over the city—leaving Levy feeling like a "tourist," she said, in her hometown.

But instead of bah-humbugging the situation, Levy took action: In 2018, she opened the Maccabee Bar, a Hanukkah-themed pop-up in Boston. Now in its fifth year, the cocktail bar, open only in December, serves drinks like the Latke Sour (apple brandy, potato, lemon, egg white, bitters) and an Everything Bagel Martini ("everything" spiced gin, tomato water, dill, vermouth), as well Jewish- and Hanukkah-adjacent small bites, such as latkes, *sufganiyot* and Bamba.

And now, for the first time, the Maccabee Bar is expanding to New York.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

**New York Jewish Week:** What was the inspiration behind starting a Hanukkah-themed bar?

**Naomi Levy:** I really love the holiday season and for many, many years I ran a bar called Eastern Standard in Boston. We were open all the time, so I worked every Christmas. I always really loved the holiday spirit and started seeing a lot more of these Christmas-themed bars popping up. But as much as I love all of the festivities this time of year, I also feel very much like a tourist because I don't celebrate Christmas. I wondered what would happen if I created a pop-up bar that was completely dedicated to Hanukkah. Luckily, I had just opened at a new bar and the ownership was amenable to trying stuff out. We gave it a go and it was absolutely incredible. The turnout was amazing. People were so excited—I've never been called a "mensch" for making a cocktail before. I realized, "Oh my gosh, it's not just me that had that feeling this time this year." There's a group of people that are underrepresented and would love to really feel like they get to get into this festive time of year just as much as everyone else. It's been really exciting to watch it grow and just to be able to bring my culture and bring something fun to the community.

**NYJW:** What are you most excited about in bringing the energy of Maccabee Bar to New York?

**NL:** I just really hope to provide a place where people get to celebrate and not in the same way that they already have access to.

We're starting with one location in New York, but in Boston we have two locations because the demand



After four successful years in Boston, bartender Naomi Levy is expanding her Hanukkah themed pop-up bar to New York. (Carlie Febo)

has just been that high. We now have Maccabee regulars [in Boston]. Last year, I had a customer who said, "My mom told me to come to this!" I just thought, how cool is it that we're a bar that your mom's telling you to go to?

**NYJW:** Tell me a little bit about the cocktails and how you make them Hanukkah-themed.

**NL:** My cocktail style in general tends to be pretty culinary. I tend to get inspiration from food and food flavors, which is perfect for a Hanukkah menu since there are so many delicious foods that we eat. The Latke Sour is obviously inspired by latkes. Then we have the Hebrew Hammer, which is inspired by *sufganiyot*. We make a leavened sugar, which is basically a yeasted simple syrup, to give you that kind of yeasty sensation of a doughnut, but it's actually a really nice dry, sour cocktail.

To me, it's also really important to showcase flavors from different aspects of the Jewish diaspora as well. I am Ashkenazi, but it's really important to me to also showcase Sephardic flavors. So we have a drink that is called Ocho Candelika, which is actually the name of a song in Ladino that is all about the celebration of oil. So we do an olive oil-infused gin with a little honey, almond, apricot and lemon for some of those more classic Spanish and Sephardic flavors. There's a drink this year that's inspired by Ethiopian *Sanbat Wat* [a spicy chicken stew typically made on Shabbat] with berbere spice in it.

Then there will be all sorts of fun things, ranging from a hot drink that has a syrup in it that is kind of *tzimmes*-inspired and a flip that's *rugelach*-inspired. So it will be both very, very Hanukkah-associated things but also just some wider Jewish flavors.

*The Maccabee Bar will be at Ollie, 64 Downing Street, beginning Tuesday Dec. 13 through Saturday, Dec. 31. ♦*

**JULIA GERGELY** IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

# SO MUCH TO CELEBRATE

## One hundred-plus Things To Love About Being Jewish

BY JAIME HERNDON, KVELLER

Ever since the High Holiday season, it feels like antisemitism is coming from all sides. Logging on to social media can be anxiety-producing. Repeatedly seeing images of antisemitic flyers and signs that are popping up all over our country is exhausting. Educating friends, co-workers, even family members is important, but it can also start to feel like we are defining ourselves and discussing things only when something bad happens.

It's also important to embrace Jewish joy.

Jewish joy is the things we love about being Jewish, the fun stuff, the inside jokes you might have with camp friends or synagogue buddies. The foods you see in the supermarket and smile to yourself because of the memories they bring. Especially in challenging times, remembering all of the things we love about being Jewish is crucial.

Earlier this year, Michael Twitty, author of "The Cooking Gene" and "Koshersoul," tweeted 50 things he loved about being Jewish, urging us to remember we aren't just our intergenerational traumas and news stories. I remembered his tweets recently, and was inspired to make my own list, some of which are things he also mentioned. (And if you haven't read his books, especially "Koshersoul," run—don't walk—to the nearest bookstore and pick them up.)

These are some of the things I love about being Jewish. What about you?

Black and whites. The *Mi Sheberach*. The smell of freshly baked challah on Friday afternoons. *Hamsa* necklaces. Playing Jewish geography. The monthly *Rosh Chodesh* group my friends just formed. My son's excitement over picking which *kippah* to wear every Friday. Quibbling over who makes better babka, Green's or Zabar's. Rainbow challah for *Parashat Noach*. Ben Yehuda Street. The perma-smell of oil in the house during Hanukkah. Debbie Friedman. The Maccabeats. Falafel. Bissli. Bamba. "Shalom Sesame" and "Rechov Sumsum." Michael Aloni, Lior Raz... basically the entire cast of "Fauda." The concept of *teshuva*. Vashti, Lilith, Naamah. The experience of climbing Masada at sunrise, after waiting more than 15 years to do so. Michael Twitty's writing. The endless debating about anything and everything. The way my son looks when he's helping to lead the congregation in the song "Romemu" on Friday nights. Wearing Ariel Tidhar jewelry. The muscle memory of prayers that I haven't said in 20-plus years instantly coming back to



me. Matzah ball soup, with lots of salt and pepper. Kosher-for-Passover chocolate chip loaf from the bakery. *Tsfat*. The moment in the song "BaShana Haba'ah" where they sing "nodedot" and everyone shouts "YES THEY DO!" Hebrew name jewelry. The Israeli sandals, Naot. Amos Oz. Lavie Tidhar. The fact that my synagogue does proneg, snacks and wine before Friday night services. Saturday Kiddush lunches. Following @therealeli7designs on Instagram. Our insistence on remembering those who have passed. The upsherin. The word "balabusta." *Mimouna*, the Moroccan Jewish festival. The concept of a *bashert*. "Sabbath Prayer" from "Fiddler." The *Shehecheyanu* blessing. Giving *tzedakah*. The "Sammy the Spider" books about every Jewish holiday. Israeli dancing. Those Sunkist fruit gems that seem to only exist for the sole purpose of being thrown at bar mitzvahs. Never eating apples and honey except on Rosh Hashanah and then always wondering why I don't do it more often. Rabbi Creditor's song "Olam Chesed Yibaneh." The increasing brightness of the menorah over the course of Hanukkah. *Hakafot* on *Simchat Torah*. *Hava Nagila*. Making s'mores on *Lag B'Omer*. The Jewish amulets that @RabbaeJewels makes. PJ Library. The increasing inclusion in so many synagogues (though we still have a long way to go). The custom of saying "May their memory be for a blessing." The dark humor that has enabled us to survive. Sprinkling Yiddish words into conversation like "balagan," "meshugganah" and "plotz." Memories of playing Gaga during recess at day school. Trader Joe's latkes. Bubbes who treat everyone like their own grandchildren. The experience of going to the Kotel, and upon putting my forehead to the wall, being overcome by tears. The joy and

dancing when we sing *Mizmor L'David* on Friday nights. The way my rabbis and cantor have embraced my son. Women of the Wall. Chai Flicks. "Shtisel." Kasha and bowties. Jewish sci-fi and fantasy. The embraced chaos of Purim. "Pizza in the Hut" during Sukkot. Changing the Torah covers to white for the High Holidays. Salted butter slathered thick onto matzah. Chinese food on Christmas. The sound of Hebrew school kids singing Debbie Friedman's *Havdalah* blessing on Sundays. The way we show up for each other. The plethora of opinions and social justice activists that are helping to make the world a better place. Cherry hamantaschen. Intersectional Torah studies. Cheesecake on Shavuot and the late night study session. The beauty and sanctity of the *mikvah*. Letting Elijah in during the seder. "The Adventures of K'Tonton." The calligraphy of a Torah. The feminist reconnecting with Kabbalah and other spiritual practices of Judaism. The reckoning of Elul. Seeing all the different menorahs people post on social media during Hanukkah. The endless kugel debate about sweet vs savory. Halva. The inclusivity of "rise in body or spirit" during services. What my cantor said after I explained that my son didn't know the words to the songs and that it's hard for him to sing sometimes because of his apraxia: "I think dancing and clapping is a beautiful expression of prayer." The



creative ways that some people style their head scarves. Seeing people walking to synagogue. The sound of little kids singing Jewish holiday songs. *Niggunim* (wordless songs) that bring you to tears. Red string bracelets you buy near the Kotel. *Daf Yomi* cycles. Hillel bagel brunches in college. More inclusion as to who can wear *kippahs*, *tallits* and *tefillin*. Headband Nation. All the great Jewish middle-grade and YA books being published. The blessing of the children. Lighting the candles on Friday night and feeling my shoulders drop after the stress of the week. *Shalom Aleichem* at the end of services on Friday night. Delivering *mishloach manot* to friends and neighbors on Purim.

