

# Jlife

SGPV JEWISH LIFE

March 2023  
Adar / Nissan 5783



**JPAC'S  
DAVID BOCARSLY**  
An interview with the  
Jewish Public Affairs  
Committee of California's  
Executive Director

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LIVELY HOLIDAY  
TRADITIONS**  
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Collaboration leads  
to opportunities

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*kiddish*



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FEDERATION**  
OF THE GREATER SAN GABRIEL  
AND POMONA VALLEYS

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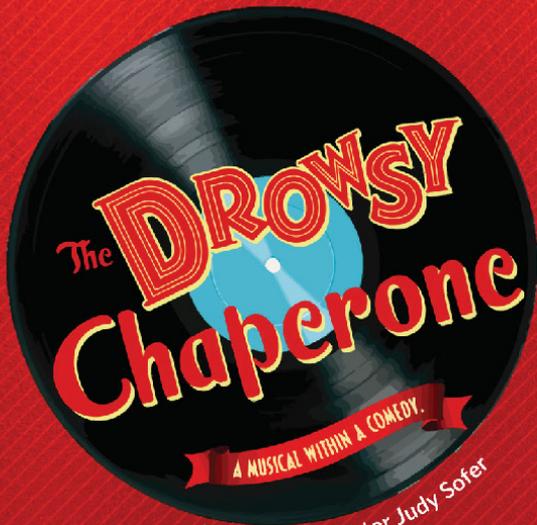
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# Jlife

SGPV'S  
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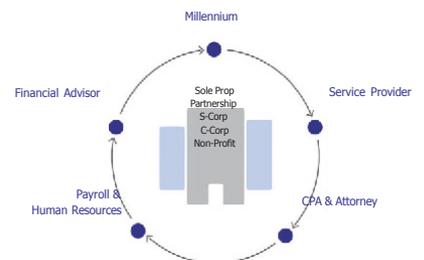
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# CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Collaboration leads to opportunities



**B**etween the emails, the phone calls, the challenges of running a nonprofit, and the targeted hatred that confronts the Jewish world every day, I always enjoy getting out of my office to talk and interact with people. In my position, I get a chance to interact with some extraordinary people.

Take, for instance, a series of meetings I had recently. My week started with a coffee meeting with the president of a local synagogue. The conversation revolved around how to re-engage the congregants while at the same time looking at ways to make what is being offered at the synagogue, besides service, relevant. Later that night, I was invited to a special meeting at the ADL, along with other Jewish leaders from organizations like the Jewish Federation of LA, the American Jewish Committee, Simon Wiesenthal Center, and several others, to share with new L.A. County Sheriff Robert Luna the concerns of the local Jewish community.

As the week continued, I was seated with Pasadena area Executive Directors, discussing the successes and challenges that each

of us is facing within our organizations and our communities. It is during these conversations that I find myself thinking about ways that we, the Jewish Federation, may be able to collaborate with other organizations on incredible opportunities. What I found fascinating was hearing others do the same thing. In fact, be on the lookout for a possible event down the road that brings the Jewish community and the African American community together through music. Think of it as a celebration of our cultures through the beauty of our rich musical traditions.

A lot of my attention of late has been focused on security and antisemitism—you know, small things. And when I think about these, I look at ways that our Jewish Federation, and me in particular, can combat them. As I have previously stated, I am not naïve to think that I alone can solve these problems, but I feel it is my job to try. And yet, I am reminded of the value and opportunities I have every day through my interactions with others that help bring about the change I am trying to make through our work.

It is in these moments and

experiences that we establish and strengthen the relationships we develop with others. And it is through these bonds that we better understand and see one another.

There is great power in those moments, and we sometimes forget that by getting to know someone and looking them in the eye, we truly see them, and they see us. It is through this understanding that we can effect change. Often, we see a problem that is so big that we feel whatever we are going to do is not going to have that great an impact on eradicating it. However, it's through these experiences, these one-to-one relationships we develop with others that can be the starting point.

We are facing great challenges today. Instead of trying to fix society, we should start by focusing on one person in that society. After all, as the ancient Chinese proverb teaches, the only effective way to eat an elephant is to take small bites. ☆



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

“I used to think of Purim mainly as a children’s holiday—but that was before I was exposed to Tel Aviv culture.”

# NOT JUST FOR KIDS

## Purim as Israeli Jewish Masquerade

BY TEDDY WEINBERGER

I used to think of Purim mainly as a children’s holiday—but that was before I was exposed to Tel Aviv culture.

Now that my two daughters live in Tel Aviv and I live in the neighboring city of Herzliya, I know that Purim is not just for kids: It is the Jewish holiday for adults in Tel Aviv, especially young ones.

The nights surrounding Purim are jam-packed with masquerade parties. These parties have a very different cast of characters than one sees at traditional Purim fairs or at Jewish days schools, where the Big Four—Mordecai, Esther, Haman, and Ahaseurus—loom large.

The Purim story is far from the minds of Tel Aviv revelers, though this is not to say that Jewish culture does not make an appearance in a costume or two—a few years ago, for example, one creative Tel Avivian got dressed up as a succah.

Purim has achieved something that no other Jewish holiday has achieved: It has galvanized secular Israelis into investing a lot of time and energy into something that is rooted in the spirit of the day.

Secular Israelis celebrate most of the other Jewish holidays as recreation days, spent at the beach or in parks, with big family meals that feature a relevant holiday touch—whether apples dipped in honey, jelly doughnuts, matza, or cheesecake. With Purim, secular Israel has taken a key element of the holiday and run with it.

In the Talmud (Tractate Megilah 7b), Rava says: “Everyone should reach a state where they cannot tell the difference between cursed Haman and blessed Mordecai.” All those wild Tel Aviv Purim parties may be thought of as being in the spirit of this Talmudic dictate.

The traditional Purim commandments



(mitzvot) are typically not practiced by people who party the night away, and this is perhaps why, from my Orthodox perspective, I used to think of Purim just as a children’s holiday. While every Israeli child observes the holiday to the extent that they come to school in costume on the appointed day, the traditions of going to synagogue on the night and on the morning of Purim to hear the reading of the Book of Esther, of exchanging food baskets (*shalach manos*), of giving Purim charity, and of having a festive meal are almost exclusively the preserve of the religious.

For example, when we used to live in Herzliya, I had thought that Purim might be an opportunity for the people in the six other apartments in our building to reciprocate for some of the challah that I routinely gave them. They did not because, in general, secular people do not give *shalach manos*; this, even though you can buy ready-made Purim food baskets all over Israel in the weeks leading up to the holiday, and many Israeli

workplaces have a day around Purim for exchanging such baskets.

Perhaps I am making too big a deal out of Purim as Israeli Jewish masquerade. After all, the cast of characters that one will see at a Tel Aviv Purim party will not be all that different from a big costume bash that might be given in your own neighborhood on Halloween.

But there is a difference: Only in Israel, the one country in the world with a majority Jewish culture, is the country’s annual masquerade on Purim, and only in Israel do secular Jews as well as religious Jews celebrate on Purim. As someone who is committed to Jewish tradition, and as someone who has both religious and secular Israeli grandchildren, I’m very glad to celebrate Purim in Israel. Happy holiday! ☆

**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.

“In too many cases, the decision to move to Israel was met with derision and anger, causing rifts that never closed.”

# JERUSALEM TOSSED SALAD

## Nature, Nurture and “Family”

BY ANDREA SIMANTOV

Leaving the bountiful land of one’s birth and moving to Israel requires conviction. To come without family already here takes a boatload of bravery or naivete.

My late father had been unwavering in his support of my move to Israel and confessed a personal disappointment in not fulfilling the dream himself. This knowledge helped assuage the guilt of not being with him in his final days. Slightly.

When my marriage dissolved after only a few years after moving here, I experienced a seismic shift in life’s road map. Frightened, lost and bereft, I suddenly discovered “my people.” The Anglos.

They’d been there all along, but the cocoon of nuclear marriage and child-rearing had kept me unaware that like-minded strangers existed in every corner of Jerusalem. Like me, all were in various stages of personal reinvention, language proficiency, spiritual reflection and a desire to cement healthy, normative lives in the country of our choice.

Single, married, straight, gay, formerly religious, newly religious, always observant, Jewish-by-choice; each year my friendship circle widened, deepened, and in short order, a motley patchwork of family-by-design emerged into a precious, connective organism upon which I’ve learned to rely.

My friend, Netanya, cogently stated, “Here, in Israel, we call one-another family, the family I choose for myself. When I was ill, my children were cared for until I got well. Shabbat and holidays wouldn’t be the same without a table filled with friends. They may not be blood related, but they are family in every other sense of the word.”

It is not unusual to become guarantors for one another in order to rent apartments. I personally served as a



guarantor for a friend’s son who was in the midst of a difficult divorce. My signature (and salary) ensured that he would continue to support his children. I didn’t have to be asked twice. Sara reminded me that we cry together, hold each other up during difficult days and party like mad. My friend Irene, despite being elderly and alone, opines that her only regret about *aliyah* is not coming when she was younger.