Our resilience.  
Our resilience.  
Our resilience.  
Our resilience.  
Our joy, because joy is also a form of resistance. ☺

JAIME HERNDON IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO KVELLER AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

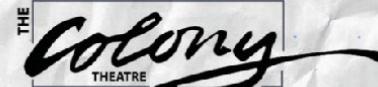


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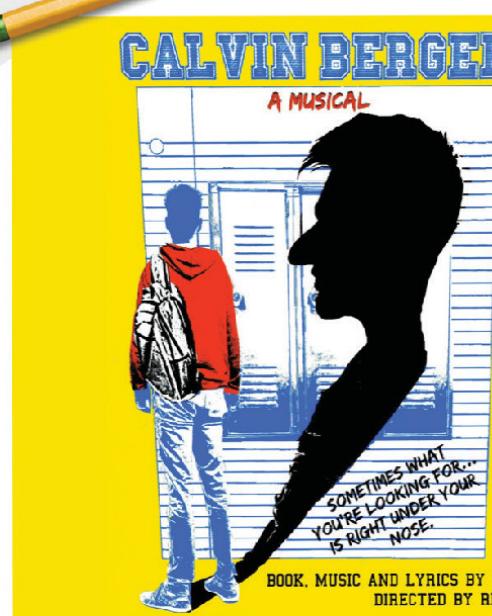
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**FEBRUARY 18 - MARCH 26, 2023**

# KOOLULAM

**The groundbreaking social musical initiative from Israel comes to Los Angeles.**

BY ELAD MASSURI



Just before the American holiday season reaches a peak, between Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's, it's the perfect time to take in one of this winter's most interesting shows. Koolulam, a groundbreaking social musical initiative from Israel, will be staging a single performance at the Saban Theater, Beverly Hills on Thursday, December 15, 2022 at 7:00 pm. Koolulam aims to generate social change by connecting people through the universal language of music. The Koolulam team specializes in bringing together large audiences from different backgrounds to enjoy a unique experience.

Indeed, the audience plays an active role in the performance: they sing, dance, and enjoy a one-of-a-kind sound and light performance. The aim is to harness the power of musical harmony to create harmony in humanity.

In Israel, Koolulam is already famous: the organization has staged hundreds of performances throughout the country in cooperation with many Israeli musicians.

Koolulam's events are professionally recorded and filmed, and the footage is used to make remarkable clips that have gone viral on social media networks. These clips combine a musical experience with a social message, commenting on important issues and connecting diverse communities. The initiative first conquered the Israeli mainstream in 2018 with a special

to celebrate the 70th birthday of the State of Israel. All 12,000 participants, including singer Shlomi Shabbat and then President of Israel Reuven Rivlin, sang Naomi Shemer's classic song *"Al Kol Eleh"* (For All These Things).

So how does it work? Most audience members are regular people: they have no professional musical background and simply want to experience something a bit different. The audience is divided into groups that will sing the different harmonies of a famous song with an important message. Professional conductors quickly teach the groups their parts. Afterwards, everyone gathers together to practice and eventually perform the song. The result is no less than amazing.

Koolulam was founded by Or Taicher, the artistic and creative director, Michal Shahaf, the organization's CEO, and Ben Yaffet, its principal conductor, musical director, and content creator. In recent months Koolulam has been touring the US, France, Canada, and Switzerland. In a special telephone interview, the trio told me how different audiences around the world reacted to the initiative.

**Elad Massuri: Where does the name Koolulam come from?**  
**Koolulam:** "When we established Koolulam, we decided that we wanted to create a new cultural and social language. We looked for a word that doesn't exist in any language. The inspiration for the name comes from the famous Koolulu—ululations that in Judaism express great joy, for example at celebrations and weddings. By contrast, in Islamic culture the same ululations are a call



for mourning; they are mainly heard at funerals. This gap between something that expresses joy in Jewish culture and such great sadness for others constitutes a bridge connecting the two cultures."

**E.M.: How was the idea for Koolulam born?**

**Koolulam:** "It was in 2016—at the time I was working as an advertising and cinema director. I noticed that the social dialogue in Israel and in the world had become very intransigent and violent, less patient and tolerant. At the same time, I remember seeing a short film that showed thousands of people standing at the Kotel in Jerusalem in the week before Yom Kippur, praying and reciting *selichot*. They sang the song 'Hatana lefanekha,' and it was really moving. I thought to myself, 'Wow, how can it be that while the dialogue in the streets, in the news, and in the media is so violent and aggressive, here are 100,000 people without any divides—men, women, black and white, religious and secular—everyone singing together in crazy harmony?' Apparently, the verbal aggression and divisions can disappear and turn into unity when everyone stands together praying for hope. I remember asking myself whether this prayer could also be a social prayer. In other words, can we take this thing and instead of praying bring together thousands of people from all kinds of communities and sectors with different backgrounds and simply teach them to sing, because music connects worlds, it's an international language. So, let's give them a good song, record and film them, and produce a clip as a message to make the world a better place.

"Coming from the world of music, I knew that I needed a musical genius. At first, people told me that it would never work, that I won't be able to teach people with no musical knowledge and abilities to sing different harmonies. But then I met Ben, who studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Music. He's a pianist and he also learned conducting and composition. It was at a performance for at-risk youth by VocaTikva, a social acapella group that he created. He believed in the initiative and we started to move forwards, together with Michal, who has amazing media and digital experience, and she is responsible for all the business and

promotional aspects."

The trio's success in Israel was just the beginning. Koolulam has performed all over the world, invited by communities and organizations who seek to bring people together through music.

More than 350,000 people have participated in over 250 Koolulam events around the globe, which have gone viral and been viewed 150 million times! The clips have reached international leaders, social organizations, and celebrities. For example, Jennifer Lopez was very impressed by Koolulam's performance of her hit song "Let's Get Loud" at a special event to raise awareness of the importance of early breast cancer detection, which was attended by thousands of women. J. Lo loved the Koolulam version so much that she included it in her iconic halftime performance, together with the singer Shakira, at the 2020 Super Bowl.

**Ben:** "The process that happens during the performance, when the audience starts to understand that they are performing, involves a lot of funny and moving moments. You feel like you are part of something very big."

Michal, the CEO of the organization, shared with me emotional letters from Muslim audiences who watched a Koolulam performance and were touched by the idea of unity. Among them was a particularly moving letter from a young man in Sudan who began to see Israelis in a completely different light: "All my life, I was taught to hate Israel, and the idea behind it, but today I understand that there are good people with good intentions among you."

**Michal:** "This moved me a lot, because we want to show people that there are also different ways of life in Israel and we can live differently."

**E.M.: What is your dream?**

"It would be a dream come true to be one of the main acts at the Super Bowl! But really, our biggest dream is to show that every person in the world can be part of the Koolulam experience, to reach all communities, schools, children and adults, and to share our initiative with them. The audience is part of us, it's the real star of the show." ♦



# HOLIDAY PRIDE

## What Makes Hanukkah Great in America

BY DIANNE ASHTON, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)

**A**s Hanukkah nears, let the grousing begin. Too much is made of a holiday that Judaism ranks as a minor festival—one whose rite takes no more than five minutes to complete each night—some American Jews will say. Some will complain about the season's excessive commercialism or materialism.

Yet most Jews will also participate in at least one of the many customs developed by American Jews to augment the holiday's simple rite and express the enhanced place of Hanukkah, which this year begins on Dec. 18, on the American Jewish liturgical calendar.

In addition to exchanging gifts (or giving them to children), they will decorate their homes, eat fried foods, sing songs, listen to holiday music and attend one or more of the many holiday festivities held at Jewish community centers, synagogues, Jewish-themed museums and Jewish schools.

At these and other venues, they will join in more elaborate versions of the domestic customs. They will light holiday candles or watch them be kindled, sing more songs than they do at home, snack on potato pancakes or jelly donuts, chat with their friends and neighbors, watch or

participate in amateur theatricals on the holiday's theme—generally have a good time.

Beneath the lighthearted celebrating, however, more serious meanings are often conveyed through the holiday's songs.

The word Hanukkah means dedication, and the holiday has always highlighted occasions when Jews overcame challenges to their continued religious commitment. Hanukkah commemorates the rededicating of the Jerusalem Temple in 165 BCE after a band of Jews led by the Maccabees retook it from the Syrians, who had conquered Judea.

Generations of Jews retold that story at Hanukkah and thanked G-d for helping their ancestors to prevail. American Jews found additional reasons to reaffirm their dedication at Hanukkah and often voiced those reasons in original songs.

Since 1842, American Jews have been singing Hanukkah songs that expressed the complicated experience of being Jewish in the United States. That year, a new hymnal for Congregation Beth Elohim in Charleston, S.C., included a special hymn for Hanukkah that reassured congregants that the G-d to whom they prayed forgave their sins and



continued to stand by them. The hymn countered the energetic effort by local Christian evangelicals to convince them to worship Jesus.