When I posted the question, “What role did friends play in your *aliyah*?” I was swamped with responses.

I’d tapped an emotional dam, bursting with tales of tenderness among strangers that trumped familial relationships by far. In too many cases, the decision to move to Israel was met with derision and anger, causing rifts that never closed. What better poultice for such pain than a community that lovingly picks up the pieces for one-another on sad days?

Most fascinating were the tangential threads that spoke of including a back-and-forth between a mother who still lived in England but has a daughter here who made *aliyah* on her own and

a woman who came on her own 50 years ago! The British mom wanted to thank everyone who was watching over her daughter and “adopting” her as their own while the long time *olah* shared, “I couldn’t believe that I left behind all of my very close friends and family. In time, friends were my lifeline to feeling human here. This network made me function in a way that I could be happy, raise a family and thrive. What is the definition of ‘family’? That which offers support and warmth. My friends embody this definition. They are my family—the family I’ve chosen.”

I feel enormously blessed to be part of a forgiving fellowship that is rife with nuance, a commonality of values, expectations, culture and attitudes. Swathed within this compassionate safety net, I needn’t fear tomorrow. There is no “alone” when others have your back. ✨

NEW YORK NATIVE **ANDREA SIMANTOV** HAS LIVED IN JERUSALEM SINCE 1995. SHE WRITES FOR SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS, APPEARS REGULARLY ON ISRAEL NATIONAL RADIO AND OWNS AN IMAGE CONSULTING FIRM FOR WOMEN.

# 10 PASSOVER CUSTOMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**Many Jewish communities have developed unique Passover traditions that make the holiday more lively and relevant.**

BY ABBY SEITZ, MY JEWISH LEARNING



**F**or over a thousand years, Jews around the world have used largely the same Hebrew text for the Passover seder. Though there are many different editions of the *haggadah*, the core text is almost always the same. Similarly, in keeping with the strictures of the Torah and Mishnah, Jews around the world eat many of the same ritual foods, like matzah, *maror* and *haroset*.

Within this framework, there is still plenty of room for innovation and customization, especially when seder hosts seek to make the Passover themes of liberation and memory relevant to their own cultures and familial experiences. As a result, Jewish communities around the world have developed a number of unique Passover traditions. Some have become more well-known in recent years, such as the Sephardic tradition of singing *Had Gadya* in Ladino or Moroccan communities marking the end of Passover with a carb-fueled festive meal called *Mimouna*. Here are 10 more lesser-known Passover traditions from around the world.

## 1. Next Level Passover Cleaning

Like most Jewish communities, Kurdish Jews begin preparing for Passover after the end of Purim. However, Passover cleaning traditionally involved washing the bags that held rice, lentils and other legumes—as well as the foods themselves—several times to ensure that no *hametz* or insects could render the food *treif* for Passover. Kurdish Jews would also paint their walls in the days before Passover, although the origin of that custom is unclear.

## 2. A Bloody *Hamsa*

In Mumbai, India, Jews mimic the Passover lamb's blood that was smeared across the entrances to Israelite homes in Egypt on the eve of their liberation. The Bene Israel Jews dip their hands in the blood of a sheep or goat. Then, they press their hands to blank pieces of paper and hang the prints above their doorway. The imprint resembles a *hamsa*, and like the amulet, symbolizes good luck and protection.

## 3. A Seder Table of Jewels and Gold

In some parts of Hungary and Austria, women at the seder would decorate the table with their jewelry

collections, based on this passage from Exodus 3:21-22 in which the escaping Jews are permitted by G-d to loot the Egyptians who had enslaved them for generations:

And I will dispose the Egyptians favorably toward this people, so that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed. Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put these on your sons and daughters, thus stripping the Egyptians.

Exodus 3:21-22

#### 4. Grass, Candy and Coins from Grandpa

Jews from Turkey recall the wealth that the Israelites brought out of Egypt differently. The patriarch of the family throws grass (symbolizing the Red Sea's reeds), coins and/or candy for children to collect. While tossing the items, the father or grandfather will also share wishes for a productive year ahead.

#### 5. Retelling through Reenactment

In Góra Kalwaria, the town in Poland that the Ger Hasidic movement originates from, families would pour water on their floor, and then family members would reenact the moment when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea by walking through it. This custom always occurs on the seventh day of Passover, because Jewish tradition says that the seventh day is when the Israelites reached the sea. As they walk through the water, some Jews will name the towns and cities that their ancestors were displaced from in Europe.

Some Romanian Jewish families also recreated scenes from the Exodus by filling a bag or pillowcase with heavy objects and walking around the seder table several times while carrying it, to remember the Israelites leaving Egypt with their belongings on their backs.

#### 6. Pharaoh's Cup

While filling a cup for Elijah—and sometimes for Miriam and/or Ruth—is a familiar ritual at most seders, the Jews of India also fill a cup not for a hero but a villain: Pharaoh. The wine from this cup is then dumped into the glasses of each seder participant, as a snub at the wicked Egyptian king.

#### 7. No Seder Plate Here

Yemenite Jews don't use a dish for their seder plate. Instead, the entire table is utilized as a seder plate, with the vegetables arranged aesthetically. This lack of a plate likely reflects ancient practice. In the time of the rabbis, food was commonly served on trays that were set on stools to create individual tables for eating.

Jews in Tunisia similarly do not use a plate; instead, the ritual foods that are otherwise found on a seder plate are placed into a reed basket, to evoke Moses being placed in a basket as an infant. The



A Yemenite family celebrating Passover in 1946 in Tel Aviv, Israel. (Photo by Zoltan Kluger)

matriarch of the house then takes the reed basket and hovers it over each guest's head. The matriarch says, "We left Egypt." The guest replies, "Yesterday, we were slaves. Today, we are free. This year, we are here. Next year, we will be free people in the land of Israel."

Jewish communities in Morocco recite a similar dialogue; however, Moroccan Jews use a seder plate rather than a reed basket.

#### 8. Passover in Ethiopia

Since Beta Israel Jews did not encounter rabbinic Judaism until the 1900s, Passover celebrations in Ethiopia were derived solely from local customs and the Torah. Ethiopian Jews understood the word *hametz* to include all fermented foods, and would refrain from consuming yogurt, butter, cheese and any leavened drinks.

Beta Israel would also perform the ritual slaughtering of a Passover lamb and smear its blood above the entrances to their synagogues. In place of *haggadot*, the Israelites' oppression and liberation was recounted by reading directly from a *sefer Torah*.

Today, many Ethiopian Jews—especially in Israel—have adopted rabbinic customs like *haggadot* and seder plates.

#### 9. Mystical Yachatz

In many Jewish communities that originate in North Africa, breaking the middle matzah (*yachatz*) takes on a mystical meaning. The matzah is broken to resemble the Hebrew letter "hey," which has kabbalistic connotations of redemption at the seder. The letter hey was chosen because its numerical value is five and the fifth cup of wine at the seder is poured for Elijah, the prophet that will announce the coming of the messiah.

Some Syrian Jews break the middle matzah to resemble the Hebrew letters "dalet" and "vav." The numerical values of the letters add up to 10, which can represent the 10 plagues or the 10 *sefirot*—mystical emanations of G-d.

#### 10. Scallion Whips

When chanting *Dayenu*, some Persian and Afghan Jews have the custom of beating each other lightly on the back with scallions or leeks. This tradition symbolizes the whipping that the Israelites endured in Egypt while enslaved. ☆

ABBY SEITZ IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO MY JEWISH LEARNING AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.



Shaun Tomson is a former world champion surfer. (Courtesy of Tomson)

# ‘SWASTIKA BOARDS’ AND ‘SURF NAZIS’

**New documentary explores surfing’s history of antisemitism**

BY JACOB GURVIS, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)

**W**hen he was 13 years old, Josh Greene moved with his family to San Clemente, California, a city known as one of the best spots for surfing on the West Coast. Greene quickly fell in love with the sport, even holding his bar mitzvah party at a local museum dedicated to it.

As a “skinny, very unathletic” teen, Greene said he endured a significant amount of bullying, including some that “extended itself into antisemitism.” Students at his school would compare his physique to that of a Holocaust survivor.

Surfing provided refuge.

“Surfing was my way to really carve my own niche and find the confidence, courage and physical strength I needed,” he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

But years after his bar mitzvah, Greene learned that his parents had arranged for the Surfing Heritage and Culture Center to remove swastika-engraved boards that were on display, to avoid disturbing the partygoers. Wanting to learn more, he discovered that the sport’s history is full of Nazi imagery: Particularly in the 1960s, seeing surfboards with swastikas or surfers giving “Sieg heil” salutes was commonplace. Serious surfers called themselves “surf Nazis” as a way to signal their intense dedication to the sport.

An aspiring filmmaker—he received his first “real camera” as his bar mitzvah present—Greene decided

to combine his two passions and delve into the dark history.

The result, completed before he graduated from the University of Southern California in May 2022, is a documentary called “Waves Apart,” which chronicles the history of antisemitism in surfing. Directed by Greene, the student-produced film was a finalist in the fall for a Student Academy Award, given by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

“Waves Apart” made its global debut at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival, before heading to other Jewish and documentary film festivals in California, Denver, Toronto and Maryland.

After chronicling his own journey with surfing and the bar mitzvah incident in the film, Greene interviews surf writer Dan Duane and Jewish history professor Steven Ross, who provide a fuller picture of Southern California’s history of both surfing and Nazism, and their unfortunate overlap. As Duane wrote in a 2019 *New York Times* article, that overlap runs deep—The first commercially made surfboards made in California are thought to be the “Swastika model,” sold in the 1930s by the Pacific Systems Homes company, which also made prefab houses. The 1960s surfer icon Miki Dora was known to have painted a swastika on at least one of his boards.

Duane cites arguments that claim early surfers, who wanted to be seen as a rebellious subculture, used the

swastika only to irk members of mainstream society. But Duane argues back that their antisemitism was part of a clear culture of racism in the largely white surfer community.

"I've heard all the predictable excuses for this stuff, like that the swastika was an ancient Sanskrit symbol," he wrote in *The Times*. "Putting a swastika on something to anger people means you know that it angers them and very likely why."

In his movie, Greene also speaks with Jewish surfers, both his classmates at USC and Jewish surfing legends like Shaun Tomson and Israel "Izzy" Paskowitz. Paskowitz shares a story of encountering a surfer with a swastika spray-painted on his surfboard—which his father, the famous surfer Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz, destroyed out of anger.

"Right as I was about to graduate, we had the first screening of our film, in our school's theater," Greene said. "We drew a packed crowd, and it was so rewarding and such a great sign of confirmation about the film's message and connectivity with our audience. We saw people crying, people smiling at the end, with the way our film ends with a hopeful tone and message for the future."

That hopeful message is where Tomson comes in. A former pro surfer and now a motivational speaker, Tomson reached the pinnacle of the sport by winning the 1977 World Surf League championship. He won 19 major professional surfing events in total and is a member of both the Southern California and International Jewish Sports Halls of Fame.

Tomson, born in Durban, South Africa, also had a surfing experience tied to his bar mitzvah that would prove foundational. Tomson's father took him on a surfing trip to Hawaii, which Tomson called "the Mount Everest of surfing."

"For me, it was a total representation of what a bar mitzvah is—it's coming into manhood," Tomson told JTA. "And here I was, a young boy paddling out in 25-foot surf in Hawaii, which was a moment for me that changed my life. I came back to South Africa, and my career and my role in surfing changed after that bar mitzvah present."

Tomson said he has faced antisemitism before outside of the sport—he was called a "Jew boy" by a fellow member of South Africa's army as a teenager—but never as a member of the surfing community in the 1970s



Josh Greene directed "Waves Apart," a documentary about the antisemitic history of surfing. onward.

"While it's not an excuse, I think there's just a lot of ignorance," Tomson said. "When I say ignorance, perhaps it wasn't actually directed at Jews, it was more just blatant stupidity, and a lack of awareness of what actually happened in the Holocaust."

There weren't many Jewish surfers in South Africa when Tomson grew up, but he said he feels a direct link between his identities as a Jew and as a surfer.

"When you're out in the ocean, there's certainly a spiritual and a religious connectivity there, which is totally aligned with Jewish values," he said.

No experience exemplifies this connection more powerfully than the tragic death of Tomson's son, Matthew, who died in 2006 at the age of 15 as a result of a schoolyard "choking game" gone wrong. Tomson tells the story in the documentary.

Tomson explained that his particular expertise is tube riding—the picturesque but challenging technique of riding inside a tunnel-like wave. Two hours before Tomson's son died, he called his father to share an essay he had written about how in tube riding, "the light shines ahead." Just hours later, Tomson received the devastating news.

"So when I was trying to make sense of the world and my life, and why G-d had done this to me, I went back to my old shul," Tomson said. "The old shul where I'd had my bar mitzvah. And I look at that lamp of everlasting light that represents the hope and faith of Judaism. And I thought of the words that my son wrote, 'the light shines ahead.' And I realized that Judaism's about hope."

The film ends on that hopeful tone: The last scene features a group of Jewish surfers at a beach in Malibu, reciting the Shema prayer in the water, before hitting the waves as the sun begins to set. In the last shot, the group sits down to a Shabbat meal on the beach.

"Surfing can be seen as a microcosm for issues like that and I think we would be doing our sport a great disservice if we ignored our own signs of darkness," Greene said. "I think that by making a film like this, we can dispel ignorance and divisiveness, and instead promote inclusivity, community and equality for all surfers and all people." ☆

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



Watch the WavesApart trailer at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw1\\_g6syyWY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw1_g6syyWY)



# DMITRY SALITA

## A Jewish Boxer Among Us

BY RACHEL STERN

**D**mitry Salita is a retired professional boxer who is the first ever shabbat observant boxer to become a world champion. Salita began his professional career in 2001 and quickly made a name for himself in the light welterweight division. Over the years he won many medals, most notably IBF International Titles and the WBF Junior *Welterweight World Title*. He stopped competing on Shabbat at 18 due to his gradual growth in Judaism. That decision was made at the US Nationals a pivotal moment in his life and career.

Dmitry Salita, a Ukrainian Orthodox Jew, immigrated to the United States when he was just nine years old. At that time, it was still part of the Soviet Union. Salita has nice childhood memories, stating that Odessa is indeed a beautiful city with a rich culture. However, he does recall attending a Communist school and Jews were feeling uncertainty in terms of their place in society. This was the main reason his family decided to leave the country. They settled in Brooklyn, New York and since they did not know the language or culture, it was a true culture shock for them all. Salita stated: "Shortly after, the challenges overshadowed the initial excitement of moving to New York City."

Salita said that he was drawn to boxing because he was already used to karate which he practiced at age seven in Odessa. His father thought it would be a good idea since he got picked on at school. Salita's instructor named Paul Mormando saw a lot of potential in Salita, but recognized he had financial issues. Salita practiced daily in the evenings and eventually started competing and won a few tournaments. The Starret City Boxing Club had no bathroom, running water, heat, or air conditioning, nevertheless he said: "I did not know it at the time, but it produced some of the best boxers in the world." As a kid in the Starret City Boxing Club, he grew up with Keysha Snow and that gave him the knowledge of the challenges that he faced. During that time, there was no real industry for women's boxing, and she could not make a living, or get recognition like men did.

Salita's started to compete at age 13. His first medal was The State Silver Gloves in Rochester, New York and he won a 95 lb. gold medal! He signed his first promotional contract after he won the U.S. Nationals and the NYC Golden Gloves. His first promoter was Bob Arum who is still the number one promoter to this day at age 91. There was a particular fight against Amir Khan, another boxing champion that Salita



lost to, but it did not bring him down. He said: "I was undefeated for 10 years. Going into that fight shook me up. It had a significant impact and allowed me to learn many lessons about myself and people around me."



Salita's promotional contract ended. He wanted to get back in the ring, but did not feel comfortable signing a new contract, so he decided to open his own promotional company. Among others, he promoted Claressa Shields. Salita saw all the talent that was within her, she was the best female fighter of all time who was already changing the industry. She was the first female boxer to sign a seven-figure deal, the first for female boxing. Today, the industry is more advanced, Salita said that this past fall, he co-promoted his boxers who had the chance to compete at the O2, Wembley in London, Bally's in Atlantic City, and the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas. It was seen on Sky, DAZN and Showtime.

Salita had a documentary made about him. As a result, director Jason Hutt became a lifelong friend of Salita's. The documentary covers everything, from when he first started, to meeting the President at the White House in Washington D.C. Salita excitedly said: "I am so grateful that he recorded over 200 hours and was able summarize it into an 'Orthodox Stance.'"

Salita's career serves as a reminder that anything is possible with hard work, dedication and the determination to succeed. He has made a great impact on the Jewish community, by showing that one can be a warrior and a tough guy while still holding onto their cultural and religious values. Salita's career is not only an inspiration to Jewish athletes but to anyone who wants to pursue their dreams.

As for his future, Salita hopes to continue the path that he is on. He wants to continue being of service in the boxing industry. He feels that there is always room for improvement as well as giving fans a more in-depth experience." ☆

RACHEL STERN IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLIFE MAGAZINE.