Yet because it reassured Jews living anywhere in a largely Protestant America, the song appeared in hymnals used by both the Reform and Conservative movements as late as 1959.

In the 1890s, two American Reform rabbis, in New York City and Philadelphia, wrote a new English version of "Maoz Tsur," a song that Jews have sung at Hanukkah since the 13th century. Titled "Rock of Ages," the new song kept the melody of its predecessor, which thanked G-d for saving Jews in the past, but in its shortened version substituted a homey image of domesticity bright with lights and joy and promised a future that would see "tyrants disappearing."



5th Avenue and 59th Street, at Central Park Plaza Lighting ceremony of the World Largest Menorah in celebration of first day of Hanukkah. It's certified by Guinness World Records as the world's largest.

"Rock of Ages" offered Jews an emotional link to past traditions through its melody while reminding them of the tyranny currently besetting their coreligionists in Eastern Europe. As 2.3 million new Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe came to America over the next 30 years, the song grew popular. It became a fixture at American Hanukkah celebrations following the rise of Nazism in 1933, when the hope for a world free of tyranny seemed even more desperate.

Rewrites of older prayers or songs often appeared in the first half of the 20th century. One Hanukkah rewrite published during World War II offered a new version of an older prayer that described G-d's saving power. The rewrite, offered in Hebrew as "Mi Yimalel?" and in English as "Who Can Retell?", has a lively melody that fits its lyric, which aims to rouse Jews to act politically, militarily and philanthropically.

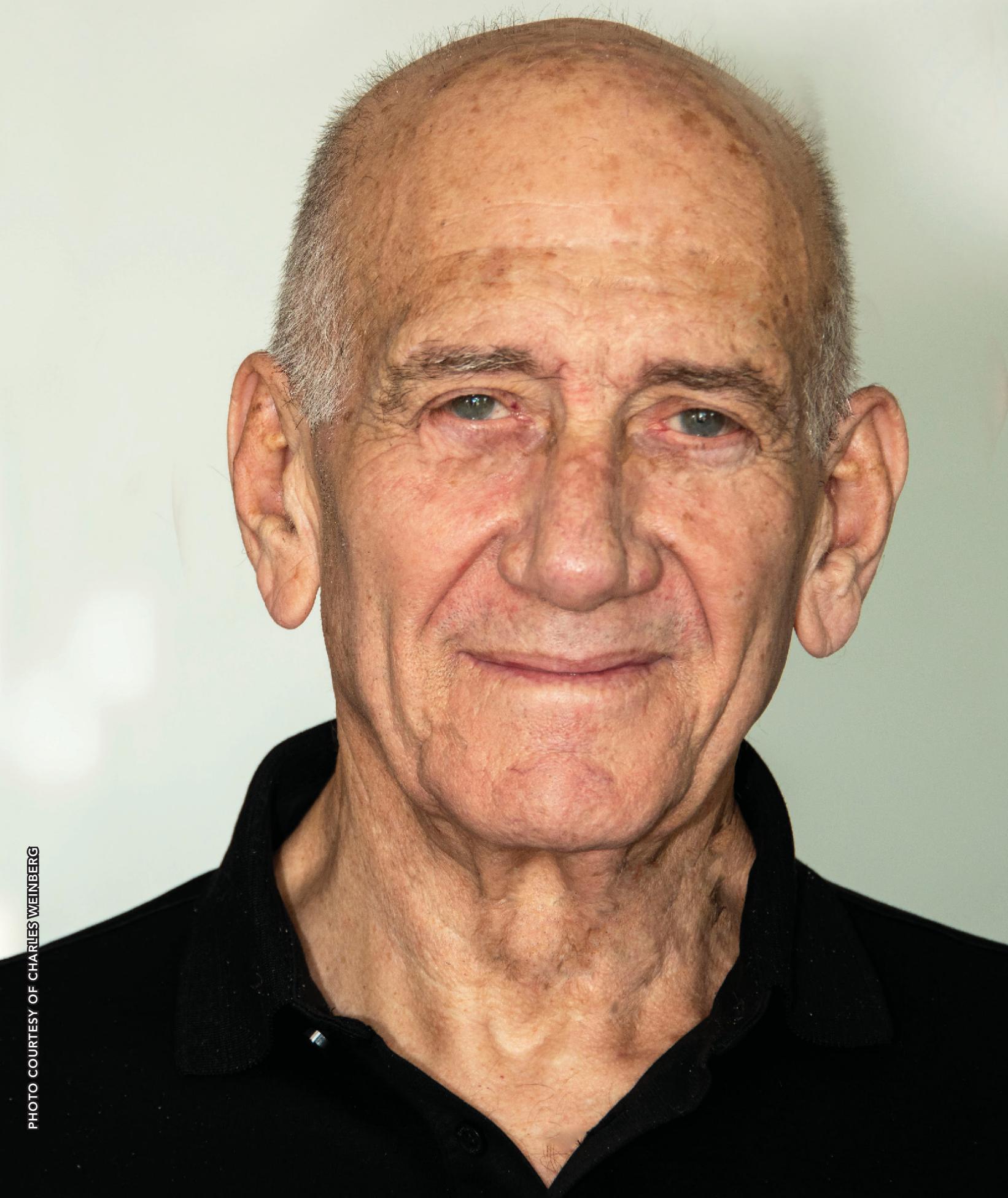
Although a "hero or sage" always came to the aid of needy Jews in the past, it says, the current problems facing Jewry require more. Now "all Israel must arise" and "redeem itself through deed and sacrifice." The crises facing Jews during those years influenced the ideas and emotions that they expressed in this Hanukkah song.

The experience of unity and strength that is felt in group singing may have assuaged Jews' fears during those decades of disorientation and anguish. Hanukkah provided an occasion for singing songs that voiced old and new hopes while building new communal alliances and bonds.

And that, perhaps, helps explain the broad and continuing appeal of Hanukkah for American Jews. Hanukkah allows Jews to join in the national merrymaking occasioned by Christmas, but also to rededicate ourselves to Judaism.

In homes, synagogues, museums, community centers and schools, it provides us with an occasion for gathering, singing, eating, lighting candles in the evenings of the shortest days of the year, exchanging gifts, voicing religious commitments and values, and enjoying being Jews. ☩

DIANNE ASHTON IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.



# THE JEWISH STATE OF AFFAIRS

## An interview with former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

BY RABBI DANIEL LEVINE

**O**n Monday Nov 14, Jlife sat down with former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at a hotel in Newport to talk about his political leadership, Zionism, Jerusalem, two-state solution, moral vision, and views on current trends in Israeli society. The interview has been edited for length and clarity. For the full audio version of the podcast visit "<https://www.youtube.com/@Jlife-ocjewishlife6396>" (you can also search "Jlife with Daniel" on Spotify or Apple Podcasts).

**Rabbi Daniel Levine:** When we look at the Jewish people in the last 2000 years, the idea that we actually have our own state with political autonomy, would have seemed incredible, almost fantastical, to Jews living over the past 2000 years spread out throughout the diaspora. What does it mean to you, as somebody who's been able to be basically the most powerful Jew, not just in the world when you served as prime minister, but really, in the span of Jewish history?

**Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert:** Well, let's put things in the right place. A prime minister of Israel is never the strongest Jew from the historic perspective. You may be the most powerful person in a time that you're serving as prime minister for the State of Israel, perhaps not far beyond it. But for me, of course, this was a very exciting experience, because like many of my generation, my parents came from outside of Israel, to live in the state of Israel. And, in the case of my parents, as in the case of many other Jews, the reason they came to Israel was not because they were running away from persecutions, but because as Zionists they chose to live where they felt that Jews should be, which is in the ancient homeland. My parents came from China, where they grew up in the northeast part of China in Manchuria. And, they never suffered any antisemitic experience. Jews in China never had any problems with the Chinese population. So as far as they were concerned, they could live there indefinitely. They chose to go to Israel because they wanted to live in what they dreamt would one day be the State of Israel.

**DL:** So that attachment to Israel and Zionism that you're talking about in terms of your parents, and that you adopted has much less to do with antisemitism and more to do with the Jewish people's historic dream to return.

**EO:** This was of great significance for people like me, my brothers, my mates in school, in the neighborhood where I live; they all were sons and daughters of parents that made it to Israel before the creation of the State of Israel. They were very proud, very devoted to the future and to the well-being and strength of the state vis-à-vis its ability to fulfill its destiny, which is to become a secure homeland for the Jewish people.