**COVER STORY**



# COALITION ADVOCATES FOR JEWS

## JPAC sets policy agenda and lobbies state legislature.

BY RABBI DANIEL LEVINE

**J**PAC, the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California, is an advocacy organization that lobbies for the interest of California's Jews. We sat down with its Executive Director, David Bocarsly, to discuss its important work. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Daniel Levine:** *For someone who's never heard of JPAC before, how would you summarize the work?*

**David Bocarsly:** We are the umbrella organization that represents 32 leading Jewish community organizations in California (including Jewish Federation of the Greater San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys). And we work with all of them to put together a policy agenda and lobby the state government on behalf of the Jewish community's issues and values. The issues range from what I call core Jewish community issues like fighting antisemitism and hate, supporting Holocaust and genocide education, and supporting the California-Israel relationship to core Jewish community values around supporting children, immigrants and older adults, and fighting hunger and poverty.

So, we're a diverse coalition, but we represent what I think is a broad spectrum of California's Jewish community and specifically focus on the state government, which is an underutilized resource, but such a really important avenue of power and resources for our community.

**DL:** *Before getting into specifics of your work, I wanted to ask a philosophic question here. JPAC is committed to upholding two different things. There are the values that affect the Jewish community so that's internal Jewish particularisms, and then there are the wider, more global, universalistic causes. How do you navigate both?*

**DB:** There are Jews who are deeply engaged in Jewish life who believe that being Jewish is doing each of these things. So, when we're doing work on behalf of the Jewish community, we find it important to make sure that we're representing the array of Jewish organizations that we partner with. So that's why we do work on both of these issues.

I'll also say just a thing or two about how they're connected. Obviously, fighting antisemitism and hate, supporting Holocaust and genocide education, supporting Israel are core to who we are as Jews. But there is a really strong argument to be made about why a lot of the social service and civil rights work that we do is as well, and how it connects to one another. So as a community, we talk a lot about two primary reasons to do social justice work.

One is because it's deeply rooted in our tradition and Torah. And the second is because we have a long history of oppression ourselves. And so the saying goes: We must help fight oppression wherever we see it. And these are both really important reasons to remember and to reiterate. But they're also rooted in this kind of monolithic idea that Jews are all white or privileged or no longer suffering from our own oppression. And it's important to



JPAC's Executive Director, David Bocarsly

root this work for other important reasons too.

The first is when we talk about helping immigrants, people of color, people experiencing food insecurity or homelessness, etc., we're also talking about helping Jews because our community is diverse and it's made up of immigrants and people of color and people experiencing food insecurity and homelessness and so many others. The other reason is also because when we show up for other people, we build trust and we build deep relationships with others who we can then ask to show up for us when we need it. So, there's a strategic value added in partnership.

So, to bring your question back to its core, in my mind, these are all core Jewish issues. We are helping across the spectrum with what we do. We're helping Jews. We're helping other people too, because that is really deeply rooted in who we are. But in that we're helping ourselves in the process.

**DL:** *Do you have any concrete examples of what you're describing in terms of allyship with other communities?*

**DB:** Yeah, one that I'll share is an example from my last job. Prior to being the Executive Director of JPAC, I was on the other side of things. I worked in the state legislature running the Legislative Jewish Caucus, which is now a group of 18 Jewish elected officials. And I was their staff director. And one of the big programs that we organized in 2019 was for a group of Jewish and Latino elected officials to go down to San Diego. This was at the height of the family separations instances under the Trump



**David Bocarsly speaking at LA Jewish Community Reception cohosted by Jewish Family Service LA and Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles. Photo Credit: via Twitter**

administration.

There was a lot of attention around people fleeing real persecution at home, near-death experiences coming to our border, and then being separated from their families and being put into our detention centers. So we took a group of Jewish and Latino elected officials down to the border to a Detention Center to meet some of these asylum seekers who were held in the detention center there. And we heard about their harrowing stories of escaping persecution at home and how they came to our borders trying to seek a lawful process to get into our country.

And then we took these Jewish and Latino elected officials down the street to the Jewish Family Service migrant shelter. Now Jewish Family Service is one of the amazing organizations that's part of the JPAC coalition that is on the front lines, helping migrants access health benefits when they cross the border. Legal support system, financial support systems, so many different resources that get them into shelter and into jobs when they're here, as they're awaiting the determination on their status. And I can tell you, I watched the faces of these Latino elected officials and saw how they were transformed.

This was the same year as the Chabad Poway shooting. And after the shooting we had a big press conference up in Sacramento where we invited the leaders of all the other ethnic caucuses to come and speak about the need to support the Jewish community, fight antisemitism and hate, and support institutional security. And we invited the leaders of all the other ethnic caucuses and they all came. They all came, and they all spoke very beautifully. But notably, the chair of the Latino caucus got up and said, "I saw firsthand how Jews risk their own safety and security

on the front lines in San Diego, helping predominantly Latino migrants. And because of that I and the Latino caucus in the Latino community stand strongly with the Jewish community today, and we demand that their requests for community security are met."

It was this beautiful, powerful moment of solidarity going from one side to the other. And at that same press conference, the governor came and announced that they were actually going to meet our request and grant our community \$15 million to support synagogue security initiatives.

**DL:** *It's interesting because if we look at Jewish history vis-a-vis governments over the last 2,000 years, Judaism has had a philosophy of "let's try to stay as far away from the government as much as we can in hopes that they leave us alone." I'm reminded there's this famous and comedic scene in "Fiddler on the Roof" where somebody asks the rabbi in the opening song "Tradition," do you have a prayer for the tsar? And the rabbi says, of course I pray for the tsar, that he stays far away from here. It sort of cues this reality that we've cultivated over thousands of years. Now what's fascinating about what you're describing in the current American political sphere is really a time where Jews are actually coming into both politics and political advocacy wearing their identity externally.*

**DB:** Professor David Meyers at UCLA writes in his brief introduction to Jewish history that the Jews have survived this long despite so many other people disappearing because of this constant fluctuation of assimilation and antisemitism. We assimilate. And just as we might assimilate ourselves out of existence, we experience a moment of antisemitism that forces us to reckon with our uniqueness.

And it's really interesting to look at Jewish history from that lens. I then look at Jewish engagement in civic life in America in the last 150 years, right after the big waves of immigration from people who fled antisemitism. As an oppressed people in America, we, for many years, were very active in civic life. We were very active in protest movements and joining hands with other marginalized oppressed communities because we were truly victims of a lot of the same oppression that they were. So, you saw Jews really engaging in the founding of the labor rights movement in the early 1900s and the women's suffrage movement. Of course, we know the long legacy of our engagement in the civil rights movement.

And then I look at the last 30, 40 years, and I start to see a pattern. As Jews gained racial and economic privilege, let's say white Jews gained racial and economic privilege in America, you start to see this familiar pattern of us going from an oppressed people to starting to assimilate a little bit. And a lot of institutional life actually shied away from civic engagement. The "Fiddler On The Roof" motto. I think we're hitting a moment of inflection in our community where antisemitism is hitting record levels and we're starting to realize that assimilation isn't protecting us. And we actually need to be engaged very actively in civic life.

I really believe our member organizations have started to invest in this space in a significant way because they realize that when we show visibly as Jews doing work both for ourselves and for all vulnerable people, we are actually doing the best thing we can to protect ourselves. Building meaningful relationships with other oppressed communities, being visible, highlighting how we exist in the world and some of the struggles we deal with. I think that we were really hitting a moment of reckoning for our community as a whole and that coincides, non-coincidentally, with the work that we're doing being much more visible and much more significant.

**DL:** *A couple years ago I recall a statistic that said that two-thirds of American Holocaust survivors live on less than \$23,000 a year. A failure on all of our parts in terms of caring for this community. Why do you think this is the case, and how does your work help fix the issue?*

**DB:** I think the major problem here is that, first of all, most of our Holocaust survivors are older adults, and there are strategies and systems that our society has put into place to help care for older adults. And we have often times forgotten that the trauma inflicted on Holocaust survivors is unlike anything anyone else has ever experienced and needs to be responded to with specific trauma-informed care. And right now, we think of lower income Holocaust survivors as any other lower income seniors, and we treat them the same way and provide the same resources, and

they can't take advantage of the same resources.

So, one major example is institutionalization. We have a lot of senior homes across the state, but going into an institution that has rigid meal schedules and people who serve in many ways as authority figures oftentimes doesn't work for Holocaust survivors. And so, we just don't have the right support systems to care for this specific community of people.

Now we've got Jewish Family Service organizations across the state that are incredible and leading social service providers for these older Holocaust survivors, and they've figured out how to provide trauma-informed care and core resources so that Holocaust survivors can age at home. The problem is they don't always have the resources to be able to help all of the survivors, and survivors might not necessarily know how to access the resources that Jewish Family Service provides. So, in JPAC, we have eight Jewish Family Service organizations that are part of our coalition that serves thousands of survivors across the state. And this past year, actually, there was an amazing advocacy effort that resulted in \$36 million from the state budget going towards Holocaust survivor assistance. To put into context, the federal government provides Jewish Family Service agencies across the country some money for this. And I think the max they provide is \$10 million. The state alone last year provided \$36 million.