**DL:** So let's talk about what that means for Israel to be a secure homeland for the Jewish people. Possibly what you are most famous for, at least in the American Jewish community and in the American political community, is the

Annapolis conference in 2007. This Annapolis conference was the last actual attempt by an Israeli government prime minister to try for a two-state solution. Now, of course, the Annapolis conference failed, Abbas said no, but in your words, **why do you think that failed? What were you trying to do in terms of your 2007 deal? And do you think looking forward, something like that will ever be possible again?**

**EO:** The negotiating process between me and the Palestinian leader started in December of 2006. By the time Annapolis took place, we had already established a very strong personal trust between the two of us. And, we were very advanced in the efforts to create a framework, which was essential for what we hoped would become the peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. I think that the efforts made by President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at that time were very significant. That is because it is one thing for me and Abu Mazen to sit in the study of the prime minister, the Balfour residents, and discuss future options. But, it was another thing for us to appear in front of the whole world with the presence of well over 60 foreign ministers and heads of world organizations, in front of all the cameras of every network of any consequence, from every corner of the world. Together, the president of the PA, the prime minister of Israel, the president of the United States of America. All stretching hands to each other, holding hands and making peace. I think that the Annapolis event made a very powerful presentation to the international community and to the populations of the countries involved.

**DL:** You grew up on the Israeli right, you were a member of Likud, the ideological position that wants a united Jerusalem and also believes that Judea and Samaria, the West Bank, should become or is a part of Israel, yet you famously offered basically the most gracious offer of any Israeli prime minister, both in terms of giving back about 90 to 95%—depending on which map you trust—of the West Bank and also famously dividing Jerusalem. **Was this an ideological shift that you underwent?**

**EO:** I never offered a division of Jerusalem. I was ready to get rid of the Arab parts of Jerusalem which were never part of the Jewish Jerusalem, Jewish history, or in other parts of Jewish memories.

**DL:** So you're talking about what we would consider to be Jerusalem in the Tanakh and Jewish literature as opposed to what Jerusalem is on a map today.

**EO:** Jerusalem on a map today is not really Jerusalem. The refugee camp in Shuafat has nothing to do with Jewish history or Jewish Jerusalem. The same goes for other areas Beit Hanina, Sheikh Jarrah, Isawiya and other parts of the city of Jerusalem, which were never part of Judaism. The focus of everything that we were praying for, yearning for, dreaming of was the holy places for the Jewish people, which were the Temple Mount and Western Wall and these



Israeli police stand outside the seventh-century Dome of the Rock on what to Muslims is the Haram Al-Sharif, and to Jews the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem.

parts of the city, but not what turned out to be the Arab villages surrounding these parts of Jerusalem.

So there was never a proposition to divide the city. I wanted to keep the Jewish part of the city entirely in the hands of the State of Israel. The only thing that I proposed, which was a very dramatic compromise, was that for the sake of achieving peace we will not have exclusive political sovereignty over the Temple Mount.

The Temple Mount is very important for us for obvious reasons. We've been dreaming about it and we've been praying for it. When we prayed for Zion we prayed for the Temple Mount not for any other sections of what has eventually become the municipal map of Jerusalem. However, we all know that the Temple Mount is also an enormously sensitive place for Muslims. And, the Old City of Jerusalem is an enormously sensitive place for Christians. So now tell me by any moral justice, who deserves to have exclusive political sovereignty, in the section of the city? Jews, Muslims, Christians?

If you want to make peace, if you want to find a way to bring together all these different peoples, all these different faiths, all these different attitudes, and make them live together, you need to give up the desire to have an exclusive position that is denied from the others.

What you have to do is guarantee that every believer will have free access to the holy basis of his faith, which is what I proposed. I said there will not be in the holy basin of Jerusalem exclusive political sovereignty for the Jews only, or for the Palestinians or for the Christians. Instead, it will be dominated by a trust of five nations. But, there will be free access for Jews to the Temple mount and the wall, for Arabs to the Aqsa Mosque, for Christians to the churches and so on and so forth. It didn't really require any dramatic change in my ideological approach. What it required was to

recognize the realities of our lives and to set up priorities which were congruent with what we think is the best for the future of the Jewish people.

**DL: And, what about in terms of the West Bank?**

*Obviously if we're considering Jewish history most of the Tanakh took place in Judea and Samaria right in the area specifically that would be given to the Palestinians in a two-state solution. Certainly, growing up in the ideological right I can't imagine that when you were 25 you would have been in favor of a two-state solution so what ended up changing?*

**EO:** I was not, in the beginning, in favor of a two-state solution, but I reached the conclusion that there will never be peace without a separation between us and the Palestinians. And the question is what is more important: to take full control of every bit of territory, and to become completely isolated, boycotted, in the international community, as we are becoming! Or, to say that land is important, but more important is the ability to live in peace and to be able to establish friendly relationships with other people that will then have the right to exercise self-determination, just as we did.

I think that there are different and conflicting attitudes in Jewish tradition for this kind of solution. Historically, all of the greatest Jewish moral leaders and religious leaders would have preferred *Pikuach Nefesh* over territory, peace over territory. Not just because someone threatens us if we don't, but because we decided that it would be best for us if we pull out from certain territories.

In recent years, particularly after the Six Day War, there are sections of the population which have become messianic and are dominated by a euphoric approach to the territories, and for them, this is the single most important thing in life. More than living in peace, more than allowing people to

have rights and so on. I think that this is not Jewish. I think that this is not represented by the tradition, the legacy of our ancestors. And, I don't think that we have to surrender to these messianic dreams, we have to be realistic, we have to be practical. We have to think about the option of creating relationships with our neighbors and ultimately with the international community that will provide us the necessary conditions to live in the best possible way.

**DL:** I hear you sort of making two different arguments in terms of why it's important to either pull back from certain parts of land or to trade land for peace. One is a global argument, for the Jewish people and for the State of Israel it will be better if we get rid of certain amounts of land, both in terms of the easing of international pressure and second that it will allow for a peaceful separation and Israel won't have to worry about what to do with millions of Palestinians living under their political or military control. The other answer you're giving, which I want to dig into, is about ethical concerns regarding the Palestinians. You're using the language of human rights. Do you think what Israel is doing is abrogating certain human rights? Is Israel doing things that you believe to be unethical vis-a-vis the Palestinians—forgetting any other international concerns about how people see Jews or Israel in the international media?

**EO:** We may not have wanted to do things which are unethical. Had we been asked, do we want to do this? Is it acceptable by our fundamental standards and tradition? The answer is no.

But, in the practicality of everyday life under the constraints that were created... if we want to control territories which are inhabited by millions of people that don't want us, that's what it does. It forces us to take measures which can't be interpreted any other way than violating the basic human rights of other people. And, this is something that we have to be very careful about. We can't believe that the rights that we think we have justifies the means that we take in order to exercise them.

**DL:** So, what you're saying is you believe that Israel has a right to security, self-determination and peace, perhaps even a right to the entire land, but that doesn't justify the means of what Israel is doing to the Palestinians to get there.

**EO:** I think that while we certainly have a right to dream of having all these territories which were part of our history for thousands of years, it is not compatible with what it requires to be there. So we have to make a choice. What is more important for us as both humans and Jews? To exercise our rights for land or to recognize the same rights that we expect ourselves to have be given to others? I think that if we look back at the history of the Jewish people, we were always a lot more tolerant in recognizing the rights of other people. What are we doing now when we try to deny the rights of other people? The same rights that we want to secure for ourselves?

**DL:** So let's unpack this in terms of what's been happening in Israel over the past several weeks. A couple of weeks ago I recorded a podcast about Itamar Ben Gvir, the new MK who has Kahanist views. Israel as a society has certainly moved to the right in the past generation. What do you think is happening? Is this just about security? Is this part of the global trend of nationalism that we're seeing taking place in a lot of countries? How does somebody like Ben Gvir—who would have been booted out of the Knesset 40 years ago—



Hand traced map of Gaza Strip.

**get such a large percentage of the vote?**

**EO:** Ignoring the fact that Israel is inhabited by 20% non-Jews who are entitled to be citizens with full rights in the State of Israel is a moral mistake of significant proportions. They are part of the State of Israel and they should be considered as equal partners to everything that happens in the State. No one denies that Israel is a Jewish state. Even the leader of the Islamic party which was part of the last coalition, Mansour Abbas said that he recognizes Israel as a Jewish state. He doesn't want to question the natural definition of what Israel is all about.

The truth is more complex. Everyone talks about the support for Netanyahu, but he was actually the least supported Likud Prime Minister in terms of public opinion of our country. Menachem Begin received 43 mandates in 1977, that's 11 more than Netanyahu has now. Begin in 1981 received 48, Yitzchak Shamir in different elections received 42 and 43 mandates, which is still 10 and 11 more than Bibi has now. Ariel Sharon in 2003 received 38 mandates. So let's put things in perspective: Bibi is the least supported leader of Likud in history.

We then need to ask what has Netanyahu made of the Likud that he represents? Menachem Begin's Likud was very much in favor of Greater Israel and having all of Israel and a united Jerusalem. But, Begin was a person of historic proportions and of moral convictions. He believed in the equality of people, Jews and non-Jews. He was against the martial government in Israel before the 67' War, when the Labour Party of Ben Gurion imposed it.

That does not contradict the fact that he was in favor of a greater Israel, but he believed in the equality of non-Jews. Ultimately, when he became prime minister, he understood that what he hoped for turned out to be impossible. He understood that if he tried to realize the dreams of a greater Israel it would be at the expense of the basic moral rights of other people and he refrained from doing it as he pulled out from all of Sinai. He was definitely as committed to maintaining these borders as Netanyahu. The same goes for Ariel Sharon.



Star of David and Menorah at Knesset, Israeli Parliament in Jerusalem, Israel

So great leadership is measured not only by the ability to spit out all kinds of slogans, sometimes shallow and simplistic, but the ability to change what used to be your position in view of what appears to you at a time that you hold the ultimate responsibility regarding how to act. This is the greatest manifestation of leadership. Begin showed this when he made the agreement with Egypt to make peace, which was a historic turning point in the life of the State of Israel. This is what Sharon did when he pulled out from Gaza, because he knew that just continuing to stay in Gaza would not bring any good to people.

**DL: There is sort of an irony that most of the land for peace swaps that Israel has done has been orchestrated by leaders from the ideological camp that does stress the need for a greater Israel, but that also maintained strong ethical concerns.**

**Let's go back to the recent Israeli election results. All signs are pointing to this next government in Israel being the most right-wing both politically and religiously in Israeli history. Why is Israeli society all of a sudden looking upon people like Itamar Ben Gvir as a worthwhile option to vote for when that same person 30 or 40 years ago would have probably received maybe one mandate in the Knesset?**

**EO:** When we look at the overall outcome, like the United States, our country is divided into two more or less equal blocks. The margin of the victory of the block of Netanyahu is only 5000 votes or 6000 votes more. The division of the attitudes of the population of Israel remains more or less the same (50% against annexation vs. 50% for it). The opinions even within the right-bloc are also different on substance. The ultra-Orthodox parties are now part of the bloc of Netanyahu, but the ultra-Orthodox parties are not in favor of annexation and not in favor of the settlements. They don't settle in the territories and they constitute the same size as Ben Gvir. So if you take them into account the majority of the people of Israel are against these slogans and

measures such as expelling the Arabs.

The picture which may surface as a result of the last election does not really represent an accurate division of the opinions of Israelis with regard to the territories, to settlements, to annexation, and so on. It may ultimately be the political outcome because of the makeup of the coalition, but it doesn't really represent the basic principles that these parties represent.

**DL: What might you say to an American Jewish audience who are deeply supportive of Israel, but are seeing what's happening in Israel in terms of its rightward tilt and social policies and becoming increasingly troubled?**

**EO:** First of all, I would say that our community is not more divided than America. We have the same internal debates between liberal and conservative and Orthodoxy and less traditional forms of Judaism. The Jewish community in America reflects a similar diversity as the community in Israel.

What I think is of greater significance is the fact that Israel is becoming increasingly identified with immoral values in the eyes of the world. In the eyes of the UN we are occupiers. This means that we are denying the fundamental rights of another people—not giving them the life that they deserve—and this will continue to damage the image of the state of Israel. I'm afraid this will also detract many of the young Jews who are committed to the wellbeing of Israel, but they are not prepared to be committed to the violation of human rights which are identified today with the way that Israel conducts itself. This is something that the leadership of Israel today should be aware of. We need to ask ourselves, what will make the difference for us? Another few acres of land or a different way of life that recognizes the rights of people, that refrains from occupying people, and that will become much more tolerant to different views and ways of life. Things that will bring greater happiness to a greater number of people. ☩

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# kiddish



## ***Hanukkah Magic***

*The Love & Light of Family*

DECEMBER 2022

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# **kiddish**

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# Hanukkah Beignets

Fun in the kitchen for the whole family.

BY PETER PELAIA, KVELLER

**W**hen it comes to Hanukkah, most folks don't think about beignets. But in our home these fried donuts are a holiday tradition, and we love to fill them with Nutella.

Our first experience with these sweet, often square-shaped donuts was during our honeymoon in New Orleans. We spent many an evening sitting outside the Café Du Monde, people-watching while eating beignets and drinking café au lait. When we returned home we decided to make our own beignets for Hanukkah. After all, beignets are fried and Jews eat fried food on Hanukkah. It was a perfect match.

That was in our pre-toddler days and having a little one to share this tradition with makes it even more special. Our almost-2-year-old loves working with dough and especially covering finished beignets in confectioners sugar.

#### How Kids Can Help:

Though there are parts of this recipe that are adults-only, kids can definitely help.

Here's how:

They can add ingredients to the mixing bowl (set everything out beforehand so you don't have to search for ingredients).

They can knead the dough. You'll have to do most of the work but the pressing and folding motions of kneading are fascinating for toddlers.

They can scoop nutella onto the cut squares of dough.

Older children can fold the dough over the nutella, brush water along the edges with their fingers, and press the dough together with the tines of a fork.

They can sprinkle confectioners sugar on the beignets after the grown-ups have finished frying them.

#### You'll Need:

1 ½ cups warm milk  
1 tablespoon active-dry yeast  
1/3 cup granulated sugar  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
2 eggs  
¼ cup + 1 teaspoon olive oil  
1 ½ teaspoons salt  
2 cups bread flour  
2 ½ to 3 cups all-purpose flour  
½ cup Nutella  
Vegetable oil for frying  
Confectioners sugar for dusting  
Makes about 18-20 beignets

#### Make the Dough

**1.** In a large bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the warm (not hot) milk, yeast and sugar. Let this mixture stand for a couple minutes.



**2.** Add the vanilla extract, eggs, ¼ cup olive oil and salt and mix well. Add the bread flour and combine with a wooden spoon or with the paddle attachment of your mixer. Add the remaining all-purpose flour ½ cup at a time until the dough starts to form a ball and pulls away from the sides of your bowl.

**3.** Turn the dough out onto a well-floured surface or switch to your dough hook. Knead the dough for 4-5 minutes, dusting with flour occasionally to prevent sticking, until you have a smooth, firm dough that bounces back when pressed with your thumb.

**4.** Grease a large bowl with the remaining 1 teaspoon of olive oil. Put your dough in the bowl, turning once to coat. Cover with saran wrap and allow the dough to rise for 1 hour.

**5.** In a large Dutch oven or heavy-duty pot, heat 5 inches of vegetable oil to 345 - 350 degrees F. (Use a candy thermometer attached to the side of the pot to judge the temperature. Dutch ovens are best since they regulate the temperature better than regular pots.) Keep an eye on the temperature and adjust the heat of your stove accordingly. You don't want to temperature to rise above 350F or the beignets will burn. Likewise, you don't want the temperature to drop below 345F or the beignets will not cook through.

#### Form the Beignets

**6.** While the oil is heating roll out your dough on a lightly floured surface until it is about 18 x 15 inches. With a pizza cutter or a sharp knife, cut the dough into 3 x 5 inch rectangles.

**7.** Using a teaspoon measure, place a ball of nutella on one side of each rectangle. Center the nutella in the middle of that side. Wet your fingers with a small amount of water, and then run them along one side of the rectangle. Fold the dough over the nutella, pressing gently so that air doesn't get trapped inside. Seal the dough by pressing the edges together with the tines of a fork.

#### Fry the Beignets

**8.** When the oil reaches 345 - 350 degrees F, fry the beignets, two or three at a time. Fry until the underside is a deep golden brown, about 1 minute. Turn the dough over and fry until that side is golden brown. Keep an eye on the temperature and adjust the heat as you go.

**9.** When finished remove the beignets from the oil with a slotted spoon and allow them to drain on a plate lined with paper towels.

**10.** Dust with a generous amount of confectioners sugar and serve immediately. ☀

**PETER PELAIA** IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO KVELLER AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

# Oy Vey!

**This New Album Celebrates All the Christmas Songs Written By Jews**

BY LIOR ZALTZMAN, KVELLER

The album contains recordings of old classics—“Winter Wonderland,” written by Felix Bernard and Richard B. Smith, “The Christmas Song,” by Mel Torme and Robert Wells, “I’ll Be Home For Christmas,” which was composed by Walter Kent, and “Little Drummer Boy,” co-written by Harry Simeone.

Yet it’s the original songs in the album that are the best part in it—the nondenomenotional “Every Day’s a Holiday,” and “The Christmas Tree,” which may be my new favorite Christmas song ever.

The song, which is sung by the artists’ daughter Joya, 7, and Aura, 5, is all about the joys of decorating a Christmas tree with your friends. Making the video for it was also Joya’s first experience decorating the Christmas staple—“I spun the dreidel, I lit the menorah, I’ve lit the candles and I’ve danced the horah, but I’ve never had the opportunity to decorate the Christmas tree,” she sing in the song.

And watching her and Aura decorate the Christmas tree and spin dreidels together in the new video for the song released today is honestly almost too adorable.

Kveller spoke with Joanie and Fyutch about how this album came to be, sharing the spotlight with their daughters, and their favorite holiday traditions.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

*Can you tell me a little bit about this album and how it came to be?*

**Joanie:** About 8 years ago, I was reading an article about Christmas music and discovered that many of the most well-known Christmas classics are actually written by Jewish songwriters. I was very surprised at first but once I learned of the rampant antisemitism in every other industry at the turn of the century, it started to make sense that these songs were written out of necessity to survive in America and assimilate patriotically. The music industry and entertainment industry was not seen as glamorous nor a desirable line of work back then.

As a Jewish songwriter, I was instantly fascinated and wanted to create a collection of some of these songs but when remaking them it was important to me to make them different from anything anyone has heard from these classics. Those who know me know I love a good concept album with a twist!