**DL:** *Where can people learn more about JPAC and potentially get involved in the work you're doing?*

**DB:** We have a robust newsletter, and I would encourage anyone who's interested in this type of work to subscribe. You can find out about it at our website, [jpac-cal.org](http://jpac-cal.org). We do an incredible conference in Sacramento where every year, we bring up hundreds and hundreds of Jewish community leaders and community members from across the state. These are staff members, board members, executives, young professionals, people looking to get involved in Jewish community organizing for the first time. It's an incredible array of Jewish life and an opportunity to really meet people who care about a lot of the same things as you from across the state. It's a two-day program. This year it's May 9 to 10, and we engage with statewide elected officials.

Last year we had over one quarter of the entire Legislature come and participate in our program, whether it be at our reception, at our dinner, speaking on panels, or being our keynote speakers. We have the lieutenant governor and the attorney general as keynotes.

We do a ton of really amazing networking events, and then we break everyone up into groups and actually go lobby. We bring people to the state Capitol and they meet with a handful of elected officials and talk to them about the different priorities for our community. And so, it's just been a really powerful and empowering event for a lot of people.

And it's open to anybody, open to Jews and non-Jews who want to be involved in this work. I really want to encourage people to come up. And we're also starting to build out some advocacy initiatives throughout the year that are to be announced on our newsletter. So, stay tuned there! ☆

**RABBI DANIEL LEVINE** IS THE SENIOR JEWISH EDUCATOR OF OC HILLEL, A RABBI AT TEMPLE BETH TIKVAH, AN ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AT UC IRVINE, AND A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JLIFE MAGAZINE.



# “A SMALL LIGHT”

## This Behind-the-Scenes Look at Disney’s New Anne Frank TV Show Is Incredible

BY LIOR ZALTZMAN, KVELLER

A new National Geographic limited series, “A Small Light,” is coming out this year, and it will explore the story of Anne Frank through the eyes of Miep Gies, Otto Frank’s secretary.

Gies, who died in 2010, was in her early 20s when she started working for Frank. Along with her husband and some of Frank’s other employees, she helped hide the Jewish Frank family, van Pels family and Dr. Fritz Pfeffer in the Secret Annex above his office between the summer of 1942 and 1944. She was the one who kept Anne Frank’s diary safe after the families were captured by the Nazis.

We already got the first glimpse of the show earlier this month, which showed the families celebrating Hanukkah in hiding. But this weekend, National Geographic released a mesmerizing behind-the-scenes look of this star-studded show—in which Bel Powley plays Gies and Liev Schreiber plays Otto Frank.

In the video, you can hear the show’s creators—the director of the show’s first three episodes, Susanna Fogel, and the show’s executive producers and creators Joan Rater and Tony Phelan, as well as the show’s stars, talk about the challenges of retelling this iconic, often-told story, and why it still feels so pertinent in 2023.

“It just felt like the right story at the right time,” Schreiber, who spent Passover in Ukraine helping feed refugees, says in the video, adding that it’s “a story that speaks so profoundly about compassion.”

The video includes the scene in which Otto asks Gies to help hide him and his family. “You need to take your time to think it through,” Liev as Otto tells her.

“No I don’t,” Miep replies emphatically, asking straight away what it is she needs to do.

We see Miep’s life—full of music and dance, young love and youthful adventures—juxtaposed with this life-endangering, huge undertaking. As Powley says, the show balances this big historical moment with the personal. “Miep’s marriage problems weren’t going to wait until the war was over; experiencing growing from a girl to woman wasn’t going to wait until the war was over,” she explains.

The glimpses of the show feel so fresh and human—and full of cheeky humor, thanks to Powley’s Miep and



National Geographic for Disney/Dusan Martincek

Billie Boulet’s wonderfully sassy Anne.

We also get to see the terrors of Nazi-occupied Amsterdam—the drama and fear, violence and suspense, soldiers filling the streets, Nazi banners hung on buildings, signs of “Jews forbidden” and wire fences.

The show was shot in Paris, Prague and Amsterdam in the summer of 2022. Shooting around the Frank apartment helped the cast and team behind the show think about—and honor—the people whose stories they were trying to tell.

“Anne’s story is still relevant today because racism and antisemitism is still happening in this world. Different formats but it’s still happening,” Boulet says in the video.

According to Fogel, the show’s mission is to make people look at the world differently. As Phelan explains, “Miep’s message was always: I am not special, you can do this as well, everybody has this in them to do something like this, to make a difference in someone’s life.”

“This is not the Anne Frank story you were taught in elementary school,” Schreiber said at an event last week. “For me, it gives you a broader perspective on what it is to be Jewish.”

There’s no release date yet for the eight episodes of “A Small Light,” but the limited series will find its way to Disney+ sometime this spring.

In the meantime, if you want more of Miep’s story, you can read her memoir “Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Woman Who Helped to Hide the Frank Family,” or, if you want to introduce her to your children ahead of the show, try “Behind the Bookcase: Miep Gies, Anne Frank, and the Hiding Place.” ☆

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

SGPV'S JEWISH YOUTH & PARENTS

# *kiddish*



***Chag Sameach!***

Passover is Coming

MARCH 2023



# Passing on the Passover Seder

Traditions to pass along to the next generation.

BY RENEE SEPTIMUS, KVELLER

Every once in a while, it hits me like a soft pillow. I am a matriarch! This year, for the first time, we are going to my daughter's house for the first days of Passover.

She is exactly the same age I was when my parents first began coming to me and my sister who lived around the corner. Nearly a quarter century has passed since the day we told our parents that it was time to give up the seder in their home, where bodies slept all over the Upper West Side apartment in which I grew up, and come out to Queens where they, and my brother's family, could be put up more comfortably.

In our house, we had put in a small *Pesach* kitchen in the basement where I cooked for days, enlisting the kids as "helpers." Yes, sometimes it was the kind of help you could do without. But we had lots of fun—daughter #1 dipped chicken cutlets in egg and matzah meal, son #1 de-bugged the *maror* lettuce, daughter #2 made *knaidlach* (matzah balls) and son #2 played in the chopped meat trying to form meatballs. We all grated the horseradish and mixed the *haroset* together. Invariably, the smoke detector let out a piercing screech in the middle of all the hoopla and I had to climb up to disconnect it. Our ears rang for a while. As I said, it was a small kitchen.

It was a lot of work and I did get crabby. I always say that if you prepare for *Pesach* you get an inside look at slavery. But the excitement and togetherness of the preparations were not only educational, they created enthusiasm for, and pride in, the finished project. We'd set the table together and the kids would put out their hand-made place cards. Each seder would begin with my acknowledgment of, and thanks to, each child for her/his particular contribution.

Since my grandsons were 2, they have come over the day before the holiday to help me prepare the ritual foods. We talk about the story of the Exodus and I reminisce about the seders I had with my own grandparents. According to custom, I acknowledge and thank the kids for their help (again, the kind of help you could, under other circumstances, do without.)

This year, I will cook at home and go to my daughter's on Sunday night. Monday, I will repeat



the ritual with my two boys and, for the first time, with their 20-month-old sister in their kitchen. We'll set the table together and put out hand-made place cards and discuss the Exodus story. And they will again listen raptly to my reminiscences about seders with my Nana and Poppa, my Grandma and Grandpa. (I am a compelling storyteller, if I do say so myself.)

I have asked my children to work out among themselves that my husband and I are not alone on a holiday. So, we are off to New Jersey while two of our kids go to Israel and one to Brooklyn with their respective in-laws. It will be a smaller seder than usual for us, but I am anticipating it happily.

My husband and I will sit at a different table this year. But, as in the past, I will look at the precious faces around the table and my eyes will fill with tears of joy and gratitude. I will be thinking of the unique confluence of past, present, and future the seder represents to me. I will remember when my grandmothers were the matriarchs and then my mother. I will be mildly astonished, yet again, that I now fill that role. And I will look forward to other holidays, other tables, other faces joining us as our family expands.

One day, I'll be missing. But I am pretty sure that my grandchildren will make the ritual foods and reminisce about the seders they spent with their *Savta* and *Zaidie*. And maybe they'll even recall the proud smile and teary eyes that *Savta* always seemed to have as she looked around the table.

Because then, you see, I will be there, no matter where they are, no matter which table they are sitting at. ☆

RENEE SEPTIMUS IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO KVELLER AND KIDDISH MAGAZINE

# Family Activities for Passover

*Art plus tradition equal bonding time.*

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

The eight-day Jewish holiday Passover falls each spring, commemorating the Jews' exodus from Egypt. Families typically gather and it is a special time in Jewish homes--and also a great opportunity to create holiday bonding art together.

Jewish tradition tells us that the most important part of this holiday is the children themselves. Children are encouraged to ask questions about the story of Passover at the seder and many even get the special role of reciting a part of the historic story and the traditions of this holiday are important, the most important part of all is the children's participation and enjoyment of it.