I met hit-maker Fyutch when we performed



together for WFUV during the pandemic and I became such a fan of his work, I knew we had to work together. I brought the idea to him and he was on board!

We released our first single last winter (“Winter Wonderland”) and it immediately charted on Sirius/XM Kids Place Live. Then we took the year to complete the album. In addition to the classic cover songs, created two originals and music videos to accompany them. It was a true collaboration and I am excited to share these beloved Christmas tunes with both Christmas celebrators and the Jewish community.

**Fyutch:** I’ve always wanted to make a Christmas album! Since Joanie and I became friends, we’ve been talking about ways to collaborate! When she brought me this album concept, I had no idea so many of my favorite Christmas songs had this largely unknown backstory with Jewish songwriters. I started thinking of ways we could reimagine them and put our spin on it.

*Did you find out more about the Jewish songwriters behind these Christmas songs as you were recording this album? Any favorite stories about them? Any song that you were particularly surprised to discover was written by a Jewish songwriter?*

**Joanie:** I spent a great deal of time on Wikipedia checking my list (and checking it twice) to make sure the songs we chose were in fact written or co-written by members of the tribe. I actually found a helpful article with a good list from Kveller and Buzzfeed and learned that one of my favorite Christmas tunes, “The Christmas Song” (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire) was penned by two Jewish songwriters, Mel Torme and Robert Wells. This is quite funny but I remember watching Night Court when I was little and don’t recall the jokes about Mel Torme... but apparently, the main character, Judge Harry Stone, was slightly obsessed with him. This long-running joke saved Mel’s career in real life and gave him a big boost- kind of like an old school version of Kate Bush’s Running up that Hill after appearing on Strangers Things.

*Tell me about the choice to include your daughters*

on this album? What was it like recording with them? tree, and the girls acted out every word of the song. Why did you choose not to include any Hanukkah specific songs on the album?

**Joanie:** We both wanted to create a true Christmas album for families of all ages so adding Hanukkah songs to the album was never the plan. My tip of the hat to my people was honoring the songwriters who penned these tunes and sharing with the world our contribution to Christmas. Bringing everyone together over the holidays no matter what one celebrates is the true goal. But, if it's Hanukkah you want, I released a great Hanukkah tune last year called Like a Maccabee with Josh Shriber from Josh and the Jamtones and my song Spinning is on my Jewish kids album, Meshugana.

*What was your approach to recording these classic songs? There are so many artists releasing new recordings of them every year—how do you keep it fresh?*

**Fyütch:** The MUSIC is my favorite part of the holiday. I've always wanted to release a Christmas project. The music makes the Christmas spirit palpable, from the timeless melodies to the nostalgic lyrics. I knew the most important thing about approaching this music was to keep it magical. My ultimate holiday playlist features so many of the same songs reinvisioned by different artists during different time periods. So I wanted our project to complement that legacy but also stand out. I love how artists like Cee-lo, Ariana Grande, and Sia have wildly different genres and interpretations, but they all seem to blend together under the theme and spirit. So that's why our album has Pop, R&B/Soul, and Rap elements throughout it. I wanted our original songs to be just as catchy as the classics. I think we accomplished creating songs that immediately get stuck in your head and you can sit and listen with the family every year.

*What is your personal favorite Christmas song? Hanukkah song?*

**Joanie:** White Christmas and The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire) are my two Christmas favorites. My favorite Hanukkah tunes are Don't Let the Light Go Out by Peter Paul & Mary, Puppy for Hanukkah by Daveed Diggs.

**Fyütch:** "This Christmas" by Donny Hathaway tops the list. It's classic 70's soul with that timeless voice. Stevie Wonder's lyrics on "Someday at Christmas" get me every time. "Someday at Christmas there'll be no wars / When we have learned what Christmas is for / When we have found what life's really worth / There'll be peace on earth."

*Joanie – What were your feelings about Christmas growing up? And now? How do you approach it as a Jewish mother?*

**Joanie:** When I grew up in Miami, Florida I felt extremely left out around Christmas. At our Temple it

was all about Hanukkah—but in public (in schools at the mall...) it always felt like we had to convince people in order for Hanukkah to exist. My mother purchased the very first menorah for my elementary school just so there was some minimal representation for the Jewish students amongst the plentiful Christmas decorations. I was in the chorus each year in elementary school and high school and there was always an extremely long Christmas medley. We were lucky if I had a Little Dreidel made it in there. Bare minimum, right? Growing up, I felt a lot of trepidation surrounding my Judaism but now, even despite the ever-present antisemitism, I feel more proud than ever of my heritage. At the same time, I also love sharing holidays with my friends from other religions and cultures and learning about their traditions as well. At home, I teach my 7 year old daughter about all cultures and holidays while explaining our history the best I can—and will continue to do so in an age appropriate way as she grows up.

*Fyütch – have you ever celebrated Hanukkah?*

**Fyütch:** No I haven't, but this might be the year! I tried latkes for the first time with Joanie. My introduction to the holiday as a kid was actually Adam Sandler's song on SNL haha.

*What are your holiday plans this year? What are your family's favorite holiday traditions?*

**Joanie:** I haven't made plans yet but I'm usually playing shows over Hanukkah. It would be fun to play a Christmas show with Fyütch though. Fingers crossed that will happen! Last year I bought an RBG Menorah (you'll see it in the Decorating the Christmas Tree video) so she will always be part of our Hanukkah now- Ruth shining truth.

**Fyütch:** My daughter and I visit my parents and sister in Florida. I just got engaged, so my fiance is coming with us! We always trade gifts in the morning, eat, and watch movies. We didn't have a lot of money growing up, so we got creative with gifts, especially my Mom! She's mastered the art of thoughtful, silly gifts.

*Tell me a little bit about what you're hoping listeners will take from this album?*

**Joanie:** For Christmas celebrators, I hope Oy Vey! Another Christmas Album becomes the new favorite Christmas album that the whole family can enjoy together. And for Jewish folk who feel a little guilty indulging in Christmas tunes, NO NEED! These songs are kosher!

**Fyütch:** I'm happy to contribute to the amazing existing tradition of Christmas music. Add this to your playlists. Revisit it every year. I have a feeling you'll hear some of them in a movie or commercial one day. And to top it all off, we are educating people about the history of these songs in the process. ☀

# The Meaning of the Season

## Our Kids Know About Our Hanukkah Gift Budget

BY GAIL HOFFER-LOIBL, KVELLER

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

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

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

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

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



try to instill in them a sense of gratitude.

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

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

Though we do our best to help our kids understand the value of spending wisely and being grateful for the gifts they receive, we are up against enormous societal pressure to get our children as many gifts as possible.

Many of us have kids whose classmates and friends celebrate Christmas and are showered with gifts, putting even more pressure on Jewish parents to help our kids "fit in." Being left out of the Christmas "magic" is eased a bit when you can share how many toys you got for Hanukkah.

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

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

This year, for example, in lieu of more physical gifts, we are hoping to give our kids a special day out in New York City. We discussed this idea with them

and explained this would mean getting fewer or less elaborate gifts for the remainder of the holiday. They also agreed that they are becoming less interested in playing with toys and would prefer doing fun things as a family. In the future, I could see us forgoing physical gifts all together, or just giving our kids a small amount of cash each night.

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

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

**GAIL HOFFER-LOIBL** IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO KVELLER AND JLIFE MAGAZINE



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# COOKING JEWISH

Lifestyle

## FESTIVAL OF DELIGHTS

**Unique Additions to  
Holiday Favorites**

BY JUDY BART KANCIGOR

PHOTO COURTESY OF ERNIE ENKLER

Rakakat

**M**y favorite expression about the cuisine of Hanukkah comes from cookbook author Susie Fishbein: "The holiday is about the oil, not the potato." Food historian Gil Marks echoes this thought in "Encyclopedia of Jewish Food" (Wiley, \$40): "The Maccabees never saw a potato, much less a potato pancake. When the Spanish first brought the potato to Europe from its native South America, it was considered poisonous, and many centuries passed before it gradually gained acceptance as food."

As every schoolchild knows, Hanukkah commemorates the victory in 164 B.C.E. of Judah and the Maccabees over the Syrian-Greeks and the rededication of the desecrated Temple. As legend has it, Judah and his followers found only enough oil to last one day, but miraculously the oil lasted for eight days...right?

Alas, there is no evidence for the eight-day oil story in either the First or Second Book of Maccabees, which contain the most detailed accounts of the battles. "Carrying branches of trees and palm fronds and flaming torches so brilliant they lit up Jerusalem, the Maccabees decided to celebrate the eight-day Sukkot holiday, which they had missed that year because the Temple had been defiled," write Phyllis and Miryam Glazer in "Jewish Festival Cooking" (Harper/Collins, \$29.95). "From then on, they instituted a winter holiday to commemorate the rededication of the Temple." How convenient that this second Sukkot celebration fell at the end of the oil-making season.

By the time the historian Josephus coined the term "Festival of Lights" 250 years after the original event—perhaps referring to those flaming torches of the first celebration, as the Glazers suggest—Hanukkah was a firmly established holiday. Sadly, the rededicated Temple lasted only another 300 years,

when it was razed by the Romans in 132 C.E.