Our children will carry these traditions on, so it is very important to engage young children in the process of preparing for, learning about and celebrating Passover. So, what better way to do this than through fun, hands-on Passover art activities!?

Try adding these activities to your own celebration of the holiday to learn about the holiday itself that will have your children exploring, engage in sensory play, storytelling, literacy, art and even some practical life skills.

Passover is a holiday rich in ritual objects. These items can be found in many Jewish homes, some even handmade, collected from special places and passed on from generation to generation.

One of the most special ways to connect young children with these special materials is to engage them in making their own. The best part is that they can be shared at a family seder, used in play or displayed for family and guests to see. There are endless creative possibilities, but here are a few ideas to get you started.

## Make your own Seder plate

Every seder table has a seder plate. Here are a couple of ideas you might try which are easy and fun and can be replicated each year or be lovely special keepsakes to use each year.

At my studio each Passover, I love to sculpt and paint decorative artsy and colorful Seder plates with kids and families out of clay and add embellishments such as gems and mosaic pieces.

This can be a cherished keepsake, a conversation piece for the seder to share with family, or as a holiday



gift. There is of course, a simpler version that can be done at home with basic materials: a white paper plate, markers/crayons/colored pencils, glue stick, printed pictures (which can be obtained online) of seder plate foods for the younger children to look at

and/or glue on for the five or six items on their seder plates, each of which has symbolic meaning to the story.

Children can make these seder plates as beautiful and ornate as they'd like and can draw their own decorative designs or even add some stickers or small craft items to glue on. There are also many free printable Seder plate coloring sheets which can be found for free online which can also be used as reference or for pictures of the seder plate foods to color.

**Make a Kiddush cup (wine goblet)**

Four cups of grape juice or wine are consumed during the course of the seder and each guest needs his/her own kiddush cup. At most supply or party stores it is easy to obtain lovely wine goblets or shot glasses. You can either take it as far as painting the glass option with permanent enamel paints (for the adults or older kids) or the younger children can decorate the plastic kind with small craft materials such as tissue paper, stickers or permanent markers.

**Make your own matzo cover/afikoman bag**

This is one of my favorite activities which can be handed down over generations. A part of the Seder is covering the table and matzo in beautiful ornate wraps. This is an opportunity to make your own decorative fabric garment to cover the matzo using

a white cloth napkin or a square of white fabric/felt. You can write the word "Matzo" on it in English or even Hebrew if you wish. Children can decorate their matzo covers using fabric markers or fabric paints, gluing on small craft items or even tie-dyeing them! The same can be done if you choose to make an afikoman bag for half of the piece of matzo which is hidden during the seder and saved for Jared. This can be done with the same fabrics by finding them in half and sewing (with help from an adult) or gluing the sides, leaving the top open like an envelope. Children can decorate their afikoman bags with the same decorative items. The afikoman bag can also be made from construction paper if you do not have fabric on hand.

I hope you enjoy and try these many special, creative, fun, bonding and joyful ways to celebrate the Passover seder as a family and gathering with loved ones. Making memories and passing down and retelling stories related to the Jewish holiday become family traditions, as does looking toward the bright future together. ✨

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# Mindful Mealtime

*Jews Sit When They Eat  
and Other Useful Parenting Hacks*

BY RISA POLANSKY SHIMAN, KVELLER



It's almost dinnertime, and in a perhaps overly familiar parenting tableau, I am standing at the counter plating my kids' food and scarfing down bites of my own. My husband walks into the kitchen.

"Sit!" he says. "Sit while you eat!"

This is a big thing for Marc, who has told me more than once, "Jews sit when they eat."

Many a generalization has been made about the Jewish people. This, for me, was a new one, and something I always meant to fact check but never did.

He's probably not wrong, though, that focusing on one's food is a good idea (for people of all religious backgrounds and affiliations). Focusing in general,

really.

Too many times I find myself entering a room and not remembering why. I'll check my phone without consciously considering whether there's any reason to check my phone, or even whether I want to be checking it. Then I'll check it again.

I've started to notice that, even when I'm with my kids, I always seem to be elsewhere. Packing their lunches while they eat their breakfast. Loading the diaper bag while they turn the couch into a fort. Listening to a very animated story about a dream they may or may not have actually had, but also thinking about when we need to leave if we want to make it home for naptime. On the floor building blocks with

them one second, reaching over to gather and put away scattered Hot Wheels the next.

None of us should self-flagellate too much about this. There's a lot to juggle as a parent and as a human. Someone has to pack the lunches. Minds wander. And, really, playtime isn't always all that engaging. It doesn't take the whole adult brain to send a toy car down a plastic ramp.

Still, I can't shake the feeling that I'm always around my children, but never quite there. Or at least not as present as I'd like to be. They're little and cute and interesting and I want to enjoy them. And I don't want to be remembered in their memoirs as just a pair of legs, like the grownups in "Muppet Babies."

So I've been making some effort, checking out library books on meditation and presence in hopes of reading my way into mindfulness. But I never really thought of it as a Jewish thing.

My husband explained it to me this way: "Jews are supposed to do everything with a purpose and make everything holy. That's why there are prayers for before we do anything. You can't be thankful for your food if you're doing other things while you eat it."

Pretty good for a guy with no formal Jewish education beyond his bar mitzvah. Marc's idea of a Judaism-mindfulness connection whet my appetite (pun intended but probably ill advised), so I sought out the rabbi of our local Chabad, where my children go to preschool. I told him Marc says Jews sit when they eat. He laughed.

The rabbi agreed, though, that part of the function of prayer (eating-related and otherwise) is to bring us into the moment—so long as it's not lip service, so long as you're really there each time you pray. By divine providence, he said, each moment you are where you're supposed to be. So be there.

I'm working on it. If not the praying, at least the being there. Trying to do one thing at a time, or to at least briefly turn away from the sink to make eye contact with a family member who's speaking to me—that sort of thing.

The other day, I was ricocheting bouncy balls around the neighborhood basketball court with my youngest son, and I found my mind had wandered to the day's to-do list. I shook my head and tried to tune back in, making mental observations like, "I hear the ball thwacking the court. I hear Benji's happy little shrieks. I see he's wearing his blue shirt."

And then I realized: We've owned this shirt for three years. It was his brother's before it was his. I have washed and folded this shirt a thousand times and yanked it over a little blond head and then a little brown one just as many. I knew it had a skier on it. But I had never read the shirt. Never! I couldn't have told you what it said if you paid me.

Of course, it's not what it says on the shirt that's important ("I do all my own stunts"). I could've gone my whole life never having read the shirt and been fine. But it just shows how you can look at something and look at something and look at something without really seeing it.

I'm tired of not seeing.

I've been trying a lot of little tricks for zoning back in when I'm zoned out, like the observation exercise that led to shirtgate, or taking a deep breath and remembering something I read by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh: "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in." And lately, a new one: I say to myself, "*Hineni*," which means in Hebrew, "Here I am." During High Holiday services, we read of Abraham answering G-d that way, and this year it stuck with me. I've probably taken it completely out of context for my own personal use, but it turns out it's a pretty good mantra.

*Hineni*, here I am. Here on the floor building a train track with my giggly kids. Here on the Starbucks patio writing on a breezy day. Here with my husband on a lunch date because he left work early to spend time with me. Even during bedtime, when someone's thirsty and someone can't find their blanket and everything's wet from bath time and all I can think about is getting downstairs—*hineni*, I am here, and I know I am here.

Using a Hebrew term to practice presence has helped it click for me, helped me better enjoy the precious moments and keep my cool during (some of) the frustrating ones. And I feel even more drawn and connected to mindfulness knowing it's a Jewish practice.

Renowned British Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his "Letters to the Next Generation," wrote, "The whole of Judaism is a sustained discipline in not taking life for granted: the thanks we say in our prayers, the blessings we make over every pleasure, the way kashrut turns eating into a holy act and the laws of Jewish family life sanctify the act of love. Shabbat stops us from traveling through life so fast that we never get to enjoy the view."

The rebbetzin and head of our preschool put it this way: "The Torah is mindfulness." Everyone has a G-d-given purpose, she said. Rituals and practices can help foster the gratitude, joy and presence needed to find that purpose.

I don't know whether I'll ever keep strictly kosher or start praying when I wash my hands, but this Jewish notion of taking note of and appreciating where you are, what you're doing, what you have—of not letting life pass by—resonates deeply.

My divine purpose has yet to be revealed, but I'm probably not going to find it scrolling around my phone. I know it goes beyond meal planning in my head or collecting errant Legos when I could be engaging with my family or otherwise experiencing life.