Yet potato latkes are an entrenched Hanukkah tradition—at least among Ashkenazim—and omitting them on Hanukkah would be the equivalent of Thanksgiving without the turkey. I'm not suggesting—heaven forbid—that you forego potato latkes this Hanukkah. If your family is like mine, that would cause a mutiny! But today's recipes ask you to think outside the box this Hanukkah. Might I suggest some unique additions to your usual repertoire?

The fried cigar-shaped delicacy known as Rakakat is just one of 100 classic and contemporary mezze recipes—accompanied by mouth-watering photography—in "Souk: Feasting at the Mezze Table" (Smith Street Books, \$35) by Nadia Zerouali and Merijn Tol. Beyond the flatbreads, kebabs, grape leaves, and hummus, you'll find authentic Middle Eastern dishes, including *moutabal* (eggplant spread with yogurt, pomegranate and oregano), classic tabbouleh, spiced goat leg, and rice pudding with turmeric, tahini and pine nuts. Serving Rakakat for Hanukkah actually serves double duty: Fried in the requisite oil, they are filled with cheese, which brings up a lesser known Hanukkah tradition. The eating of cheese on Hanukkah commemorates another miracle, this from the Apocrypha, involving Judith, a beautiful and brave widow, who plied the Assyrian general Holofernes with salty cheese and wine, causing him to fall into a drunken stupor, and then she beheaded him with his own sword.

Why celebrate this miracle on Hanukkah? While we don't know exactly when it occurred, some rabbis placed this event during the Maccabean revolt and held that Judith was a direct descendant of the Hasmonean (Maccabean) dynasty. But why quibble? Any holiday tradition that encourages the eating of cheese is okay with me!

Churros for Hanukkah—why not? "When we were working on 'Everyday Secret Restaurant Recipes,'" write Leah Schapira and Victoria Dwek in "Best of Kosher" (Artscroll, \$37.78), "we asked readers, 'What recipe would you most want to see included?' These churros, from T Fusion Steakhouse [a Glatt Kosher fine dining restaurant in Brooklyn, New York] were on the top of the list. Today, churros are even more popular than they were back then. You're bringing them home from the bakery for Shabbos, and we've even seen churro bars popping up at simchas. Now you don't need to pay per piece to get amazing churros to your table."

"Best of Kosher" brings you the best of the best iconic recipes (as well as 45 brand new ones) from Artscroll's many talented cookbook authors, including Susie Fishbein ("Kosher by Design" series), Victoria Dwek ("Passover Made Easy"), Daniella Silver ("The Silver Platter"), Miriam Pascal ("Real Life Kosher Cooking"), Renee Muller ("Our Table"), Naomi Nachman ("Perfect for Pesach") and Danielle Renov ("Peas, Love & Carrots") and many more. Recipes include Matbusha (Moroccan roasted tomato appetizer—"absolutely essential over challah"), Maple Bourbon Brisket from Sina Mizrahi, Susie Fishbein's Hot Pretzel Challah and Wonton Wrapped Chicken, Babka Straws (Chanie Apfelbaum's chocolate filled individual puff pastry "straws")—too many winners to mention! ☩

## ‘‘Churros for Hanukkah—why not?’’

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](http://WWW.COOKINGJEWISH.COM).



## Churros

Yield: 40–50

2 sticks (1 cup) margarine  
 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar  
 1 1/4 tablespoon kosher salt  
 2 1/2 cups water  
 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
 5 eggs  
 Oil, for frying

### For rolling

1/2 cup sugar  
 1 tablespoon cinnamon

### Strawberry-Ginger Coulis

8 ounces frozen strawberries or 1 pint fresh strawberries, hulled  
 1/2 cup sugar  
 1/4 cup water  
 1-inch ginger, peeled

MAKE  
ME!  
EASY TO  
FOLLOW  
RECIPE

**1.** In saucepan, combine margarine, sugar, salt and water. Bring to a boil, allowing margarine to melt. Add in flour all at once; mix with a spoon to form a ball of dough. Remove from heat; transfer dough to bowl of electric mixer. On low speed, add eggs, one at a time, until eggs are fully incorporated.

**2.** Heat oil in deep fryer to 350°F. Add batter to piping bag fitted with a 1M tip. Pipe into hot oil. Using a knife, cut batter about every 4 inches, allowing strip to drop into oil. Repeat, frying in batches of 4 churros until golden, about 4 minutes.

**3.** Meanwhile, mix cinnamon and sugar in shallow dish. Roll churros in mixture while still hot.

**4.** Prepare strawberry-ginger coulis. Combine strawberries, sugar, and water in saucepan. Bring to a boil; lower heat and simmer until strawberries are soft. Purée.

**5.** Using a microplane, zest fresh ginger to extract liquid (about 1 teaspoon). Add liquid from ginger to strawberry purée to taste. Serve alongside churros.

Make ahead: you can make batter earlier in the day and keep refrigerated in piping bag, then fry fresh. If serving Friday night, fry earlier in the day and reheat uncovered. The strawberry-ginger coulis freezes well.

Source: "Best of Kosher"

## Rakakat

"A classic on any warm mezze menu and rightly so, with their crispy dough and melting cheese. We see customers go crazy for these bad boys, especially when they're fresh and golden, straight from the pan. There are also versions with yufka dough (the best known being the Turkish borek), but our favorite is this version, made with crisp filo pastry and a combination of salty haloumi and feta (instead of feta on its own) works very well. For this recipe, seek out a good Mediterranean grocer and find yourself a nice big roll of top-quality filo from the fridge."

Yield: 10 to 15

Sunflower oil  
 13 ounces filo pastry  
 1 small bunch parsley, separated into sprigs  
 9 ounces haloumi sliced into thin strips  
 7 ounces feta, crumbled  
 Oil for frying

Note: Make sure you have a clean damp tea towel and a small bowl of sunflower oil ready to go.

**1.** Remove filo from packet, and cover with tea towel. Take 1 sheet of filo and cut it vertically into 2 pieces. Put 1 piece back under the tea towel.

**2.** Lay the other piece on your work surface with the short end facing you. Place a few sprigs of parsley near end closest to you and fold edge of the filo over parsley. Rub folded pastry with a little sunflower oil. Next, make a line of haloumi and crumbled feta along the end closest to you, then fold in the long edges about 1/2 inch, and roll the whole thing up into a neat cigar shape. Seal end with a little sunflower oil. Repeat with remaining filling and pastry, working fast so pastry doesn't dry out.

**3.** Heat oil to 350°F or until a cube of bread dropped into oil turns golden brown in 30 seconds. Fry cigars, in batches, until golden brown. Drain on paper towel and eat immediately.

Source: "Souk" by Nadia Zerouali and Merijn Tol ☘

# “HANUKKAH ON RYE”

## This Year’s Hanukkah Hallmark Movie About Jewish Delis Sounds... Good?

BY LIOR ZALTZMAN, KVELLER

**O**h my sweet baby Maccabee. A new Hallmark Hanukkah movie, “Hanukkah on Rye,” is coming out this December and wait until you hear all the details about it. Seriously, prepare to be shaken to your Jewish core. First of all, yes, this movie is about a Jewish deli—actually, Jewish delis, plural. This has been a long time coming for us, some would say since “Crossing Delancey” days. And yes, just like “Crossing Delancey,” this movie will have a meddling *bubbe*—in fact, two meddling *bubbles*—and a matchmaker too

(though no one will ever match the greatness that was Sylvia Miles). It will also be all about the push and pull between tradition and modernity.

The movie is about Jacob Leven and Molly Gilbert, whose families both own “world class delis.” They’re each trying to pave their own path and modernize their family businesses to bring them into 2022. The two meet when Jacob goes to New York City to scout for a new deli location—and while there are sparks, they’re too busy being Jewish food professionals (running a Jewish deli is no joke!).

Concerned about their grandchildren’s lack of a love life, Molly and Jacob’s Jewish grandmothers both sign them up for an old school matchmaking service that involves writing letters (not e-mails, actual letters!). Not knowing that they’re writing each other, the two form a real connection through these missives. In real life, tension escalates between the two as Jacob decides to open a deli on the same block as Molly’s. Gasp!

As the movie tagline asks—will a Hanukkah miracle keep them together? (Spoiler alert: Yes, it will, this is a Hallmark movie.)

This premise is giving me strong Joan Micklin Silver and Nora Ephron vibes (“You’ve Got Mail,” anyone??), all packaged in a schmaltzy Hallmark package (hey, *schmaltz* is great in a Jewish deli!).



Do I wish the Jewish deli movie was an actual high production value romcom? Maybe. But perhaps this is just the beginning of an oncoming Jewish deli romcom era—paging Billy Eichner and Judd Apatow.

Now, let’s talk about this cast, OK? This movie will star the one and only Yael Grobglas, aka Petra from “Jane the Virgin,” as Molly. I adore Yael in everything (she recently had to learn to speak in both Yiddish and Polish for a role in the excellent Amazon Prime series “Undone.”) I would watch anything for her, and this is no exception.

But that’s not all—this movie also stars Jewish mama Lisa Loeb (!!!) who could make me “Stay” through even the cheesiest Hallmark movie (sorry, I had to. But also Lisa makes the best, sweetest children’s music).