And I am here for it. ✨

# COOKING JEWISH

Lifestyle

## PASSOVER JOY The most celebrated of Jewish holidays

BY JUDY BART KANCIGOR



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXANDRA SHYTSMAN

Unda Kathi Roll

**A**sk most Jewish children, “What’s your favorite holiday?” and you’d think “Hanukkah” would be the quick response. For me all the blue and gold beribboned boxes in the world can’t hold a *shamos* to Passover. To my mind, you just can’t beat the cuisine. It’s the most celebrated of all Jewish holidays, and even those who rarely step into a shul all year knock themselves out cooking for Passover. While the Seders get all the glory, this is an eight-day holiday, and the creativity and careful planning that went into producing the Seder meals can be drawn upon for the rest of the week as well with some help from the myriad of Passover cookbooks out there...and, surprisingly, from others that are not even Jewish, much less dedicated to Passover.

Breakfast can be especially challenging on Passover, which begins this year at sundown on Wednesday, April 5. With bread and flour forbidden for eight days, you’ve got to get creative. While experts tell us that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, on Passover, with no toast, bagels, or cereal to speak of, pickings can be slim. Not to worry. Michele Streit Heilbrun, the “matzo heiress” (yes, that Streit!), author of “Matzo: 35 Recipes for Passover and All Year Long,” (Clarkson Potter, \$14.99), has devised some tempting breakfast options: Matzo Chilaquiles with Homemade Salsa Verde, Blueberry and Cheese Blintzes, L.E.O. Matzo Brei (lox, eggs and onions in a matzo scramble), and the light and luscious Cheesy Lemon Pancakes featured here. But eggs are not just for breakfast anymore. Any of these dishes would make a delicious lunch or even, dare I say, light dinner. Matzo in its various forms easily substitutes for the forbidden bread and flour.

“Most Jews think about matzo only at Passover when it appears on their Seder table,” observed Heilbrun, fourth-generation co-owner of Streit’s Matzo, the legendary kosher baker since 1925. “But things are different for me. I’m a Streit, which means matzo has been a vital part of my life every single day. The journey of matzo from the Passover table into everyday food is long overdue. Consider this cookbook a matzo makeover.”

When Heilbrun’s great-grandfather, Aron Streit, a baker in Austria, emigrated to the U.S. in the 1890s, he saw a need to supply matzo to the burgeoning immigrant Jewish population on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. At first, he made it by hand, but as the business grew, he opened a factory, later bringing in his sons Irving and Jack, Heilbrun’s grandfather.

While the focus of our Passover meal preparation centers around the two Seders, the celebratory and symbolic meals in which we retell the story of our ancestors’ flight from slavery in Egypt, we have 22 other meals to consider before the holiday ends. Vegetarian cookbooks are a great resource for the kosher cook on Passover as well as throughout the year. And as a bonus you’ll be eating more healthily as well.

“We shouldn’t have to choose between eating healthy and eating delicious,” says Vasudha Viswanath, author of “The Vegetarian Reset: 75 Low-Carb, Plant-Forward Recipes From Around The World” (The Collective Book Studio, \$35). While many of the dishes come from her native India, the book is really a culinary journey around the world. “We can no longer outrun a bad diet, no matter how many spin classes we take,” she writes. “It is now widely recognized that overconsumption of refined or processed carbs leads to frequent

blood sugar spikes and subsequent insulin resistance and is deeply linked to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity and several other chronic diseases. Raw salads will not keep your palate happy forever. So how do you make a healthy, vegetarian lifestyle satisfying and delicious, and thereby sustainable?” These recipes provide one delicious answer.

“Due to their focus on vegetables, the recipes in this book tend to be moderately low-carb, and predominantly gluten-free,” making them perfectly adaptable for Passover. Many call for almond flour and cauliflower rice, such as her take on arancini, for example, using what she calls cauliflower risotto. (After Passover try any of the recipes using chickpea flour as well.)

Recently Melissa’s Produce hosted Viswanath on Youtube as she went through the book, recipe by recipe, showing the accompanying mouth-watering color photos (don’t watch it on an empty stomach!) and demonstrated her zucchini bread and Pav Bhaji, a street food that consists of a one-pot, spicy vegetable mash. Describing the Unda Kathi Roll featured here, she explained: “We use an omelet wrap and a cauliflower shawarma that is so flavorful, and raita for moisture.”

**“We shouldn’t have to choose between eating healthy and eating delicious.”**

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).



*Cheesy Lemon Pancakes*

## Unda Kathi Roll

“This recipe uses an omelet (“unda” means “egg”) to make a high-protein wrap, which is stuffed with the most decadent cauliflower shawarma and raita.”  
Yield: 2 servings



### Shawarma spice blend

- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin.
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 3/4 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 3/4 teaspoon ground coriander seed
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

- 1 tablespoon +2 teaspoons olive oil, divided
- 1 teaspoon grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 pound small cauliflower florets (1 1/2 inch pieces)
- 2 to 3 tablespoons water, as needed.

### Raita

- 1/4 cup whole-milk plain Greek yogurt
- 1 baby cucumber or 1/2 large cucumber
- 1/4 teaspoon salt.
- 1/4 teaspoon cracked black pepper

- 4 eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon cracked black pepper, divided

1. Mix shawarma spice blend ingredients in large bowl.
2. Add 1 tablespoon of the oil, the ginger, and garlic to spice blend and mix well to make marinade. Add cauliflower, florets and toss until well coated with marinade.
3. Heat medium sauté pan over medium heat. Add cauliflower and 2 tablespoons water and mix. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally and adding another tablespoon of water to deglaze pan if needed, until florets are soft and deep golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Mix raita ingredients and set aside.
5. To make each wrap, beat 2 eggs with 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper in a bowl. Heat medium nonstick frying pan over medium heat. Add 1 teaspoon oil and swirl pan to coat sides. Pour eggs into pan, swirl pan to coat bottom fully, and

## Cheesy Lemon Pancakes

Serves 4

- 1 cup whole milk
- 3 large eggs, separated
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup matzo cake meal
- 1/4 cup potato starch
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 cup cottage cheese (or ricotta)
- Unsalted butter, for greasing pan
- Confectioners’ sugar, fruit, or maple syrup, for serving (optional)

1. In large bowl, whisk together milk, egg yolks, sugar, lemon zest and juice, and salt. In medium bowl, sift together cake meal, potato starch, and baking powder. Add dry ingredients to wet, using rubber spatula to mix until just combined. Do not overmix or pancakes will be tough.
2. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment or whisk and large bowl, whip egg whites until soft peaks form until consistency of soft-serve ice cream. Using rubber spatula, gently fold 1/3 of egg whites at a time into batter until well incorporated, taking care not to overfold. Gently fold in cheese – batter should be streaky with visible lumps of cheese curds throughout.
3. Melt 1 to 2 tablespoons butter in large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add 1/4 cup of the batter for each pancake, working in batches if needed. Cook pancakes until edges are golden brown and bubbles begin to form on top, about 5 minutes. Flip and cook until second side is golden, another 2 minutes. Serve with confectioners sugar, fresh fruit, maple syrup, or your favorite pancake topper.  
Source: “Matzo” by Michele Streit Heilbrun

cook, pushing dry edges gently toward center with spatula so liquid egg from center flows to sides, until top is just cooked, 3 to 4 minutes. Carefully transfer to plate and repeat for a second omelet.

6. To assemble, spoon half the raita into the center of each omelet and add cauliflower. Fold sides to make a wrap. Use a 12 x 16-inch sheet of foil to wrap bottom half of each kathi roll to hold it together. Serve hot.

Source: “The Vegetarian Reset” by Vasudha Viswanath ✨

# MY PASSOVER RANT

Take solace in that you are not alone in your struggles.

BY MAYIM BIALIK, JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY (JTA)

**W**e're all thinking of things that are annoying us/infuriating us as we prepare for Pesach. I'm going to do you the favor of making you feel justified in your indignation and in unity with other similarly-frantic preparing women. Here are my 10 things that are NOT working for me as I prepare for Pesach:

1. Not enough Pesachdik (kosher for Passover) baking dishes.
2. Pesach knife not sharp enough.
3. Husband not helpful enough.
4. Children not at all peacefully playing while I cook and I briefly contemplate doing something I have never done before: plopping them in front of a television. (I resist the urge.)
5. The quinoa insanity. Is it kosher for Passover or not? (Was it made in a *kitniyot* factory? Dried on the same rack as barley grains?)
6. Have to work today and tomorrow and need to be home cooking.
7. We get the day off for Good Friday but by then it's too late to do all the main stuff I need to do.
8. Kitchen way too small.
9. My main platter I use to serve our famous Moroccan salad broke in the box it was being stored in.
10. Fantasy is just not matching reality

In conclusion, this list is by no means complete and I will mentally add things as the day goes on, and I will add things right up until candlelighting Friday night (I know I should be spiritually and mystically elated that Shabbos and Pesach coincide this year, but at this time of morning, I am just not feeling it).