And that would have been enough (*dayenu*)—except that very handsome nice Jewish dad Jeremy Jordan will star as Jacob. You may know Jordan from “Supergirl,” “The Flash” and his many Broadway and off-Broadway appearances—including “Newsies,” which you can watch on Disney+. This man is oh-so-talented. Though let’s hope this movie will be better Jewish representation than “The Last 5 Years.”

Here’s hoping Hallmark doesn’t skimp on the food styling for this one, that the Jewish jokes aren’t too stereotypical, and that the *bubbles* are as loveable as they deserve to be. The movie will be premiering on December 18, which is the first night of Hanukkah. Here’s hoping it’s, um, well, lit. ☘

**LIOR ZALTZMAN** IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO KVELLER AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

**FRIDAY,  
DECEMBER 2**

**FRIDAY,  
DECEMBER 16**

**10:00 - 11:30 AM**

every 2 weeks until January 27, 2023

Gan Katan: PJ Library's Pre-Shabbat Playgroup, JFSGPV

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3**

**7:30 - 9:00 PM**

Jewish Book Festival  
Lana Melman: Artists Under Fire, Monrovia Library  
321 S. Myrtle Avenue  
Monrovia, CA 91016

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4**

**4:00 - 6:00 PM**

Jewish Book Festival  
Jai Chakrabarti: A Play for the End of the World, TSG

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6**

**11:00 AM - 12:00 PM**

Caffeine for the Soul, CIE

**SATURDAY,  
DECEMBER 10**

**7:30 - 9:00 PM**

Jewish Book Festival I  
David Sipress: What's So Funny?, PJTC,  
1434 N. Altadena Drive,  
Pasadena  
JFSGPV

**SUNDAY,  
DECEMBER 11**

**3:00 - 5:00 PM**

15th Annual Festival of Jewish Music, TBI,  
3033 N. Towne Avenue,  
Pomona, JFSGPV

**TUESDAY,  
DECEMBER 13**

**7:30 - 9:00 PM**

Jewish Book Festival  
Martin Indyk:  
Master of the Game,  
JFSGPV

**SUNDAY,  
DECEMBER 18**

**2:00 - 4:00 PM**

Meet the Latkes at SoCal  
Children's Museum,  
Southern California  
Children's Museum  
459 E Colorado Blvd  
Pasadena, CA

**MONDAY,  
DECEMBER 19 &**

**WEDNESDAY,  
DECEMBER 21**

**6:30 - 8:30 PM**

Hanukkah Festivals, CIE

**WEDNESDAY,  
DECEMBER 21**

**5:00 - 6:00 PM**

Let's Light Up the  
4th Night of Hanukkah  
Concert, JFSGPV

**HANUKKAH  
BEGINS THE  
EVENING OF  
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18  
ENDS THE EVENING OF  
MONDAY,  
DECEMBER 26**

**JANUARY 8**

**10:00 AM**

Jewish Federation's 28th  
Annual Meeting, TBI, 3033  
N. Towne Avenue, Pomona

**Beth Shalom  
of Whittier (BSW)**

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

**B'nai Simcha  
Community Preschool**

[www.bnaisimcha.org](http://www.bnaisimcha.org)

**Chabad of Arcadia**

(CoA)

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

**Chabad of Pasadena**

(CoP)

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

**Chabad of the**

**Inland Empire (CIE)**

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

**Congregation Hugat**

**Haverim (CHH)**

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

**Jewish Federation of SGPV**

(JFSGPV)

[www.jewishsgpv.org](http://www.jewishsgpv.org)

**Pasadena Jewish**

**Academy (PJA)**

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

**Pasadena Jewish**

**Temple & Center (PJTC)**

[www.pjtc.net](http://www.pjtc.net)

**Temple Beth El Riverside**

[www.tberiv.org](http://www.tberiv.org)

(TBR)

**Temple Ami Shalom**

(TAS)

[www.templeamishalom.org/](http://templeamishalom.org/)

**Temple Beth Israel of  
Pomona (TBI)**

[www.tbipomona.org](http://www.tbipomona.org)

**Temple Beth David of  
the San Gabriel Valley**

(TBD)

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

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

[www.tbila.org](http://www.tbila.org)

**Temple B'nai Emet (TBE)**

[www.templebnaiemet.org](http://www.templebnaiemet.org)

**Temple Sinai of Glendale**

(TSG)

<http://temple-sinai.net>

**Temple Sholom of  
Ontario (TSO)**

[www.templesholomofontario.org](http://www.templesholomofontario.org)

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

(ToL)

[www.tbipomona.org](http://www.tbipomona.org) ☹

All events listed here  
are virtual unless  
otherwise noted.  
Please visit [www.jewishsgpv.org/virtual-calendar](http://www.jewishsgpv.org/virtual-calendar) for  
details.

**December 2022**

# **15TH ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF JEWISH MUSIC**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11  
AT 3 P.M.**



**JEWISH  
FEDERATION**  
OF THE GREATER SAN GABRIEL  
AND POMONA VALLEYS



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# NEWS & JEWS



Jewish passengers were greeted by the police once they arrived in Frankfurt.  
(Courtesy)

## Jewish passengers booted off Lufthansa flight in May are getting \$20,000 payouts

By Jackie Hajdenberg,  
Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)

Nearly seven months after they were denied boarding in Frankfurt, a group of more than 100 Hasidic Lufthansa passengers are getting paid for their troubles.

The airline is paying each passenger \$20,000 plus giving them \$1,000 to reimburse them for expenses incurred during the May incident, according to Dan's Deals, the discount travel website that first reported the incident at the time. After legal fees and some other expenses, each passenger will net approximately \$17,400, the site is reporting.

Lufthansa would not confirm the dollar figures but told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that it is seeking to settle with each of the affected passengers, capping a series of conciliatory responses to the incident.

"Although we are not commenting on the details, we can confirm that Lufthansa endeavors to settle the claims with all of the passengers denied boarding on May 4th, 2022," the company said in a statement.

That date was when airline agents in Frankfurt barred many Jewish travelers coming from New York City from boarding their connecting flight to Budapest, citing the fact that some of the passengers were not wearing masks, as was required at the time. But that rule was applied inconsistently, passengers said at the time, and a Lufthansa supervisor was caught on video speaking disparagingly about Jewish passengers as a group.

"It's Jews coming from JFK. Jewish people who were the mess, who made the problems," the supervisor said on the video, which Dan's Deals shared shortly after the incident.

Amid intense media coverage, Lufthansa publicly apologized, saying in a statement that the company "regrets the circumstances surrounding the decision to exclude the affected

## SGPV Jewish Scene | December

passengers from the flight."

The company added, "What transpired is not consistent with Lufthansa's policies or values. We have zero tolerance for racism, antisemitism and discrimination of any type."

In late July, Lufthansa announced the creation of a senior management role to combat discrimination and antisemitism, even as an independent investigation commissioned by the airline concluded that there was no evidence of institutional antisemitism that led to the incident.

And in September, the American Jewish Committee announced a new program to train Lufthansa employees how to identify and respond to antisemitism.

Many of the Jewish passengers bound for Budapest were headed there for an annual pilgrimage to visit the grave of Rabbi Yeshayah Steiner, a miracle-working rabbi who died in 1925. ♦

## Leonard Cohen's 1973 Yom Kippur War concerts to be dramatized in TV series by 'Shtisel' writer By Gabe Friedman, Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA)

Leonard Cohen's momentous trip to the Sinai Desert to perform for Israeli soldiers in the wake of the Yom Kippur War is being turned into a dramatized TV series.

"Who by Fire: Leonard Cohen in the Sinai" will be written by Yehonatan Indursky, a co-creator of "Shtisel," the landmark Israeli drama about an Orthodox family in Jerusalem, according to Variety, which reported the news on Monday.

The limited series, an adaptation of journalist Matti Friedman's 2022 book of the same name, will film in Israel in 2024. It's being co-produced by Keshet, the Israeli company that has also produced shows such as "Prisoners of War," which was adapted for U.S. audiences as "Homeland."

Cohen's trip to the front lines of the 1973 war became a turning point in the way the folk troubadour incorporated his Jewishness into his songs—for instance, his 1974 album "New Skin for the Old Ceremony" featured "Who By Fire," a song inspired by the Yom Kippur "Unataneh Tokef" prayer. Despite being internationally famous, Cohen slept in an army sleeping bag, ate army rations and performed a series of concerts for on-edge soldiers, who decades later told Friedman that they were moved by his support.

"In October 1973 the poet and singer Leonard Cohen—39 years old, famous, unhappy, and at a creative dead end—traveled to the Sinai desert and inserted himself into the chaos and blood of the Yom Kippur War," the show's press materials read. "Moving around the front with a guitar and a pick-up team of local musicians, Cohen dived headlong into a global crisis and met hundreds of fighting men and women at the worst moment of their lives. Cohen's audience knew his songs might be the last thing they heard, and those who survived never forgot the experience." ♦

“Wishing you and yours  
a joyful and sweet  
Hanukkah.”

— *Jlife Magazine*

# This Chanukah, give the gift of life.



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