In all fairness, I know that the deeper meaning of Pesach will find its way into my heart come Friday night. I will review the writings of Rabbi Akiva Tatz, and his reflections on the wheel of time working through us again and again, returning us again and again to the notion of freedom and bondage. And also, to the constant



reminder of G-d's hand in our lives, year after year, Pesach after Pesach, list after list.

*Chag Pesach Kasher v'Sameach* (Happy and Kosher Passover), and I hope to see you on the other side of frustration, in the land of freedom speedily in our days! *L'shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* (Next Year in Jerusalem)! ✨



Photo Credit: Jason Mendez/Getty Images

MAYIM BIALIK IS A CONTRIBUTING WRITER TO JTA AND JLIFE MAGAZINE.

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

### DOORS OPEN

#### AT 6:30 PM

Ladies Of Laughter Festival  
- Fundraiser

#### 7:00 - 11:00 PM

Drag Queen Bingo!  
Fundraiser for the LOL  
Comedy Fest  
(Mature Audiences Only)  
Hamburger Mary's  
8288 Santa Monica Blvd.  
West Hollywood, CA

## SUNDAY, MARCH 5

### 10:00 AM - NOON

Red Carpet Purim, CIE

## SUNDAY, MARCH 5

### 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Second Annual Purim Story  
Walk in the Park  
Monrovia Library Park  
321 S. Myrtle Avenue  
Monrovia, CA

## MONDAY, MARCH 6

### SUNDOWN

### PURIM BEGINS

## TUESDAY, MARCH 7

### SUNDOWN

### PURIM ENDS

## MONDAY, MARCH 6

### 6:30 - 10:00 PM

Purim Dinner, CIE  
Azure Hotel  
1945 E. Holt Blvd, Ontario

## TUESDAY, MARCH 7

### 11:00 AM - NOON

Caffeine for the Soul, CIE

## SUNDAY, MARCH 19

### 5:00 - 7:00 PM

Online Concert-Neshama  
Carlebach and  
Duvid Swersky, TBD

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

Chabad of the  
Inland Empire (CIE)  
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Congregation Hugat  
Haverim (CHH)  
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Temple & Center (PJTC)  
[www.pjtc.net](http://www.pjtc.net)

Temple Ami Shalom  
(TAS)  
<https://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.templeholomofontario.org](http://www.templeholomofontario.org)

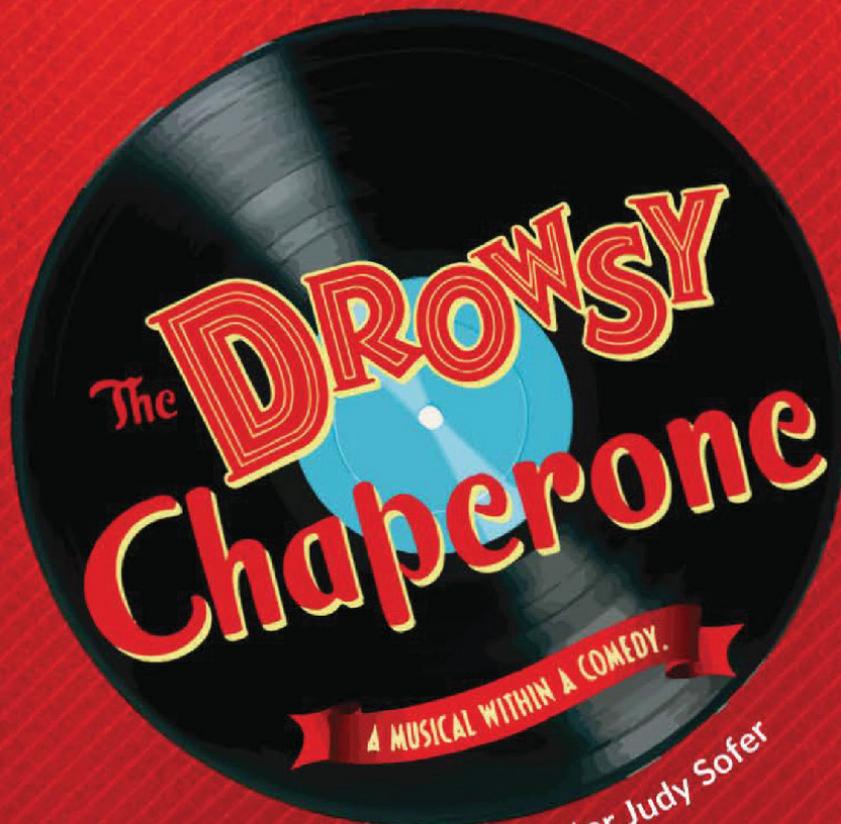
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# **A DROWSY CHAPERONE**

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# NEWS & JEWS



## Going Green with Composting Temple Beth Israel expands its work

For the past 10 years, Temple Beth Israel has teamed with Uncommon Good, a local nonprofit that provides organic produce to the underserved in our community. Uncommon Good has used a section of the Temple's property to grow organic vegetables, and when harvested, this produce is donated to food pantries in our area.

Now Temple Beth Israel is expanding its role to include a composting operation.

This site, adjacent to the farm, works with the Composting for Green Spaces Program and will help to keep food waste out of landfills while also providing Uncommon Good farms with fresh compost to support their efforts. In addition, this program will enable Temple Beth Israel to assist local restaurants in recycling their food waste into fresh compost.

During the week of Jan. 30, the U.S. Composting Council Annual National Conference was held in Ontario. Temple Beth Israel was one of the community composting sites that was showcased. Almost 50 conference participants from across the United States visited Temple Beth Israel to see the operation and were enthusiastic about the tour.

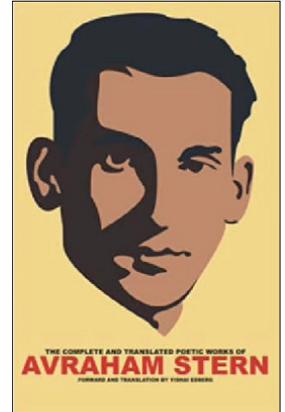
This composting effort builds on the Temple's ongoing partnership with Uncommon Good and establishes new partnerships between Temple Beth Israel and the Pomona-based Food Cycle Collective (FCC) and the Pomona-based nonprofit Integrative Development Initiative. As of this date, the food scrap diversion comes to just over 7,219 pounds diverted from the landfill.

The work is supported by funding through CalRecycle's Community Composting for Green Spaces Grant Program. Most importantly, this program, approved by the Board of Trustees, supports the Temple's mission of Tikkun Olam, or Repairing the World. ✨

## Zionist Revolutionary Poetry Comes Alive

By Moshe Phillips

It's not too often that the release of a new book of poems that are over 80 years old can be seen as a transformative moment in the American Jewish community. It can be argued that this happened with *The Complete and Translated Poetic Works of Avraham Stern* published by Yishai Edberg. It is the first book of English translations of history's key Zionist revolutionary.



For decades part of Israel's academic establishment, as well as Jewish educators in the United States, successfully fought to minimize the impact the Stern's LEHI group, and the Irgun underground Stern had originally fought in, had on London's decision to end the British Mandate. It's only in the last 20 years or so that English speaking readers have been able to really learn the details about LEHI's story.

Avraham Stern (Yair) was the founder and leader of the Stern Group (maligned by the British as the Stern Gang). After Stern's 1942 assassination by British detectives in Tel Aviv his soldiers later formed the LEHI (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel.)

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was a member of the LEHI's three-man high command after Stern's assassination. In 1998, Stern wrote in *Haaretz* about Stern stating:

"Those who revere his memory know a great deal about Yair Avraham Stern, who in the 1940s established the underground LEHI movement to fight against the British regime in Palestine. Yair—as his friends knew him—believed that only the expulsion of the British from the Land of Israel would enable the Jewish People to establish an independent Jewish state, and he foresaw that this goal could only be achieved by force. However, his admirers knew little about the "other" Yair: Yair the poet."

Edberg's translation brings Stern's distinctive poetic voice to English. No easy task.

The book has a nearly 20-page introduction that provides an overview of Stern's story and that of the LEHI. This section is not without superficial flaws but is engaging and thought-provoking.

The balance of the book contains over 50 poems with extensive explanatory footnotes. In his footnotes Edberg demonstrates how Stern repurposed lines from Jewish liturgy and verses from Tanach to inspire young Jews to take action on behalf of the cause of Zionism. What's more the footnotes also offer historic background and other information that shed light on Stern's ideas. Before this publication, only one of Stern's poems was readily available in a complete translation.

*The Complete and Translated Poetic Works of Avraham Stern* is available in softcover through Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Translated-Poetic-Works-Avraham/dp/B0B4JT2GH7/>.

[Moshe Phillips is a commentator on Jewish affairs. He was a U.S. delegate to the 38th World Zionist Congress in 2020. The views expressed are his own.] ✨



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you and yours.”***

*- Jlife*

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